



PROJECT MUSE®

Unfortunate Emigrants

Kristin Johnson

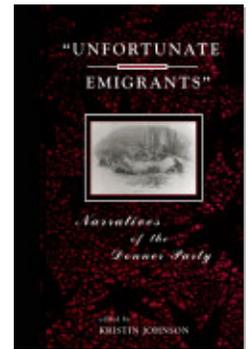
Published by Utah State University Press

Johnson, Kristin.

Unfortunate Emigrants.

Utah State University Press, 1996.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/9318.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9318>

FRANCES H. MCDougALL

On April 29, 1871, Mrs. Curtis had the last word, at least in the *Pacific Rural Press*:

THE DONNER TRAGEDY ONCE MORE. REPLY TO MR. REED.

In this regard I have very little to say. Having conscientiously done what I believed my duty, and that, too in the tenderest spirit of sympathy for the sufferers, and not intending to reflect severely on any one, I am content to know that, in the long run, truth and right will appear. Mr. Reed winces very sharply under a simple statement of truth; but strict justice in the historian would not have treated the subject quite so tenderly. All that he did afterward could never atone for what he neglected to do.

My informant was one of the general company, and traveled with, or near them, until the fatal mistake of attempting to cut a new road, when she and her companion pushed forward, getting over the mountains before the first heavy fall of snow. She was at Fort Sutter when the sufferers were brought in, and was in the habit of daily conversation with them and with the men who rescued them. She heard their stories when they first gushed forth from the heart in response to the look and words of sympathy. Was there not, then, a fair presumption that her account would be correct, especially when we consider the entire truthfulness and superior intelligence. No one who has ever seen her could doubt her word. Her character is, every way, above all suspicion. And as I know nothing of the facts myself I will briefly state what Mrs. C. gives me in reply to Mr. Reed.

“In the first place, I find truth so cunningly interwoven with falsehood it is difficult to separate them without making more words than the subject deserves.

“The assertion that we were in a state of starvation, made by Reed and McCutchen, is false. We had just killed a large ox; and besides, the bears had killed a fine cow, leaving part of her carcass behind. We had at the

time five other oxen, which were driven to San Francisco, and there sold. It would then have been absurd, though by no means disgraceful, as there seems to be an effort to represent, if we *had* fallen to eating dog; but at the same time we *had* killed one dog, on account of his howling so terribly. I made a mistake in regard to the name of the person who first came with Reed. It was not McCutchen, but another man. I am very forgetful of names.

“On my own personal knowledge I affirm that Reed and McCutchen were not out all night when they left our camp on their way over the mountains, nor did the two Indians leave their camp, as they assert, but ours. They (Reed and McCutchen) left a little before 9 o'clock in the morning and returned about sundown. We were greatly astonished at their return; and Mr. Curtis said, if he had a wife and children in so perilous a condition he would have got through. This, on one can doubt, would have been practicable if the men had so determined, for it was the first snow; and Reed's objection that the provision they had was insufficient is of no weight, because the company might then have been brought over with much greater ease than when the passage was made in the heaviest depth of the winter snows. McCutchen says that '*no two men could have got through.*' But months afterwards, six men, with heavy packs on their backs, *did* get through; and what is the reason two could not have gone, and at that more favorable time?

“The incident of Mr. Breen's sickness was related to me by Mrs. Breen herself; and the account of Mrs. Donner preferring her money to her life was given me by many witnesses. We gave the two travelers, Reed and McCutchen, all the aid we possibly could, socks, mittens, boots, etc., for which they have made but a poor return.

“The account of the altercation with Mr. Curtis about driving the cattle is generally false. We were behind, driving our cattle, and our mule got among theirs. We chose to keep behind, because Reed, the night before, had threatened to kill Mr. Curtis, for the reason that he would not submit to his overbearing behavior, and do the duty of a body servant. It is true that one of them struck Mr. Curtis with his *reata*; though, as it seemed, playfully. But when Mr. Curtis got out his pistols and loaded them, Mr. Reed found it convenient to take himself out of the way, and we saw no more of him till after arriving at Fort Sutter.”

In conclusion I will just say, that they who are so ready to catch others had better mind how they are caught tripping.

FRANCES H. MCDUGAL