



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

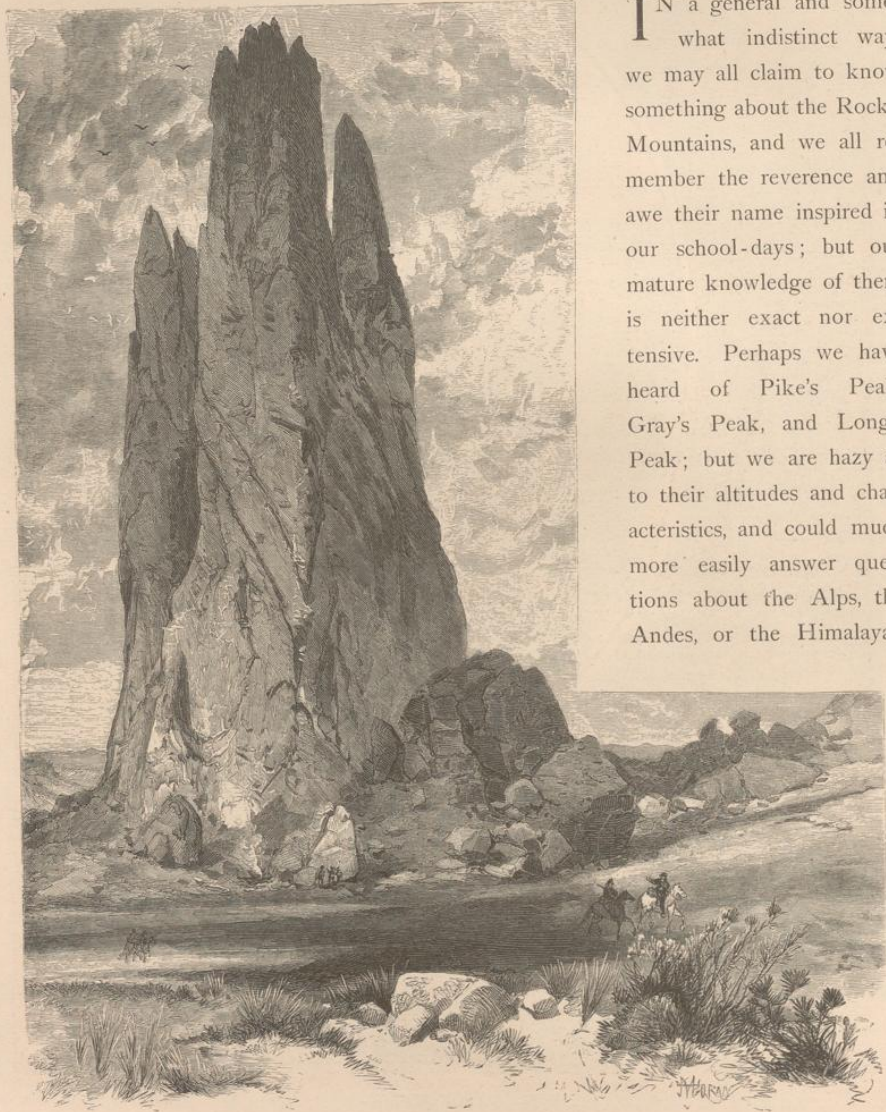
New York, 1874

The Rocky Mountains.

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THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOMAS MORAN.



IN a general and somewhat indistinct way, we may all claim to know something about the Rocky Mountains, and we all remember the reverence and awe their name inspired in our school-days; but our mature knowledge of them is neither exact nor extensive. Perhaps we have heard of Pike's Peak, Gray's Peak, and Long's Peak; but we are hazy as to their altitudes and characteristics, and could much more easily answer questions about the Alps, the Andes, or the Himalayas,

Tower Rock, Garden of the Gods.

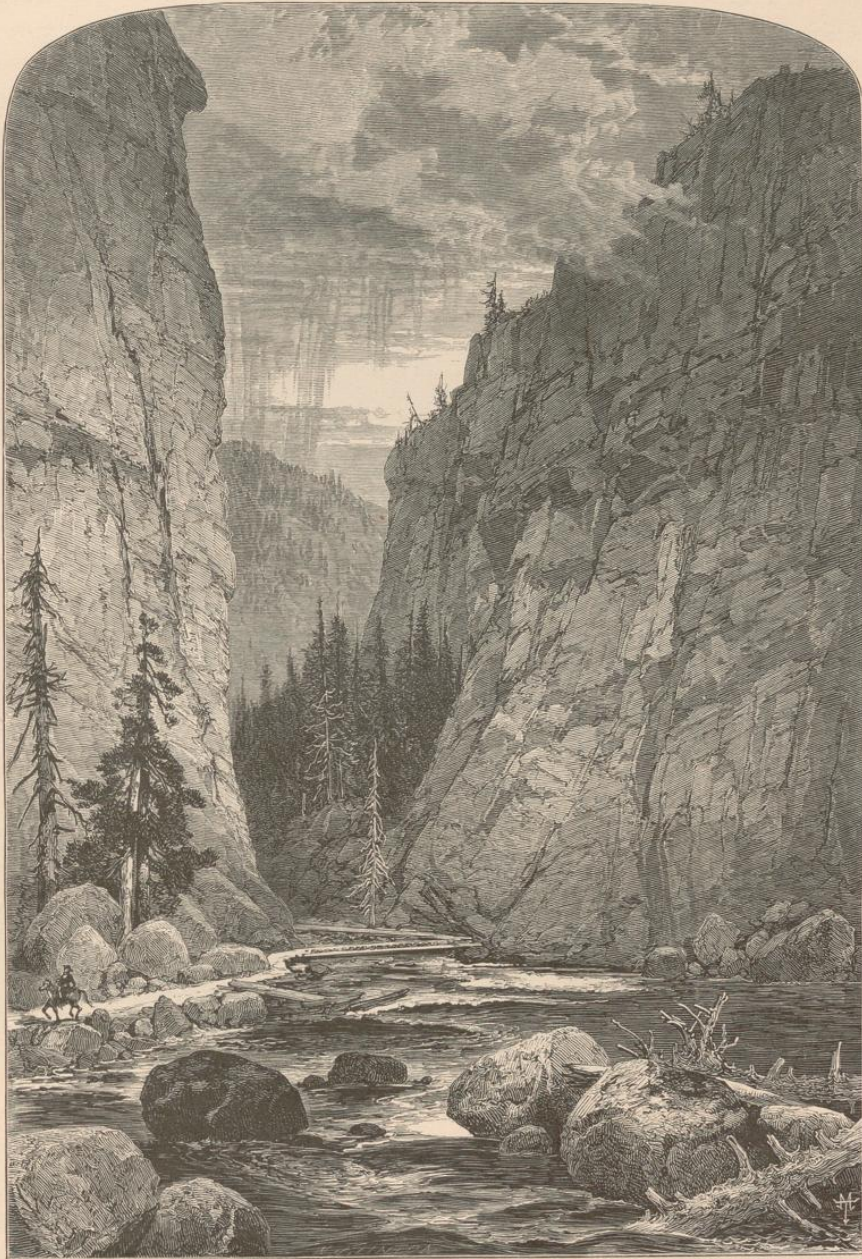


LONG'S PEAK, FROM ESTE'S PARK.

than about the magnificent chain that embraces an area of sixty thousand square miles in Colorado alone, and nurtures the streams that pour their volume into the greatest and most widely separate oceans. We may have crossed the continent in the iron pathway of the Union Pacific over and over again, and not seen to advantage one of the peaks that cluster and soar to almost incomparable elevations—minor hills hiding them from the travellers in the cars; and we may be inclined to think less of the main range than of the Sierra Nevadas, because the railway has shown us the greatest beauties of the latter. But there is not a false pretence about them; no writer has exaggerated in extolling their grandeur, nor even adequately described it.

The chain is a continuation northward of the Cordilleras of Central America and Mexico. From Mexico it continues through the States and Territories lying between the Pacific and the head-waters of the streams that flow into the Mississippi, spreading over an area of one thousand miles from east to west. Still inclining northward, and still broken into several ranges, it passes into the British possessions to the north, the eastern range reaching the Arctic Ocean in about latitude 70° north, and the western passing near the coast, and ending near Prince William's Sound, where Mount St. Elias, in latitude 60° , stands upon the borders of the Pacific, at the height of seventeen thousand eight hundred feet above the sea-level.

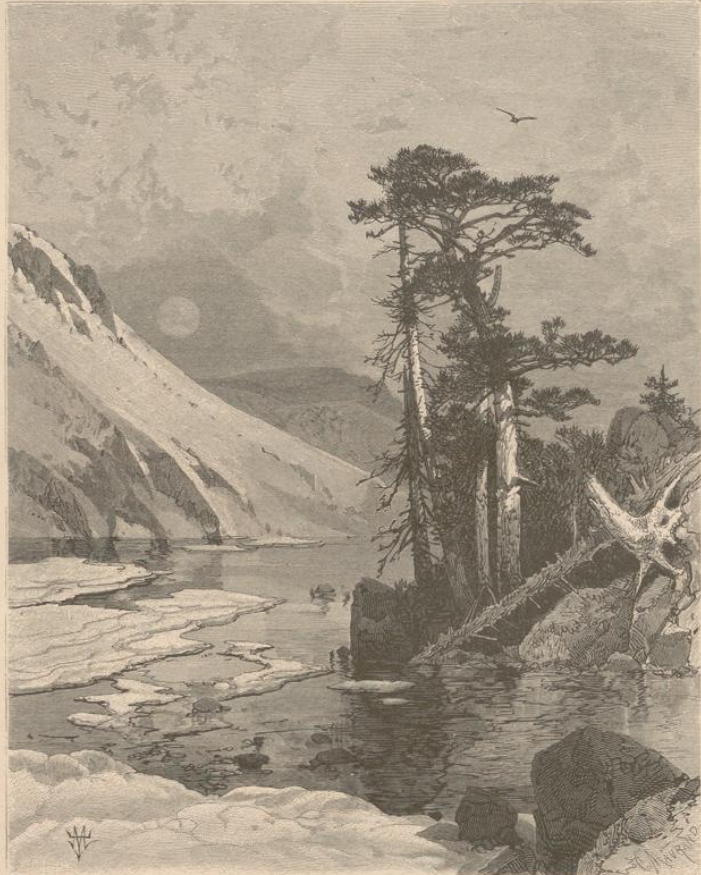
We do not like the word "Backbone" applied to the mountains. Let us rather call them the Snow-Divide of the continent, or, as the main range is sometimes named, the Mother-Sierras. Occasionally, too, they are called the Alps of America by one of those absurd whims of literary nomenclature that insist upon calling New Orleans the Paris of America, Saratoga the Wiesbaden of America, and Lake George the Windermere of America, just as though we had nothing distinctly our own, and Nature had simply duplicated her handiwork across the seas in creating the present United States. The Rocky Mountains are not like the Alps, and in some things they surpass them. From the summit of Mount Lincoln, near Fairplay, Colorado, on a clear day, such a view is obtained as you cannot find on the highest crests of the Swiss mountains. In the rear, and in the front, the peaks ascend so thickly that Nature seems to have here striven to build a dividing wall across the universe. There are one hundred and thirty of them not less than thirteen thousand feet high, or within less than three thousand feet of Mont Blanc; and at least fifty over fourteen thousand feet high. Almost below the dome on which we stand, we can see a low ridge across a valley, separating the river Platte, leading to the Gulf of Mexico, and the Blue River, leading to the Gulf of California. On one side are the famous Gray's and Evans's Peaks, scarcely noticeable among a host of equals; Long's Peak is almost hidden by the narrow ridge; Pike's is very distinct and striking. Professor Whitney has very truly said, and we have repeated, that no such view as this is to be obtained in Switzerland, either for reach or the magnificence of the included heights. Only in the Andes or Himalayas might



BOWLDER CAÑON.

we see its equal. But it is also true that one misses the beauty of the pure Alpine mountains, with the glaciers streaming down their sides. The snow lies abundantly in lines, and banks, and masses; yet it covers nothing.

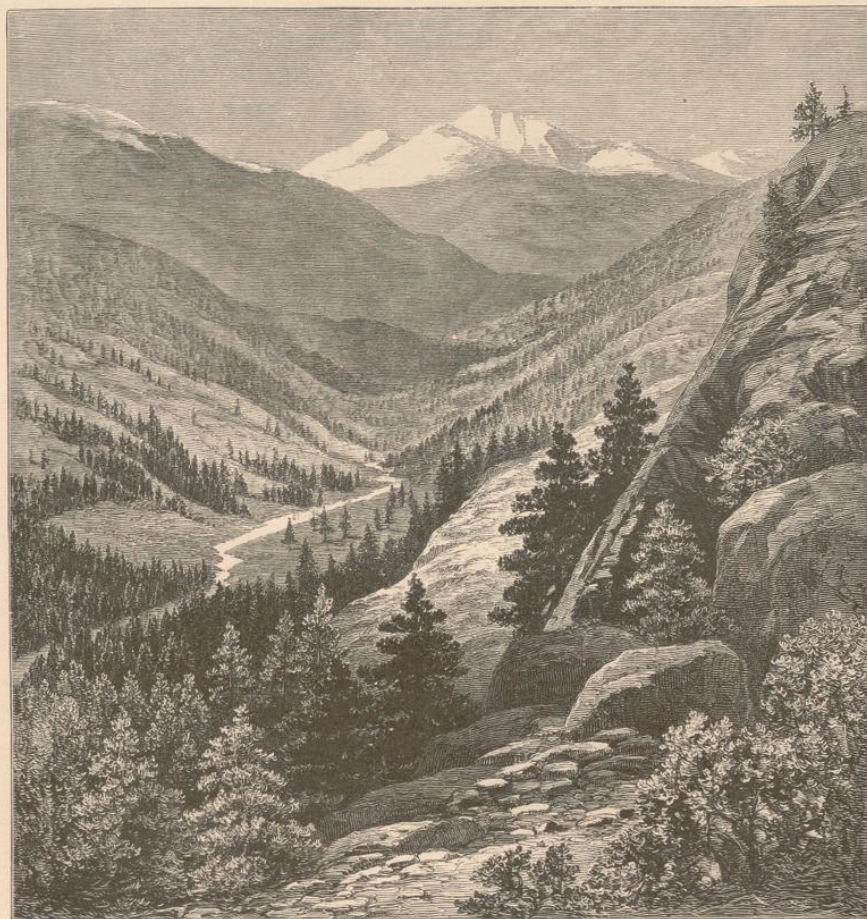
Even among eminent scientific men there has been a dense ignorance about the Rocky Mountains, and especially about the heights of the several peaks. Until 1873,



Frozen Lake, Foot of James's Peak.

only small areas of our vast Territories had been surveyed and accurately mapped. The greater space had been unnoticed, and uncared for. But in that year a geological and geographical survey of Colorado was made, under the able direction of Dr. F. V. Hayden; and the results have exceeded all expectations. The position of every leading peak in thirty thousand square miles was fixed last summer, including the whole region between parallels 38° and $40^{\circ} 20'$ north, and between the meridians $104^{\circ} 30'$ and 107° west. The

ground was divided into three districts, the northern district including the Middle Park, the middle district including the South Park, and the southern district the San-Luis Park. In these three districts the range reveals itself as one of the grandest in the world, reaching its greatest elevations, and comprising one of the most interesting areas



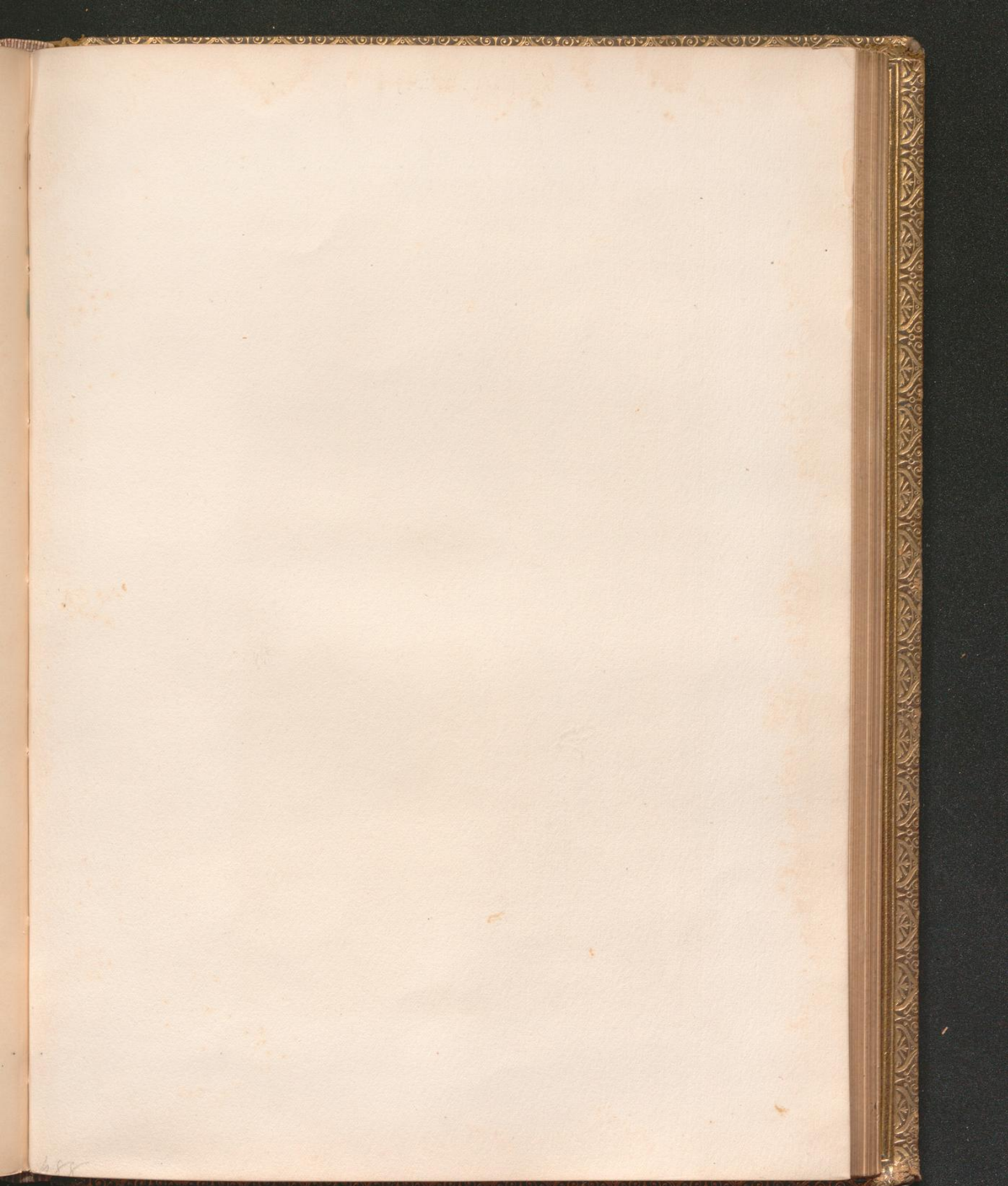
Gray's Peak.

on the continent. As unscientific persons, we owe Professor Hayden a debt of gratitude for reassuring us that the Rocky Mountains are all our forefathers thought them, and not mythical in their splendors. How much more the *savants* owe him, we will not venture to say. We ought to add, however, that he was singularly fortunate in unearthing, so to speak, the most representative scenery, as the photographs made attest; and

present or prospective travellers cannot do better than follow in the footsteps of his expedition, as we mean to do in this article.

Early in May we are far north, with a detachment of the Hayden expedition, encamped in the Estes Park, or Valley. Park, by-the-way, is used in these regions as a sort of variation on the sweeter-sounding word. The night is deepening as we pitch our tents. We are at the base of Long's Peak—about half-way between Denver City and the boundary-line of Wyoming—and can only dimly see its clear-cut outline and graceful crests, as the last hues of sunset fade and depart. Supper consoles us after our long day's march; we retire to our tents, but are not so exhausted that we cannot make merry. In this lonely little valley, with awful chasms and hills around, in a wilderness of glacier creation, scantily robed with dusky pine and hemlock, the hearty voice of our expedition breaks many slumbering echoes in the chilly spring night. A void is filled. A man on the heights, looking into the valley, would be conscious of a change in the sentiment of the scene. The presence of humanity infuses itself into the inanimate. It is so all through the region. Alone, we survey the magnificent reaches of mountain, hill-side, and plain, with a subdued spirit, as on the brink of a grave. Our sympathies find vent, but not in hysterical adulation. Our admiration and wonder are mingled with a degree of awe that restrains expression. It would be much more easy to go into ecstasies over the home-like view from the summit of Mount Washington than over peaks that are more than twice as high, and incomparably grander. There are brightness and life, smooth pastures and pretty houses, on the New-England mountain. Out here there are waste, ruggedness, and sombre colors. The heart of man is not felt; we gaze at the varied forms, all of them massive, most of them beautiful, feeling ourselves in a strange world. The shabby hut of the squatter, and straggling mining-camp, deep set in a ravine, are an inexpressible relief; and so our white tents, erected on the fertile acres of the Estes Park, throw a gleam of warmth among the snowy slopes, and impart to the scene that something without which the noblest country appears dreary, and awakens whatever latent grief there is in our nature.

Betimes in the morning we are astir, and the full glory of the view bursts upon us. The peak is the most prominent in the front range, soaring higher than its brothers around; and we have seen it as we approached from the plains. It is yet too early in the season for us to attempt the ascent; the snow lies more than half-way down; but from this little valley, where our tents are pitched, we have one of the finest views possible. The slopes are gentle and almost unbroken for a considerable distance; but, reaching higher, they terminate in sharp, serrated lines, edged with a ribbon of silver light. The snow is not distributed evenly. In some places it lies thick, and others are only partly covered by streaky, map-like patches, revealing the heavy color of the ground and rock beneath. A range of foot-hills of clumsy contour leads the way to the peaks which mount behind them. The park is a lovely spot, sheltered, fertile, and wooded. It

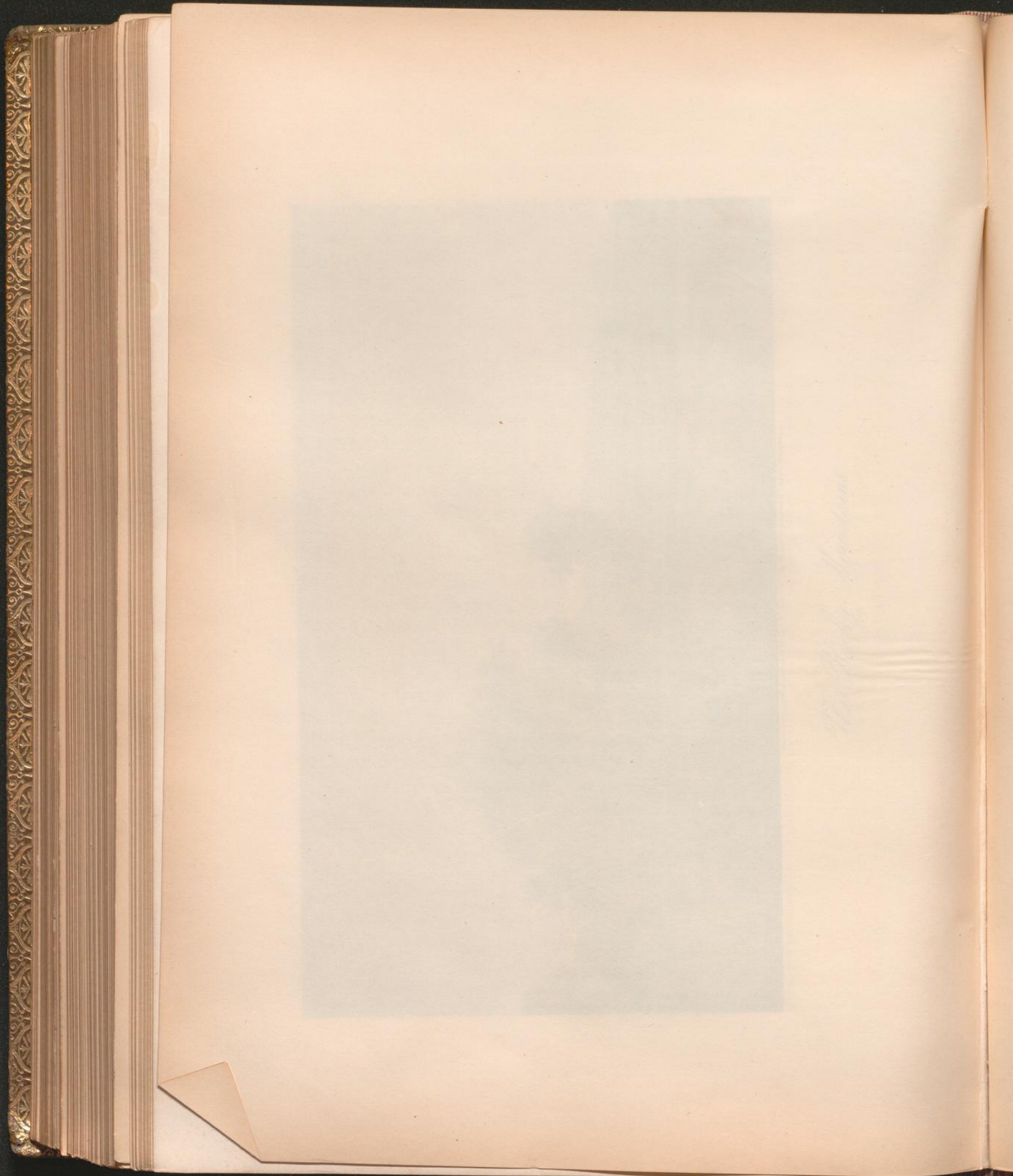




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The Rocky Mountains

New York, T. Applegate, & Co.





SUMMIT OF GRAY'S PEAK.

is an excellent pasture for large herds of cattle, and is used for that purpose. A few families are also settled here; and, as the valley is the only practicable route for ascending the peak, it is destined, no doubt, to become a stopping-place for future tourists. It is seven thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight feet above the level of the sea, and six thousand three hundred feet below Long's Peak, which is said to be about fourteen thousand and eighty-eight feet high. The peak is composed of primitive rock, twisted and torn into some of the grandest cañons in this famed country of cañons. While we remain here, we are constantly afoot. The naturalists of the expedition are overjoyed at their good fortune, and the photographers are alert to catch all they can while the light lasts. The air is crisp, joyous, balsamic. Ah! that we might never be left alone to hear the secret voice and the dread revelations of these magnificent spaces! But it follows us, and oppresses us; and we are never safe from its importunities without a mirthful, unimpressionable companion. It is a terrible skeleton in the closet of the mountain, and it comes forth to fill us with dismay and grief.

Soon we are on the march again, tramping southward through stilly valleys, climbing monstrous boulders, fording snow-fed streams, mounting perilous heights, descending awful chasms. Everlasting grandeur! everlasting hills! Then, from cañons almost as great, we enter the Boulder Cañon, cut deep in the metamorphic rocks of foot-hills for seventeen miles, with walls of solid rock that rise precipitously to a height of three thousand feet in many places. A bubbling stream rushes down the centre, broken in its course by clumsy-looking rocks, and the fallen limbs of trees that have been wrenched from the sparse soil and moss in the crevices. The water is discolored and thick. At the head of the cañon is a mining-settlement, and we meet several horsemen traversing a narrow road that clings to the walls—now on one side, and then, leaping the stream, to the other. The pines, that find no haunt too drear, and no soil too sterile, have striven to hide the nakedness of the rocks; but many a branch is withered and decayed, and those still living are dwarfed and sombre. Boulder City, at the mouth of the cañon, has a population of about fifteen hundred, and is the centre of the most abundant and extensively developed gold, silver, and coal mining districts in the Territory. Within a short distance from it are Central City, Black Hawk, and Georgetown.

James's Peak comes next in our route, and at its foot we see one of the pretty frozen lakes that are scattered all over the range. It is a picturesque and weird yet tenderly sentimental scene. Mr. Moran has caught its spirit admirably, and his picture gives a fair idea of its beauty. The surface is as smooth as a mirror, and reflects the funereal foliage and snowy robes of the slopes as clearly. It is as chaste as morning, and we can think of ice-goblins chasing underneath the folds of virgin snow that the pale moonlight faintly touches and bespangles. The white dress of the mountain hereabout is unchanged the year round, and only yields tribute to the summer heat in thousands of little brooks, that gather together in the greater streams. The lakes themselves are small basins,

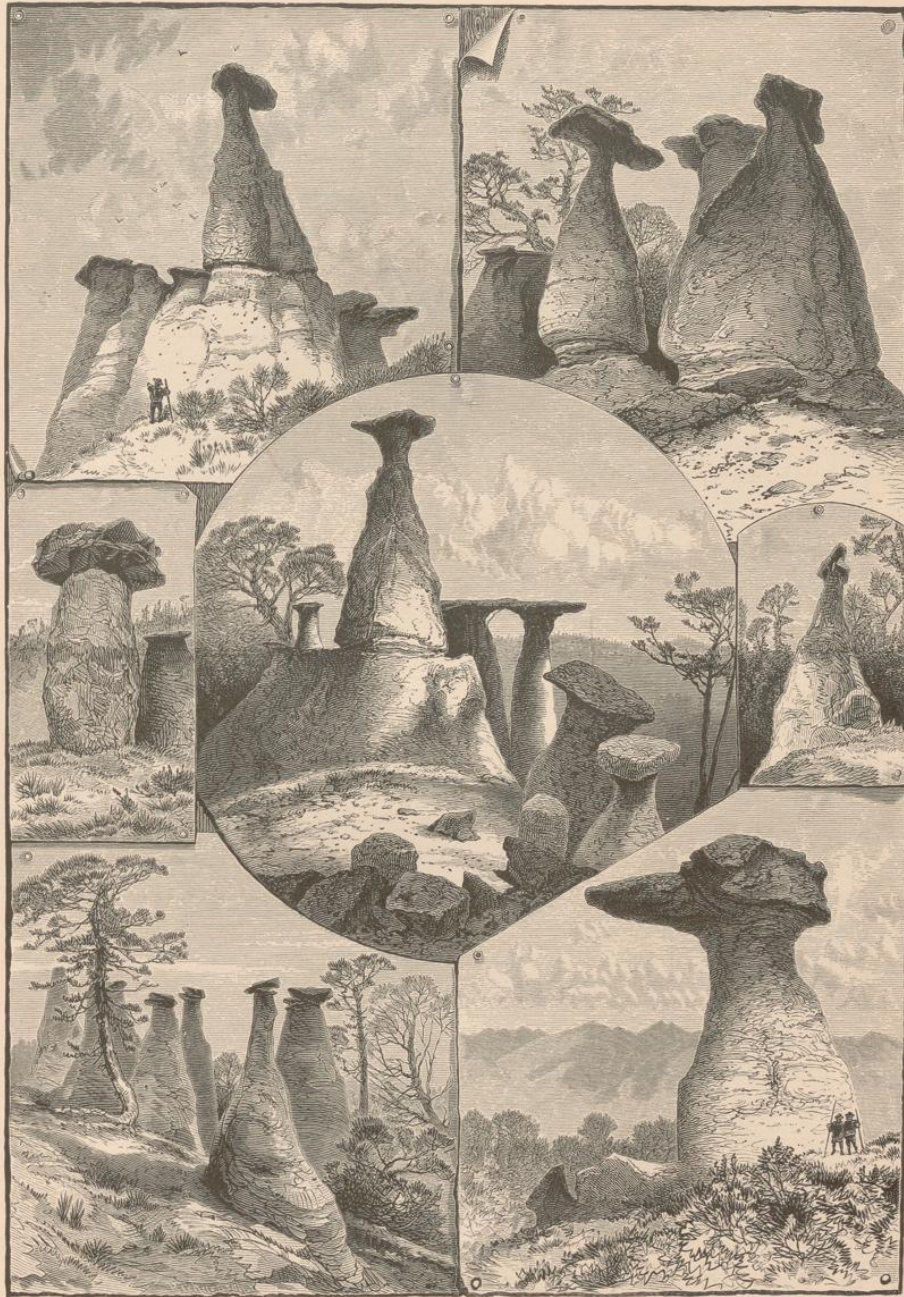


CHICAGO LAKE.

not more than two or three acres in extent, and are ice-locked and snow-bound until the summer is far advanced.

You shall not be wearied by a detailed story of our route, or of the routine of our camp. We are on the wing pretty constantly, the photographers and naturalists working with exemplary zeal in adding to their collections. We are never away from the mountains, and never at a spot devoid of beauty. In the morning we climb a hill, and in the evening march down it. Anon we are under the looming shadows of a steep pass or ravine, and then our eyes are refreshed in a green valley—not such a valley as rests at the foot of Alpine hills, but one that has not been transformed by the cultivator—a waste to Eastern eyes, but a paradise, compared with the more rugged forms around. We are not sure that “beauty unadorned is adorned the most” in this instance. A few hedge-rows here and there, a white farm-house on yonder knoll, a level patch of moist, brown earth freshly ploughed, and a leafy, loaded orchard, might change the sentiment of the thing, but would not make it less beautiful.

We encounter civilization, modified by the conditions of frontier life, in the happily-situated little city of Georgetown, which is in a direct line running westward from Denver City, the starting-point of tourist mountaineers. A great many of you have been there, using its hotel as a base of operations in mountaineering. It is locked in a valley surrounded by far-reaching granite hills, with the silver ribbon of Clear Creek flashing its way through, and forests of evergreens soaring to the ridges. A previous traveller has well said that Europe has no place to compare with it. It is five thousand feet higher than the glacier-walled vale of the Chamouni, and even higher than the snow-girt hospice of Saint-Bernard. Roundabout are wonderful “bits” of Nature, and, from the valley itself, we make the ascent of Gray’s Peak, the mountain that, of all others in the land, we have heard the most. We toil up a winding road, meeting plenty of company, of a rough sort, on the way. There are many silver-mines in the neighborhood, and we also meet heavily-laden wagons, full of ore, driven by labor-stained men. The air grows clearer and thinner; we leave behind the forests of aspen, and are now among the pines, silver-firs, and spruces. At last we enter a valley, and see afar a majestic peak, which we imagine is our destination. We are wrong. Ours is yet higher, so we ride on, the horses panting and the men restless. The forest still grows thinner; the trees smaller. Below us are the successive valleys through which we have come, and above us the snowy Sierras, tinted with the colors of the sky. Twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea we reach the Stevens silver-mine, the highest point in Colorado where mining is carried on, and then we pass the limit of tree-life, where only dwarfed forms of Alpine or arctic vegetation exist. A flock of white partridges flutter away at our coming, and two or three conies snarl at us from their nests underneath the rocks. Higher yet! Breathless and fatigued, we urge our poor beasts on in the narrow, almost hidden trail, and are rewarded in due time by a safe arrival at our goal.



ERODED SANDSTONES, MONUMENT PARK.

Foremost in the view are the twin peaks, Gray's and Torrey's; but, in a vast area that seems limitless, there are successive rows of pinnacles, some of them entirely wrapped in everlasting snow, others patched with it, some abrupt and pointed, others reaching their climax by soft curves and gradations that are almost imperceptible. We are on the crest of a continent—on the brink of that New World which Agassiz has told us is the Old. The man who could resist the emotion called forth by the scene, is not among our readers, we sincerely hope. There is a sort of enclosure some feet beneath the very summit of Gray's Peak, or, to speak more exactly, a valley surrounded by walls of snow, dotted by occasional boulders, and sparsely covered with dwarfed vegetation. Here we encamp and light our fires, and smoke our pipes, while our minds are in a trance over the superb reach before us.

Not very many years ago it was a common thing to find a deserted wagon on the plains, with some skeleton men and two skeleton horses not far off. A story is told that, in one case, the tarpaulin was inscribed with the words "Pike's Peak or Bust." Pike's Peak was then an El Dorado to the immigrants, who, in adventurously seeking it, often fell victims on the gore-stained ground of the Sioux Indians. Foremost in the range, it was the most visible from the plains, and was as a star or beacon to the travellers approaching the mountains from the east. Thither we are now bound, destined to call, on the way, at the Chicago Lakes, Monument Park, and the Garden of the Gods. Chicago Lakes lie at the foot of Mount Rosalie, still farther south, and are the source of Chicago Creek. They are high upon the mountain, at the verge of the timber-line, and that shown in Mr. Moran's picture has an elevation of nearly twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea. Mount Rosalie, ridged with snow, and very rugged in appearance, terminates two thousand two hundred feet higher. Another lake, as smooth and lovely as this, and of about the same size, is found near by, and twelve more are scattered, like so many patches of silver, in the vicinity. The water comes from the snow, and is cool and refreshing on the hottest summer days. Trout are abundant in the streams, and allure many travellers over a terribly bad road from Georgetown. Monument Park is probably more familiar to you than other points in our route. It is filled with fantastic groups of eroded sandstone, perhaps the most unique in the Western country, where there are so many evidences of Nature's curious whims. If one should imagine a great number of gigantic sugar-loaves, quite irregular in shape, but all showing the tapering form, varying in height from six feet to nearly fifty, with each loaf capped by a dark, flat stone, not unlike in shape to a college-student's hat, he would have a very clear idea of the columns in Monument Park. They are for the most part ranged along the low hills on each side of the park, which is probably a mile wide, but here and there one stands out in the open plain. On one or two little knolls, apart from the hills, numbers of these columns are grouped, producing the exact effect of cemeteries with their white-marble columns. The stone is very light in color.



PIKE'S PEAK, FROM GARDEN OF THE GODS.



Upper Twin Lake.

Once more we are on our way, and still in the mountains. We linger a while in the Garden of the Gods, which is five miles northwest of Colorado Springs, as you will see by referring to a map, among the magnificent forms that in some places resemble those we have already seen in Monument Park. There are some prominent cliffs, too; but they are not so interesting as others that we have seen, and are simply horizontal strata, thrown by some convulsion into a perpendicular position. At the "gateway" we are between two precipitous walls of sandstone, two hundred feet apart, and three hundred and fifty feet high. Stretching afar is a gently-sloping foothill, and, beyond that, in the distance, we have a glimpse of the faint snow-line of Pike's Peak. The scene is strangely impressive. The walls form almost an amphitheatre, enclosing a patch of level earth. In the foreground there is an embankment consisting of apparently detached rocks, some of them distorted into mushroom-shape, and others secreting shallow pools of water in their darkling hollows. The foliage is scarce and deciduous; gloomily pathetic. A rock rises midway between the walls at the gateway, and elsewhere in the garden there are monumental forms that remind us of the valley of the Yellowstone.



Teocalli Mountain.

Pike's Peak, seen from the walls, is about ten miles off. It forms, with its spurs, the southeastern boundary of the South Park. It offers no great difficulties in the ascent, and a good trail for horses has been made to the summit, where an "Old Probabilities" has stationed an officer to forecast the coming storms.

Now we bear away to Fairplay, where we join the principal division of the expedition, and thence we visit together Mount Lincoln, Western Pass, the Twin Lakes, and other points in the valley of the Arkansas; cross the National or Mother range into the Elk Mountains; proceed up the Arkansas and beyond its head-waters to the Mount of the Holy Cross. We are exhausting our space, not our subject, and we can only describe at length a few spots in the magnificent country included in our itinerary. At

the beginning we spoke about Mount Lincoln, and the glorious view obtained from its summit. When named, during the war, this peak was thought to be eighteen thousand feet high, but more recent measurements have brought it down to about fourteen thousand feet—lower, in fact, than Pike's, Gray's, Long's, Yale, or Harvard, the highest of which has yet to be determined. But its summit commands points in a region of country nearly twenty-five thousand square miles in extent, embracing the grandest natural beauties, a bewildering reach of peaks, valleys, cañons, rivers, and lakes. We find, too, on Mount Lincoln, some lovely Alpine flowers, which grow in profusion even on the very summit, and are of nearly every color and great fragrance. Professor J. D. Whitney, who accompanied the expedition, picked several sweetly-smelling bunches of delicate blue-bells within five feet of the dome of Mount Lincoln. These tender little plants are chilled every night to freezing, and draw all their nourishment from the freshly-melted snow.

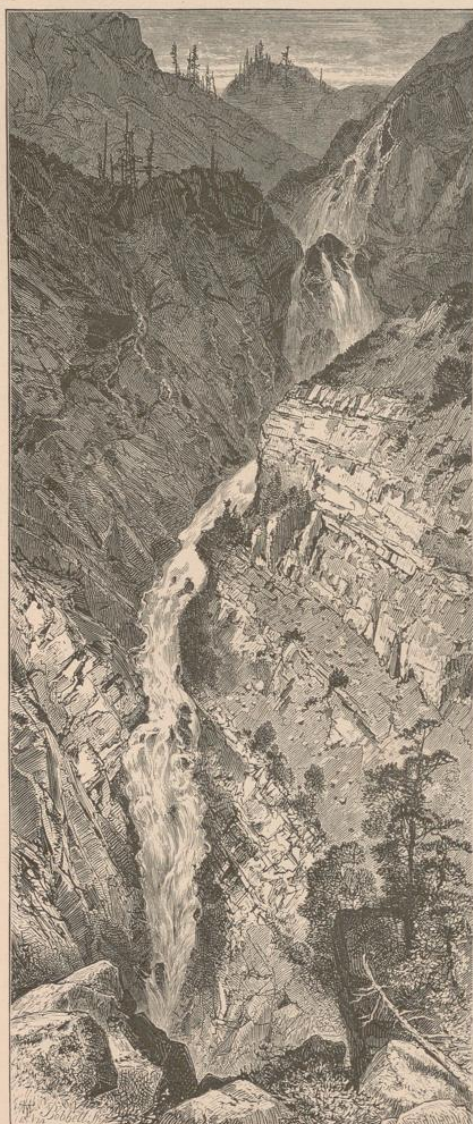
Heretofore we have spoken complainingly, it may seem, of the sombre quality of all we have seen, and its deficient power of evoking human sympathy. But at the Twin Lakes we have no more occasion for morbid brooding, but a chance to go into healthy raptures, and to admire some tender, almost pastoral scenery. The course of the Arkansas River is southward hereabout, touching the base of the central chain of the mountains. So it continues for one hundred miles, then branching eastward toward the Mississippi. In the lower part of the southward course the valley expands, and is bordered on the east by an irregular mass of low, broken hill-ranges, and on the west by the central range. Twenty miles above this point the banks are closely confined, and form a very picturesque gorge; still further above they again expand, and here are nestled the beautiful Twin Lakes. The larger is about two and a half miles long and a mile and a half wide; the smaller about half that size. At the upper end they are girt by steep and rugged heights; below they are bounded by undulating hills of gravel and boulders. A broad stream connects the two, and then hurries down the plain to join and swell the Arkansas. Our illustration does not exaggerate the chaste beauty of the upper lake, the smaller of the two. The contour of the surrounding hills is marvellously varied: here softly curving, and yonder soaring to an abrupt peak. In some things it transports us to the western Highlands of Scotland, and, as with their waters, its depths are swarming with the most delicately flavored, the most spirited and largest trout. Sportsmen come here in considerable numbers; and not the least charming object to be met on the banks is an absorbed, contemplative man, seated on some glacier-thrown boulder, with his slender rod poised and bending gracefully, and a pretty wicker basket, half hidden in the moist grass at his side, ready for the gleaming fish that flaunts his gorgeous colors in the steadily-lapping waters.

We advance from the Twin Lakes into the very heart of the Rocky Mountains, and sojourn in a quiet little valley while the working-force of the expedition explores the



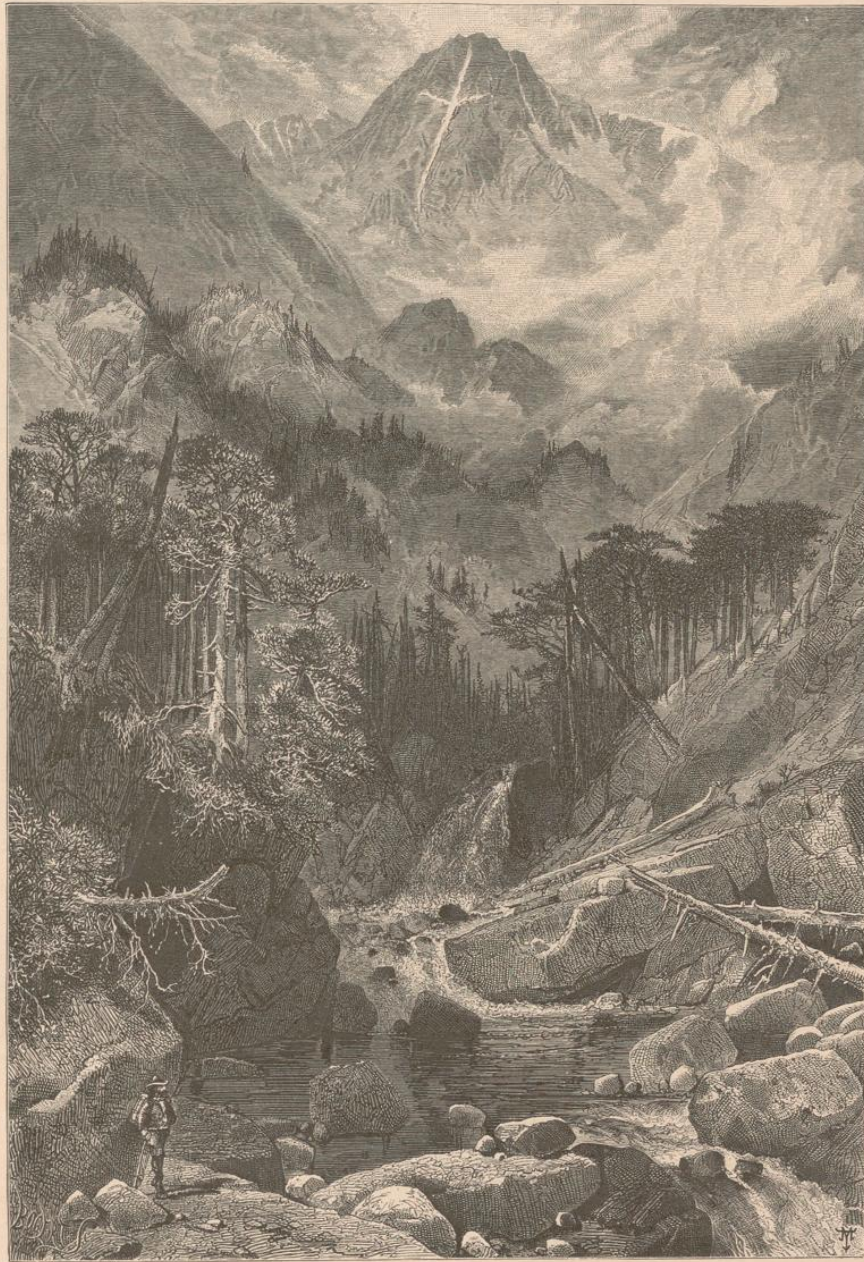
SNOW-MASS MOUNTAIN.

neighboring country. Two summits are ascended from our station, one of them a round peak of granite, full fourteen thousand feet above the level of the sea, and only to



Elk-Lake Cascade.

be reached by assiduous and tiresome scrambling over fractured rocks. This we name La Plata. We are on the grandest uplift on the continent, Professor Whitney believes. The range is of unswerving direction, running north and south for nearly a hundred miles, and is broken into countless peaks over twelve thousand feet high. It is penetrated by deep ravines, which formerly sent great glaciers into the valley; it is composed of granite and eruptive rocks. The northernmost point is the Mount of the Holy Cross, and that we shall visit soon. Advancing again through magnificent upland meadows and amphitheatres, we come at last to Red-Mountain Pass, so named from a curious line of light near the summit, marked for half a mile with a brilliant crimson stain, verging into yellow from the oxidation of iron in the volcanic material. The effect of this, as may be imagined, is wonderfully beautiful. Thence we traverse several ravines in the shadow of the imposing granite mountains, enter fresh valleys, and contemplate fresh wonders. The ardent geologists of the expedition, ever alert, discover one day a ledge of limestone containing corals, and soon we are in a region filled with enormous and surprising developments of that material. We pitch our tents near the base of an immense pyramid, capped with layers of red sandstone, which we name Teocalli, from the Aztec word, meaning "pyramid of sacrifice." The view from our camp is — we



MOUNTAIN OF THE HOLY CROSS.

should say surpassing, could we remember or decide which of all the beauties we have is the grandest. Two hills incline toward the valley where we are stationed, ultimately falling into each other's arms. Between their shoulders there is a broad gap, and, in the rear, the majestic form of the Teocalli reaches to heaven.

In the distance we have seen two mountains which are temporarily called Snow-Mass and Black Pyramid. The first of these we are now ascending. It is a terribly hard road to travel. The slopes consist of masses of immense granitic fragments, the rock-bed from which they came appearing only occasionally. When we reach the crest, we find it also broken and cleft in masses and pillars. Professor Whitney ingeniously reckons that an industrious man, with a crow-bar, could, by a week's industrious exertion, reduce the height of the mountain one or two hundred feet. Some of the members of the expedition amuse themselves by the experiment, toppling over great fragments, which thunder down the slopes, and furrow the wide snow-fields below. It is this snow-field which forms the characteristic feature of the mountain as seen in the distance. There is about a square mile of unbroken white, and, lower down still, a lake of blue water. A little to the northward of Snow-Mass, the range rises into another yet greater mountain. The two are known to miners as "The Twins," although they are not at all alike, as the provisional names we bestowed upon them indicate. After mature deliberation the expedition rechristen them the White House and the Capitol, under which names we suppose they will be familiar to future generations. Not a great distance from here, leading down the mountain from Elk Lake, is a picturesque cascade, that finds its way through deep gorges and cañons to the Rio Grande.

The Mountain of the Holy Cross is next reached. This is the most celebrated mountain in the region, but its height, which has been over-estimated, is not more than fourteen thousand feet. The ascent is exceedingly toilsome even for inured mountaineers, and I might give you an interesting chapter describing the difficulties that beset us. There is a very beautiful peculiarity in the mountain, as its name shows. The principal peak is composed of gneiss, and the cross fractures of the rock on the eastern slope have made two great fissures, which cut into one another at right angles, and hold their snow in the form of a cross the summer long.