

CHAPTER XV.

Mary's river Indians—Their fleetness—Mary's river—Unexpected and singular meeting—Applegate's exploring party from Oregon—Energy of the emigrant population on the Pacific—More Indian visitors—Large herds of antelopes—Flora of Mary's river—A merry Indian—Indian fish-trap—Extensive boiling springs—Rain in the desert—Large body of Indians—Indian foot-race with our mules.

AUGUST 9.—We had scarcely commenced our march when the Indian signal-fires were relighted, and we could discover far up and down the valley, many columns of smoke ascending from the most conspicuous positions on the sides of the mountains.

We took a west course down the grassy bottom of the stream on which we encamped last night, and after travelling some four or five miles, discovered at the distance of about a mile, six Indians running towards us with an apparent speed, greater than could be achieved by any of the animals we were riding. Notwithstanding we proceeded at our usual gait, they soon came up to us, and holding out their hands as we did to them, greeted us with much kindness and cordiality. By signs, we inquired of them their tribe, to which they answered that they were Soshonees, (Snakes.) All the Digger Indians of this valley claim to be Soshonees. The bodies of two or three of them were partially covered with the skins of hares sewn together. The others were entirely naked. Their skins are dark—nearly as dark as that of the negro. The distinguishing features between these Indians and the negro, are in the nose, which is aquiline, the long hair, and their handsome Arabian-shaped feet. Their average stature is about five feet six or seven inches in height. These Indians, doubtless, were the same that disturbed our camp and attempted to steal our mules last night.

One of them had a miserable gun, and was very desirous to

trade some roots prepared in a curious manner, for powder and balls. We declined all trades of this nature, but upon his earnest solicitations I presented him with a few charges of powder without the balls. Two or three of the others were armed with bows and well-filled quivers of iron-pointed arrows. These arrow-points they must have obtained at the northern trading-posts, or they have learned the art of smelting from trappers or emigrants passing down this valley, who have supplied them with iron. Some of them had small pouches or bags made of hare-skins, upon which they seemed to set a great value, and wished to trade them for blankets and other clothing. But our estimate of their wares did not equal their own appraisement, and we could effect no trades. We distributed among them a few pieces of bread and some fried bacon, the residuum of our breakfast, and bid them a very courteous and affectionate good-morning.

Continuing our course along the fertile bottom of the mountain branch, after travelling about two miles farther we struck and crossed Mary's river, which at this point, and at this season, is a very small stream. The channel is of considerable depth and about thirty or forty feet in width, with steep, perpendicular banks. In many places the channel is nearly dry; the water having been absorbed by the spongy earth, stands in stagnant pools with no flowing current to enliven its sluggishness and cool its offensive warmth, or to purge it of the saline, alkaline, and sulphurous substances with which the contiguous soil is strongly impregnated. Clumps of small willows, an inch in diameter, with here and there a few wild currant-bushes, fringe the margin of the river, and constitute the only "timber" that displays itself in this valley.

Just as I was crossing Mary's river, Colonel Russell being with me, considerably in advance of the main body of our party, I saw at the distance of about half a mile a party of some ten or fifteen men mounted on horses and mules, marching towards the north. Spurring our animals, we rode with as much speed as we could make, in a direction to intercept them. They soon discovered us, and halted until we approached them.

From their costume and color it was impossible, at a distance, to determine to which of the classes of the human race they belonged. But their demeanor was entirely pacific. Their rifles lay quietly on the pommels of their saddles, and they seemed to take advantage of the few moments of stoppage allowed them by our interruption of their progress, to rest in their saddles from the weariness of a long journey. I felt quite confident that they were a party from California, who, probably, had been compelled to leave the country in consequence of the war between the United States and Mexico, and were returning to the Atlantic side of the continent, their original homes.

We rode up to them, when they extended their hands and saluted us like brothers who had been long parted, and had met unexpectedly, and under difficult and trying circumstances. We spoke to them in our own language and they answered us in the same dialect, a sound not disagreeable to our ears. We soon learned that they were a party of men from the Wilhamette valley in Oregon, headed by the Messrs. Applegate, who had left their homes on the 10th of May, and since that time had been engaged in exploring a new and more feasible wagon-route to Oregon, by descending Mary's river some distance below this point, and from thence striking the head-waters of the Wilhamette river. Having completed their labors, they were now on their way to Fort Hall for the purpose of meeting the emigrant trains bound to Oregon, and guiding them by this route to their destination. Five members of their party had preceded them several days, having been supplied with their best animals, for the purpose of reaching Fort Hall, or meeting the emigrants this side as soon as possible, and returning immediately with supplies for the relief of the main party, they being nearly destitute of all provisions, and having been on very short allowance for several days. Such was their condition in regard to provisions, that they expected to be compelled to slaughter one of their horses for food, unless they met some of the emigrant trains within a day or two. They all manifested great interest in the "Oregon question," and with much cheerfulness

we gave them such information in regard to it as we possessed before leaving our homes. They informed us that there were two emigrant wagons with ten or twelve men, about four or five days in advance of us.

It would be difficult to decide which of the two parties, when confronted, presented the most jaded, ragged, and travel-soiled aspect, but I think the Oregonese had a little the advantage of us in this respect. None of us, within the settlements of the United States, would have been recognised by our nearest kindred as civilized and christianized men. Both parties had been in the wilderness nearly three months, the Oregon party, as we learned, having started on the tenth of May, and our party on the fifth of the same month; they from the shores of the Pacific travelling east, we from the waters of the Missouri travelling west. A singularity of the incident was, that after having travelled across a desert by a new route some three or four hundred miles, we should have met them just at the moment when they were passing the point of our junction with the old trail. Had we been ten minutes later, we should not have seen them. We met them with pleasure, and parted from them with regret, to pursue our long and toilsome journey, which seems to lengthen out as we proceed,—our point of destination, like the blue wall of the arch of the skies, receding from us as we advance.

I could not, however, but reflect upon and admire the public spirit and enterprise of the small band of men from whom we had just parted. Our government, doubtless, has been desirous of exploring and pointing out the most favorable routes to the Pacific, and has appropriated large sums of money for this purpose. But whatever has been accomplished in the way of explorations, which is of much practical utility, has resulted from the indomitable energy, the bold daring, and the unconquerable enterprise, in opposition to every discouragement, privation, and danger, of our hardy frontier men and pioneers, unaided directly or remotely by the patronage or even the approving smiles and commendations of the government. To them we are indebted for the originally discovered wagon-route to Oregon and Cali-

fornia, and to them we are indebted for all the valuable improvements and *cut-offs* on this route. To them we are indebted for a good, well-beaten, and plain trail to the Pacific ocean, on the shores of which, in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties, unsupported, they have founded an empire. Let us honor those to whom honor is due.

Proceeding down the river about two miles, we encamped at eleven o'clock for the day, in a handsome bottom of green nutritious grass, which the mules cropped with an apparent high relish. The varieties of grasses which I have seen since we entered this valley are numerous, and although they are not as fine and tender as the grasses of the Rocky Mountains, they are all heavily seeded and must be highly sustaining.

Jacob and Miller, unknown to me, when we left our encampment this morning, returned back upon our trail to search for a pocket-compass and some other small articles which Jacob accidentally dropped on the march yesterday, and they had not come up with us when we encamped.

Five more naked Indians, with which the valley and the *cañadas* of the mountains seem to teem, judging from the numerous trails, footprints, and signal-fires, came into our camp immediately after we halted. They brought with them a small quantity of dried meat and roots, with which they professed a desire to make trades with us. The meat I judged was that of the ground-hog. It did not present a very inviting or provocative aspect to the palate. The roots, if roots they were, were still more repulsive, but the Indians seemed to set an extraordinary value both upon the meat and the roots. We could effect no trades with them, their demands being quite too exorbitant. The truth, without doubt was, that they came into our camp for the purpose of discovering what chance there might be for theft and plunder. I requested such of our party as were present, (only four in number,) to display as much as possible their guns, pistols, and knives, in order to give them to understand the consequences of any attempt at thieving or depredation. I set up a small mark and shot my pistols several times into the centre of it, which seemed to strike them

with much astonishment. At each report of the pistol, and the splintering of the small willow stick shot at, glances of surprise passed from one to another. They soon took their leave, much to my gratification. Nothing can be more troublesome than Indians about the camp. They compel us to keep a vigilant and constant watch upon every article we possess, to prevent and detect their thievish propensities. We gave each of them a small piece of bread when they were leaving. Buchanan and Brown killed an antelope soon after we encamped, on the opposite side of the river. It was one of a drove of about twenty, which they succeeded in approaching behind a clump of willows. It was brought to camp and cooked for dinner, and enjoyed with a *gusto* unknown to the epicure whose delicacies are prepared in the kitchens of civilization.

I began to feel considerable uneasiness respecting the non-appearance of Jacob and Miller, and was preparing to return back upon the trail to ascertain what delayed them, when about two o'clock, much to my relief, they appeared in sight, coming down the valley. They had mistaken the Oregon party which we met in the morning for us, and had travelled on after them, coming up to them when they halted at noon.

I noticed, during the day, several grouse or sage-hens, as they are commonly called, sand-hill cranes, and many other small birds, flying near the banks of the river. The day has been one of intense and scorching heat, mitigated occasionally by a few light clouds, shading us momentarily from the almost blistering rays of the sun. Distance 10 miles.

August 10.—A cloudy morning with a pleasant temperature. A sprinkle of rain fell in the course of the night, which dampened the grass and moistened our blankets. Some Indians were seen lurking in the willows near our camp about midnight; but discovering our watch, they made no further attempt to steal our animals. Our camp, around which the mules are picketed, is more than arrow-shot from the willows; and these Indians will not make any hostile demonstrations unless they are sheltered by ravines or bushes.

Having reached the wagon-trail to California, although in

many places it is blind and overgrown, yet we shall have less difficulty in searching out our road, and less anxiety respecting our course. The course of the river at this point is nearly southwest, and the trail runs through the bottom, occasionally crossing the low sand-hills, to cut off the bends and avoid the *cañons*. We passed around a *cañon* early this morning. The road being smooth, and generally hard and level, our mules travel off at a brisk trot, with comparative ease.

During the day's march we have seen not less than three or four hundred antelopes, with which the valley seems to teem. They are exceedingly timid and wild, discovering us usually by the scent, at the distance of a mile, and running almost with the fleetness of the wind into the hills and mountains.

The lupin is the only flower I have seen to-day. A coarse, heavily-seeded grass has been the prevailing vegetation of the river bottom. Benches of low hills, covered with sage and grease-wood, slope down to the fertile land, beyond which high mountains raise their rocky, totally barren, and inaccessible peaks. The river is now more a succession or chain of stagnant pools than a stream of running water, and its banks are skirted, as heretofore, with small willows and wild currant-bushes. The soil of the bottom is highly fertile, wherever it is moistened by the waters of the river.

We encamped at three o'clock, P. M., as near the margin of the stream as safety would permit. The wind blew a gale from the south for two hours this afternoon; and some sparks of fire catching in the dead grass around our camp, so rapid was the conflagration that we had great difficulty in saving our baggage from destruction. A panther approached within three hundred yards of our camp about sunset. We discharged a rifle at him, but he escaped. The heat of the afternoon has been intense. Distance 30 miles.

August 11.—At eight o'clock we resumed our march down the river, which, at the distance of ten miles from our last encampment, *cañons* between ranges of elevated mountains, composed of rugged, precipitous rocks, at the bottom of which is a coarse debris of sharp broken flint and sandstone. The trail

here runs immediately upon the banks of the river, and crosses it in the course of five or six miles, as many times, in order to take advantage of the narrow bottoms made by the abrupt and worm-like windings of the stream. The small bottoms are highly fertile, and are covered with a luxuriant growth of grass and flowers. Among the flowers which ornamented these little *parterres*, I noticed the lupin, the sunflower, a small trumpet-shaped flower, the corol of which is blue and scarlet, a rare combination of colors, and a flower with a flaming, torch-like development of brilliant scarlet.

Emerging from this *cañon* we passed over another wide and fertile bottom, at the lower end of which a naked Indian, more bold than his hidden associates, made his appearance from the willows at some distance, and ran towards us with great speed. Approaching us, he extended his arm; and when he came up, shook all of us by the hand with great cordiality. A grin, illustrative of a feeling of much delight, distorted his swarthy countenance, over which, and down his neck, the long, coarse, coal-black, and matted hair fell in neglected rankness and profusion. His delight at seeing and saluting us, was apparently so overwhelming, that he could not restrain his emotions, but laughed outright, (an unusual phenomenon in an Indian,) and shouted a gleeful shout.

We did not suspend our march on his account, but he trotted along by my side for a mile or more, his garrulous tongue rolling out with an oily fluency an eloquence quite as incomprehensible as that of many a member of congress. Three more of his brethren made their appearance from the distant willows, when our good-natured and nearly overjoyed friend left us and joined them. We gave him, as usual, a small piece of bread, which has become a scarce commodity with us.

The trail at this point, to avoid a *cañon*, leaves the river, turning abruptly from it to the right, and ascending over low gravelly hills, with the usual growth in such places, of wild sage, until it gradually mounts an elevated ridge, about a mile down the western slope of which we found a small spring of cold, pure water. There being a sufficiency of grass around this

spring for our mules, we determined to encamp for the day, and enjoy the luxury of good water. A large number of antelopes, as usual, were in sight of us to-day, and I saw several wild geese and sage-hens, but we have killed nothing. Distance 32 miles.

August 12.—Morning clear and cool, with a light breeze from the west. Continuing down the narrow valley or gorge, and passing within a mile or two of our camp several springs of cold, fresh water, we again, after travelling some eight or nine miles, came in sight of the river, winding through a spacious valley which stretches far to the south, with a range of high mountains bounding it on the west. The river here makes a long bend, turning to the north, in which course it runs about fifteen miles. We left this valley through a narrow gap, through which the river forces its way; and about one o'clock, P. M., turning the point of the mountain, we entered another large and level valley, which stretches to the north as far as the vision can penetrate through the smoky vapor. We travelled down this valley, in a southwest course, about ten miles, when we encamped for the day, at three o'clock.

There has been little or no variation in the general characteristics of the country and its productions. Sage, grease-wood, etc., cover the low hills and benches of the mountains, and grass and willows the margin of the river. The soil is extremely light and porous, resembling ashes; and whenever it is disturbed by the feet of our mules, we are enveloped in clouds of dust. Our hair and beards look white and frosty, and our complexions are as cadaverous as so many corpses, until we perform our evening ablutions.

I saw to-day, while on our march, several Indians standing on a bluff at no great distance from the trail, but they did not venture to approach us. Near our encampment is the miserable dwelling of a Digger, but deserted. We discovered, on the bank of the river, a fish-trap, ingeniously constructed of willows interwoven. It was about ten or twelve feet in length, and shaped like the cornucopia. Multitudes of wolves serenade us every night with their harsh and discordant howls. The

day has been excessively hot, and the sky is of the color of copper, from the effects of the dense smoke with which the atmosphere of the valley is filled. Distance 30 miles.

August 13.—About nine o'clock, A. M., the temperature became intensely hot, the wind changing to the south, and blowing a breeze that was almost scorching. Nothing can be more oppressive than the currents of hot winds from the desert, whose fire-like fervency, sustained by the almost scorching rays of the sun, is sometimes nearly suffocating.

We travelled down the margin of the river about twelve miles, when we left the wagon-trail, turning to the right over some low hills, from which we descended into a wide valley, through which the river winds its serpentine channel, in a northwest direction. Laying our course across this valley, after travelling about ten miles we again struck the river and the wagon-trail, and continued our course along the margin of the stream until we encamped, about two o'clock.

The low hills over which we passed are covered with a debris of sharp fragments of basalt. The dark sides of the mountains beyond them indicate that they are composed of the same scoriaceous substance. The general features of the country and scenery are the same as heretofore described. Several miles of our route, to-day, the ground was thickly incrustated with the carbonate of soda. A few antelopes were seen at a distance, and occasionally a sage-hen was flushed.

During the afternoon some heavy, but dry-looking clouds obscured the sun, and I heard distant thunder in several directions, but no rain fell to moisten the parched ground. The smoke in the valley continues very dense, and the coppery hue of the heavens increases—the atmosphere feeling as it looks, heated almost to blistering. Distance 30 miles.

August 14.—The morning was hazy with thick, smoky vapor. About ten o'clock last night, a black cloud rose from the south, and continual and almost dazzling flashes of lightning were darting athwart its face in all directions, illuminating that portion of the heavens with a blaze of electrical light. The wind blew with violence, and a few drops of rain fell, but not enough

in this arid region, where all humidity seems almost instantly to be evaporated, to leave a perceptible moisture in the morning.

The channel of the river is very serpentine, winding abruptly to the right and left through the valley, to irrigate, in obedience to the economy of nature, and fertilize its ashy and spongy soil. Our general course to-day has been nearly west, bearing a little to the north of west, crossing two extensive valleys or plains, and passing through a narrow defile of the mountains, through which the river forces its way. The waters of the river appear to be decreasing, and the channel occasionally is quite dry, exposing in some places a sandy, in others a soft, muddy bed. Extensive portions of the valleys through which we have passed have been incrustated with an alkaline efflorescence.

We encamped near the bank of the river at four o'clock, P. M. About two miles from our camp, near the base of the mountains, we discovered a circle of dark green herbage. A phenomenon so unusual in such a position, excited my curiosity, and notwithstanding my fatigue, I determined to visit the spot, and ascertain its cause. Accompanied by Jacob and Nuttall, I walked to the place, and discovered that what produced the remarkable verdure was the water flowing from a number of boiling springs, which, cooling as it flowed down the slope of the valley, irrigated and fertilized the earth, producing luxuriant grass in the small circle dampened by it, before sinking and disappearing in the sands. There are some ten or twelve of these springs, the basins of the largest of which are ten feet in diameter. The temperature of the water is boiling heat. To test it by the best method within our power, (our thermometer having been broken,) we procured from camp a small piece of bacon, which, being placed on the end of a stick and thrust into the boiling basin, was well cooked in fifteen minutes. The water is slightly impregnated with salt and sulphur. Immediately around these basins, the ground is whitened with a crust of the carbonate of soda, beneath which is a stratum or shell of reddish rock, which appears to have been formed by a deposit from the springs.

Our observations and experiments detained us, until it was

quite dark, and we had great difficulty, the fires being extinguished, in finding the camp. Distance 36 miles.

August 15.—A drizzling rain commenced falling this morning, about one o'clock, which did not cease until eight o'clock. Our blankets and skins were pretty thoroughly drenched with water; but the clouds clearing away, and the sun shining out before nine o'clock, such is the rapidity of evaporation here, that fifteen or twenty minutes sufficed to dry our baggage and the ground. Judging from appearances, no rains sufficient to penetrate the earth to any extent, have fallen in the valley since the wagons passed along last year. In those places over which the trail passes, where there is no vegetation except the sage, the marks of the wagon-tires, and the footprints of the oxen and horses, are quite distinct, and do not appear to have been made more than a month. The grass, except immediately on the margin of the river, is perfectly dry, and crumbles to powder under our feet.

Our course this morning run in a direction north of west for ten miles, when we turned the point of a range of mountains on our left, and the trail takes nearly a southwest course; sometimes through the bottom, near the banks of the river, at others over the elevated, barren portions of the valley, and through the wild sage.

About twelve o'clock, I saw on a bluff on the opposite side of the river, across a low bottom at the distance of two miles, a large body of Indians—some two or three hundred. Four of them left the main body, and running across the bottom with incredible celerity, soon overtook us, notwithstanding we were travelling at a brisk trot. They were naked, and armed with bows and arrows. When they came up to us, they held out their hands in token of friendship, and falling behind, I entered into such a conversation with them as my knowledge of their signs permitted. All I could learn was, that they wished us to make presents to them of shirts, and something to eat. This request, of course, we could not comply with, our stock of clothing and provisions being too scant. Two of them fell behind very soon; the other two travelled along with us, without

any apparent fatigue, for four hours, at the rate of five miles per hour.

They have a great dread of a rifle when its muzzle is pointed towards them, and were always careful to keep out of the range of our pieces. About a mile before we encamped for the day, Buchanan and Brown being behind, killed a wolf, and a sand-hill crane. They were greatly astonished at the report of the rifle, and to them its mysterious and deadly effects. They looked in wonder, first at the muzzle of the gun, and then at the mortal wound made in the wolf, causing instant death. To them it was incomprehensible. The wolf and the crane were presented to them, with which they seemed to be delighted, and started to return to their fellows, with as much fleetness as if they had not travelled a mile during the day.

We encamped at half-past four o'clock, descending a steep bluff into a small low bottom of the river, where the grass was rank and green. Another cloud rose from the southwest just before sunset, and it rained enough before we retired for the night, to moisten the grass and the surface of the ground. The mountains bordering the valley of the river have exhibited every variety of rugged form, during the day's march. The rock of which they are composed is volcanic and of a dark hue; they are entirely destitute of vegetation, and the scenery, consequently, is most gloomy and repulsive to the eye. Distance 30 miles.

CHAPTER XVI.

Refreshing rain—Dense smoky vapor—Scarcity of provisions—Horses giving out—Dismal journey—Soup of fresh-water shellfish—Agreeable meeting—Obtain a supply of provisions—Merry Digger Indian visitres
An Indian coil—Petrifactions—Sink of Mary's river—Bitter waters—The desert between Mary's and Truckee river—Toilsome march—Unexpected refreshment—Remarkable boiling springs.

AUGUST 16.—When I woke this morning it was cloudy, and rain was falling copiously. From appearances, it had been rain-

ing several hours, and those of our party who had bivouacked were quite wet. Nothing could be more agreeable to us than this rain. By it the dust which in places is almost suffocating, has been laid for a short distance at least, and the sultry and dry atmosphere has been cooled and moistened.

Our course for the day has generally been southwest, and the trail which we have followed has sometimes passed through the grassy bottoms next to the river, and at others over the high and barren slopes of the valley, with a growth of leafless sage upon them.

We passed some places where water was standing in pools from the effects of last night's rain, a most unusual, but not unpleasant sight in this arid region. The atmosphere is so charged with smoke, upon which the rain of last night seems to have produced no effect, that distant objects are not discernible. The outlines of the nearest mountains, dimly seen through the thick vapor, present the same dark, rugged, and barren aspect as has heretofore been described.

I saw several Indians to-day at a distance, but they ran from us and concealed themselves in the willows bordering the river. The water of the river has become strongly impregnated with alkali, and being exposed to the sun, when taken from the pools is nearly blood heat. It is not, however, more distasteful than we expected to find it, and bad as it is, our excessive thirst renders it palatable.

This evening I made an inspection of the provisions of my mess, and found, owing to its increase of numbers from unavoidable circumstances since we left Fort Laramie, that there would be a deficiency, although we have been on short allowance for the last ten days, restricting ourselves to a single small slice of fried bacon and a very diminutive piece of bread, for each, twice a day, morning and evening. We estimate our journey to the settlements of California at fourteen days; and our provisions will not last us more than five or six days.

Brown's and Brookey's riding-horses nearly gave out to-day. This is a very great misfortune, as we have not a single animal whose services we can well dispense with. The sun sunk down