CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND.

Leaving M'Connell and a few other Cambridge men to take charge of the Great Telescope, Marston and Belfast in little more than an hour after the receipt of the exciting dispatch, were scudding down the slopes of Long's Peak by the only possible route--the inclined railroad. This mode of travelling, however, highly satisfactory as far as it went, ceased altogether at the mountain foot, at the point where the Dale River formed a junction with Cache la Poudre Creek. But Marston, having already mapped out the whole journey with some care and forethought, was ready for almost every emergency. Instinctively feeling that the first act of the Baltimore Gun Club would be to send a Committee to San Francisco to investigate matters, he had determined to meet this deputation on the route, and his only trouble now was to determine at what point he would be most likely to catch them. His great start, he knew perfectly well, could not put him more than a day in advance of them: they having the advantage of a railroad nearly all the way, whilst himself and Belfast could not help losing much time in struggling through ravines, canyons, mountain precipices, and densely tangled forests, not to mention the possibility of a brush or two with prowling Indians, before they could strike the line of the Pacific Railroad, along which he knew the Club men to be approaching. After a few hours rest at La Porte, a little settlement lately started in the valley, early in the morning they took the stage that passed through from Denver

to Cheyenne, a town at that time hardly a year old but already flourishing, with a busy population of several thousand inhabitants.

Losing not a moment at Cheyenne, where they arrived much sooner than they had anticipated, they took places in Wells, Fargo and Co.'s Overland Stage Mail bound east, and were soon flying towards Julesburg at the rate of twelve miles an hour. Here Marston was anxious to meet the Club men, as at this point the Pacific Railroad divided into two branches--one bearing north, the other south of the Great Salt Lake --and he feared they might take the wrong one.

But he arrived in Julesburg fully 10 hours before the Committee, so that himself and Belfast had not only ample time to rest a little after their rapid flight from Long's Peak, but also to make every possible preparation for the terrible journey of more than fifteen hundred miles that still lay before them.

This journey, undertaken at a most unseasonable period of the year, and over one of the most terrible deserts in the world, would require a volume for itself. Constantly presenting the sharpest points of contrast between the most savage features of wild barbaric nature on the one hand, and the most touching traits of the sweetest humanity on the other, the story of our Club men's adventures, if only well told, could hardly fail to be highly interesting. But instead of a volume, we can give it only a chapter, and that a short one.

From Julesburg, the last station on the eastern end of the Pacific

Railroad, to Cisco, the last station on its western end, the distance is probably about fifteen hundred miles, about as far as Constantinople is from London, or Moscow from Paris. This enormous stretch of country had to be travelled all the way by, at the best, a six horse stage tearing along night and day at a uniform rate, road or no road, of ten miles an hour. But this was the least of the trouble. Bands of hostile Indians were a constant source of watchfulness and trouble, against which even a most liberal stock of rifles and revolvers were not always a reassurance. Whirlwinds of dust often overwhelmed the travellers so completely that they could hardly tell day from night, whilst blasts of icy chill, sweeping down from the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains, often made them imagine themselves in the midst of the horrors of an Arctic winter.

The predominant scenery gave no pleasure to the eye or exhilaration to the mind. It was of the dreariest description. Days and days passed with hardly a house to be seen, or a tree or a blade of grass. I might even add, or a mountain or a river, for the one was too often a heap of agglomerated sand and clay cut into unsightly chasms by the rain, and the other generally degenerated into a mere stagnant swamp, its shallowness and dryness increasing regularly with its length. The only houses were log ranches, called Relays, hardly visible in their sandy surroundings, and separate from each other by a mean distance of ten miles. The only trees were either stunted cedars, so far apart, as to be often denominated Lone Trees; and, besides wormwood, the only plant was the sage plant, about two feet high, gray, dry, crisp, and emitting a sharp pungent odor by no means pleasant.

In fact, Barbican and his companions had seen nothing drearier or savager in the dreariest and savagest of lunar landscapes than the scenes occasionally presented to Marston and his friends in their headlong journey on the track of the great Pacific Railroad. Here, bowlders, high, square, straight and plumb as an immense hotel, blocked up your way; there, lay an endless level, flat as the palm of your hand, over which your eye might roam in vain in search of something green like a meadow, yellow like a cornfield, or black like ploughed ground--a mere boundless waste of dirty white from the stunted wormwood, often rendered misty with the clouds of smarting alkali dust.

Occasionally, however, this savage scenery decidedly changed its character. Now, a lovely glen would smile before our travellers, traversed by tinkling streams, waving with sweet grasses, dotted with little groves, alive with hares, antelopes, and even elks, but apparently never yet trodden by the foot of man. Now, our Club men felt like travelling on clouds, as they careered along the great plateau west of the Black Hills, fully 8,000 feet above the level of the sea, though even there the grass was as green and fresh as if it grew in some sequestered valley of Pennsylvania. Again,

"In this untravelled world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever as they moved,"

they would find themselves in an immense, tawny, treeless plain, outlined by mountains so distant as to resemble fantastic cloud piles.

Here for days they would have to skirt the coasts of a Lake, vast, unruffled, unrippled, apparently of metallic consistency, from whose sapphire depths rose pyramidal islands to a height of fully three thousand feet above the surface.

In a few days all would change. No more sand wastes, salt water flats, or clouds of blinding alkali dust. The travellers' road, at the foot of black precipitous cliffs, would wind along the brink of a roaring torrent, whose devious course would lead them into the heart of the Sierras, where misty peaks solemnly sentinelled the nestling vales still smiling in genial summer verdure. Across these they were often whirled through immense forests of varied character, here dense enough to obscure the track, there swaying in the sweet sunlight and vocal with joyous birds of bright and gorgeous plumage. Then tropical vegetation would completely hide the trail, crystal lakes would obstruct it, cascades shooting down from perpendicular rocks would obliterate it, mountain passes barricaded by basaltic columns would render it uncertain, and on one occasion it was completely covered up by a fall of snow to a depth of more than twenty feet.

But nothing could oppose serious delay to our travellers. Their motto was ever "onward!" and what they lost in one hour by some mishap they endeavored to recover on the next by redoubled speed. They felt that they would be no friends of Barbican's if they were discouraged by impossibilities. Besides, what would have been real impossibilities at another time, several concurrent circumstances now rendered comparatively easy.

The surveys, the gradings, the cuttings, and the other preliminary labors in the great Pacific Railroad, gave them incalculable aid. Horses, help, carriages, provisions were always in abundance. Their object being well known, they had the best wishes of every hand on the road. People remained up for them all hours of the night, no matter at what station they were expected. The warmest and most comfortable of meals were always ready for them, for which no charge would be taken on any account. In Utah, a deputation of Mormons galloped alongside them for forty miles to help them over some points of the road that had been often found difficult. The season was the finest known for many years. In short, as an old Californian said as he saw them shooting over the rickety bridge that crossed the Bear River at Corinne: "they had everything in their favor--luck as well as pluck!"

The rate at which they performed this terrible ride across the Continent and the progress they made each day, some readers may consider worthy of a few more items for the sake of future reference. Discarding the ordinary overland mail stage as altogether too slow for their purpose, they hired at Julesburg a strong, well built carriage, large enough to hold them all comfortably; but this they had to replace twice before they came to their journey's end. Their team always consisted of the best six horses that could be found, and their driver was the famous Hank Monk of California, who, happening to be in Julesburg about that time, volunteered to see them safely landed in Cisco on the summit of the Sierra Nevada. They were enabled to change horses as near as possible every hour, by telegraphing ahead in the morning, during the

day, and often far into the hours of night.

Starting from Julesburg early in the morning of the 17th, their first resting place for a few hours at night was Granite Canyon, twenty miles west of Cheyenne, and just at the foot of the pass over the Black Hills. On the 18th, night-fall found them entering St. Mary's, at the further end of the pass between Rattle Snake Hills and Elk Mountain. It was after 5 o'clock and already dark on the 19th, when the travellers, hurrying with all speed through the gloomy gorge of slate formation leading to the banks of the Green River, found the ford too deep to be ventured before morning. The 20th was a clear cold day very favorable for brisk locomotion, and the bright sun had not quite disappeared behind the Wahsatch Mountains when the Club men, having crossed the Bear River, began to leave the lofty plateau of the Rocky Mountains by the great inclined plane marked by the lines of the Echo and the Weber Rivers on their way to the valley of the Great American Desert.

Quitting Castle Rock early on the morning of the 21st, they soon came in sight of the Great Salt Lake, along the northern shores of which they sped all day, taking shelter after night-fall at Terrace, in a miserable log cabin surrounded by piles of drifting sand. The 22d was a terrible day. The sand was blinding, the alkali dust choking, the ride for five or six hours was up considerable grade; still they had accomplished their 150 miles before resting for the night at Elko, even at this period a flourishing little village on the banks of the Humboldt. After another smothering ride on the 23d, they rested, at Winnemucca, another flourishing village, situated at the precise point in the desert where

the Little Humboldt joins Humboldt River, without, however, making the channel fuller or wider. The 24th was decidedly the hardest day, their course lying through the worst part of the terrible Nevada desert. But a glimpse of the Sierras looming in the western horizon gave them courage and strength enough to reach Wadsworth, at their foot, a little before midnight. Our travellers had now but one day's journey more to make before reaching the railroad at Cisco, but, this being a very steep ascent nearly all the way up, each mile cost almost twice as much time and exertion.

At last, late in the evening of Christmas Day, amidst the most enthusiastic cheers of all the inhabitants of Cisco, who welcomed them with a splendid pine brand procession, Marston and his friends, thoroughly used up, feet swelled, limbs bruised, bones aching, stomachs seasick, eyes bleared, ears ringing, and brains on fire for want of rest, took their places in the State Car waiting for them, and started without a moment's delay for Sacramento, about a hundred miles distant. How delicious was the change to our poor travellers! Washed, refreshed, and lying at full length on luxurious sofas, their sensations, as the locomotive spun them down the ringing grooves of the steep Sierras, can be more easily imagined than described. They were all fast asleep when the train entered Sacramento, but the Mayor and the other city authorities who had waited up to receive them, had them carried carefully, so as not to disturb their slumbers, on board the Yo Semite, a fine steamer belonging to the California Navigation Company, which landed them safely at San Francisco about noon on the 26th, after accomplishing the extraordinary winter journey of 1500 miles over land

in little more than nine days, only about 200 miles being done by steam.

Half-past two P.M. found our travellers bathed, dressed, shaved, dined, and ready to receive company in the grand parlor of the Occidental Hotel. Captain Bloomsbury was the first to call.

Marston hobbled eagerly towards him and asked:

"What have you done towards fishing them up, Captain?"

"A good deal, Mr. Marston; indeed almost everything is ready."

"Is that really the case, Captain?" asked all, very agreeably surprised.

"Yes, gentlemen, I am most happy to state that I am quite in earnest."

"Can we start to-morrow?" asked General Morgan. "We have not a moment to spare, you know."

"We can start at noon to-morrow at latest," replied the Captain, "if the foundry men do a little extra work to-night."

"We must start this very day, Captain Bloomsbury," cried Marston resolutely; "Barbican has been lying two weeks and thirteen hours in the depths of the Pacific! If he is still alive, no thanks to Marston! He must by this time have given me up! The grappling irons must be got on board at once, Captain, and let us start this evening!"

At half-past four that very evening, a shot from the Fort and a lowering of the Stars and Stripes from its flagstaff saluted the Susquehanna, as she steamed proudly out of the Golden Gate at the lively rate of fifteen knots an hour.