



## **Picturesque America; or, the land we live in**

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

**Bryant, William Cullen**

**New York, 1874**

The Plains And The Sierras.

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## THE PLAINS AND THE SIERRAS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOMAS MORAN.



Witches' Rocks, Weber Cañon.

THE present banishes the past so quickly in this busy continent that to the younger generation of to-day it already seems a very dreamy and distant heroic age when men went out upon the great prairies of the West as upon a dreaded kind

of unknown sea. Even now, perhaps, there is a little spice of adventure for the quieter New-England citizen, as he gathers around him the prospective contents of a comfortable travelling-trunk, and glances at his long slip of printed railway-tickets, preparatory to thundering westward to look out at the great stretch of the Plains from the ample window of a perfectly-upholstered sleeping-car; but how remote the day seems when men tightened their pistol-belts and looked to their horses, and throbbed (if they were young) with something of the proud consciousness of explorers; and so set out, from the frontier settlement of civilization, upon that great ocean of far-reaching, level grass-land and desert, to cross which was a deed to be talked of like the voyage of the old *Minyæ*! A single title of Mr. Harte's has preserved for us the whole spirit of those seemingly old-time journeys; he has called the travellers "the Argonauts of '49," and in this one phrase lies the complete picture of that already dim and distant venture—the dreaded crossing of "the Plains."

But, although the "prairie schooner"—the great white-tented wagon of the gold-seekers and the pioneers—and its adjuncts, and the men that rode beside it, have disappeared, we cannot change the Plains themselves in a decade. We encroach a little upon their borders, it may be, and learn of a narrow strip of their surface, but they themselves remain practically untouched by the civilization that brushes over them; they close behind the scudding train like the scarce broader ocean behind the stoutest steamer of the moderns—a vast expanse as silent and unbroken and undisturbed as it lay centuries before ever rail or keel was dreamed of. It is our point of view that has changed, not they; and for all of us there remain the same wonders to be looked upon in this great half-known region as were there for the earliest Indian fighter—the first of the adventurous souls that went mine-hunting toward the Golden Gate.

Our time, it is true, attaches a different signification to the title, "the Plains," from that which it bore little more than a quarter of a century ago. In reality, there extends from the very central portion of the now well-peopled Western States to the very foot of the Rocky Mountains one vast reach of prairie—the most remarkable, in all its features, on the globe. On the eastern portion of this are now the thoroughly settled, grain-bearing States—full of fertile farms and great cities, and no longer connected in our minds, as they were in those of men a generation before us, with the untried lands of exploration and adventure. For us, the boundary of the region of the comparatively unknown has been driven back beyond the Mississippi, beyond the Missouri, even; and the Eastern citizen, be he ever so thoroughly the town-bred man, is at home until he crosses the muddy, sluggish water that flows under Council Bluffs, and hardly passes out of the land of most familiar objects until the whistle of the "Pacific express," that carries him, is no longer heard in Omaha, and he is fairly under way on the great level of Nebraska.

The route of the Pacific Railway is not only that which for many years will be

the most familiar path across the Plains, and not only that which passes nearest to the well-known emigrant-road of former days, but it is also the road which, though it misses the nobler beauties of the Rocky Mountains, shows the traveller the prairie itself

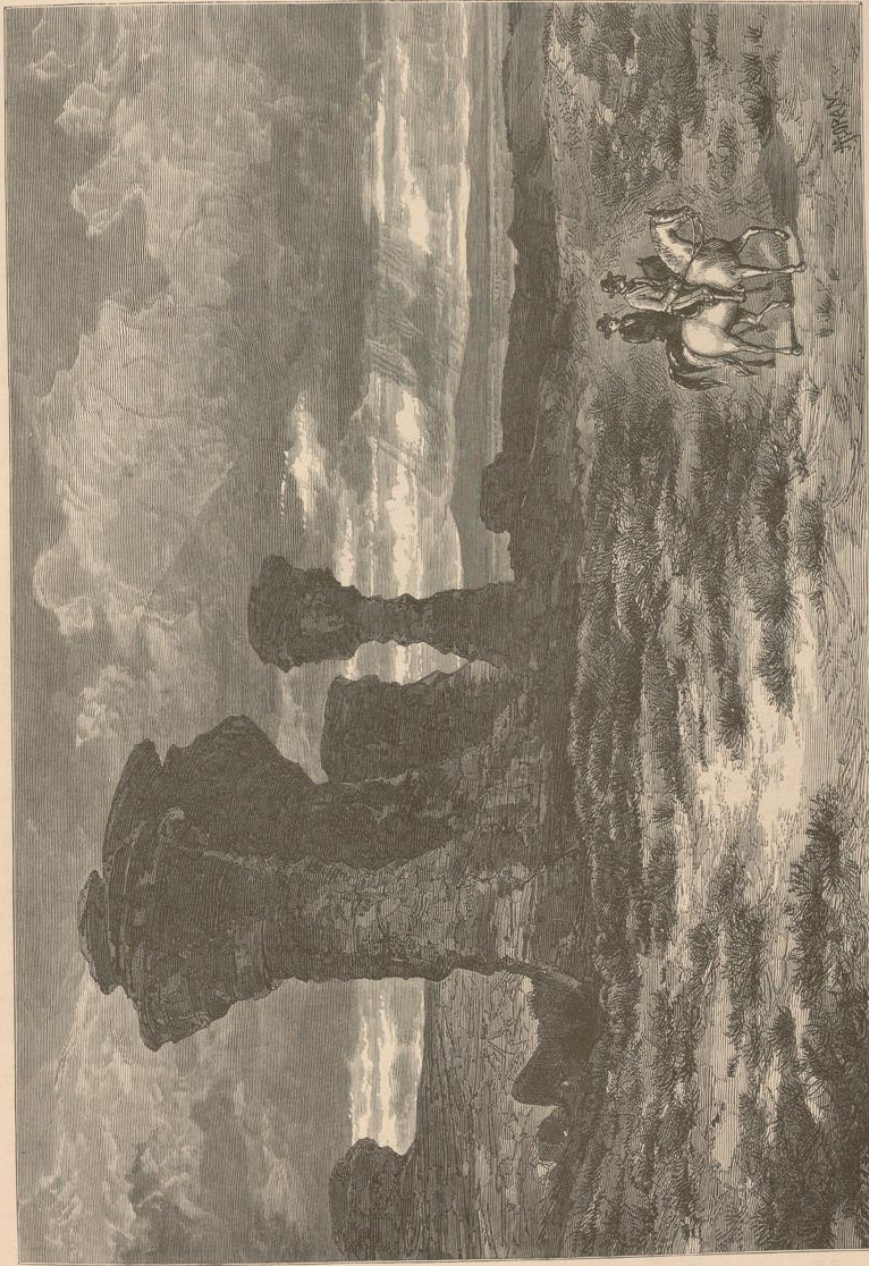


Red Buttes, Laramie Plains.

in perhaps as true and characteristic an aspect as could be found on any less-tried course. It passes through almost every change of prairie scenery—the fertile land of the east and the alkali region farther on; past the historic outposts of the old pioneers; among low *buttes* and infrequent “islands;” and over a country abounding in points of view from which one may take in all the features that mark this portion of the continent. To the south, the great level expanse is hardly interrupted before the shore of the Gulf of Mexico is reached, and the Mexican boundary; to the north, the hills and high table-land of the Upper Missouri are the only breaks this side of the Canadian border. Through almost the middle of this vast and clear expanse the Union Pacific Railway runs east and west—a line of life flowing like a river through the great plain—the Kansas Pacific joining it at the middle of its course, a tributary of no small importance.

Omaha—most truly typical of those border towns that, all the world over, spring up on the verge of the civilized where the unexplored begins—stands looking out upon the

muddy water of the Missouri, and watching with interested eyes that transient traveller whom it generally entices in vain to linger long within its precincts—a town that has been all its life a starting-place; to which hardly anybody has ever come with the thought of staying, so far as one can learn from hearsay; and yet, in spite of the fact



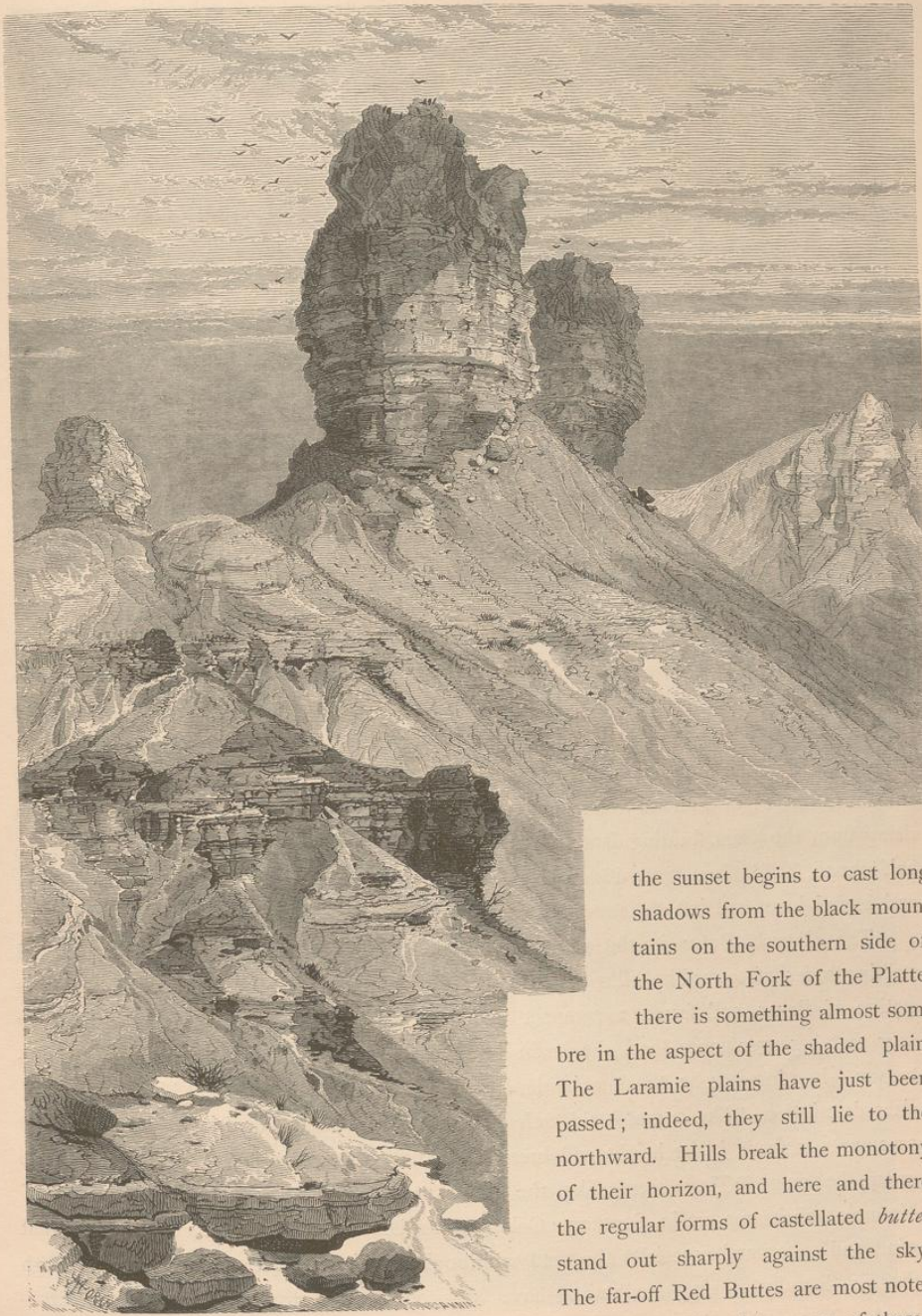
DIAL ROCK, RED BUTTES, LARAMIE PLAINS.

that every man seems to arrive only with the thought of departing, a prosperous, thrifty town, not without a look of permanence, though not of any age beyond the memory of the youngest inhabitant. In its directory, which the writer once chanced to read with some care, in a waiting hour, you may find facts that will startle you about the rapidity of its growth and the splendor of its resources. At its station, one feels a little of the old-time pioneer feeling, as he seems to cut the chain that binds him to Eastern life, and is whirled out upon the great grassy sea he has looked at wonderingly from the Omaha hills.

The word "valley," in this apparently unbroken plain, seems a misnomer; but it is everywhere used—as in regions where its significance is truer—for the slight depression that accompanies the course of every stream; and an old traveller of the Plains will tell you that you are "entering the valley of the Platte," or "coming out of the Papillon Valley," with as much calmness as though you were entering or leaving the rockiest and wildest cañon of the Sierras. And the valley of the Platte, whereof he speaks, lies before one almost immediately after he has left the Missouri behind him. There is only a short reach of railway to the northwest, a sharp turn to the westward, and the clear stream of the river is beside the track—a clear, full channel if the water is high, a collection of brooks threading their way through sandy banks if it is low. For more than a whole day the railway runs beside the stream, and neither to the north nor south is there noteworthy change in the general features of the scenery. A vast, fertile plain, at first interrupted here and there by bluffs, and for some distance not seldom dotted by a settler's house, or by herds of cattle; then a more monotonous region, still green and bright in aspect; farther on—beyond Fort Kearney, and Plum Creek, and McPherson, all memorable stations with many associations from earlier times—a somewhat sudden dying away of the verdure, and a barren country, broken by a few ravines. This, again, gives place, however, to a better region as the Wyoming boundary is approached.

Along this reach of the railway, in its earlier days, stood ambitious "cities," two or three whose ruins are the only reminders now of their existence. They are odd features of this part of the great prairie, these desolate remains of places not a little famous in their time, and now almost forgotten. The walls of deserted *adobe* houses, wherein men sat and planned great futures for these towns in embryo, look at you drearily, not seldom watching over the graves of their owners, whose schemings were nipped in the very bud by the decisive revolver-bullet or the incisive bowie, as the unquiet denizens of the mushroom metropolis extirpated their fellow-citizens like true pioneers, and "moved on" to the next "terminus of the road."

The Wyoming border crossed, a new region is entered. The Plains do not end, but they are already closely bordered, within sight, by the far-outlying spurs of the Rocky Mountains. Beyond the civilized oasis of Cheyenne, the scenery takes on a darker look, and, if one chances to come to the little station of Medicine Bow when



Buttes, Green River.

the sunset begins to cast long shadows from the black mountains on the southern side of the North Fork of the Platte, there is something almost sombre in the aspect of the shaded plain. The Laramie plains have just been passed; indeed, they still lie to the northward. Hills break the monotony of their horizon, and here and there the regular forms of castellated *buttes* stand out sharply against the sky. The far-off Red Buttes are most noteworthy and most picturesque of these;

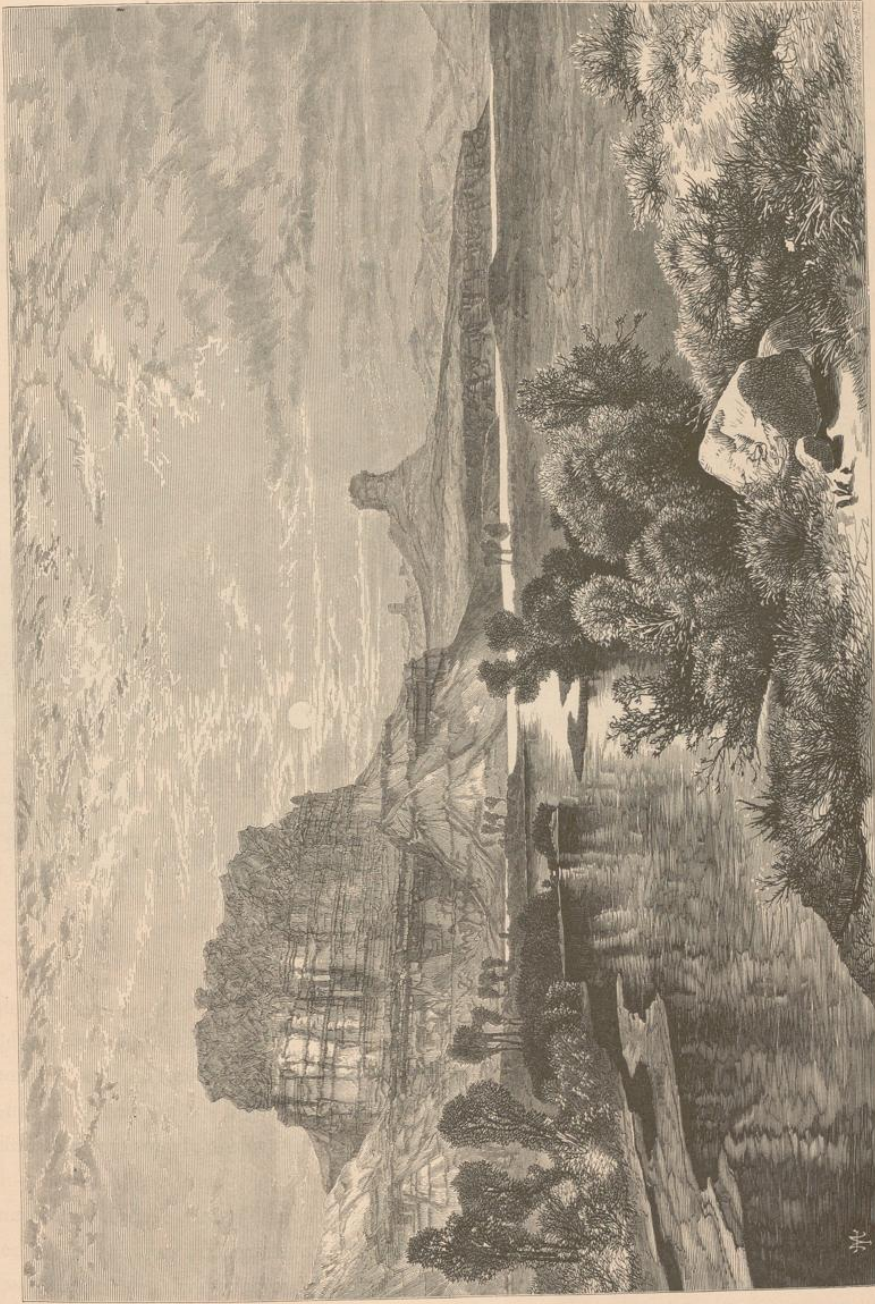
grouped together like giant fortresses, with fantastic towers and walls, they lift ragged edges above the prairie, looking lonely, weird, and strong. Among the singular shapes their masses of stone assume, the strangely-formed and pillar-like Dial Rocks tower up—four columns of worn and scarred sandstone, like the supports of some ruined cromlech built by giants. About them, and, indeed, through the whole region about the little settlements and army-posts, from the place called Wyoming, on to Bitter Creek—ominously named—the country is a barren, unproductive waste. The curse of the sage-brush, and even of alkali, is upon it, and it is dreary and gloomy everywhere save on the hills.

Only with the approach to Green River does the verdure come again—and then only here and there, generally close by the river-bank. Here the picturesque forms of the buttes reappear—a welcome relief to the monotony that has marked the outlook during the miles of level desert that are past. The distance, too, is changed, and no longer is like the great surface of a sea. To the north, forming the horizon, stretches the Wind-River Range—named with a breezy poetry that we miss in the later nomenclature of the race that has followed after the pioneers. To the south lie the Uintah Mountains.

At some little distance from the railway the great Black Buttes rise up for hundreds of feet, terminating in round and rough-ribbed towers. And other detached columns of stone stand near them—the Pilot, seen far off in the view that Mr. Moran has drawn of the river and its cliffs. And through all this region fantastic forms abound everywhere, the architecture of Nature exhibited in sport. An Eastern journalist—a traveller here in the first days of the Pacific Railway—has best enumerated the varied shapes. All about one, he says, lie “long, wide troughs, as of departed rivers; long, level embankments, as of railroad-tracks or endless fortifications; huge, quaint hills, suddenly rising from the plain, bearing fantastic shapes; great square mounds of rock and earth, half-formed, half-broken pyramids—it would seem as if a generation of giants had built and buried here, and left their work to awe and humble a puny succession.”

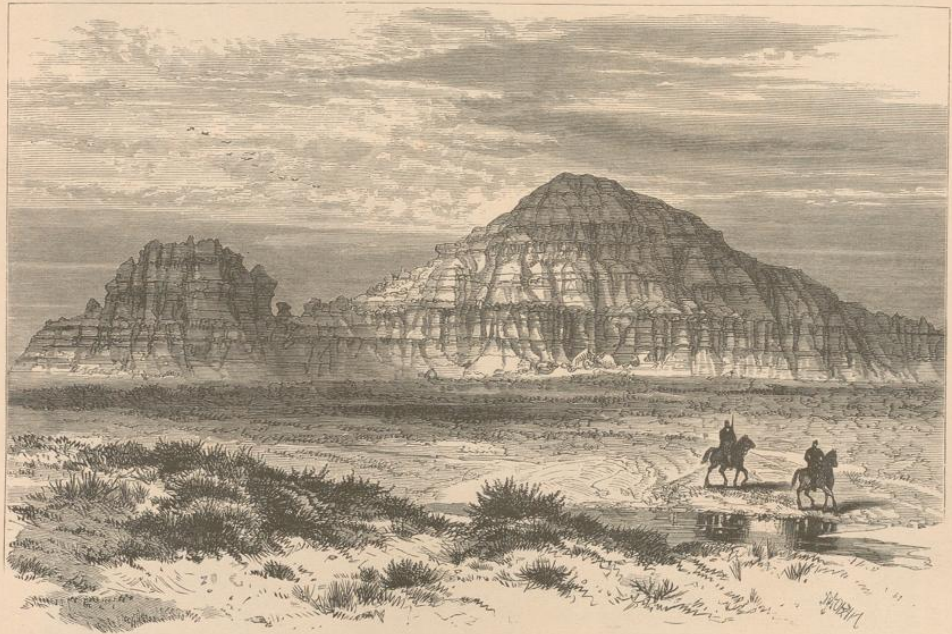
The Church Butte is the grandest of the groups that rise in this singular and striking series of tower-like piles of stone. It lies somewhat further on, beyond the little station of Bryan, and forms a compact and imposing mass of rock, with an outlying spur that has even more than the main body the air of human, though gigantic architecture. It “imposes on the imagination,” says Mr. Bowles, in one of his passages of clear description, “like a grand old cathedral going into decay—quaint in its crumbling ornaments, majestic in its height and breadth.” And of the towering forms of the whole group, he says: “They seem, like the more numerous and fantastic illustrations of Nature’s frolicksome art in Southern Colorado, to be the remains of granite hills that wind and water, and especially the sand whirlpools that march with lordly force through the air—literally moving mountains—have left to tell the story of their own achievements. Not unfitly, there as here, they have won the title of ‘Monuments to the Gods.’”





CLIFFS OF GREEN RIVER.

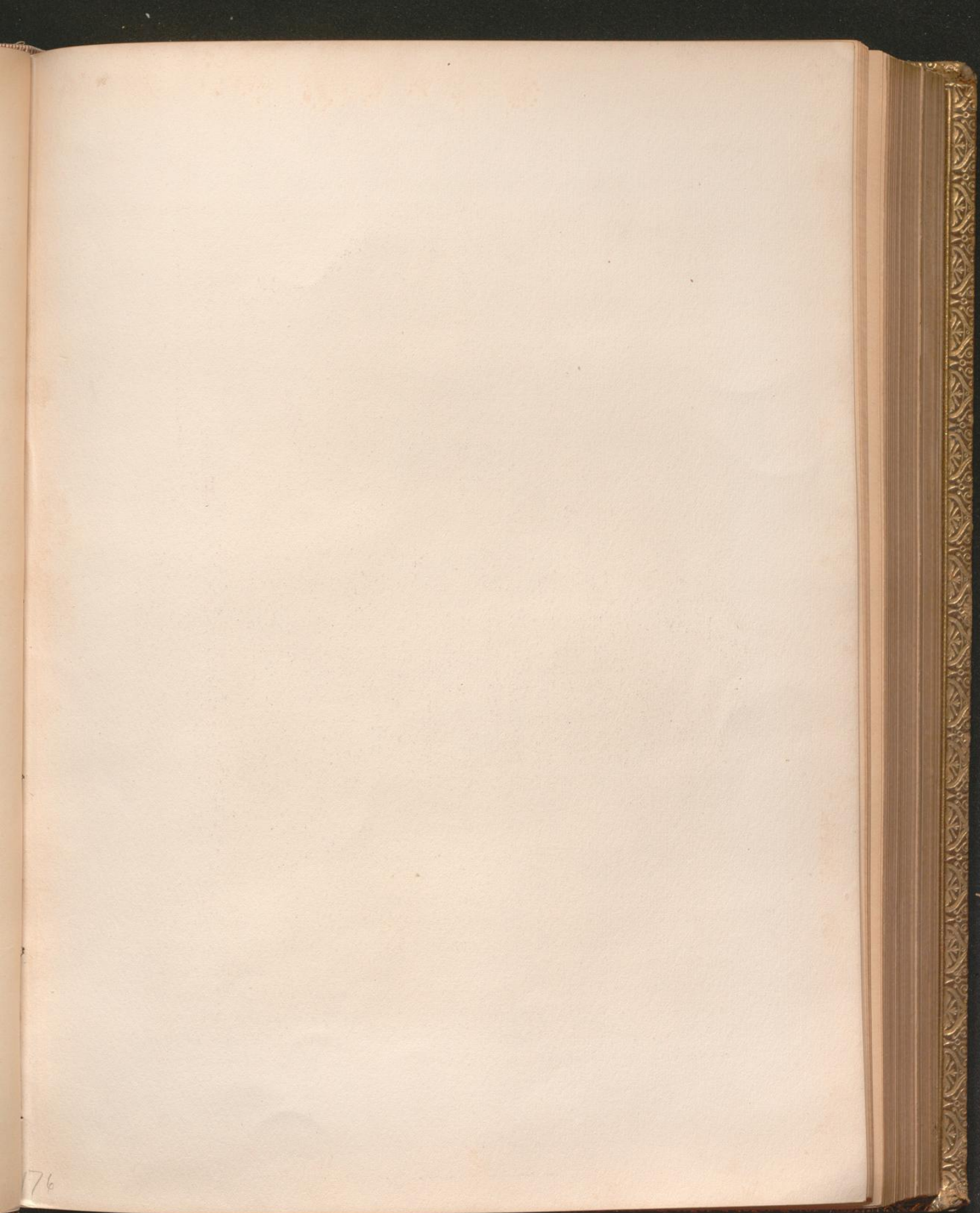
This point on the Plains, where the mountains—the main chains running northwest and southeast—seem to send out transverse ranges and outlying spurs to intersect the prairie in all directions—if, indeed, we may speak of prairie any longer where the level reaches are so small as here among the Rocks—has interests beyond those of its merely picturesque scenery. While we have spoken of the cliffs and *buttes*, the route we are pursuing has crossed the “backbone of the continent”—that great water-shed where the waters that flow through the whole east of the country separate from those that descend toward the west. It is at Sherman—which its proud neighbors and few residents will haughtily but truly describe to you as “the highest railway-station in the world”—



Church Butte, Utah.

that the greatest elevation is reached; for the little group of buildings there lies eight thousand two hundred and thirty-five feet above sea-level. It is impossible to realize that this height has been attained, the ascent has been so gradual, the scenery so unmarked by those sharp and steep forms which we are accustomed always to associate with great mountains.

It is a characteristic of this whole portion of the Rocky-Mountain chain, and one that disappoints many a traveller, that there are here no imposing and ragged peaks, no sharp summits, no snow-covered passes, and little that is wild and rugged. All that those who remember Switzerland have been accustomed to connect in their minds with great



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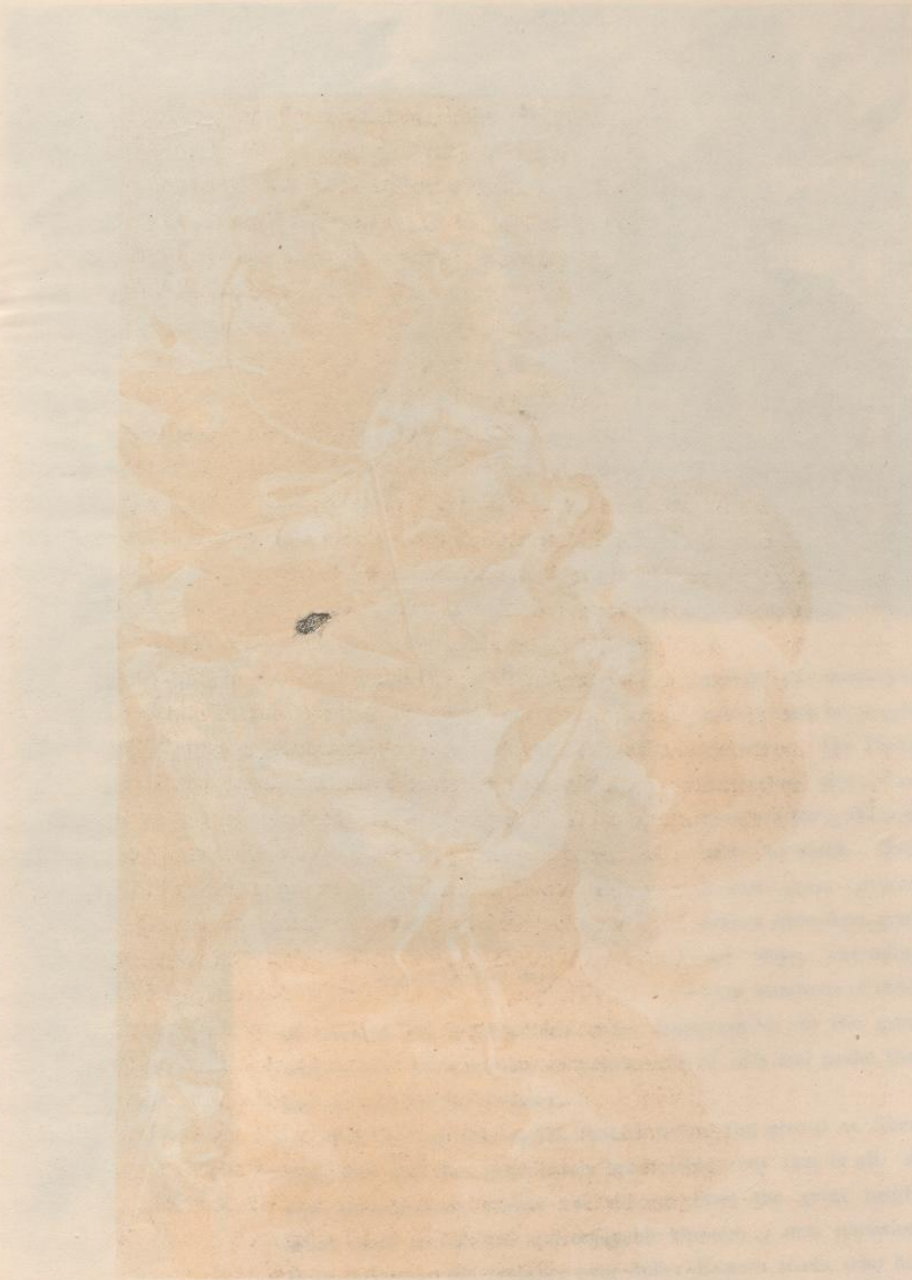


H. B. Hall, Jr. sc.

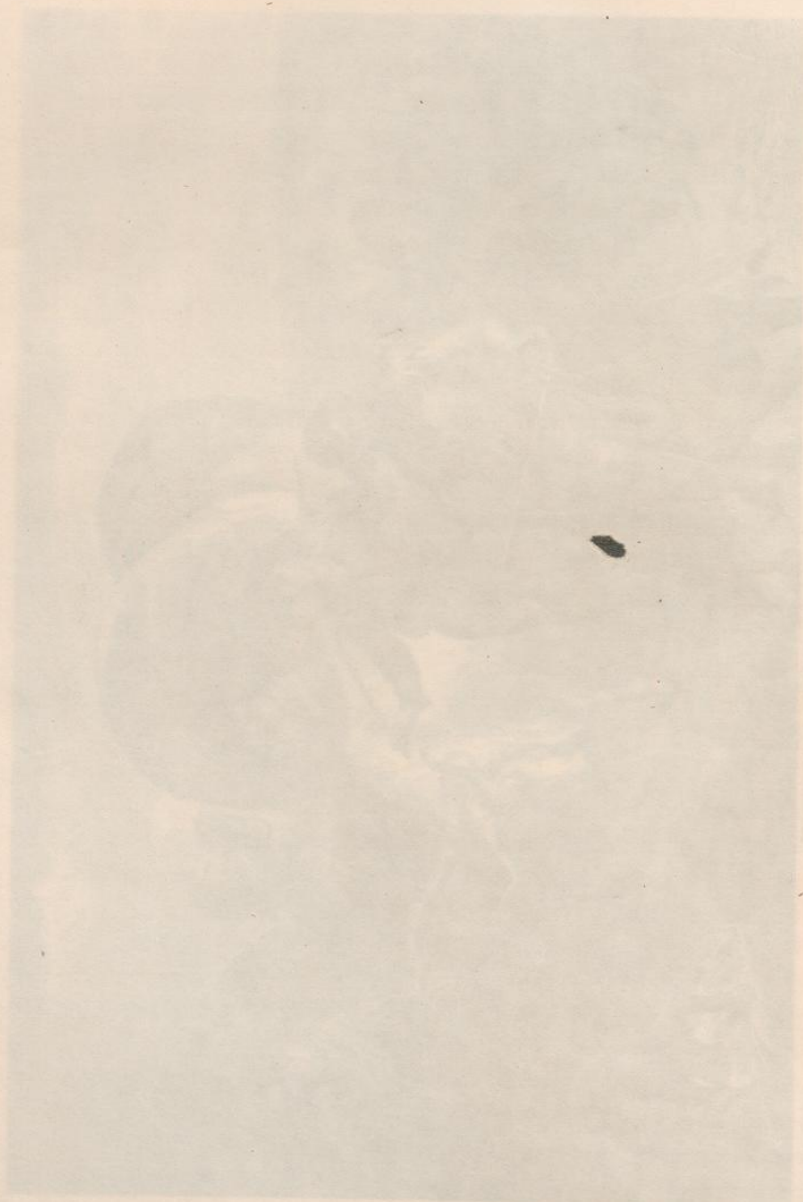
T. O. C. Dudley, fecit.

*Emigrants Crossing the Plains.*

New York: J. Appleton & Co.



...the "lightning" ... of his own ... and the ... possible ... first ... the ... "down ...". The ...



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Castle Rock, Echo Cañon.

groups of mountain-masses must be sought elsewhere. The Plains themselves rise; one does not leave them in order to climb. Over a vast, grass-covered, almost unbroken, gradual slope, extending over hundreds of miles

of country, the wayfarer has come imperceptibly to the great water-shed. It is scenery of prairie, not of hills and peaks, that has surrounded his journey.

For the last fifty miles, indeed, before the arrival at Sherman, the rise has been barely appreciable; but that is all. A new circumstance makes the descent from the great height much more perceptible and enjoyable through a new sensation. It is then that the traveller over duller Eastern roads, who has flattered himself that the "lightning express" of his own region was the highest possible form of railway speed, first learns the real meaning of a "down grade." The descent

from Sherman to the Laramie Plains is a new experience to such people as have not slid down a Russian ice-hill, or fallen from a fourth-story window. Let the hardy individual who would enjoy it to the full betake himself to the last platform of the last car, or the foremost platform of the front one, and there hold hard to brake or railing, to watch the bewitched world spin and whirl.

But we have returned a long distance on our course. We have reached the Church Butte, beyond Bryan, and had crossed Green River, near the place where, on the old overland stage-route and the emigrant-road, travellers used years ago to ford the stream—no unwelcome task, with that great Bitter-Creek waste of alkali still fresh in the memories and hardly out of their view. At Bryan Station, too, there is an offshoot from the regular path, in the form of a long stage-road, leading away into the northeast to the picturesque mining-region of Sweetwater, a hundred miles distant, where man has spent endless toil in searching for deceptive "leads."

The main line of the great railway goes on beyond Green River through the valley of a stream that flows down from the Uintah Mountains; and, leaving at the south Fort Bridger and crossing the old Mormon road, enters Utah. A little farther, and we are among the noblest scenes of the journey this side the far-away Sierras.

As on the Rhine, the long stretch of the river from Mainz to Cologne has been for years, by acknowledgment, "*the river*," so that portion of the Pacific Railway that lies between Wasatch and Ogden, in this northernmost corner of Utah, will some day be that part of the journey across the centre of the continent that will be especially regarded by the tourist as necessary to be seen beyond all others. It does not in grandeur approach the mountain-scenery near the western coast, but it is unique; it is something, the counterpart of which you can see nowhere in the world; and, long after the whole Pacific journey is as hackneyed in the eyes of Europeans and Americans as is the Rhine tour now, this part of it will keep its freshness among the most marked scenes of the journey. It is a place which cities and settlements cannot destroy.

A short distance west from Wasatch Station the road passes through a tunnel nearly eight hundred feet in length. The preparation for what is to come could not be better; and, indeed, the whole bleak and dreary region that has been passed over adds so much to the freshness and picturesqueness of these Utah scenes that it may very possibly have contributed not a little to the enthusiasm they have called forth. From the darkness the train emerges suddenly, and, tunnel and cutting being passed, there lies before the traveller a view of the green valley before the entrance to Echo Cañon. Through it flows the Weber River, bordered with trees, and making a scene that is suddenly deprived of all the weirdness and look of dreary devastation that has marked the country through so many miles of this long journey. The valley is not so broad, so pastoral in aspect, as that which comes after the wild scenery of the first cañon is passed; but it is like a woodland valley of home lying here in the wilderness.





WEBER RIVER-ENTRANCE TO ECHO CAÑON.

Near the head of Echo Cañon stands Castle Rock, one of the noblest of the great natural landmarks that are passed in all the route—a vast and ragged pile of massive stone, fantastically cut, by all those mighty forces that toil through the centuries, into the very semblance of a mountain-fortress. A cavernous opening simulates a giant door of entrance between its rounded and overhanging towers; the jagged points above are like the ruins of battlements left bristling and torn after combats of Titans; the huge layers of its worn sides seem to have been builded by skilful hands; and the great rounded foundations, from which the sandy soil has been swept away, would appear rooted in the very central earth. It surmounts a lofty, steep-sided eminence, and frowns down with an awesome strength and quiet on the lonely valley below it.

It is a great ruin of Nature, not of human structure; and its grandeur is different in kind and in degree from those other relics in an older world, wherewith human history is associated in every mind, which hold for us everywhere the memories of human toil and action. It is a strangely different feeling that this grand pile, made with no man's hands, gives us as we look up at it. It has stood alone longer than whole races have been in the world. Its lines were shaped with no thought, it seems, of those that were to see them; the purposeless wind and sand and rain have been busy at it for vast cycles of time, and at the end it is a thing of art—a great lesson of rude architecture.

Beyond it the road enters the Echo Cañon itself. It is a narrow gorge between rocky walls that tower hundreds of feet above its uneven floor, along which the river runs with a stream as bright and clear as at its very source. Not simply a straight cut between its precipices of red-and-dark-stained stone, but a winding valley, with every turn presenting some new variation of its wonderful scenery. On the mountains that form its sides there is little verdure—only a dwarfed growth of pine scattered here and there, leaving the steeper portions of the rock bare and ragged in outline. Now and then there are little openings, where the great walls spread apart and little glades are formed; but these are no less picturesque than the wilder passages.

There are memorable places here. Half-way down the gorge is Hanging Rock, where Brigham Young spoke to his deluded hundreds after their long pilgrimage, and pointed out to them that they approached their Canaan—preached the Mormons' first sermon in the "Promised Land." Full of all that is wild and strange, as is this rocky valley, seen even from the prosaic window of a whirling railway-car, what must it have been with the multitude of fanatics, stranger than all its strangeness, standing on its varied floor and looking up at the speaking prophet, whom they half believed, half feared? The weary multitude of half-excited, half-stolid faces turned toward the preacher; the coarse, strong, wild words of the leader echoing from the long-silent rocks—why has no one ever pictured for us all of the scene that could be pictured?

A relic of the early Mormon days, but not a proud one, is some miles away from



MONUMENT ROCK, ECHO CAÑON.

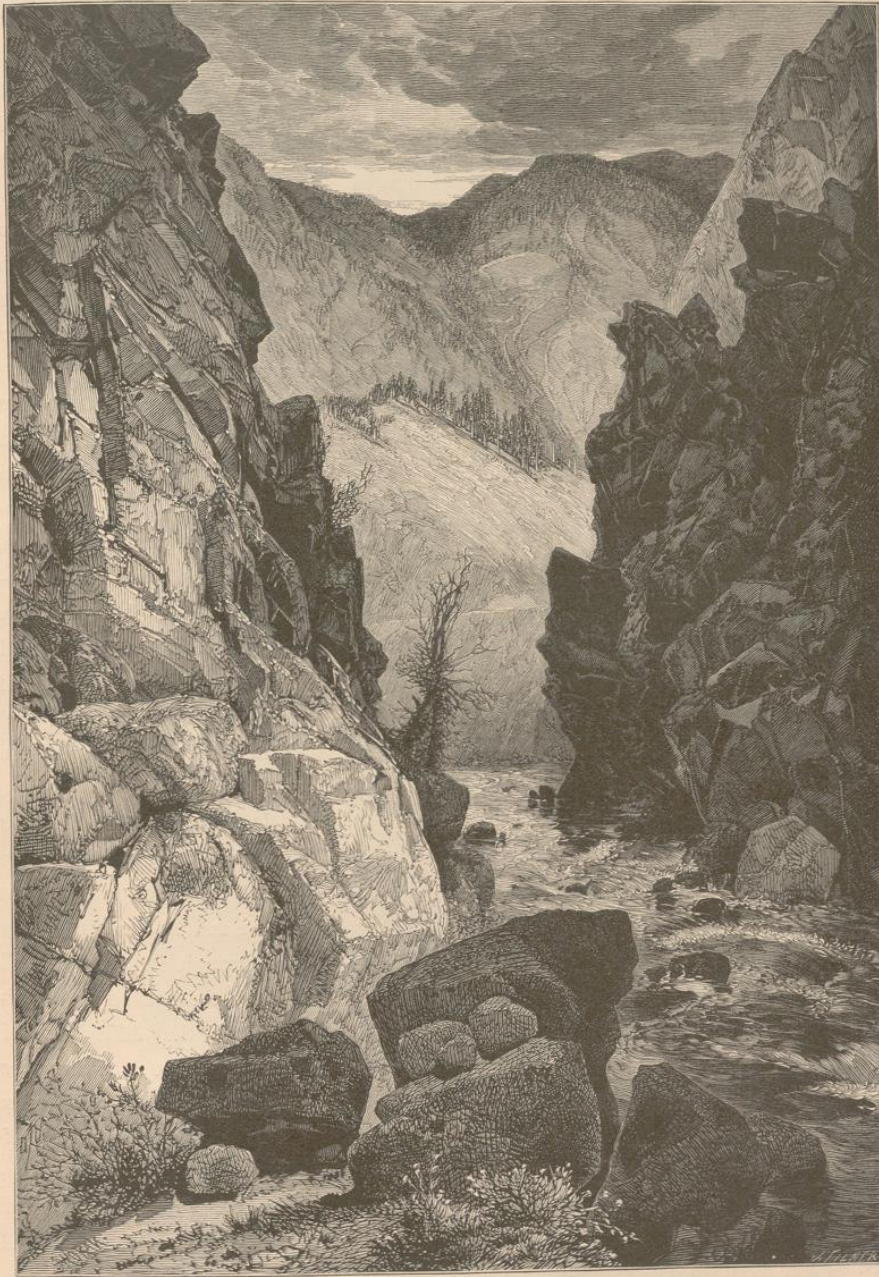
this, high on the rocks; an unnoticeable ruin of the little fortifications once for a very short time occupied by the United States troops, in the presidency of Buchanan, when a trifling detachment of soldiers made a perfectly vain and indecisive show of interfering with the rule of the rebellious saints. The ruin is hardly more important than the attempt; yet it deserves mention, if only as commemorative of an episode that the future historian, if he notes it at all, will connect with this rocky region of hard marches and ill-fated emigrants.

The cañon is not long; the train dashes through it at sharp pace; and suddenly, without passing any point of view that gives the traveller a warning glance ahead, it turns and dashes out into the beautiful and broad valley beyond, halting at Echo City—most picturesque and bright of little villages, destined, perhaps, to realize its ambitious name some time in the remotest future.

The scene here is—as has been said in advance—a really pastoral one. The broad plain, left by the encircling mountains, is green and fresh; the river winds through its grassy expanse in pleasant quiet, without brawl or rush; the trees are like those in a familiar Eastern country-side. Only the great outlines of the surrounding hills, and here and there the appearance on the horizon of some sharper, higher, more distant peaks, show the traveller his whereabouts, and take his mind from the quieter aspect of what lies about him. Near by, in valleys leading into this, are various Mormon settlements; for we are already in the country of the saints.

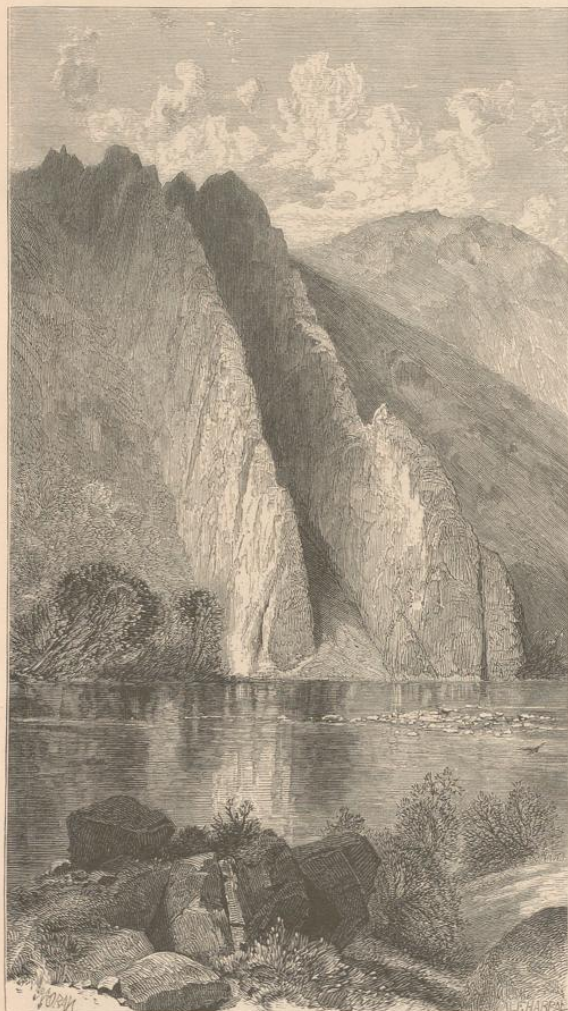
But the grandest gorge is still to come; and the road enters it almost at once after crossing the little plain. It is Weber Cañon—the greatest of these Utah ravines. Its immense walls are grander by far than those of Echo; the forms of their ragged edges and the carvings of their surfaces are more fantastic; and the deep, dark aspect of the whole narrow valley gives in every way a nobler scene. It should be viewed on a cloudy, gloomy day, to realize its whole look of wild grandeur. The little river brawls at the left of the track; the thunder of the locomotive echoes from the high precipices at its sides; the rush of the train's onward motion adds a certain additional wildness to the shadowy place.

The old emigrant-road passes through the cañon, like the railway. It crosses and recrosses the river, and winds among the trees along the banks, sometimes lost to view from the train. Little frequented as it is in these days, the writer has seen, within a very few years, a "prairie schooner" of the old historic form passing along it; a rough, strong emigrant riding beside it; children's faces looking out between the folds of the cloth covering; and household goods dimly discernible within. And at one of the river-crossings is a mark that must often have given renewed hope or pain to many a one among this family's predecessors—the famous old "Thousand-Mile Tree," that stands at just that weary distance from Omaha, even farther from the great city by the Golden Gate.



DEVIL'S GATE, WEBER CAÑON.

Whoever follows the nomenclature of Weber Cañon would be led to think the enemy of mankind held there at least undisputed sway. All the great glories of the view are marked as his. The Devil's Gate—a black, ragged opening in one part of the



Devil's Slide, Weber Cañon.

great gorge, through which the foaming waters of the river rush white and noisy—is one, but it is well named. A very spirit of darkness seems to brood over the place. On each side, the broken cliffs lie in shadow; the thundering water roars below; there is no verdure but a blasted tree here and there; great bowlders lie in the bed of the stream and along the shore. In the distance, seen through the gap, there are black hills and mountain-summits overlooking them. And there is a cool wind here, that is like a breeze blown across the Styx, and that is never still, even in the hottest summer day.

It is worth the while to think, in this wonderful valley, of the engineering skill that was needed to carry the iron road through its depths. All through the cañon are evidences of the difficulties of the task. Here a truss-bridge and web-like trestle-work carry the rails from one point of the rocky wall to another beyond the stream; here, for a great space, the road-bed is cut from the very sides of the great cliffs, where the gorge narrows and leaves no room for more than sand and river. And, as if to mock at it all, Nature has tried her hand, too, at construction, with a success at once weird, sublime, and grotesque. On the left hand of the route,



TERRES MAUVAISES, UTAH.



Salt Lake.

on the steep front of the rocky cliff, appears at one point the very mockery of human work—the singular formation called “The Devil’s Slide”—by that same rule of nomenclature that we have mentioned once before. Two parallel walls of stone, extending from summit to base of the precipice, and enclosing between them a road-way, regular and unobstructed. An editor, whom your guide-books will be sure to quote, has written a good, though somewhat too statistical, description of this singular place; we have found it in a well-used route-book, and quote it, in default of words that could say more:

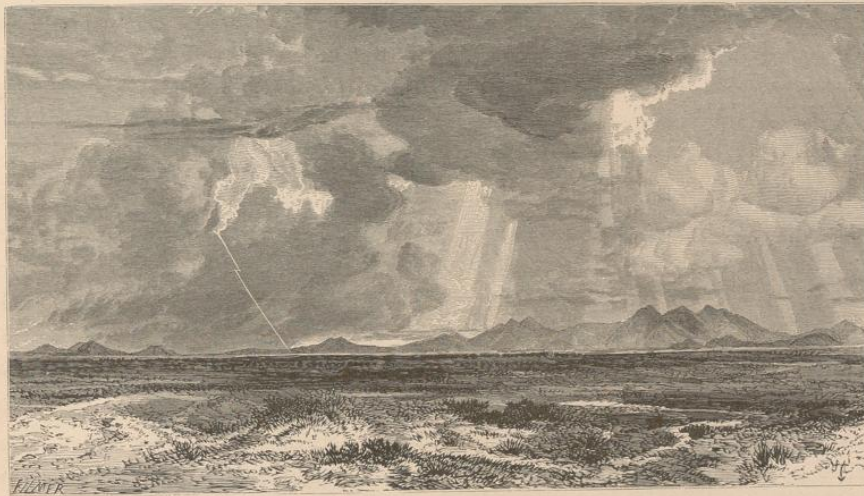
“Imagine,” the writer says, “a mountain eight hundred feet high, composed of solid, dark-red sandstone, with a smooth and gradually ascending surface to its very pinnacle, and only eight or ten degrees from being perpendicular. At the foot of this mountain the Weber River winds its devious course. From the base of the immense red mountain, up its entire height of eight hundred feet, is what is called ‘The Devil’s Slide,’ composed of white limestone. It consists of a smooth, white stone floor from base to summit, about fifteen feet wide, as straight and regular as if laid by a stone-mason with line and plummet. On either side of this



smooth, white line is what appears to the eye to be a well-laid white stone-wall, varying in height from ten to twenty feet. This white spectacle on the red mountain-side has all the appearance of being made by man or devil as a slide from the top of the mountain to the bed of Weber River."

This odd freak of Nature has nothing sublime about it; the whole idea that it conveys is that of singularity; but it is strangely picturesque and striking.

And now we are nearing the very centre of Mormondom; for only a little beyond the Devil's Gate, which, though first named, is farther toward the western extremity of the cañon than the "Slide," we come to Uintah Station, glance at the Salt-Lake Valley, and are hurried on to Ogden, whence the trains go out to the City of the Saints itself. Ogden lies in the great plain of the valley, but from the low railway-station you see



Plains of the Humboldt.

in the distance long ranges of mountains, more picturesque than almost any distant view you have had thus far; and all about the town are green fields—yes, positively fenced-off fields—and beyond them the prairie; but here no longer without trees.

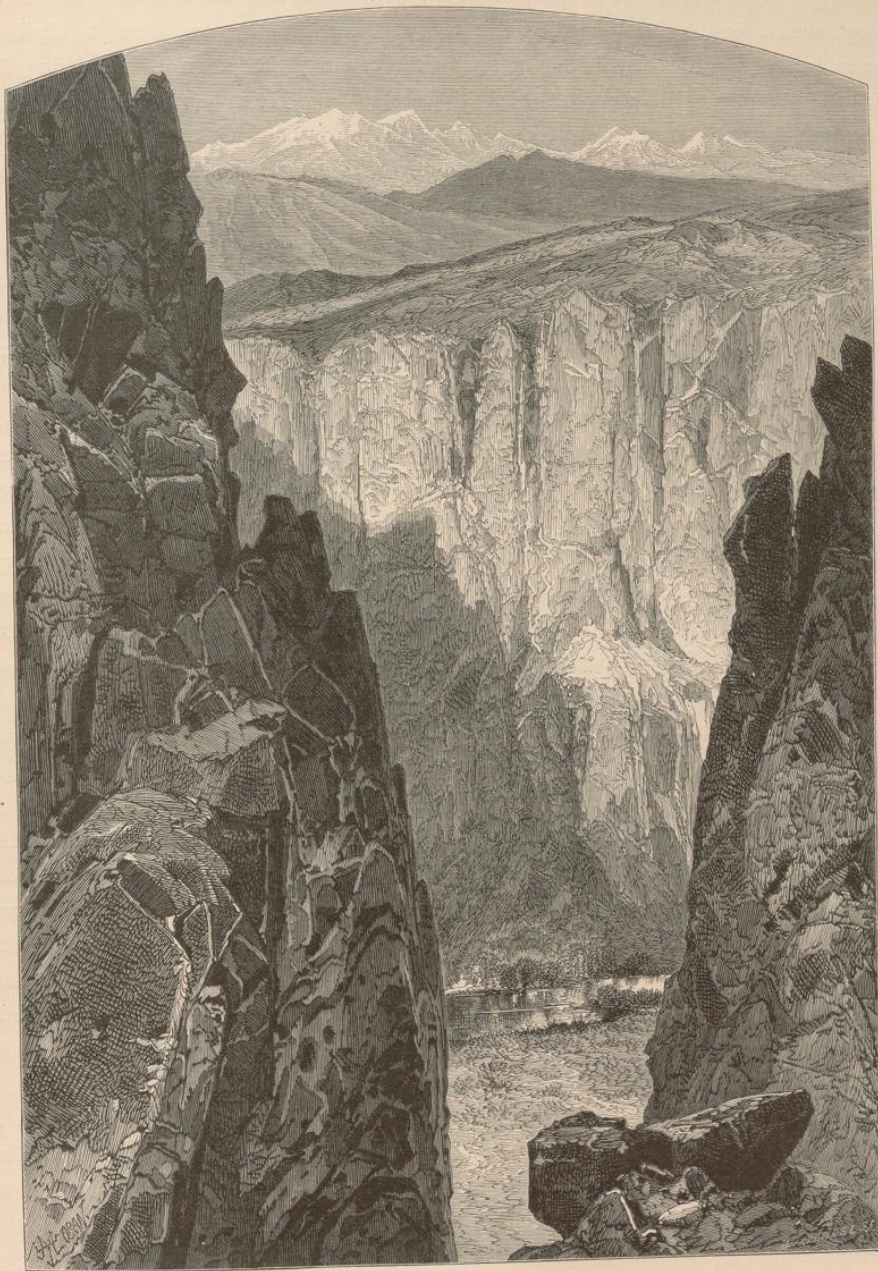
Whoever will may leave this station—a great central point of the line, for here the Union and the Central roads meet and cause the dreary business of changing cars—and, adding a day or two to his journey, may take the sonorously-named Utah Central Railway—as if, indeed, the Territory boasted a net-work of iron roads—and journey down to Salt-Lake City to see the curious civilization he will find there. "It lies in a great valley," says the statistical and accurate description of this city of the Mormons—a description which we prefer to partly set down here rather than to run risks of error by trusting our own memory for any thing more than picturesque aspects—"it lies in a

great valley, extending close up to the base of the Wasatch Mountains on the north, with an expansive view to the south of more than one hundred miles of plains, beyond which, in the distance, rise, clear cut and grand in the extreme, the gray, jagged, and rugged mountains, whose peaks are covered with perpetual snow." (Oh, unhappy writer in statistical guide-books! How much more "grand in the extreme" is that view in its bright reality than any words of yours or mine can show to those who have not seen it! Let us keep to our statistics.) "Adjoining the city is a fine agricultural and mining region, which has a large and growing trade. The climate of the valley is healthful, and the soil, where it can be irrigated, is extremely fertile. . . . The city covers an area of about nine miles, or three miles each way, and is handsomely laid out. The streets are very wide, with irrigating ditches passing through all of them, keeping the shade-trees and orchards looking beautiful. Every block is surrounded with shade-trees, and nearly every house has its neat little orchard of apple, peach, apricot, plum, and cherry trees. Fruit is very abundant, and the almond, the catalpa, and the cotton-wood-tree, grow side by side with the maple, the willow, and the locust. In fact, the whole nine square miles is almost one continuous garden."

So it will be seen that even a city on the Plains has elements that entitle it to a place in this record of the picturesque, and that it is not as other cities are. But Mr. Charles Nordhoff tells us, in his "California," that "Salt Lake need not hold any mere pleasure-traveller more than a day. You can drive all over it in two hours; and when you have seen the Tabernacle—an admirably-arranged and very ugly building—which contains an organ, built in Salt Lake by an English workman, a Mormon, named Ridges, which organ is second in size only to the Boston organ, and far sweeter in tone than the one of Plymouth Church; the menagerie of Brigham Young's enclosure, which contains several bears, some lynxes and wild-cats—natives of these mountains—and a small but interesting collection of minerals and Indian remains, and of the manufactures of the Mormons; the Temple Block; and enjoyed the magnificent view from the back of the city of the valley and the snow-capped peaks which lie on the other side—a view which you carry with you all over the place—you have done Salt-Lake City, and have time, if you have risen early, to bathe at the sulphur spring. The lake lies too far away to be visited in one day."

But, in spite of its distance, the great inland sea should certainly be seen. It is a remarkable sight from any point of view, and as you come suddenly upon it, after the long days of travel, in which you have seen only rivers and scanty brooks, it seems almost marvellous. A great expanse of sparkling water in the sunshine, or a dark waste that looks like the ocean itself when you see it under a cloudy sky, it is an outlook not to be forgotten in many a day.

Here, before we leave the Salt-Lake region, we must say a word to correct one very false idea concerning it—that which obtains concerning its great fertility and natural

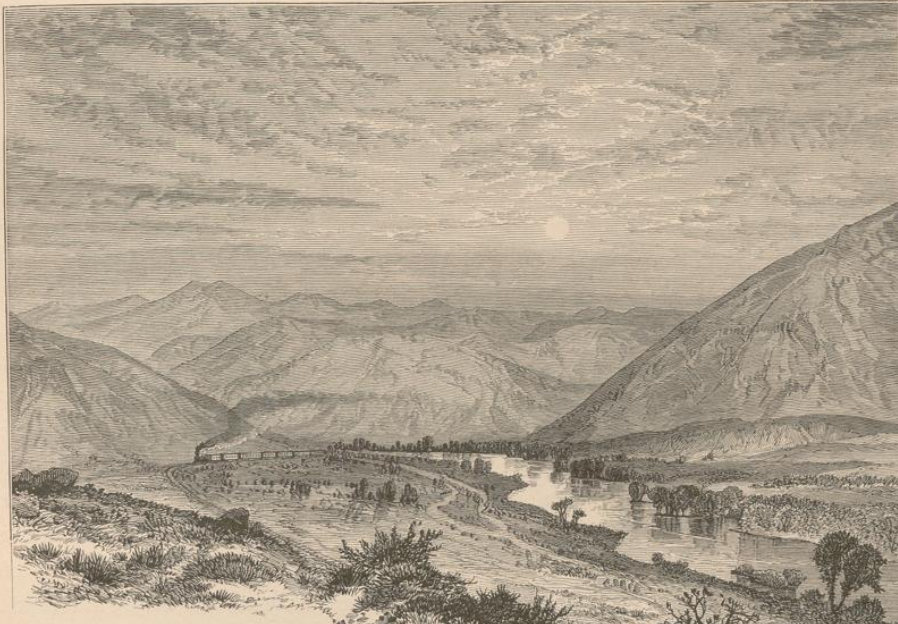


PALISADE CAÑON.

wealth of soil. This point is referred to in Mr. Nordhoff's book, and, so far as we know, almost for the first time correctly; but we have never passed through Utah by the railway, or passed a day in this portion of the country, without greatly wondering why the common, unfounded theory had kept its place so long. It is popularly supposed that the Mormons have settled in a very garden of the earth, and that their Canaan was by no means all visionary; and there are not a few good people who have agitated themselves because these heathen had possession of one of the noblest parts of the American territory.

This is all entirely wrong. The region is really, by Nature, an arid desert, made up of veritable "Terres Mauvaises," though not such picturesque ones as lie, dotted with monumental rocks, but a little distance from the lake. The Mormons can truly boast that they have made their land "blossom like the rose;" but only by the greatest toil and care, and by an expenditure of wealth utterly disproportionate to its results. "Considering what an immense quantity of good land there is in these United States," says Mr. Nordhoff, "I should say that Brigham Young made what they call in the West 'a mighty poor land speculation' for his people. 'If we should stop irrigation for ninety days, not a tree, shrub, or vine, would remain alive in our country,' said a Mormon to me, as I walked through his garden. 'Not a tree grew in our plains when we came here, and we had, and have, to haul our wood and timber fourteen to twenty miles out of the mountains,' said another. The soil, though good, is full of stones; and I saw a terraced garden of about three acres, built up against the hill-side, which must have cost ten or twelve thousand dollars to prepare. That is to say, Young marched his people a thousand miles through a desert to settle them in a valley where almost every acre must have cost them, in labor and money to get it ready for agricultural use, I should say not less than one hundred dollars. An Illinois, or Iowa, or Missouri, or Minnesota farmer, who paid a dollar and a quarter an acre for his land in those days, got a better farm, ready-made to his hand, than these people got from Brigham, their leader, only after the experience of untold hardships (which we will not now count in), and of at least one hundred dollars' worth of labor per acre when they reached their destination." It will some time be more widely appreciated how completely the whole pleasant pastoral scenery here is the work of men's hands; for the present, the passage just quoted is so true that it shall serve as the only reference here to the subject.

West from Ogden lies the second great reach of the long overland journey. Salt-Lake City, an oasis of humanity, if not of a very high order of civilization, serves to mark the half-way point in the modern crossing of the Plains. The railways meet at Ogden Station, and the continued journey toward the western coast is made on "the Central," as the affectionate abbreviation of the railway-men calls the latter half of the great iron road. It passes westward through Corinne, a station which derives its life and prosperity chiefly from its communication with the Utah silver-mines, and reaches Prom-



Pleasant Valley, Truckee River.

ontory — properly, it seems, called “Promontory Point,” which appears a strange bit of tautology. Here is a noteworthy place, and one which all historians of the future ought to celebrate, each after his manner. Close by the station, which the road reaches after skirting the shore of the great Salt Lake for a little time, and then suddenly curving away, the great iron line, pushed westward from the east, met and joined that which for many months had grown slowly toward it from the west—the last links of the iron chain were riveted. There were jubilant ceremonies when the great day of ending the road came at last, on the 10th of May, 1868. A rosewood “tie” joined the last rails; and solemnly, in the presence of a silent assembly, a golden spike was driven with silver hammer—the last of the thousands on thousands of fastenings that held together the mightiest work made for the sake of human communication and intercourse in all the world. The engines met from the east and west, as Bret Harte told us—

“Pilots touching—head to head  
Facing on the single track,  
Half a world behind each back”—

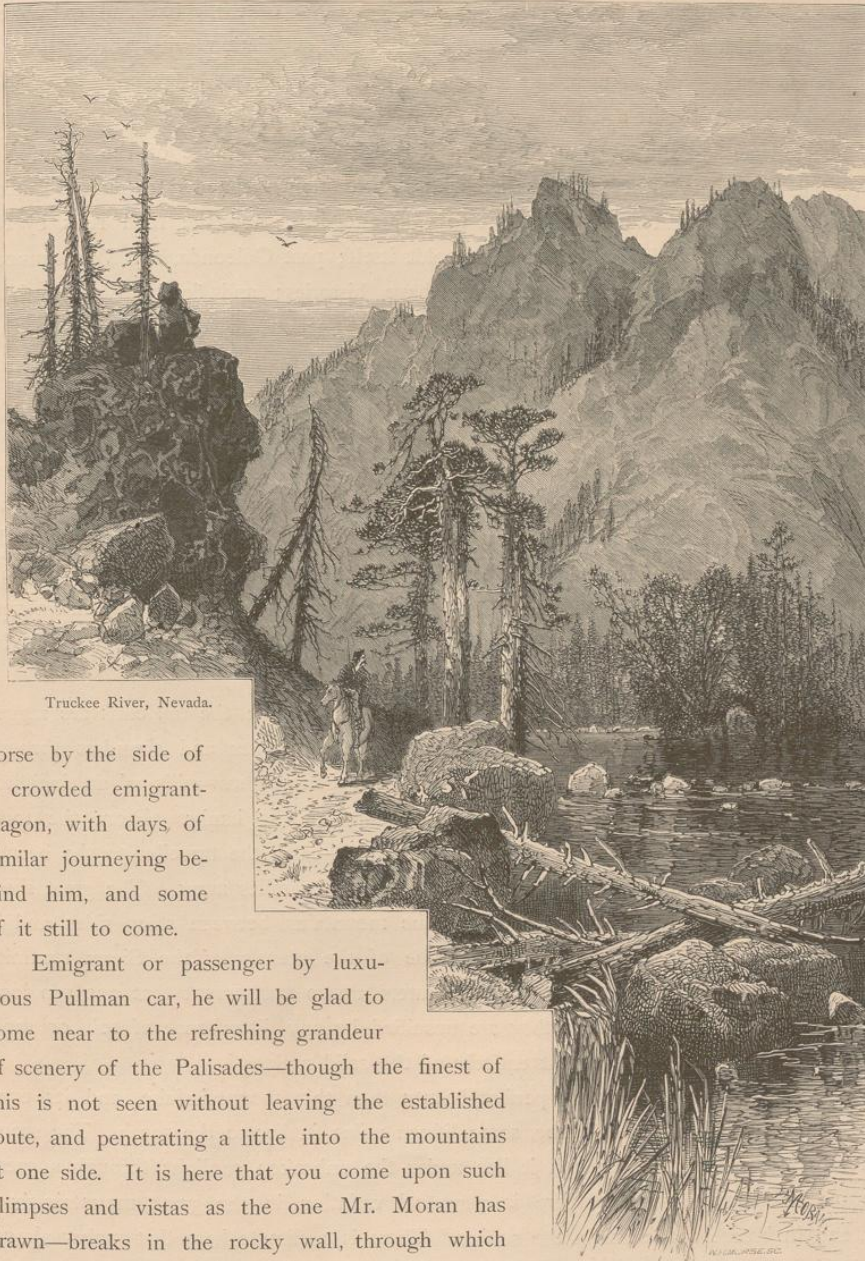
and there was a girdle round the earth such as the men of a century before had not dared even to dream of.

Beyond the memorable Promontory comes a dreary waste—the dreariest that has yet been passed, and perhaps the most utterly desolate of all the journey. Nothing lives here but the hopelessly wretched sage-brush, and a tribe of little basking lizards; yes, one thing more—the kind of gaunt, lank animals called “jackass-rabbits,” that eat no one knows what on this arid plain. The horizon is bordered by bare, burned mountains; the ground is a waste of sand and salt; the air is a whirl of alkali-dust. Kelton, and Matlin, and Toano, dreariest of Nevada stations! Could any man wish his direst enemy a more bitter fate than to be kept here in the midst of this scene for a decade?

There is some mineral wealth, farther on, hidden near the route of the railway; but, apart from this, there would seem to be nothing useful to man obtainable from all this region. We dash across the sterile space in a few hours, but imagine for a moment the dreary time for the old emigrant-trains, which came on to these gusty, dusty levels in old days, and found neither grass, nor water, nor foliage, until they came to Humboldt Wells, blessed of many travellers, lying close together within a few hundred yards of the present road, and surrounded with tall, deep-green herbage. There are nearly a score of these grateful springs scattered about in a small area; and they are of very great depth, with cool, fresh, limpid water.

They herald the approach of another and a different district, for now we soon come to the Humboldt River itself, and for a time have all the benefit of the growth of trees along its sides, and the fertility that its waters revive along its course. The soil here is really arable; but go a little distance away from the river, and the few water-pools are alkaline, and the land resumes the features of the desert-soil. The scenery here, in the upper part of the Humboldt Valley, is for a time varied, and in many places even wild and grand. The road winds through picturesque cañons, and under the shadow of the northernmost mountains of the Humboldt Range, until the important station of Elko is reached. This is a noteworthy supply-station for all the country around it, in which are numerous mining settlements. The town is a place of great import to all the guide-books of this region. It has a population of more than five thousand, as we learn from one account of it; and there are a hundred and fifty shops of various kinds, great freight-houses, an hotel, two banks, two newspapers, a school, and a court-house. Truly a most promising prairie-town is this, to have grown up in three hurried years, and to flourish on the borders of a desert!

For now we have a little more of sage-brush and alkali, ant-hills, and sand. Let him who passes over the Humboldt Plains on a hot August day, and feels the flying white dust burning and parching eyes and mouth and throat, making gritty unpleasantness in the water wherewith he tries to wash it away, and finding lodgment in every fold of his clothing, be sufficiently thankful that he is not plodding on with jaded



Truckee River, Nevada.

horse by the side of a crowded emigrant-wagon, with days of similar journeying behind him, and some of it still to come.

Emigrant or passenger by luxurious Pullman car, he will be glad to come near to the refreshing grandeur of scenery of the Palisades—though the finest of this is not seen without leaving the established route, and penetrating a little into the mountains at one side. It is here that you come upon such glimpses and vistas as the one Mr. Moran has drawn—breaks in the rocky wall, through which one looks out on really perfect mountain-pictures.

There are hot springs here; and in one valley a host of them sends up perpetual steam, of sulphurous odor, and the ground is tinged with mineral colors, as at the geysers of

California. All around us, too, are mining districts, some of them old and exhausted, some still flourishing. To the pioneers they all have association with "lively times;" the veterans talk of "the Austin excitement," and the famous "Washoe time"—periods which seem like a distant age to us.

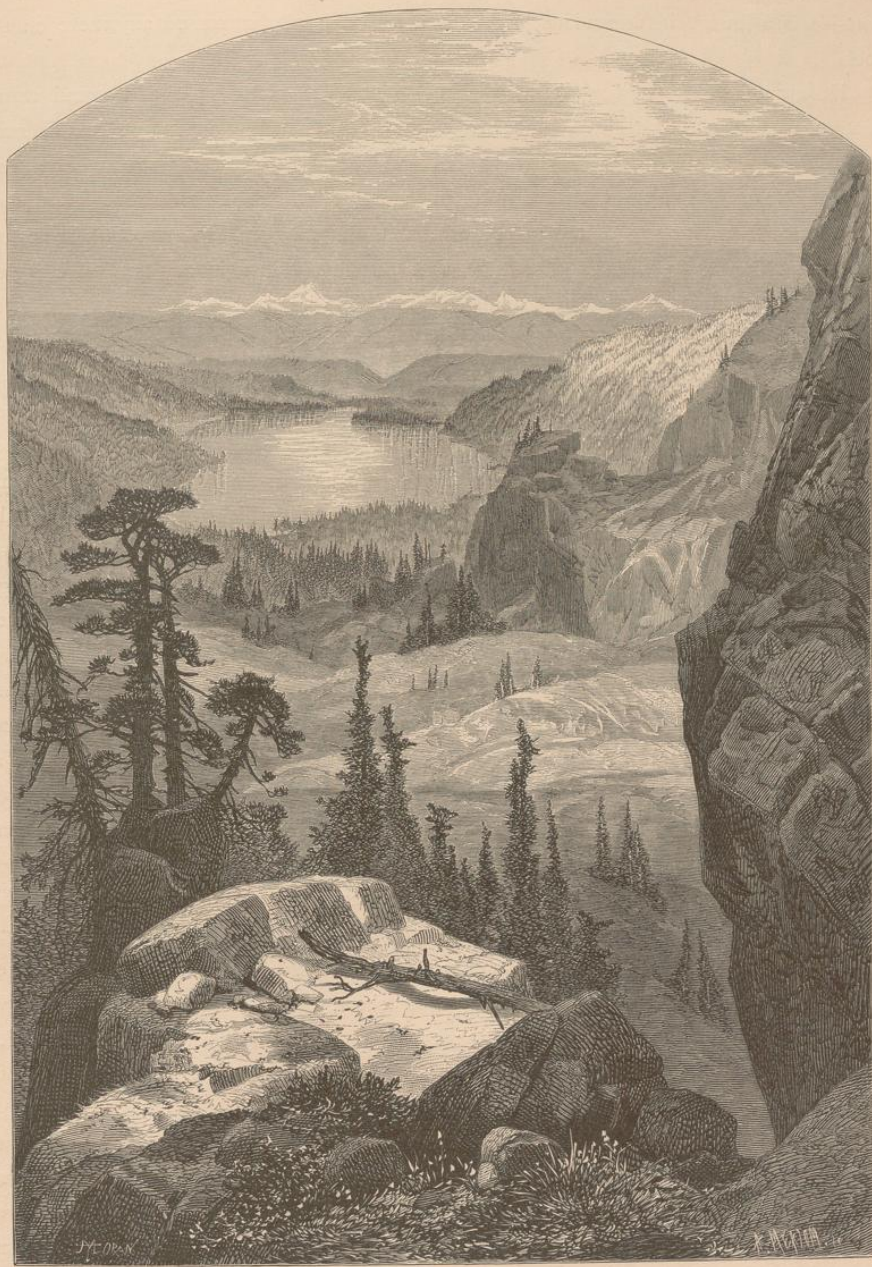
The railway and the emigrant-road have long followed the course of the Humboldt River, but this is not always in sight after Battle Mountain—named from an old Indian combat—is passed; and finally it is lost to view altogether, and the road runs by the fresh, bright-looking little station of Humboldt itself; past Golconda, and Winnemucca, and Lovelock's, and Brown's—names that have histories; and finally Wadsworth is reached, cheerfully hailed as the beginning of the "Sacramento division," a title that reads already like the California names. And here the Plains are done—the Sierras fairly begin.

The monotony of the view begins to change; the mountains slope about us, as we enter the well-named Pleasant Valley, through which Truckee River flows, and at last, passing through well-wooded land again, reach Truckee itself, a little city in the wilderness, standing among the very main ridges of the Sierra chain. The town—the first of the stations within the actual limits of California—is a picturesque, bright place of six thousand inhabitants—a place that has had its "great fire," its revival, its riots, and adventures, not a whit behind those of the larger mining towns farther toward the interior of the State.

Along the rocky shores of its river lie the noblest scenes; the tall cliffs are ragged and bare, but pine-tree-crowned; the rock-broken water ripples and thunders through gorges and little stretches of fertile plain; and the buzzing saw-mills of an incipient civilization hum with a homelike, New-England sound on its banks. From the town itself, stages—the stages of luxury and civilization, too—carry the traveller to the beautiful and now well-known Donner Lake, only two or three miles away. The great sheet of clear and beautiful water lies high up in the mountains, between steep sides, and in the midst of the wildest and most picturesque of the scenery of the Sierra summits. The depth of the lake is very great, but its waters are so transparent that one can look down many fathoms into them; they are unsullied by any disturbance of soil or sand, for they lie in a bed formed almost entirely of the solid rock.

Few things could have more perfect beauty than this mountain-lake, and its even more famous neighbor, Lake Tahoe, some fifteen miles farther to the south. The scene is never twice the same. Though it lies under the unbroken sunlight through a great part of the summer weather, there is perpetual variation in the great mountain-shadows, and in breeze and calm on the surface. There is a climate here that makes almost the ideal atmosphere. It is neither cold to chilliness nor warm to discomfort, but always bracing, invigorating, inspiring with a kind of pleasant and energetic intoxication. Already invalids come to these saving lakes from east and west, and find new life up among the





DONNER LAKE, NEVADA.

pinces and summits. There are trout in the waters around, and fishing here is more than sport—it is a lounge in dream-land, a rest in a region hardly surpassed anywhere on the globe.

Here, as elsewhere in the Sierras, the rock-forms are picturesque and grand at all points of the view. Castellated, pinnacled, with sides like perpendicular walls, and summits like chiselled platforms, they give a strangely beautiful aspect to every shore and gorge and valley. The road, twelve miles in length, by which Lake Tahoe is reached from Truckee, affords some of the most remarkable and memorable views of these formations, with all their singularities of outline, that can be obtained in any accessible region in this part of the range; and it would be impossible to find a more glorious drive than is this along the edge of the river-bed, over a well-graded path, through the very heart of one of the noblest groups of the Sierra chain. It is a ride to be remembered with the great passes of the world—with the Swiss mountain-roads, and the ravines of Greece—in its own way as beautiful and grand as these. The great cañons, and such noble breaks in the rock-wall as can give us glimpses like that of the Giant's Gap, and a hundred others, are certainly among the vistas through which one looks upon the chosen scenes of the whole world.

It has been said that the traveller is here in the very centre of the mountain-range. The general features of structure in this most noble region of the continent have been better described elsewhere than we can show them in our own words.

“For four hundred miles,” says Mr. Clarence King, who knows these mountains, better, perhaps, than any other American, “the Sierras are a definite ridge, broad and high, and having the form of a sea-wave. Buttresses of sombre-hued rock, jutting at intervals from a steep wall, form the abrupt eastern slopes; irregular forests, in scattered growth, huddle together near the snow. The lower declivities are barren spurs, sinking into the sterile flats of the Great Basin.

“Long ridges of comparatively gentle outline characterize the western side; but this sloping table is scored, from summit to base, by a system of parallel, transverse cañons, distant from one another often less than twenty-five miles. They are ordinarily two or three thousand feet deep—falling, at times, in sheer, smooth-fronted cliffs; again, in sweeping curves, like the hull of a ship; again, in rugged, V-shaped gorges, or with irregular, hilly flanks—opening, at last, through gate-ways of low, rounded foot-hills, out upon the horizontal plain of the San Joaquin and Sacramento. . . .

“Dull and monotonous in color, there are, however, certain elements of picturesqueness in this lower zone. Its oak-clad hills wander out into the great plain like coast promontories, enclosing yellow, or, in spring-time, green, bays of prairie. The hill-forms are rounded, or stretch in long, longitudinal ridges, broken across by the river-cañons. Above this zone of red earth, softly-modelled undulations, and dull, grayish groves, with a chain of mining-towns, dotted ranches, and vineyards, rise the swelling middle heights



LAKE TAHOE.

of the Sierras—a broad, billowy plateau, cut by sharp, sudden cañons, and sweeping up, with its dark, superb growth of coniferous forest, to the feet of the summit-peaks. . . .

“Along its upper limit, the forest-zone grows thin and irregular—black shafts of Alpine pines and firs clustering on sheltered slopes, or climbing, in disordered processions, up broken and rocky faces. Higher, the last gnarled forms are passed, and beyond stretches the rank of silent, white peaks—a region of rock and ice lifted above the limit of life.

“In the north, domes and cones of volcanic formation are the summit, but, for about three hundred miles in the south, it is a succession of sharp granite *aiguilles* and crags. Prevalent among the granitic forms are singularly perfect conoidal domes, whose symmetrical figures, were it not for their immense size, would impress one as having an artificial finish.

“The Alpine gorges are usually wide and open, leading into amphitheatres, whose walls are either rock or drifts of never-melting snow. The sculpture of the summit is very evidently glacial. Beside the ordinary phenomena of polished rocks and moraines, the larger general forms are clearly the work of frost and ice; and, although this ice-period is only feebly represented to-day, yet the frequent avalanches of winter, and freshly-scored mountain-flanks, are constant suggestions of the past.”

There could not well be a more satisfactory, faithful, and vivid general characterization of the Sierra chain than this that we have quoted from the account of one of our greatest American mountaineers. Its faithfulness will be confirmed by every view, gained from whatever point, of the series of giant peaks that lie in long line to the north and south of our own special route through the range.

Far off from the railway-route, in those parts of the Sierras known as yet only to a few mountaineers, there is Alpine scenery, not only as grand as the great, world-known views in the heart of Switzerland, but even of almost the same character. Whoever reads Mr. King's “Ascent of Mount Tyndall” will find no more inspiring record of mountain-climbing in all the records of the Alpine Club. Indeed, this range will be the future working-ground of many an enthusiastic successor of the Tyndalls and Whympers of our time, and the scene of triumphs like that of the great ascent of the before unconquered Matterhorn; perhaps—though Heaven forbid!—the witness of disasters as unspeakably terrible as the awful fall of Douglas and his fellows.

In reading what Mr. King and his companions have written of the wonderful hidden regions of the great chain, which, for a time at least, we must know only through these interpreters, we, and every reader, must be particularly struck by one characteristic, which they all note in the scenes that they describe. This is the majesty of their desolation—the spell of the unknown and the unvisited. Mighty gorges, with giant sides, bearing the traces of great glacial movements, and watched over by truly Alpine pinnacles of ice and snow, are the weird passes into the silent region that surrounds the highest peaks



SUMMIT OF THE SIERRAS.



Giant's Gap.

within the limits of the United States. In the bottom of these deep cañons are lakes, frozen during the greater part of the year, and at other times lying with motionless water, never touched by canoe or keel.

Against the great precipices of the ravines are piles of *débris* such as are familiar to every traveller through the passes of the Alps. Snow, encrusted with an icy, brittle crust, lies heaped against other portions of the rocky walls, and crowns their tops.

High up, there are vast glacial formations; moraines, that lie in long ridges, with steeply-sloping summits, so narrow and sharp that it is almost impossible to walk along them. Here, too, are structures of ice, pinnacles and needles and towers, and sometimes piles which have formed against walls of rock, but have melted away until they are like great sheets of glass standing on edge, while through them a blue, cold light is cast into

201.



T. G. Henry, Del.

Engraved according to a sketch by J. G. Cooper, and painted by J. G. Cooper, in the office of the engraver at Washington.

Faxata, Sculp.

*Nature's Call to the Lumberman's Bear.*

New York: D. Appleton & Co.



the chain that now connects them and their former positions supports  
... every place in the mountains of Alaska scenery is repeated here, often with  
... beauty that is not elsewhere. The work which the ... Alaska has  
... done in nature's ...

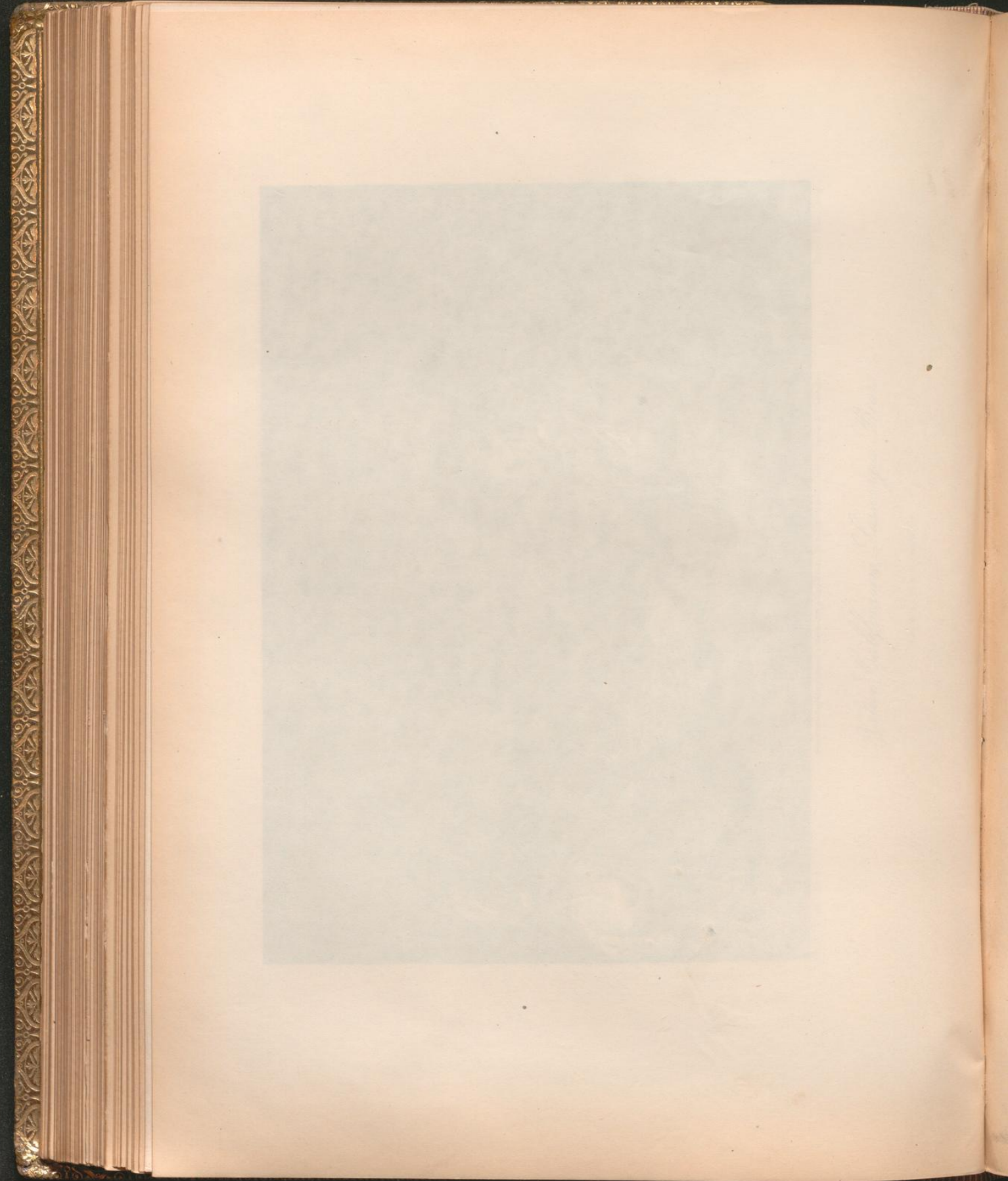
In this region of ... the ground of ... for these ...  
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the chasm that now intervenes between them and their former precipitous supports. Almost every phase in the phenomena of Alpine scenery is repeated here—often with greater beauty than in that of Switzerland even, with which the very word "Alpine" has become so entirely associated by usage.

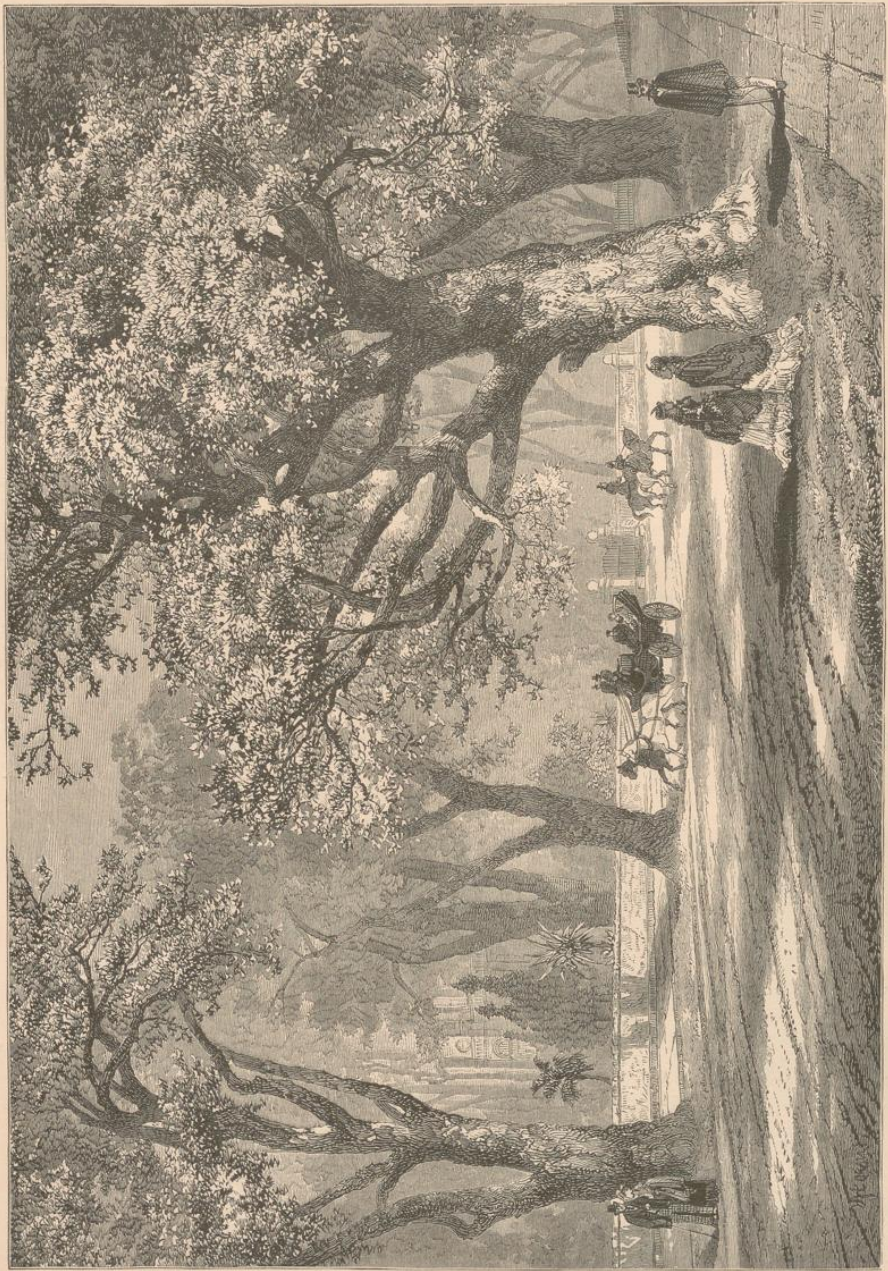
In this region of hidden grandeur lies the ground of hope for those cosmopolitan tourists who complain that the world is a small place, full of hackneyed scenes, after all. So long as there is locked up here in our great mountain-chain such a glory as the few who have penetrated into its fortresses have described, even the mountaineer who fancies he has exhausted two continents, need never despair.

One noble feature of the whole Sierra—of all of it save that which lies above the level of any vegetable life—is its magnificent forest-covering. It may well be doubted if the growth of forests of pine is ever seen in greater perfection than is found here. These tall, straight, noble shafts are the very kings of trees. Covering the great slopes with a dense mantle of sombre green, they lend a wonderful dignity to the peaks, as one looks upon them from a distance; and, to one already in the forest, they seem the worthy guardians of the mountain-sides. They are magnificent in size, as they are admirable in proportion. No mast or spar ever shaped by men's hands exceeds the already perfect grace of their straight, unbroken trunks. They are things to study for their mere beauty as individual trees, apart from their effect upon the general landscape, which even without them would be wild and picturesque enough.

Of all these features of the noble Sierra scenery, of which we have said so much, and spoken with such positive enthusiasm, the traveller by the railway sees little or nothing. For through the very finest regions of the mountains the track is of necessity



The San Joaquin River.



OAKS OF OAKLAND.

covered in by strong snow-sheds, extending, with only trifling breaks, for many miles. Indispensable as they are, no one has passed through their long, dark tunnels without feeling a sense of personal wrong that so much that is beautiful should be so shut out from view. Through breaks and openings he looks down into dark cañons, with pine-covered sides, and catches a glimpse of a foaming river hundreds of feet below, when suddenly the black wall of boards and posts closes in again upon the train, and the picture is left incomplete. That happiest of men, the lover of the picturesque who has the leisure to indulge his love, must not fail to leave the travelled route here for days, and to satisfy himself with all the grander aspects of what he will find about him.

The railway passes on from Truckee, climbing a gradual slope to Summit, fifteen miles farther, the highest station on the Central Pacific, though still lower than Sherman, of which we spoke long ago. Summit, standing at the highest point of this pass through the range, is at an altitude of seven thousand and forty-two feet above the level of the sea; and, to reach it, the track has ascended twenty-five hundred feet, say the guides, in fifty miles; and in the hundred and four miles between this and Sacramento, on the plain beyond, the descent must again be made to a point only fifty-six feet above sea-level.

This part of the journey—the western descent from Summit—is one that the writer has several times reached just at the most glorious period of sunrise. There can be no more perfect scene. The road winds along the edges of great precipices, and in the deep cañons below the shadows are still lying. Those peaks above that are snow-covered catch the first rays of the sun, and glow with wonderful color. Light wreaths of mist rise up to the end of the zone of pines, and then drift away into the air, and are lost. All about one the aspect of the mountains is of the wildest, most intense kind; for by that word “intense” something seems to be expressed of the positive force there is in it that differs utterly from the effect of such a scene as lies passive for our admiration. This is grand; it is magnetic; there is no escaping the wonder-working influence of the great grouping of mountains and ravines, of dense forests, and ragged pinnacles of rock.

But soon the mountains seem to fade away, and before we realize it we are among the foot-hills—those oak-clad or bare brown hills, that, as Mr. King told us in the passage we quoted, “wander out into the great plain like coast promontories, enclosing yellow, or, in the spring-time, green bays of prairie.” And so out upon the plain of the San Joaquin. We might fancy ourselves back again upon the Plains were it not for the still farther range of heights before us. These are brown, bare, unpicturesque, outlying hills, and we dash through them by Livermore's Pass, having passed Sacramento, and go on our way toward the coast.

Civilization appears again; houses and towns begin to line the track; the stations are like similar places in the East; the prosaic railway-peddlers come back again with their hated wares; for us, the picturesque is over; and already the hum of the still distant city seems almost to reach our ears, as we dash in under the great green oaks of Oakland.