

MISCELLANEOUS.

GENERAL COOKE'S MARCH.

[Detroit Free Press, June 6, 1865.]

There died in Detroit recently a man who was concerned in one of the most unique achievements recorded by the military annals of the United States. That achievement belongs to the prodigies performed by the heroes of the far west; and thereby, doubtless, hangs the explanation of why it has not taken its proper place in history.

Certain it is that the passing of General P. St. George Cooke, though noted through the press associations wherever newspapers are published in this country, was attended by no reference to his leadership of the Mormon battalion in its arduous march from Iowa to the Pacific coast, across the unknown deserts of the southwest. The obituaries reviewed the general's brilliant war record in the battle fought with Mexico and the southern states, and cited his claims to honorable mention—all save the one of which he was proudest and which entitles him to separate and special distinction.

This omission is less curious when you come to observe that the achievement in question—divorced from all consideration of the commander—plays a picturesque and remarkable part in the history of the western states, and is yet less known to even the student of history than are the most trivial transactions of the Plymouth pilgrims. Lack of information respecting the battalion is nevertheless in line with that system of eastern education which fires the schoolboy's imagination with the least exploit of Ethan Allen and Paul Jones, and passes over, with a paragraph the adventures of such captains as Sam Houston and the Spanish explorers of the southwest, which counts the steps down which Putnam rode his horse, names the villages aroused by Revere, but overlooks that amazing ride of Whitman across an unmapped continent, which saved Oregon to the Union.

Even the encyclopedias are silent on the subject of the Mormon march under Cooke's command; scarce a historian has seized upon that singular occurrence of the Mexican war. It is all but a lost page in the great romance of the Pacific pioneers. Yet one must thumb patiently his history of the world to find a parallel.

Is there anything in the anabasis of invading armies which outmatches it as an object lesson of pertinacity and endurance? Xenophon—that war correspondent for posterity—has left us his imperishable account of the ten thousand's retreat up the Tigris valley to the shores of the Euxine—a five months' march of something less than 1,000 miles in a strange land, among savages. But this was an enforced retreat of much less than the distance accomplished by the Mormons in their voluntary progress. And who may say that the wilderness of Kurdistan, the highlands of Armenia and Georgia, were more forbidding than the wastes of New Mexico and the barrier of the Rockies; that the wild men of Persia were more warlike than the Apaches.

Napoleon's retreat from Moscow beset by Russian forces from Finland and the

Danube, were merely a tremendous disaster. We turn half sickened from the spectacle of the 90,000 soldiers who perished by the way between October 18 and December 6, and forget the glories of the emperor's campaign as we view the beggarly remnant which tottered into Vilna.

Sherman's march to the sea need not be seriously considered in this connection. Whatever may be thought of it as a strategic movement, as a march it was all but unopposed; and those 300 miles in twenty-four days were made in a land of plenty, through the heart of Georgia.

Cooke came long before Sherman in this matter of marching; but it may be fancied that this American colonel of the 40s had Xenophon, at least, in mind when on that January morning the Pacific burst in view from the green hills of San Luis Rey, and with pardonable pride he wrote:

Headquarters Mormon Battalion,
Mission of San Diego, January 30, 1847.

Orders No. 1.

The lieutenant-colonel commanding congratulates the battalion on their safe arrival on the shores of the Pacific ocean, and the conclusion of their march of over 2,000 miles.

History may be searched in vain for an equal march of infantry. Half of it has been through a wilderness where nothing but savages and wild beasts are found, or deserts where, for want of water, there is no living creature. There, with almost hopeless labor, we have dug deep wells, which the future traveler will enjoy. Without a guide who has traversed them, we have ventured into trackless table lands where water was not found for several marches. With crowbar and pick and ax in hand we have worked our way over mountains which seemed to defy aught save the wild goat, and hewed a passage through a chasm of living rock more narrow than our wagons. To bring these first wagons to the Pacific, we have preserved the strength of our mules by herding them over large tracts, which you have laboriously guarded without loss. The garrison of four presidios of Senora, concentrated within the walls of Tucson, gave us no pause. We drove them out, with their artillery; but our intercourse with the citizens was unmarked by a single act of injustice. Thus, marching half naked and half fed, and living upon wild animals, we have discovered and made a road of great value to our country.

Arrived at the first settlement of California, after a single day's rest, you cheerfully turn off from the route to this point of promised repose to enter upon a campaign, and meet as we supposed, the approach of the enemy; and this, too, without even salt to season your sole subsistence of fresh meat.

It was early in 1846 that the Mormons, driven from Illinois, as they had already been from Ohio and Missouri, were pressing toward the Pacific. A definite objective point had not been determined; but California seemed a land of promise, and thither some of them were soon to make their way from New York by boat. Meanwhile President Polk was laying plans for the oc-

cupation of California, and this was the Mormons' opportunity. Elder Jesse C. Little, aided by Thomas L. Kané and Amos Kendall, petitioned the President for help. "If you will assist us in this crisis," said Little "I hereby pledge my honor as the representative of this people, that the whole body will stand ready at your call, and act as one man in the land to which we are going; and should our territory be invaded, we will hold ourselves ready to enter the field of battle, and then, like our patriotic fathers, make the battle-field our graves, or gain our liberty."

The outbreak of the Mexican war clinched these negotiations. It was decided to raise a battalion of 500 men, for twelve months' service, who would march by way of Santa Fe to California and late in June Captain James Allen of the 1st dragoons repaired to the Mormon camp at Mount Pisgah, Ia., and made known the government's intention. But the Mormons hesitated. They had no desire to work their passage in this way, leaving wives and children behind them. It seemed too great a sacrifice; it meant a serious drain of strength from the already impoverished army of families setting out on their toilsome journey of exile through an inhospitable country. It was even reported, and credited by many, that the whole scheme was a plan to cripple or even annihilate them.

Then the spirit of prophecy stirred Brigham Young. The battalion must be raised, he said. Duty to country and church demand it; and of those who went, not a man would fall before the nation's foe—the only fighting would be with wild beasts.

So the five hundred men were recruited in a fortnight, and mustered in at Council Bluffs on July 16. Three days later there was a farewell dance; the volunteers subscribed a large proportion of their pay for their families and the Mormon poor, and the march was begun. Fort Leavenworth was reached August 1st, and here, during a halt of two weeks, Col. Allen fell sick and died. The march to Santa Fe was resumed August 14th, under the temporary leadership of Lieut. A. J. Smith, of the regular army; and now their sufferings began—sufferings from heat and bad water and from the tyranny—so they claimed—of the commanding officer, and of Surgeon Sanderson, who dosed them with nauseous drugs against their will. By the time they entered Santa Fe, on October 12th, they were all but goaded to mutiny.

Here Lieutenant-Colonel Cook assumed command, acting on instruction from General Kearney to open a wagon road to the Pacific by the Gila route. The undertaking might well have dismayed men much better prepared for it. And what was the condition of these Mormons? "The battalion," writes Colonel Cooke in his journal, "were never drilled, and, though obedient, have little discipline; they exhibit great heedlessness and ignorance and some obstinacy." And again, in another account of his: "Everything conspired to discourage the undertaking of marching this battalion 1,100 miles for the much greater part through an unknown wilderness without road or trail, and with a wagon train. It was enlisted too much by families; some were too old, some feeble and some to