

they were overpowered. The traders also gave us an account of their ceremonies on returning to camp with their scalps and trophies. A wild dance was executed by the braves in celebration of their victory, while the women tore their hair and faces, and ran naked through the prickly pear and thorn bushes, in token of their grief for the loss of their husbands and brothers. Whether they considered our visit as hostile or not it is impossible to say; they had shed blood, and we well knew they would not cease murdering any of our companions they might dare attack. They have but a small number of rifles among them, and these are ineffective and useless in their hands: the larger portion of them are armed with shields, lances, and bows and arrows, weapons they use with surprising dexterity. Such are the most obvious features of a tribe of Indians occupying the prairies near the head waters of the Wichita, Colorado, Brazos, and Red Rivers.

The morning of August 31st was occupied in partially drying our meat over slow fires, and in making preparations for our departure. Horses were shod, bullets moulded, our rifles and pistols thoroughly examined, and nothing neglected in the way of that precaution our uncertain adventure demanded. We were placed in a position demanding some extraordinary effort. The repeated reverses that we had met with, the hunger and fatigue which we had undergone, and the impossibility of travelling farther with the wagons in any direction that would bring us nearer the settlements, formed a combination of evils for which a retreat or the plan determined upon was the only remedy. The indefatigable *go-aheadity* which characterizes the Anglo-Saxon race, no matter where or under what circumstances placed, prevented the adoption of the former plan—the same

spirit induced the officers of the expedition to adopt and carry out the latter. Almost every one appeared to rejoice when this course was determined upon. The harassing uncertainties which now encompassed all would speedily be removed, and we should soon know *where we were*.

As the advance party were about starting, we were all rejoiced by the appearance of Lieutenant Hann and his men. He had met with several small parties of the Indians, and endeavoured to induce them to come in and hold a friendly talk; but they were sulky and disposed to fight, although not strong enough to engage him. Up to this time he knew nothing of the murder of Lieutenant Hull's party. The other men who were missing, as I have since been informed, never came in, but were undoubtedly killed by the Indians.

CHAPTER XI.

Departure of the Advance in search of the Settlements.—Summit of the Steppe gained.—Level Prairie before us.—A lovely Scene.—Speculations in relation to Red River.—A Bear Chase.—Bruin noosed.—The March continued.—Sagacity of a Mule.—Arrival at a singular Chasm.—Impossibility of crossing.—A heavy Prairie Shower.—Appearance of our Men.—Description of the Chasm.—A Crossing found.—Loneliness of the Prairies.—Scarcity of Game.—Begin to suffer Hunger.—Arrival at another awful Abyss.—Farther Difficulty in crossing.—Hunger increasing.—Singular Birds.—Mustangs and Antelopes.—Their exceeding Shyness.—Curlews.—A Buffalo descried.—Preparations for a Chase to the Death.—Tom Hancock and his Skill.—Endurance of Jim the Butcher.—Description of the Chase.—Poor Prospects of a Supper.

THE sun had but a short hour to run, in order to finish his day's work on the 31st of August, when, in double file and close order, our provisions for the march

hanging at our saddle-skirts, we left our companions on the Quintufue and struck across the prairie on our journey in search of the settlements of New Mexico, Mr. Hunt, the engineer of the expedition, taking the guidance. A brisk trot of two hours brought us, as night was throwing its sable drapery over the scene, to the foot of the mountains, and here, after choosing a strong position, we encamped. No water could be found in our vicinity, but as we had filled our gourds and canteens before we left the main body, we suffered but little. Early the next morning, after travelling a mile or two along the foot of the high range, we discovered what seemed to be an Indian trail, the marks where the tent-poles had been dragged over the ground being plainly visible, leading in a zigzag course up the sides of the mountains. This we followed, and towards noon found ourselves at the summit of the chain. Here we were again gratified by finding spread out before us a perfectly level prairie, extending as far as the eye could reach, and without a tree to break its complete monotony. We halted a few minutes to rest our horses, and occupied the time in surveying the calm and beautiful valley lying hundreds of feet below us.

It was a lovely scene, beheld from the point where we stood, and I could hardly believe that but a few hours previous a horrible tragedy had been enacted upon its fair surface. Softened down by the distance, there was a tranquillity about it which seemed as though it never had been broken. The deep green skirtings of the different watercourses relieved the eye as it fell upon the wide-extending plain. The silver waters of the Quintufue, now reduced apparently to a mere thread, were occasionally brought to view as some turn of the stream threw them in line with us, and

again they were lost to the sight under the rich foliage of the banks. The white tops of our wagons showed the present encampment of our main body, while the small black spots around gave us the pleasing assurance that the cattle and horses were still there, and that the camp had been unmolested. In other parts of the valley, too, small moving specks were seen—mustangs, or perhaps our Indian enemies prowling about—but other than these no living objects met our gaze. Almost the whole valley was bordered by the yawning chasms that had impeded the progress of our wagons, now brought more plainly to view by the elevation upon which we stood, and the whole scene forcibly reminded me of one of Salvator Rosa's beautiful landscapes, framed with rough, gnarled, and unfinished oak.

The elevated chain of hills or mountains we had ascended, if they really deserve that title, was but another *steppe* towards the high table-land which forms the base of the Rocky Mountains. Where, now, was Red River? If the large stream our guides and scouting parties had seen, while in the valley below us, and in a northeast direction from the spot where Lieutenant Hull was killed—if that stream was Red River, then its source must have been near the base of the high steppe upon which we now stood, and the wide and almost dry beds we had crossed within the few past days were but its tributaries. In springtime, when the prairie snows melt away and the early rains fall, these beds are doubtless full, and when joined in one common channel form the great stream which, after passing through the Cross Timbers, fertilizes the valley known as the Red River country. The Rocky Mountains may justly be considered the parents of most of the larger streams of North America; but I cannot think that they give birth

to the river we had been so long seeking. On the contrary, I am bold in hazarding the opinion that the Rio Colorado or Red River of the United States, the Brazos de Dios, and the Rio Colorado or Red River of Texas, all take their rise in the centre of the prairies, at no great distance apart, and that the steppe we had now reached is their extreme western limit. Their waters are similar, being of a dirty, brownish red colour, and of a slightly salt and bitter taste, which goes far to prove their common origin.

From the hillsides, as was the case with the Palo Duro and Quintufue,* small streams of fresh and limpid water arise; but both their purity of taste and virgin transparency of colour are lost the moment they strike the reddish clay of the lower prairies, and they become adulterated by the copperas and sulphate of soda with which these plains appear to be impregnated. The Red River of the United States has been traced and is well known to a point west of Coffee's Upper Station, a noted Indian trading post above the mouth of the False Washita; beyond that, certainty loses itself in speculation, and the true stream, its courses and its sources, will never be known until it is explored to its fountain head—and this point will be found, I have little hesitation in saying, some two hundred and fifty or three hundred miles east-southeast of Santa Fé, and but a few miles from the *steppe* to which I have now brought my reader. In these conjectures I am borne out by the testimony of Albert Pike, now a well-known lawyer of Arkansas, and a poet and writer of great distinction.†

* These names we learned from the New Mexican traders, whom we afterward met.

† His "Hymns to the Gods," published several years since in Blackwood, are gems of rarest strength and beauty, and as such were highly lauded by Professor Wilson himself.

This gentleman, in 1832, made a hazardous journey from Santa Fé to the western settlements of Arkansas. His general course, for the first three hundred miles, was nearly southeast, the last two hundred taking him directly across the immense plain called *Llano Estacado*—Stake Prairie—by the New Mexicans. Mr. Pike had now reached the head waters of the Brazos, and in about the same longitude we had reached when Lieutenant Hull and his men were killed. He then continued down one of the forks of the Brazos some hundred and eighty miles, the stream running nearly southeast, and a part of the country being broken into rough and misshapen hills, resembling those we encountered on the stream which I have put down as the Wichita. The course of Mr. Pike was next northeast, some hundred and forty miles, until he struck the Red River of the United States. The point at which he reached this stream was probably a little to the east of the Waco village I have described, and below the mouth of the Wichita. From the appearance of Red River—the similarity of its waters, both in colour and taste, to those of the Brazos—Mr. Pike entertains little doubt that they both take their rise in the same section of country, and nearly in the same longitude—the former rising but a short distance to the north of the latter. But I am running before my narrative, and after promising other speculations in relation to Red River in a more befitting place, will reconduct the reader to the summit of the high steppe upon which we now found ourselves.

After giving our animals half an hour's rest, for they were much jaded by the precipitous ascent up which they had clambered, we resumed our journey in a north-west direction. We had ridden but a short distance before a large black bear was seen some mile or there-

about to the left of us. Major Howard immediately set off with the intention of running him down, and after a short race succeeded in placing himself on the opposite side, so as to bring the animal directly between him and our line of march. The chase was now assuming an exciting character, the bear, from the lateness of the season, being poor in flesh, and able to run nearly as fast as our fleetest horses. Onward they came, directly towards us, and when within a quarter of a mile I cocked a pistol and left the ranks with the intention of having a first shot at the animal. When within some twenty-five yards, I reined up my horse, and while taking deliberate aim, at not half that distance, I was surprised to see the bear turn a species of somerset, and commence kicking with his hind legs. Unseen by me, one of our Mexican servants had crept up close on the opposite side of my horse, and had noosed the animal with a *lariat* just as I was pulling the trigger of my pistol. Bruin soon loosed himself from his fastenings, and while running down the line was shot by Major Howard.

The journey was again resumed, and continued at a rapid pace until near the middle of the afternoon. A short halt was then called to rest our horses, at a place where no water was seen, but where the grass was excellent. The bridles were no sooner slipped from the heads of our animals than an elderly and sagacious mule, instead of beginning to nip the short grass, put off at a deliberate trot in a southwest direction. "That cunning old rascal scents water *sure*," said his owner, and sure enough he did; for he had not proceeded three hundred yards before we saw him stoop his head and commence drinking at a pond-hole which was concealed from our sight. The discovery of this water

was very opportune; for we had drunk but little in nearly twenty-four hours, and our animals had not swallowed a drop.

As soon as we had given our horses and mules a short rest, and made a light meal of our half-cured meat, we resaddled and resumed our journey. We were going forward at a rapid pace, the prairies before us presenting no other appearance than a slightly undulating but smooth surface, when suddenly, and without previous sign or warning, we found ourselves upon the very brink of a vast and yawning chasm, or *cañon*, as the Mexicans would call it, some two or three hundred yards across, and probably eight hundred feet in depth! As the front ranks suddenly checked their onward course, and diverged at right angles, the rear sections were utterly at a loss to account for a movement so irregular; they could not see even the edge of the fearful abyss at a distance of fifteen yards from its very brink. The banks at this place were almost perpendicular, and from the sides projected jagged and broken rocks, with here and there a stunted, scrubby cedar. There was some appearance of a zigzag and precipitous trail down the sides of the cañon at the point where we first reached it, and Mr. Hunt and Dr. Brenham took it with the intention of reaching the bottom if possible: they continued their winding path until they seemed mere pigmies, and only stopped when their progress was arrested by high and perpendicular bluffs. On their return, after an absence of some half an hour, they said they had not advanced half way to the bottom, and that to attempt crossing at this, or any other point within sight, would be useless. We travelled a mile or two along the banks, but finding it impossible to discover a crossing-place, we finally encamped in a little hollow of

the prairie near the edge of the ravine. Here, finding that a large portion of our badly-cured meat was spoiling, we cooked what could still be eaten, and threw much of it away for the wolves and buzzards.

Young Frank Combs and myself sought a comfortable lodging in a little sandy gulley, which had been formed by the washing of previous rains. A fine bed it was, too, for about an hour; but just as we commenced dozing we were startled by a tremendous thunder storm. In three minutes we were wet through, and in five found that we were fairly floating, our rifles and saddles, the latter of which we used for pillows, being completely under water. We snatched our rifles from the swift-running stream, took up our bed, and walked to higher ground amid the terrible storm. We found means, however, to set fire to a large dry cedar, once more rolled up in our blankets, and after thinking of home and its thousand comforts, fell asleep. Yet never shall I forget the early part of that awful night. The lightning appeared to be playing about in the chasm far below us, bringing out, in wild relief, its bold and craggy sides. Deafening peals of thunder seemed rising from the very bowels of the earth, and then muttered away in the distance, rejoicing, as it were, at their escape from confinement. The yawning abyss appeared to be a workshop for the manufacture of the storm, and there we were at the very doors when the Ruler of the elements sent forth a specimen of his grandest, his sublimest work.

When morning came, which was bright and cloudless, we crawled out from under our wet blankets, and I doubt whether a more miserable, wo-begone set of unfortunates, in appearance, have been since the passage of the Red Sea. Not a man among us who was

not as wet as though he had been towed astern of a steamer from the Falls of St. Anthony to the Balize, and without the privilege of going ashore at any of the "intermediate landings." Of my own personal appearance I can say nothing, as among our scanty stock of furniture there was no such luxury as a looking-glass; but the unshaven faces of my companions resembled, to use a threadbare comparison, the title-pages of so many distress memorials, and I cannot flatter myself into the belief that I differed from them in any material respect. Each individual hair upon our heads was sticking out almost anywhere, and to suit its own convenience; our broad-brimmed hats were cocked up, lopped down, and knocked into, or rather out of, all manner of shape and comeliness; our caps were mashed; our scanty and ragged vestments, full of sand and water, stuck close to our persons or hung heavily and drooping downward like weeping willows; and to sum all up, I verily believe that we could not have "passed muster" even in the ragged and renowned regiment promiscuously pressed into service by one Sir John Falstaff years before the Santa Fé expedition was thought of. Wretched and forlorn as we seemed, however, chilly and miserable as we felt after our soaking, good-humoured jokes were cracked at each other's expense, and every one was offering consolation and pity to his neighbour with an assumed sincerity and gravity that would have drawn a horse-laugh from Werter in his most sorrowful moments.

Unwilling to load our horses with wet and heavy blankets, we employed some two hours in spreading and drying them as much as possible. In the meantime, a scanty breakfast of half-cooked, half-dried beef was swallowed, our rifles were discharged, cleaned, and

reloaded, and our powder examined to see that all was right. To keep his powder dry is the first thing the prairie traveller thinks of when a rain comes on, and fortunately we found that ours was all in good order, although it seemed almost a miracle that much of it was not spoiled.

The immense chasm we were upon ran nearly north and south, and by watching the current of the stream far below us—a furious torrent raised by the heavy rain—it was seen that it ran towards the former point. This induced Mr. Hunt to seek a crossing to the southward, and after saddling our horses we set off in that direction. We had gone but a few miles when large buffalo or Indian trails were seen, running in a southwest course, and as we travelled on, others were noticed bearing more to the west. We were obliged to keep out some distance from the ravine, to avoid the small gullies emptying into it, and to cut off the numerous turns, and in this way we travelled until about noon, when we struck a large trail running directly west. This we followed, and on reaching the main chasm found that it led to the only place where there was any chance of crossing. Here, too, we found that innumerable trails centred, coming from every direction; proof conclusive that we must cross here or travel many weary miles out of our way.

Dismounting from our animals, we looked at the yawning abyss before us, and the impression upon all was that the passage was impossible. That buffalo, mustangs, and very probably Indians with their horses had crossed here, was evident enough, for a zigzag path had been worn down the rocky and precipitous sides; but many of our horses were unused to sliding down precipices as well as climbing them, and drew back repulsively on being

led to the brink of the chasm. After many unsuccessful attempts, a mule was started down the path, then another was induced to follow, while some of the horses were fairly forced, by dint of much shouting and pushing, to attempt the descent. In some places they went along the very verge of rocky and crumbling ledges, where a false step would have precipitated them hundreds of feet to instant death; in others they were compelled to slide down pitches nearly perpendicular. Many of them were much bruised, but after an hour's hard work we all gained the bottom without sustaining any serious injury. Finding a small patch of grass in the low and secluded dell at the bottom of the abyss, we halted for an hour or two to rest our weary animals and to seek the trail leading up the steep on the opposite side. This we finally discovered, and after the greatest exertions succeeded in clambering to the top, where we once more found ourselves upon a smooth and level prairie. I shuddered, on looking back, to see the frightful chasm we had so successfully passed, and at the time thought it almost a miracle that we had got safely across; but a few days afterward I was convinced that in comparison the undertaking we had just accomplished was as nothing.

After giving our animals another rest we resumed our journey across the lone and dreary prairie. Not a tree or bush, and hardly a weed could be seen in any direction. A green carpeting of short grass, which even at this season was studded with innumerable strange flowers and plants, was spread over the vast expanse, with naught else to relieve the eye. People may talk of the solitude of our immense American forests, but there is a company even in trees that one misses upon the prairie. There is food for thought,