

CHAPTER VII.

SAN JOSÉ GARRISONED.—A CALIFORNIA RAIN.—ESCAPE OF CONVICTS.—
SHOOTING EDWARDS.—TWO WASHERWOMEN.—DEATH OF MR. SARGENT.
—INDIAN HENS.—HUNTING CURLEW.—THE CALIFORNIA HORSE.—AN
OLD EMIGRANT.—THE GRIZZLY BEAR.

FRIDAY, NOV. 27. The prize brig Julia, Lieut. Selden commanding, arrived here to-day from San Francisco. She left there the Savannah and Warren. Fifty of the Savannah's men had been sent by Capt. Mervin to San José, under command of Lieut. Pinkney, where they will form a military post, of sufficient strength, it is believed, to repel any hostile attacks, and maintain the flag. The northern half of California is now pretty safe; the ranchos may suffer from marauding parties of the enemy, and some acts of violence be committed, but no important post can be wrenched from our possession. In the south we hold San Diego, and have an enemy in the field at los Angeles. They will probably break covert at two, or three different points; some will fly for Mexico, and some for the sheltered coves of the San Joaquin. Let those catch them who can; I would as soon track a chamois among the clefts and pinnacles of the Alps.

SATURDAY, NOV. 28. It is now near the close of

that month which in other climes is often one of the most unpleasant in the year; but here it has been one of unrivalled brilliancy. The sky has been almost without a cloud, the winds have slept, and the soft air has lain on the landscape like a golden slumber. Such is the tranquil beauty in which the vernal year here sinks to repose.

"Ah! 'twere a lot too bless'd,
Forever in thy color'd shades to stray;
Amid the kisses of the soft southwest
To rove and dream for aye;

And leave the vain low strife
That makes men mad; the tug for wealth and power,
The passions and the cares that wither life,
And waste its little hour."

BRYANT.

SUNDAY, NOV. 29. Two Californians called upon me to-day, to decide a difficulty which had arisen between them in some money transactions. I told them to call on some week-day—that I attended to no business matters on the Sabbath. They apologized for interfering with my *recreations*; I told them I had no recreations to be disturbed, but I would not open my office for business on the Sabbath. Had I told them I was going to a cock-fight, their only wonder would have been that they had not heard of the sport; and both would have forgotten their business in hunting their cash for the ring. Such is the moral obtuseness which a perversion of the Sabbath induces. The heart on which the dews of this sacred

morn have never melted, will be desolate of moral verdure; though here and there a leaf may spring like flowers in the cleft of a rock.

MONDAY, NOV. 30. We have had at last a true specimen of California showers. The wind blew a gale from the south. Cloud on cloud was piled into the zenith, till the whole dome of heaven was filled with substantial darkness. The earth lay in an eclipse. A few heavy rolls of thunder, and the rain fell in torrents; it lasted twelve hours. Every roof and frowning cliff became a cascade. Down each ravine rolled an exulting tide. The aquatic bird dashed onward in its foam to the sea. Suddenly the wind veered into the west, and in a few moments the sky was without a cloud. Field and forest flashed out in the splendors of the sun; and on the soft wind came gushes of music from the wild-wood. Instead of bleak November, you would have said:

“Fairer and brighter spreads the reign of May;
The tresses of the woods
With the light dallying of the west wind play
And the full brimming floods,
As gladly to their goal they run,
Hail the returning sun.”

PERCIVAL.

TUESDAY, DEC. 1. I was startled from my slumbers last night by the report of a musket under my window; and, seizing my rifle, rushed to the door, but could perceive no one near, and only heard, in

the darkness, the sound of retreating footsteps. The mystery was soon explained: the convicts had escaped from prison, and the sentry, posted near my residence, had fired upon them as they rushed past. Several of the guard went immediately in pursuit, and succeeded in apprehending two; but seven others, favored by the darkness and storm of the night, had cleared the town.

It appeared, on investigation, that the sentry, posted at the prison, had stolen the keys from the guard-room, where they were kept, unlocked the outer and inner doors, and then run himself with the convicts. Another sentry, by a preconcerted plan, had also joined them. Only one prisoner remained in the apartment which had been unlocked. When asked by me why *he* did not run, he said he would not be seen running from Tophet in such company. This was the funny fellow who stole the money. One of those who escaped, was a great overgrown Californian—a monstrous mass of flesh and bone. He had been shot in the leg in a previous fray, and always affected the cripple, hobbling about on huge crutches, which fairly bent under him. But last night, when his pursuers were close on his trail, he bounded forward like a rabbit. Crutches, and all occasion for them, had been left behind. You would have thought some shape of air were flitting before you, but for the heavy puffs which heaved, at brief intervals, from his laboring trunk. An innocent man escaping from violence has often a hard time of it, but a felon es-

caping from justice much harder; his guilty conscience will long keep the pursuer at his heels.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 2. A party, well mounted and armed, started this morning in pursuit of the convicts. They overtook one of them and the two sentries about twenty miles distant. The sentries still had their arms, which they surrendered, and delivered themselves up without resistance. The convict was shot down through the impetuosity of one of the party. There is a degree of ferocity in shooting down an unarmed man at which humanity revolts. We can hardly find an apology for it, even in the brutal instincts of the savage. The fate of the two sentries concerned in liberating the prisoners whom they were posted to guard, is uncertain. If tried by a court-martial, their sentence will be death; if delivered over to the civil authority, they will be sentenced to the public works for a long term of years.

THURSDAY, DEC. 3. The convict Edwards, found with the two sentries, and who had been shot after he had surrendered, was left in a dying condition on the public road. My constable left this morning to find him, but was unable to cross the Salinas river on account of the freshet, and its extreme rapidity. His horse got frightened and refused to swim him over. He fastened him on this side, and, divesting himself of his hat, shoes, and coat, plunged in; but the current,

after sweeping him down a mile or more, landed him on the same side from which he had started.

He is a man of great humanity as well as courage and resolution, and it was not with his consent that Edwards was left at night-fall, wounded and dying, exposed to a pitiless storm, and to be devoured by wild beasts. It was inhuman to leave him in this condition, when he might have been brought in, or taken to some house in the neighborhood. Those in fault, now that the wrong has been done, and is irretrievable, would gladly veil it from the public eye. There is a tongue in cruelty, which those who inflict it can never silence. It will speak out and awaken pangs in the most callous conscience. If we have no mercy on others, how can we expect it for ourselves in that day when we most need it?

“ Teach me to feel another's woe,
To hide the faults I see;
The mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.”

FRIDAY, DEC. 4. The moment a child is born on a farm in California, and the nurse has had time to dress it, it is given to a man on horseback, who, with its future godfather and godmother, ride post-haste with it to some mission, and present it to a priest for baptism. This ceremony concluded, the party, full of glee, start on their return; and the little newcomer may now, perhaps, rest a week or two before he starts on another excursion; but after that, hardly

a day will elapse without his being on horseback. He literally rides from his cradle to his grave. Thus, by the time a boy is ten or twelve years of age, he becomes an expert rider, is devoted to the saddle, and looks upon pedestrian motion as a contemptible way of getting through the world. He would sooner travel a hundred miles on horseback than ten on foot, and connect less fatigue and hardship with the result. Most of his labors, too, are on the saddle. He has a farm of twenty or thirty miles to ride over; vast wheat-fields to survey, and, perhaps, ten thousand head of cattle to keep from straying. He would have but little time for repose if he went by steam.

SATURDAY, DEC. 5. Of all the women I have had to deal with here the washer-women are the most unmanageable. Two of them entered my office today as full of fight as the feline antagonists of Kilkenny. It seems they had been out washing in one of the little pools created by the recent showers, when one had taken that part of the margin previously occupied by the other. War offensive and defensive immediately commenced. One drew a knife, which had a blade two mortal inches in length, and the other a sharp ivory bodkin. But what their weapons wanted in terror and strength their ungentle anger supplied.

At last one cried out, "the alcalde;" the other echoed it, and so they both rushed down to the office to have their difficulties settled. Both of course

commenced talking at the same time; and their stories ran together like two conflicting rivulets forced into the same channel. There was plenty of tumult and bubble. When these had a little subsided, I began cautiously to angle for the truth—a difficult trout to catch in such waters. But one darter after another was captured, till I had enough to form some opinion of those that had escaped. These we discussed till bitter feeling, like biting hunger, became appeased. The rest was very easily settled. Both went away declaring either margin of the pool good enough, and each urging on the other the first choice.

How gentle is forgiveness! and how sweet
To feel the severed heart flow back again
To one we loved, estranged by hasty words!

SUNDAY, DEC. 6. Mr. Sargent, who came out in the Congress in the capacity of clerk to the purser, and who had been left here several weeks since for the restoration of his mind and health, was missed from his quarters on Tuesday last. He has been laboring for some time under mental aberrations which wear a reasoning show, and which alarm only the close observer. His amiable disposition and exemplary life exempted him from all reproach, and have excited a general sympathy and concern for his uncertain fate. He was last seen winding his way through the forest which skirts Monterey, towards a ledge of rocks which overhangs the boiling surf of

the bay. I have traversed the beach for miles, and watched each swell as it rolled in, to see if it bore on its crest aught like a human form. But nothing came to the shore or eddied in the surge, to resolve mystery and give a painful certainty to doubt. The sea itself is an awful mystery, and becomes doubly so when the fate of one we loved is locked in the tongueless silence of its unfathomed depths.

The waves tell not the fate of those
On whom their hasty waters close ;
But deeper still their secrets spread,
That travel with their drifting dead.

MONDAY, DEC. 7. The simplest article for the table is often beyond the reach of your money here. I have found it so difficult to procure a few eggs, when required, that I have at last gone to keeping hens. I purchased six of an Indian woman for six dollars, and a rooster for fifty cents. On asking the woman why she charged only half price for the rooster, she replied that the fellow laid no eggs, and as for his crowing that did nobody any good. Sounder reasons than these could not be furnished in a much higher place than a hencoop. The habits of these hens are a little singular. They are perfectly tame, and are as much at home in the kitchen as the cook. They never trouble themselves much about a nest, but deposite their eggs where they find it most convenient ; one takes the tea-tray, another the ironing-table, a third the oven, and there is one that

always gets into the cradle. She is not at all disturbed by the tossing of the little fellow on whose premises she is obtruding. Neither she nor any of her feathered sisters cackle when they leave the nest. They don't seem to think that any thing worth making an ado about has come to pass. The rooster, it is true, perks up a little, and perhaps feels a feather taller. But this is the vanity of his sex. There are a great many who crow over what others have done.

TUESDAY, DEC. 8. The banditti, that have hovered for some weeks past in the vicinity of Monterey, have made it unsafe to venture out on our hunting excursions, unless in sufficient numbers to repel an attack. But last evening, the want of exercise, and of something to relieve the endless monotony of beef on the table, induced me forth. I took my boy, and put into his hands one of Colt's revolving rifles, and took myself the fowling-piece. We had hardly got a mile from town, when two horsemen broke from the covert of the woods, and dashed down in our direction. I had but little more than time to exchange pieces with my boy, when they were within rifle-shot. Their garb showed them to be Californians. My heart beat a great deal louder than usual. But they suddenly wheeled, and soon disappeared behind one of the hills which look out on the bay. They had no arms, except pistols at the saddle-bow. Whether they had hostile intentions, I know not : their move-

ments had very much that appearance; and I must say I never before experienced so fully those feelings men describe in going into battle. They are not fear so much as an intensity of excitement, which seems as if it would suffocate life: it is dispelled with the first gun. I had once occasion to repel an exasperated Spaniard with a pistol, and though I had anticipated his attack, was prepared for it, and believed that the aim of the pistol would make him sheath his knife; still there was for a moment an intensity of feeling that would, if prolonged, destroy one. We continued our hunting, but changed our ground to the vicinity of the sea, and brought home a dozen curlew, which almost rival in flavor the canvas-back duck.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 9. The horses of California are of a hardy nature; and it is well for them that they are, considering the inhuman manner in which they are generally treated by the natives. If a man wants to ride forty or fifty miles from his residence, he mounts his horse, and spurs off upon the gallop. On arriving at the place of his destination, he ties him to a post, where he stands two or three days, waiting for his master. During this time he is not once fed, and is quite fortunate if he gets a swallow of water. At last, his rider comes, mounts him, and he takes him back again at the same free and easy gait with which he first started. This, of course, is confined to the summer season, when the grass has the most substance and nutriment: still it is almost

incredible. Besides the weight of his heavy rider, the horse generally carries fifty or sixty pounds in the gear of his saddle, and double this in a soaking rain. It requires two large tanned ox hides to fit out a Californian saddle; then add to this, the wooden stirrups, three inches thick, the saddle-tree, with its stout iron rings and buckles, a pair of goat-skins across the pommel, holsters and pistols, and spurs at the heels of the rider, weighing from four to six pounds, and we have some idea of what a Californian horse has to carry. Still he is cheerful and spirited, and never flags till nature sinks with exhaustion. A man who can abuse such an animal, ought to be bitted and saddled himself.

THURSDAY, DEC. 10. The old as well as the young are coming over the mountains. I had an emigrant to dine with me to-day, who has recently arrived, and who is seventy-six years of age. His locks are as free of gray hairs as those of a child, and his eye still flashes with the fires of youth. He is among the volunteers, and you may see him every day on a spirited horse, with a rifle at his saddle-bow. He has four sons with Col. Fremont. They enlisted before they had time to unpack their saddles, and have with them the remnants of the biscuit and cheese which they brought from the United States. I asked the old man what could induce him at his age to come to California. He said his children were coming, and so he determined to come too. I asked him if he

had no compunction in taking up arms against the inhabitants the moment of his arrival. He said he had Scripture example for it. The Israelites took the promised land of the East by arms, and the Americans must take the promised land of the West in the same way. I told him that would do, if he could show the same high commission. But I find this kind of parallel running in the imagination of all the emigrants. They seem to look upon this beautiful land as their own Canaan, and the motley race around them as the Hittites, the Hivites, and Jebusites, whom they are to drive out. But they have gone at it with other weapons than ram's horns, except as powder-flasks.

FRIDAY, DEC. 11. The grizzly bear is the most formidable and ferocious animal in California; and yet, with all this ferocity of disposition, rarely attacks a man unless surprised or molested. The fellow never lies in wait for his victim. If the hunter invades his retreat or disputes his path he will fight, but otherwise contents himself with the immunity which he finds in the wildness of his home and the savage grandeur of his nature. It is never safe to attack him with one rifle; for if you fail to hit him in a vital part, he is on you in the twinkling of an eye. Your only possibility of escape is up a near tree, too slender for his giant grasp; and then there is something extremely awkward in being on the top of a tree with such a savage monster at its root. How long he will

remain there you cannot tell; it may be a day, and it may be a week. Your antagonist is too shrewd to hand you up your rifle, or let you come down to get it. You are his prisoner, more safely lodged than in a dungeon, and he will set you at liberty when it suits him. He sleeps not himself at his post; day and night his great flashing eyes are fastened upon you. The lyre of Orpheus may have lulled to sleep the sentinel of Hades, but its magic tones have never charmed to slumber the sentinel of the California forest.

The full-grown California bear measures from eight to ten feet in length, and four or five in girth. His strength is tremendous, his embrace death. Had the priest of Apollo fallen into his folds, he would have perished without any of those protracted agonies which the sympathetic muse has wailed round the world. Nature has thrown over him a coat of mail, soft indeed, but impervious to the storm and the arrow of the Indian. The fur, which is of a dark brown color, is nearly a span long, and when the animal is enraged each particular hair stands on end. His food in the summer is chiefly berries, but he will now and then, on some of his feast days, slaughter a bull-ock. In winter he lives on acorns, which abound in these forests. He is an excellent climber, and will ascend a large oak with the rapidity of a tar up the shrouds of his ship. In procuring his acorns, when on the tree, he does not manifest his usual cunning. Instead of threshing them down like the Indian, he selects a well-stocked limb, throws himself upon its

extremity, and there hangs swinging and jerking till the limb gives way, and down they come, branch, acorns, and bear together. On these acorns he becomes extremely fat, yielding ten or fifteen gallons of oil, which is said to be sufficiently pungent and nutritive as a tonic to tuff a statue's marble head.

The she bear has one peculiarity that must puzzle even the philosophical inquirer. As soon as she discovers herself with young, she ceases to roam the forest, and modestly retires from the presence of others, to some secluded grotto. There she remains, while her male companion, with a consideration that does honor to his sex, brings her food. She reappears at length with her twin cubs, and woe to the luckless wight who should attempt to injure or molest them. They are guarded by an affection and ferocity with which it would be madness to trifle. For them she hunts the berries, and dislodges the acorns. Her maternal care is a beautiful trait in her savage nature, and

"Shines like a good deed in a naughty world."