

were feasted and sent back, returning the next day with forty more. The men, fifteen in all, dared not risk a fight then, but closely watched the Modocs to prevent treachery on their part. The result of thus hob-nobbing with their intended victims was that in a few days their provisions were entirely exhausted.

They then moved camp to the mouth of Lost River, to be nearer the expected supplies, and failed to invite their guests to accompany them. Here they were absolutely without food for six days, save old duck bones and scraps dug from the sand, thrown away when they were in camp here before. Had the Modocs known of their distressed condition and loss of ammunition they would probably not have left them in undisturbed possession of their camp.

The cause of delay was that the messengers arrived in Yreka on election day, and, being good Democrats, aided to elect Franklin Pierce President of the United States. This made it necessary for them to get gloriously drunk, and to so remain for several days; then the supplies contributed by the people were gathered up slowly, and when they again started for the field they were a week behind time.

The famishing men could have killed a horse for food, but they feared to deprive themselves of their animals. At length, on the sixth day, it was decided that one of their number, who was still strong enough to accomplish the feat, should climb a neighboring hill that overlooked the trail and see if he could espy the expected train. If so, he was to fire his pistol; if not, they were to kill one of their animals for food and return to Yreka. Slowly the man dragged his toilsome way up the hill, with fourteen pairs of hungry eyes following his every step. At last he stood upon the summit and scanned the distant horizon. Five—ten—minutes, that seemed like hours, passed, and still he stood like a stone monument on the brow of the hill. At length he slowly raised his arm, and a puff of white smoke shot upward from his hand.

Then ensued a scene of frantic joy. Men hurraled and hugged each other, and started with feeble footsteps to meet the coming train. When they reached it they made a fierce onslaught upon the provisions. Again and again they filled their stomachs with food they were too weak to retain. In a few days they were recruited; and now fully supplied with provisions and ammunition, were again ready for their work of vengeance.

Invitation was sent to the Modocs to visit the new camp, and some half hundred braves, with their families, came and camped on the bank of the river, living on the provisions of the whites. Wright sought by specious promises to induce them to deliver up the property taken from the emigrants, and this they agreed to do. They brought in a few old guns and pistols, and then said they would give no more; that they were stronger than the whites, and would as soon fight as not. Old Schonchin, the head chief, left the camp with a number of others when he saw that trouble was brewing.

To properly understand the scene, a correct idea must first be had of the location of the camp. The river at

that time, the middle of November, 1852, was very low, and had two banks—one low bench down by the water's edge, and the other rising like a terrace back of it. On the low bench the men did their cooking, while they slept on the high bank above. The Indian camp was but a few yards down the stream on the low ground.

It was the custom of both parties to leave their weapons in camp and mingle unarmed where the cooking was done. One night Old Mary informed Wright that the Modocs had planned a massacre of the whites for the following morning. When the men were gathered on the lower ground eating their breakfast, the savages were to slip in between them and their camp, where their guns were, and kill every one of them.

This was not pleasant news for Wright. It had been his intention from the first to coax all the valuables possible from them, then pick a quarrel and kill all he could of them. It seemed now that they were likely to get ahead of him, and the biter would be bitten. It was evident to him that he must either depart hastily in the night, or else forestall their treachery by equal treachery on his part. He decided to do the latter, and quickly formed a plan to slay the whole band.

Six men were sent across the river at the Natural Bridge and posted on the bank just opposite the Indian camp, where they lay on their arms all night. The other men were stationed on the high bank in the rear of the Modoc camp and within twenty paces of it. It was arranged that Wright would go into the Indian camp at daylight, and when all was ready, shoot one of the braves and fall to the ground out of harm's way. This was to be the signal for them to pour a deadly rain of bullets among the doomed savages.

Taking some beef* in his hand, Wright advanced into the Indian camp, threw down his load and sat down

*The story has been circulated and generally believed that an attempt was first made to poison the Indians by inviting them to banquet upon a beef that had been prepared with strychnine. I investigated this matter carefully and am satisfied the story is not founded upon fact. The only evidence to support it was of the poorest kind of hearsay, while all the direct testimony that can be had, that of surviving members of the company, controverts it. Even old citizens of Yreka, with equal opportunities to judge of the facts, differ in their opinions on the subject. J. A. Mallick and J. C. Burgess, two members of the company, say that when their men were in Yreka after provisions a certain physician suggested that they poison the savages, and offered to furnish the material. The fiendish barbarities they had committed upon helpless emigrants had so filled the people of Yreka with utter horror and indignation that they wanted the perpetrators exterminated. It was with this feeling that they supplied the company with provisions and ammunition. The physician, who looked upon the savages as so many ravenous wild beasts, proposed this way of disposing of them as the cheapest and most effectual. The men said they would consult with their companions about it, and departed without taking the poison with them. The proposition was rejected with scorn by the better element of the company, and with contempt by the others. The latter were hunting Indians for excitement and pleasure; they wanted to shoot them, and would as soon think of killing them with poison as the enthusiastic hunter would think of placing out arsenic for the noble buck his hounds had aroused on the mountains. Nevertheless, it was whispered about in Yreka that Ben Wright was going to poison the Modocs; and when he returned and showed that the Indians had been killed in battle, it was then reported that he had attempted to do so and failed. No amount of denial was able to head off the slander. It was spread abroad, and even carried to the ears of the Modocs in after years, who now firmly believe that Wright had attempted to poison them. These, I believe, to be the bottom facts of the poison story. The beef Wright took to camp on the morning of the massacre was but one of several pieces he had given his intended victims, who were boarding with him, as it were. Monahan, Joaquin Miller and others have laid considerable stress in their writings about the Modocs upon this poison story, but have done so because they did not take the time to investigate. However well written and entertaining their writings may be, they are very poor history.