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OREGON PIONEER HISTORY.

SKETCHES OF EARLY DAYS.—MEN AND TIMES IN THE PORTIES

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Circumnavigating the Continent, Coming to Oregon by Sea in 1850.

For a variety from the almost monotony of that universal note of travel "across the plains," I am minded to change the theme for a while and wait for months. So we knocked our heels together for a while and waited "for something to turn up." One day the captain came into 13 Broadway, and said a bark anchored off the battery was to sail for Chagres, and we could take passage to the isthmus in her. So we shut our eyes to the future and embarked for Chagres. The "old salt" who was my partner in adventure, said we would find some way from there. Just then all the world and his sisters, his cousins and his aunts, as well as the males of creation, were bound for the Golden Gate. How to squeeze into some ship at Panama was a conundrum that we afterwards found only money would solve. The Nacoochee came from Maine. Her skipper was a down-easter all over and so was his wife. Their son and heir was a promising lad of 6, who earned a dozen thrashings a day—and never got them. It might have been worse, but the skipper's boy was bad enough. His mother was "all hands and the cook," and her lord, the captain, was as clever a man as the sun shone on. So on the 29th of April we went on board and the Nacoochee went off to sea. "The world was mine oyster" sure enough, and big and wide and round as it was, it seemed all before us that beautiful spring season, when we journeyed over unknown seas towards unknown lands and hung our hopes on the uncertainties of regions as strange to us as the moon. Dashing through and parting wave after wave, we went on and on, and all the uncertainty of a lifetime seem piled into that voyage, when like the ancient Argonauts, we searched an unknown world.

A PIRATICAL EPISODE.

For days and weeks we sailed southward, and the Nacoochee's wife and son raised an occasional rumpus by "tricks that were vain." But we combined forces and held our own against all odds. There were a few very decent people in the cabin, and two young fellows—the writer and Addison C. Gibbs, who lived to be Oregon's second governor. We skimmed the Gulf stream and one day in May found ourselves short of water and hugging a north-western projection of San Domingo. It was decided that the barque was to anchor and send a boat into a creek that put into the bay to fill some water casks to take on board. This would occupy two days, and to pass the time some of us landed at a village, easily seen from the ship, to have a lark ashore. As we landed we were received with extraordinary honors—in fact, by a military guard, who escorted us to the village guard house. We cracked many a joke as we were paraded up the beach to this public building. The guard was far ahead of the army in Flanders in the extent and variety of costume and want of costume. One would have a cocked hat and no breeches; others wear coat, pants or vest, and experience some notable lack of completeness in equipment. Imagine a broadcloth coat and heavy cocked hat, in that climate, too, in May! It was too funny for anything.

The funniest part of the business was that we were actually under arrest as prisoners and suspected of being pirates. It seems that the near neighbors of these San Domingo folks had played them some scurvy tricks. Cuba was in sight on the weatherbow as we bore down on San Domingo, and they were almost in sight of each other. Some piratical Spaniards had come in small crafts and ravaged their island, and worst of all had carried off their people to slavery. They were trying to decide if we were of this sort, and while making up their minds got together the loyal guard and marshaled us to the public calaboose. This much we learned through Ellsler, a Frenchman, who was

our fellow passenger. He was half-brother to the famous danseuse, then in all her glory, and one of the most famous dancers that ever lived. He understood their language—a mongrel French—but could not satisfy their fears and suspicions of evil. So we fretted the day away in durance vile and were not allowed to frisk about as we had expected, and unable to enjoy the tropical luxuriance around us. Finally the ship's mate and Ellsler were put on top of mules or donkeys and sent away under guard to a seaport at a distance of twelve miles, where the Frenchman proved his own identity, as they remembered that two years before he had performed as a magician in that very town. So the great American nation was recognized by the agency of a wizzard, sleight-of-hand sort of Frenchman.

MATTERS IN SAN DOMINGO.

The skillful and erudite Ellsler was quite an addition to our ship's company. He was a large man, not corpulent but large frame and with wonderful activity. As a traveling magician and sleight-of-hand performer he had been all over the world, time and again, and could spin yarns from week's end to end that made the youthful Gibbs, who had seen but little of the world at that time and was making his first venture away from home, open his eyes the widest. He was dark-eyed and swarthy as a Spaniard. He explained the condition of things we saw at Hayti by saying that years ago Napoleon tried to subdue San Domingo, or Hayti, and sent 10,000 troops there, who fell before the deadly climate, while the mongrel race—more negro than anything else and more Indian blood in them than white—had only to follow around and pick up the uniform and equipments of the defeated Frenchmen. Thus they became possessed of the seedy coats and chapeaux, the rusty sabers and carbines we saw in use, and though that had been many years ago, they kept them secure for display as occasion should require.

It was not so much the garments and equipments these veterans wore and carried that was surprising as the way they wore and carried them. Here would be a three-cornered hat of an officer with its rich plume of black feathers on the top—and wholly top too—of a man as black as Africa affords, and no other garment save a ragged pair of dirty duck pants that tied by the waist; there was a braided cloth coat—worn solus—over the carcass of a pot-bellied ancient who also wore a straw hat and ragged trousers. So it went, only the commander had on anything like a suit of clothes. Catching some inkling of their talk I interposed a few words in French and was respected all the more. We were expecting to have a lively time chaffing and trading on the beach and rather regretted the necessity of wasting time in what we thought was intended as an official reception, and so it was, but hardly such as we liked. We were prepared to make fun of anything and marched to calaboose with each a guard of two blacks and imagined there was lots of fun in it.

OVER THE TROPIC SEAS.

As some compensation for their ill-founded suspicions they promised to send us on board the next morning, a boat load of chickens, eggs, provisions, meats, fruits and vegetables. We were anticipating great sport, but during the night a favoring wind came up and we sailed away. Capt. McClintock—what a name for a down-easter!—cared more for a good wind in the sail than a boat load of provisions, and when we climbed on deck in the morning the Nacoochee was bounding on the billows of the great Caribbean sea. To our right loomed the level shores of Cuba, "the ever faithful isle" that costs Spain so many millions. Before we reached San Domingo, one moonlight night, we had skirted the

shores of Cuba, and as I sat on deck and saw the silvery sheen of moonlight on the rustling waters and its darker shades on the distant line of shore, there came thoughts of a past when my father's home was not far away, on those ridges; when I was a child there; of a cluster of graves on a gentle slope I remember; of orange and mango groves, and pineapples, and how I sailed and sailed away from graves of father, brothers and sisters to get back with my mother to our New England home! A memory picture without a frame, but true in every feature.

That voyage through the Caribbean sea is one of the "things of beauty that are a joy forever." We were cut loose from time and home and all the world and beginning a new quest for fortune. The scorching days were spent lolling and reading under the shadow of a sail or a canvas awning. One day fierce, hot showers, steamed over the waters and seemed to suck up from the sea around boiling cauldrons of wrath. They were waterspouts, and the captain had his carronade ready to create a concussion of the air to demolish the enemy in case any seething spout might come our way. He may not have cared much for the passengers, as all had paid their passage ashore, but he didn't want the Nacoochee to go up the spout in the Caribbean sea. We dodged the water spouts for days through, and they gave variety to our life. We watched flying fish and sea life all around us.

A FISH STORY.

One day we baited a big hook with a chunk of salt pork and set it trolling by a strong line in the wake of the ship, to tempt the dainty appetite of a half-grown shark that had been for days picking up the offal from the cook's galley. We had noticed the pilot fish that accompanied him. Every shark has this beautiful fish for company, and sometimes two of them. The pilot fish seems to tell the shark what to do, and to be an inseparable companion. He may have given him bad advice about that chunk of pork, for after awhile the big savage turned over and made a snap at the bait, and was a gone shark. Every one may not know that a shark turns on his back to take any prey. The shape of his mouth requires it. Suddenly the cry went out that the shark was caught. The mate had managed the fishing, and he allowed the fellow to be towed awhile to wear out his extra enthusiasm. We had a memorable time of it getting the shark on board, but finally managed to land him on deck. There was nothing about it worth keeping except some of the skin, which answers for sandpaper when dry. We then watched the poor pilot fish, that didn't know what to make of his friend's disappearance. After awhile we set a bait for him also, and had pilot fish for supper. It was a beautifully marked fish, about sixteen inches long. In this way we varied the monotony of sea life, and passed the many days we were becalmed in the Southern seas. We occasionally saw other sails, or the smoke of some steamer would go by, when the Nacoochee lay like

"A painted ship upon a painted ocean."

ANCHORED IN THE CHAGRES RIVER.

In those beautiful nights of May the tropic seas were entrancing. Many an hour I looked over the stern and watched the rudder-way, and looked back on the trail left by the moving ship, where the ruffled waters show with a phosphorescent glow that seemed like fairyland—or sea. There, too, the moon and stars had a significance not felt ashore, for our skipper read them and learned his way from them in a manner that seemed very wonderful to "a land lubber." It was evident from the anxiety shown by the captain that we were nearing our port, and, sure enough, one day the land of Central America hove in sight. At early morning a sugar-loaf peak of the mighty

Andes was visible, looking at us over the waters and serving as a sign board for the sea. We ran down the coast with this sharp and rather unique monument for a guide; by its aid we steered a correct course, and toward noon, with favoring wind, we entered the Chagres river under command of one of the pilots of that country, a sea-going man of some queer nationality, who took us in safely and anchored the Nacoochee close under the guns of a fortress of the United States of Central America.

Chagres was then a great point for all the trade and commerce of California via the Isthmus route there. There was no Panama railroad, no Aspinwall, no line of steamers, as now, though the firm of Howland & Aspinwall was coining millions by its traffic. Stopping a day at Chagres, we chartered a boat to ascend the famous river to Gargona, whence there was a mountain trail across the isthmus to Panama. Chagres was then a wild, cut-throat sort of a place, where thousands of men gambled, and drank, and swore fearfully, though they could not safely drink liquors as they could in northern latitudes. We looked in a small sized "hell," where loose women and looser men dealt the favorite Spanish game—monte. I found here a cousin of mine own from St. Augustine, in Florida, who was trying to do a commission and forwarding business. He did do it for a while, though he managed not to live very long to do it. He was a strange being, whose life was full of adventures; brave, rash, generous, gay, loyal to friends and to enemies, and as brave and venturesome in business as a cavalier of the olden time or a knight of the—round table.

RIVER TRAVEL IN THE TROPICS.

At Chagres we chartered a rowboat capable of accommodating several and their baggage. Then some half a dozen of us went pushing, poling and rowing up the Chagres as fast or as slow as our lazy boatmen would furnish propelling power. It was a unique voyage. The dusky citizen of Columbia who owned the boat had a motley crew and several of them put forth their energies in various ways. Sometimes they sat and pulled at the oars, and sometimes they took long poles and shoved against a rapid current that was too much for mere oarsmen. They worked forward and walked along the gun-wales, while the half dozen of us who were passengers reclined under the shade of an awning that made a retreat from the scorching sun. It was something we were not used to, that tropical scenery, the trees bending far out from shore and pendent with vines and quaint mosses. The various specimens of "animated nature" that came within our range of vision where tropical birds with variegated plumage, parrots and parquets, and agile armed and nimble footed monkeys climbed among the overhanging branches, and with mischief in their eyes. Chattering as they did it, they threw small missiles at us as we passed beneath their haunts. It was all fresh and new; the modest villages we saw on the shores were filled with attraction. The natives had become accustomed to the presence of white men, and it was no new sight for them to go up in river boats as we did. They associated the sight of us with the thoughts of plunder, and everyone we met had "speculation in his eye" as he looked on us. At night we tied up at the bank and all slept. The first peep of day was a sign for new effort. We got food of ranches along the river and "made a live of it" comfortably.

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