

CHAPTER VI.

BLACK CANON TO GREAT BEND—RETURN TO MOJAVE VALLEY.

CANON SCENERY.—ROARING RAPID.—CAMP IN THE CANON.—FREQUENT OCCURRENCE OF RAPIDS.—OUTLET FROM CANON.—FORTIFICATION ROCK.—NEIGHBORHOOD OF GREAT BEND.—HEAD OF NAVIGATION.—RETURN TO STEAMER.—NEWS FROM THE TRAIL.—COMMENCEMENT OF DESCENT OF RIVER.—MORMON SCOUTING PARTY.—DISAFFECTION AMONG INDIANS.—MORMONS AMONG MOJAVES.—ARRIVAL OF MULE TRAIN.—RECONNAISSANCE TO MORMON ROAD.—VIOLENT STORM.—DEFECTION OF MOJAVES.—RETURN TO MOJAVE VALLEY.—SUSPICIOUS CONDUCT OF INDIANS.—INTERVIEW WITH CAIRCK.—EXPLANATION OF DIFFICULTY.—DIVISION OF PARTY.—RETURN OF STEAMBOAT.—MOJAVE GUIDES.—DEPARTURE FROM RIVER.—SLOPE TO BLACK MOUNTAINS.—LAST VIEW OF MOJAVE VALLEY.—SITGREAVES'S PASS.

Camp 59, head of Black cañon, March 10.—The skiff having been put in tolerable order, a bucket full of corn and beans, three pairs of blankets, a compass, and a sextant and chronometer were stowed away in it, and a little before sunrise the captain, mate, and myself commenced the exploration of the cañon. My companions each pulled a pair of sculls, and with considerable vigor; but as the current has a flow of three miles an hour we could not make rapid progress. We had proceeded a quarter of a mile, and had just rounded the first bend, when one of the sculls snapped, reducing by half our motive power. There was, fortunately, a current of air drawing in the right direction through the narrow gorge, and, with the odd scull and a blanket, an apology for a sail was rigged, which, at intervals, rendered great assistance.

In a few minutes, having passed what may be called the outworks of the range, we fairly entered its gigantic precincts, and commenced to thread the mazes of a cañon, far exceeding in vastness any that had been yet traversed. The walls were perpendicular, and more than double the height of those in the Mojave mountains, rising, in many places, sheer from the water, for over a thousand feet. The naked rocks presented, in lieu of the brilliant tints that had illuminated the sides of the lower passes, a uniform sombre hue, that added much to the solemn and impressive sublimity of the place. The river was narrow and devious, and each turn disclosed new combinations of colossal and fantastic forms, dimly seen in the dizzy heights overhead, or through the sunless depths of the vista beyond. With every mile the view became more picturesque and imposing, exhibiting the same romantic effects and varied transformations that were displayed in the Mojave cañon, but on an enlarged and grander scale.

Rapids were of frequent occurrence, and at every one we were obliged to get out of the skiff, and haul it over. Eight miles from the mouth of the cañon, a loud sullen roaring betokened that something unusual was ahead, and a rapid appeared which was undoubtedly the same that had been described by Ireteba. Masses of rock filled up the sides of the channel. In the centre, at the foot of the rapid, and rising four or five feet above the surface of the water, was a pyramidal rock, against which the billows dashed as they plunged down from above, and glanced upwards, like a water spout.

The torrent was swifter than at any place below, but a steamboat, entirely emptied of its cargo, which could be deposited upon the rocks alongside of the rapid, could, if provided with long and stout lines, be hauled up. During a higher stage of the river the difficulty of the place would be much diminished. With our nearly worn out ropes it would be very hazardous to attempt the ascent.