

EXCURSION TO THE OREGON.

you subsist until you reached the settlements? You had a long journey before you.' 'Why, set to trappin' prairie squirrels with little nooses made out of the hairs of my head.' I should remark that his hair was so long that it fell in heavy masses on his shoulders. 'But squirrels in winter, Richardson! I never heard of squirrels in winter.' 'Well, but there was plenty of them, though; little white ones, that lived among the snow.' Such is a trait of human nature in these far western regions.

On the 18th of May the party reached the Platte river, one of the streams which pour their waters into the Missouri. Wolves and antelopes were abundant in the neighbourhood of the river, and herons and long-billed curlews were stalking about in the shallows, searching for food. The prairie is here as level as a race-course, not the slightest undulation appearing throughout the whole extent of vision in a northerly and westerly direction; but to the eastward of the river, and about eight miles from it, was seen a range of high bluffs, or sand-banks, stretching away to the south-east till lost in the far distance. The travellers were not less struck with the solemn grandeur of the apparently boundless prairie, than with the sight of its surface, which was in many places encrusted with an impure salt, seemingly a combination of the sulphate and muriate of soda: there were also seen a number of little pools, of only a few inches in depth, scattered over the plain, the water of which was so bitter and pungent, that it seemed to penetrate into the tongue, and almost to take the skin from the mouth. Next morning the party were alarmed with the appearance of two men on horseback, hovering on their path at a great distance. On looking at them with a telescope, they were discovered to be Indians, and on their approach it was found they belonged to a large band of the Grand Pawnee tribe, who were on a war-excursion, and encamped at about thirty miles' distance. Having got rid of these suspicious visitors, the party moved rapidly forward in an altered direction, and did not slacken their pace till twelve o'clock at night. After a brief rest, they again went on, travelling steadily the whole day, and so got quite clear of the Grand Pawnees.

The travellers were now proceeding across one of the large central prairies of North America, and were, as they reckoned, within three days' journey of the buffalo region; that is, the region haunted by herds of buffalo. The uninitiated of the party, who for a good many days past had been listening to the spirit-stirring accounts given by the old hunters of their sport in the buffalo region, began to grow impatient for the first sight of this animal, the tenant of the prairies. At length, on the afternoon of the 20th, they came in sight of a large gang of the long-coveted buffalo. They were grazing on the opposite side of the Platte, as quietly as domestic cattle; but as they neared them, the foremost *winded* the travellers, and started back, and the whole herd followed in the wildest confusion, and were soon out of