

## OCTAVIUS PRINGLE—1846-47

(Source: "Experiences of An Immigrant Boy in 1846-47," by Octavius Pringle.)

"It was on the 15th day of April, 1846, that a family of nine persons, consisting of father, mother, three sisters and four brothers, left Warren county, Missouri, equipped with two ox teams and provisioned for a six months' journey of over two thousand miles, across the almost unknown, savage wilderness of wild, savage beasts and men, of vast plains of sand and desert wastes and wild and rugged mountains to the then Territory of Oregon, upon the sunset shores of the Pacific Ocean. The personnel of the above family were as follows: Virgil K. and Pherna T. Pringle (father and mother), Virgilia E., Clark S., Alero M., Sarelia L., and Emma P. Pringle, Charles P. Fulerton and Octavius M. Pringle, the writer of this narrative.

"When arriving upon the frontiers of Missouri, we were joined by our grandmother, Mrs. Tabitha Brown, who, after arriving in Oregon, became the principal founder of the Pacific University at Forest Grove, and several of our old neighbors, making sixteen wagons in the company, but later, while passing through the Territory of Kansas, we were joined by enough more to swell the number to sixty-nine wagons, manned by one hundred and fifty men, organized for defense against the perfidious and treacherous savages as best we might. To the imagination of the writer of this article (then a lad just past 14 years of age, but at the time of this writing nearly fourscore years), to see this long concourse of wagons as the sun sank to the western horizon each day as they swung around into a circle forming a corral as a means of defense in which to gather and protect our stock, upon which our very existence depended, the night guards stationed at the opening of the corral, the grave and anxious expressions upon the countenances of parents and elders of the company, the free-go-easy sports and shouts of the youth around the campfires, the lovemaking of those a little older, that often resulted in nuptials later on and laying the foundation of many a family in the new Oregon, and then in the morning to watch the unwinding corral slowly stretch out over the plain and anon wind in and out in its serpentine course over hills and mountains where the scene was ever changing and ever new, was and is still a vivid panorama that has never faded from my mind, although sixty-five years have since flown by.

"Little did any of us then think that we were going to a land abounding in inexhaustible resources, to plant and lay the foundation of an empire of progress and development, whose benign light was destined to radiate to the east, west, north and south and bless the world with a new vibrating pulsation of progress and brotherly fellowship it had never felt before; an empire that would not only spread its benign influence along the shore of America and over its hills and mountains and over the inhabitants of the older states of this union, but over the Orient and the rest of the Occident as well.

"After many months of weary travel over scorching, sandy deserts, fertile plains and valleys, rough and rugged mountains, passing through

many Indian tribes, some friendly, others hostile, finally with teams worn out, with many of them perished and left by the wayside, with provisions so nearly exhausted that every one was on short rations, with many members of the company buried in unmarked graves by the wayside and every few days adding new graves to the number, with those who survived hungry, weak, travel worn and discouraged; in this condition and late in the year, with winter storms beating upon us, we reached the southern border of the Territory of Oregon, a vast territory at that time extending from California on the south to Canada on the north, and from the Pacific Ocean on the west to the summit of the Rocky mountains on the east. This vast territory is now divided into four states, namely, Washington, Idaho, Utah and Oregon, whose wealth of resources runs up into billions of dollars in grazing, agriculture, timber and mines of a great variety of minerals and metals, including vast deposits of coal, all of which is now being developed, but to us poor immigrants it was all worthless. Food and shelter were all that had any value to us. Many of our wagons were left to rot in the mountains, as the teams that remained were not sufficient to move the empty wagons, yet we were nearly three hundred miles away from succor or help and the streams were beginning to swell from the cold winter rains. The extremity had now come, with famine and starvation staring us in the face.

After holding a family consultation, it was decided that the writer of this narrative, Octavius M., should take the only animal of the horse kind (a mare) and go with a couple of young men who were going over the only mountain range that intervened between us and the little settlement in the Willamette Valley, which was three hundred miles away, in the vicinity of the old Methodist mission then known as Salem, now the capital of the state of Oregon. I was to accompany them only as far as a depot, where I could get provisions which had been sent out by this settlement spoken of above for the relief of immigrants that had such prospect of perishing. This depot was about one hundred and twenty-five miles away, in the upper stretches of the Willamette Valley. It took us three days to reach the depot. Here I expected to meet some parties that would be going south to assist friends in need of help, but in this I was destined to be disappointed and camped one night at this depot. You may well imagine the disappointment and dreadful fear that came over this boy of 14 years when it was known that his return trip must be made alone, and that through a wild country uninhabited save by wild beasts and possibly wild Indians. But with undaunted courage and many misgivings he resolved to show no cowardice and thinking of parents, brothers and sisters who might be suffering for food, resolved to make the attempt.

"The next morning (one long to be remembered by that boy), after lashing upon the poor mare as much dried peas and wheat graham flour as was thought best she could carry in her emaciated condition, without my weight being added, I started on the return trip. It was one of those dark, gloomy, foggy days with a constant drizzling rain, and under the tall, overshadowing forests, dripping with water, it was little better than night. After several miles' travel, I came to the mountain trail, and had not gone far up the mountain when a very large bear track

came into the trail just ahead of me. It looked very fresh, the muddy water was still filtering into the tracks in places. I expected at every turn in the trail to come upon the monster that made them, but after following them miles, as it seemed to me, to my great relief it turned off of the trail. But directly I heard a snort peculiar to the bear and a crashing among the sallow brush that thrilled me with fear, nearly lifting the hair off of my head, but presently it was manifest that the animal was more afraid of my outfit than I had been of it, and plodding along, I met with no adventure the rest of the day. But, lackaday! as the sun began to sink into the west, and as I came to a promontory that overlooked my prospective camping place, where I expected to meet some of the advanced immigrants with whom I could camp, you can again imagine my sad and fearful loneliness and the dread of spending the night alone in such a wilderness. The argument went on in my mind whether to camp or struggle on all night, or until I met the company I was looking for. But as myself and horse were both tired and hungry, though I felt but little of the pangs of the latter and but meager means at my command to gratify it, if ever so keen, but for the poor mare food was in superabundance, as the grass was like a meadow waving in the soft south wind and nearly as green as the midsummer, and the thought of losing the trail during the night determined me to camp. I selected a large fir tree, that stood upon the outskirts of a grove of woods, with drooping boughs, under whose roof-like shelter it looked as though it had not rained for half a century, but I was not the first one that it had sheltered from the storms, as there were the relics of an Indian camp still remaining, and selecting the best spot of grass and picketing out the mare I arranged my camp as best I could. As the darkness slowly crept over the valleys and mountains, the rain ceased and the dark, gloomy clouds broke up into rifts and in orderly procession were drifting majestically to the north before a soft south wind, while the nearly full moon was playing hide-and-seek with the rifted clouds, amidst the almost constant clang and squawk of the waterfowl upon their annual migrations south, and in the dark woods close by, the hoo-ou-hoo-hoo-ho-o-o-hoo-osh of the big owl chorused by the chilling and lonesome producing k-a-z-e-az-zz-z-ea-rrr of the little screech owl, accompanied by the long drawn-out, lonesome lament of the ever-present coyote. This was the serenade that accompanied my preparations for supper, which consisted of a half pint of graham flour moistened in a tin cup (the only vessel of any kind I had). When this was eaten I then prepared my bed by spreading a quilt over some hazel rods already in position under the fir trees (left by some Indian camper) and then wrapped the blanket around me as best I could to go to the sleep of forgetfulness, if possible, but this was not possible.

"Before retiring I examined some ash trees, that stood within fifty paces of my bed, that I could easily climb into if I were disturbed by some wild beast of prey, if I had a chance to reach it before being caught. Being weary and boy-like, I would ever and anon drop into a sleep, only to be startled by my own fears or the bark of the coyote and the squawk of the birds. About midnight I was awakened by the crackling of the brush close by. In an instant I was on my feet, and hearing the heavy breathing of some large animal I gathered up my be-

longings and threw the sack of precious peas and flour over a low limb, then climbing higher up, to a place where I could sit with some ease, I wrapped the two pieces of bedding about me and literally went to roost for the rest of the night. Thus the night wore away, while the serenade around me went on. Imagine my chagrin and disgust next morning when I discovered the cause of my fright, and flight to the tree, was an old, emaciated immigrant cow, left, because she could go no further, to either winter it through or perish (I learned in the spring that she was found all right and in good condition).

"After breakfast, which again consisted of graham flour and cold water, I started on the trail and resolved not to spend another night like the one just passed. I reflected and felt it would be better to camp with hostile Indians and be butchered outright than to be tortured with such fear as I had endured, and I resolved to keep the trail all the next night if I did not find some one to camp with, either civilized or uncivilized. Oh! if I could only meet those dear ones once more before nightfall.

"As I was passing through the Umpqua valley, wild geese and deer were all about me. They were very tame. The deer would gather in clumps among the oaks on the hills and gaze down upon me and then scurry away. In the afternoon I discovered an Indian wickiup, constructed partially of canvas and partly of fir boughs, hard by the trail that I must pass. I hesitated but a moment, as I knew full well I could not hide from them if they wished to do me evil, so putting on a bold front I went up to their camp and found it occupied only by squaws and children. The men were out hunting deer. These women used a few English words and I soon learned that they came from Lee's mission at Salem and they had some of the utensils of civilization, all of which relieved my fears wonderfully. They took care of my things and myself as though I had been a brother, and there was nothing to fear from them if the men were as friendly as the women and children. When the men came in they reported the killing of fifteen deer that day. During the night the squaws prepared a saddle of venison. The major part of the meat had been cut off for drying, but the remainder was kept before the fire roasting and drying, and in the morning they gave this to me to lunch upon as I tramped along the trail. When I first came to the camp they set out a pot of boiled venison ribs and backbone without salt or any seasoning whatever, but my appetite did not need any. When the men came I found I was among friends and that I had nothing to fear from these people. They treated me as royally as though I had been a prince, or nearer of kin than grandpa Adam would make us. Being assigned a corner in the tepee, I rolled up and slept the sleep of peace and quiet dreams.

"In the morning my dark hosts were as attentive as the evening before, having horse and pack ready with that hunk of roast venison to lunch upon by the way and also a whole carcass of a deer for my people, for which I was to pay them in powder, lead and caps. When we came thus far, thus equipped, I struck the lonely trail, not knowing when but hoping to meet the loved ones before nightfall.

"Some time near noon, as I was trudging along, munching roast venison and wondering with anxious fear if the boy were doomed to ex-

perience another night alone in this wilderness, I presently rounded a sharp point that jutted out into the valley and I heard a welcome, familiar voice just around this point that sounded more precious than that of an angel; it was that of my brother Clark as he exclaimed, "Gee up, Buck!" addressed to an always delinquent ox. A few rods further and two wagons, that had been our home for seven months, and the loved ones were in sight, moving slowly along toward me. Oh! the emotions that swelled and heaved in the boy's bosom with the deepest emotions of thankfulness to God, our Father in heaven, whom this boy had learned to love and trust some years ago, and in those hours of darkness and fear had been his only solace and trust to protect him from the savages surrounding him. Boy as he was, no one can realize the consolation it was to feel that God could protect His children, and when he saw father, mother, brothers and sisters all intact, and was embraced in the arms of a loving mother and smothered with sobs and kisses of gratitude and thankfulness for the return of her boy, his mother declared she would never again let one of her children go alone into such a wilderness, saying that the vision of her boy being torn by wild beasts or tortured by savages would startle her in her sleep and distort her dreams, they having heard nothing of me nor I of them for six days, averring that she would rather we had all perished together than endure the agonies of the last six days. But happily we were all together once more, with no fear of savages, as most of the Indians were gone and the few that were in these valleys were friendly, or on their way to the happy hunting grounds beyond.

"After these greetings and joys had sufficiently subsided, the first good camping place was the scene of a great feast of boiled peas, roast venison and graham bread, which made a bountiful feast. From this on our progress was slow, only a few miles each day. One day brought us to the Indian camp where I had lodged two nights before, and owing to the weakened condition of the teams and the wet and soft state of the ground, we determined to remain here three days to recruit, and to bury one of our fellow travelers, a young lady of about 18 years of age, and also to repair shoes and make new ones for those that had none to repair.

"Father and myself were practical shoemakers, having run a shoe shop while in Missouri, and had with us a small supply of both upper and sole leather for such emergencies, also a kit of cobblers' tools. While here we made one pair of shoes for an Indian and in exchange received the carcass of three fine, large deer.

"A week's travel brought us over the Calapooia mountains into the Willamette Valley to a point just above where the city of Eugene now stands. Here the teams utterly gave out and could pull the wagons no farther, and two of the oxen died under the cold rains and heavy snow-fall. Just what to do in this extremity was the perplexing question, but two more families joined us here in much the same predicament as ourselves; one was the Lebo and the other the Mansfield family, the father of the latter being an expert boatman. As our teams could carry us no further, he proposed to utilize the Willamette river and build a boat large enough to carry the most of us and our goods down to the settlements, as it was reported that there were no falls to intervene.

This was finally decided upon as the only alternative. Then with dull and insufficient tools we attacked a very large fir tree standing near the river. After many days' labor it was finally launched a few days before Christmas. The two families of Messrs. Lebo and Mansfield, consisting of nine persons and all their effects, went aboard this crude craft to navigate a strange river that no white man had ever explored, but the voyage proved successful and they finally landed safely at the old Methodist mission ten miles below Salem, on the east bank of the Willamette river. This boat or canoe was used for a ferry boat at this place for several years after.

"About the time these people had the boat ready to sail, an uncle of ours came from Forest Grove, to our relief, with some provisions, and by hiring some half-breed French that happened to come along with a number of pack horses, father's family was enabled to make the rest of the trip by land down the west side of the Willamette river through what is now Lane, Benton and Polk counties. Though less than seventy-five miles, we had no small task, as we had to cross the Long Tom, Mary's, Luckiamute and Rickreal rivers without any bridge or ferry, and every small, insignificant branch, creek and swell was a swimming river, but, nevertheless, upon Christmas Day we landed at Salem, bare-foot, weary and worn out.

"Before leaving the boat-building camp, all the immigrants who had got this far realized the impossibility of taking their stock any further, so they joined together and arranged for three men to remain and look after the stock until spring. These men took possession of an unfinished cabin and had to depend upon their rifles for protection and deer for food. The cabin was built by Mr. Eugene Skinner, the founder of Eugene city.

"Notwithstanding all the vicissitudes of such a journey and the trying ordeals that laid low so many of our traveling companions in unmarked graves by the way, yet the protection of God, the Heavenly Father, was over us, as neither sickness nor accidents, to speak of, happened to us in all these months.

"We had just got comfortably housed when it began to turn cold and snowed for three weeks, and we would surely have perished in such weather had we not reached shelter.

"When we reached the summit of the Polk county hills just west of Salem, we looked down upon Salem, prairies bordered with grand forests and settlers' cabins and a few buildings clustered around that old mission, called the Oregon Institute, now the Willamette University, and it looked as if a scrap of civilization had made a tremendous leap of three thousand miles and dropped down in this beautiful valley. To this hungry, footsore and weary boy it looked like a paradise and the end of a long and weary pilgrimage."