

THE OVERLAND TRAIL

Reminiscences of the Journey Across the Continent in the Forties.

It has been proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that after the Mormons located at Salt Lake they bent all their energies to two things—making friends with the Indians and seeking to prevent white people not of their own faith from penetrating into that country. They did gain the good will of the several tribes of Indians with whom they came in contact to such a degree as made it safe for a Mormon to go anywhere. Once in a while one was killed before he could identify himself, but the man who proved himself a Mormon need have no fear of the savages, who had been trained from infancy to hate a white man and take his scalp whenever opportunity offered. This desideratum was accomplished in various ways. They made common cause with the redskin against the remainder of the white race, promising him all the scalps and plunder. They made him presents, caused him to believe that they were persecuted because they espoused his cause, and in other ways got such a firm hold on his affections that he became the most powerful ally they could have selected. They made him arrow heads and lance heads, they provided him with his first firearms and best tomahawks, they fed him when he was hungry, and helped to outfit him when he went to war.

When the California gold fever began to push long wagon trains across the country the Mormons saw what the result would be unless they could stop the rush. Left to themselves the savages would no doubt have attacked in every case where there was hope of success, but not one person would have been killed where ten actually yielded up their lives, but for the assistance of

THE ACCUSED DANITES.

These were the "good men and true" of the Mormon Church—the enthusiasts and fanatics who could be depended on to carry out any order and preserve the secrets of the Church with their last breath. They knew the country, the trails, the streams, and ravines, and valleys, from Council Bluffs or St. Joseph to their own doors in Salt Lake City. They were strung out all along the overland trail, and in constant communication with the Indians. They acted as guides—were elected as captains of trains—sought every position which would enable them to play into the hands of their allies and work the destruction of trains. This was not even suspected, however, until they had worked fearful slaughter among the gold seekers. No living man will ever be able to give figures of the train people murdered during the years in which the overland trail was in daily use.

The first train I went out with consisted of fifteen wagons and fifty men, women, and children. Of these twenty-two were full-grown men and well armed, and each one fully realized the perils which beset the route. It would seem the height of folly for a husband to invest his all in a span of horses and wagon and set out for California with a sickly wife and three or four children, but plenty of them did so. Indeed, there was no train without its women and children, and their presence always increased the dangers. Previous to leaving St. Joe we had to elect a Captain of the train, a "boss," whose word should be law until we reached the end of our journey. This position naturally fell to some veteran—some hunter, scout, or Indian fighter, who was posted as to the route and the ways of the Indians. Some such man was elected. In our case it was G. A. Wood, an I.D.S., to whom one old trap-

been rebellion to speak against him or refuse to obey his orders, and he had the power to disarm us and put us under guard. At that date the train which progressed one hundred miles into Kansas was sure to find the advance guard of the Indians. On the fourth day out we sighted some at a distance, and I narrowly watched our Captain. He closed the train up in good order, stationed the defenders where they could do the most good, and exhibited such nerve and caution that I began to feel ashamed of myself for having suspected his loyalty. But for one circumstance I should have banished all suspicion. We saw the first Indians about two hours before sundown. None of them came nearer than half a mile, seeming to be content with an inspection of our strength. An hour later, and when within two miles of the spot where we proposed to camp, the Captain, whose name I have neglected to state was Baker, ran up a green flag on one of the wagons. This flag, as we afterward concluded, he must have had secreted about his person. He explained that if we ran up a flag the Indians would conclude that there are soldiers with the train and haul off, and no one—no one but me—questioned the truth or policy of the proceeding. It struck me that he raised the flag for a signal, and when I stated my suspicions to two others of the band they agreed with me that he could have no other object. From that time we

WATCHED HIS EVERY MOVEMENT

with the eye of a fox, but he made no further sign for many hours. When we went into camp he took all the precautions the most timid could suggest, and I do not believe he slept two hours between dark and dawn.

The night passed without an alarm, and it was after noon next day before we saw Indians again. We had been travelling for an hour after the noon halt when we came to a singular bit of ground. It was a ridge about fifty feet wide, with heavy washouts or dry ravines on each side of it. This place could be avoided by turning to either the right or the left, but Baker, who was mounted, as most of the rest of us were, led the way right along this ridge. I was watching him, and I saw that he was further ahead than usual. I also saw him make a curious sign. He raised his right arm on a line with his ear, bent the forearm across his head, and held it thus for a few seconds with the palm open and toward his horse's head. Looking ahead and to the left I thought I caught a brief glimpse of a dark object—something like a black head peering above the bank of the ravine. I was close to the head wagon, and I asked the man to halt, and in twenty words made him understand that I firmly believed the Indians had prepared an ambush for us. I had made him understand this when Baker halted and turned to us with the query:

"What's the matter now?"

"The route looks dangerous," I answered.

"The route is all right, bring your wagons."

"Why can't we go to the left or right?" I asked.

"Look here," he began, as he rode back, "is this train under my orders or yours?"

"Yours, sir."

"Then you be careful. If you attempt to interfere with me I'll order you under arrest. Come on with the wagons."

He turned and galloped forward. As he did so I rode to the right and a companion to the left to reach a point where we could see into the ravines. We both saw the same sight—the dry ditch crowded with redskins, we both cried out together:

"Shoot the villain! He has led us into an ambush!"

I don't know who killed him. Five or six of us fired together just as he had put his horse on a gallop, and he toppled from his saddle and fell to the earth. The Indians, seeing that they were discovered, sprang up and made a dash at us on foot. Although we had no leader, we did just the right thing.

We rushed to the front, leaving the train to take care of itself, and we fired a volley which broke the ranks of their number dead. We sought cover, ran where their arrows whistled off without hitting us. We had we got away with every soul.

out several years later, an active Danite, and had led more than one hundred emigrants to slaughter.

Dr. Nansen and the North Pole.

This scheme of polar exploration in which Dr. Nansen, the Greenland traveller, hopes soon to embark will probably rank high among the wildest and most impracticable of Arctic undertakings. He seems to have abandoned his idea of trying to reach the Pole along the east coast of Greenland in favor of a far more surprising project. As he announced in a lecture last week, he proposes to obtain a strong, well-provisioned ship with which he will endeavor, by way of Behring Strait, to reach the New Siberian Islands northeast of the Lena delta. With these islands as a base of operations he contemplates entering the ice floes under the belief that a favorable current there will carry him north toward the Pole. He thinks he can avoid the fate of the Jeannette by having a specially built vessel with its sides constructed at such an angle that ice pressure will lift the vessel instead of crushing it.

Only once has any vessel reached the New Siberian Islands, and the chances are decidedly against the supposition that the grand good fortune which smiled on Dr. Nordenfjeld's enterprise would happen to another Arctic sailor. Indeed, Nansen's chances of reaching that coveted point where longitude ceases would be about as brilliant as his prospects of reaching the New Siberian Islands by taking a ship through Behring Strait. The fate of Dr. Long's expedition and of many a whaler crushed in the ice floes that imprisoned Nordenfjeld, lucky as he was, for months, shows that Nansen's prospects of reaching his proposed base are very slender.

But if he reached the New Siberian group, there is no reason to believe he would find a northern current that would bear him towards his destination. The only Arctic currents of which we have any knowledge flow south except the two branches of the Gulf Stream, which penetrate northward for a short distance east and west of Greenland. To be sure, De Long, in his retreat to the New Siberian Islands, found the ice moving north but the track of the Jeannette, which often drifted south as well as northwest, shows that there is no regular movement of these Arctic waters in any direction. The results of exploration thus far go to show that if there is any land at the North Pole, it is an archipelago and not a continental mass, and that the ice fields drift to and fro between these islands and the continental lands to the south as they are driven by winds and variable currents.

Hunting for the North Pole is not a profitable amusement any way, but if Dr. Nansen is determined to pursue the quest, it will be surprising if he chooses the route that of all others has not a single advocate among Arctic authorities.

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