

GENERAL JOHN BIDWELL'S TRIP ACROSS THE PLAINS IN 1841

THE first emigrant train from the United States entered California in the fall of 1841. The first settlement reached was Dr. Marsh's ranch, and the date November 4. So far as is now known there are but two men survivors of that memorable journey—General John Bidwell of Chico, Cal., and Michael C. Nye of Crook County, Oregon.

In his twentieth year Bidwell became possessed of an idea to see the great Western Reserve and that longing eventually led him to what afterward became California. He had \$75, which he had saved to enter college, and this he spent in getting as far west as the Platte reserve. There he became acquainted with men who like himself were resolved on going West. There were public meetings, and gradually 500 of them banded themselves together

beyond that they had nothing to guide them.

Provisionally they heard of a company of Roman Catholic missionaries who were on their way from St. Louis to establish a mission among the Flat-head Indians of the Rocky Mountains. This company had engaged an old mountaineer for a guide, whose name was Fitzpatrick and would be up with Captain Bartleson's party if they would wait another day. They chafed at the delay, but it proved a most fortunate wait for them. The missionary band, headed by Fathers De Smet, Fort and Mengarini, accompanied them as far as Soda Springs, now in Idaho. It was rare good fortune to be accompanied by such a man as Father De Smet, genial, even-tempered, experienced in rough travel and withal one of the saintliest of men.

Until the party reached the Platte River nothing unusual happened. Headed by Captain Fitzpatrick and the missionaries they each day made what

had been surrounded by thousands of Indians, who had taken from him his mule, his gun and the major part of his clothing.

The buffalo was a new source of interest. Almost from the start many antelope, elk and much smaller game had been seen, but buffaloes were scarce till after the Platte had been reached. It is impossible for young persons to conceive of the vast herds of these huge animals that swept over prairie and hillside, thundering at times all night long, making the very earth tremble with their wild indescribable rush. At times some of the party were compelled, on the approach of one of these vast herds, to advance some distance from camp to turn or divide them by firing guns and making fires, lest they should in their mad sweep trample under foot the entire camp. By the time the party had reached the Sweetwater buffaloes had comparatively disappeared. Great numbers of mountain sheep were seen at Scott's

here at times made it impossible to discern obstacles far ahead; the deceptive mirage occasioned many a sore disappointment by its phantom hopes of water and foliage. Without knowing it they were making directly for the lake. The salty plain became softer and softer, the water of the river no longer quenched thirst, and at last the poor, almost famished animals were unable to proceed with their loads. This compelled the party to lie by a day for rest; but it was not long till grass and water were found to the north. The condition of the animals made it imperative to rest there nearly a week. It is impossible in a short sketch like this to relate fully even the most thrilling incidents and momentous hardships, much less the innumerable experiences of mountain and plain, with Indians and wild beasts. More than once those hardy emigrants traveled all day and all night without water.

After sustaining many delays and encountering obstacles that tried the

ding all that day and night and nearly losing not only the oxen, but his horse and gun, Bidwell saw nothing of the party till late on the day following. He was indignant to learn that they had not waited for him according to promise.

The party had been warned against going too far south and thus getting into a desert country; they could not then go west; there seemed no alternative—they must turn to the north and cross a range of mountains. Would they ever reach California traveling northward? The dangerous canyons leading toward the Columbia were feared. At length the river was reached which, four years later, Fremont first saw and named the Humboldt. Following the Humboldt many days they came to the Sink.

Fully one-half the party were now on foot, the provisions were nearly exhausted, and there was almost no game. Some food was purchased from Indians; but when the Americans saw



"THE INDIANS RUSHED UPON US YELLING AND FIRING BEFORE WE COULD FIX OUR WAGONS FOR DEFENSE." Fate of the Logan Party.

for the trip. They styled themselves the Western Emigration Society. But reverses came and the movement went to pieces, leaving young Bidwell the only one bent on the undertaking. He redoubled his exertions among distant neighbors, and finally a party of sixty-nine persons were plodding slowly westward. There were five families. Young Bidwell had a wagon and a yoke of oxen. A man named Bartleson, from Jackson County, Mo., was elected captain. Each man furnished his own supplies. Nobody was to have less than a barrel of flour, with proportionate amounts of sugar, etc. Teams of horses, mules and oxen were used.

The great trouble of the party at first was that nobody knew which way to go. In a general way they knew that California was somewhere out west;

progress they could. It was customary at night to draw the wagons together into a hollow square, picket the animals inside and detail a guard to watch. At times the train was half a mile or more in length, but when danger threatened a compact body was kept for safety. For most part these first pioneers had their own roads to make, but when obstacles were to be removed or gulches filled all hands worked with a will.

From Fitzpatrick much was learned about the Indians. As a precaution cooking was usually done by day, so as to have no fires by night. Of course the emigrants were treated to an occasional scare from the Indians; as when Dawson, who chanced to be separated from his companions while hunting, was so frightened by thirty friendly Cheyennes as to report that he

Bluffs, below Fort Laramie, on the North Platte, but because of their exceeding wildness none were killed.

When the missionary party was about to leave Soda Springs one-half of the emigrant party—now numbering sixty-four in all—were so discouraged that they decided to continue with the missionaries to Fort Hall rather than to venture into the unknown regions toward California.

and, not without misgivings, penetrated the trackless western wilds, following down the west side of Bear River toward Salt Lake.

Using what scanty information they had been able to gain from Fitzpatrick and other sources, it was September before they reached the northern extremity of the lake. Progress was impeded by almost constant interruptions and frequent delays. The smoky atmos-

stoutest hearts, they came within sight of great mountains to the westward. Then it was quickly decided that the wagons must be abandoned or the party would be overtaken by the snows before reaching California. None of the party ever forgot the indescribable difficulties of this undertaking. They were all inexperienced in the methods of packing horses, mules and oxen. It soon became a caravan of loose packs, frightened horses, kicking mules and bellowing oxen.

Having oxen instead of horses, young Bidwell had a harder time than the others. Not infrequently the oxen with their packs were left from six to ten miles behind the party, and would only reach camp about midnight. On one occasion the animals failed to come up, so next morning the owner returned in search of them; and, though trav-

of what this was made, all relish for it was gone. The faithful oxen now constituted the entire food supply.

Being compelled to drive the packed oxen, the party made but eighteen or twenty miles per day. Some were in favor of leaving the oxen and hastening on to California, where they were assured, there was plenty of beef. One day, after circumstances peculiarly trying to Bidwell, Captain Bartleson and seven men, after taking most of the store of meat, abruptly separated from the remainder of the party and started off, the captain calling out to those left behind to keep up if they could.

Following their trail for two or three days, all indications of their course were lost in the sand, and Bidwell's party were thrown wholly upon their own resources. Maintaining a general westerly course, they crossed the Carson River and followed up the Walker River—these were not then named—to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, not then knowing their name.

The party was prepared to make the difficult ascent and had just killed the

brought to Dr. Marsh's ranch, and there they first learned where they were.

It was almost exactly six months since they had set out from Sapling Grove.

That is the story of how the first overland train reached California.

ROCKWELL D. HUNT,
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The Blanch Barkly nugget, which was exhibited at London, weighed 145 pounds troy, or 1752 troy ounces. It was found at Kingowa, Victoria, and was melted in London in August, 1858, yielding gold to the value of £6905 about \$34,525.

The Precious, found at Berlin, Victoria, Australia, weighed 1821 troy ounces.

In July, 1851, a very large nugget was found in a pile of quartz at Meroo Creek, fifty miles from Bathurst, New South Wales. It was in three pieces, but was considered to be of the same origin, and is reckoned as one mass. It was found by a native boy, who saw the glitter of some exposed portion. The total weight was 130 pounds troy, or 1621 troy ounces.

A mass of gold mixed with quartz and mud was found in 1853 at Bannandans, near Orange, New South Wales. After the quartz and sulphide of iron were removed by hammering the gold weighed 120 pounds. Being melted at the Sydney mint it yielded a little over 112 ounces of gold, 874 fine, and valued at £2489.

The Ural nugget, found in 1842 in the valley of Tschukou Targunka, near Miask, Russia, is now preserved in the Museum of Mining Engineers at St. Petersburg. Several others were found near the same locality of less size. It weighed ninety-six pounds troy, or 1152 troy ounces.

The Viscount Canterbury, found at Berlin, Victoria, Australia, weighed 1105 troy ounces.

In November, 1854, a mass of gold was found at Carson Hill, Calaveras County, which weighed 185 pounds troy, or 2220 troy ounces, valued at \$43,534. This is the largest piece of gold ever found in the State.

August 18, 1850, a large piece of gold was taken from the Monumental quartz mine, Sierra County, which weighed 600 ounces, the value of which was estimated at \$30,000. It was placed on exhibition at Woodward's Gardens.

Mr. Knapp's ranch, a half mile east of Columbia, Tuolumne County, which weighed over fifty pounds avoirdupois. When broken up it yielded gold to the amount of \$8500.

A nugget was found at Sullivan's Creek, Coluimne County. In the year 1849 which weighed 408 ounces troy; calculated value, \$7500.

In 1855, at French Ravine, Sierra County, a nugget was found which weighed 532 ounces; value, \$10,100.

In 1867, at Pilot Hill, El Dorado County, a bowlder of gold quartz was found which sold for \$8000.

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In the year 1867, at Pilot Hill, El Dorado County, a bowlder of gold quartz was found which sold for \$8000.

Mr. Virgin found a nugget on Gold Hill worth \$2500.

In 1837 a mass of gold weighing 283 ounces and valued at \$5205 was found at Columbia, Tuolumne County.

A nugget found at the same place a few days later was worth \$6000.

In 1850 a piece of gold quartz was found in Sierra County worth \$4850.

A Frenchman found a nugget near Columbia worth over \$5000. The next day he went insane and was sent to Stockton. The French Consul recovered the money and sent it to his family in France.

A nugget was found near Kelsey which sold for \$4700.

In 1876 J. D. Colgrave of Dutch Flat found a white quartz bowlder containing over \$7500 gold.

A nugget said to have been pure gold was found from the American River and was sold for \$204.

At Smith Flat, Sierra County, in 1864, a 140-ounce nugget was found, worth \$2716.

One found in El Dorado County worth \$5500 is now in a museum in France.

TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE OF THE ILL-FATED DONNER PARTY.

THE attractions of California made themselves felt in the East even before the days of the Golden Era. Though no hint had as yet reached the world of the vast stores of mineral wealth concealed in her gullies and ranges, the agricultural and pastoral resources of the State were sufficient to attract many immigrants, and party after party, traveling slowly in wagons laden with all their household goods, made the tedious and dangerous journey across the desert and over the Sierras.

Many, attacked by Indians, or perishing slowly of hunger and thirst, left their bones whitening by the side of the track to mark the path for the next comer. Many, more fortunate, got through safely and prospered exceedingly in the land of promise. The story of these overland disasters has never been fully told, party after party of immigrants perished unnoticed in the desert, and no historian has written of their sufferings. But contemporaneous accounts throw a lurid light on the tragedy of Donner Lake.

In 1847 San Francisco, or Yerba Buena as it was then called, was but a little village by the side of the bay, yet its few hundred inhabitants had energy and resource, the nobler feelings of humanity were strong within them. When the news reached the town that a party of immigrants had been snowed up in the Sierras whilst attempting to cross the Truckee Pass, the generous citizens made immediate response and a relief fund of \$1500 was subscribed. Search parties were organized and with infinite trouble and danger the remnant of the miserable Donner party were brought forth from the snowy range by the side of the lake which still bears their name.

Though well equipped and furnished with all needful supplies, everything seems to have gone wrong with the Donner party from the outset. The trouble began when the immigrants, after leaving Fort Bridger, attempted to follow a new route over the mountains. The trail, though largely used during later years, was then entirely unopened, and often the party had to halt for days to cut away the brush or to explore the country in front of them.

Thus they dragged their weary way along until September, when it was already getting late in the year, to attempt the passage over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. After passing Twenty Wells they attempted a two days' journey from water to water. The passage took them three days, they had to abandon a number of wagons and lost half their cattle. This disaster

completed the demoralization of the party. Many families were entirely ruined, but the others bravely refused aid, and savage fighting resulted.

One would think that the common dangers to which all were exposed should have developed their spirit of humanity. Under proper discipline this would undoubtedly have happened. But as it was, the fear of death only intensified each traveler's selfishness, men fought like brutes over trifles, and one old man whose feet were swollen, was actually abandoned in the wilderness.

It was late in October before the straggling remnant which had escaped death from privation or at the hands of the hostile Indians reached the base of the Sierras. They found it impossible to cross the Truckee Pass, a heavy fall of snow barred the way, and they were forced to winter as best they could near the Donner Lake.

Here, lacking all proper clothing and shelter, they strove to shield themselves from the icy blasts of winter, and when their provisions were exhausted had recourse to the most terrible of all nourishment in order to preserve their miserable lives. Sixteen of the party, under the leadership of Eddy, made a gallant attempt to win their way out on snowshoes, leaving a crimson track over the spotless Sierra snows as they toiled wearily on day after day.

Several relief expeditions at once started out, the first under the leadership of Glover, reaching the camp on February 19. Fourteen of the wretched party had already perished of starvation, and the appearance of the survivors, as they crawled from the hovels where they strove to shelter themselves, their hair matted and filthy, their faces haggard, their flesh wasted to the bone, was ghastly in the ex-

shrunken from cannibalism, but now it had become universal; the bodies of those who died were deliberately used for food, and one human monster was more than suspected of having murdered women and children in order to gratify his appetite. The relief party

better of the two remaining oxen, when he should come up from behind but the eight men who had left them nine days before. Captain Bartleson was a sorry sight as he ate the best supper that could be provided. He exclaimed: "Boys, if I ever get back to Missouri I will never leave that country. I would at this moment gladly eat out of the trough with my dogs."

Climbing the mountains with difficulty on the north side of Walker River, the reunited party at length came to the summit, then found the head waters of what proved to be the Stanislaus. This was followed for several days. Then the last ox was killed; then the party killed whatever they could—even crows and wildcats—to keep from starving.

They came down into the San Joaquin Valley; but seeing another range of mountains far to the west, some thought it yet 500 miles to California. How tired, how utterly exhausted they were on the evening of that day they entered the valley. And the poor jaded horses had nearly perished.

Next morning Bidwell breakfasted upon the lights and windpuffs of a coyote that the advance party had killed over. Next day preparations were made to press on into California before the winter snows. The chosen course lay to the north of what proved to be Mount Diablo; but by means of a snow trail, found on horseback, those pioneers of pioneers were shortly

re was horror struck at the scene which met their gaze.

Out of the eighty persons who started with the party nearly one-half, or 36, perished, and that any survived was due solely to the heroic exertion of the Californians, who spared neither life nor expense in attempting the rescue.

at Donner Lake.



THE DONNER PARTY OVERTAKEN BY WINTER IN THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS.

EXPRESS TIME FROM NEW YORK TO SAN FRANCISCO, From 1848 to 1898.

1848: From New York to San Francisco by sailing vessel around the Horn, from 120 to 233 days.

1849: From New York to San Francisco, steamer to Aspinwall, transit across the Isthmus of Darien and steamer from Panama, 51 to 33 days.

1849: Across the plains by emigrant train from five to seven months.

1854: New York to San Francisco, steamer to Aspinwall, by rail across the isthmus and steamer from Panama, 21 to 23 days.

1858: Overland stages by southern route, 21 days.

1860: Pony express for mail only, postage \$5 per half ounce, from St. Joseph, Mo., to San Francisco, 10 days.

1861: Overland stages via Pony Express route, via Salt Lake, 19 to 20 days.

1869 (June): Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads, New York to San Francisco, 9 days.

1898: By rail, "Overland Limited," from New York to San Francisco, 4 1/2 days.

rush to California from the ends of the earth had begun, and he found San Francisco in a wild state of excitement. He arrived late in the summer of 1848. At that time a young soldier of Stevens's regiment, while on riding along the Mokelumne River, stopped to drink from a stream, and discovered a gold nugget weighing between twenty and twenty-five pounds. He hastened to San Francisco and placed his prize in the hands of Colonel Mason for safety. The latter sent it by General Beale to the Eastern States. The exhibition of this nugget in New York increased the gold fever, and the nation began to realize the importance of newly acquired California.

A mass of gold was exhibited at the World's Fair, London, which is said to have been three hundredweight. It is stated that this specimen was brought up from a deep mine on the back of a man. If the English hundredweight is meant, it would be 336 pounds avoirdupois, or 4,839.39 ounces troy. It was brought from Chile.

With the exception of the Chile nugget, the largest mass of gold on record was found at Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, in 1859. The mass is known as the "Sarah Sands." Its weight was 2583 ounces, or 322.875 pounds troy. The welcome nugget also found at Bakery Hill, Ballarat, Victoria, in 1853, at a depth of 180 feet, weighed 2195 ounces troy. A model of this magnificent specimen may be seen in the State Museum of California.

Queen Margherita of Italy is not only one of the most accomplished women that has ever graced a European throne, but she is likewise winning for herself the good will of the scientific world by having constructed at her own expense a splendidly equipped observatory on the summit of Mount Rosa, 15,000 feet above the level of the sea.