

CHAPTER XV.

THE EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AND THE METHOD OF TRAVELING.

In treating of the equipment, supplies, and the method of traveling, I shall confine my remarks, entirely, to the over land route, which lies through the great southern pass; as the chief emigration, to those countries, is, at this time, by that route, which from present indications, is destined to become the great thoroughfare, between the States, and both Oregon and California. All persons, designing to travel by this route, should, invariably, equip themselves with a good gun; at least, five pounds of powder, and twenty pounds of lead; in addition to which, it might be advisable, also, for each to provide himself with a holster of good pistols, which would, always, be found of very great service, yet they are not indispensable. If pistols are taken, an additional supply of ammunition should, also, be taken; for, it almost necessarily follows, that the more firearms you have, the more ammunition you will require, whether assailed by the Indians, or assailing the buffalo.

In procuring supplies for this journey, the emigrant should provide himself with, at least, two hundred pounds of flour, or meal; one hundred and fifty pounds of bacon; ten pounds of coffee; twenty pounds of sugar; and ten pounds of salt, with such other provisions as he may be considered, ample, both as to quantity, and variety. It would, perhaps, be advisable for emigrants, not to encumber themselves with any other, than those just enumerated; as it is impracticable for them, to take all the luxuries, to which they have been accustomed; and as it is found, by experience, that, when upon this kind of expedition, they are not desired, even by the most devoted epicurean [sic]. The above remarks, in reference to the quantity of provisions, are designed to apply only to adults; but taking the above as the data, parents will find no difficulty, in determining as to the necessary quantum for children; in doing which, however, it should always be observed, that children as well as adults, require, about twice the quantity of provisions, which they would, at home, for the same length of time.

Very few cooking utensils, should be taken, as they very, much increase the load, to avoid which, is always a consideration of paramount importance. A baking-kettle, frying-pan, tea-kettle, tea-pot, and coffee-pot, are all the furniture of this kind, that is essential, which, together with tin plates, tin cups, ordinary knives, forks, spoons, and a coffee-mill, should constitute the entire kitchen apparatus. Bedding should consist of nothing more than blankets, sheets, coverlets and pillows, which, being spread upon a buffalo robe, an oiled cloth, or some other impervious substance, should constitute the beds, which are found much preferable, because of their being much less bulky, and weighty. Feather-beds are sometimes taken by the families, but in many instances, they find them, not only burthensome [sic] and inconvenient, but entirely useless, consequently, they leave them by the way, and pursue the course above suggested.

Our common horses are preferable for the saddle, but it becomes necessary to take such numbers of them, that they may be occasionally changed; for it is found by experience, that no American horse can be taken entirely through, being daily used, either under the saddle, or in the harness. Many prefer mules for the saddle, but they are objectionable, because of their extreme intractability, and their inflexible inertness, in which they appear to indulge, to a much greater extent than usual, upon this kind of expedition. For the harness, mules are preferable to horses; for, notwithstanding their extreme inertness and slowness, they are found to endure the fatigue and to subsist upon vegetation alone, much better than horses; but oxen are considered preferable to either. If mules are taken, it is advisable to take more of them, than are required for ordinary teams, in order that they maybe changed as occasion may require; for they, even, frequently become so fatigued, and exhausted, that they, like the horses, are left by the way, to be taken or killed, by the Indians. Oxen endure the fatigue and heat, much better than either horses or mules; and they also, subsist much better, upon vegetation alone, as all herds are, of course, required to do, upon all portions of the route. There is no instance, within my knowledge, of any emigrants being required to leave his oxen by the way, because of excessive fatigue, or extreme poverty; for, as a general thing, they continue to thrive, during the entire journey. But there are other considerations, which give them a decided preference, among which is the fact,

that they are not liable to be stolen by the Indians, who are aware, that they travel so extremely slowly, that it would be impossible for them, to drive them so far, during the night, that they could not be retaken, during the next day; hence, they will not hazard the attempt, especially as they would be serviceable to them, only as food; and as the country abounds with buffalo, and other game, the meat of which they very much prefer. Some urge the propriety of working cows, instead of oxen, both the advantage and propriety of which, are very questionable; for, it will be admitted, that they are much inferior to oxen, in point of physical strength, and, hence, cannot be as serviceable for the draught; but it is urged, that, although they are more feeble, and, hence, less serviceable for the yoke, yet they are preferable, because they answer the double purpose draught animals, and milk-cows; but the force of this reason is lost, when we take into consideration, the unwholesomeness of the milk of animals, whose systems are, thus, enfevered [sic] by exposure to excessive heat, and extreme physical exertion.

Good and substantial wagons should always be selected, and however firm and staunch they may appear, they should, invariably, be particularly examined, and repaired, before leaving the States; for, otherwise, the emigrant may set out, with a very good wagon to all appearances, the defects of which, when he shall have traveled a few hundred miles, will have become very obvious; the consequence of which, is, that he is left without a wagon, and thrown upon the kindness of his friends, for the conveyance of his family and provisions. Whether wagons are new or old, it is perhaps, preferable, always to have the tires re-set, previous to leaving Independence; otherwise, before traveling one thousand miles, into that vastly elevated region, from the intense heat of those extensive, sandy plains, and the extreme aridity of the atmosphere, the tires become so expanded, and the wooden portions of the wheels, so contracted, that it will be very difficult to keep them together, in which, however, by the constant and regular application of water, you may possibly succeed.

Besides the foregoing supplies, emigrants should also, provide themselves with good wagon covers and tents, tent poles, axes, spades, and hoes, as well as strong ropes, of about sixty feet in length, for each horse or mule, with a supply of stakes, to which they are to be tied; in addition to which, every wagon should be supplied with extra axletrees, chains, hammers, and the like; and the different mechanics should also take a small portion of their tools, as they are, always, needed by the way. Should there be physicians and surgeons, attached to the company, as there most usually are, they should supply themselves with a small assortment of medicine, and a few surgical instruments. In addition to all the foregoing, perhaps, it would also be advisable for each emigrant, to provide himself with some such goods, as are adapted to the Indian trade, such, for instance, as beads, tobacco, handkerchiefs, blankets, ready made clothing, such as cheap, summer coats, pantaloons, vests and course, cheap shirts, butcher knives, fishhooks, and powder and lead.

Nothing now remains to be done, but to notice the method of traveling, which I shall proceed to do, with as much brevity, as is consistent with the importance of the subject. Emigrants should, invariably, arrive at Independence, Mo., on, or before, the fifteenth day of April, so as to be in readiness, to enter upon their journey, on or before, the first day of May; after which time, they should never start if it can, possibly, be avoided. The advantages to be derived, from setting out at as early a day as that above suggested, are those of having an abundance of good pasturage, in passing over those desolate and thirsty plains; and being enabled to cross the mountains, before the falling of mountains of snow, or floods of rain, which usually occurs, in that region, early in October.

Being equipped and supplied, as here suggested, the emigrant may set out upon this wild, yet interesting excursion, with high prospects of enjoying many extraordinary and pleasing scenes; and of safely arriving at his desired place of destination, without suffering any of that extraordinary toil, unheard of hardship, or eminent danger, which his own fruitful imagination, or the kind regard of his numerous friends, may have devised.