

**FOLLOWING
FREMONT.**

THE CONSERVATIVE is interested in the movements of Captain J. C. Fremont, of Georgia, who traveled in the West in the summer of 1842 and in the two succeeding years, but is in some doubt as to the degree of credit, in the history of the development of the Western country, to which those travels may entitle him. The prevalent belief, among persons only generally informed on the subject, places Fremont in the same category of explorers with Columbus; but this is wholly incorrect. With the exception of a few eccentric spots, such as the islands in the Great Salt Lake and the summit of Fremont's Peak, he visited no part of the country with which white men had not long been familiar. In fact, the Reverend Samuel Parker's book, "An Exploring Tour beyond the Rocky Mountains," with a large map, was in its third edition in 1842; and Fremont simply followed through the greater part of his course the trail of the Oregon emigrants, which was so well-defined that he calls it a road. "The road led along a ridge," "the road kept the valley," he says frequently. Even before this migration began, the country had been pervaded by hunters and trappers, who were estimated as early as 1835 to number "a few thousand."

Another current impression is that Fremont selected a route for the Pacific railroad. This is equally erroneous.

The Railroad. Except that in crossing the plains he went up the valleys of the Platte and the Republican, which neither he nor the railroads could avoid, his route was widely separated from that afterward followed by them. Three out of his four crossings of the Rocky Mountains were effected by way of the South Pass, which is as innocent of railroads today as it was then. Nor, so far as THE CONSERVATIVE has been able to discover, do his journals contain a single reference to railroads. The Presbyterian missionary above mentioned, however, had this to say seven years before: "There would be no difficulty in the way of constructing a rail road from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean; and probably the time may not be very far distant, when trips will be made across the continent, as they have been made to the Niagara Falls, to see Nature's wonders."

THE CONSERVATIVE would not deprive any candidate for the presidency, living or dead, of his just meed of honor; but it can neither perceive wherein Pathfinder Fremont deserved that appellation, nor why he is entitled to more credit for his explorations than a thousand other men, who had not the government behind them. Nor does it consider his account of his travels especially diverting. In fact, one can hardly follow his coffee-pot, his barometers and his unhappy German topographer

through all their ups and downs, without becoming somewhat weary of the narrator's personality.

If to come upon a route one has not previously traveled and travel it, making use of the most

Pathfinders. up-to-date facilities, is to be a pathfinder, then the member of THE CONSERVATIVE staff delegated to look into Fremont has as good a right to the title as that explorer himself.

Fremont started with a menagerie of oxen and asses, an arsenal, an astronomical observatory, a rubber boat, 22 Frenchmen, one German topographer, one Illinois hunter, one Kit Carson and two boys. THE CONSERVATIVE started with an old hat, a toothbrush, a map, a volume of Fremont's travels and some four hundred entire strangers, on the morning train from Omaha over the Union Pacific. Three days later THE CONSERVATIVE was back in Omaha, after having eaten dinner in Salt Lake City; while Captain Fremont had just reached the ford of the Kansas, near Topeka, and was preparing to swim it.

The two routes do not converge for some 200 miles. Meantime there is plenty to see from our special rear-platform. The first token of Fremont is a town named after him; just why is not apparent, for though he passed down the left bank of the Platte in returning from his first expedition, there is no record of his having halted at that point. He gives a bare minute of an observation for latitude at the mouth of the Loup, and another three days later at the mouth of the "Elk Horn." It must have been near the site of Fremont, however, that he met a messenger returning from Mr. P. Sarpy's trading-post at Bellevue, with a "welcome supply of provisions and a very kind note."

We pass through many towns, with elevators and stockyards at each; the country between is one great farm, with a powerful outcropping just at present of spring green. Our hungry predecessors found one village, and that on the south bank; it was the village of the Grand Pawnees, who it seems were agriculturists, for they had vegetables for sale. When Fremont passed they were shucking their corn, or whatever was the Grand Pawnee equivalent for that operation. If the Indians raised regular crops at that date, how could the sweeping negation of the fertility of Nebraska soil have gained currency?

Here we cross the Loup; three picturesque river-names thus far, the Butterfly, the Elkhorn and the Wolf. But for sheer suggestiveness, a very recent signpost at a bare crossing outdoes them all: "Portal," it says; throwing open to you at a sweep the vastest of human theaters, the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. This crossing of the Loup fork, has, however, unique associations of its own, for here, according to the theory worked out by the late Judge

Savage, stood the great city of Quivira, visited by an explorer from Mexico in 1662. It was miles in extent and contained many-storied houses in plenty. The case is stated at length in Volume II of the State Historical Society's papers, and is highly plausible; unfortunately it rests at bottom on the word of a Spanish adventurer, a class who were, like a certain famous Rose, "happy and blest to lie on" every possible topic. It is curious, however, to note that he too said that the Indians brought him corn, beans and pumpkins.

The marvelous beauty of the landscape, one of the points in the argument, seems to have been somewhat overpraised. It is a green plain, without apparent limit in any direction, having a fair stream of clear water flowing through it. This has been the character of the Platte Valley from the start, the bluffs merely suggested by a faint roll in the distance, and that never visible save on one side the stream at a time. And here it is shown that two valleys can be flatter than one.

If this should really have been the center of a great Indian population, it is passing strange that George Francis Train should have selected it independently, as he did, for the spot to which he proposed to have the national capital removed.

We come to the city of Grand Island, and for an hour and more are passing the formation that gives it its name.

Navigation. A little way below the head of the island we come to Fremont and his path, though he was on the south side of the river. We are five hours from the Missouri, he is sixteen days. A few miles above, he met one John Lee with a party of the American Fur Company's men, who had left Fort Laramie for St. Louis two months before with their winter's catch, meaning to make the journey in boats, which drew only nine inches; but had been obliged to abandon, first their boats, then their furs, and were now plodding down stream with what they could carry on their backs.

We pass Kearney, which is too much of a subject, in pioneer affairs, to be treated cursorily; the place, about opposite Lexington, where Fremont met the first of the buffalo; and come to the forks of the Platte, where on his return he attempted navigation himself in a boat which he constructed for the purpose, with brazen studs and tough bull-hide. As this craft was only large enough for the intrepid explorer to stow himself in, with the German topographer and a few other necessaries, it drew only four inches and the prospects for a voyage seemed bright; but four inches is a great deal for the Platte. Captain Fremont (now doubly a captain) respected his boat enough to call it she, but had little satisfaction from it otherwise. "We dragged her over the