

EZRA MEEKER.

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During the forenoon of this first day, while in one of those deepest of deep forests, where, if the sky was clear, and one could catch a spot you could see out overhead, one might see the stars as from a deep well, my pony stopped short, raised his head with his ears pricked up, indicating something unusual was at hand. Just then, I caught an indistinct sight of a movement ahead, and thought I heard voices, while the pony made an effort to turn and flee in the opposite direction.

Soon there appeared three women and eight children on foot, coming down the road in blissful ignorance of the presence of anyone but themselves in the forest.

"Why, stranger! Where on earth did you come from? Where are you going to, and what are you here for?" was asked by the foremost woman of the party, in such quick succession as to utterly preclude any answer, as she discovered me standing on the road holding my uneasy pony. Mutual explanations soon followed. I soon learned their teams had become exhausted, and that all the wagons but one had been left, and this one was on the road a few miles behind them; that they were entirely out of provisions and had had nothing to eat for twenty hours, except what natural food they had gathered, which was not much.

They eagerly inquired the distance to food, which I thought they might possibly reach that night, but in any event the next morning early. Meanwhile I had opened my sack of hard bread and gave each a cracker, in the eating of which the sound resembled pigs cracking dry, hard corn. Of those eleven persons, I only know of but one now alive, although, of course, the children soon outgrew my knowledge of them, but they never forgot me. Mrs. Anne Fawcet, the spokesman of the party, I knew well in after years, and although now eighty years old (she will pardon me for telling her age), is living in good circumstances a mile out from the town of Auburn, nearly twenty miles south of Seattle.

Mrs. Fawcet can scarcely be called a typical pioneer woman, yet there were many approaching her ways. She was of too independent a character to be molded into that class; too self-reliant to be altogether like her neighbor housewives; and yet was possessed of those sturdy virtues so common with the pioneer industry and frugality, coupled with unbounded hospitality. The other ladies of the party, Mrs. Herpsberger and Mrs. Hall, I never knew afterwards, and have no knowledge as to their fate, other

than that they arrived safely in the settlements. But we neither of us had time to parley or visit, and so the ladies with their children, barefoot. and ragged, bareheaded and unkempt, started down the mountain intent on reaching food, while I started up the road wondering whether or not this scene was to be often repeated as I advanced on my journey.

A dozen biscuits of hard bread is usually a very small matter, but with me it might mean a great deal. How far would I have to go? When could I find out? What would be the plight of my people when found? Or would I find them at all? Might they not pass by and be on the way down the Columbia River before I could reach the main immigrant trail? These and kindred questions weighed heavily on my mind as I slowly and gradually ascended the mountain.