

THE MONTANA POST.

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Montana.

Since the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act, in 1854, the great middle belt of States—Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California—has been woven into a perfect band, from the Missouri to the Pacific. Just north of it, the threads of the second belt—Dacotah, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington—begin to assume shape and texture. Another territory is in contemplation, to embrace portions of Montana, Dacotah and Utah, under the proposed name of Wyoming. A bill, organizing it, passed the House of Representatives last year, but failed in the Senate. Wyoming is a good name; but one man in American history is commemorated by a future State, and another ought to be. We have the Territory of Washington—let us have the Territory of Lincoln.

Salt Lake City, Utah, is the metropolis and distributing point between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada. From it Virginia, capital of Montana, lies four hundred and seventy-five miles north; Boise, capital of Idaho, four hundred and fifty miles northwest. The road is like the letter Y. Eighty miles from Salt Lake, it forks—the right stroke leading to Montana, and the left to Idaho. Both are traversed by mail-coaches.

For hours after leaving the City of the Saints, the traveler rides along the north bank of the Great Salt Lake—a shining mirror, spotted with purple mountains of islands, and framed in pale, violet peaks, draped with ganzy clouds of purest white. He passes thrifty Mormon villages of dull brown adobe houses, with flourishing orchards, shading cottonwoods, and streets watered by little artificial streams. One of these, called Morrisville, was built by the fanatical followers of Morris, a prophet who out-brigged Brigham. Persuading them that the world, with all its people, except themselves, was about to be destroyed, he taught them to seize the cattle, horses, and grain of their neighbors, upon the theory that the earth and the fruits thereof belonged to the chosen of the Lord. But religion is a poor excuse for horse-stealing, and this was too much even for the Mormons. In a pitched battle, they defeated the scismatics—who fought bravely—lodged a bullet in the brain of the pretended prophet, killed several of his devoted followers, including women and children, and drove out the rest. The surviving Morrisites, escorted from the Territory by United States soldiers, settled in Montana, where they still reside. They asserted of their thieving, just as the Saints, from whom they were an offshoot, do of polygamy—that it was a part of their faith; and Brigham may learn a wholesome lesson from their fate. It is useless to fight the moral sentiment of the civilized world. Every relic of barbarism must succumb sooner or later. The Mormons begin to comprehend this, for, like many religious communities in history, they combine extreme fanaticism of belief with the shrewdest and wisest common sense in practical affairs.

Leaving Utah, with its great basin, the passenger crosses over a low, bare "divide," and is in Idaho, on waters running to the Pacific. The southern part of this young Territory juts far eastward, cutting off Montana from Utah. There are no dwellings, except low adobe stage stations, with stacks of winter hay cut from the wild grass of the valleys.

The road passes through Port Neuf Canyon—thirty miles long—where twice the coach bringing gold-dust from Montana has been robbed. The most daring assault was committed one year ago. The stage was crowded with passengers, all armed to the teeth, and keeping vigilant watch—for a suspicious looking horseman, his face concealed by a slouching hat, had twice ridden past, staring into the vehicle. The canyon is narrow, with high walls and shrubbery along the little brook which threads it. In broad day light, when all were riding with guns and revolvers cocked in their hands, seven men, with blackened faces, instantly rose up from the dense willows on each side, stopping the horses, and firing into the coach. At the same moment the passengers returned the fire, but their courage was useless. In stage-robberies, which occur frequently on the lonely roads leading out of our gold regions, persons are seldom able to defend themselves if they remain in the coach. By jumping out and scattering, they often succeed in driving away the robbers. On this occasion, one of the highwaymen was wounded, but escaped; four passengers were killed—one riddled with fifty bullets and buckshots. The robbers secured sixty thousand dollars in gold dust, climbed back out of the canyon to the sand-hills, where waiting confederates guarded their horses, and thus made good their escape. Singularly, none were ever caught, though the people of Montana searched vigorously for them, through all the border States and Territories.

Beyond the road winds along the clear Snake River, the old Lewis Fork of the Columbia. The Indian name, Shoshone, or Winding River, is far more fitting and musical than ours. This dim, crooked artery of the great desert's heart, fifteen hundred miles in length, rises from springs within half a mile of those forming the headwaters of the Missouri. It is the river of desolation. Unrelieved by forests or green banks for nearly the entire length, it is a natural ditch sunk in the sand—filled with clear water, and faintly fringed with scattering willows and cottonwoods. Many smaller streams suddenly sink

into the earth, like the rivers of Damascus, and, running under ground for many miles, abruptly re-appear in their parched beds. The road crosses miles of sand, which the slow stage-mules and wheels plow a foot deep. On the eastern horizon, the Three Tetons (woman's breasts)—a unique spur of the Rocky Mountains—rise side by side, tall, slender, and spire-like, suggesting the name, the Finger Mountains, which belongs to a group of Arizona peaks. The Indians call them the Three Pinnacles. Pleasant Valley Station is in a little grassy basin—a natural bowl, among the dark hills. Just beyond, climbing over the divide of the Rocky Mountains, one leaves the Pacific slope behind passing into Montana, among the tributaries of the Missouri.

The first important settlement is the city of Bannack, named from a tribe of Indians. It was the pioneer town of Montana, begun deep down in the gulch of Grasshopper Creek, inclosed by bare, lofty mountains. The diggings yielded very richly, sometimes paying fifty dollars per day to the man; but like most gulch mines, were soon exhausted. In flush times, the city had two thousand people; now, it has but a few hundred, and is a dreary succession of straggling, empty low-houses, overlooked by a huge gallow, which has outlived many tenants. But rich quartz-lodes, now opening hard by, will give it a new lease of life. In mining regions, as elsewhere, history repeats itself. Bannack was the first town of Montana; but, when its gulch gave out, other sections were developed, and the people flocked to Virginia City, seventy miles beyond. That continues to flourish; but new settlements are springing up, among the rich mines of Helena and the Blackfoot region, which bid fair to eclipse it.

Virginia was settled in July, 1862, and has five thousand people, including Nevada City and Junction. Enveloped by mountain crests dotted with a few lonely cedars, it lies like a huge serpent—the head, Virginia—the tail, its two suburbs—a crooked, irregular strip of low log houses, winding for nine miles down Alder Creek. Many of these cabins are deserted. The American miner is a migratory animal, who will always leave five dollars per day for the possibility of twenty, especially when the new diggings are very remote and inaccessible. Alder Gulch has yielded many millions of dollars, and, for its length—thirteen miles—was probably the richest gold deposit ever found. Now, it is completely cut to pieces, honey-combed with shafts, ridged with ditches, and disemboweled with tunnels. A few miners are still washing the gold from the brown earth.

The heart of the town is within a hundred yards of the diggings. In flush times, it was a crowd of people, and a whirl of business. Streets were thronged, stores choked with a stream of commerce, sidewalks monopolized by irrefusable auctioneers, hoarsely crying horses, oxen, mules, wagons, and household goods. Drinking saloons, whose name was legion, were densely crowded. Theaters, which always spring up in mining regions, were closely packed. At the hotels, beds were hardly obtainable, for love or money. Gambling-halls were musical with clinking coin and shining with yellow gold. Hurdy-gurdy houses, with dancing-girls, music and long bars, where whisky was sold at fifty cents a drink and champagne at \$12 per bottle, were filled with visitors, ranging from judges to blacklegs, in every costume, from broadcloth to buckskin. And all this, in a town less than one year old, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, a thousand miles from everywhere! For Montana is the most remote Territory of the United States, the furthest both from New York and San Francisco—the great cities of the future, which will yet contend for the mastery of the world.

Virginia, though less lively than of yore, still boasts heavy trade and bustling streets. The buildings are of logs, lumber, and granite, with wooden signs overhanging the plank sidewalks. Many citizens habitually wear revolvers at their belts.

Daily mail coaches ply north to Helena, one hundred and twenty-five miles, over mountain roads which were never worked, but have witnessed the best staging in the United States. In summer, coaches often run the whole distance—equal to one hundred and sixty miles of good roads—during daylight, and sometimes in fourteen hours. The route crosses the great Jefferson Fork of the Missouri, upon a log bridge two hundred feet in length, where shines the river, along a broad, beautiful valley, between mountains pine-covered and snow-clad. We pass the log ranches of settlers, whose huge hay-stacks are waiting for winter, and whose fields are rich in ripening wheat and barley, or overgrown turnips and potatoes. Despite frost every month in the year, Montana has great agricultural capacity, and will one day support a large population. Small grains, root vegetables, and the hardy fruits produce abundantly. It seems far north for barley and wheat; but in the British possessions—still higher latitude—the Hudson Bay Company has raised, successfully, every product of our Northwestern States. Some even believe that the true wheat-growing region of the continent lies north of the Upper Missouri. Farming will always be lucrative, because the transportation of supplies from "the States" costs from twelve to forty cents per pound.

In a deep canyon of the rugged mountain, is the junction of the Jefferson, Gallatin and Madison, whose blended waters form the Missouri. In Minnesota, one may cross the Mississippi by a wooden bridge, with only two spans. Here we can fling a pebble across the Missouri. Still higher up, among mountain springs, a member of the Lewis & Clark expedition thanked God that he was able to stand astride of the largest river in the world. We enter White-tailed Deer Canyon, twenty miles long, with grand and startling scenery, ever shifting, like scenes in a theater. Immense granite boulders, some as large as a railway-car, lie upon and against each other, piled up in all positions, as if the gods had torn up and hurled vast rocks in deadly battle. Some walls of the gorge are gray rock, others clothed in ferns and pines of dark green and purple-brown, mottled with yellow cottonwoods. Looking back through the canyon's mouth, I have seen snowy mountains glorified by the dying sun, like battlements of the Celestial City.

Through the opposite gateway, some peaks were obscured by slabs of leaden clouds, dark and sullen, bridging the gulfs between them; others, scarred and gashed, were robed in drapery, white as milk and soft as down—a heave more inviting than that for which Jason and the Argonauts traversed the world.

Whirling along slippery banks and sliding roads, and passing a spring ten inches in diameter, which gushes, boiling hot, from the hill side, we reach Helena, less than two years old, with a population of nearly five thousand. Its two principal streets are in the form of a cross. It is made up of rough log houses, and spacious, barn-like frame buildings, and pleasant cottages with latticed verandas. It is the supply point for the placer mines of the Blackfoot country and other portions of Northern Montana, embracing some of the richest diggings in the world. I have never been in any region where gold dust in the hands of working miners circulated so freely and in so large quantities. Several nuggets, worth from two to four thousand dollars, have been taken out, and single claims have produced one thousand dollars per day. These are rare, exceptional cases; but Montana is doubtless the richest placer mining region ever discovered in the United States, and its quartz veins promise better than those of any other State or Territory. This year's immigration has been enormous, both from the East and the Pacific coast. The most rapid and impressive changes are going on. Before advancing civilization, even brutal, stolid, savage faces light up with surprise and bewilderment at the new era opening to their vision:

"Behind the squaw's light birch canoe The steamer rocks and raves, And city lots are staked for sale Above old Indian graves.

I hear the tread of pioneers Of nations yet to be— The first low wash of waves, where soon Shall roll a human sea. The rudiments of empire here Are plastic yet and warm; The chaos of a mighty world Is rounding into form."

Soon Montana will ask admission to the Union as a sovereign State. At present, nominally, it is ruled by a Territorial Governor, Legislature and Courts, but actually by the "Vigilantes," a secret tribunal of citizens, organized before civil laws were framed, when robberies and cold blooded murders were of daily occurrence. The highwaymen were called "Road Agents," from their assumed authority over the stage roads and stage companies, transcending that of the superintendents themselves. Coaches and private conveyances were stopped by "Road Agents," with cocked guns, compelling passengers to hold up their hands lest they should grasp weapons, while their persons and vehicle were rifled. He who resisted was killed on the spot. An immigrant, who had shot a grouse near the road, ran to pick it up, and found that it had fallen upon the corpse of one of these victims, lying among the stage brush. In a Virginia barber shop, revolvers were drawn, one man was shot dead and another wounded; but such affairs were so common, that the barber did not even stop lathering his patron's face, nor did the patron leave his chair. After a hundred homicides, the Vigilantes organized, captured, tried and executed twenty-four of the leading desperadoes, and banished many others. Upon the great gallow, which now overlooks Bannack City, they hung even the county Sheriff who built it, and one of his deputies, on well established charges of robbery and murder. Two or three days before I visited Helena, the people awoke one morning to find a notorious reprobate hanging dead from a tree limb, and labeled "Murderer." It was a sharp warning to the surviving cut throats.

Every new State, in its early history, attracts thieves and murderers, and sooner or later, purges itself through the swift, terrible vengeance of lynch law. I do not learn that these "Vigilantes" ever executed any man of whose guilt there was reasonable doubt, and they have rendered life and property comparatively safe. But only the most imperative, direful necessity can justify, even for a brief period, this irregular and dangerous administration of justice. In California, a miner gave a good illustration of the general sentiment of the frontier. When he was called up as juror in a murder case, the judge asked him the usual question.

"Have you any conscientious scruples about capital punishment?"

He responded:

"I have, in all cases when it is not administered by a Vigilance Committee!" In summer, the mails bring letters from New York to Montana in twenty-two days. During winter snows, the time is indefinite. About half the freight of the Territory is brought up the Missouri, from St. Louis to Fort Benton, the nominal head of navigation, twenty miles below the Great Falls, one hundred and forty miles from Helena, and two hundred and sixty-five from Virginia. None but boats of light draft can reach Fort Benton, save upon the spring floods. The river trip from St. Louis consumes from thirty-five to seventy days. The summer boats stop at Fort Union, four hundred miles lower, near the mouth of the Yellowstone. The old trading post is well known to the trappers and merchants of the early days. It stands on the bank of the clear river—a stockaded fort with two towers at opposite corners, the United States flag flying, Indian lodges in the rear, little cottonwood groves in ravines on either side, and light batteaux upon the shining stream in front. I am indebted to Major Culbertson, an old Indian trader, for a view of the fort in its palmy days, painted upon bed ticking, by an unskilled employee of the American Fur Company, with such brushes and colors as he could obtain in a wilderness. This unique work of art—in some respects more moribund than many pretentious paintings—is reproduced upon the first page of the present paper, as faithfully as photography, engraving and printing can copy it.

The Great Falls of the Missouri, twenty-five hundred miles above Saint Louis, and forty above Fort Benton, which have been seen by few tourists, are bold and striking. In thirteen miles of cascades and rapids, the total fall is three hundred and eighty feet. The Upper Cataract, forty feet high, extending across the river like a slightly bent bow, is picturesque and beautiful. Among the rapids below are several smaller falls, of from one to five yards, while the banks on either side form a deep, narrow gorge,

one thousand feet below the general level of the bare plains. These tremulous walls of yellow sandstone give peculiar grandeur and impressiveness to the wild, rocky, rugged scene. The lower or Great Falls, are eighty-four feet. The stream is nearly one-third of a mile wide. The southern half leaps in a perfect sheet over sandstone rocks. The northern half, broken and perturbed, descends into the basin at its feet, a series and labyrinth of rapids and chutes. On the southern side, the sandstone presents a sharp face; on the northern, it is worn into plateaus and benches. A projecting point of rock affords the best view. The thunder of the falling water, veiled in snowy foam, the bold, wild banks, the dazzling rainbows, and the immense volume of water, will make the spot a favorite one for tourists in all coming time.

Rich beds of coal—the "portable climate" of our civilization—exist on the Upper Missouri. The gap from the head of navigation here, to its head on the Columbia, should soon be filled by railway. According to Captain Mallan's survey, the distance from Fort Benton to Wallula, Washington Territory, regularly reached by all steamers on the Columbia, is less than six hundred and fifty miles, through a region which, opened by railroad, would sustain a large farming population.

Montana is the young daughter of a young mother—the child of Colorado. Thence came most of the pioneer settlers. Among the later immigrants, every new State and Territory is represented, for frontier life, once known, inspires restlessness, like the shirt of Nessus. A large majority of the inhabitants are Missourians, at whose expense the settlers of eastern origin relate many droll stories. In a street discussion, a longer was defending, as correct, the rural southern phrase—"We uns" and "You uns." One of the bystanders asked him:

"Are you a grammarian?"

"Which?" was his bewildered inquiry.

"Are you a grammarian?"

"Why, no. I'm a Missourian!" It was a distinction with a difference. But the fun is not all on one side. During the early Kansas troubles, the Missourians posted a guard at the ferry on the great river, and whenever an immigrant sought to cross into the new, convulsed Territory, asked him to say "cow." If he pronounced it "kew" he was voted a Yankee, and like Moore's disconsolate Peri outside the gate, was not permitted to enter the desired paradise.

I remember an old Missourian on the borders of the Indian Territory, who was brought in contact many a time by the establishment of a new stage line through his neighborhood. Said he: "I've lived on the frontier all my life. I know English and the six languages, and have picked up a smattering of French, Spanish, Choctaw and Delaware; but one language I can't understand, and that is this infernal New York language!"

The phrases of some of the miners are original and suggestive. They call the fine particles of gold in the earth, "the color." One of them remarked of a man tried in various positions and found utterly worthless:

"I have panned him out, clear down to the bed rock, but I can't even raise the color."

The quartz mining of Montana, which has but just begun, gives rare promise for the future. Gold and silver, whether found in the rock or the decomposed earth, are genii more potent than those of Oriental fable. When they wave their wands, palaces spring up in the wilderness, and cities among the mountain tops. The stream is imprisoned by the dam, and vexed with the wheel; fruitful farms are wrested from the lonely valleys; shining treasures torn from the disemboweled mountains; newspapers and telegraphs abolish time and diminish space; the beaver must dive quickly to avoid the plowing steamer; and buffalo and Indian run their feetest to keep out of the way of the locomotive.

Montana is eight hundred miles from east to west, by nearly three hundred from north to south. It is a mountain territory, containing five large basins—four on the Atlantic slope, one on the Pacific—and numberless smaller valleys. While snow is several feet deep upon the mountains, cattle are growing fat among the green bunch grass of the valleys, less than a thousand feet lower.

"My father's empire," said Cyrus to Xenophon, "is so large that people perish with cold at one end, while they suffocate with heat at the other." But here one may find summer and winter, blooming flowers and deep snow, less than a mile apart. Sometimes the mantle of winter half covers even the hardy grass of the valleys. Then cattle still subsist upon the protruding tops. Horses and antelope paw up the snow, to find the hidden food; but if the snow is too deep they live upon the bark of cottonwood. Copper and iron are plentiful, and agates, amethysts, rubies and garnets, all abound.

My return from Helena to Virginia was in October, but the weather was intensely cold, with snow drifts obstructing the track, and turning the pine trees into exquisite white coral. Driving stages upon these bleak, dangerous mountain roads is an ill-paid and unattractive pursuit; yet, like journalism and seafaring, once tasted, its fascination seems irresistible. The driver is always a character, often entertaining and witty, and no respecter of persons. There is a story of one, with a clergyman on the box beside him, whose voice long and loud at his balking horses.

"My friend," expostulated the preacher, "don't swear so. Remember Job—he was severely tried, but never lost his patience."

"Job! Job!" pondered Jehu—"what line did he drive for?"

Once with the Governor of a Territory I spent a night at a lonely desert station. His Excellency asked permission to sleep on the driver's bunk.

"Certainly," was the unabashed reply, "that is if you haven't any graybacks about you!"

But I wander from my winter journey. One morning I took a little excursion which was not down in the programme. We were upon a sliding mountain road, coated with ice buried under two feet of light snow. Our six horses were upon the full run, to take the coach over before it should slide down the hill. Suddenly one wheel struck a hidden rock. The vehicle narrowly escaped capsizing, and I did not escape being pitched from

the driver's box. I was wrapped in blankets and buffalo robes, which fortunately slipped off without entangling my feet. I was projected fully twenty-five feet through the air, describing a section of a circle. As John Phenix used to say, that was the only description of the affair I should ever have been able to give, but for the friendly snow bank, which cushioned the ledge of rock upon which I alighted head foremost. The driver seemed to enjoy the joke, until ten minutes later when a similar rock upon his side sent him flying against the brake handle, where he hung, like Mohamed's coffin, until he found his lost legs and abandoned seat. Serious, and sometimes fatal accidents, occur in winter upon these unworked roads.

Regretfully I left Montana—youngest and least developed, but richest and fairest of all our Territories. In scenery, farming land, timber, water, precious and base metals—in all the native elements of a powerful and prosperous State, she is full of richness and of promise. Beautiful upon the mountain tops are her rugged hills, somber with pines and firs, and her green slopes glad with streams and flowers.

CHURCHES IN THE TERRITORIES.—Idaho City is not the only place where religion does not thrive vigorously. We notice that at Virginia City, Montana, the "Union Church" has been sold to satisfy claims of creditors, and has been turned into a horse stable. That is worse than Idaho. Here the "Union" Church was sold for a court house.—Idaho World.

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