

was upset, two men narrowly escaped being drowned, much of the sugar and nearly all the coffee of the expedition were irrecoverably lost. The Canadians, well versed in the vicissitudes of prairie life, sagaciously hit at once on the cause of this misfortune—the expedition had set out on a Friday! This conclusion, whether just or not, they owed to what they called experience, and the inductive method. The following paragraph suggests at once the motive of the survey on which Lieut. Fremont was employed:—

“A party of emigrants to the Columbia river, under the charge of Dr. White, an agent of the government in Oregon Territory, were about three weeks in advance of us. They consisted of men, women, and children. There were sixty four men, and sixteen or seventeen families. They had a considerable number of cattle, and were transporting their household furniture in large heavy waggons. I understood that there had been much sickness among them, and that they had lost several children.”

The country travelled over was what is called a rolling plain, with boulders of red sandstone, often four or five tons in weight, lying on the heights. There was little vegetable life in exposed situations:—

“The road led along a high dry ridge; dark lines of timber indicated the heads of streams in the plains below, but there was no water near, and the day was very oppressive, with a hot wind and the thermometer at 90°. Along our route the *amorpha* has been in very abundant but variable bloom; in some places, bending beneath the weight of purple clusters; in others, without a flower. It seems to love best the sunny slopes, with a dark soil and southern exposure. Every where the rose is met with, and reminds us of cultivated gardens and civilization. It is scattered over the prairies in small bouquets, and when glittering in the dews, and waving in the pleasant breeze of the early morning, is the most beautiful of the prairie flowers. The *artemisia*, absinthe, or prairie sage, as it is variously called, is increasing in size, and glitters like silver, as the southern breeze turns up its leaves to the sun. All these plants have their insect inhabitants, variously coloured; taking generally the hue of the flower on which they live. The *artemisia* has its small fly accompanying it through every change of elevation and latitude; and wherever I have seen the *Asclepias tuberosa*, I have always remarked too on the flower, a large butterfly, so nearly resembling it in colour as to be distinguished at a little distance only by the motion of its wings.”

The groves of willow, cotton-wood, and oak, on the Little Blue river, were found to be tenanted by turkeys in great numbers. Hills of sand, forty or sixty feet in height, marked the course of the Nebraska or Platte river, the valley of which is here about 2000 feet above the sea. This river, though above a mile wide below its forks, is yet not available for navigation. A party of wild looking strangers here made their appearance; alarm seized our surveyor's camp; every man leaped on his horse, rifle in hand, and yelling with excitement, galloped towards the new comers. These however proved to be, not fierce Pawnees, but a party of unfortunate fur traders, whose patience and provisions had been exhausted in struggling with the shallows of the Nebraska. Two months before, they had left Laramee's fork, 300 miles higher up, in barges laden with furs of the American Fur Company. Starting with the annual floods, and drawing but nine inches water, they hoped to make a prosperous voyage to St. Louis. But they had not proceeded far when they found that the sand banks of the Platte (the Indian name of which, Nebraska, means “shallow,”) were impassable even with their moderate draught. After much toil, therefore, they resolved to bury (or in Canadian phrase make a cache of) their furs, and to trudge on foot to St. Louis. In return for some provisions, they communicated the agreeable intelligence that the buffalo were not far off. Their information proved correct. Mr. Fremont says:—

“A few miles brought us into the midst of the buffalo, swarming in immense numbers over the plains, where they had scarcely left a blade of grass standing. Mr. Preuss, who was sketching at a little distance in the rear, had at first noted them as large groves of timber. In the sight of such a mass of life the traveller feels a strange emotion of grandeur. We had heard from a distance a dull and confused murmuring, and when we came in view of their dark masses, there was not one among us who did not feel his heart beat quicker. It was the early part of the day, when the herds are feed-

ing; and everywhere they were in motion. Here and there a huge old bull was rolling in the grass, and clouds of dust rose in the air from various parts of the bands, each the scene of some obstinate fight. Indians and buffalo make the poetry and life of the prairie, and our camp was full of their exhilaration.”

In plain terms, the camp was full of roast beef. “At any time of the night might be seen pieces of the most delicate and choicest meat, roasting on sticks round the fire, and the guard were never without company.” The delights of buffalo-hunting are here described enthusiastically; and, indeed, what must not be the feelings of the equestrian sportsman in such a case, when even the horse, as we are informed, enjoys the chase? A large herd of buffalo, which had been drinking at the river, and now crossed the plain slowly, grazing as they went, presented an irresistible temptation to our unsated and untired travellers. Lieut. Fremont, and two expert hunters mounted in pursuit of them; but were soon discovered, as was manifest from the tumult with which the herd hastened forward. The particulars of the chase shall be told in our author's words:—

“We started together at a hand-gallop, riding steadily abreast of each other, and here the interest of the chase became so engrossingly intense, that we were sensible of nothing else. We were now closing upon them rapidly, and the front of the mass was already in motion for the hills, and in a few seconds the movement had communicated itself to the whole herd. A crowd of bulls, as usual, brought up the rear, and every now and then some of them faced about and then dashed on after the band a short distance, and turned and looked again, as if more than half inclined to stand and fight. In a few minutes, however, during which we had been quickening our pace, the rout was universal, and we were going over the ground like a hurricane. When at about thirty yards' distance we gave the usual shout, the hunters' *pas de charge*, and broke into the herd. We entered at the side, the mass giving way in every direction in their heedless course. Many of the bulls, less active and less fleet than the cows, paying no attention to the ground, and occupied solely with the hunter, were precipitated to the earth with great force, rolling over and over with the violence of the shock, and hardly distinguishable in the dust. We separated on entering, each singling out his game. My horse was a trained hunter, famous in the West, under the name of Proveau, and with his eyes flashing, and the foam flying from his mouth, he sprung on after the cow like a tiger. In a few minutes he brought me alongside of her, and rising in the stirrups, I fired at the distance of a yard, the ball entering at the termination of the long hair, and passing near the heart. She fell headlong at the report of the gun, and checking my horse, I looked around for my companions. At a little distance, Kit was on the ground, engaged in tying his horse to the horns of a cow, which he was preparing to cut up. Among the scattered bands at some distance below, I caught a glimpse of Maxwell; and while I was looking, a light wreath of white smoke curled away from his gun, the report of which was inaudible from the distance. Nearer, and between me and the hills, towards which they were directing their course, was the body of the herd, and giving my horse the rein we dashed after them. A thick cloud of dust hung upon their rear, which filled my mouth and eyes, and nearly smothered me. In the midst of this I could see nothing, and the buffalo were not distinguishable until within thirty feet. They crowded together more densely still as I came upon them, and rushed along in such a compact body that I could not obtain an entrance—the horse almost leaped upon them. In a few minutes the mass divided to the right and left, the horns clattering with a noise heard above everything else, and my horse darted into the opening. Five or six bulls charged on us as we dashed along the line, but were left far behind, and singling out a cow, I gave her my fire, but struck too high. She gave a tremendous leap, and scoured on swifter than before. I reined up my horse, and the band swept on like a torrent, and left the place quiet and clear. Our chase had led us into dangerous ground. A prairie dog-village so thickly settled, that there were three or four holes in every twenty yards square, occupied the whole bottom for nearly two miles in length. Looking around, I saw only one of the hunters nearly out of sight, and the long dark line of our caravan, crawling along, three or four miles distant.”

From the extent of country covered with these wild herds, our author concludes that not fewer than 11,000 were at one time in view. The buffalo are attended by packs of wolves, which cut off stragglers and devour those that fall in the combats, which are frequent among the bulls. The following anecdote shall terminate our notice of these lower inhabitants of the prairies:—

“While we were at breakfast, a buffalo calf broke through the camp, followed by a couple of wolves. In its fright it had probably mistaken us for a band of buffalo. The wolves were obliged to