

company into messes according to their affinities, kindled their fires, prepared and ate their evening-meal, and enjoyed their first night on the prairies in the luxury of deep and uninterrupted sleep, till the sun rose. The next day passed without any event of fresh interest; and at nightfall, after passing a heavy "growth of timber," they encamped by a stream, upon the border of a rolling prairie, unbroken by tree or shrub as far forward as the eye could reach. A tree was cut from the forest near them and a roaring fire built. The wagons were corralled, i. e., run together in the form of a horse-shoe, so that the live-stock, after feeding, could be driven into the enclosure. This precaution warned the company that they were henceforth on the plains, and liable to attack from the Indians. Leaving the cattle to the care of the herder, the company gathered around the camp-fire. Some hardly touched the ground ere they fell asleep, with the fatigue of the march. Others joined in songs and stories of the camp. These being past and equally familiar to them all, the general interest centred in Sam Hallett, the wagon-master, whose very garb and manner seemed to reveal marvellous tales of the new life on which they were now entering.

"Any chance of scaring up some 'Injuns' yet?" inquired Fairleigh of the prairie-scout, as he lighted his pipe by the camp-fire.

"More chance o' their scarin' us up," replied the wagon-master. "Have a good time, while ye can, these moon-light nights, for, as we get on, we'll only boil the kettle, and then dash the fire. Can't keep a fire going to draw the 'Injuns.'"

"Don't you usually get some inkling beforehand? Can't you scent 'em, or guess pretty well when they're around?" inquired Dakin.

The old man surveyed Dakin with a look of compassion, and replied, dryly,

"Sometimes, young man, they send a letter by the post-office, or a messenger to notify us when we may expect 'em; but, as you may have read somewhere, them instances is seldom."

Dakin smiled with the rest at the old man's humor, as he cared more to "draw him out" than to shine in the discussion.

"But these injuns could not make many points fighting veterans like ourselves?"

"You'd be cooler under fire," replied Hallett; "and if that would stop an arrow, you'd be safer. But I tell you, boys, you've all got your fightin' to larn ag'in, when you come out here. It's a long time since General Braddock found that out, and the pint is settled."

"Now and then," said Eaton, "the rebs fought about as mean as the Injuns. What with guerillas in ambush, picket-firing, torpedoes, and—"

"Hark—hist—drop!" said the old guide, throwing himself on the grass, and putting his ear to the ground.

"Nothing," he remarked, rising; "it felt like a stampede, but it's only the herder moving his stock. It's well we've got a good herder: they aren't common. The first time I crossed the plains, I was a herder. I hadn't larned the trade at all, and rough time we had of it."

"Tell us about it," chimed the whole party.

"Well, if you don't care to retire, I will. We started, a large party, from Fort Leavenworth, about the middle of September, for Californy. Grass was high, and not much water, till we reached the Platte. We lay corralled, one night, at Plum Creek, thirty miles beyond Fort Kearney. It was in October, and the nights were cool. In the afternoon there had been a light fall of snow. While we were unharnessing, an ox-train came up, and camped near us. I drove our mules down to drink, and was returning with them to find good grass, when the oxen came down to the river-bank. Their herder was a young man, not over twenty, mounted on a handsome bay. He reined up, and said, 'Partner, if you'll wait until I water my oxen, I'll show you a place where the buffalo-grass is high.'

"So I waited for him. We were soon driving our stock before us, laughing