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No. 80 Bay street, New York.
June 16, 1859.—1y.*

AN OVERLAND JOURNEY.

IX.

THE AMERICAN DESERT.

Editorial Correspondence of The Tribune.
STATION 18, P. P. EXPRESS CO.,
June 2, 1859.

The clouds, which threatened rain at the Station on Prairie Dog Creek, whence I wrote two days ago, were dissipated by a violent gale, which threatened to overturn the heavy wagon in which my fellow-passengers and I were courting sleep—had it stood broadside to the wind, it must have gone over. It is customary, I learn, to stake down the wagons encamped on the open prairie; in the valleys of the creeks, where the Company's stations are located, this precaution is deemed superfluous. But the winds which sweep the high prairies of this region are terrible; the few trees that grow thinly along the creek bottoms rarely venture to raise their heads above the adjacent bluffs, to which they owe their doubtful hold on existence.

For more than a hundred miles back, the soil has been steadily degenerating, until here, where we strike the Republican, which has been far to the north of us since we left it at Fort Riley, 300 miles back, we seem to have reached the some barrenness and desolation. We left this morning Station 17 on a little creek entitled Gouler, at least 30 miles back, and did not see a tree and but one bunch of low shrubs in a dry watercourse throughout our dreary morning ride, till we came in sight of the Republican, which has a little—a very little—scrubby cottonwood nested in and along its bluffs just here, but there is none beside for miles, save a little lurking in a ravine which makes down the river from the north. Of grass there is little, and that little of miserable quality—either a scanty furze of coarse alkaline sort of rush, less fit for food than physic. Soil there is none but an inch or so of intermittent grass-root tangled about what usually seems to be a thin stratum of clay, often washed off so as to leave nothing but a slightly argillaceous sand. Along the larger water-courses—this one especially—this sand seems to be as pure as Sahara can boast.

The dearth of water is fearful. Although the whole region is deeply seaoned and gullied by water-courses—now dry, but in rainy weather mill-streams—no springs burst from their steep sides.—We have not passed a drop of living water in all our morning's ride and but a few puddles of muddy moisture at the bottoms of a very few of fast drying sloughs or sunken holes in the beds of dried up creeks. Yet there has been much rain here this season, some of it not long ago. But this is a region of sterility and thirst. If utterly unaided, the grass of a season would hardly suffice, when dry, to nourish a prairie-fire.

Even the animals have deserted us.—No Buffalo have been seen this year within many miles of us, though their old paths lead occasionally across this country; I presume they pass rapidly through it, as I should urgently advise them to do; not a Gray Wolf has honored us with his company to-day—he prefers to live where there is something to eat—the Prairie-Dog also wisely shuns this land of starvation; no animal but the Gopher (a little creature, between a mouse and a ground-squirrel) abounds here; and he burrows deep in the sand and picks up a living, I cannot guess how; while a few Hawks and an occasional Prairie-Wolf (ayota) lives by picking here and there a Gopher. They must find him disgusting-ly lean.

I would match this Station and its surroundings against any other scene on our continent for desolation. From the high prairie over which we approach it, you overlook a grand sweep of treeless desert, through the middle of which flows the Republican, usually in several shallow streams separated by sandbars or islets—its whole volume being far less than that of the Mohawk at Utica, though it has drained above this point an area equal to that of Connecticut. Of the few scrubby cottonwoods lately cowering under the bluffs at this point, must have been cut for the uses of the Station, though logs for its embryo house are drawn from a little clump, eight miles distant. A broad bed of sand indicates that the volume of water is sometimes a hundred fold its present amount, though it will doubtless soon be far less than it now is. Its av-

erage depth cannot now exceed six inches. On every hand, and for many miles above and below, the country above the bluffs is such as we have passed over this morning. A dead mule—bitten in the jaw this morning by a rattlesnake—lies here as if to complete the scene. Off the track to Pike's Peak, all is dreary, solitude and silence.

—Speaking of Rattlesnakes—I hasten to retract the skepticism I avowed in a former letter as to the usual and welcome residence of these venomous serpents in the Prairie-dog's burrow. The evidence of the fact is too direct and reliable to be gainsayed. A credible witness testifies that he and others once tried to drown in out a Prairie-Dog in his domicile, and when sufficient water had been rapidly called a Prairie-Dog, an Owl and a Rattlesnake all together. In another case a tremendous rain raised a creek so that it suddenly overflowed a Prairie-Dog town, when the general stampede of Prairie-Dogs, Owls and Rattlesnakes was a sight to behold. It is idle to attempt holding out against facts; so I have pondered this anomaly until I think I clearly comprehend it. The case is much like that of some newspaper establishments, whose proprietors, it is said, find it convenient to keep their staff "a broth of a boy" from Tipperary, and sending six feet two in his stockings and measuring a yard or more across the shoulders, who stands ready, with an illegitimate brogue, a twinkle in his eye and a hickory sapling firmly grasped in his dexter fist, to respond to all choleric, peremptory customers, who call of a morning, hot with wrath and bristling with cowhide, to demand a parley with the editor. The Cayota is a gentleman of an inquiring, investigating turn, who is an adept at excavation, and whose fondness for Prairie-Dog is more ardent than flattery. To dig one out and digest him would be an easy task, if he were alone in his den, or with only the Owl as his partner; but when the firm is known to be Prairie-Dog, Rattlesnake & Co., the Cayota's passion for subterranean researches is materially cooled. The Rattlesnake is to the concern what the fighting Editor is to the journalistic organizations aforesaid. And thus, while my faith is enlarged in my reason satisfied.

—A word now on the Antelope. I liked him when I first saw him, days ago; I then wished for a better acquaintance, which wish has since been gratified; and since I dined with him (that is, off him) my esteem has ripened into affection.—Of the many antelopes I have seen, I judge a majority considerably larger than the deer of our Eastern forests—not so tall nor (perhaps) so long, but heavier in body, while hardly less swift or less graceful in motion. He is the only animal I have seen here that may justly boast of either grace or beauty. His flesh is tender and delicate—the choicest eating I have found in Kansas. Shy and fleet as he is, he is the chief sustenance at this season of the Indians out of the present Buffalo range.—An old hunter assures me that, with all his timidity, he is easily taken by the knowing. To follow him is absurd, his scent is too keen, his fear too great; but go upon a high prairie, to a spot whence you can overlook fifteen or twenty square miles; there crouch in a hollow or in the grass, and hoist your handkerchief, or some red, fluttering scarf on a light pole, which you wave gently and patiently in the air; soon the Antelope, if there be one within sight, perceives the strange apparition; his curiosity is excited; it masters his caution; he makes toward the strange object, and keeps drawing nearer and nearer till he is within fifteen or twenty rods. The rest requires no instruction.

STATION, 21, June 3, (evening) 1859.

Since I wrote the foregoing, we have traveled ninety miles up the south branch of the Republican (which forks just above Station 18) and have thus pursued a course somewhat south of west. In all these ninety miles, we have passed just two live streams making in from the South—both together running scarcely water enough to turn a grind-stone. In all that ninety miles, we have not seen wood enough to make a decent pig-pen. The bottom of the river is perhaps half a mile in average width; the soil is good part clay and covered with a short thin grass; the bluffs are naked sand heaps; the rock, in the rare cases where any is exposed, an odd conglomerate of petrified clay with quartz and some specks that resemble corneolium. Beside this, some of the bluffs, where clay overlies and is blended, under peculiar circumstances, with the sand below it, a sort of rock seems to be formed or in process of formation. Water is obtained from the apology for a river, or by digging in the sand by its side; in default of wood, corrals (cattle-pens) are formed at the stations by laying up a heavy wall of clayey earth flanked by sods, and thus excavating a deep ditch on the inner side, except at the portal, which is closed at night by running a wagon into it. The tents are added at their bases; houses of sods are to be constructed as soon as may be. Such are the shifts of human ingenuity in a country which has probably not a cord of growing wood to each township of land.

Six miles further up, this fork of the Republican emerges from its sandy bed, in which it has been lost for the twenty-five miles next above. Of course it loses in volume in passing through such a land of drouth. Probably thirty times to-day we have crossed the broad sandy

beds of creeks running down from the high prairies—creeks which in Winter and early Spring are sweeping torrents, but now are wastes of thirsty sand. Thus has it been for ninety miles—thus is it for many miles above and I presume many also below. The road from Leavenworth to Denver had to be taken some 50 miles north of its due course to obtain even such a passage through the American Desert; on a direct line from the head of Solomon's Fork, it must have passed over some 200 miles of entire absence of wood and water.

—I have seen, during the last three or four days, several bands of wild Indians—Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kioways, Sioux, &c., mainly the two former. Of these the Arapahoes have been the most numerous and repulsive. Their children swarmed around us at Station 16—the men being mainly absent on a marauding expedition against the Pawnees—the women staying in their lodges. The young ones are thorough savages—their allowance of clothing averaging six inches square of buffalo skin to each, but so unequally distributed (as is the case with worldly goods in general) that the majority have a far scant allowance. A large Cheyenne village is encamped around Station 19, where we stopped last night; and we have been meeting squads of these and other tribes several times a day. The Kioways are encamped some eight miles from this spot. They all profess to be friendly, though the Cheyennes have twice stopped and delayed the express wagons on pretense of claiming payment for the injury done them in cutting wood, eating grass, scaring away game, &c. They would all like to beg, and many of them are deemed not disinclined to steal. We are to pass through several more encampments, but expect not rouble from them. The Cheyennes are better clad, and seem to have more self-respect than the Arapahoes, but they are all low in the scale of intellectual and moral being, and must fade away unless they can be induced to work. More of them hereafter.

—The unusual dullness of this letter is partly accounted for by an accident. Two evenings since, just as we were nearing Station 17, where we were to stop for the night, my fellow-passenger and I had a jocular discussion on the gullies into which we were so frequently plunged, to our personal discomfort. He premised that it was a consolation that the sides of these gullies could not be worse than perpendicular; to which I required with the assertion that they could be and were—for instance where a gully, in addition to its perpendicular descent had an inclination of 45 degrees or so to one side the track. Just then a violent lurch of the wagon to one side, then to the other, in descending one of these jolts, enforced my position. Two minutes later, as we were about to descend the steep bank of the creek interval, the mules acting perversely, my friend stepped out to take them by the head, leaving me alone in the wagon. Just then, we began to descend the steep pitch, the driver pulling up with all his might, when the left rein of the leaders broke, and the team was in a moment sheared out of the road and ran diagonally down the pitch. In a second, the wagon went over, hitting the ground a most spiteful blow. I of course went over with it, and when I rose to my feet as soon as possible, considerably bewildered and disheveled, the mules had been disengaged by the upset and were making good time across the prairie, while the driver, considerably hurt, was getting out from under the carriage to limp after them. I had a slight cut on my left cheek and a worse one below the left knee, but a pretty smart concussion generally, but not a bone started nor a tendon strained, and I walked away to the Station as firmly as ever, leaving the superintendent and my fellow-passenger to pick up the pieces and guard the baggage from the Indians who instantly swarmed about the wreck. I am sore yet, and a little lame, but three or four days' rest—if I can ever get it—will make all right. This is the first and only accident that has happened to the Express line, though it has run out some thirty passage-wagons from Leavenworth, and perhaps half so many back from Denver. And this was the result of a casualty for which neither driver nor Company was to blame.

—Three days hence, I hope to be at Denver (185 miles distant), whence our latest advices are very cheering to the hearts of the legions of faint and weary gold-seekers we have passed on the way. I trust, for their sakes, that this news will prove fully true. But you will have heard by telegraph before this can reach you.

X.—Good Bye to the Desert.

DENVER, June 6, 1859.

My last, I believe, was written at Station 21, 90 miles up the Republican from the point at which the Leavenworth Express Company's Road strikes that river in the great American desert. Six miles further up, the stream disappears in the deep, thirsty sands of its wide bed, and is not seen again for twenty-five miles.—Even a mile or two below its point of disappearance I learn that excavations in its bed to a depth of eight feet have failed to reach water. Its reappearance below this point is marked, and seems to be caused by the timely junction of a small tributary from the south, which seems to flow over a less thirsty bed, and pours into the devouring sands of the Re-

publican a small but steady stream, aided by which, the river begins to reappear, first in pools and soon in an insignificant but gradually increasing current. At the head of this 'sink,' the stream disappears in like manner to that of its emergence. Here is station 22, and here are a so-called spring and one or two considerable pools, not visibly connected with the sinking river, but doubtless sustained by it. And here the thirsty men and teams which have been twenty-five miles without water on the Express Company's Road, are met by those which have come up the longer and more southerly route by the Smoky Hill, and which have traveled sixty miles since they last found water or shade. This is a sore trial for weary, gaunt, heavy-laden cattle, and doubtless proved fatal to many of them. The Pike's Peakers from the Smoky Hill I met here with ox-teams, had driven through the sixty miles at one stretch, the time required being two days and the intervening night. From this point, westward, the original Smoky Hill route is abandoned for that we had been traveling which follows the Republican some twenty-five miles farther, its bed is often dry, or only moistened by little pools from the meagre current which filters slowly through the deep sands below.—Where the bed is narrow and the channel under one bank, the petty stream is seen creeping away to the Kansas, the Missouri, the Mississippi, the Gulf of Mexico.—Of course, there are seasons when the river runs above ground throughout, and others when the sink is far longer than now.

The face of the country remains as I have already described it, save in the greater scarcity of wood and water. The bluffs are usually low, and the dry creeks which separate them are often wide reaches of heavy sand, most trying to the ill-fed teams. There is little grass on the rolling prairie above the bluffs, and that little generally thin, dead, worthless.—Some of the dry creek valleys have a little that is green but thin, while the river bottom—often half a mile wide—is sometimes tolerably grassed, and sometimes sandy and sterile. Of wood, there is none for stretches of forty or fifty miles: the corrals are made of earth, and consist of a trench and a mud or turf wall; one or two station-houses are to be built of turf if ever built at all; and at one station the fuel is brought sixty miles from the pinceries further west. Even the grasses are often coarse and rushy, or so alkaline as to be injurious to cattle; the more common plants seem to be wild sage and wild wormwood; the Cactus—which had begun to appear some 200 miles back—grows common, but is dwarfed by the prevailing sterility; the Spanish Nettle and Prickley Pear are abundant further on. But little rock is seen, and that looks like a volcanic conglomerate. Yet the river, such as it is, is the life of this region; the Ground Squirrel of the prairies digs his holes profusely in its vicinity; the Hawk and the Raven circle and swoop in pursuit of him; the Antelope often looks down from the ridges, and is hunted with success; the bark of the Coyote is heard, and the Gray Wolf prowls fearless and ferocious, and does not hesitate to rob cows of their young calves in spite of the desperate maternal resistance, and even to attack and disable ponies. The harness of the mules which draw the Express wagons have been often gnawed and injured as they hung up beside the tents, in which half a dozen men were sleeping, by these impudent miscreants. They may easily be shot by any one who will bait and patiently, skillfully hunt them.

A ride over a rolling 'divide' of some twenty miles brought us to the 'Big Sandy,' running southwest to become tributary (when it has anything to contribute) to the Arkansas. Like the Republican, it is sometimes a running stream, sometimes a succession of shallow pools, sometimes a waste of deep, scorching sand. A few paltry cotton-woods, a few bunches of low willow, may have graced its banks or those of some dry creek running into it, in the course of twenty miles or so that we followed up its northern bank, but I do not now remember any. I recollect only that the grass at intervals along its narrow bottoms seemed a little better than on the upper course of the Republican. One peculiarity of the Big Sandy I had not before observed—that of a thin alkaline incrustation—mainly of soda, I believe—covering many acres of the smoother sands of its dry bed. Of course, the water of its stagnant pools must be prejudicial to man or beast. At length, we crossed its deep, trying sand and left it behind us, passing over a high 'divide,' much cut up by gullies through which the water of the wet seasons flows and tears its way to the Arkansas on the south or the Platte on the north, until we struck, at 5 last evening, the first living tributary to the Platte—a little creek called Beaver, which I have not seen on any map. It is about ten miles east of the Bijou, with which it probably unites before reaching the Platte.

After leaving the valley of Big Sandy, the grass of the uplands becomes better, and is no longer confined to the water-courses. It spreads in green luxuriance up the southward slopes of considerable hills, which seems to be owing to vast drifts of snow in Winter, swept over and off the tops of hills by the fierce prairie winds, and piled up here to a height of fifteen or twenty feet, to be slowly dis-

solved by the warmer suns of the Spring months, and thus give rise to an after-growth of grass which contrasts strongly with the surrounding sterility.

—At Beaver Creek, we saw for the first time in many weary days—for more than 200 miles at the least—a clump of low but sturdy Cottonwoods, thirty or forty in number—part of them laid low by the devastating ax, but still giving hope that the desert was nearly past.—And six or seven miles after, just as night was falling, we came in sight of the Pines, giving double assurance that the mountains were at hand. Pike's Peak, in the west-south-west, and Long's Peak in the west-north-west—(the latter nearly the direction of Denver)—had stood revealed to us hours before by the gleam of their snowy diadems, as the morning sun dispelled the chill mists of the preceding night; but their majesty was a bleak and rugged one; while the Pines, though but scattered clumps of the short and scrubby variety known in New-England and the South as Pitch Pine, lent a grace and hospitality to the land scape which only the weary and way worn who have long traversed parched and shadeless deserts can appreciate. They grow here mainly in steep ravines, and often show marks of fire which the barrenness of the surrounding prairies—sterile as "pine plains," are apt to be—renders to me inexplicable.—Possibly, the fires that scorched them were kindled in the leafy carpet spread beneath them by the trees themselves.

This is but the northern outskirts of the Pine region, which stretches far south, through Arkansas and beyond, and soon thickening into forests and winding to a breadth of some sixty miles. Scattered as it is, I could hardly repress a shout on meeting it. And it was a pleasure to see last evening the many parties of way-worn gold-seekers encamped beside our way, after their long journey through a woodless region, surrounding great, ruddy, leaping fires of the dead pitch wood, and solacing themselves for their long privation by the amplest allowance of blane and warmth. For the climate of the American desert is terrible. Be the day ever so hot in the sun's unsoftened glare, the night that follows is sure to be chill and piercing, driving the musketees and buffalo-gnats to their hiding-places directly after sunset. The fierce prairie-wind searches to the marrow (ice froze a quarter of an inch thick on the Plains on the 26th of May), and a shower at this season is very apt to be accompanied by hail as well as thunder and lightning.—I trust our country has no harsher climate, save high among her grandest mountains.

From the Bijou to Cherry Creek—some 40 miles—I can say little of the country, save that it is high, rolling prairie, deeply cut by several streams, which run north-eastwardly to join the Platte, or one of the tributaries just named. We passed it in the night, hurrying on to reach Denver, and at sunrise this morning stopped to change mules on the bank of Cherry Creek, twelve miles south of this place (which is situated at the junction of the creek with the south fork of the Platte). The "foot hills" of the Rocky Mountains seemed but a few miles west of us during our rapid ride down the smooth valley of the Cherry Creek, which has a fine belt of Cottonwood only, but including trees of immense size—not less than three to four feet in diameter. The soil of the adjacent prairie seems light and sandy, but well grassed, and likely to yield Oats, Potatoes, &c., but the elevation (hardly less than 6,000 feet), and the proximity of the Rocky Mountains, whose snow-covered crests, gleaming between and over the foot hills, seem hardly twenty miles distant, must ever render the growth of Corn difficult if not absolutely impossible. Wheat, I understand, has been grown fifty to eighty miles south of this with moderate success. Still, if the adjacent Gold Mines realize the sanguine expectations now entertained here, this region will require Millions on Millions' worth of food from the rich prairies and bottoms of Kansas proper, Nebraska, and Missouri, and we shall need but the Pacific Railroad to open up a most beneficent Home Trade, and give the rich valley of the Missouri and its immediate tributaries better markets than those of the East.

And I fervently trust that the fond expectations of these gold-seekers, however chastened, may not be disappointed. For the sake of the weary, dusty foot-sore thousands I have passed on my rapid journey from civilized Kansas to this point, I pray that Gold may be found here in boundless extent and reasonable abundance. Throughout the next six weeks, they will be dropping in here, a hundred or more per day, and I trust that they are not to be sent home disappointed, spirit-broken, penniless. If they must recross the great desert with their slow-moving teams, may they be enabled to do so with lighter hearts and heavier purses.

For the very mothers who love them would hardly recognize their sons now toiling across the Plains, and straggling into this place, hideously hirsute, recklessly ragged, barefoot, sun-browned, dust-covered, and with eyes shielded from the glare of the prairie sun. A true picture of gold-seekers setting out from home, trim and jolly, for Pike's Peak, and those same gold-seekers, sober as judges and slow-moving as their own weary oxen,

dropping into Denver, would convey a salutary lesson to many a sanguine soul. Nay; I have in my mind's eye an individual who rolled out of Leavenworth, barely thirteen days ago, in a satisfactory rig and a spirit of adequate self-complacency, but who—through his hardships—have been nothing to theirs—came into Denver this morning in a sobered and thoughtful frame of mind, in dust-begrimed and tattered habiliments, with a patch on his cheek, a bandage on his leg and a limp in his gait, altogether constituting a spectacle most awful to behold. It is likely to be some time yet before our fashionable American Spas and Summer resorts for idlers will be located among the Rocky Mountains.

—As to Gold, Denver is crazy. She has been low in the valley of humiliation and is suddenly exalted to the summit of glory. The stories of day's works and rich leads that have been told me to-day—by grave, intelligent men—are absolutely bewildering. I do not discredit them, but I shall state nothing at second-hand where I may know if I will. I have come here to lay my hand on the naked, indisputable facts, and I mean to do it. Though unfit to travel, I start for the great diggings (50 miles hence nearly due west in the glens of the Rocky Mountains) to-morrow morning.

HORACE GREELEY.

Extraordinary Exhibition—A Man of Leather.

An exhibition of a very remarkable and unnatural character attracted a small but highly respectable audience at the Melodeon on Thursday evening last.—A young man by the name of James Steevens, had advertised that he would do many wonderful things in the way of cutting himself up with knives, nailing his feet, arms and legs to chairs, to the wall, &c., which astounding exploits he proceeded to exhibit at the appointed hour in the presence of a number of physicians of celebrity, including members of the Medical Faculty of Transylvania University, and other learned Professors, who were invited to the stand that they might detect any fraud or deception, if practised. He began by sticking a handful of pins, up to the head, in his legs, he drove an awl through the middle of his wrist into a chair; drove a knife through the muscle of his leg; nailed his foot to a wooden shoe, the nail or awl passing through the middle of the foot, and so walked about the stage; cut his dexter finger through the fleshy part exhibiting the naked bone, and concluded by passing a knife through his cheek, the blade protruding from his mouth. In all this but little blood was drawn.

He also offered to drive a knife through each leg and hang himself from the wall, which the audience mercifully excused him from doing, feeling satisfied that he could accomplish whatever, he proposed. About the whole procedure there was no sort of hump, as the eyes of divers gentlemen, who were upon the stand, were steadily fixed upon him, and any "unbelieving Thomas" had an opportunity to touch the knife blade on the opposite side to that into which it had been thrust, of the leg, wrist or hand. He used a few galvanic rings about his person, which was probably more for show than anything else, as they could effect nothing. Mr. Steevens looks to be not more than 20 or 21 years of age. Before closing, he proposed to operate in a similar manner upon any one of the audience, agreeing to forfeit \$1,000 if he inflicted pain. This, however, they prudently declined. We saw this man of leather early yesterday morning, looking as fresh and whole as though knife or nail had never penetrated his elastic body.—Lexington, Ky., Observer.

At a cattle show recently, a fellow who was making himself ridiculously conspicuous at last broke forth:

"Call these here prize cattle! Why they ain't nothing to what our folks raised. My father raised the biggest calf of any man 'round our parts."

"Don't doubt it," remarked a bystander, "and the noisiest too."

We have had some days in our possession, says *The Evening Post*, a one dollar bill on the City Bank of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, which bears on its back a burden as follows:

"This one dollar bill is all I received for performing the marriage ceremony between John Gibbs and Mary Wallace, of the town of Salem, Kenosha County, Wisconsin, after having traveled five miles in the cold and paid \$2.50 for ferry."

JAMES L. SIDELL.

At a recent exhibition of paintings, a lady and her son were regarding with much interest a picture which the catalogue described as "Luther at the Diet of Worms." Having desecrated at some length upon its merits, the boy remarked, "mother, I see Luther and the table but where are the worms?"

Since the 4th of July it has been unlawful for any person to pass or receive in the State of Arkansas, any bank bill of a less denomination than ten dollars. After the 4th of July, 1860, no bill of a less denomination than twenty dollars can be put or kept in circulation. This is approximating to a specie currency.