

## TO CALIFORNIA BY PANAMA IN '49.<sup>1</sup>



IN the autumn of 1848 the whole United States was electrified by the rumor of astounding gold discoveries in our newly acquired territory of California. The authentic statements subsequently received more than confirmed what at first seemed a fable, and made it certain that throughout a large area of country on the

Pacific coast the valleys and ravines showed the presence of vast deposits of nuggets and particles of pure gold in plain sight in the midst of the drift, while a slight excavation of the soil revealed far richer deposits beneath. Any man who could wield a pick and a shovel and a tin pan for washing the dirt was sure of large returns, with the chance of a fortune. The country was almost without inhabitants, and the field was open to all who could get there. The wildest excitement and activity immediately prevailed throughout the United States, and every city and village throbbed with a feverish impulse to rush to the diggings. The difficulty and expense of reaching this *terra incognita* restrained thousands from the attempt, so that only those who possessed natural courage or adventurous proclivities, or whose local attachments were weak, actually made the great plunge into the unknown experience which awaited the gold hunters of '49.

The world has never witnessed so motley and promiscuous a throng in pursuit of a common object as sprung into life simultaneously in the winter of 1848-49 and turned their course towards the gold fields of California. Men of all ages, clergymen, professors, doctors, lawyers, farmers, traders, mechanics, laborers of every degree, adventurers, thieves, gamblers, and murderers, jostled one another in the struggle to gain access to some of the avenues which were supposed to lead to the desired goal.

The "Argonauts" had several routes among which to select. By those from the New England and the Middle States the Cape Horn route was

generally preferred; those from the Southern States chose the Isthmus of Panama or Nicaragua or Mexico; while the hardy pioneers of the West, who had become accustomed to prairie travel, started in their covered wagons, and, following buffalo trails, broke the paths which in a few months were plainly outlined by the bleaching bones of their beasts and the mounds of dead companions who had succumbed to the hardships of the desert. Many who could not leave their homes sought to invest their capital in the seductive venture, and a coöperative plan was generally adopted in the New England States by which the services of working members were offset by a fixed amount of money contributed by others. Hundreds of companies were organized on this plan, each of them with a physician, and in many instances with a chaplain also.

At the time of this great social upheaval I was a victim of enforced idleness in consequence of the destruction by fire of the manufactory in which I was interested as office man, and which could not be rebuilt and stocked with machinery for a year or two. I was then twenty-seven years old, in robust health, and, being fond of adventure, I determined to see California for myself. In a short time I organized a company of twenty good, intelligent Yankee men, taken from various trades and occupations, each of whom subscribed to a code of laws for associate government and to articles of agreement for a two years' service. The capital paid in was ten thousand dollars, and the profits were to be divided, after all expenses were paid, on the basis of five hundred dollars as the equivalent for one man's services. Most of the members were married men, and respectable citizens of the New England town in which we lived. The proposed expedition became a matter of interest to the whole community, and until we took our departure was the chief topic of discussion. A stalwart physician from a neighboring town joined us as one of the company; but as a substitute for the regulation chaplain books of sermons and other good reading were deemed sufficient, because they might be read aloud to appreciative listeners on Sundays, and would not consume any rations on workdays. There were singers enough in our company to carry all the parts, and we took with us our collection of glees and other music. Each man was restricted to seventy-five pounds of clothing and personal effects, to be packed in a water-tight rubber

<sup>1</sup> The illustrations for this article are by Gilbert Gaul after drawings made by the late Charles Nahl, in 1850, and representing the personal experiences of a party of emigrants of whom the artist's family were a part.—EDITOR.



PLEASANT WEATHER IN THE GULF.

bag. Each was provided with a carbine for shot or ball, and a revolver. Camp equipments and provisions for the journey were also purchased, and our physician procured a chest of medicines and a set of surgical instruments.

The question of route was a perplexing one. The maps then published exhibited all the territory west of the State of Missouri as a blank, across which were printed the words, "Great American Desert." This desert extended to the Pacific coast, where, according to the maps, there were four towns—Yerba Buena (now San Francisco), Monterey, Los Angeles, and San Diego, the insignificant commerce of which had been monopolized by one or two Boston firms. The voyage around the Horn seemed too long for our impatient spirits, and we finally selected the route by the Isthmus of Panama.

The Isthmus was then an unknown wilderness, traversed occasionally, however, by traders and adventurers in canoes on the Chagres River a part of the distance and thence by a single mule-trail to Panama. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company had just been organized and had already sent around the Horn two steamers, the *Oregon* and the *California*, and would soon send another, the *Panama*, all to ply between Panama and San Francisco. We reasoned that if we could reach Panama our journey thence would be easily completed by means of one of these steamers.

New York particularly was alive with excitement, and all sorts of schemes were advertised for conveying the gold hunters to California, the projectors being as ignorant as their prospective victims of the routes to be traversed. All the old unseaworthy hulks that were lying idle in our harbors were suddenly transformed by a new coat of paint, dressed up with attractive bunting, and advertised as about to sail by "the best" routes to California, while their unscrupulous owners well understood that their destination was in the direction of misery, shipwreck, and death. From the numerous vessels advertised to sail for Vera Cruz, Tehuantepec, Nicaragua, and Chagres I selected a little brig of one hundred and forty tons called the *Mayflower*, advertised for Chagres.

On the evening of our departure, by request of our friends, public exercises were held in the largest church of the town. The room was crowded. A very impressive address was delivered by our talented clergyman, and other appropriate exercises followed according to a printed program. I conducted the music, and our choir performed an original chant of selections from the twenty-eighth chapter of Job, beginning with, "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it." After service and a general leave-taking we all crossed the street to the railroad station, where our company boarded the train which

soon after bore us away, bountifully blessed with the farewell tears and prayers of many anxious friends. The next day we arrived in New York and made all necessary arrangements for our final departure the same afternoon. Among other precautions I bought two large bags of dimes for expenses on the Isthmus, where, as I had learned, these coins were rated as "reals" (eight for a dollar). I had already shipped provisions and numerous articles and implements such as we should require at "the diggings" by two vessels sailing from New York to San Francisco *via* Cape Horn, but we took with us tents and good supplies for camp life wherever we might be, *en route* or in California.

We left New York on the 22d of March, 1849. The passengers consisted of forty-five persons, and occupied a cabin extemporized from the hold by fitting up berths on the sides. Immediately after passing Sandy Hook we encountered a terrific northeast gale. The passengers, most of whom had never been to sea, soon took to their berths, too sick to move. The baggage and some freight in half-barrels and boxes, which had been placed promiscuously amidships in this cabin just before leaving the dock, with the intention of stowing them away as soon as we were at sea, were hurled by the terrible lurching of the vessel from side to side and from end

to end with a violence awful to observe. I had been accorded a place in the captain's cabin, a small house on the after-deck, but when the fury of the waves threatened to carry away this outside structure I became alarmed, and when at last the main-boom and the topmast came down with a crash on the roof overhead I sought safety in the cabin below, the hatches of which had been fastened. The main-boom as it fell knocked down the man at the helm, breaking his ribs, and at the same time destroyed the steering apparatus, and for forty-eight hours we were tossed about like an egg-shell at the mercy of the waves, which sometimes entirely submerged us. The captain told me he thought the chances were even whether we weathered the storm or foundered, but on the third day we were drifting in smooth water with a clear sky. The captain proposed to adopt some temporary shift for steering and with the foresail make for Norfolk; but when I informed him that we had good mechanics, blacksmiths, and one ship carpenter in our company, he set them to work on an extra spar to make a new main-boom. They also repaired the wheel and the rudder, and we all went to work with needles and twine to make a new sail from canvas which we had in the hold, and in two days more we were bounding cheerily along on our course, and on the 13th of April came to anchor in the harbor of Chagres.



LANDING AT CHAGRES.



OLD CHAGRES.

There were other vessels and two or three steamers at anchor near us, which had brought hundreds of people with the same purpose as our own.

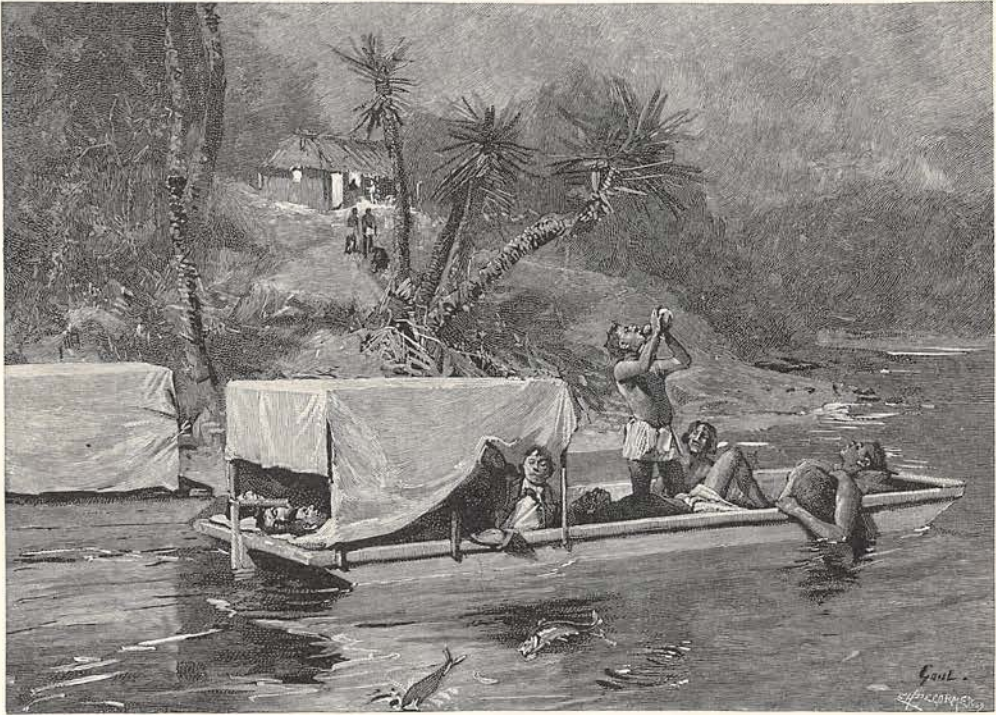
The only means of travel across the Isthmus at that time was by canoes, or bungos, up the Chagres River to the village of Gorgona and thence by mule-trail twenty-eight miles; or, if the river was full, to Cruces and thence twenty-four miles to Panama. At the time of our arrival the rush of people from all parts of the world had made it difficult and very expensive to obtain transportation up the river, and the passengers on our vessel, most of whom had revolvers and rifles, agreed to organize as a military company. They made me captain of the expedition, and after waiting until the crowd had gone ahead, and returning bungos and boatmen had accumulated, I made a very reasonable contract for transportation, and, late in the afternoon of the 15th of April, we started with ten boats and thirty native boatmen. The river was broad, and its banks low and covered with an impenetrable jungle. As night came on the stillness and darkness of that tropical wilderness were very impressive. The boatmen chanted monotonous songs to the dip of the oars, and the wild beasts on the shore responded with savage howls. Our progress was slow, and at about eleven o'clock at night we landed on the bank at a point where

a few huts were located. One boat was missing, and at daybreak we sent back a detachment to learn the cause. In a few hours they returned with the boat and passengers, who reported that the boatmen had claimed to be tired out and had refused to proceed; so they had passed the night in the boat. While we were eating our breakfast a quarrel broke out between the boatmen and the contractor, which took the form of a mutiny and the refusal to go any farther with us. This became more and more serious until at length we formed our company into line behind the boatmen and drove them into the boats at the muzzles of our guns and revolvers. The two succeeding nights we encamped on the river-bank, and on the morning of the fourth day landed at the village of Gorgona. Here we learned that the city of Panama was overcrowded with people from all nations, but more especially with Americans who had come expecting to find means of transportation to California. There was neither steamer nor sailing vessel in port, and a large majority of the adventurers were prostrate with sickness. As we could in some way hear from Panama nearly every day, we concluded to pitch our tents in a pretty grove on the bank of the Chagres, which at this point was a clear, swift-running stream. Here our company of twenty remained three weeks, inquiring anxiously each day from people who came in from Panama what was

the chance of getting away from that point. We learned each succeeding day that there were neither steamers nor sailing vessels in the harbor, and no early prospect of escape from the pest-ridden city. At last the skies gave warning of the rainy season, which would greatly embarrass us in our journey across the remaining land route, and we divided into four detachments, each accompanied by five or six pack-mules loaded with our goods and provisions, and proceeded on foot towards Panama. Our last detachment, in which I was, reached our camping ground, two miles short of Pan-

elsewhere, lemon and fig trees. We brought to camp dozens of birds — mostly parrots — and squirrels and a deer, and saw, but did not kill, a ferocious cougar.

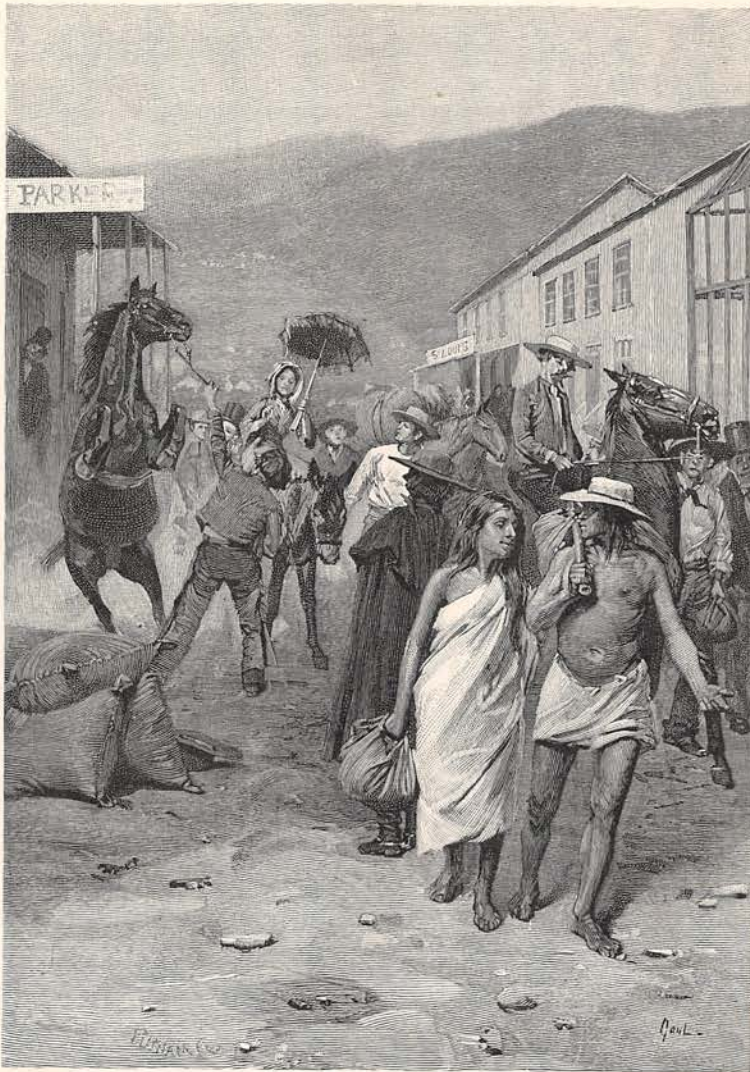
Some of our party went to the city every day, but they uniformly brought back the discouraging report that no steamers or sailing vessels had arrived. At this time a ship of five hundred tons, the *Humboldt*, was anchored in the harbor as a storeship for coal, and it was under bond of \$10,000 to remain as such. In view of the prevailing sickness and distress our case was desperate, and we sought the consignee



THE FIRST STOPPING-PLACE ON THE CHAGRES RIVER.

ama, in a terrific rain; but we found that our comrades who had preceded us a day earlier had prepared our tents, and we were soon in comfortable quarters on high ground, and much better off than the crowd of gold seekers who were in the city, a large proportion of whom were sick and destitute. We found good hunting in the forests around us, particularly in one which was growing over the ruins of an old city three miles distant — a city which I afterward learned was the original Panama, destroyed by the torch of Spanish bucaniers two hundred years before. Upon some of the crumbling walls I saw trees growing that were five or six feet in diameter; at another place an arched gateway forty feet high; at another, the ruins of stone baths and fountains; and

and persuaded him to forfeit his bond and send the vessel to San Francisco. This he agreed to do on three conditions: the number of passengers was to be limited to four hundred, exclusive of the crew of forty men; the price of passage was to be two hundred dollars each; and no cooked provisions were to be furnished except such as could be prepared once a day in a large fifty-gallon iron kettle. It was arranged that the passengers should be divided into messes of sixteen persons, and each mess should be provided with a small tub of such victuals as should be cooked; coffee was to be distributed from the same kettle every morning, and tea at night. The hold of the vessel was cleared out and bunks of boards were arranged in tiers along the sides so that



GORGONA.

each cube of space, measuring six feet high, wide, and deep respectively, should contain nine persons. This did not provide for all, but the rest were to seek places to sleep on deck or in the boats hung at the davits.

We paid our money and went on board the vessel, which was anchored three miles from shore. We found a promiscuous crowd from every nation under heaven, the predominant type being that of the American rough. The deck was so densely packed with men from stem to stern that we could scarcely move. Many were prostrate with sickness, or supported by friends, or lying in hammocks swung along the side rigging. All day long this crowd of men were seething, swaying, quarreling, and cursing. No food was provided,

and hunger and thirst gave an edge to the bad passions of the mob. The captain, a United States naval officer, had not assumed command because he was shut off from his men by the chaotic crowd. At length, towards evening, he stood on the quarter-deck, and shouted above the angry mutters and jargon of the crowd that the deck must be cleared for his men so that they could raise the anchor. I had conferred with a few of the more respectable-looking passengers, and we had concluded that there were more men on board than our contract stipulated for, so we replied to the captain that the anchor could not be raised until we had had a count. The effort to get the men in order and to set them in motion so that they could pass around in line required two or

three hours, but was at last accomplished, and the result showed four hundred and forty persons on board besides the sailors. This attempt of the consignee to increase his enormous profits dishonestly at the risk and discomfort of the passengers excited a torrent of indignation. Inflammatory speeches were made, and a committee was appointed to visit the consignee and adjust the matter. About one hundred men left for the shore in boats that the natives had in waiting about the vessel, and those who remained agreed to keep the ship at anchor until they should return. A committee of five, of

he was in, and that if he did not show himself in five minutes we would come in and find him. In less than that time he appeared on the upper balcony with a few attendants, and inquired what we wished. A volley of Anglo-Saxon anathemas was the response from the infuriated crowd, but as soon as quiet could be restored one of our committee stated our grievance and demanded a reduction of the number of passengers. The Frenchman was profuse in his protestations, and promised to arrange the matter to our satisfaction. A brief consultation by the committee was held,



A MEXICAN-INDIAN HUT BETWEEN GORGONA AND PANAMA.

which I was one, directed the expedition, and about ten o'clock at night we reached the house of the consignee, a Frenchman. Every man was armed, and knowing that with the help of the Americans on shore, also armed, we could easily capture the city, we prepared to dictate terms. The house of the consignee was a three-story building with balconies on every story and fronting on a small plaza. Our company in marching through the town had attracted many adherents, and our formidable army occupied the whole place. The committee knocked at the door and demanded of a servant that he should call the proprietor. He replied that monsieur was not in, but if we would state our business he would inform him when he returned. We replied that we knew

and he was informed that we should require the number to be reduced by forty to even the scales of justice, and then by forty more as a retribution for his attempted swindle; that volunteers who desired to leave the vessel should first be invited, and, if there were not enough, then the persons whose names had been entered latest on the list should be excluded, and the passage-money paid by them should be refunded. He apologized most abjectly, saying that the mistake was beyond his comprehension; that he would willingly consent to our demand; and that if our committee would guarantee him from bodily harm he would visit the vessel in the morning and carry out the plan. We agreed to protect him and to accompany him to the vessel, which we did early the next



HALT FOR SUPPER.

morning. We had some trouble with a party of eight or ten Alabama outlaws who met us at the gangway with the amiable threat to "knife the old cuss." I explained to their leader, whom I had known in schoolboy days, that the man was our guest and would be protected, and they retired while we called for volunteers to leave the ship. At this juncture a British brig, the *Corbière*, which had been approaching from the ocean, came to anchor within a short distance, and we suggested that our Frenchman should charter her for San Francisco with the eighty surplus passengers. He immediately took a boat and put off, and in less than half an hour returned and began to transfer the men who had been enrolled. Thus the *Humboldt* with just four hundred men, including the crew, was ready to sail, and before night something like order had been evolved from existing chaos.

Probably there is no prison in the United States where we could have found so little real comfort as we experienced on that ship. We were packed more densely, had less accommodation for sleeping, and were served with infinitely viler food and water than the inmates of the worst jail in our land; in fact we had for

associates many who deserved to be within prison walls. At first discontent and quarrelling prevailed, but in a few days all accepted the situation with resignation or indifference. The captain was discreet and established good discipline. I always slept on the deck, having brought with me a mantle with a rubber lining which I could inflate and make into an air cushion to defy the dampness beneath, while a waterproof blanket above was sufficient to shed the rain. We were three weeks drifting amid adverse currents and calms before we could get out of the Bay of Panama, and after that made but slow progress on our course.

As the Fourth of July approached we determined on a celebration. Our orator was a talented young fellow from New Orleans, our chaplain a minister from Maine. I took in hand the music, acting also as special cook, and in that character prepared three barrels of doughnuts. A New York caterer made a hog-head of small beer; the captain hoisted all the bunting in the ship, and our rifles and pistols were brought into action for salutes. The small quantity of liquor brought on board by some of the passengers at Panama had long since



disappeared, and an enforced abstinence kept the violent spirits in a peaceful mood, so that Independence Day passed off to the complete satisfaction of all.

Forty-eight days were passed on this prison ship, and our rotten and wormy provisions and our intolerably nasty water were almost exhausted when we entered the beautiful harbor of Acapulco, July 7, 1849. The bay of Acapulco is one of incomparable beauty, entirely surrounded by rugged hills clothed with perpetual verdure. From the ocean there is a narrow inlet through the bluff, through which we sailed for more than half a mile,

them and gave them employment among the natives in cooking and in providing for the numerous wants of the *Humboldt's* famished passengers. The vessel was delayed about a week in procuring provisions, and then resumed her voyage with the twenty destitute Americans, to whom an equal number of us had given our tickets, preferring ourselves to remain ashore. We learned that steamers were by that time running between Panama and San Francisco, and we hoped soon to find a chance for passage on one. Meantime we purposed to live in comfort and make the most of our opportunities.

The largest residence in the town had re-

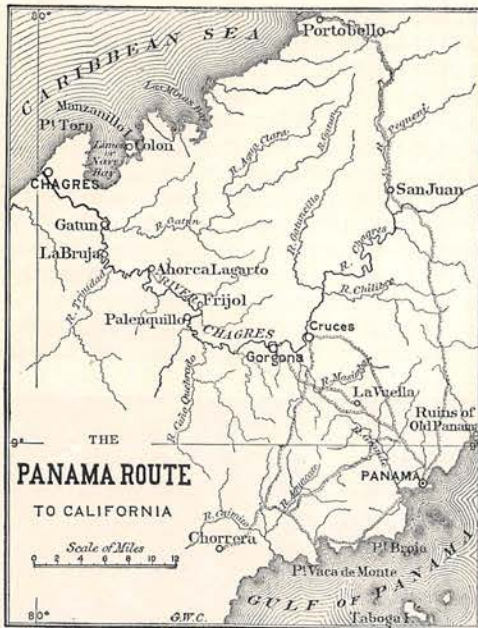


THE RUSH FOR DINNER.

and then the bay, with water clear as crystal, and deep enough for the anchorage of the largest vessels close to shore, appeared in view like an inland lake. On the interior shore lay the village of Acapulco with its low adobe houses nestled under the shade of palm, cocoa-nut, and mango trees, the whole landscape rising gently from the beach for a mile or two, and terminating abruptly at the base of an amphitheater of mountains three thousand feet high.

On landing we met about twenty Americans who had come on foot from the city of Mexico, on their way to California. They were ragged and destitute, having exhausted all their money on the way. Our arrival infused new life into

cently been vacated, and we rented it and began an independent club life. The house was in the form of a hollow square with an interior court, in the center of which stood a large orange tree. One side with a broad piazza fronted on the bay, another upon the plaza, and the rooms were many and spacious. We hired three servants and took turns in marketing. All the fish that we could eat, and of delicious varieties, were easily caught within a few feet of our piazza; and chickens, eggs, meat, vegetables, and fruits were obtained from the plaza early every morning. We bathed morning and evening, strolled through the town or over the surrounding hills, rowed or fished on the bay, lay in our hammocks under the piazza



during the heat of the day, and enjoyed a luxurious ease.

Our comparative physical comforts in Acapulco could not compensate for our mental suspense and our anxiety to proceed on our way. We knew that steamers had been sent from New York around Cape Horn for the Pacific coast trade, and that one or more of them would stop at Acapulco. We dared not move out of sight of the bay lest one should enter and leave without us. In about three weeks after our arrival the steamer *Panama* sailed in at dusk and anchored about a mile from shore. Soon after, her boat came ashore with mail bags. I was the first to meet the boat, and I extorted a promise from the mate in command that he would wait until my comrade (Dr. Paddock) and I could go and get our effects and return with him to the steamer. We hurriedly threw our things into our trunks, and each with a trunk on his shoulder and other articles in his hands ran back to where we had left the boat. It had gone, as we were informed, to send from the ship a larger boat for all the Americans on shore. We waited, and half an hour later the large boat appeared. Meanwhile, by order of the custom-house officers, a company of soldiers was stationed at the landing to prevent the boat from coming ashore, the pretext being that the steamer had failed to comply with the quarantine regulations. We sought the American consul, who came to the scene and tried to persuade the officers to allow us to embark, but they replied that if the boat came nearer than twenty paces from the shore the soldiers would fire upon it.

The boat lay on and off waiting for developments, and finally left without us. I then ran along the shore where canoes were hauled up, — all of them within sight of the custom-house, as required by the authorities, — and offered a large price to the owners to take me to the steamer. They replied that they dared not, as they would be attacked by the soldiers. I then purchased a boat for \$25 from one of them, and with my comrade was loading our baggage into it when we were surrounded by several soldiers with muskets and fixed bayonets who forbade our pushing off. I had in my walks seen a canoe on the beach about a mile away, and separated from our part of the town by a high, rocky point. I hastily left our trunks in charge of one of our party to bring to San Francisco whenever he could get away, and Dr. Paddock and I took our carpet sacks and ran to the place where the canoe was lying: our purpose was to borrow the boat without asking, and after reaching the steamer to send it afloat for the owner to recover. We seized a pair of oars that were standing against the side of a hut near by, and, without stopping to discuss the legal points with a dog who disputed the title, rushed for the boat and pushed it off into the water. Our last ray of hope flickered in its socket as the water came rushing up through a great seam in the bottom, and we returned the oars to the hut with a thousand thanks to the owner, who had then appeared. On our way back we saw the steamer's lights disappear from the bay.

The next steamer to call was due one month later. The time came, and our eager eyes looked in vain for its arrival. We afterward learned that it was so overcrowded that the captain purposely avoided us, and kept out of sight on his course to San Francisco. My great anxiety to proceed to California can be understood when I state that all the business interests of my company had been placed in my special keeping, and no one else of my associates could manage its affairs. One object in leaving the *Humboldt* had been to take a steamer so as to arrive in San Francisco in advance of the company, and when it became manifest that they would reach our destination in advance of my own arrival, and that they would be without funds and without any knowledge of what to do, I was in a fever of impatience.

The steamer *California* stopped a day on her way down to Panama from San Francisco, and I extorted a promise from the captain that in case our American party should be unable to leave before his return trip, a month later, he would certainly take us to San Francisco. He came with his steamer at the time appointed, but the vessel was swarming with passengers, all suffering the greatest discomfort. He pro-

tested that his passengers far outnumbered the legal limit, and that the strife among them for such food and sleeping space as he could give amounted almost to a continuous riot, and that it was not possible to take us. He finally consented to submit the question to the passengers themselves, provided we would accept sailors' rations — salt junk and hardtack — and sleep wherever we could find a place. Our party spent some time in making friends among the passengers, and when the vote was taken it was in our favor. So we bade good-by to the beautiful shores and bay of Acapulco and were soon afloat again on the smooth Pacific. By a private arrangement with the steward I secured for a party of five a private room in a secret part of the ship, reached by a ladder from a small scuttle, where we had a private table and an abundance of the best things on board regularly served. Meanwhile the first-class passengers were all day long elbowing one another and scrambling for their chance to get something from the cabin table. Off the coast of Lower California we saw one day a hundred and twenty whales of different kinds, one of which, about seventy-five or eighty feet long, swam just across our bow. At San Diego we were detained two days. The landing was three or four miles below the town, and as soon as the steamer was at anchor close to the shore there was a stampede of hungry passengers in the direction of the town in search of something to eat and drink. There was no hotel, but there were two or three stores, which were completely cleaned out of everything eatable and potable by the first invaders. About the first of October, 1849, seven months after leaving home, we passed through the Golden Gate and stepped ashore upon the promised land.

My agent in San Francisco, to whom I had letters of introduction, and to whom I had consigned goods by sailing vessels around Cape Horn, was a merchant formerly of Honolulu, who was among the first to locate in San Francisco and take advantage of the tremendous business wave incident to the gold discovery. I found him very agreeable, and learned that my company had called on him on their arrival about a month before, and that he had generously advanced two thousand dollars to help them to get established at the mines, and that some of them had stopped at Sacramento City. This, like all other places in California at that time, including San Francisco, was a chaos of board cabins and tents. There was not as yet any defined and recognized ownership of land, nor any laws for the protection of life and property, but the universal instinct of self-preservation and the omnipotent power of public opinion guaranteed to both life and property complete security in one of the great-

est communities of desperadoes and criminals ever congregated on the face of the earth.

My duty required that I should lose no time in bringing together the scattered members of our company and locating them in a suitable place in the mines. There was no way of reaching Sacramento except by sailing vessel, and without delay I took passage on a sloop loaded with lumber, and after a passage of four days found a tent near the river in which half a dozen of my old comrades were sick with scurvy and diarrhea. They were dieting on raw onions at one dollar each and raw potatoes at one dollar per pound. They gave me directions so that I could find two carpenters of our company on a ranch, and informed me of the whereabouts of others who had gone to the diggings on the American River. I found the two carpenters

## PANAMA STAR.

VOL. I. "PRESS ONWARD." NO. 1.

PANAMA, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1850.

### THE STAR

Will be published Weekly, in the City of Panama, by J. B. BIDDLEMAN & CO.,

at one cent per copy. Advertisements not making more than one square, inserted at the rate of \$3.00 for the first insertion, and \$1.00 for each subsequent insertion. JOB WORK neatly executed at this Office on reasonable terms.

Printed by S. N. Howie & J. F. Bachman.

#### To our American Friends in Panama.

In order to relieve the tedium of our, perhaps protracted stay in this so strange land, surrounded by the people, matutious and language so dissimilar to our own, a few American have undertaken this publication. Having embarked in a common object, the emigration to what seems to promise to be the El Dorado of the World, our interests are identical — and we believe that whatever of news, information to future emigrants, or local matters we may find to place in our columns, must be alike interesting to those who are already here, to those who may hereafter arrive, and to those especially whom we have left behind, anxiously expecting news of our position, comfort and welfare.

We therefore embark in our agreeable undertaking, confident in your sympathy and desire to be kept advised of the means of temporary relief from the monotony of our situation — and for this purpose we shall be glad to receive any hints or information that may be considered of sufficient interest to call the views of persons named above, to warrant publication here.

We solicit our American Fellow Citizens on their safe progress thus far on their way to the "promised land," and that such of happiness and prosperity may be the lot of all, and as large a choice of the good things of this world as may be desirable for them, to persist consistently with a due sense of the value of wealth, as a means of good, rather than the mere gratification of the appetite or propensities of man.

With these remarks we present ourselves to our friends, asking only that a fair allowance be made for the peculiarity of our position here, and excuse for any omission that may occur in our first number.

The barque *Philadelphus* left on the 7th inst, with about one hundred and thirty passengers for San Francisco.

Many of the passengers by the steamer *Isthmus* were among the number.

We give below a translation of a Proclamation issued here by Gen. Smith, prior to his sailing for California. It created some considerable discussion at the time, in our society, and public sentiment is still somewhat divided upon the subject. — We publish it without comment.

[Translated from the *Evening Post*, Feb. 11, Panama, N. Y., Consul of the United States, at Panama, N. Y.]

The laws of the United States impose numerous and severe penalties upon those who unlawfully occupy the public lands. As nothing can be more unjust and unmeasurable than for persons not citizens of the United States to direct their emigration in part and to dig the gold found in California, or lands belonging to the American government, and to stretch conduct in a direct violation of the laws, it will be my duty immediately upon arrival here, to put these laws in force to prevent any infraction thereof, and, in future, to punish those who violate them with the full penalties prescribed therein.

As the existence of these laws is probably unknown to many, I deem it proper to promulgate a kindness thereof, and of my intention to enforce them against all those who do not hold citizenship in the United States.

Your position as Consul here, and communication with our Consuls on the Coasts of South America, render you the most suitable organ to disseminate the information, and to thereby respect your services for the promotion of this object.

With sincere respect,  
I am your obedient servant,  
PERSIFER F. SMITH,  
Major Gen U. S. A., Consul,  
Pacific Military Division.

#### Arrivals.

Steamers *Falson* and *Conquest City* with two Biggs and a Brogue from New York, one *Irish* from Philadelphia, and two from New Orleans, with about one thousand passengers in all, have arrived at Chagres within the last few days. It is supposed there are about fifteen hundred persons now on the Isthmus waiting for vessels.

The *California*. — The Steamer *California* left here on the 21st of January, with about four hundred passengers for San Francisco.

Caution to Emigrants. — Most of the preserved vessels bought by emigrants in New York are entirely spoiled and unfit for use.

The above reproduction represents the first number of a periodical published by American emigrants belated in Panama in 1849. The original consisted of four pages, about six by ten inches in size, and was printed on light blue paper. So far as we are informed, but four numbers appeared, the others being published on the 3d, 10th, and 17th of March. This publication throws interesting side lights on the Panama trip, of which there is an account. Lists of arrivals are printed in each number. A protest which appeared the day it appears, was duly celebrated by American citizens with a procession and a banquet, and record is made of a "large and respectable meeting" to protest against the exorbitance of the prices of tickets to San Francisco, after which 350 emigrants signed an agreement not to pay over \$20 for passage in any sailing vessel to California — a protest which appears to have been successful. These papers also contain an announcement by the public interpreter that matter translated by any other person than himself would be of no force before any local tribunal; a protest by the editor against the inhuman barbarity exercised by some of the owners of animals on the route from Gorgona to Panama; a communication from the Intendente of the Department of Panama, Don Mariano Arrosmena, proposing to his government to do away with all custom-house and government monopolies, and thus to make the transit of the Isthmus free to the commerce of the world, the compensation for the loss of revenue to be found in the institution of a license for the transport of goods on the Isthmus. The illustration is made by permission of Mr. H. S. Bachman, son of John F. Bachman, one of the printers of the paper. — EDITOR.



A CROWDED STEAMER.

enjoying themselves in a primitive California house of adobe which they were enlarging by a modern wooden addition. They were employed at their trade at sixteen dollars each per day and board. Their diet was mostly beef, one young bullock being slaughtered each day from the great herd of cattle. The family reserved the loin portions and the tongue, and gave all the rest to the Indian servants, who regarded the entrails as the choicest morsels of the animal. The ruddy brown cheeks of the women of the household bore testimony to the salutary effect of the six or eight pounds of beef which each of them daily consumed.

The next day, after making an appointment for my two friends to come to Sacramento, I rode across the country by a trail which led in the direction of the American River diggings. Having appointed a day for a rendezvous of the party at Sacramento and sent word to others of the company a few miles away, I started next morning on foot for that place, thirty miles distant. There I purchased a large covered wagon and five mules, which, with a horse, made a good team of six, and in two or three days, when all the men had arrived, we loaded the wagon with tents, baggage, and provisions, and all the company,—except two or three invalids, who were allowed to ride,—with revolvers in our belts and carbines on our shoulders, started afoot on the trail for Stockton, *en*

*route* for the head waters of the Stanislaus. A journal published by Frémont had given me a good knowledge of the whole country, so that I felt no apprehension of getting lost, and the topographical features, as to rivers, plains, and mountains, were so uniformly as he described them that we made no mistake in our calculations of courses and distances. Two or three days later, just before we reached Stockton, the rainy season burst upon us, and it became very difficult to travel. We stopped a day at this embryonic town, consisting of a few tents, took in some fresh supplies, and continued on our journey.

About sixty miles of level country intervened before we could reach the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, in the gold belt, where our winter quarters were to be located. This tract of country had now become flooded, and the soil was a soft paste, in which our wagon wheels would often sink to the hub. Often the mules were mired, and, becoming discouraged, one after another would lie down. On such occasions we unloaded the wagon, taking the goods ahead to some comparatively hard ground, and then by main strength hauled out the animals one by one, pushed or lifted the empty wagon forward, reharnessed and reloaded, only to repeat the same experience over and over again. Before night came on we usually found some spot where we could

encamp, and where we could tether our mules, so that they could browse on the dead grass, the new grass not having yet sprouted. We also gave them a little barley from our stores. Some nights they strayed away and were not recovered until late the next day. Thus our progress was slow—one day only three miles; but at length we reached the foothills, where the soil was hard, and then we had no more trouble in moving along. Having indicated where the party were to locate, I left them in charge of our second officer, in an open grove, where they at once began to build a spacious log cabin, near a ravine where other gold hunters had already begun work.

Returning to Stockton, I hired a man with a rowboat to take me down the river to San Francisco, where I had reason to expect the arrival of the two vessels from New York with a supply of goods and provisions suitable for our use at the mines. The vessels had been out nine or ten months, but when I reached San Francisco they had not appeared. I waited nearly two months in great suspense, hearing occasionally from the company at the mines through traders who went back and forth with pack-mules. I learned that they were not earning enough to pay for their provisions, the cheapest of which, such as pork and flour, on account of the difficulty of transportation, cost one dollar and fifty cents per pound. I arranged to send, partly by a boat and partly by ox-team, enough to keep them supplied, and after eleven months' and twelve months' passage respectively from New York both vessels arrived in port.

After three months' experience in gold washing in our associated capacity, the more intelligent and conscientious of our company reached the conclusion that it was inadvisable to continue the organization—a conclusion I had already reluctantly accepted. By our contract we were pledged to two years' service; the sick were to be cared for by a good doctor, who was one of our members, and for whose use we had a full supply of medicines and surgical tools. The departments of labor were assigned to and regulated by an executive committee, profits and benefits were to be equally shared, and as there was no civil administration of law, any needed discipline was to be enforced by a majority vote. Our members were superior to the average in intelligence and morals, and in mental and physical capacity, but it was soon demonstrated that a few would contribute a much larger share than others to the common product; that many would shirk duty; and that some, in the assurance that they would be provided for, were downright drones. Hundreds of companies, representing nearly every State of the

Union, had been organized on a similar plan, and all had had the same experience. Most of them disbanded as soon as they reached California, and all did so after a short period. So, after a division which gave to each member the necessary outfit for digging and washing, and one month's rations, we dissolved, and each became free to pursue his own way. The financial settlement of the concern was left for me to adjust. I returned to San Francisco and sold off the effects of the company, realizing enough to pay all the debts incurred for the maintenance of the company during the eight months' interval between their departure from home and their arrival at the mines, besides the deficiency of earnings during the four months in which I had had to feed them there, and the heavy expense of travel; and then I was able to pay back to the stockholders sixty per cent. of the original capital. It was the only instance out of all similar companies that I could hear of where so much was saved to original investors.

The goods which we had shipped from New York were in great demand when they arrived. A cooking range and fixtures which had cost \$60 sold for \$400. A farm wagon and harness which had cost \$90 brought \$500. A lot of cheeses sealed hermetically in tin, for which we had paid 16 cents per pound, sold for from \$1.25 to \$1.50 per pound. At this time the labor of a good workman was worth \$16 a day. Such goods as happened to be scarce and in demand would bring a fabulous price. Knee boots that cost me \$6 a pair I could have sold for \$100. Colt's revolvers, worth in New York \$15 to \$20, sold for \$125 to \$150. I paid in San Francisco \$25 each for ordinary scythes and sold them in Stockton for \$75 each. Beads which cost 30 cents a bunch I sold to Indians for \$10 a bunch. Fresh eggs brought 50 cents each, a fowl being worth \$16. The country was overrun with rats brought in by the vessels, and as no cats had been imported there was for a long time a boom in the feline market, and all the cats that could be collected from abroad were sold on arrival for \$16 each. The fluctuation in prices of all kinds of merchandise may be illustrated by a single example. In the autumn of 1849 lumber was worth \$500 per thousand feet. Nine months later, when the news of high prices had brought whole fleets of vessels from all parts of the world, and all kinds of goods were thus poured into the country, I bought the material of a large warehouse already framed and fitted for the bare cost of the freight, and constructed from it a respectable church in the town of Stockton for less than half the price it would cost to-day in New Jersey.

Having closed up the company affairs I cast about for some occupation for myself, and con-



DINING-ROOM OF FRENCH'S HOTEL, PANAMA.

cluded to open a store in Stockton for miners' supplies. I formed a partnership with a friend who was stationed at San Francisco to make purchases, and my sales were made mostly to traders who carried goods to the mines on pack-mules or in wagons. At first my profits were large, but before the year had closed the enormous inpouring of merchandise from all parts of the world had reduced prices so low that many articles could be bought by paying the freight bills, and the loss by the fall in value of my stock of goods wiped out the profit of the previous business. The only currency was gold dust, which was carried in small buckskin bags, the gold being rated at \$16 per ounce and weighed out by scales, which were found at every place of business.

Life in California was at that time a wild romance. No words of mine can describe the scenes that were enacted during that chaotic period. Thousands of men, organized in bands or wholly disorganized, were constantly arriving from every part of the world and leaving for the diggings. Outlaws and professional gamblers opened saloons by the score at every point where men congregated. Money was scattered everywhere as if by the wind. Miners who had realized fortunes in a few days came down to Stockton, Sacramento, and San Francisco to squander them in a night at the gambling-tables. Scarcely a woman was any-

where to be seen. All restraining influences of society were absent, and I cannot find an expression better suited to the case than "Pandemonium on a frolic."

As there were no wives, there could be no homes or families. A few stores had been hastily put up along the shore, made of rough boards or canvas, and all of them were doing an enormous business. The rest of the village consisted of shanties or tents used for restaurants and saloons. Human life was a moving panorama. The whole place was alive with a mass of unkempt men clad in flannel shirts and heavy boots, who were inspired with the one desire to hurry on to the mines.

This rough life was not without its touches of sentiment. One day the town was electrified by the rumor that an invoice of women's bonnets had arrived and could be seen at one of the stores. The excitement was intense, and there was a rush from every direction to get a realistic view of even so insignificant a substitute for female society. I do not overstate the truth in saying that the thoughts of home that were awakened in the breasts of the rude-looking men at the sight of those bonnets started tears from eyes which the worst forms of privation and hardship had failed to moisten.

The Christian missionary was already on the ground, and good Parson Williams had managed to find a place where he could preach

on Sunday. One of the first men who arrived with his family came to one of these meetings attended by his wife and baby. During the sermon it chanced that the baby cried and the mother was about to withdraw, when the preacher addressed her thus: "My good woman, I beg you to remain; the innocent sound of that infant's voice is more eloquent than any words I can command. It speaks to the hearts of men whose wives and children are far away, looking and praying for a safe return to their own loved ones at home." Never shall I forget the sobs and tears which those words evoked throughout that rough assembly. That infant's cry seemed to them the music of angels.

With those who made San Francisco their temporary abode gambling appeared to be the chief occupation and Spanish monte the favorite game. One house fronting on the plaza, a two-story frame building called the Parker

when I left home two years before. At Panama, by placing confidence in the honesty of a native porter, I lost my trunk with all my clothing, my gold watch, and about six hundred dollars' worth of gold. I spent three days in searching for it, by which delay I lost the company of all passengers who made the transit of the Isthmus in regular time for steamers about to leave Chagres. I had calculated the time so that by rapid riding on horseback to Gorgona and special boat service down the river to Chagres I could just catch the last steamer advertised to leave for New York. I knew nothing of the great risk in traveling alone, as the natives two years before appeared to me an exceptionally honest people. But two years' contact with American roughs had changed them to thieves and murderers, and the whole route across the Isthmus was infested with American, English, and Spanish highwaymen, who pounced upon defenseless



"THE STEAMER IS IN!"—PANAMA.

House, rented for \$120,000 per annum, the rental being paid mostly by gamblers. A single store of small dimensions and made of rough boards rented for \$3000 a month. A canvas tent used as a gambling-saloon rented for \$40,000 per annum. Money was loaned on good security at fifteen per cent. a month, and out of the loan the borrowers made fortunes in real estate operations.

In February, 1851, I passed out of the Golden Gate laden with the experience of a most romantic chapter of life, no worse off financially, and perhaps a little better, than

travelers at every opportunity. I, however, faced the exigency, although quite ignorant of the full danger. I hired a horse from a man who had a partner at Gorgona to whom I was to deliver the beast, and started alone on my perilous journey. Just as I was passing out of the gate of Panama, at that time a walled city, I encountered a horseman riding the same way, a pleasant-looking American, who was overjoyed to learn that I was going to Chagres, as he had just come into Panama from Chili on his way to New York, and knew nothing of the route across the Isthmus, which he had



OUTSIDE THE GATE OF PANAMA.

feared he must travel alone. He gave his name as Fowler. His frank and confiding manner gave me assurance that he would be a safe and agreeable companion, and we at once became friends. We proceeded rapidly for a distance of eight or nine miles to where a branch trail led to the village of Cruces, the fork of the road being occupied by a tent with sundry refreshments. Here we rested. A few minutes later a horseman who had been in pursuit of us, and had ridden so hard that his horse was panting and sweating, stopped in front of the tent and appeared to be in suffering. I assisted him to alight, and helped to place him in a hammock. With groans and dazed eyes he informed me that he had a ticket for the New York steamer at Chagres, and was afraid he could not reach it unless he could have our company across. I felt of his pulse, which was regular, and asked him where was his pain. He was not explicit in locating his trouble, and seemed disconcerted when I told him that I had practised medicine. I asked him if he would have anything I could get. He replied that he would take a "stone fence" — a drink of rum and brandy mixed. I ordered it for him and he drank it. I noticed

that he was quite watchful of us whenever he thought we were not looking. His general appearance was that of a genteel desperado, and after watching him awhile I signalled to my comrade to join me outside. On consultation we agreed that the man was a sham, and that he was seeking our company in order to entrap us among some confederates in ambush. We made a pretense of going out on the Cruces trail to look for our baggage mules, leaving the man to think that we would return, but in fact we took the road to Gorgona, determined that if he came near us again we would speedily settle matters with him. Near sundown, when within two or three miles of Gorgona, we met five horsemen, a bad-looking lot, Americans and Spaniards, who eyed us closely as they passed, and immediately after wheeled around to join us. We lost no time in starting at a run. They were evidently surprised at our movement and made a rapid pursuit, but became so scattered that in case of attack we should have had an even chance by fighting them singly. We kept in advance until we came within sight of the village, when they fell back. We learned that they made their headquarters at the public house where we



stopped, and were known there as desperate gamblers and outlaws. Robbery and murder were of frequent occurrence on the line we had traveled, and we were told on our way down the river that on the day of our arrival a party of eight coming up the river were overpowered, robbed, and murdered by their boatmen.

We reached Gorgona about dusk, and as it was necessary, in order to reach the steamer at Chagres, to take a light canoe and to leave at three o'clock next morning, I left Mr. Fowler at the so-called hotel and went out to engage a boat and three boatmen, taking the precaution to learn where they would sleep, so that I might waken them, for I well knew they would not otherwise keep their appointment. When I returned, in the course of an hour or two, I found my comrade quite overcome with nervous prostration. He hurriedly placed in my hands his gold watch, a pile of money and a banker's draft for \$80,000, gave me the address of his father, and then sank exhausted to the floor with the feeling that he was dying. I obtained a stimulating drink for him, and, taking advantage of his confidence in me, told him that I possessed a mesmeric power which

would restore him. I made a few passes over his head and took his hands in mine, asking him to notice the vital current passing from my fingers to his. He was so assured of this that he revived, and would not let go of my hands until he had gained strength enough to walk.

We embarked in a light canoe about daylight. My revolver was ready for immediate use, but we reached Chagres the next evening without mishap. Finding that the *North America*, a new independent steamer, was in the harbor and about to leave for New York, we paid off our canoe men, and at once embarked on a large yawl with six oarsmen over the rough waters to the steamer three miles away. The result of my gold hunting was that my entire stock of effects consisted of the clothing I had on, namely, corduroy trousers, a soiled shirt, and a brown linen coat, together with a grizzly bear skin which I had saved as a trophy of California. When we reached New York I was completely cured of my passion for adventure and ready to put on the harness of hard and sober work for all the rest of my life.

*Julius H. Pratt.*

## THE CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA.



FOR many years after the Louisiana Purchase the Mississippi and Missouri rivers made the boundary line of occupied country. Above St. Louis and between these rivers an encroachment on the wilderness had been made by the first generation of this century. From the confluence of the two great rivers, where the Missouri rolls its yellow floods into the clear waters of the Mississippi, the line of settlement extended along the farther shore of the great tributary only to the mouth of the Kansas. The solitude of the turbulent river in its long course through unknown lands and from remote mountains was broken only by the yearly visit of the Fur Company's steamer on its struggling way to their ports on its upper waters, one or two thousand miles above St. Louis. In those early days the Missouri had for me a mysterious character. I remember with what real excitement I watched for the point where it entered the Mississippi as one of the grand features of the continent. In imagination I saw the tribe of dusky warriors who peopled its upper shores and with whom I afterward became familiar. But when I lately crossed it in the dusk of evening the shapes that I saw were of the comrades with whom

I had traveled its solitary lands and who had now crossed the river of greatest mysteries.

Westward the Indian country stretched to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. On its southern edge were the detached settlements of Mexico, hundreds of years old and oblivious of progress. On the northern side were the British possessions. The great plains and beds of the Rocky Mountains made its eastern division. From the western foot of the Rocky Mountain ranges to the eastern foot of the Sierra Nevada lay the intervening Great Basin. Beyond was the "California Mountain," the trapper's name for the snowy Sierras. This broad region was unoccupied, unused, and trackless. The only traveled way across was the "Spanish Trail," which led along its southern border from the Missouri frontier to the old Mexican towns of the Del Norte, and thence across the "American Desert" to Los Angeles, in the southern part of what was then Upper California. This was the precarious road for trade between the American frontier and the Mexican settlements, subject always to Indian barbarities and the tribute exacted by the savages. Other than this were only the buffalo roads and the Indian trails.

[General Frémont here describes the country as it then appeared.]