

The Voyage of the Rattletrap eBook

The Voyage of the Rattletrap by Hayden Carruth

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| The Voyage of the Rattletrap eBook..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Table of Contents..... | 5 |
| Page 1..... | 6 |
| Page 2..... | 8 |
| Page 3..... | 10 |
| Page 4..... | 12 |
| Page 5..... | 14 |
| Page 6..... | 16 |
| Page 7..... | 18 |
| Page 8..... | 20 |
| Page 9..... | 22 |
| Page 10..... | 24 |
| Page 11..... | 26 |
| Page 12..... | 28 |
| Page 13..... | 30 |
| Page 14..... | 32 |
| Page 15..... | 34 |
| Page 16..... | 36 |
| Page 17..... | 37 |
| Page 18..... | 39 |
| Page 19..... | 41 |
| Page 20..... | 43 |
| Page 21..... | 45 |
| Page 22..... | 47 |



[Page 23.....49](#)

[Page 24.....51](#)

[Page 25.....52](#)

[Page 26.....54](#)

[Page 27.....56](#)

[Page 28.....57](#)

[Page 29.....59](#)

[Page 30.....60](#)

[Page 31.....62](#)

[Page 32.....64](#)

[Page 33.....66](#)

[Page 34.....68](#)

[Page 35.....70](#)

[Page 36.....72](#)

[Page 37.....74](#)

[Page 38.....76](#)

[Page 39.....78](#)

[Page 40.....80](#)

[Page 41.....82](#)

[Page 42.....84](#)

[Page 43.....86](#)

[Page 44.....88](#)

[Page 45.....90](#)

[Page 46.....92](#)

[Page 47.....94](#)

[Page 48.....96](#)



Page 49..... 98

Page 50..... 99

Page 51..... 101

Page 52..... 103

Page 53..... 105

Page 54..... 107

Page 55..... 109

Page 56..... 111

Page 57..... 113

Page 58..... 115

Page 59..... 117

Page 60..... 119

Page 61..... 121



Table of Contents

| Section | Table of Contents | Page |
|---|-------------------|------|
| Start of eBook | | 1 |
| ILLUSTRATIONS | | 1 |
| THE VOYAGE OF THE RATTLETRAP | | 1 |
| II: OUTWARD BOUND | | 5 |
| III: FROM LOOKOUT LAKE TO THE MISSOURI RIVER | | 10 |
| IV: INTO NEBRASKA | | 15 |
| V: ACROSS THE NIOBRARA | | 20 |
| VI: BY CAYNONS TO VALENTINE | | 24 |
| VII: THROUGH THE SAND HILLS | | 30 |
| VIII: ON THE ANTELOPE FLATS | | 35 |
| IX: OFF FOR THE BLACK HILLS | | 40 |
| X: AMONG THE MOUNTAINS | | 45 |
| XI: DEADWOOD | | 51 |
| XII: HOMEWARD BOUND | | 56 |



Page 1

ILLUSTRATIONS

Map

The Voyage First Suggested

Preparations

Grandpa Oldberry Presages Disaster

Snoozer

Mutiny Of The Pony

Effect Of A Strange Noise

Plan For Rousing A Sound Sleeper

First Lesson In Hay Twisting

Investigations

Hats

Milking The Heifer That Wore A Sleigh Robe

Wet But Hopeful

Anti-Horse Thieves

Jack Shoots A Grouse

Flight Of The Blacksmith

Studying Botany

“When The Winds Are Breathing Low”

Sad Result Of Dishonesty

First Night Camp In The Sand Hills

Dark Doings Of The Cook

No Horse-Feed

The Careful Corn Owner

A Study In Red Men

A Good Salesman

Big Bear Looks Into The Educational Situation

A Lesson In Finance

The Rattletrap In The Storm

Effect Of A Dog On A Mexican

Post-Mortem On A Grizzly

'gene Starts A Cook-Book

Lack Of Confidence In Mankind

Flying Cord-Wood

The Deserted Ranch

Old “Blenty Vaters”

In The Prairie Fire

Well! Well! Well!

[Frontispiece: Map of the voyage]



THE VOYAGE OF THE RATTLETRAP

I: GETTING READY

Perhaps we were pretty big boys—Jack and I. In fact, I'm afraid we were so big that we haven't grown much since. But Ollie was a boy, anyhow; he couldn't have been more than a dozen years old, and we looked upon him as being a very small boy indeed; though when folks saw us starting off, some of them seemed to think that we were as boyish as he, because, they said, it was such a foolish thing to do; and in some way, I'm sure I don't know how, boys have got the reputation of always doing foolish things. "They're three of a kind," said Grandpa Oldberry, as he watched us weigh anchor; "their parents oughter be sent fer."

Well, it's hard to decide where to begin this true history. We didn't keep any log on this voyage of the Rattletrap. But I'll certainly have to go back of the time when Grandpa Oldberry expressed his opinion; and perhaps I ought to explain how we happened to be in that particular port. As I said, we—Jack and I—were pretty big boys, so big that we were off out West and in business for ourselves, though, after all, that didn't imply that we were very old, because it was a new country, and everybody was young; after the election the first fall it was found that the man who had been chosen for county judge wasn't quite twenty-one years of age yet, and therefore, of course, couldn't hold office; and we were obliged to wait three weeks till he had had his birthday, and then to have a special election and choose him again. Everybody was young except Grandpa Oldberry and Squire Poinsett.

But I was trying to account for our being in the port of Prairie Flower. Jack had a cheese-factory there, and made small round cheeses. I had a printing-office, and printed a small square newspaper. In my paper I used to praise Jack's cheeses, and keep repeating how good they were, so people bought them; and Jack used, once in a while, to give me a cheese. So we both managed to live, though I think we sometimes got a little tired of being men, and wished we were back home, far from thick round cheeses and thin square newspapers.

Page 2

One evening in the first week in September, when it was raining as hard as it could rain, and when the wind was blowing as hard as it could blow, and was driving empty boxes and barrels, and old tin pails, and wash-boilers, and castaway hats and runaway hats and lost hats, and other things across the prairie before it, Jack came into my office, where I was setting type (my printer having been blown away, along with the boxes and the hats), and after he had allowed the rain to run off his clothes and make little puddles like thin mud pies on the dusty floor, he said:

[Illustration: The Voyage First Suggested]

“I’m tired of making poor cheeses.”

“Well,” I answered, “I’m tired of printing a poor newspaper.”

“Let’s sell out and go somewhere,” continued Jack.

“All right,” I said. “Let’s.”

So we did.

Of course the Rattletrap wasn’t a boat which sailed on the water, though I don’t know as I thought to mention this before. In fact, a water boat wouldn’t have been of any use to us in getting out of Prairie Flower, because there wasn’t any water there, except a very small stream called the Big Sioux River, which wandered along the prairie, sometimes running in one direction and sometimes in the other, and at other times standing still and wondering if it was worth while to run at all. The port of Prairie Flower was in Dakota. This was when Dakota was still a Territory, three or four years, perhaps, before it was cut into halves and made into two States. So, there being no water, we of course had to provide ourselves with a craft that could navigate dry land; which is precisely what the Rattletrap was—namely, a “prairie schooner.”

“I’ve got a team of horses and a wagon,” went on Jack, that rainy night when we were talking. “You’ve got a pony and a saddle. We’ve both got guns. When we drive out of town some stray dog will follow us. What more ’ll we want?”

“Nothing,” I said, as I clapped my stick down in the space-box. “We can put a canvas cover on the wagon and sleep in it at night, and cook our meals over a camp-fire, and—and—have a time.”

“Of course—a big time. It’s a heavy spring-wagon, and there is just about room in it behind the seat for a bed. We can put on a cover that will keep out rain as well as a tent, and carry a little kerosene-oil stove to use for cooking if we can’t build a fire outdoors for any reason. We can take along flour, and—and—and salt, and other things to eat, and shoot game, and—and—and have a time.”



We became so excited that we sat down and talked till midnight about it. By this time the rain had stopped, and when we went out the stars were shining, and the level ground was covered with pools of water.

“If it was always as wet as this around here we could go in a genuine schooner,” said Jack.

“Yes, that’s so. But what shall we call our craft?”



Page 3

"I think 'Rattletrap' would be a good name," said Jack.

"I don't think it's a very pretty name," I replied.

"You wait till you get acquainted with that wagon, and you will say it's the best name in the world, whether it's pretty or not. You don't know that wagon yet. The tongue is spliced, the whiffletrees are loose, the reach is cracked, the box is tied together with a rope, the springs creak, the wheels wobble, lean different ways, and never follow one another."

"Do they all turn in the same direction?" I asked.

"I don't believe they do. It would be just like one to turn backward while the other three were going forward."

"We'll call our craft the Rattletrap, then. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Jack; and we parted, each to dream of our approaching cruise.

[Illustration: Preparations]

In a week we were busy getting ready to start. I found, when I looked over the wagon as it stood back of the cheese-factory, that it was much as Jack had described it, only I noticed that the seat as well as the springs creaked, and that a corner was broken off the dash-board. But we set to work upon it with a will. We tightened up the nuts and screws all over it, and wound the broken pole with wire. We nailed together the box so that the rope could be taken off, and oiled the creaking springs. We had no trouble in finding a top, as half the people in the country had come in wagons provided with covers only a year or so before. We got four bows and attached them to the box, one at each end, and the other two at equal distances between. These bows were made of hard-wood, and were a quarter of an inch thick and an inch and a half wide. They ran up straight on either side for two or three feet, and then rounded over, like a croquetwicket, being high enough so that as we stood upright in the wagon-box our heads would just nicely clear them. Over this skeleton we stretched our white canvas cover, and tied it down tightly along the sides. This made what we called the cabin. There was an ample flap in front, which could be let down at night and fastened back inside during the day. At the rear end the cloth folded around, and was drawn together with a "puckering-string," precisely like a button-bag. By drawing the string tightly this back end could be entirely closed up; or the string could be let out, and the opening made any size wanted. After the cover was adjusted we stood off and admired our work.

"Looks like an elephant on wheels," said Jack.

"Or an old-fashioned sun-bonnet for a giantess," I added.

“Anyhow, I’ll wager a cheese it’ll keep out the rain, unless it comes down too hard,” said Jack. “Now for the smaller parts of our rigging, and the stores.”

Page 4

On the back end we fastened a feed-box for the horses, as long as the wagon-box was wide, and ten or twelve inches square, with a partition in the middle. We put stout iron rings in the corners of this, making a place to tie the horses. On the dash-board outside we built another box, for tools. This was wedge-shaped, about five inches wide at the top, but running down to an inch or two at the bottom, and had a hinged cover. We put aboard a satchel containing the little additional clothing which we thought we should need. Things in this line which did not seem to be absolutely necessary were ruled out—indeed, for the sake of lightness we decided to take just as little of everything that we could. We made another box, some two feet long, a foot deep, and fourteen inches wide, with a hinged cover, which we called the “pantry,” for our supply of food. This we stood in the wagon with the satchel. Usually in the daytime after we started each of these rode comfortably on the bed back of the seat. This bed was a rather simple affair, made up of some bed-clothing and pillows arranged on a thick layer of hay in the bottom of the wagon-box. Our small two-wick oil-stove we put in front next to the dash-board, a lantern we hung up on one of the bows, and a big tin pail for the horses we suspended under the wagon.

“Since you’re going to be cook,” I said to Jack, “you tend to getting the dishes together.”

“They’ll be few enough,” he answered. “I don’t like to wash ’em. Tin mostly, I guess; because tin won’t break.”

So he put a few knives and forks and spoons, tin plates and cups, a frying-pan, a small copper kettle, and a few other utensils in another box, which also found a home on the bed. Other things which we did not forget were a small can of kerosene; two half-gallon jugs, one for milk and one for water; a basket for eggs; a nickel clock (we called it the chronometer); and in the tool-box a hatchet, a monkey-wrench, screw-driver, small saw, a piece of rope, one or two straps, and a few nails, screws, rivets, and similar things which might come handy in case of a wreck.

“Now for the armament and the life-boat,” said Jack.

For armament Jack contributed a double-barrelled shot-gun and a heavy forty-five-calibre repeating rifle, and I a light forty-four-calibre repeating rifle, and a big revolver of the same calibre (though using a slightly shorter cartridge), with a belt and holster. This revolver we stored in the tool-box, chiefly for use in case we were boarded by pirates, while the guns we hung in leather loops in the top of the cover. In the tool-box we put a good supply of ammunition and plenty of matches. We also each carried a match-box, a pocket compass, and a stout jack-knife.

“Now, how’s your life-boat?” asked Jack.



I led her out. She was a medium-sized brown Colorado pony, well decorated with brands, and with a white face and two white feet. She wore a big Mexican saddle and a horse-hair bridle with a silver bit.



Page 5

“She’ll do,” said Jack. “In case of wreck, we’ll escape on her, if possible. She’ll also be very handy in making landings where the harbor is poor, and in exploring unknown coasts.”

[Illustration: Grandpa Oldberry Presages Disaster]

All of this work took several days, but when it was done the Rattletrap was ready for the voyage, and we decided to start the next morning.

“She’s as prairie-worthy a craft as ever scoured the plain,” was Jack’s opinion; “and if we can keep the four wheels from starting in opposite directions we’ll be all right.”

But where was Ollie all this while? And who was Ollie, anyhow? Ollie was Jack’s little nephew, and he lived back East somewhere—I don’t remember where. The nearer we got ready to start, the more firmly Jack became convinced that Ollie would like to go along, so at last he sent for him to come, and he arrived the night before our start. Ollie liked the idea of the trip so much that he simply stood and looked at the wagon, the guns, the pony, and the horses, and was speechless. At last he managed to say:

“Uncle Jack, it’ll be just like a picnic, won’t it?”

The next morning we started as early as we could. But it was not before people were up.

“Where be they going?” asked Grandpa Oldberry.

“Oh, Nebraska, and Wyoming, and the Black Hills, and any crazy place they hear of,” answered Squire Poinsett.

“They’ll all be scalped by Injuns,” said Grandpa Oldberry. “Ain’t the Injuns bad this fall?”

“So I was a-reading,” returned the Squire. “And in the hills I should be afeared of b’ar.”

“Right,” assented Grandpa. “B’ar and sim’lar varmints. And more ’specially hosstieves and sich-like cutthroats. I disremember seeing three scalawags starting off on such a fool trip since afore the war.”

II: OUTWARD BOUND

The port of Prairie Flower was in the eastern part of the Territory of Dakota. It stood out on an open plain a half-dozen miles wide, which seemed to be the prairie itself, though it was really the valley of the Big Sioux River, that funny stream which could run either way, and usually stood still in the night and rested. To the east and west the edges of this valley were faintly marked by a range of very low bluffs, so low that they were mere



wrinkles in the surface of the earth, and made the valley but very little lower than the great plain which rolled away for miles to the east and for leagues to the west.

It was a beautiful morning a little after the middle of September that the Rattletrap got away and left Prairie Flower behind. The sun had been up only half an hour or so, and the shadow of our craft stretched away across the dry gray plain like a long black streak without end. The air was fresh and dewy. The morning breeze was just beginning to stir, and down by the river the acres of wild sunflowers were

Page 6

nodding the dew off their heads, and beginning to roll in the first long waves which would keep up all day like the rolling of the ocean. We shouted “Good-bye” to Grandpa Oldberry and Squire Poinsett, but they only shook their heads very seriously. The cows and horses picketed on the prairie all about the little clump of houses which made up the town looked at us with their eyes open extremely wide, and no doubt said in their own languages, like Grandpa Oldberry, that they had no recollection of seeing any such capers as this for many years.

“See here,” I said, suddenly, to Jack, “where’s that dog you said was going to follow us?”

“You just hold on,” answered Jack.

“Oh, are we going to have a dog, too?” asked Ollie.

“You wait a minute,” insisted Jack.

Just then we passed the railroad station. Jack craned his head out of the front end of the wagon. Ollie and I did the same. Lying asleep on the corner of the station platform we saw a dog. He was about the size of a rather small collie; or, to put it another way, perhaps he was half as big as the largest-size dog. If dogs were numbered like shoes, from one to thirteen, this would have been about a No. 7 dog. He was yellow, with short hair, except that his tail was very bushy. One ear stood up straight, and the other lopped over, very much wilted. Jack whistled sharply. The dog tossed up his head, straightened up his lopped ear, let fall his other ear, and looked at us. Jack whistled again, and the dog came. He ran around the wagon, barked once or twice, sniffed at the pony’s heels and got kicked at for his familiarity, yelped sharply, and came and looked up at us, and wagged his bushy tail with a great flourish.

“He wants to get in. Give him a boost, Ollie,” said Jack.

Ollie clambered over the dash-board and jumped to the ground. He pushed the dog forward, and he leaped up and scrambled into the wagon, jumped over on the bed, where he folded his head and tail on his left side, turned around rapidly three times, and lay down and went to sleep, one ear up and one ear down.

[Illustration: Snoozer]

“He’s just the dog for the Rattletrap,” said Jack. “We’ll call him Snoozer.”

“That looks a good deal like stealing to me, Uncle Jack,” said Ollie. “Doesn’t he belong to somebody?”



“No,” said Jack, “he doesn’t belong to anybody but us. He came here a week ago with a tramp. The tramp deserted him, and rode away on the trucks of a freight train; but Snoozer didn’t like that way of travelling, because there wasn’t any place to sleep, so he stayed behind. Since then he has tried to follow every man in town, but none of them would have him. He’s a regular tramp dog, not good for anything, and therefore just the dog for us.”

Page 7

Snoozer was the last thing we shipped, and after taking him aboard we were soon out of the harbor of Prairie Flower, and bearing away across the plain to the southwest. In twenty minutes we were among the billowing sunflowers, standing five or six feet high on other side of the road, which seemed like a narrow crack winding through them. Ollie reached out and gathered a handful of the drooping yellow blossoms. The pony was tied behind carrying her big saddle, and tossing her head about, and showing that she was very suspicious of the whole proceedings, and especially of a small flag which Ollie had fastened to the top of the wagon-cover, which fluttered in the fresh morning breeze. Snoozer slept on and never stirred. At last the road came to the river, and then followed close along beside its bank, which was only a foot or so high. Ollie was interested in watching the long grass which grew in the bottom of the stream and was brushed all in one direction by the sluggish current, like the silky fur of some animal. After a while we came to a gravelly place which was a ford, and crossed the stream, stopping to let the horses drink. The water was only a foot deep. As we came up on the higher ground beyond the river we met the south wind squarely, and it came in at the front of the cover with a rush. We heard a sharp flutter behind, and then the wagon gave a shiver and a lurch, and the horses stopped; then there was another shock and lurch, and it rolled back a few inches.

"There," exclaimed Jack, "some of those wheels have begun to turn backward! I told you!"

I looked back. Our puckering-string had given way, and the rear of the cover had blown out loosely. This had been more than the pony could stand, and she had broken her rope and run back a dozen rods, where she stood snorting and looking at the wagon.

"First accident!" I cried. "She'll run home, and we'll have to go back after her."

"Perhaps we can get around her," said Jack. "We'll try."

We left Ollie to hold the horses, and I went out around among the sunflowers, while Jack stood behind the wagon with his hat half full of oats. I got beyond her at last, and drove her slowly toward the wagon. She snorted and stamped the ground angrily with her forward feet; but at last she ventured to taste of the oats, and finding more in the feed-box on the rear of the wagon, she began eating them and forgot her fright.

"I guess we'd better not tie her, but let her follow," said Jack. "As soon as we have gone a little ways she'll come to think the wagon is home, and stick to it."

"Yes," I said. "I think she is really as great a tramp as Snoozer, and just the pony for us." "Are we all tramps?" asked Ollie.

"Well," said Jack, "I'm afraid Grandpa Oldberry thinks we don't lack much of it. He says varmints will catch us."

“Do you think they will?” went on Ollie, just a little bit anxiously.



Page 8

“Oh, I guess not,” said Jack. “You see, we’ve got four guns. Then there’s Snoozer.”

“But will they try to catch us?”

“Well, I don’t know. Grandpa Oldberry says the varmints are awfully thick this fall.”

“But what are varmints?”

“Oh, wolves, and b’ars, and painters, and—”

“What are painters?”

“Grandpa means panthers, I guess. Then there’s Injuns, and hoss-thieves, and—”

“There’s a prairie-chicken!” I cried, as one rose up out of the long grass.

“Perhaps we can get one for dinner,” said Jack.

[Illustration: Mutiny of the Pony]

He took his gun and went slowly toward where the other had been. Another whirred away like a shot. Jack fired, but missed it. We started on, leaving the pony tossing her head and stamping her feet in a great passion on account of the report of the gun; but when she saw that we paid no attention to her and were rapidly going out of sight she turned, after taking a long look back at distant Prairie Flower, and came trotting along the road, with her stirrups dangling at her sides, and soon was following close behind.

Before we realized it the chronometer showed that it was almost noon. By this time we had left the sea of sunflowers and crept over the wrinkle at the western edge of the valley, and were off across the rolling prairie itself. Still Snoozer never stirred.

“I wonder when he’ll wake up?” said Ollie.

“You’ll see him awake enough at dinnertime,” said Jack.

“Well, you’ll see me awake enough then, too,” answered Ollie. “I’m hungry.”

“We hardy pioneers plunging into the trackless waste of a new and unexplored country never eat but one meal a day,” said Jack. “And that’s always raw meat—b’ar-meat, generally.”

“Well,” said Ollie, “I don’t see any b’ar-meat, or even prairie-chicken-meat. Why didn’t you hit the prairie-chicken, Uncle Jack?”

“I’m not used to shooting at such small game,” answered Jack, solemnly. “My kind of game is b’ar—b’ar and other varmints.”



Just then we passed a house, and down a little way from it, close to the road, was a well.

“Here’s a good place to have dinner,” said Jack; so we drove out by the side of the road and stopped. “If I’m to be cook,” said Jack to me, “then you’ve got to take care of the horses and do all the outside work. I’ll be cook; you’ll be rancher. That’s what we’ll call you—rancher.”

I unhitched the horses, tied them behind the wagon, and gave them some oats and corn in the feed-box. The pony I fed in the big tin pail near by. The grass beside the road was so dry, and it was so windy, that we decided it was not safe to build a fire outdoors, so Jack cooked pancakes over the oil-stove inside. These with some cold meat he handed out to Ollie and me as we sat on the wagon-tongue, while he sat on the dashboard. We were half-way through dinner when we heard a peculiar whine, followed by a low bark, in the wagon, and then Snoozer leaped out, stretched himself, and began to wag his tail so fast that it looked exactly like a whirling feather duster. We fed him on pancakes, and he ate so many that if Jack had not fried some more we’d have certainly gone hungry.

Page 9

“I told you he was a true tramp,” said Jack. “Just see his appetite!”

After we had finished, and the horses had grazed about on the dry grass some time, we started on. We hoped to reach a little lake which we saw marked on the map, called Lake Lookout, for the night camp; so we hurried along, it being a good distance ahead. All the afternoon we were passing 'between either great fields where the wheat had been cut, leaving the stubble, or beside long stretches of prairie. There were a few houses, many of them built of sod. Not much happened during the afternoon. Ollie followed the example of Snoozer, and curled up on the bed and had a long nap. We saw a few prairie-chickens, but did not try to shoot any of them. The pony trotted contentedly behind. Just before night I rode her ahead, looking for the lake. I found it to be a small one, perhaps a half-mile wide, scarcely below the level of the prairie, and generally with marshy shores, though on one side the beach was sandy and stony, with a few stunted cottonwood-trees, and here I decided we would camp. I went back and guided the Rattletrap to the spot. Soon Jack had a roaring fire going from the dry wood which Ollie had collected. I fed the horses and turned them loose, and they began eagerly on the green grass which grew on the damp soil near the lake. The pony I picketed with a long rope and a strap around one of her forward ankles, between her hoof and fetlock, as we scarcely felt like trusting her all night. Snoozer got up for his supper, and after that stretched himself by the fire and blinked at it sleepily. The rest of us did much the same. After a while Ollie said.

“I think that bed in the wagon looks pretty narrow for two. How are three going to sleep in it?”

“I don't think three are going to sleep in it,” said Jack.

“Where are you going to sleep, then, Uncle Jack?”

Jack laughed. “I think,” he said, “that the rancher and the cook will sleep in the wagon, and let you sleep under the wagon. Nothing makes a boy grow like sleeping rolled up in a blanket under a wagon. You'll be six inches taller if you do it every night till we get back.”

“Well, I don't think so,” said Ollie, just a little alarmed at the prospect. “I'd prefer to sleep in the wagon. Maybe what Grandpa Oldberry said about wild animals is so. You say you like to shoot 'em, so you stay outside and do it—I don't.”

At last it was arranged that Ollie and I should sleep inside and Jack under the wagon. We were surprised to find how early we were ready for bed. The long ride and the fresh air had given us an appetite for sleep. So we soon turned in, the dog staying outside with Jack.



“Good-night, Uncle Jack!” called Ollie, as we put out the lantern and covered up in the narrow bed. “Look out for painters!”

I was almost asleep when Ollie shook me, and whispered, “What’s that noise?”



Page 10

I listened, and heard a regular, hollow, booming sound, something like the very distant discharge of cannon.

“It’s the horses walking on the ground—always sounds that way in the night,” I answered.

Again I was almost asleep when Ollie took hold of my arm, and said, “What’s that?”

[Illustration: Effect of a Strange Noise]

I once more listened, and recognized a peculiar creaking noise as that made by the horses cropping off the grass. I explained to Ollie, and then dropped off sound asleep. I don’t know how long it was, but after some time I was again roused up by a nervous shake.

“Listen to that,” whispered Ollie. “What can it be?”

I sat up cautiously and listened. It was a strange, rattling, unearthly sound, which I could not account for any better than Ollie.

“It’s a bear,” he whispered. “I heard them make that noise at the park back home.”

I was puzzled, and concluded that it must be some wild animal. I took down one of the guns, crept softly to the front end of the wagon, raised the flap, and looked out. The wind was still, and the night air met my face with a cool, damp feeling. The moon had just risen and the lake was like silver. I could see the horses lying asleep like dark mounds. But the mysterious noise kept up, and even grew louder. I grasped the gun firmly, and let myself cautiously out of the front end of the wagon. Then I climbed back in less softly and hung up the gun.

“Wh-what is it?” asked Ollie, in a faint whisper.

“It’s your eloquent Uncle Jack snoring,” I said. “He’s one of Grandpa Oldberry’s sim’lar varmints.”

III: FROM LOOKOUT LAKE TO THE MISSOURI RIVER

Our first night in the Rattletrap passed without further incident—that is, the greater part of it passed, though Ollie declared that it lacked a good deal of being all passed when we got up. The chief reason for our early rise was Old Blacky, a member of our household (or perhaps wagonhold) not yet introduced in this history. Old Blacky was the mate of Old Brown, and the two made up our team of horses. Old Brown was a very well-behaved, respectable old nag, extremely fond of quiet and oats. He invariably slept all night, and usually much of the day; he was a fit companion for our dog. It was



the firm belief of all on board that Old Brownny could sleep anywhere on a fairly level stretch of road without stopping.

But Old Blacky was another sort of beast. He didn't seem to require any sleep at all. What Old Blacky wanted was food. He loved to sit up all night and eat, and keep us awake. He seldom even lay down at night, but would moon about the camp and blunder against things, fall over the wagon-tongue, and otherwise misbehave. Sometimes when we camped where the grass was not just to his liking he would put his head into the wagon and help himself to a mouthful of bedquilt or a bite of pillow. He was little but an appetite mounted on four legs, and next to food he loved a fight. Besides the name of Old Blacky, we also knew him as the Blacksmith's Pet; but this will have to be explained later on.



Page 11

On this first morning, just as it was becoming light in the east, Old Blacky began to make his toilet by rubbing his shoulder against one corner of the wagon. As he was large and heavy, and rubbed as hard as he could, he soon had the wagon tossing about like a boat; and as the easiest way out of it, we decided to get up. It was cool and dewy, with the larger stars still shining faintly. We found Jack under the wagon. Ollie stirred him up, and said:

[Illustration: Plan for Rousing a Sound Sleeper]

“See any varmints in the night, Uncle Jack?”

“Yes,” answered Jack, as he unrolled himself from his blanket. “Or at least I felt one. That disgraceful Old Blacky nibbled at my ear twice. The first time I thought it was nothing less than a bear.”

“Did he disturb Snoozer?”

“I guess nothing ever disturbs Snoozer. He never moved all night. How’s the firewood department, Ollie?”

“All right,” replied Ollie. “Got up enough last night.”

“Then build the fire while I get breakfast.”

This pleased Ollie, and he soon had a good fire going. I caught Old Blacky, who had started off to walk around the lake, woke up Old Brownny, who was sleeping peacefully with his nose resting on the ground, quieted the pony, who was still suspicious, with a few pats on the neck, and gave them all their oats. Soon the rest of us also had our breakfast, including Snoozer, who seemed to wake up by instinct, and after waiting a little for somebody to come and stretch him, stretched himself, and began waving his tail to attract our attention to his urgent need of food.

“Before we get back home that dog will want us to feed him with a spoon,” said Jack.

It was only a little while after sunrise when we were off for another day’s voyage. We were headed almost due south, and all that day and the three or four following (including Sunday, when we stayed in camp), we did not change our general direction. We were aiming to reach the town of Yankton, where we intended to cross the Missouri River and turn to the west in Nebraska. The country through which we travelled was much of it prairie, but more was under cultivation, and the houses of settlers were numerous. The land on which wheat or other small grains had been grown was bare, but as we got farther south we passed great fields of corn, some of it standing almost as high as the top of our wagon-cover.



For much of the way we were far from railroads and towns, and got most of our supplies of food from the settlers whose houses we passed or, indeed, sighted, since the pony proved as convenient for making landings as Jack had predicted she would. Ollie usually went on these excursions after milk and eggs and such like foods. The different languages which he encountered among the settlers somewhat bewildered him, and he often had hard work in making the people he found at the houses understand what he wanted. There Were many Norwegians, and the third day we passed through a large colony of Russians, saw a few Finns, and heard of some Icelanders who lived around on the other side of a lake.

Page 12

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” said Ollie one day, “to find the man in the moon living here in a sod house.”

Perhaps a majority—certainly a great many—of all these people lived in houses of this kind. Ollie had never seen anything of the sort before, and he became greatly interested in them. The second day we camped near one for dinner.

“You see,” said Jack, “a man gets a farm, takes half his front yard and builds a house with it. He gains space, though, because the place he peels in the yard will do for flowerbeds, and the roof and sides of his house are excellent places to grow radishes, beets, and similar vegetables.”

“Why not other things besides radishes and beets?” asked Ollie.

“Oh, other things would grow all right, but radishes and beets seem to be the natural things for sod-house growing. You can take hold of the lower end and pull ’em from the inside, you know, Ollie.”

“I don’t believe it, Uncle Jack,” said Ollie, stoutly. “Ask the rancher,” answered Jack. “If you’re ever at dinner in a sod house, and want another radish, just reach up and pull one down through the roof, tops and all. Then you’re sure they’re fresh. I’d like to keep a summer hotel in a sod house. I’d advertise ‘fresh vegetables pulled at the table.’”

“I’m going to ask the man about sod houses,” returned Ollie. He went up to where the owner of the house was sitting outside, and said:

“Will you please tell me how you make a sod house?”

“Yes,” said the man, smiling. “Thinking of making one?”

“Well, not just now,” replied Ollie. “But. I’d like to know about them. I might want to build one—sometime,” he added, doubtfully.

“Well,” said the man, “it’s this way: First we plough up a lot of the tough prairie sod with a large plough called a breaking-plough, intended especially for ploughing the prairie the first time. This turns it over in a long, even, unbroken strip, some fourteen or sixteen inches wide and three or four inches thick. We cut this up into pieces two or three feet long, take them to the place where we are building the house, on a stone-boat or a sled, and use them in laying up the walls in just about the same way that bricks are used in making a brick house. Openings are left for the doors and windows, and either a shingle or sod roof put on. If it’s sod, rough boards are first laid on poles, and then sods put on them like shingles. I’ve got a sod roof on mine, you see.”



Ollie was looking at the grass and weeds growing on the top and sides of the house. They must have made a pretty sight when they were green and thrifty earlier in the season, but they were dry and withered now.

“Do you ever have prairie-fires on your roofs?” asked Ollie, with a smile.

“Oh, they do burn off sometimes,” answered the man. “Catch from the chimney, you know. Did you ever see a hay fire?”



Page 13

“No.”

“Come inside and I’ll show you one.”

In the house, which consisted of one large room divided across one end by a curtain, Ollie noticed a few chairs and a table, and opposite the door a stove which looked very much like an ordinary cook-stove, except that the place for the fire was rather larger. Back of it stood a box full of what seemed to be big hay rope. The man’s wife was cooking dinner on the stove.

“Here’s a young tenderfoot,” said the man, “who’s never seen a hay fire.”

“Wish I never had,” answered the woman. The man laughed. “They’re hardly as good as a wood fire or a coal fire,” he said to Ollie; “but when you’re five hundred miles, more or less, from either wood or coal they do very well.” The man took off one of the griddles and put in another “stick” of hay. Then he handed one to Ollie, who was surprised to find it almost as heavy as a stick of wood. “It makes a fairly good fire,” said the man. “Come outside and I’ll show you how to twist it.”

[Illustration: First Lesson in Hay Twisting]

They went out to a haystack near by, and the man twisted a rope three or four inches in diameter, and about four feet long. He kept hold of both ends till it was wound up tight; then he brought the ends together, and it twisted itself into a hard two-strand rope in the same way that a bit of string will do when similarly treated. There was quite a pile of such twisted sticks on the ground. “You see,” said the man, “in this country, instead of splitting up a pile of fuel we just twist up one.” Ollie bade the man good-bye, took another look at the queer house, and came down to the wagon.

“So you saw a hay-stove, did you?” said Jack. “I could have told you all about ’em. I once stayed all night with a man who depended on a hay-stove for warmth. It was in the winter. Talk about appetites! I never saw such an appetite as that stove had for hay. Why, that stove had a worse appetite than Old Blacky. It devoured hay all the time, just as Old Blacky would if he could; and even then its stomach always seemed empty. The man twisted all of the time, and I fed it constantly, and still it was never satisfied.”

“How did you sleep?” asked Ollie.

“Worked right along in our sleep—like Old Brownie,” answered Jack.

The last day before reaching Yankton was hot and sultry. The best place we could find to camp that night was beside a deserted sod house on the prairie. There was a well and a tumble-down sod stable. There were dark bands of clouds low down on the southeastern horizon, and faint flashes of lightning.



“It’s going to rain before morning,” I said. “Wonder if it wouldn’t be better in the sod house?”

We examined it, but found it in poor condition, so decided not to give up the wagon. “The man that lived there pulled too many radishes and parsnips and carrots and such things into it, and then neglected to hoe his roof and fill up the holes,” said Jack. “Besides, Old Blacky will have it rubbed down before morning. ‘When I sleep in anything that Old Blacky can get at, I want it to be on wheels so it can roll out of the way.”

Page 14

We went to bed as usual, but at about one o'clock we were awakened by a long rolling peal of thunder. Already big drops of rain were beginning to fall. Ollie and I looked out, and found Jack creeping from under the wagon.

"That's a dry-weather bedroom of mine," he observed, "and I think I'll come up-stairs."

The flashes of lightning followed each other rapidly, and by them we could see the horses. Old Brown was sleeping and Old Blacky eating, but the pony stood with head erect, very much interested in the storm. Jack helped Snoozer into the wagon, and came in himself. We drew both ends of the cover as close as possible, lit the lantern, and made ourselves comfortable, while Jack took down his banjo and tried to play. Jack always tried to play, but never quite succeeded. But he made a considerable noise, and that was better than nothing.

The wind soon began to blow pretty fresh, and shake the cover rather more than was pleasant. But, nothing gave way, and after, as it seemed, fifty of the loudest claps of thunder we had ever heard, the rain began to fall in torrents.

"That is what I've been waiting for," said Jack. "Now we'll see if there's a good cover on this wagon, or if we've got to put a sod roof on it, like that man's house."

The rain kept coming down harder and harder, but though there seemed to be a sort of a light spray in the air of the wagon, the water did not beat through. In some places along the bows it ran down on the inside of the cover in little clinging streams, but as a household we remained dry. Jack was still experimenting on the banjo, and the dog had gone to sleep. Suddenly a flash of lightning dazzled our eyes as if there were no cover at all over and around us, with a crash of thunder which struck our ears like a blow from a fist. Jack dropped the banjo, and the dog shook his head as if his ears tingled. We all felt dizzy, and the wagon seemed to be swaying around.

[Illustration: Investigations]

"That struck pretty close," I said. "I hope it didn't hit one of the horses." "If it hit Old Blacky, I'll bet a cooky it got the worst of it," answered Jack, taking up his banjo again. "Look out, Ollie, and maybe you'll see the lightning going off limping."

It was still raining, though not so hard. Soon we began to hear a peculiar noise, which seemed to come from behind the wagon. It was a breaking, splintering sort of noise, as if a board was being smashed and split up very gradually.

"Sounds as if a slow and lazy kind of lightning was striking our wagon," said Jack.

Ollie's face was still white from the scare at the stroke of lightning, and his eyes now opened very wide as he listened to the mysterious noise. Jack pulled open the back cover an inch and peeped out. Then he said:



“I guess Old Blacky’s tussle with the lightning left him hungry; he’s eating up one side of the feed-box.”



Page 15

Then we laughed at the strange noise, and in a few minutes, the rain having almost ceased, we put on our rubber boots and went out to look after the other horses. Old Brownie we found in the lee of the sod house, not exactly asleep, but evidently about to take a nap. The pony had pulled up her picket-pin and retreated to a little hollow a hundred yards away. We caught her and brought her back. By the light of the lantern we found that the great stroke of lightning had struck the curb of the well, shattering it, and making a hole in the ground beside it. The storm had gone muttering off to the north, and the stars were again shining overhead.

“What a stroke of lightening that must have been to do that!” said Ollie, as he looked at the curb with some awe.

“It wasn’t the lightning that did that,” returned his truthful Uncle Jack. “That’s where Old Blacky kicked at the lightning and missed it.”

Then we returned to the wagon and went to bed. The next morning at ten o’clock we drove into Yankton. We found the ferry-boat disabled, and that we should have to go forty miles up the river to Running Water before we could cross. We drove a mile out of town, and went into camp on a high bank overlooking the milky, eddying current of the Missouri.

IV: INTO NEBRASKA

We were a good deal disappointed in not getting over into Nebraska, because we had seen enough of Dakota, but there was no help for it. A log had got caught in the paddlewheel of the ferry-boat and wrecked it, and there was no other way of crossing.

“Old Blacky could swim across,” said Jack, “but Brownie would go to sleep and drown.”

[Illustrations: Hats]

It is rather doubtful, however, about even Blacky’s ability to have swum the river, since it was a half-mile wide, and with a rather swift current. In the afternoon we walked back to Yankton and bought the biggest felt hats we could find, with wide and heavy leather bands. We knew that we should now soon be out in the stock-growing country, and that, as Jack said, “the cowboys wouldn’t have any respect for us unless we were top-heavy with hat.”

We were camped on the high bank of the river, opposite a farm-house. It was getting dusk when we got back to the wagon, with our heads aching from our new hats, which seemed to weigh several pounds apiece. Jack, as cook, announced that there was no milk on hand, and sent Ollie over to the neighboring house to see if he could get some. Ollie returned, and reported that the man was away from home, but that the woman said we could have some if we were willing to go out to the barn-yard and milk one of the

cows. The others decided that it was my duty to milk, but I asked so many foolish questions about the operation that Jack became convinced that I didn't know how, and said he would do it himself. We all went over to the house, borrowed a tin pail from the woman, and went out to the yard.



Page 16

We found about a dozen cows inside, of various sizes, but all long-legged and long-horned.

“Must be this man belongs to the National Trotting-Cow Association,” said Jack, as he crawled under the barbed-wire fence into the yard. “That red beast over there in the corner ought to be able to trot a mile in less than three minutes.”

He cautiously went up to a spotted cow which seemed to be rather tamer than the rest, holding out one hand, and saying, “So, bossy,” in oily tones, as if he thought she was the finest cow he had ever seen. When he was almost to her she looked at him quickly, kicked her nearest hind-foot at him savagely, and walked off, switching her tail, and shaking her head so that Ollie was afraid it would come off and be lost.

“Can’t fool that cow, can I?” said Jack, as he turned to another. But he had no better luck this time, and after trying three or four more he paused and said:

“These must be the same kind of cows Horace Greeley found down in Texas before the war. When he came back he said the way they milked down there was to throw a cow on her back, have a nigger hold each leg, and extract the milk with a clothes-pin.”

But at last he found a brindled animal in the corner which allowed him to sit down and begin. He was getting on well when, without the least warning, the cow kicked, and sent the pail spinning across the yard, while Jack went over backwards, and his new hat fell off. There was one calf in the yard which had been complaining ever since we came, because it had not yet had its supper. The pail stopped rolling right side up, and this calf ran over and put his head in it, thinking that his food had come at last. Jack picked himself up and ran to rescue the pail. The calf raised his head suddenly, the pail caught on one of his little horns, and he started off around the yard, unable to see, and jumping wildly over imaginary objects. Jack followed. A cow, which was perhaps the mother of the calf, started after Jack. The family dog, hearing the commotion, came running down from the house and began to pursue the cow. This wild procession went around the yard several times, till at last the pail came off the calf’s head, and Jack secured it. Then he picked up his hat, the brim of which another calf had been chewing, rinsed out the pail at the pump, and tried another cow.

This time he selected the worst-looking one of the lot, but to the surprise of all of us she stood perfectly still, only switching him a few times with her tail. As soon as he got a couple of quarts of milk he stopped and came out of the yard. Ollie and I had, of course, been laughing at him a good deal, but Jack paid no attention to it. As we walked towards the house he said:

“Well, there’s one consolation: after all of that work and trouble, the woman can’t put on the face to charge us for the milk.” A moment later he said to her: “I’ve got about two quarts; how much is it?”

Page 17

"Ten cents," answered the woman. "Didn't them cows seem to take kindly to you?"

"Well, they didn't exactly crowd around me and moo with delight," replied Jack, as he handed over a dime with rather bad grace.

That evening a neighbor called on us as we sat about our camp-fire, and we told him the experience with the cows.

[Illustration: Milking the Heifer that Wore a Sleigh-Robe]

"Puts me in mind of the time a fellow had over at the Santee Agency a year or so ago," said our visitor. "There's a man there named Hawkins that's got a tame buffalo cow. Of course you might as well try to milk an earthquake as a buffalo. Well, one day a man came along looking for work, and Hawkins hired him. Milking-time came, and Hawkins sent the man out to milk, but forgot to tell hint about the buffalo. The man was a little green, and it was sort of dark in the barn, and the first thing he tried to milk was the buffalo cow. She kicked the pail through the window, smashed the stall, and half broke the man's leg the first three kicks. He hobbled to the house, and says to Hawkins: 'Old man, that there high-shouldered heifer of yourn out there has busted the barn and half killed me, and I reckon I'll quit and go back East, where the cows don't wear sleigh-ropes and kick with four feet at once.'"

Bright and early the next morning we got off again. Nothing of importance happened that day. We were travelling through a comparatively old-settled part of the country, and the houses were numerous. A young Indian rode with us a few miles, but he was a very civilized sort of red man. He had been at work on a farm down near Yankton, and was on his way to the Ponca Reservation to visit his mother. As an Indian he rather disgusted Ollie.

"If I were a big six-foot Indian," he said, after our passenger had gone, "I think I'd carry a tomahawk, and wear a feather or two at least. I don't see what's the advantage of being an Indian if you're going to act just like a white man."

We camped that night in a beautiful nook in a bluff near a little stream. The next day we reached Running Water. The ferry-boat was a little thing, with a small paddle-wheel on each side operated by two horses on tread-mills. A man stood at the stern with a long oar to steer it. The river was not so wide here as at Yankton, but the current was swifter, which no doubt gave the place its name. It looked very doubtful if we should ever get across in the queer craft, but after a long time we succeeded in doing so. It gave us a good opportunity to study the water of the river, which looked more like milk than water, owing to the fine clay dissolved in it. The ferry-man thought very highly of the water, and told us proudly that a glass of it would never settle and become clear.



“It’s the finest drinking-water in the world,” he said. “I never drink anything else. Take a bucket of it up home every evening to drink overnight. You don’t get any of this clear well-water down me.”

Page 18

We tasted of it, but couldn't see that it was much different from other water.

"Boil it down a little, and give it a lower crust, and I should think it would make a very good custard-pie," said Jack.

We found Niobrara to be a little place of a few hundred houses. We went into camp on the edge of the town, where we stayed the next day, as it was Sunday. Early Monday morning we were out on the road which led along the banks of the Niobrara River. We were somewhat surprised at the smallness of this stream. It was of considerable width but very shallow, and in many places bubbled along over the rocks like a wide brook. We spoke of its size to a man whom we met. Said he:

"Yes, it ain't no great shakes down here around its mouth, but you just wait till you get up in the neighborhood of its head-waters. It's a right smart bit of a river up there."

"But I thought a river was usually bigger at its mouth than at its source," I said.

"Depends on the country it runs through," answered the man. "Some rivers in these parts peter out entirely, and don't have no mouth a' tall—just go into the ground and leave a wet spot. This here Niobrara comes through a dry country, and what the sun don't dry up and the wind blow away the sand swallows mostly, though some water does sneak through, after all; and in the spring it's about ten times as big as it is now. The Niobrara goes through the Sand Hills. Anything that goes through the Sand Hills comes out small. You fellers are going through the Sand Hills—you'll come out smaller than you be now."

This was the first time we had heard of the Sand Hills, but after this everybody was talking about them and warning us against them.

"Why," said one man, "you know that there Sarah Desert over in Africa somewhere? Well, sir, that there Sarah is a reg'lar flower-garden, with fountains a-squirting and the band playing 'Hail Columbia,' 'longside o' the Newbraska Sand Hills. You'll go through 'em for a hundred miles, and you'll wish you'd never been born!"

This was not encouraging, but as they were still several days' travel ahead, we resolved not to worry about them.

But the country rapidly began to grow drier and more sandy, especially after the road ceased to follow the river. Before we left the river valley, however, Ollie made an important discovery in a thicket on the edge of the bank. This was a number of wild plum-trees full of fruit. We gathered at least a half-bushel of plums, and several quarts of wild grapes.

About the middle of the afternoon we came up on a great level prairie stretching away to the west as far as we could see. There seemed to be but few houses, and the



scattering fields of corn were stunted and dried up. It had apparently been an extremely dry season, though the prospects for rain that night were good, and grew better. It was hot, and a strong south wind was blowing.

Page 19

Night soon began to come on, but we could find no good camping-place. We had not passed a house for four or five miles, nor a place where we could get water for the horses. As it grew dark, however, it began to rain. It kept up, and increased to such an extent that in half an hour there were pools of water standing along the road in many places, and we decided to stop. It was wet work taking care of the horses, but the most discouraging thing was the report from the cook that there was no milk with which to make griddle-cakes for supper, and as he did not know how to make anything else, the prospect was rather gloomy. But through the rain we finally discovered a light a quarter of a mile away, and Ollie and I started out to find it. Jack refused to go, on the plea that he was still lame from his Yankton trip after milk.

[Illustration: Wet but Hopeful]

We blundered away through the rain and darkness, and after stumbling in a dozen holes, running into a fence, and getting tangled up in an abandoned picket-rope, at last came up to the house. It was a little one-room board house such as the settlers call a "shack." The door was open, and inside we could see a man and woman and half a dozen children and a full dozen dogs. We walked up, and when the man saw us he called "Come in!" tossed two children on the bed in the corner, picked up their chairs, which were home-made, and brought them to us.

"Wet, ain't it?" he exclaimed. "Rainy as the day Noah yanked the gang-plank into the Ark. I was a-telling Martha there was a right smart chance of a shower this afternoon. What might you-uns' names be, and where might you be from, and where might you be going?"

We told him all about ourselves, and he went on:

"Rainy night. Too late to help the co'n, though. Co'n's poor this year; reckon we'll have to live on taters and hope. Tater crop ain't no great shakes, though. Nothing much left but hope, and dry for that. Reckon I'll go back to old Missouri in the spring, and work in a saw-mill. No saw-mills here, 'cause there ain't nothing to saw. Hay don't need sawing. Martha," he added, turning to his wife, "was it you said our roof didn't need mending?"

"I said it did need it a powerful sight," answered the woman, as she put another stick of hay in the stove, and a stream of rain-water sputtered in the fire.

"Mebby you're right," said the man. "There's enough dry spots for the dogs and children, but when we have vis'tors somebody has got to get wet. Reckon I oughter put on two shingles for vis'tors to set under. You fellers will stay to supper, of course. We 'ain't got much but bacon and taters, but you're powerful welcome."



“No,” I said, “we really mustn’t stop. What we wanted was to see if we couldn’t get a little milk from you.”

“Well, I’ll be snaked!” exclaimed the man. “That makes me think I ain’t milked the old cow yet.”



Page 20

"I milked her more'n two hours ago, while you was cleaning your rifle," said his wife.

"That so?" replied the man. "Where's the milk?"

The woman looked around a little. "Reckon the dogs or the young Uns must 'a' swallered it. 'Tain't in sight, nohow."

"Oh, we can milk 'er again!" exclaimed the man. "Old Spot sometimes comes down heavier on the second or third milking than she does on the first."

He took a gourd from a shelf, and told us to "come on;" and started out. He wore a big felt hat, but no coat, and he was barefooted. Just outside the door stood a bedstead and two or three chairs. "We move 'em out in the daytime to make more room," explained the man. The rain was still pouring down. The man took our lantern and began looking for the cow. He soon found her, and while I held the lantern, and Ollie our jug, he went down on his knees beside the cow and began to milk with one hand, holding the gourd in the other. The cow stood perfectly still, as if it was no new thing to be milked the second time. We had on rubber coats, but the man was without protection, and as he sat very near the cow a considerable stream ran off of her hip-bone and down the back of his neck. When the gourd was full he poured it in our jug, and at my offering to pay for it he was almost insulted. "Not a cent, not a cent!" he exclaimed. "Al'ays glad to 'commodate a neighbor. Good-night; coming down in the morning to swap hosses with you."

He went back to the house, and we started for the wagon.

"He wouldn't have got quite so wet if he hadn't kept so close to the cow," said Ollie, as we walked along.

"What he needs," said I, "are eave-troughs on his cow."

V: ACROSS THE NIOBRARA

The next morning dawned fair. We were awakened by Old Blacky kicking the side of the wagon-box with both hind-feet.

"If that man with the ever-blooming cow comes down," said Jack, "I'll swap him Old Blacky."

Just then we heard a loud "Hello!" and, looking out, we found the man leading a small yellow pony.

"I just 'lowed I'd come down and let you fellers make something out of me on a hoss-trade," said the man.



“Well,” answered Jack, “we’re willing to swap that black horse over there. He’s a splendid animal.”

“Isn’t he rather much on the kick?” the man asked. “He does kick a little,” admitted Jack, “but only for exercise. He wouldn’t hurt a fly. But he is so high-lifed that he has to kick to ease his nerves once in a while.”

“Thought I seen him whaling away at your wagon,” returned the man. “Couldn’t have him round my place, ’cause my house ain’t very steady, and I reckon he’d have it kicked all to flinders inside of a week.”

He talked for some time, but finally went off when he found that Jack was not willing to part with any horse except Old Blacky.

Page 21

The road was so sandy that the rain had not made much difference with it, and we were soon again moving on at a good rate. We were travelling in a direction a little north of west, and from one to half a dozen miles south of the Niobrara River. It would have been nearer to have kept north of the river, but we were prevented by the Sioux and Ponca Indian reservations, through which no one was allowed to go. Our intention was to cross to the north of the river at Grand Rapids and get into the Keya Paha country, about which we heard a great deal, keep straight west, and, after crossing the river twice more, reach Fort Niobrara and the town of Valentine, beyond which were the Sand Hills. This route would keep us all the time from twenty to thirty miles north of the railroad.

[Illustration: Anti-Horse-Thieves]

We had not gone far this morning when we met two men on horseback riding side by side. They looked like farmers, only we noticed that each carried a big revolver in a belt and one of them a gun. They simply said “Good-morning,” and passed on. In about half an hour we met another pair similarly mounted and armed, and in another half-hour still two more.

“Must be a wedding somewhere, or a Sunday—school picnic,” said Jack.

“But why do they all have the guns?” asked Ollie, innocently.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Jack. “Varmints about, I suppose.”

In a few minutes we came to a man working beside the road, and asked him what it all meant. He looked around in a very mysterious manner, and then half whispered the one word “Vigilantees!” with a strong accent on each syllable.

“Oh!” said Jack, “vigilance committee.”

“Correct,” returned the man.

“After horse-thieves, I suppose?” went on Jack.

“Exactly,” replied the man. “Stole two horses at Black Bird last night at ten o’clock. Holt County Anti-Horse-thief Association after ’em this morning at four. That’s the way we do business in this country!”

We drove on, and Jack said:

“What the Association wants to do is to buy Old Blacky and put him in a pasture for bait. In the morning the members can go out and gather up a wagon-load of disabled horse-thieves that have tried to steal him in the night and got kicked over the fence.”



We either met or saw a dozen other men on horseback, always in pairs; but whether or not they caught the thief we never heard.

[Illustration: Jack Shoots a Grouse]

So far we had had very poor luck in finding game; but in the afternoon of this day Jack shot a grouse, and we camped rather earlier than usual, so that he might have ample time to cook it. There were also the plums and grapes to stew. We made our camp not far from a house, and, after a vast amount of extremely serious labor on the part of the cook, had a very good supper.

Page 22

The next day passed with but one incident worth recalling. In the afternoon we crossed the Niobrara at Grand Rapids on a tumbledown wooden bridge, and turned due west through the Keya Paha country. This is so called from the Keya Paha River (pronounced Key-a-paw), a branch of the Niobrara which comes down out of Dakota and joins it a few miles below Grand Rapids. The country seemed to be much the same as that through which we had travelled, perhaps a little flatter and sandier. Just across the river we saw the first large herd of stock, some five or six hundred head being driven east by half a dozen cowboys.

A short distance beyond the river we came to a little blacksmith shop beside the road. As soon as Jack saw it he said:

“We ought to stop and get the horses shod. I was looking at the holes the calks of Old Blacky’s shoes made in the wagon-box last night, and they are shallow and irregular. He needs new shoes to do himself justice. If this blacksmith seems like a man of force of character, we’ll see what he can do.”

Jack looked at the blacksmith quizzically when we drove up, and whispered to us, “He’ll do,” and we unhitched. The pony had never been shod, and did not seem to need any artificial aids, so we left her to graze about while the others were being attended to.

“Just shoe the brown one first, if it doesn’t make any difference,” said Jack.

“All right,” answered the blacksmith, and he went to work on this decent old nag, who slept peacefully throughout the whole operation.

He then began on Old Blacky. He soon had shoes nailed on the old reprobate’s forward feet, and approached his rear ones. Old Blacky had made no resistance so far, and had contented himself with gnawing at the side of the shop and switching his tail. He even allowed the blacksmith to take one of his hind-feet between his knees and start to pull off the old shoe. Then he began to struggle to free his leg. The blacksmith held on. Old Blacky saw that the time for action had arrived, so he drew his leg, with the foolish blacksmith still clinging to it, well up forward, and then threw it back with all his strength. The leg did not fly off, but the blacksmith did, and half-way across the shop. He picked himself up, and, after looking at the horse, said:

[Illustration: Flight of the Blacksmith]

“Pears’s if that ain’t a colt any more.”

“No,” answered Jack; “he’s fifteen or sixteen.”

“Old enough to know better,” observed the blacksmith. “I’ll try him again.”



He once more got the leg up, and again Old Blacky tried to throw him off. But this time the man hung on. After the third effort Blacky looked around at him with a good deal of surprise. Then he put down the leg to which the man was still clinging, and with the other gave him a blow which was half a kick and half a push, which sent the man sprawling over by his anvil.



Page 23

"The critter don't seem to take to it nohow, does he?" said the blacksmith, cheerfully, as he again got up.

"He's a very peculiar horse," answered Jack. "Has violent likes and dislikes. His likes are for food, and his dislikes for everything else."

"I'll tackle him again, though," said the man.

But Blacky saw that he could no longer afford to temporize with the fellow, and now began kicking fiercely with both feet in all directions, swinging about like a warship to get the proper range on everything in sight, and finally ending up by putting one foot through the bellows.

"Reckon I've got to call in assistance," said the man, as he started off. He came back with another man, who laid hold of one of Blacky's forward legs and held it up off the floor. The blacksmith then seized one of his hind ones and got it up. This left the old sinner so that if he would kick he would have to stand on one foot while he did it, and this was hardly enough for even so bad a horse as he was. He did not wholly give up, however, but after a great amount of struggling they at last got him shod.

"We'll call him the Blacksmith's Pet," said Jack.

Good camping-places did not seem to be numerous, and just after the sun had gone down we turned out beside the road near a half-completed sod house. There was no other house in sight, and this had apparently been abandoned early in the season, as weeds and grass were growing on top of the walls, which were three or four feet high. There was also a peculiar sort of well, a few of which we had seen during the day. It consisted of four one-inch boards nailed together and sunk into the ground. The boards were a foot wide, thus making the inside of the shaft ten inches square. This one was forty or fifty feet deep, but there was a long rope and slender tin bucket beside it. The water was not good, but there was no other to be had. Near the house Ollie found the first cactus we had seen, which showed, if nothing else did, that we were getting into a dry country. He took it up carefully and stowed it away in the cabin to take back home as evidence of his extensive travels.

For several days we had not been able to have a camp-fire, owing to the wind and dryness of the prairie, for had we started a prairie fire it might have done great damage.

"We don't want the Holt County Anti-Prairie Fire Society after us," Jack had said; so we had been using our oil-stove.

But this evening was very still, and there seemed to be no danger in building a camp-fire within the walls of the house, and we soon had one going with wood which we had gathered along the river, since to have found wood enough for a camp-fire in that



neighborhood would have been as impossible as to have found a stone or a spring of water.

We were sitting about on the sods after supper when a man rode up on horseback, who said he was looking for some lost stock. We asked him to have something to eat, and he accepted the invitation, and afterwards talked a long time, and gave us much information which we wished about the country. Somebody mentioned the little well, and the man turned to Ollie and said:



Page 24

“How would you like to slip down such a well?”

“I’m afraid I’m too big,” answered Ollie. “Well, perhaps you are; but there was a child last summer over near where I live who wasn’t too big. He was a little fellow not much over two years old. The well was a new one, and the curb was almost even with the top of the ground. He slipped down feet first. It was a hundred and twenty feet deep, with fifteen feet of water at the bottom; but he fitted pretty snug, and only went down about fifty feet at first. His mother missed him, saw that the cover was gone from the well, and listened. She heard his voice, faint and smothered. There was no one else at home. She called to him not to stir, and went to the barn, where there was a two-year-old colt. He had never been ridden before, but he was ridden that afternoon, and I guess he hasn’t forgotten the lesson. She came to my place first, told me, and rode away to another neighbor’s. In half an hour there were twenty men there, and soon fifty, and before morning two hundred.

“There was no way to fish the child out—the only thing was to dig down beside the small shaft. We could hear him faintly, and we began to dig. We started a shaft about four feet square. The sandy soil caved badly, but men with horses running all the way brought out lumber from Grand Rapids for curbing.

“The child’s father came too. He listened a second at the small shaft, and then went down the other. Two men could work at the bottom of it. One of the men was relieved every few minutes by a fresh worker, but the father worked on, and did more than the others, notwithstanding the changes. All of the time the mother sat on the ground beside the small shaft with her arms about its top. At four o’clock in the morning we were down opposite the prisoner. He was still crying faintly. We saw that to avoid the danger of causing him to slip farther down we must dig below him, bore a hole in the board, and push through a bar. But a few shovelfuls more were needed. The work jarred the shaft, and the child slipped twenty—five feet deeper. At seven o’clock we were down to where he was again, though we could no longer bear him. We dug a little below, bored a bole, and the father slipped through a pickaxe handle, and fainted away as he felt the little one slide down again but rest on the handle. We tore off the boards, took the baby out, and drew him and his father to the surface. There were two doctors waiting for them, and the next day neither was much the worse for it.”

The man got on his horse and rode away. We agreed that he had told us a good story, but the next day others assured us that it had all happened a year before.

VI: BY CAYNONS TO VALENTINE



Page 25

Besides the cactus, another form of vegetation which began to attract more and more of Ollie's attention was the red tumbleweed. Indeed, Jack and I found ourselves interested in it also. The ordinary tumbleweed, green when growing and gray when tumbling, had long been familiar to us, but the red variety was new. The old kind which we knew seldom grew more than two feet in diameter; it was usually almost exactly round, and with its finely branched limbs was almost as solid as a big sponge, and when its short stem broke off at the top of the ground in the fall it would go bounding away across the prairie for miles. The red sort seemed to be much the same, except for its color and size. We saw many six or seven feet, perhaps more, in diameter, though they were rather flat, and not probably over three or four feet high.

The first one we saw was on edge, and going at a great rate across the prairie, bounding high into the air, and acting as if it had quite gone crazy, as there was a strong wind blowing.

"Look at that overgrown red tumbleweed!" exclaimed Jack. "I never saw anything like that before. Jump on the pony, Ollie, and catch the varmint and bring it back here!"

Ollie was willing enough to do this, and the pony was willing enough to go, so off they went. I think if the weed had had a fair field that Ollie would never have overtaken it, but it got caught in the long grass occasionally, and he soon came up to it. But the pony was not used to tumbleweed-coursing, and shied off with a startled snort. Ollie brought her about and made another attempt. But again the frightened pony ran around it. Half a dozen times this was repeated. At last she happened to dash around it on the wrong side just as it bounded into the air before the wind. It struck both horse and rider like a big dry-land wave, and Ollie seized it. If the poor pony had been frightened before, she was now terror-stricken, and gave a jump like a tiger, and shot away faster than we had ever seen her run before. Ollie had lost control of her, and could only cling to the saddle with one hand and hold to the big blundering weed with the other. Fortunately the pony ran toward the wagon. As they came up we could see little but tumbleweed and pony legs, and it looked like nothing so much as a hay-stack running away on its own legs. When the pony came up to the wagon she stopped so suddenly that Ollie went over her head. But he still clung to the weed, and struck the ground inside of it. He jumped up, still in the weed, so that it now looked like a hay-stack on two legs. We pulled him out of it, and found him none the worse for his adventure. But he was a little frightened, and said:

[Illustration: Studying Botany]

"I don't think I'll chase those things again, Uncle Jack—not with that pony."

"Oh, that's all right, Ollie," said Jack. "I'm going to organize the Nebraska Cross-Country Tumbleweed Club, and you'll want to come to the meets. We'll give the weed

one minute start, and the first man that catches it will get a prize of—of a watermelon, for instance.”



Page 26

“Well, I think I’ll take another horse before I try it,” returned Ollie.

“Might try Old Browny,” I said. “If he ever came up to a tumbleweed he would lie right down on it and go to sleep.”

“Yes, and Blacky would hold it with one foot and eat it up,” said Jack. “Unless he took a notion to turn around and kick it out of existence.”

We looked the queer plant over carefully, and found it so closely branched that it was impossible to see into it more than a few inches. The branched were tough and elastic, and when it struck the ground after being tossed up it would rebound several inches. But it was almost as light as a thistle-ball, and when we turned it loose it rolled away across the prairie again as if nothing had happened.

“They’re bad things sometimes when there is a prairie fire,” said Jack. “No matter how wide the fire-break may be, a blazing tumbleweed will often roll across it and set fire to the grass beyond. They’ve been known to leap over streams of considerable width, too, or fall in the water and float across, still blazing. Two years ago the town of Frontenac was burned up by a tumbleweed, though the citizens had made an approved fire-break by ploughing two circles of furrows around their village and burning off the grass between them. These big red ones must be worse than the others. I believe,” he went on, “that tumbleweeds might be used to carry messages, like carrier-pigeons. The next one we come across we’ll try it.”

That afternoon we caught a fine specimen, and Jack securely fastened this message to it and turned it adrift:

“Schooner Rattletrap, September —, 188-: Latitude. 42.50; Longitude, 99.35. To Whom it may Concern: From Prairie Flower, bound for Deadwood. All well except Old Blacky, who has an appetite.”

The night after our stop by the unfinished house we again camped on the open prairie, a quarter of a mile from a settler’s house, where we got water for the horses. This house was really a “dugout,” being more of a cellar than a house. It was built in the side of a little bank, the back of the sod roof level with the ground, and the front but two or three feet above it.

“I’d be afraid, if I were living in it, that a heavy rain in the night might fill it up, and float the bedstead, and bump my nose on the ceiling,” said Jack.

It had been a warm afternoon, but when we went to bed it was cooler, though there was no wind stirring. The smoke of our camp-fire went straight up. There was no moon, but the sky was clear, and we remarked that we had not seen the stars look so bright any night before. The front of our wagon stood toward the northwest. We went to bed, but

at two o'clock we were awakened by a most violent shaking of the cover. The wind was blowing a gale, and the whole top seemed about to be going by the board. We scrambled up, and I heard Jack's voice calling for me to come out. The cover-bows

Page 27

were bent far over, and the canvas pressed in on the side to the southwest till it seemed as if it must burst. The front end of the top had gone out and was cracking in the wind. I crept forward, and as I did so I felt the wagon rise up on the windward side and bump back on the ground. I concluded we were doomed to a wreck, and called to Ollie to get out as fast as he could. I supposed a hard storm had struck us, but as I went over the dash-board I was astonished to see the stars shining as brightly as ever in the deep, dark sky. Jack was clinging to the rear wagon wheel on the windward side, which was all that had saved it from capsizing. He called to me to take hold of the tongue and steer the craft around with the stern to the gale. I did so, while he turned on the wheel.

[Illustration: When the Winds are Breathing Low]

As it came around the loose sides of the cover began to flutter and crack, while the puckering-string gave way, and the wind swept through the wagon, carrying everything that was loose before it, including Ollie, who was just getting over the dash-board. He was not hurt, but just then we heard a most pitiful yelping, as Jack's blankets and pillow went rolling away from where the wagon had stood. It was Snoozer going with them. The yelping disappeared in the darkness, and we heard frying-pans, tin plates, and other camp articles clattering away with the rest. The Rattletrap itself had tried to run before the gale, but I had put on the brake and stopped it. The three of us then crouched in front of it, and waited for the wind to blow itself out. We could see or hear nothing of the horses. There was not a cloud in sight, and the stars still shone down calmly and unruffled, while the wind cut and hissed through the long prairie grass all about us. It kept up for about ten minutes, when it began to stop as suddenly as it had begun. In twenty minutes there was nothing but a cool, gentle breeze coming out of the southwest. We lit the lantern and tried to gather up our things, but soon realized that we could not do much that night. We found the unfortunate Snoozer crouched in a little depression which was perhaps an old buffalo wallow, but could see nothing of the horses. We concluded to go to bed and wait for morning.

When it came we found our things scattered for over a quarter of a mile. We recovered everything, though the wagon-seat was broken. The horses had come back, so we could not tell how far they had gone before the wind.

"I've read about those night winds on the plains," said Jack, "and we'll look out for 'em in the future. We'll put an anchor on Snoozer at least."

This intelligent animal had not forgotten his night's experience, and stuck closely in the wagon, where he even insisted on taking his breakfast.



Page 28

The road we were following was gradually drawing closer to the Niobrara, and we began to see scattering pine-trees, stunted and broken, along the heads of the canyons or ravines leading down to the river. There was less sand, and we made better progress. The country was but little settled, and game was more plentiful. We got two or three grouse. We went into camp at night by the head of what appeared to be a large canyon, under a tempest-tossed old pine-tree, through which the wind constantly sighed. There was no water, but we counted on getting it down the canyon. A man went by on horseback, driving some cattle, who told us that we could find a spring down about half a mile.

“Can we get any hay down there?” I asked him. “We’re out of feed for the horses, and the grass seems pretty poor here.”

“Down a mile beyond the spring I have a dozen stacks,” answered the man, “and you’re welcome to all you can bring up on your pony. Just go down and help yourselves.”

We thanked him and he went on. As soon as we could we started down. It was beginning to get dark, and grew darker rapidly as we went down the ravine, as its sides were high and the trees soon became numerous. There was no road, nothing but a mere cattle-path, steep and stony in many places. We found the spring and watered all the horses, left Blacky and Brownie, and went on after the hay with the pony, Jack leading her, and Ollie and I walking ahead with the lantern. It seemed a long way as we stumbled along in the darkness, all the time downhill. “I guess that man wasn’t so liberal as he seemed,” said Jack. “The pony will be able to carry just about enough hay up here to make Snoozer a bed.”

We plunged on, till at last the path became a little nearer level. It crossed a small open tract and then wound among bushes and low trees. Suddenly we saw something gleam in the light of the lantern, and stopped right on the river’s bank. The water looked deep and dark, though not very wide. The current was swift and eddying.

“We’ve passed the hay,” I said. “It must be on that open flat we crossed.”

We went back, and, turning to the right, soon found it. I set the lantern down and began to pull hay from one of the stacks, when the pony made a sudden movement, struck the lantern with her foot, and smashed the globe to bits.

“There,” exclaimed Jack, “we’ll have a fine time going up that badger-hole of a canyon in the dark!”

But there was nothing else to do, and we made up two big bundles of hay and tied them to the pony’s back.

“She’ll think it’s tumbleweeds,” said Ollie.

“If she’s headed in the right direction I hope she will,” answered Jack.

Page 29

We started up, but it was a long and toilsome climb. In many places Jack and I had to get down on our hands and knees and feel out the path. The worst place was a scramble up a bank twenty feet high, and covered with loose stones. I was ahead. The heroic little pony with her unwieldy load sniffed at the prospect a little, and then started bravely up, "hanging on by her toe-nails," as Ollie said. When she was almost to the top she stepped on a loose stone, lost her footing, went over, and rolled away into the darkness and underbrush. Jack stumbled over a little of the hay which had come off in the path, hastily rolled up a torch, and lit it with a match. By this light we found the pony on her back, like a tumble-bug, with her load for a cushion and her feet in the air, and kicking wildly in every direction. While Ollie held the torch, Jack and I went to her rescue, and, after a vast deal of pulling and lifting, got her to her feet just as the hay torch died out. Again she scrambled up the bank, and this time with success. We went on, found the other horses, and were soon at the wagon. We voted the pony all the hay she wanted, and went to bed tired.

The next day, the ninth out from Yankton, though it was a long run, brought us to Valentine, the first town on the railroad which we had seen since leaving the former place. Before we reached it we went several miles along the upper ends of the canyons, down a long hill so steep that we had to chain both hind wheels, forded the Niobrara twice, followed the river several miles, went out across the military reservation, which was like a desert, saw six or eight hundred negro soldiers at Fort Niobrara, and finally drove through Valentine, and went into camp a mile west of town. On the way we saw thousands of the biggest and reddest tumbleweeds, and two or three new sorts of cactus. The colored troops surprised Ollie, as he had never seen any before.

"It's the western winds and the hot sun that's tanned those soldiers," said Jack. "We'll look just that way, too, before we get back."

Ollie was half inclined to believe this astonishing statement at first, but concluded that his uncle was joking.

[Illustration: Sad Result of Dishonesty]

We went into camp on the banks of the Minichaduzza River, a little brook which flows into the Niobrara from the northwest. All night it gurgled and bubbled almost under our wheels. A man stopped to chat with us as we sat around our camp-fire after supper. We told him of our experience in getting the hay the night before. He laughed and said: "Ever steal any of your horse feed?"

"We haven't yet," answered Jack. "We try to be reasonably honest."



Page 30

“Some don’t, though,” replied the man. “Most of ’em that are going West in a covered wagon seem to think corn in the field is public property. A fellow camped right here one afternoon last fall. He was out of feed, and took a grain sack on one arm and a big Winchester rifle on the other, and went over to old Brown’s cornfield. He took the gun along not to shoot anybody, but to sort of intimidate Brown if he should catch him. Suddenly he saw an old fellow coming towards him carrying a gun about a foot longer than his own. The young fellow wilted right down on the ground and never moved. He happened to go down on a big prickly cactus, but he never stirred, cactus or no cactus. He thought Brown had caught him, and that he was done for. The old man kept coming nearer and nearer. He was almost to him. The young fellow concluded to make a brave fight. So he jumped up and yelled. The old man dropped his gun and ran like a scared wolf. Then the young fellow noticed that the other also had a sack in which he had been gathering corn. He called him back, they saw that they were both thieves, shook hands, and went ahead and robbed old Brown together.”

The man got up to go. “Well, good-night, boys,” he said. “Rest as hard as you can tomorrow. You’ll strike into the Sand Hills at about nine o’clock Monday morning. Take three days’ feed, and every drop of water you can carry; and if you waste any of it washing your hands you’re bigger fools than I think you are.”

VII: THROUGH THE SAND HILLS

“Come, stir out of that and get the camels ready for the desert!”

This was Jack’s cheery way of warning Ollie and me that it was time to get up on the morning of our start into the Sand Hills.

“Any simooms in sight?” asked Ollie, by way of reply to Jack’s remark.

“Well, I think Old Brownly scents one; he has got his nose buried in the sand like a camel,” answered Jack.

It was only just coming daylight, but we were agreed that an early start was best. It was another Monday morning, and we knew that it would take three good days’ driving to carry us through the sand country. We had learned that, notwithstanding what our visitor of the first night had said, there were several places on the road where we could get water and feed for the horses. We should have to carry some water along, however, and had got two large kegs from Valentine, and filled them and all of our jugs and pails the night before. We also had a good stock of oats and corn, and a big bundle of hay, which we put in the cabin on the bed.



“Just as soon as Old Blacky finds that there is no water along the road he will insist on having about a barrel a day,” said Jack. “And if he can’t get it he will balk, and kick the dash-board into kindling-wood.”

A little before sunrise we started. It was agreed, owing to the increase in the load and the deep sand, that no one, not even Snoozer, should be allowed to ride in the wagon. If Ollie got tired he was to ride the pony. So we started off, walking beside the wagon, with the pony lust behind, as usual, dangling her stirrups, and the abused Snoozer, looking very much hurt at the insult put upon him, following behind her.

Page 31

For three or four miles the road was much like that to which we had been accustomed. Then it gradually began to grow sandier. We were following an old trail which ran near the railroad, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other; and this was the case all the way through the hills. The railroad was new, having been built only a year or two before. There was a station on it every fifteen or twenty miles, with a side-track, and a water-tank for the engines, but not much else.

There was no well-marked boundary to the Sand Hills, but gradually, and almost before we realized it, we found ourselves surrounded by them. We came to a crossing of the railroad, and in a little cut a few rods away we saw the sand drifted over the rails three or four inches deep, precisely like snow.

“Well,” said Jack, “I guess we’re in the Sand Hills at last if we’ve got where it drifts.”

“I wonder if they have to have sand-ploughs on their engines?” said Ollie.

“I’ve heard that they frequently have to stop and shovel it off,” answered Jack.

As we got farther among the sand dunes we found them all sizes and shapes, though usually circular, and from fifteen to forty feet high. Of course the surface of the county was very irregular, and there would be places here and there where the grass had obtained a little footing and the sand had not drifted up. There were also some hills which seemed to be independent of the sand piles.

We stopped for noon on a little flat where there was some struggling grass, This flat ran off to the north, and narrowed into a small valley through which in the spring probably a little water flowed. We had finished dinner when we noticed a flock of big birds circling about the little valley, and, on looking closer, saw that some of them were on the ground.

“They are sand-hill cranes,” said Jack. “I’ve seen them in Dakota, but this must be their home.”

They were immense birds, white and gray, and with very long legs. Jack took his rifle and tried to creep up on them, but they were too shy, and soared away to the south.

We soon passed the first station on the railroad, called Crookston. The telegraph-operator came out and looked at us, admitted that it was a sandy neighborhood, and went back in. We toiled on without any incident of note during the whole afternoon. Toward night we passed another station, called Georgia, and the man in charge allowed us to fill our kegs from the water-tank.

[Illustration: First Night Camp in the Sand Hills]



We went on three or four miles and stopped beside the trail, and a hundred yards from the railroad, for the night. The great drifts of sand were all around us, and no desert could have been lonelier. We had a little wood and built a camp-fire. The evening was still and there was not a sound. Even the Blacksmith's Pet, wandering about seeking what he could devour, and finding nothing, made scarcely a sound in the soft sand. The moon was shining, and it was warm as any summer evening. Jack sat on the ground beside the wagon and played the banjo for half an hour. After a while we walked over to the railroad. We could hear a faint rumble, and concluded that a train was approaching.



Page 32

“Let’s wait for it,” proposed Jack. “It will be along in a moment.”

We waited and listened. Then we distinctly heard the whistle of a locomotive, and the faint roar gradually ceased.

“It’s stopped somewhere,” I said.

“Don’t see what it should stop around here for,” said Jack, “unless to take on a sand-hill crane.”

Then we heard it start up, run a short distance, and again stop; this it repeated half a dozen times, and then after a pause it settled down to a long steady roar again.

“It isn’t possible, is it, that that train has been stopped at the next station west of here?” I said.

“The next station is Cody, and it’s a dozen miles from here,” answered Jack. “It doesn’t seem as if we could hear it so far, but we’ll time it and see.”

He looked at his watch and we waited. For a long time the roar kept up, occasionally dying away as the train probably went through a deep cut or behind a hill. It gradually increased in volume, till at last it seemed as if the train must certainly be within a hundred yards. Still it did not appear, and the sound grew louder and louder. But at the end of thirty-five minutes it came around the curve in sight and thundered by, a long freight train, and making more noise, it seemed, than any train ever made before.

“That’s where it was!” exclaimed Jack—“at Cody, twelve miles from here; and we first heard it I don’t know how far beyond. If I ever go into the telephone business I’ll keep away from the Sand Hills. A man here ought to be able to hold a pleasant chat with a neighbor two miles off, and by speaking up loud ask the postmaster ten miles away if there is any mail for him.”

We were off ploughing through the sand again early the next morning. We could not give the horses quite all the water they wanted, but we did the best we could. We were in the heart of the hills all day. There were simply thousands of the great sand drifts in every direction. Buffalo bones half buried were becoming numerous. We saw several coyotes, or prairie wolves, skulking about, but we shot at them without success. We got water at Cody, and pressed on. In the afternoon we sighted some antelope looking cautiously over the crest of a sand billow. Ollie mounted the pony and I took my rifle, and we went after them, while Jack kept on with the wagon. They retreated, and we followed them a mile or more back from the trail, winding among the drifts and attempting to get near enough for a shot. But they were too wary for us. At last we mounted a hill rather higher than the rest, and saw them scampering away a mile or more to the northwest. We were surprised more by something which we saw still on

beyond them, and that was a little pond of water deep down between two great ridges of sand.

“I didn’t expect to see a lake in this country,” said Ollie.

I studied the lay of the land a moment, and said: “I think it’s simply a place where the wind has scooped out the sand down below the water-line and it has filled up. The wind has dug a well, that’s all. You know the telegraph-operator at Georgia told us the wells here were shallow—that there’s plenty of water down a short distance.”

Page 33

We could see that there was considerable grass and quite an oasis around the pond. But in every other direction there was nothing but sand billows, all scooped out on their northwest sides where the fierce winds of winter had gnawed at them. The afternoon sun was sinking, and every dune cast a dark shadow on the light yellow of the sand, making a great landscape of glaring light covered with black spots. A coyote sat on a buffalo skull on top of the next hill and looked at us. A little owl flitted by and disappeared in one of the shadows.

“This is like being adrift in an open boat,” I said to Ollie. “We must hurry on and catch the Rattletrap.”

“I’m in the open boat,” answered Ollie. “You’re just simply swimming about without even a life-preserver on.”

We turned and started for the trail. We found it, but we had spent more time in the hills than we realized, and before we had gone far it began to grow dark. We waded on, and at last saw Jack’s welcome camp-fire. When we came up we smelled grouse cooking, and he said:

“While you fellows were chasing about and getting lost I gathered in a brace of fat grouse. What you want to do next time is to take along your hat full of oats, and perhaps you can coax the antelope to come up and eat.”

The camp was near another railroad station called Eli. We had been gradually working north, and were now not over three or four miles from the Dakota line; but Dakota here consisted of nothing but the immense Sioux Indian Reservation, two or three hundred miles long.

The next morning Jack complained of not feeling well.

“What’s the matter, Jack?” I asked.

“Gout,” answered Jack, promptly. “I’m too good a cook for myself. I’m going to let you cook for a few days, and give my system a rest.”

[Illustration: Dark Doings of the Cook]

This seemed very funny to Ollie and me, who had been eating Jack’s cooking for two or three weeks. The fact was that the gouty Jack was the poorest cook that ever looked into a kettle, and he knew it well enough. He could make one thing—pancakes—nothing else. They were usually fairly good, though he would sometimes get his recipes mixed up, and use his sour-milk one when the milk was sweet, or his sweet-milk one when it was sour; but we got accustomed to this. Then it was hard to spoil young and tender fried grouse, and the stewed plums had been good, though he had got some hay



mixed with them; but the flavor of hay is not bad. We bought frequently of “canned goods” at the stores, and this he could not injure a great deal.

We did not pay much attention to Jack’s threat about stopping cooking. He got breakfast after a fashion, mixing sour and sweet milk as an experiment, and though he didn’t eat much himself, we did not think he was going to be sick. But after walking a short distance he declared he could go no farther, and climbed into the cabin and rolled upon the bed.



Page 34

Ollie and I ploughed along with the sand still streaming, like long flaxen hair, off the wagon-wheels as they turned. In a little valley about ten o'clock Ollie shot his first grouse. We saw more antelope, and met a man with his wife and six children and five dogs and two cows and twelve chickens going east. He said he was tired of Nebraska, and was on his way to Illinois. At noon we stopped at Merriman, another railroad station. Jack got up and made a pretence of getting dinner, but he ate nothing himself, and really began to look ill.

We made but a short stop, as we were anxious to get out of the worst of the sand that afternoon. We asked about feed and water for the horses, and were told that we could get both at Irwin, another station fifteen miles ahead. We pressed on, with Jack still in the wagon, but it was almost dark before we reached the station. We found a man on the railroad track.

"Can we get some feed and water here?" I asked of him.

"Reckon not," answered the man.

"Where can we find the station agent?"

"He's gone up to Gordon, and won't be back till midnight."

"Hasn't any one got any horse-feed for sale?"

[Illustration: No Horse-Feed]

"There isn't a smell of horse-feed here," said the man. "I've got the only well, except the railroad's, but it's 'most dry. I'll give you what water I can, though. As for feed, you'd better go on three miles to Keith's ranch. It's on Lost Creek Flat, and there's lots of haystacks there, and you can help yourself. At the ranch-house they will give you other things."

We drove over to the man's house, and got half a pail of water apiece for the horses. They wanted more, but there was no more in the well. The man said we could get everything we wanted at the ranch, and we started on. The horses were tired, but even Old Blacky was quite amiable, and trudged along in the sand without complaint.

Jack was still in the wagon, and we heard nothing of him. It was cloudy and very dark. But the horses kept in the trail, and after, as it seemed to us, we had gone five miles, we felt ourselves on firmer ground. Soon we thought we could make out something, perhaps hay-stacks, through the darkness. I sent Ollie on the pony to see what it was. He rode away, and in a moment I heard a great snorting and a stamping of feet, and Ollie's voice calling for me to come. I ran over with the lantern, and found that he had ridden full into a barbed-wire fence around a hay-stack. The pony stood trembling, with the blood flowing from her breast and legs, but the scratches did not seem to be deep.

“We must find that ranch-house,” I said to Ollie. “It ought to be near.”

For half an hour we wandered among the wilderness of hay-stacks, every one protected by barbed wire. At last we heard a dog barking, followed the sound, and came to the house. The dog was the only live thing at home, and the house was locked.



Page 35

"Well, what we want is water," I said, "and here's the well."

We let down the bucket and brought up two quarts of mud.

"The man was right," said Ollie. "This is worse than the Sarah Desert."

"Fountains squirt and bands play 'The Old Oaken Bucket' in the Sarah Desert 'longside o' this," I answered.

It was eleven o'clock before we found the wagon. We could hear Jack snoring inside, and were surprised to find Snoozer on guard outside, wide awake. He seemed to feel his responsibility, and at first was not inclined to let us approach.

We unharnessed the horses, and Ollie crawled under the fence around one of the stacks of hay and pulled out a big armful for them.

"The poor things shall have all the hay they want, anyhow," he said.

"I'm afraid they'll think it's pretty dry," I returned, "but I don't see what we can do."

Then I called to Jack, and said: "Come, get up and get us some supper!"

After a good deal of growling he called back: "I'm not hungry."

"But we are, and you're well enough to make some cakes."

"Won't do it," answered Jack. "You folks can make 'em as well as I can."

"I can't. Can you?" I said to Ollie. He shook his head.

"You're not very sick or you wouldn't be so cross," I called to Jack: "Roll out and get supper, or I'll pull you out!"

"First follow comes in this wagon gets the head knocked off 'm!" cried Jack. "Besides, there's no milk! No eggs! No nothing! Go 'way! I'm sick! That's all there is," and something which looked like a cannon-ball shot out of the front end of the wagon, followed by a paper bag which might have been the wadding used in the Cannon. "That's all! Lemme 'lone!" And we heard Jack tie down the front of the cover and roll over on the bed again.

"See what it is," I said to Ollie.

He took the lantern and started. "Guess it's a can of Boston baked beans," he said. "Oh, then we're all right," I replied.

He picked it up and studied it carefully by the light of the lantern.



“No,” he said, slowly, “it isn’t that. G—g, double o—gooseberries—that’s what it is—a can of gooseberries we got at Valentine.”

“And this is a paper bag of sugar,” I said, picking it up. “No gout to-night!”

I cut open the can and poured in the sugar. We stirred it up with a stick, and Ollie drank a third of it and I the rest. Then we crawled under the wagon, covered ourselves with the pony’s saddle-blanket, and went to sleep. But before we did so I said:

“Ollie, at the next town I am going to get you a cook-book, and we’ll be independent of that wretch in the wagon.”

“All right,” answered Ollie.

VIII: ON THE ANTELOPE FLATS

The next morning the condition of the tempers of the crew of the Rattletrap was reversed. Jack was feeling better and was quite amiable, and inclined to regret his bloodthirsty language of the night before. But Ollie and I, on our diet of gooseberries, had not prospered, and woke up as cross as Old Blacky. The first thing I did was to seize the empty gooseberry can and hit the side of the wagon a half-dozen resounding blows.



Page 36

“Get up there,” I cried, “and ’tend to breakfast! No pretending you’re sick this morning.”

“All right!” came Jack’s voice, cheerfully. “Certainly. No need of your getting excited, though. You see, I really wasn’t hungry last night, or I’d have got supper.”

“But we were hungry!” answered Ollie. “I don’t think I was ever much hungrier in my life; and then to get nothing but a pint of gooseberries! I could eat my hat this morning!”

“I’m sorry,” said Jack, coming out; “but I can’t cook unless I’m hungry myself. The hunger of others does not inspire me. I gave you all there was. Your hunger ought to have inspired you to do something with those gooseberries.”

“I’d like to know what sort of a meal you’d have got up with a can of gooseberries?”

“Why, my dear young nephew,” exclaimed Jack, “if I’d been awakened to action I’d have fricasseed those gooseberries, built them up into a gastronomical poem; and made a meal of them fit for a king. A great cook like I am is an artist as much as a great poet. He—”

“Oh, bother!” I interrupted; “the gooseberries are gone. There’s the grouse Ollie shot yesterday. Do something with that for breakfast.”

Jack disappeared in the wagon, and began to throw grouse feathers out the front end with a great flourish. The poor horses were much dejected, and stood with their heads down. They had eaten but little of the hay. Water was what they wanted.

“We must hitch up and go on without waiting for breakfast,” I said to Ollie. “It can’t be far to water now, and they must have some. Jack can be cooking the grouse in the wagon.”

So we were soon under way, keeping a sharp lookout, for any signs of a house or stream of water. We had gone five or six miles, and were descending into a little valley, when there came a loud whinny from Old Blacky. Sure enough, at the foot of the hill was a stream of water. The pony ran toward it on a gallop, and as soon as we could unhitch the others they joined her. They all waded in, and drank till we feared they would never be able to wade out again. Then they stood taking little sips, and letting their lips rest just on the surface and blinking dreamily. We knew that they stood almost as much in need of food as of water, as they had had nothing but the hay since the noon before. There was a field of corn half a mile away, on a side-hill, but no house in sight.

“I’m going after some of that corn,” I said to the others. “If I can’t find the owner to buy it, then I’ll help myself.”



I mounted the pony and rode away. There was still no house in sight at the field, and I filled a sack and returned. The horses went at their breakfast eagerly. But twice during the meal they stopped and plunged in the brook and took other long drinks; and at the end Old Blacky lay down in a shallow place and rolled, and came out looking like a drowned rat.



Page 37

In the meantime Jack had got the grouse ready, and we ate it about as ravenously as the horses did their corn. We had just finished, and were talking about going, when a tall man on a small horse almost covered with saddle rode up, and began to talk cheerfully on various topics. After a while he said:

[Illustration: The Careful Corn Owner]

“Well, boys, was that good corn?”

We all suspected the truth instantly.

“He did it!” exclaimed Jack, pointing at me. “He did it all alone. We’re going to give him up to the authorities at the next town.”

The man laughed, and said: “Don’t do it. He may reform.”

There seemed to be but one thing to do, so I said: “It was your corn, I suppose. Our only excuse is that we were out of corn. Tell us how much it is, and we’ll pay you for it.”

“Not a cent,” answered the man, firmly. “It’s all right. I’ve travelled through them Sand Hills myself, and I know how it is. You’re welcome to all you took, and you can have another sackful if you want to go after it.”

I thanked him, but told him that we expected to get some feed at Gordon, the next town. After wishing us good-luck, he rode away.

We started on, and made but a short stop for noon, near Gordon. We found ourselves in a fairly well-settled country, though the oldest settlers had been there but two or three years. The region was called the Antelope Flats, and was quite level, with occasional ravines. The trail usually ran near the railroad, and that night we camped within three or four rods of it. Long trains loaded with cattle thundered by all night. We were somewhat nervous lest Old Blacky should put his shoulder against the wagon while we slept, and push it on the track in revenge for the poor treatment we gave him in the Sand Hills, but the plan didn’t happen to occur to him. It was at this camp that we encountered a remarkable echoing well. It was an ordinary open well, forty or fifty feet deep, near a neighboring house, but a word spoken above it came back repeated a score of times. We failed to account for it.

The next forenoon we jogged along much the same as usual and stopped for noon at Rushville. This was not far from the Pine Ridge Indian Agency and the place called Wounded Knee, where the battle with the Sioux was fought three or four years later. We saw a number of Indians here, and though they came up to Ollie’s idea of what an Indian should be a little better than the one that rode with us, they still did not seem to be just the thing.



[Illustration: A Study in Red Men]

“I don’t think,” he said, “that they ought to smoke cigarettes.”

“It does look like rather small business for an Indian, doesn’t it?” answered Jack. “But then smoking cigarettes is small business for anybody. What’s your idea of what an Indian ought to smoke?”

“Well, I’m not sure he ought to smoke anything, except of course the peace-pipe occasionally. And he oughtn’t to smoke that very much, because an Indian shouldn’t make peace very often.”



Page 38

“Right on the war-path all the time, flourishing a scalping-knife above his head, and whooping his teeth loose—that’s your notion of an Indian.”

“Well, I don’t know as that is exactly it,” returned Ollie, doubtfully. “But it seems to me these are hardly right. Their clothes seem to be just like white people’s.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Jack. “I saw one when I went around to the post-office wearing bright Indian moccasins, a pair of soldier’s trousers, a fashionable black coat, and a cowboy hat. I never saw a white man dressed just like that.”

“Well, I think they ought to wear some feathers, anyhow,” insisted Ollie. “An Indian without feathers is just like a—a turkey without ’em.”

The Indians were idling all over town, big, lazy, villanous-looking fellows, and very frequently they were smoking cigarettes, and often they were dressed much as Jack had described, though their clothes varied a good deal. There were two points which they all had in common, however—they were all dirty, and all carried bright, clean repeating-rifles. We wondered why they needed the rifles, since there was no game in the neighborhood.

The chief business of Rushville seemed to be shipping bones. We went over to the railroad to watch the process. There were great piles of them about the station, and men were loading them into freight-cars.

“What’s done with them?” we asked of a man.

“Shipped East, and ground up for fertilizer,” he answered.

“Where do they all come from?”

“Picked up about the country everywhere. Men make a business of gathering them and bringing them in at so much a load. Supply won’t last many months longer, but it’s good business now.”

They were chiefly buffalo bones, though there were also those of the deer, elk, and antelope. We saw some beautiful elk antlers, and many broad white skulls of the buffalo, some of them still with the thick black horns on them. As we were watching the loading of the bones Ollie suddenly exclaimed:

“Oh, see the pretty little deer!”

We looked around, and saw, in the front yard of a house, a young antelope, standing by the fence, and also watching the bone-men as they worked.

“It is a beautiful creature, isn’t it?” said Jack. “And how happy and contented it looks!”



“I guess it’s happy because it isn’t in the bone-pile,” said Ollie.

We went over to it, and found it so tame that it allowed Ollie to pet it as much as he pleased. The man who owned it told us that he had found it among the Sand Hills, with one foot caught in a little bridge on the railroad, where it had apparently tried to cross. He rescued it just before a train came along.

We left Rushville after a rather longer stop for noon than we usually made. Nothing worthy of mention occurred during the afternoon, and that night we camped on the edge of another small town, called Hay Springs.



Page 39

"I don't know," said Jack, "whether or not they really have springs here that flow with water and hay, or how it got its funny name. If there are that kind of springs, I think it's a pity there can't be some of them in the Sand Hills."

Jack went over town after supper for some postage-stamps, and came back quite excited.

"Found it at last, Ollie!" he exclaimed. "Grandpa Oldberry was right."

"What—a varmint?" asked Ollie.

"A genuine varmint," answered Jack. "A regular painter. It's in a cage, to be sure, but it may get out during the night."

We all went over to see it. It was in a big box back of a hotel, and the man in charge called it a mountain-lion, and said it was caught up in the Black Hills. "Right where we're going," whispered Ollie. The animal was, I presume, really a jaguar, and was a big cat three or four feet long.

We were off again the next morning, looking forward eagerly to the camp for the night, which we expected would be at Chadron, and where our course would change to the north into Dakota again, this time on the extreme western edge, and carry us up to the mountains. Most of the day we travelled through a rougher country, and saw many buttes—steep-sided, flat-topped mounds; and in the neighborhood of Bordeaux the road wound among scattering pine-trees. We camped at noon near the house of a settler who seemed to have a dog farm, as the place was overrun with the animals. We needed some corn for the horses, and asked him if he had any to sell. He was a queer looking man, with hair the color of molasses candy, and skim-milk eyes.

[Illustration: A Good Salesman]

"Waal, now, stranger, I jess reckon I have got some co'n to sell," he said. "The only trouble with that there co'n o' mine is that it ain't shucked. If you wouldn't mind to go out into the field and shuck it out, we can jess make a deal right here."

We finally gave him fifty cents for all our three sacks would hold, and he pointed out the field a quarter of a mile away and went back to the house. We noticed that he very soon mounted a pony and rode away towards Hay Springs, but thought nothing of it. When we were ready to start we drove over to the cornfield to get what we had paid for. Jack put his head out of the wagon, took a long look, and said:

"That's the sickest-looking cornfield I ever saw!"

We got out, and found a sorry prospect. The corn was poor and scattering and choked with weeds.

“And the worst of it,” called Jack, as he waded out into the weeds, “is that it has been harvested about twelve times already. The scoundrel has been selling it to every man that came along for a month, and I don’t believe there were three sackfuls in the whole field to start with.”

We went to work at it, and found that he was not far from right.

“No wonder the old skeesicks went off to town soon as he got his money,” I said. “He won’t show himself back here till he is sure we have gone.”

Page 40

We worked for an hour, and managed to fill one bag with “nubbins,” and gave up, promising ourselves that we wouldn’t be imposed upon in that way again.

We reached Chadron in due time, and went into camp a little way beyond, on the banks of the White River, a stream which flows through Dakota and finally joins the Missouri. Our camp was on a little flat where the river bends around in the shape of a horseshoe. It seemed to be a popular stopping-place, and there were half a dozen other covered wagons in camp there. The number of empty tin cans scattered about on that piece of ground must have run up into the thousands. But there had not been a mile of the road since we left Valentine which had not had from a dozen to several hundred cans scattered along it, left by former “movers.” We had contributed our share, including the gooseberry can. From the labels we noticed on the can windrow along the road it seemed that peaches and Boston baked beans were the favorite things consumed by the overland travellers, though there were a great many green-corn, tomato, and salmon cans.

“You can get every article of food in tin cans now,” observed Jack one day, “except my pancakes. I’m going to start a pancake cannery. I’ll label my cans ‘Jack’s Celebrated Rattletrap Pancakes—Warranted Free from Injurious Substances. Open this end. Soak two weeks before using.’”

It was a pretty camping-place on the little can-covered fiat, and we sat up late, visiting with our neighbors and talking about the Black Hills.

“I think,” said Jack, as we stumbled over the cans on our way to the Rattletrap, “that I’ll go into the mining business up there myself. I’ll just back the Blacksmith’s Pet up to the side of a mountain, tickle his heels with a straw, and he’ll have a gold-mine kicked out inside of five minutes.”

IX: OFF FOR THE BLACK HILLS

The next day was Sunday, so we did not leave the White River camp till Monday morning. We found Chadron (pronounced Shadron) an extremely lively town, in which all of the citizens wore big hats and immense jingling Mexican spurs. We had the big hats, but to be in fashion and not to attract attention we also got jingling spurs.

“I shall wear ’em all night,” said Jack, as he strapped his on. “Only dudes take off their spurs when they go to bed, and I’m no dude.”

Our next objective point was Rapid City. It was a beautiful morning when we turned to the north. The sand had disappeared, and the soil was more like asphalt pavement.

“The farmers fire their seed into the ground with six-shooters,” said a man we fell in with on the road. “Very expensive for powder.”

“The soil’s what you call gumbo, isn’t it?” I said to him.

“Yes. Works better when it’s wet. One man can stick a spade into it then. Takes two to pull it out, though.”

Page 41

It was not long before we passed the Dakota line, marked by a post and a pile of tin cans. Shortly before noon Ollie made a discovery.

“What are those little animals?” he cried. “Oh, I know—prairie-dogs!”

There was a whole town of them right beside the road, with every dog sitting on top of the mound that marked his home, and uttering his shrill little bark, and marking each bark by a peculiar little jerk of his tail.

“How do you know they are prairie-dogs?” asked Jack.

“They had some of them in the park at home,” said Ollie. “But last fall they all went down in their burrows for the winter, and in the spring they didn’t come up. Folks said they must have frozen to death.”

“Nonsense,” said Jack. “They got turned around somehow, and in the spring dug down instead of digging up. They may come out in China yet if they have good-luck.”

“I can hardly swallow that,” replied Ollie. “But, anyhow, these seem to be all right.”

There must have been three or four hundred of them, and not for a moment did one of them stop barking till Snoozer jumped out of the wagon and charged them, when, with one last bark, each one of them shot down his hole so quick that it was almost impossible to see him move.

“Now that’s just about the sort of game that Snoozer likes!” exclaimed Jack. “If they were badgers, or even woodchucks, you couldn’t drive him at them.”

“I don’t think there is much danger of his getting any of them,” said Ollie.

We called Snoozer back, and soon one of the little animals cautiously put up his head, saw that the coast was clear, gave one bark, and all the rest came up, and the concert began as if nothing had happened.

“I suppose that was the mayor of the town that peeped up first?” said Ollie. “Yes, or the chief of police,” answered Jack. We camped that night by the bed of a dry creek, and watered the horses at a settler’s house half a mile away.

“That’s the most beautiful place for a stream I ever saw,” observed Jack. “If a man had a creek and no bed for it to run in, he’d be awfully glad to get that.”

The next day was distinctly a prairie-dog day. We passed dozens of their towns, and were seldom out of hearing of their peculiar chirp.

“I wonder,” said Ollie, “if the bark makes the tail go, or does the tail set off the bark.”



“Oh, neither,” returned Jack. “They simply check off the barks with their tails. There’s a National Prairie-Dog Barking Contest going on, and they are seeing who can yelp the most in a week. They keep count with their tails.”

At the little town of Oelrichs we saw a number of Indians, since we were again near the reservation. One little girl nine or ten years old must have been the daughter of an important personage, since she was dressed in most gorgeous clothes, all covered with beads and colored porcupine-quill-work. And at last Ollie saw an Indian wearing feathers. Three eagle feathers stuck straight up in his hair. He was standing outside of a log house looking in the window. By-and-by a young lady came to the door of the house, and as we were nearer than anybody else, she motioned us to come over.

Page 42

[Illustration: Big Bear Looks Into the Educational Situation]

“I wish,” she said, “that you’d please go around and ask Big Bear to go away. He keeps looking in the window and bothering the scholars.”

We stepped around the corner, and Jack said: “See here, neighbor Big Bear, you’re impeding the cause of education.”

The Indian looked at him stolidly, but did not move.

“Teacher says vamoose—heap bother papposes,” said Jack.

The Indian grunted and walked away. “Nothing like understanding the language,” boasted Jack, as we went back to the wagon.

At noon we camped beside a stream, but thirty feet above it. There was a clay bank almost as hard as stone rising perpendicularly from the water’s edge. With a pail and rope we drew up all the water we needed. In the afternoon we got our first sight of the Black Hills, like clouds low on the northern horizon. About the same time we struck into the old Sidney trail, which, before the railroad had reached nearer points, was used in carrying freight to the Hills in wagons. In some places it was half a mile wide and consisted of a score or more of tracks worn into deep ruts. There was a herd of several thousand Texas cattle crossing the trail in charge of a dozen men, and we waited and watched them go by. Ollie had never seen such a display of horns before.

Shortly after this we came upon the first sage-bush which we had seen. It was queer gray stuff, shaped like miniature trees, and had the appearance of being able to get along with very little rain.

Toward night we found ourselves winding down among the hills to the Cheyenne River. They were strange-looking hills, most of them utterly barren on their sides, which were nearly perpendicular, the hard soil standing almost as firm as rock. They were ribbed and seamed by the rain—in fact, they were not hills at all, properly speaking, but small bluffs left by the washing out of the ravines by the rain and melting snows. Just as the sun was sinking among the distant hills we came to the river. It was shallow, only four or five yards wide, and we easily forded it and camped on the other side. The full moon was just rising over the eastern hills. There was not a sound to be heard except the gentle murmur of the stream and the faint rustle of the leaves on a few cottonwood-trees. There was plenty of driftwood all around, and after supper we built up the largest camp-fire we had ever had. The flame leaped up above the wagon-top, and drifted away in a column of sparks and smoke, while the three horses stood in the background with their heads close together munching their hay, and the four of us (counting Snoozer) lay on the ground and blinked at the fire.



“This is what I call the proper thing,” remarked Jack, after some time, as he roiled over on his blanket and looked at the great round moon.

“Yes,” I said, “this will do well enough. But it would be pretty cool here if it wasn’t for that fire.”

Page 43

“Yes, the nights are getting colder, that’s certain. I was just wondering if that cover will withstand snow as well as it does rain?”

“Why,” said Ollie, “do you think it’s going to snow?”

“Not to-night,” returned Jack. “But it may before we get out of the mountains. The snow comes pretty early up there sometimes. I think I’ll get inside and share the bed with the rancher after this, and you and Snoozer can curl up in the front end of the wagon-box. It would be a joke if we got snowed in somewhere, and had to live in the Rattletrap till spring.”

“I wouldn’t care if we could keep warm,” said Ollie. “I like living in it better than in any house I ever saw.”

“I’m afraid it would get a little monotonous along in March,” laughed Jack. “Though I think myself it’s a pretty good place to live. Stationary houses begin to seem tame. I hope the trip won’t spoil us all, and make vagabonds of us for the rest of our lives.”

We were reluctant to leave this camp the next morning, but knew that we must be moving on. It was but a few miles to the town of Buffalo Gap, and we passed through it before noon.

“There are more varmints,” cried Ollie, as we were driving through the town. They were in a cage in front of a store, and we stopped to see them.

“What are they?” one of us asked the man who seemed to own them.

“Bob-cats,” he answered, promptly.

“Must be a Buffalo Gap name for wild-cats,” said Jack, as we drove on, “because that’s what they are.”

Ollie had gone into a store to buy some cans of fruit, and when he came out he looked much bewildered.

[Illustration: A Lesson in Finance]

“I think,” he said, “that that man must be crazy, or something. There were thirty cents coming to me in change. He tossed out a quarter and said, ‘Two bits,’ and then a dime and said, ‘Short bit—thank you,’ and closed up the drawer and started off. I didn’t want more than was coming to me, so I handed out a nickle and said, ‘There, that makes it right.’ The man looked at it, laughed, and pushed it back, and said, ‘Keep it, sonny; I haven’t got any chickens.’ Now, I’d like to know what it all meant.”

We both laughed, and when Jack recovered his composure he said:



“It means simply that we’re getting out into the mining country, where no coin less than a dime circulates. He didn’t happen to have three dimes, so the best he could do was to give you either twenty-five or thirty-five cents, and he was letting you have the benefit of the situation by making it thirty-five. A bit is twelve and a half cents, and a short bit is ten cents. A two-bit piece is a quarter.”

“Yes; but what about his not keeping chickens?”

“Oh, that was simply his humorous way of saying that all coins under a dime are fit only for chicken-feed.”

We camped that night beside the trail near a little log store. “What you want to do,” said the man in charge, “is to take your horses down there behind them trees to park ’em for the night. Good feed down there.”

Page 44

“To park,” said Jack, in a low voice. “New and interesting verb. He mean’s turn ’em out to grass. We mustn’t appear green.” Then he said to the man:

“Yes, we reckoned we’d park ’em down there to-night.”

The next day was the coldest we had experienced, and we were glad to walk to keep warm. We were getting among the smaller of the hills, with their tops covered with the peculiarly dark pine-trees which give the whole range its name. We camped at night under a high bank which afforded some protection from the chilly east wind. Now that we were all sleeping in the wagon there was no room in it to store the sacks of horse-feed which we had, and we knew that if we put them outside Old Blacky would eat them up before morning.

“There’s nothing to do,” said Jack, “but to carry them around up on that bank and hang them down with ropes. Leave ’em about twelve feet from the bottom and ten feet from the top, and I don’t think the Pet can get them.”

We accordingly did so, and went to bed with the old scoundrel standing and looking up at the bags wistfully, though he had just had all that any horse needed for supper. But in the morning we found that he had clambered up high enough to get hold of the bottom of one of the sacks and pull it down and devour fully half of it. He was, as Jack said, “the worst horse that ever looked through a collar.”

[Illustration: The Rattletrap in the Storm]

But the weather in the morning gave us more concern than did the foraging of the ancient Blacky. It was even colder than the night before, and the raw east wind was rawer, and with it all there was a drizzling rain. It was not a hard rain, but one of the kind that comes down in small clinging drops and blows in your face in a fine spray. Jack got breakfast in the wagon, and we ate the hot cakes and warmed-over grouse with a good relish. Then we loaded in what was left of the horsefeed, and started.

It was impossible to keep warm even by walking, but we plodded on and made the best of it. The road was hilly and stony; but by noon we had got beyond the rain, and for the rest of the way it was dry even if cold. The hills among which we were winding grew constantly higher, and the quantity of pine timber upon their summits greater. Just as dusk was beginning to creep down we came around one which might fairly have been called a small mountain, and saw Rapid City spread out before us, the largest town we had seen since leaving Yankton. We skirted around it, and came to camp under another hill and near a big stone quarry a half-mile west of town. There was a mill-race just below us, and plenty of water. We fed the horses and had supper. There was a road not much over a hundred yards in front of our camp, along which, through the darkness, we could hear teams and wagons passing.



“I wonder where it goes to?” said Ollie.

“I think it’s the great Deadwood trail over which all the supplies are drawn to the mines by mule or horse or ox teams,” said Jack. “There’s no railroad, you know, and everything has to go by wagon—goods and supplies in, and a great deal of ore out. Let’s go over and see.”



Page 45

The moon was not yet risen and the sky was covered with clouds, so it was extremely dark. We took along our lantern, but it did not make much impression on the darkness. When we reached the road we found that everywhere we stepped we went over our shoe-tops in the soft dust. We heard a deep, strange creaking noise, mixed with what sounded like reports of a pistol, around the bend in the trail. Soon we could make out what seemed to be a long herd of cattle winding towards us, with what might have been a circus tent swaying about behind them.

“What’s coming?” we asked of a boy who was going by.

“Old Henderson,” he replied.

“What’s he got?”

“Just his outfit.”

“But what are all the cattle?”

“His team.”

“Not one team?”

“Yes; eleven yoke.”

“Twenty-two oxen in one team?”

“Yes; and four wagons.”

The head yoke of oxen was now opposite to us, swaying about from side to side and swirling their tails in the air, but still pressing forward at the rate of perhaps a mile and a half or two miles an hour. Far back along the procession we could dimly see a man walking in the dust beside the last yoke, swinging a long whip which cracked in the air like a rifle. Behind rolled and swayed the four great canvas-topped wagons, tied behind one another. We watched the strange procession go by. There was only one man, without doubt Henderson, grizzled and seemingly sixty years old. The wagon wheels were almost as tall as he was, and the tires were four inches wide. The last wagon disappeared up the trail in the dust and darkness.

“Well,” said Jack, “I think when I start out driving at this time of night with twenty-two guileless oxen and four ten-ton wagons that I’ll want to get somewhere pretty badly.” Then we went back to the Rattletrap.



X: AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

After we got back to the Rattletrap we promised ourselves plenty of Sport the next day watching the freighters with their long teams and wagon trains. Jack could not recover from his first glimpse of Henderson.

“Rather a neat little turnout to take a young lady out driving with,” he said, after we had gone to bed. “Twenty-two oxen and four wagons. Plenty of room. Take along her father and mother. And the rest of the family. And her school-mates. And the whole town. Good team to go after the doctor with if somebody was sick—mile and a half an hour. That trotting-cow man at Yankton ought to come up here and show Henderson a little speed. Still, I dare say Henderson could beat Old Browny on a good day for sleeping, and when he didn’t have Blacky to pall him along.”



Page 46

But we got small sight of the trail the next day, as the rain we had left behind came upon us again in greater force than ever. It began toward morning, and when we looked out, just as it was becoming light, we found it coming down in sheets—"cold, wet sheets," as Ollie said, too. The horses stood huddled together, wet and chilled. We got on our storm-coats and led them up to a house a sort distance away, which proved to be Smith's ranch. There we found large, dry sheds, under which we put them and where they were very glad to go. Once back in the cabin of the Rattletrap, we scarcely ventured out again.

It certainly wasn't a very cheerful day. We would not have minded the rain much, because we were dry enough; but the cold was disagreeable, and we were obliged to wear our overcoats all day. We could watch the road from the front of the wagon, and saw a number of freighters go by, usually with empty wagons, as it soon became too muddy for those with loads. We saw one fourteen-ox team with four wagons, and another man with twelve oxen and three wagons. There were also a number of mule teams, and we noticed one of twelve mules and five wagons, and several of ten mules and three or four wagons. With these the driver always rode the nigh wheel animal—that is, the left-hand rear one.

"I'm going to put a saddle on Old Blacky and ride him after this," said Jack. "Bound to be in the fashion. Wonder how Henderson is getting along in the mud? A mile in two hours, I suppose. Must be impossible for him to see the head oxen through this rain."

The downpour never stopped all day. We tried letter-writing, but it was too cold to hold the pen; and Jack's efforts at playing the banjo proved equally unsuccessful. We fell back on reading, but even this did not seem to be very satisfactory. So we finally settled down to watching the rain and listening to the wind.

When evening came we shut down the front of the cover and tried to warm up the cabin a little by leaving the oil-stove burning, but it didn't seem to make much difference. So we soon went to bed, rather damp, somewhat cold, and a little dispirited. I think we all stayed awake for a long time listening to the beating of the rain on the cover, and wondering about the weather of the morrow.

When we awoke in the morning it did not take long to find out about the weather. The rain had ceased and the sky was clear, but it was colder. Outside we found ice on the little pools of water in the footprints of the horses. We were stiff and cold. Some of us may have thought of the comforts of home, but none of us said anything about them.

"This is what I like," said Jack. "Don't feel I'm living unless I find my shoes frozen in the morning. Like to break the ice when I go to wash my face and hands, and to have my hair freeze before I can comb it."



But we observed that he kept as close to the camp-fire which we started as any of us. We went up to Smith's to look after the horses. While Jack and I were at the sheds Ollie stayed in the road watching the freight teams. A big swarthy man, over six feet in height, came along, and after looking over the fence at Smith's house some time, said to Ollie:



Page 47

[Illustration: Effect of a Dog on a Mexican]

“Do you s’pose Smith’s at home?”

“Oh, I guess so,” answered Ollie.

“I’d like to see him,” went on the man, with an uneasy air.

“Probably you’ll find him eating breakfast,” said Ollie.

“I don’t like to go in,” said the man. “Why not?”

“I’m—I’m afraid of the dog.”

“Oh!” replied Ollie. “Well, I’m not. Come on,” and he stalked ahead very bravely, while the man followed cautiously behind.

“He’s a Mexican,” said Smith in explanation afterwards. “All Mexicans are afraid of dogs.”

“That’s a pretty broad statement,” said Jack, after Smith had gone. “I believe, if there was a good reward offered, that I could find a Mexican who isn’t afraid of dogs. Though perhaps it’s the hair they’re afraid of; Mexican dogs don’t have any, you know.”

“Don’t any of them have hair?” asked Ollie.

“Not a hair,” answered his truthful uncle. “I don’t suppose a Mexican dog would know a hair if he saw it.”

“I think that’s a bigger story than Smith’s,” said Ollie.

It was Sunday, and we spent most of the day in the wagon, though we took a long walk up the valley in the afternoon. The first thing Ollie said the next morning was, “When are we going to see the buffaloes?”

Smith had been telling us about them the evening before. They were down-town, and belonged to a Dr. McGillicuddie. They had been brought in recently from the Rosebud Indian Agency, and had been captured some time before in the Bad Lands.

We followed the trail, now as deep with mud as it had been with dust, meeting many freighters on the way, and found the buffaloes near the Deadwood stage barn.

“See!” exclaimed Ollie; “there they are, in the yard.”



“Don’t say ‘yard,’” returned Jack; “say ‘corral,’ with a good, strong accent on the last syllable. A yard is a corral, and a farm a ranch, and a revolver a six-shooter—and a lot more. Don’t be green, Oliver.”

“Oh, bother!” replied Ollie. “There’s ten of ’em. See the big fellow!”

“They’re nice ones, that’s so,” answered Jack. “I’d like to see the Yankton man we heard about try to milk that cow over in the corner.”

[Illustration: Post-Mortem on a Grizzly]

After we had seen the buffaloes we wandered about town and jingled our spurs, which were quite in the fashion. We encountered a big crowd in front of one of the markets, and found that a hunter had just come in from the mountains to the west with the carcass of the biggest bear ever brought into Rapid City. Some said it was a grizzly, and others a silvertip, and one man tried to settle the difficulty by saying that there wasn’t any difference between them. But it was certainly a big bear, and filled the whole wagon-box. Ollie sidled through the crowd and asked so many questions of the man, who was named Reynolds, that he good-naturedly gave Ollie one of the largest of the claws. It was five inches long.



Page 48

At noon we went down to the camp of the freighters on the outskirts of town, near Rapid Creek. There must have been fifty “outfits”—Jack said that was the right word—and several hundred mules, as many oxen, and a few horses. The animals were, most of them, wandering about wherever they pleased, the mules and horses taking their dinner out of nosebags, and the mules keeping up a gentle exercise by kicking at one another. It seemed a hopeless confusion, but the men were sitting about on the ground, calmly cooking their dinners over little camp-fires. One man, whom we had got acquainted with in the morning at Smith’s, asked us to have dinner with him, and made the invitation so pressing that we accepted. He had several gallon’s of coffee and plenty of bacon and canned fruit, and a peculiar kind of bread which he had baked himself.

[Illustration: 'Gene Starts a Cook-Book]

“I’m a-thinking,” he said, “there ain’t enough sal’ratus in that there bread; but I’m a poor cook, anyhow.”

The bread seemed to us to be already composed chiefly of saleratus, so his apology struck us as unnecessary. He very kindly wrote out the receipt on a shingle for Jack, but I stole it away from him after we got home and burned it in the camp-fire; so we escaped that.

“Your pancakes are bad enough,” I said to him. “We don’t care to try your saleratus bread.”

Jack was a good deal worked up about the loss of his receipt, and experimented a long time to produce something like the freighter’s bread without it; but as Snoozer wouldn’t try the stuff he made, and he was afraid to do so himself, nothing came of it.

We enjoyed our dinner with the man, however, and Jack added further to his vocabulary in finding that the drivers of the ox teams were called “bullwhackers,” and those of the mules and horses “muleskinners.”

In the afternoon we climbed the hill above our camp. It gave us a long view off to the east across the level country, while away to the west were the mountain-peaks rising higher and higher. It was still cold, and the raw northeast wind moaned through the pines in a way that made us think of winter.

We went to bed early that night, so as to get a good start for Deadwood the next day. We brought the horses down from the ranch in the evening, blanketed them, and stood them out of the wind among some trees.

“Four o’clock must see us rolling out of our comfortable beds and getting ready to start,” said Jack, as we turned in. “We must play we are freighters.”



Jack planned better than he knew; we really “rolled out” in an exceedingly lively manner at three o’clock. We were sleeping soundly at that hour, when we were awakened by the motion of the wagon. Jack and I sat up. It was swaying from side to side, and we could hear the wheels bumping on the stones. The back end was considerably lower than the front.

Page 49

"It's running down the bank!" I cried, and we both plunged through the darkness for the brake-handle. We fell over Ollie and Snoozer, and were instantly hopelessly tangled. It seemed an age, with the wagon swaying more and more, before we found the handle. Jack pushed it up hard, we heard the brake grind on the wheels outside; then there was a great bump and splash, and the wagon tilted half over and stopped. We found Ourselves lying on the side of the cover, with cold water rising about us. We were not long in getting out, and discovered that the Rattletrap was capsized in the mill-race.

"Old Blacky did it!" cried Jack, as he danced around and shook his wet clothes. "I know he did. The old sinner!"

We got out the lantern and lit it. Only the hind end of the wagon was really in the race; one front wheel still clung to the bank, and the other was up in the air. Ollie got in and began to pass things out to Jack, while I went up the hill after the horses. Jack was right. Old Blacky was evidently the author of our misfortune. He had broken loose in some manner, and probably begun his favorite operation of making his toilet on the corner of the wagon by rubbing against it. The brake had carelessly been left off, he had pushed the wagon back a few feet, and it had gone over the bank. I soon had the harness on the horses, and got them down the hill. We hitched them to the hind wheel with a long rope, Jack wading in the water to his waist, and pulled the wagon upright. Then we attached them to the end of the tongue, and after hard work drew it out of the race. By this time we were chilled through and through. Our beds and nearly everything we had were soaking with water.

"How do you like it, Uncle Jack?" inquired Ollie. "Do you feel that you are living now?"

Jack's teeth were chattering. "Y—yes," he said; "but I won't be if we don't get a fire started pretty quick."

There were some timbers from an old bridge near by, and we soon had a good fire, around which we tramped in a procession till our clothes were fairly dry. The wind was chilly, and it was a dark, cloudy morning. The unfortunate Snoozer had gone down with the rest of us, and was the picture of despair, till Ollie rubbed him with a dry corner of a blanket, and gave him a good place beside the fire.

By the time two or three hours had elapsed we began to feel partially dry, and decided to start on, relying on exercise to keep ourselves warm. We had had breakfast in the meantime, and, on the whole, were feeling rather cheerful again. We opened the cover and spread out the bedding, inside and outside, and hung some of it on a long pole which we stuck into the wagon from the rear. Altogether we presented a rather funny appearance as we started out along the trail, but no one paid much attention to us. The freighters were already astir, and we were constantly passing or meeting their long trains. Among others we passed Eugene Brooks, the man with whom we had taken dinner. We told him of our mishap, and he laughed and said:

Page 50

"That's nothing in this country. Something's always happening here which would kill folks anywhere else. You stay here awhile and you'll be as tough as your old black horse."

Brooks had an outfit of five spans of mules and two wagons. We stayed with him a half-hour, and then went on. As we could not reach Deadwood that day, he advised us to camp that night where the trail crossed Thunder Butte Creek, a branch of La Belle Fourche.

The trail led for the most part through valleys or along the sides of hills, and was generally not far from level, though there was, of course, a constant though hardly perceptible rise as we got farther into the mountains. We camped at noon at Elk Creek, and made further progress at drying our household effects. We pressed on during the afternoon, and passed through the town of Sturgis, where we laid in some stores of provisions to take the place of those spoiled by the water, and also a quantity of horse-feed. Later we congratulated ourselves on our good-luck in doing this.

As the afternoon wore away we found ourselves getting up above the timber-line. The mountains began to shut in our view in all directions, and the valleys were narrowing. As night drew nearer, Jack said:

"Seems to me it's about time we got to this Thunder Butte Creek. 'Gene said that if we passed Sturgis we'd have to go on to that if we wanted water."

We soon met a man, and inquired of him the distance to the desired stream. "Two miles," he replied, promptly. We went on as much as a mile and met another man, to whom we put the same question. "Three miles," he answered, with great decision.

"That creek seems to be retreating," said Jack, after the man had gone on. "We've got to hurry and catch it, or it will run clean into Deadwood and crawl down a gold mine."

It was growing dark. We forged ahead for another mile, and by this time it was quite as dark as it was going to be, with a cloudy sky, and mountains and pines shutting out half of that. I was walking ahead with the lantern, and came to a place where the trail divided.

"The road forks here," I called. "Which do you suppose is right?"

"Which seems to be the most travelled?" asked Jack.

"Can't see any difference," I replied. "We'll have to leave it to the instinct of the horses."

"Yes, I'd like to put myself in the grasp of Old Blacky's instinct. The old scoundrel would go wrong if he knew which was right."



“Well,” I returned, “come on and see which way he turns, and then go the other way.”
(Jack always declared that the old fellow understood what I said.)

He drove up to the forks, and Blacky turned to the right. Jack drew over to the left, and we went up that road. We continued to go up it for fully three miles, though we soon became convinced that it was wrong. It constantly grew narrower and apparently less travelled. We were soon winding along a mountain-side among the pines, and around and above and below great rocks.



Page 51

"We'll go till we find a decent place to camp, and then stop for the night," said Jack. We finally came to a little level bench covered with giant pines, and we could hear water beyond. I went on with the lantern, and found a small stream leaping down a gulch.

"This is the place to stop," I said, and we soon had our camp established, and a good fire roaring up into the tree-tops. Ollie found plenty of dry pine wood, and we blanketed the horses and stood them under a protecting ledge. It was cold, and the wind roared down the gulch and moaned in the pines, but we scarcely felt it below. We finished drying our bedding and had a good supper. Jack got out his banjo and tried to compete with the brook and the pines. We went to bed feeling that we were glad we had missed the road, since it had brought so delightful a camping-place.

Ollie was the first to wake in the morning. It was quite light.

"What makes the cover sag down so?" he asked. Jack opened his eyes, reached up with the whipstock and raised it. Something slid off the outside with a rush.

"Open the front and you'll see," answered Jack.

Ollie did so, and we all looked out. The ground was deep with snow, and it was still falling in great feathery flakes. Old Blacky was loose, and looked in at us with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

XI: DEADWOOD

"You're a miserable, sneaking, treacherous old equine scoundrel!" cried Jack, shaking his fist violently at Old Blacky. "You knew you were making us come the wrong road."

Old Blacky answered never a word, but turned, hit the wagon-tongue a kick, and joined the other horses.

"Well, close down the front and let's talk this thing over," said Jack. "In the first place, we are snowed in."

"In the second place," said I, "we may stay snowed in a week."

"I don't think we're prepared for that," said Ollie, very solemnly.

"Let's see," went on Jack. "There are two sacks of ground feed under Ollie's bed. By putting the horses on rather short rations that ought to last pretty nearly or quite a week. But for hay we're not so well provided. There's one big bundle under the wagon, if Blacky hasn't eaten it up. The pony won't need any, because she knows how to paw down to the dry grass. The others don't know how to do this, and the hay will last them, after a fashion, for about three days."



“Perhaps by that time the pony will have taught them how to paw,” I said.

“Wouldn’t be surprised,” returned Jack. “Perhaps by that time we’ll all be glad to learn from her. We’ve got flour enough to last a fortnight, so we needn’t be afraid of running out of water-pancakes at least. You don’t grow fat on ’em, but, on the other hand, there is no gout lurking in a water-pancake as I make it.”

“No, Jack, that’s so,” I said, feelingly. “We’ve got enough bacon for several meals, a can of chicken, and two earls of beans. Also a loaf of bread and a pound of crackers. Then there’s three cans of fruit, a dozen potatoes, six eggs, a quart of milk, and half a pound of pressed figs. After that we’ll paw with the pony.”

Page 52

"I wonder if we couldn't get some game?" inquired Ollie.

"Snow-birds, maybe," said Jack. "Or perhaps an owl. I've heard b'iled owl spoken of."

After all, the prospect was not so bad. Besides, it was so early in the season that it did not seem at all likely that we should be snowbound a week. Still, we knew little about the mountain climate.

We got on our overcoats and went out and gave the horses their breakfast. Old Blacky was still cross, but Jack contented himself by calling him a few names. We also got up what wood we could and piled it against the wagon, for use in case our kerosene became exhausted, though we decided to cook in the wagon for the present. The snow was seven or eight inches deep, and still falling rapidly. After breakfast we took the pony down to a little open fiat and turned her loose. The old instinct of her wild days came back to her, and she began to paw away the snow and gnaw at the scanty grass beneath.

After giving the other horses a little hay we returned to the wagon, where we stayed most of the day. I'm afraid we were a little frightened by the prospect. Of course, we knew that if it came to the worst we could leave the wagon and make our way back along the trail on foot, but we did not want to do that. But as for getting the wagon back along the narrow road, now blotted out by the snow, we knew it would be foolish to attempt it. It was not very cold in the wagon, and Jack played the banjo, and we were fairly cheerful. The snow kept coming down all day, and by night it was a foot deep. The pony came in from the flat as it began to grow dark, and we gave the horses their supper and left them in the shelter of the rocks. Then we brushed the snow off the top of the cover, as we had done several times before, and went in to spend the evening by the light of the lantern. When bedtime came, Jack looked up and said:

"The cover doesn't seem to sag down. It must have stopped snowing."

We looked out, and found that it was so. We could even see the stars; and, better yet, it did not seem to be growing colder. We went to bed feeling encouraged.

The next morning the sun peeped in at us through the long trunks of the pines, and Ollie soon discovered that the wind was from the south.

"Unless it turns cold again, this will fix the snow," said Jack.

He was right, and it soon began to thaw. By noon the little stream in the gulch was a torrent, and before night patches of bare ground began to appear. We decided not to attempt to leave camp that day, but the next morning saw us headed back along the tortuous road. In two hours we were again on the main trail. Just as we turned in, Eugene Brooks came along, having also been delayed by the snow, though the fall

where he was had not been nearly so great. 'Gene laughed at us, and told us that we had been following a trail to some lead mines which had been abandoned several months before.



Page 53

[Illustration: Lack of Confidence in Mankind]

Half a mile farther on we came to the Thunder Butte Creek which we had sought. The water was almost blood-red, which 'Gene told us came from the gold stamp-mills on its upper course. If the water had been gray it would have indicated silver-mining. Just beyond we met the Deadwood Treasure Coach. It was an ordinary four-horse stage, without passengers, but carrying two guards, each with a very short double-barrelled shot-gun resting across his lap. The stage was operated by the express company, and was bringing out the gold bricks from the mines near Deadwood.

"I suppose," said Ollie, musingly, "if anybody tried to rob the coach, those fellows would shoot with their guns?"

"Oh no," replied Jack. "Oh no; they carry those guns to fan themselves with on hot days." But Ollie did not seem to be misled by this astonishing information.

As we went on the road grew constantly more mountainous. Sometimes the trail ran along ledges, and sometimes near roaring streams and waterfalls, and the great pine-trees were everywhere. We passed two grizzly old placer-miners working just off the trail, and stopped and watched them "pan out" a few shovelfuls of dirt. They were rewarded by two or three specks of gold, and seemed satisfied. 'Gene told us afterward that one of them was an old California '49er, who had used the same pan in every State and Territory of the West.

It was a little after noon when we drove into Deadwood—the last point outward bound at which the Rattletrap expected to touch. It was a larger town than Rapid City, and was wedged in a little gulch between two mountains, with the White Wood Creek rushing along and threatening to wash away the main street. We noticed that the only way of reaching many of the houses on the mountain-side was by climbing long flights of stairs. We drove on, and camped near a mill on the upper edge of town.

In the afternoon we wandered about town, and, among other places, visited the many Chinese stores. We also clambered up the mountain-sides to the two cemeteries, which we could see far above the town. It seemed to us that on rather too many of the head-stones, (which were in nearly every case boards, by-the-way) it was stated that the person whose grave it marked was "assassinated by" so-and so, giving the name of the assassin; but these were of the old days, when no doubt there were a good many folks in Deadwood who left the town just as well off after they had been assassinated. "Killed by Indians" was also the record on some of the boards. Ollie was greatly interested in the Chinese graves, with dishes of rice and chicken on them, and colored papers covered with curious characters—prayers, I suppose. We climbed on up to the White Rocks, almost at the top of the highest peak overlooking Deadwood, and had a good view of the town and gulch below, and of the great Bear Butte standing out alone

and bold miles to the east. We were tired, and glad to go to bed as soon as we got back to the wagon.



Page 54

The next day we decided to visit Lead City (pronounced not like the metal, but like the verb to lead). Here were most of the big gold mines, including the great Homestake Mine. It was only two or three miles, and we drove over early. It was a strange town, perched on the side of a mountain, and consisted of small openings in the ground, which were the mines, and immense shed-like buildings, which contained the ore-reducing works. The noise of the stamp-mills filled the whole town, and seemed to drown out and cover up everything else. We soon found that there was no hope of our getting into the mines.

“They’d think you were spies for the other mines, or something of that sort,” said a man to us. “Nobody can get down. Nobody knows where they are digging, and they don’t mean that anybody shall. They may be digging under their own property exclusively, and they may not. For all I know, they may be taking gold that belongs to me a thousand feet, more or less, under my back yard.”

“If I had a back yard here,” said Jack, after we had passed on, “I’d put my ear to the ground once in a while and listen, and if I heard anybody burrowing under it I’d—well—I’d yell scat at ’em.”

We found no difficulty in getting in the stamp-mills, and a man kindly told us much about them.

“The Homestake Mills make up the largest gold-reducing plant in the world,” said the man. “Where do you suppose the largest single stamp-mill in the world is?” We guessed California.

“No,” he said; “it’s in Alaska—the Treadwell Mill.”

We decided that the stamp-mills were the noisiest place we were ever in. There were hundreds of great steel bars, three or four inches in diameter and a dozen feet long, pounding up and down at the same time on the ore and reducing it to powder. It was mixed with water, and ran away as thin red mud, the gold being caught by quicksilver. The openings of the shafts and tunnels were in or near the mills, and there were the smallest cars and locomotives which we had ever seen going about everywhere on narrow tracks, carrying the ore. Ollie walked up to one of the locomotives and looked down at it, and said:

“Why, it seems just like a Shetland-pony colt. I believe I could almost lift it.”

The engineer sat on a little seat on the back end, and seemed bigger than his engine. As we looked at them we constantly expected to see them tip up in front from the weight of the engineer. There was also a larger railroad, though still a narrow gauge, winding away for twenty miles along the tops of the hills, which was used principally for bringing wood for the engines and timbers for propping up the mines.



[Illustration: Flying Cord-Wood]

We were walking along a connecting shed, and happened to look out a window, when we saw a four-foot stick of cord-wood shoot up fifty feet from some place behind us, and after sailing over a wide curve, like a “fly-ball,” alight on a great pile of similar sticks on the lower ground, which was much higher than an ordinary house, and must have contained thousands of cords.



Page 55

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Jack. “Wish I could throw a stick of wood like that fellow.”

Another and another shot after the first one in quick succession. Sometimes there were two almost together, and we noticed the bigger and heavier the stick the higher and farther it was shot. We saw some almost a foot in diameter soaring like straws before the wind.

“What a baseball pitcher that man would make!” went on Jack, enthusiastically. “Think of his arm! Look at that big one go—it must weigh two hundred pounds!”

“Let’s get out of this shed and investigate the mystery,” I said.

Outside it was all clear. The narrow-gauge wood railroad ended on the edge of the steep hill overlooking the mills. Down this was a long wooden chute, or flume, like a big trough, which for the last thirty or forty feet at its lower end curved upward. Men were unloading wood from a train at the upper end. Each stick shot down the flume like lightning, up the short incline at the end, and soared away like a bird to the pile beyond and below the shed. A little stream of water trickled constantly down the chute to keep the friction of the logs from setting it on fire.

“That’s the most interesting thing here,” said Jack. “I’d like to send the Blacksmith’s Pet down the thing and see what he would do. I’ll wager he’d kick the wood-pile all over the town after he alighted.”

We spent nearly the whole day in wandering about the stamp-mills. The great steam engines which operated them were some of the largest we had ever seen.

“And think,” observed Jack, “of the fact that all of this heavy machinery, including the big engines and the locomotives and cars, and, in fact, everything, was brought overland on wagons, probably most of it nearly three hundred miles. No wonder people got to driving such teams as Henderson’s.”

Toward night we returned to Deadwood by the way of Central City. Here were more great mines and mills, but they did not seem to be so prosperous, and part of the town was deserted, and consisted of nothing but empty houses. Just as the sun set we drove in through the Golden Gate, and east anchor at our old camp near the mill.

The next morning was wintry again, with snowflakes floating in the air. The ground was frozen, and the wind seemed to come through the wagon-cover with rather more freedom than we enjoyed.

“It’s time we began the return voyage,” said Jack. “We’re a long way from home, and we won’t get there any too soon if we go as fast as we can and take the shortest out.” So we started that afternoon.

The shortest cut was to return to Rapid City, and then, instead of going south into Nebraska, to go straight east, through the Sioux Indian Reservation, crossing the Missouri at Pierre, and then on across the settled country of eastern Dakota to Prairie Flower, over against the Minnesota line.



Page 56

We followed the same road between Deadwood and Rapid City, with the exception that we turned out in one place, and went around by Fort Meade. Here we found a beautiful camping-place the first night near a little stream and great overhanging rocks, and not far from Bear Butte. We reached Rapid late the next night, which was Saturday, and stopped at the old camp near the mill-race. Here we stayed over Sunday, but Monday noon saw us under sail again. As we went through the town we stopped at the freighter's camp, and told 'Gene Brooks good-bye, and then drove away across the wide rolling plain to the east.

'Gene had warned us that we had a lonesome road before us to Pierre, one hundred and seventy miles, nearly all of it across the reservation.

"You'll follow the old freight trail all the way," he said, "but you may not see three teams the whole distance, because since the railroad got nearer it isn't used. You'll find an old stage station about every fifteen or seventeen miles, with probably one man in charge. You may see a horse-thief or two, or something of that sort. S'ciety ain't what it ought to be 'round a reservation gen'rally."

[Illustration: The Deserted Ranch]

Just before the sun sank behind the mountains, which lay like low black clouds to the west, we came to a little ranch standing alone on the prairie. The door was open, and it seemed to be deserted, though there was a rude bed inside. There was a good well of water, and we decided to camp near it for the night, especially as the grass was good. There was no other house in sight. Bedtime arrived, and no one came to the ranch.

"I think I'll just sleep in that house tonight," said Jack, "and see how it seems. I'll leave the door open, so as not to have too much luxury at first."

So he went to bed in the shanty, taking Snoozer along, and leaving the wagon to Ollie and me.

We must have been asleep three or four hours when I was awakened by the loud barking of a dog. I started up and began unfastening the front end of the cover. Just then I heard the pony snort in terror; and then followed a shot from a gun and the sound of horses galloping away. As I put my head out, Jack called, excitedly:

"Some men were trying to get the pony. They'd have done it, too, if Snoozer hadn't barked and scared them away."

I was out of the wagon by this time, and found the pony trembling at the end of her picket-line as near the wagon as she could get. Snoozer kept barking as if he couldn't stop.

"Did they shoot at you, Jack?" I asked.



“No, I guess not. I think they just blazed away for fun. They went off toward the Reservation. Some of Gene’s poor s’ciety, I suppose.”

It took half an hour to get the frightened pony and indignant dog quieted; and perhaps it was longer than that before we again got to sleep.

XII: HOMEWARD BOUND

Page 57

“Snoozer shall have a pancake medal.”

This was the first thing Ollie and I heard in the morning, and it was Jack’s voice addressing the hero of the night before. We speedily rolled out, and agreed with Jack that Snoozer must be suitably rewarded, he seemed fully to understand the importance of his action in barking at the right moment, and for the first morning on the whole trip he was up and about, waving his bushy tail with great industry, and occasionally uttering a detached bark, just to remind us of how he had done it. He walked around the pony several times, and looked at her with a haughty air, as much as to say, “Where would you be now if it hadn’t been for me?”

“He shall have a pancake,” continued Jack—“the biggest and best pancake which the skilful hand of this cook can concoct.”

Jack proceeded to carry out his promise, and when breakfast was ready presented a griddlecake, all flowing with melted butter, to the dog, which was as big as could be made in the frying-pan.

“I always knew,” said Jack, “that Snoozer would do something some day. He’s lazy, but he’s got brains. He would never bark at the moon, because he knows the moon isn’t doing anything wrong, but when it comes to horse-thieves it’s different.”

Snoozer munched his pancake, occasionally stopping to give a grand swing to his tail and let off a little yelp of pure joy.

As we were getting ready for a start, and speculating on the prospect for water, a man came along, riding a mule, and we asked him about it.

[Illustration: Old “Blenty Vaters”]

“Yah, blenty vaters,” said the man. “Doan need to dake no vaters along.”

“Any houses on the road?” asked Jack.

“Blenty houses,” answered the stranger “houses, vaters, efferydings.”

We thanked him and started. Notwithstanding this assurance, I had intended to fill a jug with water, but forgot it, and we went off without a drop. We were going down what was called the Ridge Road, along the divide between Elk and Elder creeks, and hoped to reach the crossing of the Cheyenne at Smithville Post-office that evening, and get on the Reservation the next morning. In half an hour we passed some trees which marked the site of the Washday Springs, but there was no house there, nor had we seen one at eleven o’clock. We met an Indian on foot, and Jack said to him:

“Where can we get some water?”



The Indian shook his head. “Cheyenne River,” he replied.

“Isn’t there any this side?”

“No,” with another jerk of the head. Then he stalked on.

“Yes, and the Indian’s right, I’ll warrant,” exclaimed Jack. “‘Blenty raters,’ indeed! Why, that Dutchman doesn’t know enough to ache when he’s hurt.”

“Well, we’re in for it,” said I. “We can’t go back. Maybe it’ll rain,” though there was not a cloud in sight, and there was more danger of an earthquake than of a shower.



Page 58

So we went on, and a little after dark wound down among the black baked bluffs to the crossing, without any of us having had a drop to drink since before sunrise. After we had “lowered the river six inches,” as Jack declared, we went into camp.

We were up early in the morning, and Jack went down the river with his gun and got a brace of grouse. There was one house near the crossing, which was the post-office. The man who lived there told us it was a hundred and twenty-five miles across the Reservation to Pierre, and twenty miles to Peno Hill, the first station at which we should find any one. The ford was deep, the water coming up to the wagon-box, and there was ice along the edges of the river. It was a fine clear day, however, and the cold did not trouble us much. We wound up among the bluffs on the other side of the river, and at the top had our last sight of the Black Hills. We went on across the rolling prairie, black as ink, as the grass had all been burned off, and reached Peno Hill at a little after noon. There was a rough board building, one end of it a house and the other a barn. All of the stage stations were built after this plan. We camped here for dinner, and pressed on to reach Grizzly Shaw’s for the night. About the middle of the afternoon we passed Bad River Station, kept by one Mexican Ed.

“I’m going to watch and see if he runs when he sees Snoozer,” said Ollie. Snoozer had insisted on walking most of the time since his adventure with the horse-thieves; but, greatly to Ollie’s disappointment, Mexican Ed showed no signs of fear even when Snoozer went so far as to growl at him.

As it grew dark we passed among the Grindstone Buttes—several small hills. A prairie fire was burning among them, and lit up the road for us. We came to Shaw’s at last, and went into camp. We visited the house before we went to bed, and found that Shaw was grizzly enough to justify his name, and that he had a family consisting of a wife and daughter and two grandchildren.

“Pierre is our post-office,” said Shaw, “eighty-five miles away.”

“The postman doesn’t bring out your letters, then?” returned Jack.

“We ain’t much troubled with postmen, nor policemen, nor hand-organ men, nor no such things,” answered Shaw. “Still, once in a while a sheriff goes by looking for somebody.”

We told him of our experience with thieves, and he said:

“It’s a wonder they didn’t get your pony. There’s lots of ’em hanging about the edge of the Reserve, because it’s a good place for ’em to hide.”

“Must make a very pleasant little walk down to the post-office when you want to mail a letter,” said Jack, after we got back to the wagon—“eighty-five miles. And think of

getting there, and finding that you had left the letter on the hall table, and having to go back!"

We were off again the next morning, as usual. At noon we stopped at Mitchell Creek, where we found another family, including a little girl five or six years old, who carried her doll in a shawl on her back, as she had seen the Indian women carry their babies. We had intended to reach Plum Creek for the night, but got on slower than we expected, owing partly to a strong head-wind, so darkness overtook us at Frozen Man's Creek.



Page 59

“Not a very promising name for a November camping-place,” said Jack, “but I guess we’ll have to stop. I don’t believe it’s cold enough to freeze anybody to-night.”

There was no house here, but there was water, and plenty of tall, dry grass, so it made a good place for us to stop. Frozen Man’s Creek, as well as all the others, was a branch of the Bad River, which flowed parallel with the trail to the Missouri. We camped just east of the creek. The grass was so high that we feared to build a camp-fire, and cooked supper in the wagon.

“I’m glad we’ve got out of the burned region,” said Jack. “It’s dismal, and I like to hear the wind cutting through the dry grass with its sharp swish.”

There was a heavy wind blowing from the southeast, but we turned the rear of the wagon in that direction, saw that the brake was firmly on, and went to bed feeling that we should not blow away.

“I wonder who the poor man was that was frozen here?” was the last thing Jack said before he went to sleep. “Book agent going out to Shaw’s, perhaps, to sell him a copy of ‘Every Man his Own Barber; or, How to Cut your Own Hair with a Lawn-Mower.’”

We were doomed to one more violent awakening in the old Rattletrap. At two o’clock in the morning I was roused up by the loud neighing of the horses. Old Blacky’s hoarse voice was especially strong. As I opened my eyes there was a reddish glare coming through the white cover. “Prairie fire!” flashed into my mind instantly, and I gave Jack a shake and got out of the front of the wagon as quickly as I could. I had guessed aright; the flames were sweeping up the shallow valley of the creek before the wind as fast as a horse could travel.

[Illustration: In the Prairie Fire]

Jack came tumbling out, and we knew instantly what to do. We both ran a few yards ahead of the wagon and knelt in the grass, and struck matches almost at the same moment. Jack’s went out, but mine caught, and a little flame leaped up, reached over and to both sides, and then rolled away before the wind, spreading wider and wider. I beat out the feeble blaze which tried to work to windward, and ran back to the wagon, while Jack went after the horses. The coming flames were almost upon us by this time; but Ollie was out, and together, aided by the wind, we rolled the wagon ahead on our little new-made oasis of safety. Jack pulled up the pony’s picket-pin, and brought her on also, while the other horses, being loose, sought the place themselves. The flames came up to the edge of the burned place, reached over for more grass, did not find it, and died out. But on both sides of us they rushed on, and soon overtook our little fire, and went on to the northwest. The wind, first hot from the fire, now came cool and fresh, though full of the odor of the burned grass.

“Closest call we’ve had,” said Jack. “Yes,” I replied; “been pretty warm for us if we hadn’t waked up. Our animals are doing better; first Snoozer distinguished himself, and now I think we’ve to thank Old Blacky mainly for this alarm.”



Page 60

We were pretty well frightened, and though we went back to bed, I do not believe that any of us slept again that night. At the first touch of dawn we were up. As it grew lighter, the great change in the landscape became apparent. The gray of the prairie was turned to the blackest of black. Only an occasional big staring buffalo skull relieved the inkiness. Far away to the northwest we could see a low hanging cloud of smoke where the fire was still burning.

“Blacky ought to have a hay medal,” said Jack at breakfast. “If I had any hay I’d twist him up one as big as a door-mat.”

But Blacky, unlike Snoozer, seemed to have no pride in his achievement, and he wandered all around the neighborhood trying to find a mouthful of grass which had been missed by the fire; but he was not successful.

“If the frozen man had been here last night he’d have been thawed out,” I said.

“Yes; and if Shaw had been here, what a good time it would have been for him to let the fire run over his hair and clear off the thickest of it!” returned Jack.

We started on, but the long wind had brought bad weather, and before noon it began to snow. It kept up the rest of the day, and by night it was three or four inches deep. We stopped at noon at Lance Creek, and made our night camp at Willow Creek; at each place there was a stage station in charge of one man. It cleared off as night came on, but the wind changed to the north, and it grew rapidly colder. Shortly after midnight we all woke up with the cold. We already had everything piled on the beds, but as we were too cold to sleep, there was nothing to do but to get up and start the camp-fire again. This we did, and stayed near it the rest of the night, and in this way kept warm at the expense of our sleep.

The morning was clear, but it was by far the coldest we had experienced. The thermometer at the station marked below zero at sunrise. We almost longed for another prairie fire. It grew a little warmer after we started, and at about eleven o’clock we reached Fort Pierre, on the Missouri, opposite the town Of Pierre. The ferry-boat had not yet been over for the day, but was expected in the afternoon.

“You’re lucky to get it at all,” said a man to us. “It is liable to stop any day now, and then, till the ice is thick enough for crossing, there will be no way of getting over.”

The boat came puffing across toward night, and we were safely landed east of the Missouri once more. But we were still two hundred miles from home; the country was well settled most of the way, however, and we felt that our voyage was almost ended. Little happened worthy of mention in the week which it took us to traverse this distance. The weather became warmer and was pleasant most of the way. On the last night out it

snowed again a little and grew colder. We were still a long day's drive from Prairie Flower, but we determined to make that port even if it took half the night.



Page 61

[Illustration: Well! Well! Well!]

It was ten o'clock when we saw the lights of the town.

"Here we are," said Jack, "and I vote we've had a good time, and that we forgive Old Blacky his temper, and old Brownly and Snoozer their sleepiness, and Ollie his questions, and the rancher his general incompetence."

"And the cook his pancakes!" cried Ollie. We stopped a little way in front of Squire Poinsett's grocery, and Jack picked up the big revolver and fired the six shots into the air. The pony had come alongside the wagon, and Snoozer had his head over the dash-board. Half a dozen people came running out, including Grandpa Oldberry, wearing red yarn mittens and carrying a lantern. He held up the light and looked at us.

"Well, I vum," he exclaimed, "if it ain't them three pesky scallawags back safe and sound! I've said all along that varmints would get ye sure, and we'd never see hide nor hair of ye again! Well, well, well!"

It was clear that Grandpa was just a little disappointed to see that his predictions hadn't been fulfilled.

So the voyage of the good schooner Rattletrap was ended. It had been over a thousand miles in length, and had lasted for more than two months.