

THE CROWS.

Stealing a Supper.—The Rocky Mountains.—A Horse killed for Food.—Cold and Hunger—Crossing the Mountains.—A Splendid Sunset.—A Passage Found.—The Angosturas.—A Party of Mexicans—Indian Scalp-Dance.—Guides sent Back.—A scene of Feasting.—Thoughts of Starvation.—Shepherd's Dogs—Crooks and their Uses.

On the 10th of September, the day following that on which our whilom guide had been seen, we found what appeared to be an old cart road, and also a deserted Mexican camp. The road we followed until it was lost upon a sandy prairie destitute of vegetation. This day, three mountains were discovered in a southwest direction, and some fifteen miles distant, which bore the strongest resemblance to the description Carlos had often given us of *The Crows*. It seemed, too, as though we could discover a passage through the chain of smaller hills north of them—an opening resembling the *Angosturas* I have often before mentioned—but we had been so often deceived that few of us could now anticipate any such good fortune.

In the mean time, our men were driven nearly to desperation by hunger. Little or no order could be preserved by the officers, the volunteers scattering about in every direction, hunting for plums, grapes, and game as might fall in their way. Few deer or antelope were seen, and they were so shy that it was impossible to shoot them; but in place of them every tortoise and snake, every living and creeping thing was seized upon and swallowed by our famishing men with a rapacity that nothing but the direst hunger could induce. Occasionally a skunk or polecat would reward some one more fortunate than the rest; but seven out of every ten of us were compelled to journey on without a morsel of anything to appease our sufferings.

One amusing little anecdote I will here relate, to show, in the first place, the direful straits to which our men were driven, and in the second to give my readers an insight into the trickery of old campaigners. We had reached a camping-ground late one evening, where a sufficiency of wood was found to kindle good, substantial fires. While a knot of us were reclining around one of the fires, speculating as to our prospects, a youngster brought in a spotted-backed land tortoise, alive and kicking, which he had been fortunate enough to find upon the prairie. Throwing it upon the ground, and placing the end of his rifle upon the back of the animal to prevent its crawling off, he next asked an old hunter how to cook his prize. The answer was, that he must open the coals and throw the tortoise in, cover it over, and allow it to remain for at least half an hour in the fire—a longer time would only serve to make the repast more savoury.

No sooner said than done; for in less than a minute the unfortunate tortoise was roasting alive beneath a bushel of coals. The countenance of the young man was lit with joy in anticipation of a meal, which, although at any other time it would have been revolting, he now coveted with that longing which starvation only can create. But it was a meal he was not destined to enjoy. The old campaigner, after telling him three or four times that his supper was not cooked, finally found means to withdraw the youngster's attention from the coals, and then to whip the animal out with his iron ramrod was but the work of a moment. Another moment, and the well-roasted terrapin was safe behind the back of the more elderly ranger, and where the youngster could not see it.

"Don't you think he's nearly done?" inquired the latter, now turning his head and looking wistfully at the fast-expiring bed of coals.

"Pretty well cooked by this time—you can take him out," retorted the old borderer, while he quietly watched the first speaker as he eagerly raked open the embers.

The movements of the youngster, as he first commenced opening the coals, were slow and decided: by-and-by, as he neared the bottom of the mouldering heap, his action grew excited and hurried. The expression of his countenance may be easier imagined than described, as, after having due to the hard ground itself, he turned to the author of his misfortune, and, in utter ignorance of the trick, exclaimed, "He's gone!"

"Gone!" slowly repeated the veteran borderer: "was he alive when you threw him in the fire?"

"Certainly—why?"

"Why?"

"Yes, why?"

"Because," continued the ranger, "you must have thought the terrapin mightily troubled with the simples if you supposed he would stay in the fire and be roasted alive, when he could easily crawl out and make tracks off!"

Gloomily the youngster dragged himself to his blanket supperless, while the old trickster quietly wended his way to a neighboring fire to pick the scanty meat from his ill-got prize, and chuckle at his success in "doing" the green-horn out of his supper. To return to my narrative.

The road we had found and followed some distance in the morning we hunted for in vain in the afternoon: all the old wheel-marks had lost themselves in a barren, gravelly prairie. That we must find a passage through or over the mountains before us was considered certain, but where that passage was, no one could imagine. We were far from being aware of it at the time, but they proved to be outer and eastern spurs of the Rocky Mountains. As the sun gradually sank behind their lofty and rugged summits, a raw, chill breeze sprang up from their neighborhood. It was the first cold weather we had experienced, and in our weak and exhausted condition the biting wind seemed to pierce directly through us.

We continued our march until we reached the dry bed of a mountain stream, upon the banks of which we encamped for the night. A flock of wild turkeys had

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taken shelter under the banks, running off as we approached their roost. Altho' contrary to strict orders, nothing could restrain our men from banging and blazing away at the turkeys as they sped across the prairie, fifty rifles and muskets being discharged at them before they were out of sight. Two or three only were killed by the volley and running fire which ensued, and they were but half grown, and so extremely poor that they did not furnish a meal for half a dozen men. To go farther without something to eat was now deemed impossible—the wild and haggard expression, the sunken eyes, and sallow, fleshless faces of the men too plainly showed that some means of sustenance must be speedily provided. A horse formerly belonging to Howland, which in the early part of the campaign had been one of the best animals in the command, was now found to be so poor and badly broken down that it was resolved to shoot him and divide his flesh among the different messes. As they led the once proud and gallant animal to execution, the words of an old nursery song came fresh to my mind—one that I had neither heard nor thought of for many, many years. The burden of the ballad was,

"Poor old horse! he must die!"

and I have only mentioned the circumstance to illustrate the well-known eccentricities of memory. A man is often placed in situations and becomes a witness of scenes which suddenly awaken and bring back the long-forgotten associations of his childhood.

But to return to the actual. The horse was killed, and in less time than it takes me to tell it his hide was off and his flesh distributed. I have before said that the flesh of a young mustang is excellent—but that of an old, broken-down horse is quite another affair. It was tough as India-rubber, and the more a piece of it was masticated the larger it became in the mouth. Poor as it was, however, and hard to swallow, I am confident that many a man in the party ate four or five pounds of it, half cooked and without salt—I know that I devoured my share. That I lost some of the good opinion I entertained of myself while eating this food I will not pretend to deny, and even a buzzard, that sat perched upon a dry limb of a cotton-wood overhead, appeared to look down upon us reproachfully as he saw us appropriating food that legitimately belonged to him. There was something, too, like honest indignation expressed in the countenance of a wolf, which sat quietly watching our operations from the adjoining prairie; but at the time we were hungry enough to make a meal even of him had he fallen into our hands. A man never knows what he will eat until driven by a week's starvation.

Our tough and most unsavoury meal over, we spread our blankets in the ravine, where we could be partially protected from the biting northeast wind; but the cutting blasts found their way through our scanty covering, chilling our weakened frames to such a degree as almost entirely to prevent sleep. With the ordinary stock of flesh and blood we should have been far better able to withstand the bitter wind; as it was, we could only shun and shake, and pass a sleepless night.

Weak and unrefreshed, we arose in the morning—breakfastless and desponding, we mounted our horses, and once more resumed our gloomy march. Our course was southwest, and in the direction of what appeared to be a passage through the mountains; but after travelling some six or eight miles we found our farther progress cut off by high precipitous ascents. To return was our only alternative, and at noon we again found ourselves near the point whence we had started in the morning.

A consultation was now held as to our future course. Running directly north was a high chain of mountains, extending as far as the eye could reach, and many contended that our best course would be to travel along the base of this chain until we either found a passage through or met with the trail of the St. Louis traders.

Others, again, thought our wisest and safest plan would be to attempt crossing directly over the mountains where we then were, laborious as was the prospect. The latter party prevailed, and the attempt to cross was immediately made.

After incredible fatigue to both horses and men, for we were obliged to dismount and carry our arms and baggage in our hands, the ascent was finally achieved. Arrived at the summit, a beautiful prospect was before us. Below, a peaceful and lovely valley was spread out, through the centre of which the large stream we had left the previous day wound along. Innumerable brooks, taking their rise in the mountains around, meandered through this valley, and finally found their way to the larger stream. Their immediate borders were fringed with small trees and bushes of the deepest green, while the banks of the river were skirted with a narrow belt of timber of larger and more luxuriant growth. The valley was hemmed in on all sides by mountains, whose frowning and precipitous fronts appeared to offer impassable barriers against all approach to the tranquil and beautiful scene lying far below us. At another time these rugged and dangerous steeps might have seemed to pierce directly through us.

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the approach of its termination, when the pilot first placed his foot upon deck, they crowded around and pressed him with idle questions innumerable: so with us, in coming up with these strangers. Every one among us, who could speak a word of Spanish, earnestly showered upon the rugged, swarthy, and half-frightened Mexicans volumes of interrogations, without giving them time to answer one of them, even had they been able or willing. They were just returning, with a small drove of broken-down mules and donkeys, from a trading trip of some two months' duration among the Cayugas and Camanches. They frankly told us, as soon as we gave them time to breathe and collect the little scattering sense they had, that they had seen us early in the morning, and that we had seen them in the main camp of the Indians when the murdering party returned, bringing the dead bodies of eleven of their warriors, among whom was a principal chief. The ceremonies and performances on the occasion—the wild dances of the warriors around the scalps of their victims, with the painful penance of the women in token of their grief for the loss of the warriors of the tribe—were described by our new acquaintances with graphic effect.

The women smote and cut their breasts, and ran naked through thorns and prickly pear-bushes, to show the intensity of their affection.

Sunset in this secluded valley presented a scene of almost unrivalled magnificence, as well as of mild and heavenly beauty. The tops of the surrounding mountains, upon which the blue vault of heaven seemed to rest, were gilded by the sun's last most brilliant rays, while the deep-black shadows, as some beam of sunlight would dance around and kiss for the last time a more towering summit, would course hurriedly down the frowning mountain sides, as if to find their homes in the depths below ere darkness assumed her sway. A soothsaying, an ethereal quiet reigned throughout the valley, broken only by the evening hymn of some turtle-dove, vowing anew her constancy to her mate, or by the last bark of the squirrel, as with light and buoyant leaps, he wended his way from the river to his nest among the mountain cliffs. By-and-by a brood of wild turkeys, which had been hunting for their supper at the base of the rocky steep, flew over our heads and sought their roost in a large cotton-wood which overhung the river. The sharp crack of a rifle soon announced the doom of one of the flock, while the report, taken up by a thousand echoes, reverberated from grot and glen, from steep hill-side and quiet dell, until lost to the ear in distance. Night had thrown her sable mantle, alike over the valley and the recently-gilded mountain tops, before I could turn from the contemplation of the lovely scene.

Early the next morning, Mr. Hunt, our guide, set off, in company with Captain Sutton, in search of a passage through the mountains, which would lead us along the river banks. They returned in two or three hours with the joyful intelligence that they had discovered an excellent route in a western direction, one which would extricate us from our present dilemma without much labor. To saddle and mount our horses was a work of but few moments, and then, with hearts much lightened, we resumed the journey.

After crossing the river, and emerging from the timber which lined its banks, we entered a narrow but open valley that had been concealed from view by a projecting point of one of the mountains. Two hours' ride brought us into a road which had evidently been used for carts, as we found yoke-keys, standards, and other trappings belonging to a Mexican vehicle, scattered along its sides. On either hand, the frowning and rocky sides of mountains rose high above us, and we now knew and felt that we were in the *Angosturas*, or where the stream has forced its passage through the eastern spur of the Rocky Mountains. Well do these mountains deserve their name, for they are nothing but immense heaps of stones, irregularly piled up, while but little vegetation is to be found upon their sides save a few stunted pines and cedars.

For three or four miles, after first entering the *Angosturas*, our road was along a solid ledge of rocks, the river on our right, and running nearly east and west. The greatest width of the pass through which the stream runs, until the traveller leaves the rocky road, cannot be more than half a mile, while the towering fronts of the mountains on either side are so steep that even a goat would find much difficulty in climbing them. On leaving the ledge of rocks the pass grows gradually wider, and the road becomes sandy. We had no sooner struck the latter than the tracks of mules and asses were plainly visible. A little farther on, the footprints of men were also seen, and every appearance they had been made but few hours. Not a sign of a human habitation had we discovered, either in the beautiful valley where we had spent the previous night or along the road we were now travelling, but that we had at length reached an open highway and were close upon a party of Mexicans.

Shortly after Matias and his three companions had left us we resumed our march towards San Miguel. Not a morsel of food did we have during the day, and at night we encamped, supperless, on the banks of a small creek emptying into the Rio Mora. On this stream the Mexicans, who had thus far accompanied us, had their places of residence. After giving us instructions for our route towards San Miguel, they left us on the ensuing morning for their homes in the mountains.

Before we set out, our commander despatched four of our best-mounted men in advance to make arrangements for provisions, while the rest of us followed as fast as our weary animals could travel. As we neared the point where we knew that food could be procured in abundance, not only our hunger, but our impatience increased. During the day, I was fortunate enough, in company with the madcap Fitzgerald, and Doctor Brenham, set out on their journey across the immense prairie, and, as we afterward learned, were less than four days in getting to the town which had occupied us thirteen!

Now that we had found provisions in plenty, we considered the dangers, the fatigues, the delays, and the vexations of the march as over, and bright were the anticipations of the future. Every face was animated with joy, every heart was filled with gladness. How different would have been our feelings had we known the sufferings and privations, the indignities, and the cruel maltreatment we were yet to endure—the terrible fate that was awaiting us!—*Kendall's Sketches of the Texian Santa Fe Expedition*.

made themselves sick by overeating; but an attempt to restrain the appetites of half-starved men, except by main force, would be the very extreme of folly. Had the food been anything but mutton, and had we not procured an ample supply of salt from the Mexicans to season it, our men might have died of the surfeit.

I have never yet seen a treatise or dissertation upon starving to death—I can speak *feelingly* of nearly every stage except the last. For the first two days through which a strong and healthy man is doomed to exist upon nothing, his sufferings are perhaps, more acute than in the remaining stages—he feels an inordinate, unquenchable craving gives place to a sinking and weakness of the stomach, accompanied by nausea. The unfortunate sufferer still desires food, but with loss of strength he loses that eager craving which is felt in the earlier stages.—Should he chance to obtain a morsel or two of food, as was occasionally the case with us, he swallows it with a wolfish avidity; but five minutes afterward his sufferings are more intense than ever. He feels as if he had swallowed a living lobster, which is clawing and feeding upon the very foundation of his existence. On the fifth day his cheeks suddenly appear hollow and sunken, his body attenuated, his colour an ashy pale, and his eye wild, glassy, cannibalistic. The different parts of the system now begin to fail; the stomach calls upon the legs to go with it in quest of food: the legs, from the very weakness, refuse. The sixth day brings with it increased suffering, although the pangs of hunger are lost in an overpowering languor and sickness. The head becomes giddy—the ghosts of well-remembered dinners pass in hideous procession through the mind.—The seventh day comes, bringing increased lassitude and further prostration of strength. The arms hang listlessly, the legs drag heavily.—The desire for food is still left to a degree, but it must be brought not sought. The miserable remnant of life which still hangs to the sufferer is a burden almost too grievous to be borne; yet his inherent love of existence induces a desire still to preserve it, if it can be saved without a tax upon bodily exertion. The mind wanders. At one moment he thinks his weary limbs cannot sustain him a mile—the next, he is endowed with unnatural strength, and if there be a certainty of relief before him, dashes bravely and strongly onward, wondering whence proceeds this new and sudden impulse.

Farther than this my experience runneth not. The reader may think I have drawn a fancy sketch—that I have coloured the picture too highly: now, while I sincerely trust he may never be in a situation to test its truth from actual experience, I would in all sober seriousness say to him, that many of the sensations I have just described I have myself experienced, and so did the ninety-and-eight persons who were with me from the time we first entered the grand prairie until we reached the flock of sheep, to which more pleasing subject I will now return.

There were very few men with the immense herd, but in their stead were a large number of noble dogs, which appeared to be peculiarly gifted with the faculty of keeping them together. There was no running about, no barking or biting in their system of tactics; on the contrary, they were continually walking up and down, like faithful sentinels, on the outer side of the flock, and should any sheep chance to stray from his fellows, the dog on duty at that particular post would walk gently up, take him carefully by the ear, and lead him back to the fold. Not the least fear did the sheep manifest at the approach of these dogs; and there was no occasion for it. They appeared to me to be of mongrel breed, somewhat resembling, perhaps, a cross of the Newfoundland or St. Bernard species with the larger mastiff. They possessed mid, frank, and open countenances, were indefatigable in protecting their charge from wolves, and from what I could learn were extremely sagacious.

The shepherds had crooks in their hands, instruments I had often read of in poets' lays.—The uses to which they were put took away much of the romance I had associated with crooks and gentle shepherds. One of the