HELENA SEEN WITH OTHER EYES

How Helena and Her People Impress the Correspondent of a Metropolitan Paper.

Comparisons With Other Places and People Which Will Do the Capital No Harm.

Personal Mention of Men Whom All Montana Knows--A City the State Should Be Proud Of.

Mr. E. G. Donnell, the well-known Washington correspondent of the New York Times, who has been making an extended our through the west and northwest, spent it is time in Helena to good advantage, as the following letter from him, published in the Times of the 4th inst., shows:

After an eastern man has been wandering about in the west for a month, listening to the confident expectations of hopeful "boomers" in Cheyenne, Laramie, Salt Lake and Butte, and comes at length to Helena, he feels as if he had at last changed a diet of expectancy for the substantial relations of realization. They tell you in Cheyenne of what will be done when Wyoming's resources begin to be developed, and they prove by what has already been accomplished that moderate prosperity will be followed ay an increase in the number of attractive and substantial houses and shops and by liberal expenditures for public improvements. In Laramie, while you are shown the beginnings of a profitable manufacture and the first steps toward a vast scheme of land reclamation that will convert thousands of acres of unproductive sagebrush prairie into grain fields, and you see many signs of present activity, the city is yet in the future. In Salt Lake the complaint is heard in explanation of the visible lack of public spirit, that Mormon domination suffocates public spirit, and that not until the Mormons are dispersed or outnumbered and the Gentiles have full sway will the shabbiness and shiftlessness that annoy all strangers be replaced with thrift and tastefulness. Butte is satisfied with itself. It does not set up to be a garden spot. It is proud of its ugliness, and too busy undermining itself to care about superficial attractiveness.

Helena is different from all of the cities named. While it has no "boom," and does not want to be boomed, while it looks forward to a great future, depending upon the development of all of Montana's rich resources; while it is still in a transition state, with the cabins of the first settlers still dotting the sides of gulches long ago abandoned by the placer miners; although it is still without many advantages that it hopes to possess, it is altogether the most thriving city west of St. Paul and on the Pacific and north of Denver. It is not necessary to be told by anyone that it is growing. Its growth can be seen. The foundation digger, the mason, the carpenter are Helena's boomers. They are at work in every direction that one chooses to turn earing down the primitive log shacks of the pioneers to make room for handsome stone and brick blocks for shops and offices and carrying further and further into the country the line of detached villas in which will live the prosperous citizens of a town full of men who have learned to believe by experience, in Helena's prosperity. Nature favors it greatly. Its wealthy men have plenty of good taste. There is a common feeling of pride in the tendency to make the city a business center with a good title to a share of refinement. That is manifested in the determination to find time, even where a constantly enlarging business is exacting greater attention and longer hours from all classes of workers, to devote some attention to decoration and common convenience and comfort.

It will be many years yet before visitors to Helena will cease to be reminded as they enter the city that they are riding in "Last Chance" gulch, and that the acres and acres of lava stones, presenting the appearance of a macadam road, overturned and demoralized by an earthquake, cut through by intersecting ditches, piled up here in a mound and spread out there as if by a road repairer, have all been turned over and over again by the placer miners, and that the tract has yielded gold to an amount variously estimated at $30,000,000 to $60,000,000. You are landed in Helena at the north, and the city slopes away to the south and west, following the gulch until it is pinched out in the rise of Mount Helena, which is at once a fine back ground and a natural limit to the extension of the city. A few Chinamen still pick and wash over ground already many times worked. Foundation diggers are said to have struck "pay dirt" in excavating for the erection of new buildings and to have profited by purchasing and washing it for "dust." While Helena is not exactly built upon a gold foundation, there is undoubtedly a good deal of the precious metal under its busy streets.

It is only a few steps past the group of little log cabins, some of them half buried in the dusty slope of the gulch, to the beginning of Main street's business. The photographer ought to make a record of these primitive log houses, which must soon disappear before the march of improvement. They are not pretty, but they will be useful by and by to illustrate the history of Helena's growth. They are almost in the shadow of handsome and substantial stone and brick structures of four and five stories in height. Almost at the boundary of the busiest section there is nearly completed a fine five-story brownstone structure, stylishly effective with its quarry-faced material, and reaching perhaps 100 feet along Main street and the one bounding it on the side. Further on is the Pittsburg Block, spacious and complete; then there is another five story building of brick and stone for the Merchants' National bank, of which Mr. L. H. Hershfield, the president, an old resident, although a young man, is the builder. The First National bank, of which ex-Gov. Samuel T. Hauser, one of the democratic "big four," is president, is only three stories high, but is a model of good taste in architecture, but its only fault is that it is not large enough for the business of the institution, which thinks nothing of $500,000 in cash transactions in a day. Eighteen clerks crowd each other in this bank, and a larger number ought to be employed. There are many visitors who come to look at a great panful of Helena gold nuggets, one of which is as pure and solid almost as gold bar, and is worth $900.

This is the neighborhood of banks and "big" men. Across the street is the back office of the Montana National bank. The president of this institution, who is small physically, like ex-Gov. Hauser, is also one of the "big four" democrats. Besides being president of the Montana bank, he is the president of the Montana Central railway, president of the Great Falls Water Power and Town Site company, president of the Nevada Creek Placer Mining company, the proprietor of the Broadwater Hot Springs hotel and a stockholder in a dozen or more companies for the development of Montana's resources. Like Mr. T. C. Power, he is constructing a handsome private residence. Col. Broadwater's house will be as complete as liberal expenditure can make it, and will cost about $100,000. The Gold block, the Atlas block, and other groups of buildings from four to five stories high, any of which would be notable in the best of western cities, are in this compact business quarter. There is no hotel building in town of which Helena is proud. It will have one soon, a well constructed edifice of five stories, with 140 rooms. By and by it will have a still larger one, comparable with the best of the famous western inns. The school houses, of which there are many, testify to the regard of the people for the common-school system. They are tastefully built, commodious and well kept and equipped. The most conspicuous and expensive public building is the county court house. It is a very tasteful structure with three stories and a gable, a tower changing from circular to square form at the belfry, and it is built of granite and sandstone in the Romanesque style. The territorial legislature met here, and the first legislature of the state will hold its session here also.

Helena has not yet reached the stage of prosperity when she is ready to put pavements down on the dirt roads and to exchange planked sidewalks for those of stone. The streets are sometimes very dusty, and the sidewalks, subjected to a great deal of travel, get out of repair quickly. You are told that all this will be changed before the 20,000 population is increased to 30,000. Grades have been changed so rapidly that it would have been an expensive mistake if all the streets had been paved before this time. Following Main street as it winds around in the gulch, the half mile of solid brick buildings comes to an end at a division of the street, a branch running off on each side. At the right is the Chinese quarter. When the placer miners were at work lower down, the Chinese flocked into Helena from the Pacific coast, to be the washermen of the camp, and gained the foothold that they have kept. You meet them everywhere, and are told that there are 600 to 800 of them in the city. Sam Fong Lee & Brother, who are merchant tailors, occupy their own two-story building, with the firm name in the pediment in block letters of gold. "Chang Quang, Grocer," is another sign over the door of a shop that is patronized by Americans as well as Chinese. Song Long & Co., Hok Hing, Chang & Co., and other Chinese firm names appear over other shop fronts. They are flourishing merchants, and brick buildings are pointed out, three stories in height, that they are erecting to accommodate their increasing business. There are of course, many Chinese laundrymen, and a great many Chinese peddlers of vegetables and fruits. They find employment as general house servants at high wages. Female servants are hard to get at $30 a month and harder to keep. They are led away by all sorts of temptations, some of them indulged only to bring them to a quick degradation and bitter repentance. While female servants are particular about stipulating to do as little work as possible, and most of them decline to engage to do the household washing, even in very small families, the Chinese will do anything there is to be done. But a good cook, washer and ironer, and doorman combined gets $40 a month. They will smoke a little too much opium occasionally, and stay out inconveniently without furnishing any apology or explanation whatever, but they are generally good cooks, neat, noiseless, amiable, honest about small change and large amounts intrusted to them to make purchases, are rarely impertinent, and do what they are told to do with almost invariable cheerfulness.

No visitor to Helena who has been in the city since Aug. 1 has failed to hear of, and most of them have seen the new hotel, the Broadwater, with the annex that Col. Broadwater calls his "washtub." To reach it it is necessary to take a hack or a motor road. Hacks are cheap in Helena, oddly enough, just as they are in Butte, where everything else is very dear. The fear of the 'bus has kept the hackmen down to a half-dollar fare for almost any distance. So you can take a hack to the Broadwater for half a dollar, or else ride in a car drawn by an inclosed locomotive, the line running through the public streets. The route is generally by the north and west, around the base of Mount Helena. "Last Chance" Gulch widens into a beautiful valley twelve miles wide and thirty miles long, with the Belt mountains bounding it on the east and the Rockies on the west. Helena's fashionable section is to be in the northwest, just as it is in Washington, and you discover that fact as you ride. There are many fine houses already built, and others are going up, attractive arrangements of brick and stone, stone, brick and shingles, of wooden materials alone, and of stone used without contrasting brick. There are some very modest houses that shelter men of large fortunes. One with no pretense to size or impressive style, but with a well kept lawn and plants, is the home of Mr. Tommy Cruse, who is called "Old Tommy Cruse" by some of the irreverent. He can stand being called pet names. Ten years ago he was living in a plain log cabin and working with pick and hammer as a prospector. He found the great Drum Lummon Mine at Marysville, sold the controlling interest to a syndicate for $1,500,000, and is now taking his share of its $1,200,000 annual net earnings, running a bank, fearing God, and helping the democratic party.

The houses of ex-Gov. Hauser, Col. C. A. Broadwater, the Hon. Samuel Word, J. W. Russell, H. L. Child, and S. C. Ashby are pointed out as examples of the taste of Helena's well-to-do-men. Well out to the northwest, but still far from the thinly-settled but high priced section that will soon be transformed from a dusty sagebrush plain into a villa neighborhood, is the pretty home of ex-Gov. B. Platt Carpenter, formerly a state senator in New York and a candidate for lieutenant governor on the ticket with Charles J. Folger. Mr. Carpenter helped to make the constitution which Montana is about to adopt. He is practicing law here, and finds time to speak to the people of Montana with great earnestness about the desirability of clean elections and honest methods in politics. Behind all these buildings, as one looks at them from the valley, is always the soft background of Mount Helena, with the old flumes used by the placer miners clinging to its sides as they run down from the water sources above.

It is a ride of ten miles to the hot springs. By building a hotel six miles nearer the city, Col. Broadwater has, with pipes, brought them six miles nearer. At an expense of $100,000 a very handsome hotel has been erected in a pleasant valley, its two low stories set off with graceful gabled roofs, towers, carriage porches, and extra wide piazzas. Everything that is modern in the way of conveniences and comfort has been combined with handsome furniture to complete this exceptionally attractive place. At each end of the house, on the main floor, are ten bathing apartments, luxuriously fitted up with porcelain tubs costing about $24,000, with taps that bring in the water from the springs at a temperature of 150 degrees. Just east of the hotel, across grounds that are being graded, set with plants and converted by irrigation into refreshingly green lawns, there is a building of Oriental construction and warmth of color, with dome-capped towers and spires. Under its arched roof is a bathing pool 120 feet wide and 300 feet long. No one in Montana disputes the assertion that it is the largest inclosed bathing pool in the world. It is a great "go." As many as 700 persons have laved in its tepid waters and enjoyed the hot and cold showers that are provided in the form of falls in one end of the pool in a single day, and 500 is not an uncommon register.

Helena has reason to be confident that here there is to be a great city. Its growth has been very steady. There has been no pushing of building ahead of the city's needs. As a matter of fact, there has been one attempt by Boston capitalists to get up a "boom," which was summarily discouraged by a deliberate counter movement by some of Helena's most capable capitalists. With the Northern Pacific, the Montana Central, and Manitoba furnishing the means of access to a vast agricultural and mining region and with other railroads in contemplation that will yet further bring Helena within the reach of new buyers and sellers, and with no prospectively dangerous rival in sight, there seems to be good reason for the confidence. In no other Montana town is there so much cultivated society or so much of the refinement that comes with wealth and culture. By and by, as this becomes more and more the case, the men who make their money in the mines, but who tire of living in dust heaps on the mountain sides or in the gulches, will flock to Helena to live. They will want lots, and their demand will put up the prices of property. As the city is only about 4,000 feet above the level of the sea, while other mining towns are higher, it will be more desirable than the higher cities. Its climate in winter is affected by the chinooks, so that there is not much sleighing, even when the mountains are covered with snow. The smelters of Helena are not, like those of Butte, planted right in town, but are off at East Helena, three miles away, so that their fumes are not perceptible.

It is a city which the state ought to be glad of having chosen as its capital. With statehood it is expected that many improvements will come. There is much public spirit in the city, but it has not been fully drawn out. If Helena should receive a little more kind outside attention it would certainly be encouraged to prove its title to a poetic name and become famous as a western center of influence as well as culture.

E. G. D.

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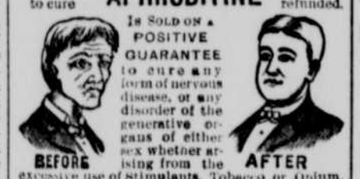

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