

understanding. Most of them agree that noisy gobbling of soup is not nice. And sometimes we look out of the window at an alley cat of loose morals, and they laugh ruefully at the resemblance. They hate to think that they look just like that to anybody. And if a reduction of the moral law to that of prowling cats and noisy soup is a decking out of that stern goddess in rather scanty drapery, we must cut our garments from what material we have, on the principle that any drapery is better than none at all.

Thus far, experience points to the fact that the acquiring of a sex code takes place along about the time that the individual acquires language. Unless the language is learned before, say, the age of ten, it is never the mother tongue. It may be learned with an effort, and lived by if necessary, but it will not be felt. It will show an accent, and in moments of stress, the language of infancy will take its place. I have been told of an English lady who, upon meeting a reformed cannibal, congratulated him upon his change of diet.

"You no longer believe in cannibalism?" she asked.

"I do not," he replied with a dignified but appraising glance. "Nevertheless," he added, "nothing will ever taste so good as a plump little English woman's thumb!"

I am told that the lady moved on rather hastily; and if so, her instincts were entirely sound. No technic can be considered learned unless the knowledge has got past the cerebrum, and is accepted by the spinal cord, the muscles, and the solar plexus. Only then will it operate quickly enough to be of value. If the cannibal's brain had accepted the new code, but the nerves of his stomach had not, he was like our young wantons, whose experience may tell them that their habits needed mending, but whose nervous systems do not yet rise in protest against so simple a method of getting a fur coat as prostituting for it.

I was once one of a group of guests at a church service in a reformatory for young girl offenders. The psalms of David had

been chosen for the reading, apparently as least likely to offend the religious sensibilities of Catholic, Protestant or Jew, and the psalm which became branded on my memory was the fifty-fifth. As I listened to the girls' glib responses, the sentimental tears came into my eyes. Was it possible that these little castaways from a great city did not see that David had written the psalm about them? "I have seen violence and strife in the city," they chanted. "Deceit and guile depart not from her streets. For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it. Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide and my acquaintance". . . .

The words were too appropriate. I hesitated to look up to see the tragic response which I expected. But did I observe any? Not in the least. The unconscious victims snapped off the final curse, "But Thou, O Lord, shalt bring them down into destruction. Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days," and slammed their Bibles into the racks with the dispatch of those who long for dinner. How strange, I reflected, that they do not realize their own tragedy. And then, glancing at the row of well-bred, well-fed friends beside me, I wondered whether we should have noticed any great relevancy if, instead of the fifty-fifth, the psalm had happened to be the second, with its wild verse, "He that sitteth in the Heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision." Should we have felt at all uncomfortable, or lost our appetites? Not we. We, as well as they, were too well-trained in our code to take the words of an over-excited poet seriously. We, too, would have cast covert glances at the clock, smoothed out our ruffles, and closed our Bibles with a yawn. Why assume that any social tragedy includes us among its chorus? Why get upset? How do *we* know which of His creatures are so sublimely ludicrous that they make even the Lord laugh?

THE MOUNTAIN MEN

BY BERNARD DE VOTO

FOR over two centuries after the establishment of the British and French colonies in America, the frontier of exploration was pushed westward by fur-traders far in advance of the frontier of settlement. The fur-trader was the actual pioneer, the trail-breaker and the map-maker of a continent. He prepared the way that emigration was to follow—charted the rivers, discovered the passes, and marked the trails by which seekers of free lands or of gold and silver were to penetrate the wilderness. Of necessity, he was a riverman. Once across the Alleghanies, rivers and the Great Lakes were the means of access to the Mississippi valley, and west of the Mississippi the key to the high plains and the mountains was the Missouri with its scores of tributaries.

No better rivermen than the Canadian *voyageurs*, French and French half-breeds, ever lived. In canoe, bull-boat, or keel-boat, by pole, paddle, or *cordelle*, they went wherever water would float them; and, under the direction of adventurous Scotchmen who had the faculties of leadership and organization which they lacked, they made fortunes for such employers as the Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company, and John Jacob Astor. Toward the end of the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century, however, the scene and methods of the fur-trade changed radically. The British, finally ousted from American territory, moved to Oregon, and the exhaustion of the lower Missouri and Great Lakes fields forced their American competitors westward toward the Rocky mountains, the Columbia river, and the drainage-basin of the Great Salt Lake. But

the new fields, though rich, were difficult of access. The line of communication up the Missouri was long and the passes were difficult—and the country of the Blackfoot Indians was squarely in the way.

The Blackfeet were implacable enemies of the whites, and they were the best fighters in the West. The Assiniboines, the Utes, the Shoshones, the Snakes, and even the Crows and the Arikaras could sometimes be counted on for friendship, but the Blackfeet were always hostile. Even the Crows, who were the greatest thieves, and the Utes, who were the best riders, had been known to pass up a white man's horse or to return it after using it a while, but when a Blackfoot saw a horse he stole it without further ado and you had to scalp him to get it back. The rest would sometimes leave a caravan alone and could be easily intimidated, but whenever a white party came within sight of the Blackfeet they at once swept down on it with horrid caterwauling and violent intent. They would not trade their furs nor allow the whites to trap in their country. As the trade moved in their direction, they nearly wrecked it.

Then one William Henry Ashley formed a partnership with Andrew Henry, who, as a member of the Missouri Fur Company, had already suffered disasters at the hands of the Blackfeet. Henry waited to suffer one more and to see Ashley routed by the Arikaras, and then abandoned the trade altogether. Ashley was a Virginian who had emigrated to St. Louis, in the days of its glamor, and when he entered the fur trade in 1822 he was Lieutenant-Governor of the new State of Missouri and a general

of its militia. After he had made a fortune in the trade, he served three terms in the National House of Representatives, where he was a supporter of Benton and an authority on the West. He once entertained Daniel Webster so successfully that the orator ever after remembered St. Louis as a city of miraculous beverages.

This Ashley, by a process of trial and error, devised the new methods the fur-trade required. In 1822, with Henry, he ascended the Missouri in the orthodox way. Leaving Henry to go on, he went back to St. Louis and led a second party up the river in 1824. At the Arikara villages, he was attacked, routed, and demoralized. Meanwhile Henry had also been harassed by the Arikaras and had lost most of his horses to the Blackfeet. The two expeditions were so costly a failure that Henry withdrew from the trade, but they furnished Ashley the clue to ultimate success. For several of Henry's detachments had gone on to the Green, the Bear, and the Snake rivers and on their way had re-discovered South Pass, and when, in 1825, Ashley led another expedition to meet them, he marched directly up the Platte river, breaking a great part of what was to be the most important trail in the exploration and settlement of the West.

This route along the Platte and through South Pass shortened the line of communication many hundred miles. It also lay in lower latitudes, led by easy gradients through passes which were open most of the Winter, and permitted the use of wheeled vehicles to the very crest of the Continental Divide. Furthermore, it was far south of the Blackfoot country. It therefore permitted the fur-trade to reach its most promising fields with something like ease and security. But the Platte was not navigable and much of the route was altogether separated from water. The country, most of it mountains or desert, required the trader to possess qualities the riverman had never needed. Thus Ashley's new system tended to substitute for the trader, who got his furs by barter

with the Indians, the trapper who hunted them himself, and tended also to require him to stay permanently in the mountains, meeting his employers at an annual rendezvous, where he turned in his peltries and received enough supplies to last him for another year.

All these requirements drove the *voyageurs* out of the trade. A new figure took the place of the riverman: the mountain man. He was, in the overwhelming majority, a Virginian or a Kentuckian, though Jedediah Smith, perhaps the best of them all, was a Yankee. Many of the most eminent accompanied Ashley in 1822 and 1823, among them Smith, Etienne Provot, Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, William and Milton Sublette, David Jackson, Hugh Glass, and Louis Vasquez.

These mountain men were the true wilderness-beaters of the last American frontier. For fifteen or twenty years they pushed into all the fastnesses of our most difficult ranges. They created several fortunes, in which they never participated, and they did so at the cost of hazardous lives, obscure and violent deaths, energy and privation and daring almost inconceivable, and a skill which has never had a superior on American soil. Romance and the movie have gilded the cowboy, the gold-seeker, and the homesteader as the true frontiersmen, and ignored the trapper beside whom the cowboy had an unskilled occupation, the Forty-niner traveled in comfort along pleasant boulevards, and the homesteader made a living with comparative ease. For the mountain man had to be skilled at a dozen trades that none of the others ever needed. Separated by a thousand miles from the outposts of civilization, he had to be self-sufficient in a world he had himself created and had to accommodate his world to a thousand daily emergencies. He not only had to live off the country, sometimes for years on end, but he had to defend himself against the country and its aboriginal inhabitants. He had to master a complex and extremely difficult craft—or die.

II

The elements of prairie-craft and woods-craft were, of course, part of the American tradition everywhere outside the towns, part of the elementary education every boy was subjected to, but the mountain men had to adapt them to a far greater variety of circumstances than anyone else ever encountered. Basically, the craft was Indian. The virtues which the Indians admired were those which the trapper emulated. He dressed like an Indian and was most easily flattered by being told that he resembled one. Along the seams of his buckskin breeches and shirt ran a fringe, sometimes worked with dyed quills like his moccasins and leggings. Quills or beads ornamented the pouches that held his powder and shot and the fur cap he wore in Winter. A sash of crimson or yellow completed the costume—or in Winter a fur coat, or the scarlet blanket that symbolized grandeur to the Indian. He wore his hair long, leaving it free or braiding it with shells, ribbons or bright feathers.

The trapper could buy buckskin from the Indians, but he frequently tanned his own. The fresh skin was scraped free of hair on one side and of tissue and ligaments on the other, by the aid of water and ashes and much labor, and was then twisted and worked in every direction till it became flexible. A prolonged dubbing with a mixture of brains and water followed, after which it was again stretched, kneaded, and twisted to the pliability of silk. The only remaining operation was smoking, which was carried out over a greenwood smudge till the skin acquired an orange-brown color. No other material has ever equalled buckskin for moccasins, leggings, and outdoor clothes of every kind. It was warmer than wool, it made no noise against the underbrush, it had a neutral protective color, it was proof against cactus and the minor assaults of stones and sticks, it did not rot, and it wore indefinitely.

Besides buckskin, the mountain men made other kinds of leather as the occasion demanded. Rawhide, stiffly flexible and as hard as oak, was prepared in skin-sizes and cut up to serve as ropes and thongs of all sorts; twisted or braided, it did for harness or riatas; or properly molded, it served better than iron to shoe horses for the flinty uplands. It could be dried on forms in the shape of buckets, boxes, and shields, and was practically everlasting. The sinews of slaughtered animals, whole or divided or braided together, served as thread and light cord. Their bladders and paunches were carefully preserved for watertight containers of everything from powder to goose-grease.

The customary outfit included a skinning knife which was a common butcher knife till Colonel Bowie invented a better one, a tomahawk (shingler's hatchet), a rifle and perhaps a pistol or a bow, powder and lead in pouches, buffalo robes for shelter and bedding, a packet of awls and needles, from three to six beaver traps, flint and steel, and a minimum of extras. Each man had two horses for himself and from one to three for his outfit and furs, and to these he must be both hostler and veterinary. The horses put a definite check on the movements of the party, for where there was no fodder there could be no trapping. Some hardy upland grasses were available all year long, being edible even when buried under snow, but in regions of alkali or lava and in those which had been "et over," there was only one recourse, the cottonwood tree. The inner bark of one species, *Populus occidentalis* (*angulata*), when shredded and chopped up, provided a fodder as nutritious as hay. It had to be kept warm in Winter, for when frozen its jagged sides would pierce the intestines.

The mountain men lived almost exclusively on meat, and though the modern faddist would condemn them to every ill from Bright's disease to pyorrhea, managed to lead active and hilarious lives for as long as they escaped scalping. Through-

out all the fur-country, the buffalo roamed in great herds and might be killed with little exertion. The Indians thriftily ran them over cliffs, when that was possible, to avoid labor and the loss of weapons. The trappers rode them down and shot them with rifles or, perhaps even more efficiently at short range, with arrows. The hump and the tongue were the most succulent portions, and young cows were far more desirable than bulls. The frontier staple, pemmican, was made from buffalo-meat. Into "officers' pemmican" went only the humps and the marrow, but the ordinary article was made up indiscriminately of all cuts. Strips of meat were dried in the sun or smoked over a fire till crisp and were then pulverized between stones and mixed with equal parts of melted fat. The mixture when pounded down in skin bags and sealed with fat would keep sweet for years. It was probably the best concentrated food ever devised. Two tablespoonfuls would make an excellent meal for one man, and he might eat it raw or warm it over a fire and flavor it with service berries, choke cherries, wild currants or any other fruit that was at hand.

The buffalo were wanderers; no one knew in advance where they might be found. If no herd was in sight, the trapper took what he could get—deer, antelope, elk, bear, geese, ducks, prairie chicken, or sage hens. Mountain lion, or "painter," was a delicacy, and porcupine a treat, but such vermin as wolves and coyotes were to be eaten only in extremity—which would sometimes force a man as low as prairie dog or even muskrat. The beavers which supplied the trapper's livelihood were contemptible as food. All these supplies were likely to fail, especially at the highest altitudes or toward the end of Winter. Then Indian lore was called upon to distinguish edible from bitter or poisonous roots and to provide other substitutes. Dozens of mountain plants could be safely eaten, but most of these grew on the lower levels or were unavailable under the snow. A slender meal could sometimes be

made from wild rosebuds, or the Digger Indians—the shy, ubiquitous pariahs of the frontier—might be prevailed upon to give up their stores of sunflower seeds, and along the Columbia there was the chance of meeting a tribe that had smoked salmon.

Coffee and tobacco were the principal stores carried from the East, and their loss by plunder or accident was a catastrophe. They, more than anything else, made life in the wilderness comfortable, and the trapper would boil the empty sack that had held coffee or smoke the papers that had wrapped his tobacco. No adequate substitute for them existed, though a hot drink could be made from wheat, and dried cedar-bark and the bark and berries of kin-nikinnick could be smoked with some satisfaction.

III

Nearly every kind of pelt the trapper could take was worth something. He traded in otter, marten, mink, bear, buffalo, deer, and elk hides, but all these were incidental to his principal business, beaver. The fur trade was the beaver trade and, in America, its *dépôt* was St. Louis, where an average fur was worth from four to eight dollars, exactly twice what it had brought to the trapper, who, after that discount, bought his outfit and supplies from the purchaser at an advance on St. Louis prices of never less than 100%. The beaver's value to the trapper, then, never exceeded one-fourth of what it brought in the States and was liable to decline to an eighth.

The beavers were to be found on the tributaries of the larger streams. Such rivers as the Green, the Bear, the Snake, the Fraser, the Yellowstone, and the three forks of the Missouri were fed by a multitude of creeks along which the trapper found his richest harvest. Trapping required a complex knowledge of stream-craft, topography, climatology, and animal psychology. As the beavers retired to their lodges during cold weather and as the fur was worthless during the Summer, the

hunting seasons were the Fall and Spring. Each man set his traps as his fur-sense dictated. The beaver-dam was the starting-place; and near it, in natural approaches, the trap would be set so as to stay only a few inches below the surface of the stream. It was pegged down to a stake, fastened to a chain round a boulder or otherwise secured. No bait was used beyond "castoreum," or castor, a rank internal secretion of the beaver itself which served at once to attract the animal and to cover the scent of the trapper's hands. Trap, chain, and anchor were also well rubbed with green deer-hide to eradicate the smell of man.

In this operation, the craft lay in finding the right place for the trap. Obviously, a trap set at random would catch its prey only by accident, one set in too deep water would be ignored, and one in too shallow or too exposed a place would betray itself. The trap, too, must be so arranged that it would drag the captive's head under water and drown him. The trapper generally worked upstream from the mouth, staying as long as necessary on any given creek. Usually he worked in the water, wading most of the way to keep his scent from grass and brush. A position in midstream had the further advantage of making surprise by Indians less likely.

His constant following of streams was the basis of his most impressive skill: his ability to find his way in the wilderness. The country in which he lived was a chaos of peaks, canyons, alkali flats, valleys, lava plains, sand and salt deserts, timberland prolonged on a scale hardly to be realized, crisscrossed by rivers and ranges, infinitely deceptive and infinitely hazardous. Trails marked the major sequences, raying out from the most important passes, but every trail not originally marked by Indians was the trappers' work and their daily labor took them into unblazed country. To carry out a campaign of several months' duration which would take a party through a given district,

visiting specified streams, picking up other parties at places and dates arranged months before, and finally arrive on time at a rendezvous separated by hundreds of miles from both starting-place and trapping grounds, required the best military leadership and individual skill. The trapper read the country he passed over with practised eyes, picked out its gradients, monuments, and exits, stored away a photographic impression of it, and made it a part of his learning to be contributed to the common stock. By 1827, it was practically impossible for a mountain man to be lost in the vast country he worked through—a fact to be compared with the disaster that overtook the gold-seeker or the emigrant whenever they forsook the main-traveled road.

The keys to this formidable lore were the peaks and the drainage system. The trapper's first act on reaching a new stream or valley was to climb the peak that commanded the vicinity. From its summit he could make out the direction the streams took and the flow of the master-creek. He could also follow the mass of ridges, peaks, parks and valleys. He needed little more. For years he had exchanged information with every newcomer and so knew by heart all the principal streams, passes and other landmarks. He checked his decision by many other signs: height, size, kind and abundance of timber; number and drift of buffalo; vegetation, coloring of rocks, fauna; prevalence of winds, snow, alkali, or sand; hot springs, waterfalls, Indian tribes.

The tactics developed by defense against the Indians in such country were passed on to the emigrant trains, and, in technical adaptations, still play a part in the Infantry and Cavalry Drill Regulations and the Field Service Regulations of the United States Army. A large brigade was safe from direct attack by any tribe except the Blackfeet and so was chiefly concerned with guarding its horses. Advance, rear and flank guards were sent out on the march. At the bivouac the wagons were

chained together in a circle which formed a corral. If all the horses could not be got inside, they were picketed by night, being allowed to graze only before sunset and after dawn. If there were no wagons the corral consisted of the fur-packs, from three to nine to a man, and other impedimenta. When the horses were stampeded in spite of all precautions, the brigade must go after their captors and stampede them in return.

Smaller parties were in greater danger. Guerrilla warfare with its intrenchments and open-order skirmishing was the daily routine of the trade. One vital element of such warfare was trailing—the art of telling by ground-sign who had passed that way, in what numbers, how recently, and in what state of mind. The marks of lodge-poles indicated a peace party, since tepees and hence squaws were part of the expedition. The number and dispersion of the horses revealed the purpose of the party, the freshness or exhaustion of the stock, and the distance from its objective or its home. The identity of the tribe might be disclosed by the hoof-prints, by the shape of a deserted bivouac, by fragments of food, lost head-dresses, pieces of fur or skin, decorations, or weapons. Single trails might be as revealing. An expert trailer could tell at what gait a horse had passed, how many hours or days had since elapsed, and what the probable destination was. He could make a shrewd guess as to the rider's state of mind.

Wounds sustained in warfare or accidents must be treated by the most primitive surgery. Broken bones could be set, arrows could be pulled out, and lacerations from a bear's or a panther's claws could be treated with pitch, goose-grease, bear-grease or poultices made of corn-meal, soft-soap, or anything else that folk-lore might prescribe. A few drastic amputations are recorded—arms and legs cut off with hand-made saws, the arteries closed with cauteries extemporized from red-hot ram-rods. In those dry and dustless altitudes

infected wounds were very rare. The brigade's dispensary contained only the simple, heroic remedies of frontier therapy—eye-lotions, great masses of calomel, a variety of physics, rubifacients and expectorants and febrifuges from the traditional pharmacopœia, bismuth and opium for mountain dysentery, and perhaps copaiba and cinchona.

The medicines were but little called upon, for few distempers harassed the mountain men. They suffered far less from disease than from black-flies and mosquitoes. Rattlesnakes, too, were a great terror—more dreaded than Indians, more lied about than the Yellowstone country. The approved treatment was to cicatrize the bite and apply a tourniquet above it. The frontiersman recognized the desirability of a stimulant and preferred the traditional snakebite whiskey to the contemporary strychnine. Vaguely understanding that some antidote was desirable, he bound a quid of tobacco over the cicatrice or, when possible, a slice cut from the snake that had bitten him.

IV

When the beavers went into hiding and the canyons were choked with snow, scattered bands of trappers met at designated places for the Winter encampment. Open valleys to the south or the west of tall ranges made desirable camp-grounds, but the best ones were those circular recesses known as holes, deep, wide, and sheltered from wind and snow. Two or three hundred whites commonly gathered together and not infrequently they were joined by many lodges of Indians, for war was a purely warm weather diversion. The two camps would be separated by a quarter of a mile, but intercourse between them was continuous.

A pastoral contentment characterized these Winter doldrums. The horses moved slowly along the southern slopes. Along the half-frozen creek, in huts of brush or skin, Indians and trappers alike carried on

their Winter tanning and dressing. The stock of firewater, if any had survived the last rendezvous, had long since been exhausted, so that there was no carousing. By night the huts filled with adventurous men whose authentic adventures surpassed those of all wanderers from Ulysses to Marco Polo. The true story of Hugh Glass has had to wait till recently for its epic, and the wanderings of the lost trappers then believed in have been proved fictitious, but they made great tales around the fire, and every listener could contribute episodes from his own past no less heroic. And when the true Romance sang, the bounds of heaven and earth were removed away, and in a new universe super-trappers went forth to their titanic destinies, gathering packs of beaver Paul Bunyan himself could not have moved, slaying whole nations of Indians, driving over the edge of the world more buffalo than could have grazed along the Milky Way, and entering at last those Islands of the Blest Trappers where life was an eternal rendezvous—overflowing with Virginia tobacco and Kentucky liquors and made beautiful by lodges of Indian squaws, slender and beaded and forever young.

More than one man has paid his respects to the talk in these snow-bound huts. And no wonder, for though the average trapper was illiterate, there were among the mountain men some of ambiguous past and mysterious present. Life on the far frontier had its attractions for some who had had and lost great names in the East. The excitement of the trails, too, called out more than one gentleman amateur, even a few with hereditary titles. Every year scientists and globe-trotters came out to study the rocks, the birds or the flowers, and these were elegant gentlemen. There were too the secret agents of Great Britain, the United States, and even Spain and Russia, unobtrusively doing the will of their Foreign Offices. So that the University of the Rocky Mountains, as one trapper called Winter quarters, did not lack learned professors. But the university was

no Thelema and the arts and the sciences were supplemented by such games as Old Sledge and Spoil-Five. And of course, as single men in deerskin huts, they found the daughters of the Indians fair.

For splendor the Winter camp yielded to the rendezvous. Toward the end of June a general movement would begin toward one or another of the places designated by Eastern employers the year before. Such places were pleasant valleys along the upper Green, the Portneuf, Henry's Fork, the labyrinths of Jackson's or Pierre's Holes, and the vicinity of Bear Lake, Bear River, Cache Valley and the Ogden or the Weber in the valley of Great Salt Lake.

From all around came the Indians, to trade their furs if they had any, to barter for firewater, and to steal whatever was unguarded. If it were purely a company rendezvous, besides the Indians only the company's employés and the nearby bands of free trappers met the caravans from the East. But as competition stiffened, the rival companies began to rendezvous within a mile or so of each other, in an effort to debauch as many Indians and free trappers as possible and, by higher prices and more generous portions of alcohol, to attract deserters from their competitors. Such a festival might bring together a thousand resident white trappers, half as many more in the caravans from the States, and from three to five thousand Indians. One clump of timber and its adjacent meadows would form the park of the company founded by Ashley and taken over by successive partnerships. A mile away were the tents of the American Fur Company, Astor's successor and the eventual victor in the trade. Austerely remote, restrained by British regulations from the cruder debaucheries, Ross or McKay or Ogden represented the stockholders of the Hudson's Bay Company. Such an amateur as Wyeth or Bonneville might also make a pretentious camp nearby, and there might be the humbler stations of smaller St. Louis firms, with

bands of free trappers roving clamorously among them all.

A radius of eight hundred miles would not cover all the country ransacked within the year by those who gathered at such a rendezvous. Personages from the East, with sometimes a petty German prince or an ambassador in their keeping, came to watch their employés and their profits. From the South came Dick Wootton, Kit Carson, and their half-Spanish retainers—dignified, expansive, ceremonious. From the North, the Scotch factors of the Hudson's Bay Company, chaperoning a younger son or two, with rituals of rank, precedence, and table etiquette. Such purely American giants as Fitzpatrick, Bridger, and many others of their kind—the mountain men in quintessence, violent, hardy, wise beyond expression, and, till the mysteries began, taciturn. A rabble of camp-followers of all kinds. And everywhere Indians.

The substratum was a bitter commercial rivalry that used every device of bribery, theft, and debauchery to win an advantage. But the mountain men left such civilized concerns to their employers. They were not interested in profits—cared little, when the rendezvous was over, whether they had fully discharged their debts to the company or had tripled them for the next year. For them the rendezvous was a fair, a market-day, a town-meeting, with overtones of the pagan mysteries, the sessions court and the Olympic games. The kegs of raw alcohol were brought out. Whites, half-breeds and Indians gathered round them. And presently the peaks were giving back the echoes of the clamor of strong men at their ease. Four hundred thousand square miles of mountain and desert had to be accounted for in news, gossip, oratory and debate. Here and there bands of roaring men held saddle-races, foot-races, and target practice; elsewhere knives, hatchets and javelins were thrown in competition; here a strong man raised four times as many beaver-skins with one hand as his opponent could with two;

there a grudge fight was put through to a finish, or the guesses of a hundred Winter campfires were settled when a Chouteau man pinned the shoulders of a Hudson's Bay champion to the ground. The alcohol flowed on by night and songs were sung by choruses of a hundred bull-throated wassailers—songs that not all the tears of connoisseurs or collectors can ever recover. By dawn, perhaps, with the same ecstatic joy, extemporized armies were assaulting each other with clubs, stones and fists, all for fellowship and the hope of a good yarn for next Winter's fires.

In and out among all the groups weaved the Indians, frantic for alcohol. They had already learned the art they have since practiced so profitably, of displaying their religious ceremonies for pay. Over the hill roared their mock battles, pursuits, captures and scalp-dances. Chiefs bartered their wives and daughters for a cup of watered alcohol. Wives and daughters without a chief's protection did a good business for themselves in beads, mirrors, blankets, and other gewgaws. All innocently, too, they roused jealousies that could be settled only with the skinning-knife. The clamor rose in pitch and volume. All about the pleasant groves were groups of dancing, shouting, guzzling heroes. White or red, the alcohol had its way with them, and their survivors laid them out in impersonal rows to await the waking. And in a week the caravans had gone, only a grave or two and much refuse marked the rendezvous, and life was dull again till next Summer.

Such were the mountain men in the day of their grandeur. Few of them would serve for heroes of romantic novels. All of them sinned against most of the taboos of their age. All told, there were not many of them, and their heyday was short. But American life lost much of its strongest color when they turned to guiding the onrush of emigrants along trails they had broken, and bequeathed the remnants of their craft to decorous half-breeds in the Canadian north woods.

PHILOSOPHERS

BY H. M. KALLEN

THE porter was a college graduate. He had observed me fumbling with Kerr's translation of Plato's "Republic" and had made an occasion to cause me to know that he, too, had heard of Plato and read him. The flaccid-faced commercial travellers who mostly use this flyer, which was taking me from New York to Chicago, were calling him Sam and exhibiting toward him an old familiarity, that especial familiarity which is called forth by waiters, bootblacks, newsboys and porters once you have commanded a service from them. I could see that Sam's—his name was really Francis; Francis Columbus Sprayer, he told me, was the name on his bachelor's diploma—that Sam's genial servility had an aura of scorn; that he regarded himself as playing a part in his relations to the patrons on whose tips his living depended; that what he thought of himself had no connection with his work for the Pullman Company. In his own mind he was leading a double life. The real one was with the Negro community in Chicago, of which he was a distinguished and somewhat withdrawn member. His ruminations and fantasies on his trips were, I found, concerned with that, and with the scraps of reading he had picked up in college. I gathered that he felt rather removed from his own people also.

And many other things I gathered. Not all at the once, but in the many snatches of the conversation he came always to resume in the intervals of his duties, after I had asked him once to sit down opposite me and to discourse to me about Plato and the Platonic philosophy. What he actually

knew about both was false or negligible; his exhibition was as bad as that of any son of Japheth who had gone through a college. But there was the native salt of philosophy in him; the personal savor of a theory of life and a secure sense of his own destiny. His rambling discourse of scraps of doctrine and Brobdignagian phrases revealed a certain poise and security of mind; the tone of philosophic wisdom such as can never come from mere schooling.

It is a quality always of born philosophers, and is sometimes hardily won through experience. Anxiety, fear, anger, and discontent—all the smouldering resentment of the lighter-colored among our educated dark-skinned fellow-Americans, such as one almost naturally expects—all these things Sam's mood was particularly free from. That tone, that temper which the insecurities of life automatically create, seemed entirely lacking in him. He gave you the feel of a serene assurance without any hinterland of anxiety or foreground of doubt.

In the course of the day I felt free to ask him about his plan of life. It culminated, I learned, in a somewhat magniloquent station among his own people: the position of a college-bred Garvey. He told me that as he spoke about the weather.

"Why," I asked, "are you so sure?"

"Ise de sevent' son of a sevent' son," he replied with a transluminating smile, dropping into the patois of his people.

There was the key to his fate, the heart of his reality! There was the alpha and omega of his education and the salvation of his philosophy!