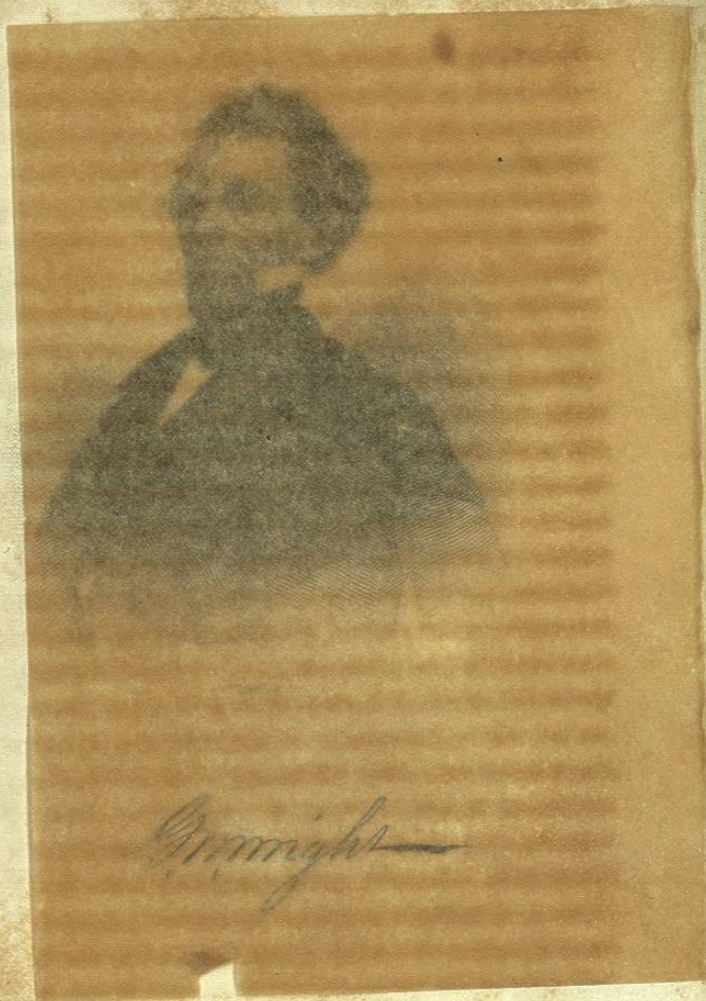


CHAPTER XIX.

TOUR TO THE GOLD-MINES.—LOSS OF HORSES.—FIRST NIGHT IN THE WOODS.
—ARRIVAL AT SAN JUAN.—UNDER WAY.—CAMPING OUT.—BARK OF THE
WOLVES.—WATCH-FIRES.—SAN JOSÉ.—A FRESH START.—CAMPING ON
THE SLOPE OF A HILL.—WILD FEATURES OF THE COUNTRY.—VALLEY OF
THE SAN JOAQUIN.—BAND OF WILD HORSES.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 20. A servant of James McKinley, Esq., led to my door this morning a beautiful saddle-horse, with a message from his master, desiring me to accept the animal as a token of his regard. The gift was most opportune, as I was on the eve of a trip to the gold-mines. To guard against contingencies I purchased another, and, to prevent their being stolen, placed them both in the government corral, where a watch is posted night and day. My companions on the trip were to be Capt. Marcy, son of the late secretary of war, Mr. Botts, naval storekeeper, and Mr. Wilkinson, son of our ex-minister to Russia.

Having procured a suitable wagon, we freighted it lightly with provisions, articles of Indian traffic, tools for working in the mines, cooking utensils, and blankets to sleep in. To this we attached four mules, but little used to the harness, and of no great power, but they were the best that could be got at the time. The whole was put under the charge of a man who was half sailor and half teamster, and not much of



either. Thus accoutred, the team was sent ahead, and we were to follow the next day.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 21. The hour for starting having arrived, I sent my man to the government coral for my horses. He returned in a few moments with the intelligence that a party of the volunteers had broken into the coral during the night, and carried off ten horses, and among them both of mine! There was no time now for ferreting out thieves, or hunting stolen animals. Our wagon was on the way, and my companions were mounted and waiting. I hurried to Mr. S—, who I knew had a fine horse in his yard, and offered him two hundred dollars for the animal, but he declined parting with him. My only resource now was with Mr. T—, who had three horses in his coral, but they were off a long journey the night before. I struck a bargain at a hundred dollars for one of them, and throwing on my saddle, was under way in a few minutes.

My horse held out pretty well for twenty miles, and then suddenly broke down. We were on the plain of the Salinas, and there was but little prospect of my being able to procure a substitute. But just at this crisis the mail rider hove in sight, with a horse in lead. I arranged with him for the spare animal, transferred my saddle to him, and with a farewell to my wearied steed, started again. We had directed our wagoner to proceed to San Juan, and expected to overtake him at that place before dark. But night

set in while we were eight or ten miles distant, and it was a night of Egyptian darkness. We lost our way, and brought up in the woods. To proceed was impossible; so we dismounted, tied our horses together, felt for some dry leaves, and fired them with a lucifer which had been given us by a traveller an hour before.

With brush and bits of bark we managed to sustain our fire, but our prospect for the night was rather gloomy—without a drop of water, without any food, without an overcoat or blanket to cover us, with heavy thunder over head, and the wolves barking around. But we divided ourselves into four watches; one was to keep up the fire while the other three slept, and each take his turn in feeding the flame. My watch came first, and it was the longest two hours I ever experienced. Every old snag I drew to the fire seemed to exhaust the little strength that remained. My eyelids would fall, and it seemed impossible to lift them. I heard the wolves bark, but it was like a noise in one's dream. But my relief came at last, and throwing myself down close to the fire, I slept too sound even for the thunder. It was the cold dim gray of advancing morn when I awoke. A ride of an hour brought us to San Juan, where we found our baggage-wagon at a stream, the mules tethered, and whistling a piteous welcome to our steeds, and the driver blowing into a bundle of reeds and straw, from which a slender thread of smoke was rising into the chill atmosphere.

San Juan is thirty-four miles from Monterey; the only buildings are a gigantic church and the contiguous dwelling—once occupied by the priests and their Indian neophytes. The sanctuary remains; but the priests are gone, and the Indians are on the four winds, save those over whom the pine sings its requiem. We broke our long fast on hard bread, broiled pork, and coffee without milk. The sun was high when our mules were harnessed, and the crack of the driver's whip told that we were on the way. A few miles brought us to the foot of a hill; when half-way up our mules balked, and the wagon began to travel backward. We blocked the wheels, and tried to cheer and force them on; but a mule has that peculiar virtue which is insensible alike to flatteries and frowns. Still we coaxed, and whipped, and cheered, but in vain—there stuck our old wagon, fast as a thunder-cloud on a mountain's bluff. We had to turn lighters, and carry the greater part of the load, by hand, to the top of the hill. One of the mules whistled out in seeming derision; while his fellow looked sorry, as if smitten with compunction. This delay consumed several hours, and the sun was far down his western slope when we reached a few shanties on a plain covered in spots with the surviving verdure of the year: here we camped for the night. One tethered the animals; two brought wood and water; and one turned cook. We made our supper by the light of our watch-fire, smoked our cigars, and turned down upon the earth, with our

saddles for our pillows. A blanket served to protect each from the dews and the night air. How little man wants here! His palace seems to tower in idle grandeur, between a cradle and a coffin.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 22. Day glimmered over the hills and we were up; the gathered brands of our watch-fire kindled again under our camp-kettle. Our breakfast was soon dispatched, our mules in harness, our blankets stowed, and we were on the way. Ten miles farther, and my third horse, which I had procured at San Juan, began to give out, and I was thrown upon my feet, till relieved by the opportune arrival of a gentleman with a spare horse, which I purchased at his own price, leaving my own to shift for himself. When on my feet, my thoughts ran bitterly back to the two fine horses with which I had expected to leave Monterey. We are the least forgiving when we feel most the need of that of which we have been robbed.

Our road lay through a level plain, into which the spur of a mountain range had thrown its bold terminus. Doubling this, we wound into a deep cove, where wild oats waved, and a copious spring gushed from a cleft of the rock. It was yet two hours to sunset; but the next stream lay ten miles ahead, and we decided to camp where we were. Our horses and mules were turned into the ample cove untethered; and in half an hour we had gathered sufficient wood for a strong fire through the night. We

were near the rancho of Mr. Murphy, and the kind old gentleman called, and invited us to his house; but we deemed it more prudent to stay by our animals. Our supper of hard bread, broiled pork, and coffee was quickly prepared, and as quickly disposed of. The shadows of eve fell fast; we arranged our watches for the night; and each, in his blanket wound, composed himself to sleep. Mine was the mid-watch: I found the camp-fire bright, and the cliffs around lit with its rays. I numbered the animals to see that none had strayed, and then sat down to watch the motions of a wolf, who was reconnoitering our camp, with step as soft and low—

“As that of man on guilty errand bent.”

SATURDAY, SEPT. 23. We broke camp, were up and away while the dew was yet fresh on the grass. Ten miles brought us to Fisher's rancho, where we procured soft bread and fresh milk. But our animals fared hard; the grasshoppers had been there before them. We had yet three hours of sun when we reached the lagoon near San José, but camped there on account of the grass. A shanty stood near by, where we procured a few potatoes and onions, and a piece of fresh meat, with which we made a stew—quite a luxury on a California road. The owner of the shanty invited me to a night's lodging, which I accepted, but found my host much more hospitable than his fleas, for I was driven back to my camp be-

fore midnight. A California flea is not to be trifled with; his nippers drive you into spasms.

SUNDAY, SEPT. 24. This is the Sabbath, and we are in San José, in the house of Dr. Stokes, to whose hospitality we are indebted for a good table and quiet apartments. I must here relate a domestic incident in the doctor's family, which fell under my eye while he resided at Monterey, and which pictured itself strongly on my mind. It was evening, and the hour for rest with the children, when six little boys and girls knelt around the chair of their father, repeating the Lord's prayer, and closing with the invocation—“God bless our dear parents, and brothers, and sisters, and grant that we meet in heaven at last.” Then came the good-night, and the cheerful footsteps to the chamber of soft sleep. What are gold mines to this? A glow-worm's light beneath a star that shall never set!

MONDAY, SEPT. 25. San José is sixty-five miles from Monterey, and stands in the centre of a spacious valley which opens on the great bay of San Francisco. It is cultivated only in spots, but the immense yield in these is sufficient evidence of what the valley is capable. A plough and harrow, at which a New England crow would laugh, are followed by fields of waving grain. Within this valley lie the rich lands of Com. Stockton, and they will yet feel the force of his vivifying enterprise. The mission buildings of

Santa Clara lift their huge proportions on the eye. The bells that swing in their towers are silent, but they will yet find a tongue and fill the cliffs with their glad echoes. The Anglo-Saxon blood will yet roll here as if in its first leap.

Such are the representations of the roads between this and the mines, that we have concluded to part with our wagon and pack our mules. Mr. Botts, one of our companions, has received intelligence which requires his return to Monterey. We must proceed without his agreeable society. Wm. Stewart, Esq., secretary of Com. Jones, and Lieut. Simmons, of the Ohio, have just arrived, on their way to the mines. Two of our mules were now packed, the third mounted by our wagoner, and the fourth driven, to guard against contingencies. Thus equipped, we started again for the mines; but we had hardly cleared the town when one of our mules took fright, plunged over the plain, burst his girth, and scattered on the winds the contents of his pack. Capt. Marcy and Mr. Wilkinson, with the mules and their driver, returned into town to repack, and I proceeded on in the company of Mr. Stewart and Lieut. Simmons.

We passed the mission of San José, which stands three leagues from the town. The massive proportions of the church lay in shadow, but the crowning cross was lit with the rays of the descending sun. No hum of busy streets or jocund voice of childhood saluted the ear. No eye regarded us but that of the owl gazing in wise wonder from his ivy tower. He

seemed to marvel at the vanity that had brought us here; and as we hurried past on our gold destination, sent after us an ominous hoot! The purple twilight was settling fast when we reached a stream singing along between the slopes of two hills. Here we camped for the night. The grass was scanty and the ground uneven, but it was now too late to look for other spots. The dry willows, which skirted the stream, furnished us with fuel. The lid of our coffee kettle was soon trembling over the steam, while the fresh steaks, curling on the coals, scented the evening air. Our supper over, we talked of friends far away, and spread our blankets for the night. The ground was so descending I put a stone at my feet to keep from slipping down, but must have rolled from my pedestal, for on awaking at daybreak, I found myself at the foot of the slope, and close on the verge of the bubbling stream. My ground-blanket remained where it had been spread, though it seemed higher up the hill, as I clambered back to it from my somnambule roll.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 26. My companions, who had returned to San José to repack the mules, arrived at our camp about mid-day, accompanied by W. R. Garner, so long my secretary in the office of alcalde. Our own horses were soon saddled, and we were off, all the more light-hearted for this accession to our numbers. Our road lay through a rolling country covered with live-oak and pine, and through small

prairies, cradled in emerald repose among the hills. It was quite dark when we reached the small farmhouse of Mr. Livermore. Here we camped. A snag-fence supplied us with fuel, and Mr. L. furnished us with a sheep ready dressed. Our large camp-fire sent up its waving flame, which threw its red light over a group gathered around in every attitude which hunger and culinary care could assume. What was the howl of the wolves on the hills to us, engaged in picking the bones of that sheep? A camp-life teaches you the value of three things—meat, salt, and fire; with these you can travel the globe round.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 27. The night had been dark, the wind bleak, and the rack was driving on the sky, when the first rays of the sun kindled the soaring cliffs. We had the great Tularé plain to pass, and lost no time in finishing our breakfast and effecting an early start. Crossing the plain attached to the rancho, which we had left, our road lay among steep conical hills feathered with pine, and pyramids of rock piled in naked majesty. From these we opened on the great plain of the San Joaquin, stretching away like a Sahara, and without an object on which the eye could rest. The sun was hot, and not a breath of wind crept over the cheerless expanse. A column of cloud, soaring on the distant horizon, showed where the fearful flame was at work.

We were now in the midst of the plain, when a moving object, dim and distant, rapidly advanced

into more distinct vision. It was a band of wild horses, rushing down the plain like a foaming torrent to the sea.

“ With flowing tail and flying mane,
With nostrils never stretched by pain,
Mouths bloodless to the bit or rein;
And feet that iron never shod,
And flanks unscarred by spur or rod,
A thousand horse—the wild, the free—
Like waves that follow o'er the sea—
Came thickly thundering on.”

We instantly seized the halters of our pack-mules, and not knowing whether to advance or retreat, waited the issue where we stood. They swept past us but a short distance ahead, heeding us as little as the Niagara the reeds that tremble on its bank. The very ground shook with the thunder of their hoofs. Their arching necks and flowing mane, their glossy flanks and sinewy bound made you begrudge them their freedom. You thought what a flight you might make on them into the mines. It seemed a pity that so much celerity and strength should be thrown away upon a stampede.

As we advanced the line of the horizon began to lift itself into irregular shapes, like a broken coast at sea. These emerging forms proved to be the broad tops of a belt of trees, which seemed not more than half a league distant, but which retreated as we advanced, like the bow which childhood pursues. It was a weary ride before we reached them, but

the tedium of the way was relieved by several adventures among the wild geese, which hovered near our path in immense flocks. Mr. Stewart, who is an excellent shot, brought several to the ground: with these trophies we camped for the night. Some watered and tethered the animals, others gathered wood, and others ground the coffee and picked the geese. Having in our panniers a few onions and potatoes, with a piece of pork, we prepared for a stew. But our geese must have been the goslings of those that went into the ark, for neither fire nor steam could make an impression on their sinewy forms. We tried them with the puncture of our long knives; found them tough as ever, and then swung off the pot. There was enough, with bread and coffee, without the geese, and as we threw the legs and wings this way and that, an owl watched the flying fragments, as much as to say, it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GRAVE OF A GOLD-HUNTER.—MOUNTAIN SPURS.—A COMPANY OF SONORIANIANS.—A NIGHT ALARM.—FIRST VIEW OF THE MINES.—CHARACTER OF THE DEPOSITS.—A WOMAN AND HER PAN.—REMOVAL TO OTHER MINES.—WILD INDIANS AND THEIR WEAPONS.—COST OF PROVISIONS.—A PLUNGE INTO A GOLD RIVER.—MACHINES USED BY THE GOLD-DIGGERS.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 28. We slept soundly last night. The sun had been up an hour before we finished our coffee and vaulted into our saddles. A short ride brought us to the San Joaquin river, which we crossed in the primitive way. We threw our saddles and packs into a boat, and then getting in ourselves, rowed off, leading at the stern one of our little mules, called Nina. The horses being driven in, followed in her wake and swam to the opposite bank. The moment they reached the shore, every one lay down and rolled, covering himself with a layer of sand. My own for once seemed to have caught the mine fever, and without waiting for the saddle, much less his rider, went snorting up the bank.

A mile or two further on, and we passed the grave of one whom I had known well in Monterey. He was a young man of many amiable and excellent qualities; was on his way to the mines; but in crossing a gulch, now entirely dry, but through which a freshet then swept, became entangled with