CHAPTER III.

Leave Indian Creek—"Catching up"—A corral—Droves of mules from New Mexico—Santa Fé traders returning—Dismal accounts of the journey—Leave the Santa Fé trail—Wild onions—Difficult crossings—Pottawattomie Indian—Ex-governor Boggs and other emigrants come up—Reasons assigned for emigration—Solitude of the prairies—More Indians—First news of war with Mexico—Signs of dissolution of the party—An adventure almost—Extreme heat—Sufferings of cattle—Division—Kansas River—A luxury in the wilderness—New-comers—Rumors of war confirmed.

MAY 12.—All the wagons and teams were this morning inspected by a committee appointed for that purpose. It appeared from their report that the number of wagons belonging to the company was 63; of men 119; of women 59; of children, male and female, 110; pounds of breadstuffs 58,484; of bacon 38,080; of powder 1,065; of lead 2,557; number of guns, mostly rifles, 144; pistols 94. The number of cattle was not reported, but I estimate it at 700, including the loose stock, and 150 horses.

The scene of "catching up," as the yoking and attaching of the oxen to the wagons is called in emigrant phraseology, is one of great bustle and confusion. The crack of the ox-goad, the "whoa-haws" in a loud voice, the leaping and running about of the oxen to avoid the yoke, and the bellowing of the loose stock, altogether create a most Babel-like and exciting confusion. The wagons commenced moving at nine o'clock, and at ten the camp was entirely deserted. In consequence of there being no order of march to-day, the train of wagons was strung out two or three miles in length. The views of this long procession, occasionally sinking into the depressions of the prairie, and then rising therefrom and winding along the curves of

the ridges to avoid the wet and soft ground, were highly picturesque.

Our journey has been over a prairie entirely destitute of timber, or shrubbery of any kind. The soil is generally composed of a black argillaceous loam, several feet in depth. The summits of the highest elevations exhibit a more sandy composition of soil, with a debris of flint and porous sandstone. The grouse, or prairie-hens, have been frequently flushed during our march. Smaller birds are not very numerous. The heat of the sun has been extremely oppressive.

At one o'clock, P. M., we reached a small grove, composed of a few oaks, cotton-wood, maple, and hickory trees, on the banks of a small branch, (head of Blue Creek,) where we encamped for the day. The wagons, in forming the encampment, were what is called *corraled*, an anglicised Spanish word, the significance of which, in our use of the term, is, that they were formed in a circle; constituting a wall of defence in the event of an attack from the Indians, and a *pound* for the confinement of the cattle and horses, whenever necessary or desirable. A Spanish *corral* is a common cattle or horse pound. The area of this circle is sufficiently large to graze, during the night, such horses and cattle as are most likely to stray, if not thus confined. On the outside of the *corral* the tents are pitched, with their doors outwards; and in front of these the camp-fires are lighted, and the culinary operations for the several families, or messes, performed.

This afternoon the company was divided into four sections, and a leader for each was appointed, to superintend their order of march. Several subordinate or staff officers were appointed, as assistants to the captain, etc., etc. Regular guard-duty was established, and our organization, theoretically, appeared to be very perfect, and entirely sufficient for all the purposes required of it. Distance, six miles.

May 13.—Brownell, our driver, having left camp last night, to ride a distance of ten or twelve miles on some business, did not return until after we had commenced our march. It was not without great trouble that we collected our oxen, and suc-

ceeded in attaching them to the wagons. Nuttall volunteered to act as driver *pro tem.* for the day, or until Brownell returned.

Our march was along the Santa Fé trail, through an undulating prairie-country, occasionally dotted with a few trees and clumps of small hazel-bushes. But generally there was no object for the eye to rest upon but the green and flowery slopes and gentle and ever-varying irregularities in the surface of the prairie. About one o'clock we passed what is called the "Lone Elm," a solitary tree, standing near a pool of water.

I met, this afternoon, three returning Santa Fé trading-companies; two of them with three or four wagons, and the other with twelve wagons, all drawn by mules. They were driving before them several large herds of mules, in the aggregate about one thousand. The mules were so lean that the ribs of most of them were defined with precision, and the bones of some of them appeared to have worn through the flesh. I never saw a more ghostly collection of animals. The operative men composing these companies were principally New-Mexicans; the chiefs of the parties, however, were Americans. They all presented a most fagged and worn appearance.

I stopped and conversed some time with one of the leading men of these companies. He was intelligent, notwithstanding his soiled and ragged costume, and appeared to be very candid in all his statements. He said that the principal part of the mules had been driven from Chihuahua, and cost there twenty dollars per head; that they were taken in exchange for such commodities as had been carried out with them, and he expected to dispose of them at a profit on his arrival in the settlements of Missouri. He said that the journey to Santa Fé and Chihuahua was one of great fatigue and hardship, as he knew, but that the journey to California was infinitely more so; that our lives would be shortened ten years by the trip, and before we returned, if we experienced such good fortune, our heads would be white, not with the frosts of age, but from the effects of exposure and extreme hardships. This was not very cheering information, and bidding him a polite good-day, we left him.

About 4 o'clock, P. M., I reached the point where I supposed the Oregon trail diverged from the Santa Fé road. It was raining copiously. At some distance in the prairie, I saw a man mounted on a horse, with a loose mule feeding near him. Supposing him to be a member of some of the front emigrating parties, I rode up to him and inquired the probable distance to the next camping-ground. He was a man of that non-committal order sometimes met with, from whom no satisfactory or explanatory information can be drawn by any inquiry, however pointed. He appeared to be afraid of exposing his own ignorance by committing himself in any direct reply; and in a vain effort to seem eminently wise and discreet, his affirmative responses were rebutted by such a volume of negative qualifications and reservations, that he was entirely incomprehensible.

The rain had abated before this unsatisfactory colloquy was ended, and a bright rainbow was formed in the east, the arch of which was not raised more than one degree above the horizon. Our train of wagons coming up, we continued on the Santa Fé trail four miles farther, when we left it on the right hand, and soon afterwards crossing a small creek with high and steep banks, we encamped on the western side of it, in a small grove which fringes the margin of the stream. Large quantities of wild onions were gathered by many of our party to-day, and being cooked with their bacon, composed the vegetable portion of their evening meal. Their odor is rank, and any thing but agreeable. The rain recommenced falling before we could pitch our tent, heavily and steadily, with every prospect of a stormy night. Distance 16 miles.

May 14.—The rain of yesterday and last night has again so much saturated and softened the ground, as to render travelling with wheels very difficult.

The first mile and a half of our route was through the timbered bottom of the branch on which we had encamped. Our progress through this was very greatly obstructed by the unevenness of the ground and its soft and miry condition. We were frequently obliged to fell trees and to cut down large quantities of small brush and throw them into the muddy ra-

vines, in order to enable our animals and wagons to pass over them. These difficulties operate as serious discouragements upon the energies of many, but I look for a better road before we advance a great distance. Throughout the day the travelling has been very fatiguing to our oxen, the wagons frequently stalling in the mud-holes and the *crossings* of the small branches. Three or four hours were occupied in fording a diminutive tributary of the Wakarusa creek. The banks on the eastern side are so steep, that the wagons were let down with ropes, and the teams were doubled, sometimes quadrupled, in order to draw them up on the other side.

The largest portion of our train reached the banks of the Wakarusa about 5 o'clock, and encamped on a sloping lawn in a curve of the stream, carpeted with verdant and luxuriant grass. A grove of small trees (oak, hickory, dogwood, and willows) nearly surrounds our camp. Their foliage is of the deepest green, and flowers of all the brilliant, and the softer and more modest hues, enliven the landscape around us. The face of the country over which we have travelled to-day, has been more broken and picturesque than yesterday. We passed during our march an elevated conical swell of the plain, which I ascended; and the view from it was one of commanding extent and great richness and beauty. The configuration of the vast diameter of the plain which can be observed from this, presents all the graceful and gentle curves, and the delicate shading and coloring that would charm the enthusiastic landscape artist in his dreaming sketches.

A number of wagons being behind at dark, a party was formed and returned on the trail to their assistance. We found two or three of the wagons stalled in the deep mud, and the tongue of one of them, belonging to some highly worthy young men from Lexington, Ky., named Putnam, was broken. After great exertions they were all drawn out and up to the camp, but it was near midnight before this was accomplished. Distance 15 miles.

May 15.—A Potawattomie Indian, accompanied by a half-breed who spoke English correctly, came to our camp early

this morning. The Potawattomie was a tall, athletic young man of a symmetrical figure, and rode a fat and handsome Indian pony, which several of our party made overtures to purchase, but they were not successful. He was dressed in a calico shirt, with buckskin pantaloons, gaiters, and moccasins. He brought with him several pairs of moccasins, some of them second-hand, which he wished to trade for meat. He soon sold out his small stock of wares and left us. The morning was spent in cleaning our rifles and pistols, which had become rusty and foul from the frequent rains.

In the afternoon we were joined by Ex-governor Boggs, of Missouri, and Colonel Thornton and another gentleman from Illinois. The general reason assigned for emigration to the Pacific, by those from the frontier settlements of Illinois and Missouri, is the extreme unhealthiness of those districts. They state that during the summer and autumnal months they are afflicted with the ague and fever; and of late years, in the winter season, the congestive fever prevails, and sometimes it is so fatal in its ravages as nearly to depopulate whole neighborhoods. They emigrate to the Pacific in search of health, and if they can find this with a reasonable fertility of soil on their arrival, they will not only be satisfied but feel thankful to Providence for providing them such a retreat from the miseries they have endured.

In the afternoon we crossed the Wakarusa creek, and encamped on the opposite bank in a grove of large timber. Several Shawnee Indians came to our camp in the evening; one of whom, calling himself John Wolf, spoke English. They begged for whiskey. Distance 1 mile.

May 16.—Several Potawattomie Indians, male and female, visited our camp this morning. None of them spoke English. They could, however, pronounce the word "whiskey," and uttering this and at the same time exhibiting small pieces of silver, was the common salutation of these miserably-clad, half-starved creatures. They excited mingled emotions of loathing and commiseration. John Wolf, the Shawnee, whose acquaintance I made yesterday, applied to me to indite for him a letter, and

to carry it westward to some great Indian captain of his tribe. The letter, written from his dictation, was only four lines in length. It informed his friend that two Shawnee chiefs, named Henry Clay and Ben Kiasas, and a sister of the Indian addressed, named Black Poddee, were dead. I folded, sealed, and superscribed the letter, but I could never hear of the friend of John Wolf, and consequently the brief epistle was never delivered.

The grove in which we were encamped presented, this morning, a most noisy and animated scene. The oxen belonging to our teams, and in daily use, now number about seven hundred; and the mules, horses, and other loose animals, amount to three hundred, numbering, in the aggregate, one thousand head of cattle and horses. "Gee-up!" "gee-haw!" and "whoa-haw!" with incessant cracks of the whip, resounded on all sides, as soon as the word to "catch up" was given. As usual, a portion of the cattle could not be found when wanted, notwithstanding a guard had been placed over them during the night; and it was ten o'clock, A. M., before the rear division of the train left the encampment.

Our route, with the exception of the low rich bottom of the Wakarusa, has been over the high rolling prairie. In the far distance we could see the narrow dark lines of timber, indicating the channels of the small water-courses, stretching far away, until lost in the haze, or concealed from our view by the interposition of the horizon. Some of the slopes of the plain, in the perspective, were beautifully ornamented with clumps and rows of trees, representing the parks, avenues, and pleasure-grounds of some princely mansion, which the imagination was continually conjecturing might be hidden behind their dense foliage. Not a living or moving object of any kind appears upon the face of the vast expanse. The white-topped wagons, and the men and animals belonging to them, winding slowly over the hill-tops and through the hollows, are the only relief to the motionless torpor and tomblike stillness of the landscape. A lovelier scene was never gazed upon, nor one of more profound solitude.

A short time before we encamped, this afternoon, a small party of Indians were seen in a hollow about a mile to our right.

We rode to them, and ascertained them to be Kachinga, a chief of the Kansas tribe, two warriors, and two squaws, with their families of children. They were here encamped, their tents being smoke-colored skins sewn together, and raised on small sticks, about two feet from the ground. Kachinga carried a rifle, which appeared to be new. He did not seem to understand very well the use of it. He was rouged with vermilion paint, and his hair was shorn to the skin, except a small tuft on the crown of his head, and under his chin. He wore, suspended by a buckskin string from his neck, two medals, one representing, in *alto relievo*, the likeness of Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States. The other medal, the device on which I do not recollect, purported, from the inscription, to have been presented to him by a citizen of Hartford, Ct.,—evidently a "Yankee notion." Kachinga appeared to be a man of about sixty, and the expression of his countenance and his general appearance were prepossessing. The two squaws were miserable-looking objects in their features, figures, and clothing. The Indians broke up their encampment when we left them, and soon overtaking our train, travelled along with us. The two squaws had each a pony, heavily laden with baggage. The children were in a state of nudity, and the infants were carried by their mothers, being fastened to their backs by closely-drawn blankets. They came around us while eating supper, and begged something to eat, which we gave them. Their appearance was extremely wretched.

We were overtaken to-day, during our march, by a man belonging to one of the forward trains, but who left the settlements since we did. He brought with him a late number of the "St. Louis Republican," from the columns of which we derived intelligence of the first overt acts of hostility between Mexico and the United States. The paper contained an account of the defeat and capture of a company of dragoons on the Rio Grande, under the command of Captain Thornton, by the Mexicans, and also of the supposed critical situation of the United States troops composing the command of General Z. Taylor. Notwithstanding this warlike demonstration, none of the emigrants

to California, so far as I could learn, manifested a disposition to turn back in consequence of it.

That discordance, arising from many trifling circumstances and unavoidable inconveniences, which I had heard mentioned as inevitable concomitants of this journey, was displayed in several instances to-day. Many of the men manifested much petulance, incivility, and the want of a spirit of accommodation. In short, there appears to be considerable wrangling and intrigue in camp, which will probably result in a division of our party. Distance, 12 miles.

May 17.—The morning was so delightful and the atmosphere so bracing, that I started on foot in advance of the train; and noticing on the right some attractive objects at a distance of two or three miles, I left the trail, and proceeding towards them, passed over two or three elevated swells of the prairie and through several deep and lonely hollows. In one of the latter I saw two horses grazing. My first conjecture, seeing no signs of emigrants or Indians about, was, that these horses had strayed either from our own camp or from some of the forward emigrating parties, and I attempted to drive them before me; but they were not to be controlled, running off in a contrary direction, prancing and snorting.

In the next hollow, through which flows a small spring branch, I saw the embers of an Indian camp-fire, with the low, rude frame upon which their tent-skins had been spread surrounding it. I stirred the ashes and discovered a few live coals, showing that the camp had been occupied last night. The diminutive bottom bordering the miniature stream was covered with hazel brush, with a few alders and larger shrubbery. I crossed through the brush, and was commencing the ascent on the other side, when six Indians, mounted on horses, came in sight on the top of the hill, and began to descend it. They did not discover me immediately, but as soon as they did, they halted on the side of the hill. I was sufficiently near to see that one of them carried in his hand a broadsword, with a bright metal scabbard, which glittered in the sunbeams. This Indian, the foremost of the party, was leading a horse. When

he saw me he gave the horse in charge of another. I had very carelessly, in order to be unincumbered by weight, left all my arms in the wagon, except my hatchet. I was now several miles distant from our train and entirely concealed from them, and there was no probability of any of our party passing this way. Not liking the manœuvres of the Indians, or knowing what might be their designs, I never felt more regret for any misadventure, than for not bringing my gun and pistols with me. Ascertaining that my hatchet was in a right position for use, if necessary, I advanced up the hill to the place where the Indians had halted, and stopped.

I ascertained that the party was composed of three men and three squaws. The men were armed with bows and arrows and tomahawks. The leader spoke to me in English, and said, "How do?" I replied and reciprocated the inquiry in the usual manner. He then asked, in his broken English, if there were more white men with me? I replied that there was a great number just behind. He nodded his head and looked at his companions with an expression of disappointed intelligence. I asked him if he was a Kansas? His reply was, "No,—Sac." I then passed, leaving them standing and apparently in earnest consultation.

I was glad to be relieved of their company, for I felt doubtful of their intentions, and my arms were insufficient for a successful defence against them, if they had made an attack,—from which I believe they were deterred by the supposition that my fellow-travellers would immediately be upon them. I rose the hill, and saw, at a distance of about two miles, a man on horseback riding in such a direction across the prairie that I could easily intercept him. I soon came up to him and found it to be Mr. Grayson, one of our own company, out hunting. We walked onward. and came up to the caravan while our party were nooning.

After procuring from our wagon some refreshments, and resting an hour, accompanied by Mr. Curry I again started a pedestrian, in advance of the train of wagons, for a walk of twelve or fifteen miles, the nearest point in our route, to water. The

fresh breeze which had fanned us during the forenoon, died away entirely, and the sun shone with an almost scorching fervency of heat, unmitigated by a solitary cloud on the face of the sky. The trail is smooth and hard, running over the high table-land of the prairies. Clumps and rows of timber could be seen at long distances, giving to the background of the scenery a cultivated and inhabited aspect. The effects of the intense heat, aggravated by the severe exercise of fast walking, became intolerably oppressive, and produced a thirst and faintness such as I had not before experienced. We hunted along the roadside for even a puddle of water to moisten our mouths and throats, but could discover none. Finding some prairie peas, we filled our pockets with them, and their juice afforded a little relief to our thirst. At length we arrived within the distance of two miles of a line of timber on the left, indicative of water. Leaving the trail we marched directly towards it, and reaching its banks we found it to be a small creek which empties into the Kansas river, about five miles distant. We satisfied our thirst with long draughts of the tepid water, and then plunged into the current of the stream to cool our almost broiling flesh and purify our bodies from the dust accumulated upon them by the day's march.

Refreshing ourselves, in the manner above described, for an hour, the invigorating effects of which were most salutary, we returned again to the trail, just as the train of wagons was coming up and passing. Many of the oxen were so much exhausted that they could with difficulty move forward at a very slow pace. Their tongues were hanging out, and several had fallen down, being unable to proceed. One had died on the march. The order had been given to encamp on the opposite side of the stream, and several of the front wagons when they reached it attempted to cross; but the oxen, mad with thirst and heat, when they came in sight of the water, became uncontrollable, and ran down the steep bank into the stream, threatening destruction to the wagons and their contents. All efforts to prevail upon them to leave the water and ascend the opposite bank, for a long time, were unavailing. Such being

the difficulties, the order was countermanded, and our camp formed on the southeastern bank of the stream.

Near our camp there is a crescent-shaped chain of elevated mounds, the natural undulations of the prairie, which I had plainly seen this morning when we commenced our march. These mounds stretch some four or five miles, and their bases being precipitous and wall-like, but for their extent, in outline they would represent the foundations and the fallen and ruined superstructure of some vast temple or overthrown city.

This evening, after we had encamped, it appeared from a speech delivered by Mr. Dunleavy, that a portion of the company had determined to separate from the main party, being dissatisfied with its present organization. Distance 24 miles.

May 18.—Mr. Jacob, who had been appointed sub-captain of one of our divisions; Mr. Kirkendall, who had been appointed quartermaster; and Mr. Greenbury, our pilot, were dispatched early this morning to a mission about ten miles distant up the Kansas river, to ascertain if the river was fordable at that point. Colonel Russell, our captain, rode to the Kansas ferry, five miles distant, to ascertain if the ferry-boats were disengaged, and could, if we deemed it expedient to cross here, ferry our wagons over the river.

Although the morning was fine and pleasant, it clouded up before eight o'clock and commenced raining, accompanied by thunder. After considerable labor and difficulty we succeeded in crossing the creek without any accident, except the breaking of an axletree of one of the wagons in descending the steep bank. Colonel Russell met us on the opposite bank, and, some conversation ensuing with the leaders of the disaffected party, it was proposed that the company should divide, it being too numerous and cumbrous for convenient progress. Those who were in favor of remaining with the originally organized company were requested to move towards the ferry. Thirty-five of the wagons moved forward, and the remainder separated from them.

The signs were so strongly indicative of a heavy rain, that it was thought imprudent to delay crossing the Kansas until the

return of the gentlemen dispatched up the river this morning, but that we should proceed to the ferry and cross forthwith. The Kansas, at the ferry, which is owned by two half-breed Indians, is about two hundred yards in width at this time; but at some seasons of the year, from its banks, it evidently is much narrower. The approach to it, on either side, is through a timbered bottom about three-fourths of a mile in width. The trees are chiefly oak, linden, and hickory. Hazel and a variety of underbrush and grapevines, make up the small shrubbery of the bottom.

The labor of ferrying our wagons over was commenced at one o'clock. The wagons were hauled as near the boat-landing as they could be by the teams, and then with their loads in them were lifted and pushed into the boats by the united strength of the men. By hard and unremitting toil the thirty-five wagons, which now constituted our train, were safely transported to the other side; and all our oxen, horses, and loose stock swam over, by six o'clock, P. M. The fee for ferriage, per wagon, was one dollar. Two boats are employed, and they are large enough to transport two wagons each trip. They are pushed across the stream with long poles handled by Indians. All being over, we moved forward about three miles and encamped on the bank of Soldier Creek, a small stream emptying into the Kansas.

While on our march from the Kansas to our encampment, Mr. Branham and myself, being in advance of the main party, discovered an abundance of ripe strawberries. We stopped and gathered several quarts, and, carrying them to camp, they were served up by Mrs. B., with rich cream and loaf-sugar, a genuine luxury in this wild region.

This morning, before we commenced our march, a Mrs. Hall, the wife of one of the emigrants, was safely delivered of a pair of twins. Thus two were added to our number. These young natives of the wilderness were appropriately named. The mother and children were doing well this evening.

Mr. Webb, editor of the "Independence Expositor," accompanied by Mr. Hay, a great-grandson of Daniel Boone, arrived

at our camp, direct from the settlements, just after dark. They came express to communicate to us the last intelligence we shall receive from the United States, before reaching the Pacific. They brought with them all the letters at the Independence and Westport post-offices addressed to emigrants, and several files of papers to the latest dates. These gave positive information of the existence of hostilities between Mexico and the United States on the Rio Grande, and confirmed the rumor respecting the perilous situation of Gen. Taylor. How this important event is to affect us upon our arrival in California, it is impossible to foresee. No one, however, is in the least disposed to turn back in consequence of it. Distance 10 miles.

CHAPTER IV.

Methodist Mission on the Kansas—Soldier Creek—Lustration—A ruined Indian town—A rose in the wilderness—Another division—Kansas Indian towns—Ki-he-ga-wa-chuck-ee—Prairie potato—Mountain trappers—Beauty of scenery and fertility of soil—Vermilion Creek—Brilliant meteor—Big Blue River—Prairie-pea—Legislation on the prairies.

MAY 19.—We remained encamped to-day, in order to enable Mr. Boone, a grandson of Daniel Boone, and his family and party, who wish to join us, to come up. Messrs. Kirkendall, Jacob, and Greenbury, reached camp this morning about seven o'clock, relieving me of some uneasiness on their account. They had found a ford, near the mission, about twelve miles up the Kansas; but when they returned to the ferry, finding that our train had all passed over, and it being late, they remained during the night with the party that separated from us this morning. The mission which they had visited, and at which they were well received and entertained, is an establishment for the education and christianization of the Indians, supported in part by the United States government, and under the patronage and