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TWO THOUSAND MILES

ON

HORSEBACK.

SANTA FÉ AND BACK.

A SUMMER TOUR THROUGH KANSAS, NEBRASKA,  
COLORADO, AND NEW MEXICO, IN THE  
YEAR 1866.

BY

JAMES F. MELINE.



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## TWO THOUSAND MILES ON HORSEBACK.

### LETTER I.

LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS, June 1, 1866.

WITHIN the memory of living men, the adventurous traveller from the Atlantic cities to the Great West made his outfit and start, first from Schenectady, then Chambersburg, then Clarksburg (Va.). Later came Limestone (now Maysville), Kaskaskia, St. Louis, and Independence. Now even Leavenworth is getting too far East, and soon the iron rail will clamp East and West together, leaving neither plains nor savage frontier for dangerous wayfaring and exciting adventure with horse and rifle.

There are many officers still in service who, being ordered from St. Louis to Fort Leavenworth, have considered themselves fortunate in reaching their destination in sixteen days. We have just made the same trip in twenty-six hours.

Leavenworth claims for her correct census 25,000 inhabitants. On inquiry, I am satisfied that the place may be fairly credited with a population of 20,000, of which 15,000 may be classed as permanent and 5000 as floating. Immense numbers of teams and wagons for transportation of merchandise and Government stores to Utah, New Mexico,



Nebraska, and Montana, are fitted out here, giving employment to a small army of drivers, mechanics, and contractors. The town is well and handsomely built. Judging from the well-graded avenues and flagged gutters, I should say its municipal affairs were in good hands. The naming of cross streets after the Kickapoo, Delaware, Dakotah, and other Indian tribes, is a pleasing variation from First, Second, Third. The stores and shops are almost metropolitan in their stock and variety. Three daily papers, well supported, give an idea of importance and activity.

On a high and commanding site, a Catholic cathedral of substantial brick is now going up, and is almost ready for roofing. Judging by the eye, I should say its size was one hundred and eighty feet by ninety. Bishop Miede, who is to officiate in it, has been a missionary in Kansas since 1851, at which period there were not five white men within its boundaries. Material for building seems to be plenty and put to good use, as several edifices, stores and dwellings, attest. Of hotels there is no lack, and Leavenworth, too, has its Tremont, Everett, Planters', and Astor. Alas, there are no longer any rustic villages with a single tavern and simple population!

Our young towns, like our young children, are scarcely fledged before they are full grown. The children assume old manners and the small towns put on city airs. Every little place must have its "Metropolitan," its "Varieties," and its "saloons," just as every boy must smoke his cigar and play billiards, and every girl of fifteen wear the silk and diamonds which, in countries of high civilization, are only awarded to matronly maturity.

Fort Leavenworth lies three miles north of the city. It was established as a post in 1827, and called Cantonment Leavenworth, after the commanding officer of the Third Infantry, who built its first huts. A part of the same regiment now garrisons the place, and the present post commander, Colonel Hoffman, was on duty there in 1828 as Second Lieutenant. The position is fine, on a high bluff of the Missouri River, commanding a beautiful view of the Iowa shore and surrounding country.

The reservation in which the fort stands, some miles square, extends to the edge of the town and has excited the cupidity of politicians and speculators to a high degree. About the period of the Fort Snelling swindle—the palmy days of the noble, disinterested Floyd—a nice little plan was on foot for its sale.

Returning to town I passed numbers of the ox trains used in freighting merchandise to New Mexico. They are remarkable, each wagon team consisting of ten yokes of fine oxen, selected and arranged not only for drawing but for pictorial effect, in sets of twenty, either all black, all white, all spotted, or otherwise marked uniformly.

Each set of twenty oxen draws from 6500 to 8000 pounds, and makes the journey from Leavenworth to Santa Fé at the contract rate of seven miles per day. Thereby hangs a tale which I have not time to tell at present, having special business with saddlers and outfitters. We start in the morning; but not by the Santa Fé trail. That route has no longer the charm of novelty. What say you to a different, circuitous, and far more interesting route?—a route that will take us through Kansas,



Nebraska, Colorado, and New Mexico — returning by the Rio Grande, Pecos, and Arkansas Rivers, with a glimpse at Denver, the gold mines, Pike's Peak, and a slice of the dreaded Llano Estacado by way of relish — a matter of some twenty-four hundred miles?

## LETTER II.

BANKS OF THE LITTLE BLUE RIVER, KANSAS, June 7, 1866.

LITTLE BLUE is a branch of the Big Blue — a branch of the Kaw or Kansas — a branch of the Missouri; latitude  $40\frac{1}{2}$ ; longitude  $98\frac{1}{2}$ . "And there," as Dr. Marigold remarks, "you have me." I rather lay stress upon the river portion of my date, for here in this endless monotony of prairie, a river with its trees and green fringes of bushes, is a lovely and refreshing spectacle.

After a week on these boundless stretches of herbage, the main impression left is that you have heretofore had but a limited idea of territorial grandeur. Upon them all the armies of the earth might review, manœuvre, fight, and even retreat without danger of being found, if they chose to remain beyond the horizon line. Kingdoms could be carved out of them, and dozens of principalities made up out of the parings and slicings.

You ride a week, and move rapidly too, and from daybreak to sunset, as you pass on, the grand prairie spreads out before you, behind, right and left, — stretching to the horizon, apparently boundless. The sight from the White Mountains, from the Righi, or from any other picturesque "coign of vantage," is a mere matter of kaleidoscope and child's play to it.

The view of these prairies is often compared to



that of the sea, and the comparison is correct. There is the same boundless sweep to the eye, with rolling waves of green from horizon to horizon — the same undulating play of sunshine and shade on its face — the same solitude — the same solemn and silent grandeur. And the resemblance in its features of life are not dissimilar. A distant wagon is a sail, and wrecks strew its strands as they do the ocean's shores. Bones of animals that have perished by the wayside line the route, and, of themselves, tell you of the scores of thousands that have passed on this great highway to the Pacific. After leaving Leavenworth, you notice them every mile or two. Soon they become more numerous, and now we pass them, carcasses and bones of oxen and mules, at very short intervals.

The first hundred miles (the whole distance from Leavenworth to Fort Kearney is two hundred and ninety-four miles) of the route, is to some extent through a settled country. The soil, black as your hat, is so rich that the earth looks as though it would laugh if you tickled it. New farms are evidently increasing rapidly, as the road itself shows. Being public domain, travellers have followed the most favorable undulations of the ground, without reference to the quantity of land covered. But as new farms are made, we find ourselves sent right or left, down hill or up, by the inclosure of the old route. We passed many newly fenced fields that have taken in large sections of the road.

I have not seen Southern Kansas, which, I am told, is far superior to Northern Kansas. It must be a beautiful country, for the northeast corner of the State, through which I passed, is sufficiently fertile

to satisfy any reasonable man. It is impossible, too, that farming can be more remunerative anywhere else, for the farmer can sell at his own door, and at city prices, every thing he can raise.<sup>1</sup> I met a young man driving an ox team, yesterday, who had just been up to Fort Kearney to sell his corn at a dollar and a half per bushel. He and his brother cultivate fifteen acres of ground, all in corn, and for the past two years have sold what they do not use at the rate of about six hundred dollars per annum. He told me he was from Dutchess County, New York, and has lived in Southern Nebraska for eight years.

The towns and villages rapidly diminish as you approach the Nebraska frontier. Seneca, Nemaha County, and Marysville, Marshall County, are the last two, and are both nice and thriving villages of some six hundred inhabitants each. Marshall County has five hundred voters.

As yet we have not passed a single town in Nebraska, nor, I might say, even a farm proper. Things already begin to take a California or New Mexico tinge, and a house is now a ranch, consisting, generally, of a log building roofed with earth and grass, an adjoining inclosure, palisaded with heavy sticks of wood, and a well. There are but few of them, — mostly stations of the Overland Stage Company, — all having an air of half dwelling, half castle; not without reason, for as late as August, 1864, they were burnt by the Indians, as far as the Little Blue.

As well as I could observe, without leaving the road, the hills we have passed appear to be of car-

<sup>1</sup> Until yesterday I had been paying five cents a glass (one half pint) for milk; since getting into Nebraska we pay ten.

*Pacific Sta.*



boniferous limestone, stratified horizontally, and coming out occasionally on the water-courses in prominent escarpments. As we advance, the limestone becomes more ferruginous and the groves of hickory and white and black walnut on the banks of streams less frequent. Yesterday a part of the prairie we passed over was strewn with masses of porphyritic granite and pebbles of quartz and porphyry.

The beautiful prairie carpet is, at this season, variegated with a rich collection of wild flowers — the rose, pink, phlox, cluster lily (which here grows single), the amorpha in full bloom, large and luxuriant, while near the streams we find digitalis, cœnothra with its bright, yellow flowers, and a species of mal-low.

The prairie-rose is abundant to profusion, and gave rise to a spirited discussion in camp last night — one claiming it to be a sweet-briar, another the prairie-rose; "for," argued he, "if a rose that grows on the prairie is not a prairie-rose, I should like to know what is?"

And we have birds to enliven our progress. The road is alive with the mule-bird, whip-poor-will, doves, plover, and meadow lark. Of grouse, or prairie chicken, we have scared up a dozen or two. They are, of course, more shy than the others, but off the road and out in the prairie the hunter would, doubtless, find them more abundant. I speak of Kansas, for we have not seen one in Nebraska.

The solitude of these prairies is often spoken of. They are solitary, but not the road over them, which is as populous and active as any great highway in the country. You are scarcely ever out of sight of wagons — one, two, three, four yoke ox

teams, and one and two span mule teams. And this reminds me of a story I promised to tell, in connection with the remarkable twenty-ox teams mentioned in my last. As ever in the Santa Fé trade, a high official in Washington expressed great dissatisfaction at the dilatoriness of the Quartermasters at Fort Leavenworth in starting transportation out in the spring. He did not appear to know that, until the grass grows on the Plains, the animals cannot be fed, and, consequently, cannot be sent out. They were always started about the middle of May, but that, he declared, would never do. He insisted on their starting the middle of April — came out himself and made the contracts accordingly — very easily finding the contractor that suited him. Having written triumphantly to Washington that he had revolutionized the whole system of transportation contracts, and proportionately pleased with himself, he happened to ride out to Salt Creek, three miles from Leavenworth, about the second week of May, and there, to his astonishment and disgust, found encamped his teams, that he supposed a month on the road to Santa Fé! They had *started*, just as they agreed to!

The average daily time by the Government contract, by ox teams, is seven miles. I should rather say it is the minimum time. The mule teams contract for twelve. Private enterprise is proverbially ahead of Government, and the result of my inquiries among more than a hundred wagoners whom I have conversed with on the road is, that their ox teams, loading five thousand pounds and upward, average sixteen, and the mules eighteen to twenty miles per day. The teams are of four, six, or eight oxen.

miles

or  
teams



One man, who has crossed the Plains fourteen times, had a train of seven wagons, drawn by two oxen each, and told me that he made twenty-five miles per day. I am satisfied that his statement is correct. His loads, of course, are proportionately light, and the economy of time in yoking, unyoking, and herding two instead of six or eight animals, enables him to make the additional miles.

Since leaving Leavenworth, we have passed on the road, in one week, six hundred and eighty wagons, mostly filled with freight — some of them with emigrants. More than half of these wagons are bound for Denver with freight. On the ridge, eighteen miles long, between Rock Creek and the Little Blue, I counted one hundred bound for Denver. One train had a complete quartz-crushing machine, boilers, steam-engine and all, for Central City. Several trains were for Virginia City, some for Empire City, for Utah, and for Oregon. For Denver, they get from six and a half to eight cents per pound freight. It ought to be a money-making business, for it costs nothing to support the animals, which feed on the broad pastures of the Government, and but little to support the men, who cook their own crude comestibles. Indeed, the fast ox-team man told me that his men cost him nothing but the provisions they consumed, for they all went without wages — some for their health and some to work their passage. It may not be generally known that a trip across the Plains for health is in the West a well-recognized remedy for pulmonary and kindred ailings in their incipient stages.

### LETTER III.

FORT KEARNEY, NEBRASKA TERRITORY, June 11, 1866.

STORM-BOUND! Arriving Saturday afternoon, it was our intention to make Sunday a day of rest; but rain, thunder, lightning, and wind raged from Saturday evening until this morning. I particularly mention wind, for it has, in these regions, a strength and endurance nowhere else equalled. Crossing the prairies behind us, it would, in a clear atmosphere under a shining sun and bright sky, bluster and rush with such force as to render a march against it very difficult, and this without the slightest apparent provocation; for in other respects it would be a mild summer day. All that, however, was just the sighing of the gentle zephyr (I grant you the zephyr was full grown and robust) to the performance of yesterday. And then the rain! In "the States" — as they term it here — a well-behaved exhibiting storm is satisfied with sports of the ring, and ground and lofty tumbling for a few hours — say six or eight; here it does not get under fair headway in much less than twenty-four. Then, such lightning! Such rain!

I once heard a man give as a reason for quitting Western Arkansas, that he would n't live in a country where a man could n't lie down without being drowned, nor stand up without being struck by lightning! I feel justified on the same grounds, or rather waters, — for my tent was afloat last night, —



in taking leave of the Valley of the Platte with the least possible delay.

These high winds are a serious obstacle to the planting of fruit-trees in Northern Kansas, and we remarked that nearly all the farmers are endeavoring to procure a plantation of trees, mostly cottonwood, about their houses, as a preliminary shelter for their young orchards. Such is the rarity of trees, as you recede from the Missouri, that at length the eye rests upon a clump or cluster of them peeping from the bosom of some valley, with more pleasure than upon a lovely bouquet of carnations and roses in a city. I am speaking of Northern Kansas, where the great route west travels on a "divide." Going south, as you strike the creeks feeding the Kaw or Kansas, there is no want of every variety of fruit-trees in profusion. This scarcity of wood is, however, attended with one benefit, namely: the erection of solid stone houses, material for which appears to be abundant and excellent. I remarked at Marysville, Kansas, several houses built of a stone identical, in every respect, with the Roman *tufa*, used in the erection of the Coliseum, St. Peter's, and other monuments in Rome, and was informed that there are inexhaustible quarries of it in the neighborhood.

I stop a moment here to chase my paper, which has blown out of my hand, although covered by a tent — and there comes the rain again.

"A soldier's life is always gay."

We have, thus far, made rapid marches for a train of some forty-six mule wagons and sixty mounted men, having come thirty, thirty-five, and even thirty-

eight miles a day. On one occasion, I had for my individual share fifty miles, having preceded the train, and gone seven miles too far.

You gentlemen of the city think it quite an equestrian performance to ride out some six miles and back. Why, your legs are hardly stretched! Rise at three in the morning, clean and feed your horse, get your own breakfast, ride forty miles without stopping, except to water, and then let us hear from you. One piece of advice I will give you. For any fatigue arising from horseback riding, your true repose is not in lying down, but in *walking*. The pain is not in the members stretched in the saddle, but in the unemployed muscles, which stiffen, and can only be properly relaxed by motion. If you are under the stern necessity of going on horseback for some hundreds of miles, you will find the advice good.

As advice is on the carpet, a word about pistols. The custom of carrying arms about the person in a civilized community is so barbarous and cowardly that no gentleman does it; but if you come out here, I could not advise you to dispense with them — not that the inhabitants are not civilized, but because you meet with some very irresponsible people on the road. One of our party, a civilian, who would not be persuaded to go armed, was suddenly converted the other day. He rode ahead of the party out of Seneca, Kansas, and took the wrong road. He tells the story thus:—

"I had gone about two miles, when I thought there was too much grass in the track, and soon was satisfied I was not on the grand route. Presently I saw a horseman coming across the prairie. I waited in order to ask him for information. He soon came



up — a heavy-bearded, hard-looking customer, on a California saddle, with a pair of pistols in his belt. 'Is this the road to Fort Kearney?' said I. 'W-a-l-l,' said he, taking a mental inventory of my personal effects, accoutrements, and points of my horse, 'it is the road to Fort Kearney, but' —

" 'You mean,' said I, 'it's not the direct road. It's over there,' — pointing north.

" 'Yes.'

" 'Thank you,' and putting spurs to my horse, I galloped across the prairie. Once started, I did n't fear him, for I had a good horse under me, but I candidly acknowledge I would n't care to have such another interview. The man may have been perfectly honest and inoffensive, but I should have felt more comfortable with a pistol in my belt.' "

The pleasantest part of our journey, thus far, was our three days on the Little Blue, ascending a valley from one to two miles in breadth, the river fringed on one side or the other with a green belt of willow and cottonwood. Leaving the river, vegetation changes as we reach an immense level plateau, stretching north to the Platte. Here we begin to see the aloe, prickly-pear, and saxifrage, and from a rich black loam the soil now becomes sand and clay, with an occasional ugly alkaline crust upon it. It is said to be utterly sterile, except in its wild grasses. The soil of the valley of the Platte is better, but crops cannot be raised, and the reason — want of rain — somewhat surprises us after our experience of last night. Three dollars per bushel has been paid for corn here within the past two years — the main cost being transportation from a distance.

Ten days out one begins to feel the want of news-

papers. In this plight, a misfortune befell me the other morning. We passed the Frankfort station of the Overland Mail Company, and seeing some passengers about the door, I rode up and asked the favor of any old newspaper they no longer needed. Out of six one only complied, and handed me — a scurrilous and disloyal sheet. I asked for bread, and they gave me a stone!

Speaking of newspapers reminds me of schools. We have seen but one on the route, although we may have passed others without knowing it. We had been travelling over a dry ridge since four o'clock A. M., under a hot sun, with horizon unbroken by tree or cloud, when coming suddenly on the banks of the Vermilion, amidst running waters and grand clumps of trees, we saw something still more fresh and charming — a group of children on their way to school.

" All the little boys and girls,  
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,  
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,  
Tripping and skipping ran merrily "

through the greenwood after each other. I stopped to speak to them, as much as they would let me with their constant interruption of "Are more soldiers coming?" There were fifteen in all — not one from Kansas, but two from Ohio, some from Illinois, Indiana, and Minnesota, three from Germany. Presently along came the teacher, — a nice-looking young woman, — who replied, as I might have expected, to my question as to her native State, — "Connecticut, sir!" She has, she tells me, twenty-two pupils every day in attendance, representing twenty-one families, settled six miles up and down the river.



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#### LETTER IV.

##### NEBRASKA.

FORT KEARNEY, NEBRASKA TERRITORY, June 11, 1866.

"BUFFALO, buffalo?" is the constant inquiry of all those in the party who are on their first trip across the Plains. "When shall we see buffalo?" The anxiety of our country cousins to see the city elephant could not be greater. And yet I venture the assertion that the wild buffalo is not so dangerous an animal.

But I forget. We did see a buffalo, and unexpectedly soon,—in a field ten miles from Leavenworth,—a real, live one, full grown, too. He was in a pasture, in close proximity to a hay-stack; had been brought in from the prairies a mere calf, and now stands, hirsute and shaggy, sad and tractable. Like unto the other reconstructed animal, he takes kindly to Government fodder, and cultivates amicable relations with the Commissary.

The sight of our first real game was an event. It was some thirty miles south of this. I was riding ahead of our party, with a companion, when we remarked to our left, out on the prairie, six objects of unusual appearance. It took us some moments to make up our minds they were game. "Elk," said my friend. "Deer," said I. We were both wrong, for as soon as they started it was plain from their motion that they were antelopes.<sup>1</sup> They were dis-

<sup>1</sup> They need be seen but once to be readily distinguished from deer. The deer leaps, the antelope skims over the ground.

covered an instant after by the head of the column, and in a moment our greyhound, followed by the guide and hunter, started in pursuit.

By the way, I forgot to tell you about our guide — the most striking object in camp. Six feet, lithe, active, sinewy, daring rider, dead shot with pistol and rifle, long locks, fine features and mustache, buckskin leggins, red shirt, broad-brim hat, two pistols in belt, rifle in hand — he is a picture. Has lived since he was eleven on the prairies; when a boy, rode Pony Express on the California route, and during the war was scout and spy. He goes by the name of Wild Bill, and tells wonderful stories of his horsemanship, fighting, and hair-breadth escapes. We do not, however, feel under any obligation to believe them all.

guide  
Wild Bill

It was an exciting race. The greyhound gaining on the antelope, the horse doing his best; for it is a remarkable animal that can run with an antelope. Among the Navajoe Indians the highest praise that can be made of a horse is to say, "He can catch an antelope." But the Indian and Mexican horses are inferior to our blooded stock in speed. Faster and faster went the antelope, and faster sprang the greyhound, until we lost sight of them. I have seen the Derby Day at Epsom Races,—nineteen of the best horses in England running,—but it was a tame affair to this. When the guide returned he told us that if the greyhound had been trained he could have caught the game. It did not know what to do, and would overtake the antelope and lie down, waiting for the hunter to come up.

In approaching Fort Kearney from the east, twenty-six miles off, the eye rests for the first time

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since leaving Leavenworth upon a line of horizon differing from the smooth, ocean-like verge of the prairie. An outline of mountain is seen — at least it looks like mountain by contrast. It is the summit of the dunes or sand-hills which mark the line of demarcation between the high table-land of the prairie and the valley of the Platte. These sand-hills form a line of bluffs sometimes called "Coast of the Nebraska." From the bluff, more than two miles from the river where the road strikes in, the valley of the Platte, covered with grass of a richer green than that of the prairies, presents a lovely appearance, as level as a floor; the fort is easily discernible across it, at a distance of eight miles.

To-day two Pawnee Indians came into camp, — two braves, — draped to the entire satisfaction of that ancient philosopher, who kept his single garment wrapped round him until the fashions should settle down into something definite. Our chiefs had on blankets — only these and nothing more; and in point of fact, without them they would have been *in puris naturalibus*.

Between the upper and nether mill-stone of their traditional enemies — the Sioux on the north, and the Apaches on the south — these poor Pawnees (Cooper's copper heroes) have been nearly, in prairie parlance, wiped out. The remnant left are friendly to the whites, well behaved, and quite equal to their own number of Sioux in a fair fight. Three companies of them enlisted and served during the war as mounted scouts, with great satisfaction to themselves and the Government.

To-day we saw a small squad of cavalry come in. Three out of five were Omaha Indians.

Shortly after entering Nebraska, the first word you hear indicating a current of civilization from the West, is the word *Ranche*. A ranche is not a dwelling, nor a farm-house, nor a store, nor a tavern, but all of these, and more. It is connected with a large corral, and capable of standing an Indian siege. You can procure entertainment at them, — decidedly Nebraskish, — and they keep for sale liquors, canned fruit, knives, playing-cards, saddlery, and *goggles* — both blue and green. Their assortment of optical wares is not large, though, and, not to put too fine a point upon it, they have nothing in that line but goggles. Jestings apart, they are here an article of prime necessity, and you will find them on sale at every ranche on the plains, north and south. The prevalent heat, dust, and glare make them almost indispensable. I saw, among other wares, some handsome buckskin gloves, manufactured by the Mormons at Salt Lake City, which they sell cheaper than Eastern; so look out for a counter-current in the commercial stream.

Descending the sand-hills into the valley of the Platte, you see your first adobe building, and thence they meet your eye all along the road. Strictly speaking, it is not adobe, (which is brick, regularly moulded, and burned in the sun,) but *terrero*, — I believe that is the Spanish term, — being simply prairie sod, cut in blocks of two feet by one foot and a half, and three or four inches thick. They are laid, grass down, in walls three feet thick, and make the coolest house in summer, and warmest in winter, known in this region. Such a building stands an Indian siege better than any other, as it is impossible to fire it, and arrows can do it no damage.



Fort Kearney was established as a cantonment in 1843, by Colonel James Stephen Kearney, (the uncle of General Phil. Kearney,) commanding three companies of the First United States Dragoons. A few adobe buildings were at once put up, and in 1846 it was created a regular post. Of fort there is no longer any vestige, the pickets and block-house put up for defense against Indians having long since disappeared.

The garrison, consisting of a few scattered buildings of inferior class, and quartermaster's stables, is situated about three quarters of a mile from the south bank of Platte River, and two miles north of the ridge of sand bluffs which, for hundreds of miles, form the southern boundary of Platte Valley proper. Nothing grows in the neighborhood, and supplies of every description must be brought from a distance. Corn is a dollar and a half per bushel; whisky ten dollars per gallon, and other things in proportion.

Canned meats, fruits, and vegetables are (of necessity) used to a great extent. I never before understood where the outlet existed for the immense quantities prepared in the Eastern cities. Every ranche from here to California, and down to Mexico, buys largely of them.

Kearney City — familiarly and disrespectfully known to Nebraska teamsters as "Adobe Town" — is two miles west of the fort, and rejoices in some ten or a dozen stores and the "Kearney Herald," a weekly paper which contains some stunning advertisements, mainly of ranches up and down the valley. Among others, Sam. Hyde, in closing a flourishing announcement of his Valley Ranche, says: "Be pleased to give us a call, and taste of the

viands, smell of a smile, and loose your animals to the forage, and if you don't go away feeling better, your stock moving livelier, and your whole outfit looking refreshed, then say Sam. Hyde is n't a good ranchman. Don't forget the place — Valley Ranche, situated in the very heart of that Canaan-like valley, the charming Platte." All of which is what printers call "displayed" in the largest and most ornamental type of the "Kearney Herald."

We encamped eleven miles west of Fort Kearney, last evening, at a point where the road strikes the river. The number of wooded islands here, picturesquely grouped, remind you vividly of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence. The Platte River rises at the base of Frémont's Peak, in the Wind River range of the Rocky Mountains, its main branch flowing directly east to the Missouri. Its name — Platte — is said to be significant of the character of this shallow and many-channeled river, which is platted into myriads of islands and sand-bars. One of these islands, known as Grand Island, was, a few years ago, ninety miles long — probably the largest river island in the world. The new channels, forced by high water, have recently cut it into four islands. Counting the Sweetwater, its main branch, the Platte River is nine hundred miles in length. It is utterly worthless for the purposes of navigation, the quicksands of to-day filling the channels of yesterday.

At Kearney City is stationed an officer with a small squad of soldiers, charged with the execution of the order from department headquarters, not to allow emigrant or other trains to go west of that point unless properly manned and armed against



possible attacks of hostile Indians. No train is allowed to proceed unless attended by men capable of fighting, and fully armed and equipped. A train too weak to protect itself must halt until it can join another train sufficient at least to make up the minimum force required by the order.

I ascertained from the officer on duty there that since May 15, emigrant trains have gone west from Kearney City at the rate of eighty wagons and one hundred and sixty people (men, women, and children) per day. This computation is exclusive of freighters' trains, which exceed the emigrant trains in number of wagons, but not in people. The freight trains are on the road all the time, going and coming, have all their teamsters armed, and do not require the surveillance necessary for the emigrants. It would be within bounds to say that one hundred and fifty wagons pass west daily, during the season. I insert an extract from the Kearney City paper giving the departures for two days. The list, I am informed, is not full:—

LIST OF FREIGHTERS' AND PILGRIMS' TRAINS ORGANIZED AT  
AND PASSING WEST OF KEARNEY.

"June 5— Conductor John Shaum, 23 wagons, 34 men, 34 revolvers, 20 guns, 2 women; bound for Denver.

"June 6— Conductor J. S. Miller, 33 ox wagons, 42 men, 25 revolvers, 15 guns, 3 women, 7 children; bound for Denver.

"Conductor Harmon Kish, 20 ox wagons, 30 men, 8 guns, 23 revolvers; bound for Denver.

"Conductor S. M. Scott, 32 wagons, 34 men, 34 revolvers, 20 guns; bound for Salt Lake."

<sup>1</sup> The term Pilgrims for emigrants first came into use at the period of the heavy Mormon travel—the Mormons styling themselves "Pilgrims to the promised land of Utah." The word has been retained on the Plains, and applied indiscriminately to all emigrants.

A matter of interest just now for Kearney is the completion of the railroad from Omaha. The company expect it to be finished in August next, and are now laying rail at the rate of one mile and a half per day. If the Iowa railroad were completed, so as to make the connection from Chicago to Omaha, across the State of Iowa, the Pacific Railroad from Omaha would be far ahead of all its competitors.



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## LETTER V.

BANKS OF THE RIVER PLATTE,  
(Thirty-four miles W. of Plum Creek.)  
NEBRASKA TERRITORY, June 13, 1866.

WE to-day passed very near the spot designated by acts of Congress as the point where the various lines of railroad intended to reach the Pacific Ocean must concentrate; the exclusive privileges of the remainder of the route to be accorded to the one first at that point with a completed road. The place designated is at the intersection of the one hundredth meridian of longitude and the Republican Fork of the Kansas.

From all I can learn, the railroad from Omaha appears to have, in point of time, what is called the inside track; but whether its want of connection east of Omaha may, or not, prejudice its claim, I am not sufficiently familiar with the act of Congress to decide.

The Indian name of this stream is "Nebraska," — the Shallow River, — but it is now universally called the Platte. The etymology of the word "Platte," given in my last, is the one adopted in Nebraska, the river being so called, they say, from the fact that it plats out the islands and its banks, in its rapid and erratic course. The derivation appears to me far-fetched and forced. Without knowing it positively — for I have never heard it suggested — I feel

almost certain that the name of Platte was given it as follows: —

The boatmen and hunters who accompanied the early explorers, were Canadian *voyageurs* and "*coureurs des bois*," and after some hundreds of miles' experience of the river, spreading indefinitely in width, with low, level banks, scarcely a foot or two higher than the stream, they must inevitably have exclaimed, "*Dieu ! qu'elle est donc plate, cette riviere !*" The word *plate*, repeated in English, was necessarily spelled with two *t*'s, to follow the French pronunciation, and I am well satisfied that this is the origin of the name Platte.

Ascending from Fort Kearney, the hills that bound the river on the south, running with it at a distance varying from a half to three miles, treeless and shrubless at the start, become gradually barren even of grass, and increase in sterility and broken outline until you have a range of cones, caps, and peaks of almost naked earth, pierced and separated by deep cañons. In places, the river is beautiful to the eye, sometimes as broad as the St. Lawrence at Montreal, studded with innumerable islands of every size and form, and fringed (mostly on both sides) with picturesque trees. As I write, looking across a stretch of rich meadow prairie, on which our horses are feeding, at the shining water, relieved by the emerald of the green islets and the heavy border of large dark trees, to the distant frontier of hills, I have as beautiful a landscape before me as an artist need wish.

We have left civilization, and are in the Indian's land. No more houses, farms, fences, gardens, orchards or fields. At the solitary ranche — each one



many miles from the next, a man meets you with pistols in his belt, and you hear from him that as soon as the Cheyennes, Sioux, and Arrapahoes have eaten up the provisions they are now receiving while in attendance at the treaty at Fort Laramie, he expects to be attacked by them. The treaty will last, they say, as long as the sugar the Indians get. They never knew it to be otherwise. The Indians themselves, in going to Laramie, made sport of the treaty, and say they will make one "so long" — indicating the last thumb-joint on the hand. I have conversed with the dwellers in the ten ranches from here to Fort Kearney, and they all tell substantially the same story. Notwithstanding treaties and the most solemn promises on the part of the savages, they look for an outbreak, with the usual Indian barbarities and horrors, as certainly as the leaves fall.

The trouble appears to be that these Indians have not been thoroughly whipped. They despise the whites and their government, for they cannot understand that we should not chastise them if we have the ability to do it. Their successive massacres have been rewarded with treaties and presents. If a force strong enough to subdue them is sent out, they immediately sue for peace, and, of course, it is granted them in spite of all their treachery. Were we to do otherwise, and give them no quarter, there would be a cry of cruelty and oppression that would deafen Congress and the country; and yet year after year, the dreadful farce goes on. Whenever our friends, the savages, run short of powder, lead, and blankets, they have an inexhaustible store-house from which to draw. They are not at all embarrassed. They step down to the Plains, plunder a few wag-

ons, murder a few emigrants — a force is sent after them — they sue for peace — have a treaty, with its usual accompaniment of presents — get what they want — and begin over again when they see fit! Some eight thousand of them have been for the past two months at Laramie "negociating" — and it is supposed the treaty will cost the Government more than half a million of dollars.

If the expenditure were of any avail, well and good; but every one knows it is not of the slightest. It is very true that the Indians do not get all the money appropriated. Much of it is intercepted and stolen before it reaches them, and the amount of corruption generated by this useless and vicious system of Indian treaties is precisely one of the strongest arguments against its existence.

The nature of the outrages and barbarities perpetrated by these savages is not, I think, generally understood at the East. Murder and scalping are their mildest features. Their treatment of women and young girls beggars description. I was in Minnesota during the dreadful Sioux outbreak of 1862, and I speak within bounds in saying that it is impossible to write in English a description of the horrors inflicted on women. A man face to face with another man, would find it difficult to tell them! Language cannot render them.

And yet the men who have made their wild prairie home in these ranches, are willing to remain and brave it out. I said to one, "Of course, as you expect the Indians down upon you, you will leave your ranche and place your family in safety?" "No," said he; "where should I go? All I have is here. They burned my house and killed my stock



two years ago, and I'll stay and see it out." Another whom I asked what he would do, replied, "Give 'em the best I've got," pointing to his rifle.

An hour ago, about sunset, I strolled up to the hut near which we are camped. The wife of the ranche man was watering a struggling little evergreen, growing at her door. On the door-sill sat a bright-eyed, flaxen-haired little child. The mother returned my "good-evening," with a sad expression. Poor evergreen! Poor child! Poor mother!

These ranches are seen at a distance of from four to six miles on these dead levels, and loom up like a Fortress Monroe, or a Castle St. Angelo. A stable or house with its square openings for light and air, resembles, at a short distance, a brown stone fort, with embrasures. The dwelling is sometimes adobe, but more frequently a solidly built log house, much more compact and strong than our Ohio log huts, and a corral of pickets or adobe, constitute the prairie castle.

The last ranche I passed—a new one—was built of cedar logs, hauled forty-five miles.

I have been surprised to find the cactus growing in great variety and profusion in so high a latitude as this. Within the past four days I have seen a dozen different kinds; some of them of great beauty. If I had been told a month ago that the cactus grew in latitude forty-one, I should have doubted it.

Thermometer yesterday morning at 3.30 A. M., 45°. This morning at the same hour, 57°. This evening at six P. M., 75°.

## LETTER VI.

MORROW'S RANCHE, ON THE PLATTE, }  
NEBRASKA TERRITORY, June 15. }

FORT McPherson, named after the gallant General McPherson, who fell in front of Atlanta, was hastily established as a post during the war by some volunteer troops. The winter quarters, huts of cedar logs, erected by them, with a stockade, flag-staff, a few pieces of small artillery, and quartermaster's buildings, constitute the post. It is at present garrisoned by two companies U. S. Volunteers, and two companies Regular Cavalry.

The place is designated on some of the maps as Cottonwood, and is ninety-five miles west of Fort Kearney. We laid over here this morning to rest and shoe our horses, and have made only an afternoon's march to-day, twelve miles, to this point, which is at the junction of the North and South Fork of the Platte.

I mentioned in my last, the change in the character of the hills on the south bank of the Platte, which we are ascending.

For the last fifteen miles our route rises rapidly, and the hills approach the river denuded even of the scant herbage with which they are clothed near Fort Kearney, arid and broken into separate and rugged peaks and elevations, like some gigantic ocean breaker dashing its immense volume into a hundred different waves. There is a striking similarity be-



tween the last elevations of the range and the celebrated Siebengebirge on the Rhine; even to the peculiar shape of the Drachenfels. The hills of the Rhine are wooded, and allowing for the apparent difference on that account I should say they were of the same size with those of the Platte.

The birds have become scarce. The prairie hen or grouse, which follows the fields and civilization, disappeared hundreds of miles back; the bobo'link, who was with us only for a few days in Southern Nebraska, also affects the society of man. All that are left are meadow larks, plover, and doves, which last are in plenty. Game increases. We see deer and antelope every day; the prairie dog has amused us with his antics, and all we need to make our happiness complete is the sight of a buffalo.

Great excitement in camp this evening. "Boys, there's an Indian up at the ranche!" "Is there? let's go see him." I supposed it was some drunken outcast, such as too frequently loaf around stores, and paid no attention to the report. Having occasion, however, to go up in the evening, I saw our savage, and a fine specimen he was — a Sioux, such as I have seen many in Minnesota.

When the first French explorers went into the land of the Dakotah, they came from the Ojibways or Chippewas, their traditional enemies. In their conversations among themselves, the Frenchmen avoided the use of the word Dakotah, so that the suspicious savages might not know they were speaking of them. To designate them they availed themselves of the Chippewa expression when referring to the Dakotah — "Nadiessou," "our enemies." The last syllable changed to *Sioux* has remained in pop-

ular use, but is a mere nickname, and excessively disagreeable to the tribe to which it is applied.

The origin of the word Sioux, as I give it, may be found in the published travels of the early French discoverers. Thus much to make clear my conversation with the savage. He had been out hunting, was thrown from his horse and badly bruised. Jack Morrow, well known in all this region, and the owner of the ranche, to which he has given the somewhat ambitious title of "The Junction House," from the fact of its being near the junction of the South and North Plattes, accords him protection and hospitality until he shall be able to return to his tribe — the Brulés. This Sioux belongs to the band of a chief called Spotted-Tail, which gentleman of variegated extremity is said to be now in attendance at the treaty of Fort Laramie.

I found him the centre of a crowd of soldiers, (most of whom had never seen an Indian,) calmly smoking his long wooden pipe, and profoundly oblivious of the presence of all around him. Waiting until the crowd had dispersed, I approached him with the question, "Pawnee"?

Violent negation and expression of disgust.

"Sioux"?

Reluctant and gruff assent.

"Then you are a Dakotah!"

His features instantly relaxed, and grasping my hand with "Good, good; Dakotah! Dakotah!" he actually laughed with pleasure.

Thermometer at 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> A. M., 63°; at 4 P. M., 82°; at 9 P. M., 58°.

SATURDAY, June 16.

We had no wood last night for our fires but



cedar, and the camp was filled with its aroma. Our route to-day has been monotonous. Passed a train of thirty-one wagons bound for Salt Lake City, all six or eight ox teams, carrying freight, three to four thousand pounds each load. They travel an average of seventeen miles a day, and expect to reach their destination by the end of August. Their freight is paid eighteen cents per pound, from Nebraska City.

As we march there is great increase of dead animals fallen by the wayside, mostly oxen. The carcasses soon disappear here, showing the presence of the prairie wolf, whose sharp howl we sometimes hear in the night.

We have not much ice-water, but soda-water is to be had in every puddle by the road-side, and the ground is covered, where it has stood, with a white incrustation. Properly enough, a station called Alkali is just ahead of us.

"Thermometer at 3½ A. M., 57°; 3 P. M., 72½°; 6 P. M., 69°." Dry stuff—figures about the thermometer? perhaps you think. Not dry to everybody. Even distances and the price of freight, interest many. If I were to indite a page or two about the the prairie flowers,—the large patches of blue eutoca, the artemisia, glittering like silver as the wind turns its leaves to the sun, the acres of helianthus and golden coreopsides, the fragrant phloxes, rudbeckias, azure larkspur, purple psilotria; the quantities of cacti, pink, red and yellow, the islands of sweet-briar in the ocean of prairie grass,—your business man, who wants "facts, sir, facts!" would set it down as nonsense, and so your poor correspondent, after a hard day's ride, having risen at three A. M., scribbling with a lead-pencil, paper on knee, at set

of sun, in front of his tent, has before his eyes the fear of dissatisfying many, with no certainty of pleasing even a few.

We passed O'Fallon's Bluff to-day — named after a hunter killed there by the Cheyennes. The Bluff is sandy, and not very high. The road passes around, and strikes the river above it again, coming in at the bank through a lane of cottonwood, willow, and innumerable bushes of sweet-briar, loading the air with fragrance. A hum of gratification ran through the party. Much sand and sun, and the shade of nothing but telegraph-poles all along the road, made it an oasis on the desert route.

SUNDAY, June 17.

We have glorious risings and settings of the sun. With reveille at three, we are usually standing by our horses waiting for the bugler to sound "mount" when the rich sunlight, bathing the clouds in gold, spreads over valley and river. Each sunset is declared more magnificent than the last, and sometimes the question is asked if this is as grand as an Italian sunset, showing how deeply rooted in our literature is the English belief on that subject. It is all very well to declare an Italian sunset magnificent, as compared with English leaden skies, but it is simply absurd for an American to adopt the idea and apply it to his own country.

Graves by the roadside increase in number. I saw but few in Kansas. To-day we passed many. Two small pieces of board, one of them rudely lettered, usually mark the places of burial. Some of them are without name or date. Many are the graves of soldiers or travellers killed by the Indians.



Most of them are of those who died by the wayside, travelling from their home to a distant land of promise, to which, indeed, let us hope, they have gone. One grave, off the road some distance, on a solitary hillside, bears an inscription on its rude headboard, evidently made from a portion of a wagon, more remarkable than any I ever saw, and, touching and beautiful in its simplicity. It is

### WOMAN.

7 P. M. Shades steal over the soft outline of the hills, across the Platte, and the sun sets in an unclouded horizon. Thermometer, 3½ A. M., 44°; 3 P. M., 90°; 6 P. M., 80°.

To-morrow we reach Fort Sedgwick, and leave Nebraska for Colorado.

BANKS OF THE SOUTH FORK OF THE PLATTE }  
(near Beauvais Rancho), }  
OLD CALIFORNIA CROSSING, MONDAY, June 18, 1866.

WE rise as we advance, and a few miles further on shall be three thousand feet above sea level. The valley narrows, the river grows smaller, and the hills lower and bleaker. We passed through some twenty acres of cactus this morning, most of it of what is called the prickly-pear variety. Some of the bunches were from ten to fifteen feet in diameter. They are just beginning to flower, the bunches bearing from fifty to one hundred flowers. These are in great variety of colors — straw, buff, pink, red, &c.

Thermometer to-day, at 3½ A. M., 58°; 3 P. M., 77°; 5 P. M., 85°; 7 P. M., 62°; 9 P. M., 58°.

Graves by the roadside still increase in number. To-day for the first time we saw one with a

cross on it. How much to be regretted that the sacred emblem of man's redemption and hope of a blessed immortality, should be banished from such a spot! In our elegant metropolitan cemeteries, in whose adornment all the erudition of theology, architecture, sculpture, and sacred history is laid under contribution, prominent place can be found for the Roman cinerary urn, — meaningless in such a place, — for the ram's head, typical of pagan sacrifice, for the reversed torch, emblematic of heathen despair beyond the grave, for the links and triangles of modern profane societies; for any thing, in short, but the Cross, the highest, holiest symbol of Christianity.



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## LETTER VII

FORT SEDGWICK, (Five miles west of Julesburg,) }  
COLORADO TERRITORY, MONDAY, June, 1866. }

JULESBURG has six houses, including a store, adobe-yard, blacksmith shop and — billiard saloon! This last institution has been established but a short time, and at its advent,

"All the world wondered;"

— that is, all the world in Julesburg.

At Fort Sedgwick, this grand territorial highway branches. Wagons, emigrants, and trains for Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, and some portions of Utah and California, cross the South Fork of the Platte and go by the Lodge Pole Creek and Fort Laramie routes. The South Fork is fordable here, and a ferry-boat is now nearly completed, to be used at high water.

Fort Sedgwick is the most important of the military posts on this route. As already stated in a previous letter, these forts are mere posts or garrisons, having no defensive works whatever. Sedgwick was established in 1864, and is now a four-company post, garrisoned by two companies of the 5th United States Volunteers, one company of the 18th Regulars, and one company of the 2d United States Cavalry; all under the command of Captain Neill, of the 18th Regulars. It is the best-ordered and dis-

Not Sedgwick  
Hot

BARE BEAUTIES. — WOOD.

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ciplined fort we have seen since leaving Leavenworth. The position is commanding, being high, and yet very near the river. A point called Pilot Knob, on the highest elevation of the range of hills behind, affords a magnificent view of the two Forks of the Platte, the Republican Fork, a grand sweep of prairie, and the distant Bear Buttes, called by some the Bare Beauties! — beauties not even

Pilot Knob

"Dans le simple appareil"

of the one "snatched from slumber."

The surgeon at this post insists that the entire Platte Valley is susceptible of as high a state of culture and fertility as that of the Nile. For the sake of the Valley itself, and the future State of Nebraska, I sincerely hope he may be right. Irrigation is his remedy. The Valley, and in fact nearly all the State, wants water and wood. Irrigation is to cure the first defect, and the discovery of coal the second. With the exception of some cedar up the cañons, difficult of access and more difficult to obtain, there is no wood; and fuel is hauled to Fort Sedgwick from distances of forty to seventy miles, at a cost of more than one hundred dollars per cord. The lumber with which they are now erecting houses in Julesburg is brought by wagon from Denver, and costs eighty dollars per thousand. On the Platte below, a fringe of trees is almost everywhere visible along the river; but, in ascending the South Fork, you may travel a long day's journey without a tree in sight.

Irrigation

Wood

We have not ascended on our route for several days without result. Fort Sedgwick is 3,660 feet above the level of the sea.

Sedgwick Fort



June 19, 1866.

My journal of yesterday was interrupted by the most startling incident of our travel thus far. An angry-looking storm, that had been gathering since four o'clock, burst upon our camp at about 6 P. M., in rain, thunder, lightning, and hail. I have seen heavier rain and hail, but the lightning had terrifying, grand, forked tongues, and the usual descending flashes were its simplest expression. Against the black curtain of the sky it formed a quivering lattice-work of livid fire. The crashes and peals came nearer and more deafening, until suddenly two vivid strokes fell within a moment of each other, which, we were certain, must have struck within the camp. I looked out of our tent, as well as the dashing rain and blinding light would allow, and within fifty yards of it I saw a mule just stricken down. The animal gave one convulsive shudder and was dead. Nearer to us, almost at the same instant, we saw a man fall. We ran to his assistance. Fortunately he was only stunned. He rallied in the course of half an hour, and described his sensation from the shock thus: "I thought my back was broken, and my mouth appeared to be full of vinegar." Experimenters in electricity will appreciate the latter effect.

While the mule that was struck stood in the lowest ground in camp, on the more elevated places, within sixty feet, were wagons and elevated tent-poles, all with more or less iron about them, unharmed! The storm passed down the Valley, where it appeared to be raging with unabated vigor for more than an hour after it left us.

Thermometer yesterday (18th), at 3.30 A. M., 58°;

3 P. M., 77°; 5 P. M., 85°; 7 P. M. (after the storm), 62°; 9 P. M., 58°.

We made a short twelve-mile march this P. M. More cactus. I should be afraid to say how many acres of it we passed over, lest you might doubt my estimate. Among the colors I had not before remarked were lemon, maroon, and a beautiful cherry with a silver-white edge. Any half-dozen of them would make a garden the centre of attraction for a whole city. Besides the birds I have already mentioned, I saw to-day several flocks of ducks, curlew, and the red-winged blackbird.