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THE WHEELER EXPEDITION IN SOUTHERN COLORADO.



“PICKING A COURSE.”

THE journey across the continent is an old story, and those who have not made it have probably read the chapters describing it in Mr. Nordhoff's delightful book. For three days I was rolling over the thickly settled farm lands between the metropolis and Omaha in a Pullman car. Toward noon on the fourth day, when by imperceptible degrees we had reached an altitude of 6000 feet above the level of the sea, the tedium of the ride over the desert plains was relieved by the distant line of the Rocky Mountains, stretching northward into the Black Hills, and southward as far as Pike's Peak—a hazy succession of curves accentuated by the exclamation points of many peaks, streaked with the whitest of white snow, and seeming to burn in nebulous flames and smoke—a regiment of giants, the culminating testimony and offspring of nature's fiercest passions.

We alighted from the Union Pacific train at Cheyenne, the incomplete little town that sprang into existence in a night, and thence traveled a hundred miles south along the eastern front of the mountains to Denver, passing by the flourishing settlement dedicated to Horace Greeley, which, with its tasteful houses, fruitful gardens, and irrigating canals, is a refreshing contrast to its arid surroundings, and a credit to the temperance principles on which it is governed. The title of Colorado that we have seen so far is not a fulfillment of the agricultural paradise that we have been promised. The air is crisp and the wind is strong and bleak. The soil is loose, sandy, and neglected. In the foreground the wavy plains are yellow, and in the distance they are subdued to a leaden gray color, reaching to the blue foothills, from which the mountains rise to a duller sky. A disagreeable and significant

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"DAVE" MEARS.

feature of the landscape are the bleached bones of cattle that have perished in the winter storms; and excepting the indistinct forms and color of the pines on the far-off slopes, we search vainly for a trace of greenery.

Denver, moreover, contains nothing to charm away the feeling of disappointment that our first glimpse of Colorado inspires. Its rapid growth and transition, since the advent of the railroad, from a nest of border ruffians and miners to a law-abiding city are marvelous; and the traveler is pleasantly surprised by its handsome buildings, busy streets, well-stocked markets, and general appearance of finish and permanency. But it is cheerless and bleak too, and is forever swept by the rushing winds blowing from the icy mountains. The climate is a perpetuation of March—at least it seems so to us, with our fresh memories of the sultry days left behind in the lower altitudes. The dust is intolerably thick, and lies in drifts across the roads and on the sidewalk. Our clothing acquires a gritty feeling, our lips chap and blister, and as we think of the humid atmosphere and verdure of the genial Eastern country, we are almost "sorry we came."

The Wheeler expedition of 1875 was to be divided into two sections, one organizing

for the exploration of Southern California and Arizona, at Los Angeles, under the direction of Lieutenant Wheeler, and the other organizing for work in Southern Colorado and New Mexico, at Pueblo, under the direction of Lieutenant William L. Marshall. The writer was detailed to follow the fortunes of the Colorado section, and went from Denver to the railroad terminus at Pueblo, a distance of about one hundred miles, by the narrow-gauge road in operation between the two places. The route meanders the sage-bush plains to the east of the mountains, rounding the base of Pike's, and occasionally winding among the foot-hills of pine and spruce, with their grotesquely eroded yellow sandstones and loose beds of detritus. The sage plain is one of the dreariest keys that Nature has struck in this Western symphony of hers. It is an inconceivably lifeless crust of earth, that bears no fruit nor beauty, and yields but the pain of its monotone to the senses of the beholder—a wan, unlovely husk that seems to parch with the heat of inward fires. The reddish soil is dry and sandy, and is split with thirsty veins, as though it would fall apart and open into another of the frequent vertical-walled gullies that the wash of the mountain torrents has formed. The little tufts and rings of grass in this red expanse are mockeries of vegetation, and the superabundant sage bushes spread their knotted and fibrous branches in every direction, until the distance fades away in the pallor of their hoary leaves. A little emphasis is given to this tame variation of dull green and duller brown-red by the fierce blades of the Spanish bayonet and the bristling cactus; but the long reaches are oppressed by a settled air of unutterable and unalterable sadness. At this stage of our journey we were too ready to express our disappointment in a judgment that was neither correct nor kindly, albeit we had seen so little; but as we went farther, and saw more of Southern Colorado, we learned to like it better.

The organizing camp at Pueblo was all astir with preparations for the departure into the field of the three parties into which Lieutenant Marshall's section of the expedition was to be subdivided. The tents were pitched in a pleasant situation outside the town under a grove of cotton-woods, and the ground was strewn with the packing cases, filled with instruments and other parts of the outfit, that were arriving by every train: carbines and revolvers from Springfield and Rock Island; army saddles, with heavy stirrups, and bridles; rations of bacon, ham, flour, and coffee; bags of cartridges; and delicate bits of scientific mechanism, bright from the hands of their London and Paris makers. The meteorological tent was occupied day and night by watchful observers correcting

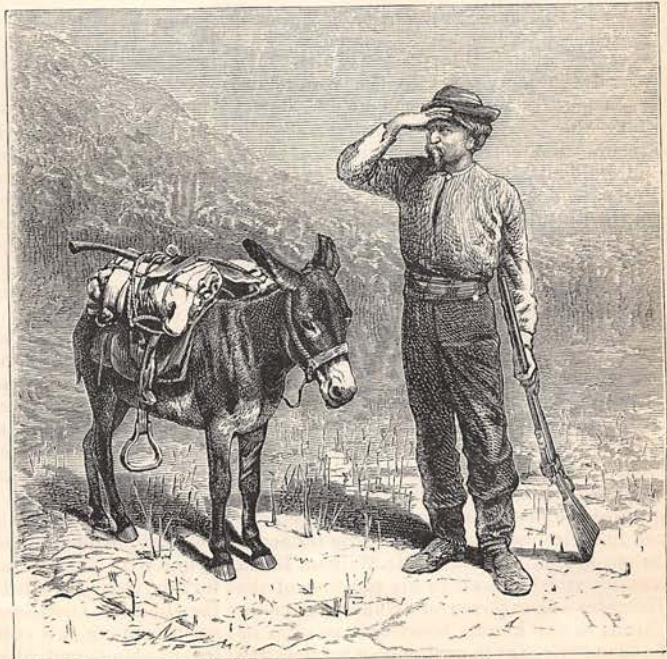
and comparing the barometers, thermometers, and aneroids by the Washington standards. The odometer recorders were out on the stage road testing by actual chain measurement the little dials attached to the curious one-wheeled carriages, and the packers were busy fitting pack-saddles and aparejos to the mules. Officers and men were alike dressed in buckskin or heavy cloth trowsers, with a belt and bowie-knife, thick blue or gray flannel shirts, high boots, and sombrero hats; and all sat down to the common mess of bread, bacon, and coffee which, with very little variation, formed our breakfast, dinner, and supper.

Foremost of all in fun and work was "Dave" Mears—in full, David Y. Mears—the master of transportation, as good a soul as ever breathed, who had a deeper and truer insight of the perplexing conglomeration of obstinacy, stupidity, and sagacity in mule nature than any other man I had met before or have met since. His subordinates looked up to him with irrepressible admiration, and, lost in the reverent contemplation of his wisdom, would at odd times ejaculate as he passed, "Lord! what he *don't* know 'bout mewles!" And Dave accepted this homage with becoming modesty, and disclaimed all merit on his own part except that resulting from his extensive experience. "I oughter," he would say, when his varied knowledge was remarked; and indeed in twenty-one years of far Western life he had been pretty nearly every where in the Territories, and engaged in most occupations, from mining to stock raising, and stock raising to mule driving. He had a pair of the merriest eyes that were ever set in human head, and illustrated every incident that occurred or was mentioned in his presence with a laughable anecdote.

My anticipations of field life were based on what I had seen in the summer encampments of volunteer soldiers, and I was considerably shocked when I saw the extreme economy of our outfit, which consisted of twenty-two pounds of personal baggage and a small roll of bedding for each man—no cozy

little iron bedsteads or reclining steamer chairs, such as I had seen in pictures of Wimbledon and Aldershot, but the stern reality of mother earth for a couch, and a dog-kennel sort of a tent, five feet wide and three feet high, for a shelter. Each man had to do his own share of the work, to groom and saddle his own mules, erect his own tent, and make his own bed—none of which duties was at all pleasurable. And by the time we had been in the field a week, when our lips were sore and swollen, and our clothing and bedding were as gritty as sand-paper, little wonder that we spoke of our experiences only in invectives.

Our detachment consisted of nine men—Lieutenant C. C. Morrison, of the Sixth Cavalry (in charge), Mr. Fred A. Clark, chief topographer, Mr. Anton Karl, assistant topographer, Mr. W. C. Niblack, meteorologist, the writer, three packers, and a cook—with a riding and pack mule for each. We were detained at the organizing camp about a week, and then separated from the other two parties, not to meet again until the close of the season's work in November. From Pueblo we rode southward over still drearier plains, and through squalid Mexican villages with mud huts and swarthy inhabitants. While we remained in the road we occasionally met a dusty traveler, a burly stock raiser, or a light-hearted miner perched on an overloaded little donkey, starting out to prospect for gold in the mountains. The wind was bleak and constant, and bore



PROSPECTING.



NEAR THE SUMMIT OF THE SANGRE DEL CRISTO.

clouds of abominable dust with it. We crossed the mountains by the Sangre del Cristo pass, at an elevation of 10,500 feet above the level of the sea, and saw the Greenhorn Mountains, the Sierra Blanca, and Baldy Peak, clothed in the changing glories of morning, noon, and sunset light. On the tenth day of our travels we reached the town of Conejos, and thence explored a country of miraculous and inexpressible grandeur.

From childhood most of us, in thinking of Western mountain scenery, have attributed to it a solemn and superlative grandeur which it does not always possess. It is not altogether as dusky, as silent, or as sad as it is thought to be, and it is not always endowed with that power of exciting human emotions common in some phases of nature. The arid wastes of scoria and decomposed granite are desolate enough, yet they have not in their desolation that mystic influence on our sympathies which Mr. William Black has described so well in his romance of the Hebrides—that power of awakening tender chords in the human heart that most of us have experienced in gazing on a barren strip of sand with the gray sea beating against

it, and the white clouds drifting overhead. But the cañons of the Conejos, the Los Piños, and the Rio Chama have all the elements of a grand primeval solitude.

From a camp near Guadalupe the expedition explored the main branch of the Conejos for about three miles, and then diverged on a trail through a pass in the steep walls to the west, and over a heavily wooded acclivity, with a crest about 800 feet above the level. The way up the hill was obstructed in the earlier stages by fragments of rock scattered in every direction, like the *debris* of a spent shower of meteors, and as we mounted higher, another difficulty appeared in a dense forest of cotton-wood, with an almost impassable undergrowth of shrubs and brambles. The facility with which this tree adapts

itself to circumstances is one of the marvels of the vegetable world. When it has room, it soars to a height of seventy feet, spreading itself out like an old yew, and it seems to thrive equally well in a confined space, where hundreds of its species are limited in growth to six feet, and concentrated within a few inches of each other. Its leaves are like those of the lilac, a small oval in shape, with the lightness and sensitiveness of the aspen and the glitter of the silver poplar. But most beautiful is the bark, which in nearly all the ages of the tree is a shade of soft gray, and as smooth on the surface as a piece of ivory.

Climbing higher, we became entangled in this maze of cotton-wood, which hid us from one another, and knotted itself in our bridles and stirrups, making our progress more laborious than ever. The grass was tall and rank, and sprinkled with blue, yellow, red, and purple flowers, the blue and yellow vying with the sky and sun, which at intervals were revealed through a break in the thicket. Occasionally a breath of wind swept among the cotton-woods, and their leaves shook and glistened like the drops of a silvery rain. So we went on, with our

arms extended over our mules' heads to ward off the obstructing branches, until we came to a pile of moss-covered lava at the head of the farther slope. Beneath us was the junction of two branches of the main cañon — two deep cuttings, with high, precipitous banks, leading from an even ridge to a flat bottom. Here the cotton-wood was still more profuse and the other vegetation still more redundant. The bed of the cañon was matted by a luxuriant shrub, called, our Mexican guide told me, the jara, with leaves a vivid green and stalks a bright red. Underneath this there was a low rippling sound, and when we swept the branches aside, we discovered a brooklet running with the bluish water of freshly melted snows. Snows? Yes: with all the abundance of foliage, in the middle of an exceptionally hot June, a white mantle still lay on the shady parts of this cañon, 8000 feet above the level of the sea. The banks were covered with cotton-woods varying in height from six to seventy feet, all trem-

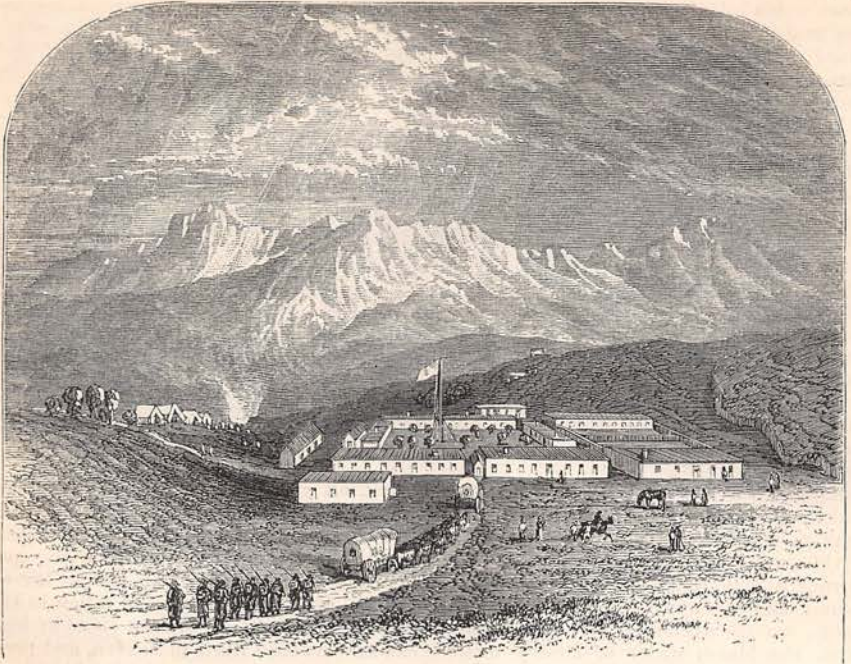


ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, GUADALOUPE.

bling, all gleaming, as the wind touched them. Some majestic pines, with rugged limbs and dusky green foliage, were super-added to these, and dense as the living timber was, thousands of dead trunks lay on the hill-sides, where they had fallen in the last tempest. Ahead of us a cloud of blue smoke wreathed itself to heaven, and presently we came upon a wide patch of land wasted and blackened by fires that were still spreading. As we went through the hollows, the sound of our steps was drowned in the beds of mosses and ferns, and numberless wild flowers constantly tempted us to dismount and pick them.



CONEJOS.



FORT GARLAND AND SIERRA BLANCA.

Then, after resting a night, and on the next morning finding our tents sheathed in an armor of frozen rain, we struck into another labyrinth, crossing the main branch, and continuing on our way over fertile valleys and snowy ridges until we reached the head of a declivity looking down on the two arms of the cañon of the Los Piños, which formed a junction. If you would realize the scene, think of two awfully deep ravines extending at an obtuse angle from each other, one toward the southwest, the other toward the east—two ravines with slanting walls of hemlock, fir, and pine, which at their bases are only separated by the hair's-breadth of a rushing stream, these walls forming themselves at intervals into perpendicular cliffs of green basaltic rock. Think of a tempestuous sky, with ragged storm clouds careering in massive volumes overhead, and a perpetual twilight below casting weird shadows upon the lower slopes. Think of a strong wind whistling in fitful gusts around the corners of enormous boulders held loosely in their places by a pebbly soil; of wintry gloom and tumultuous motion. Then, possibly, you will have an understanding of some of the elements that gave the scene its impressive and peculiar grandeur.

For about four hours we meandered a trail not more than ten inches wide, worn in the left wall of the cañon stretching to the north. This precarious foot-hold was at least three hundred feet above the bed of the stream, which bubbled along like a

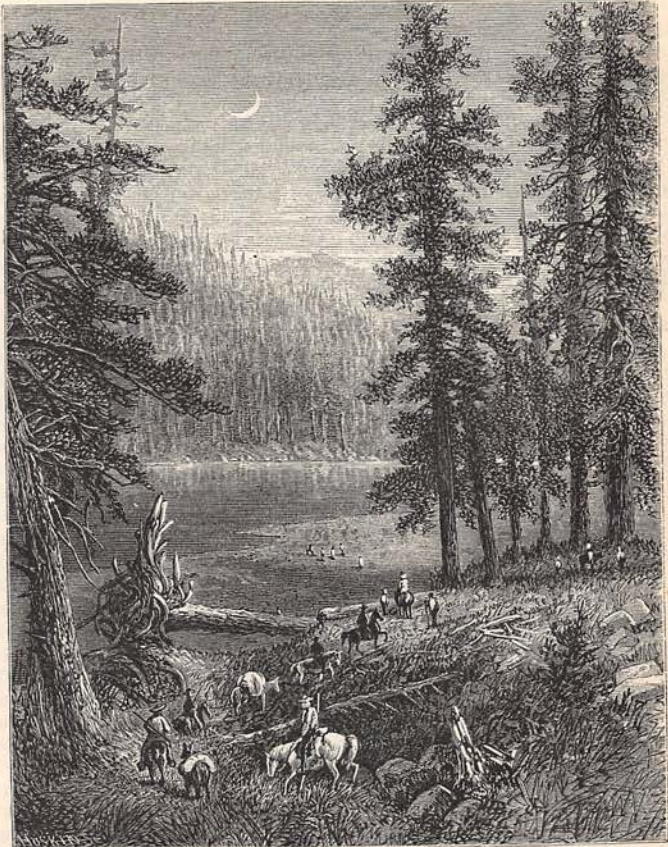
vein of burnished metal, and at least four hundred feet below the upper edge of the wall. In some places it was overhung by crags or abutments of cavernous rock eroded into quaint resemblances of artificial things, and again it wound itself into the shadows of massive boulders that seemed balanced on needle points. The timber was scarce here. A few charred pine stems, straight as arrows, shot into the air, divested of branch and leaf, intensely black in contrast with the pallid cotton-wood trunks that lay in waste on the gravelly cañon-sides. Out on the point of a rock an eagle sat brooding, and swooped away in an ever-increasing circle when he saw us. The turbulent stream that foamed over the ledges in its course was silent at our height; but our voices were drowned in the steady roar of the wind, which swept through the cañon with the sound of the waters at Niagara. Overhead—what was there? A strip of the brightest blue, dazzling in its purity; a constant drift of little puffs of white and great volumes of rainy gray that hurried on with wild messages into the distant east.

A frosted mass of snow lay here and there in the fissures, with threads of water trickling from it into the bed of the stream. Our breathing was labored, and our lungs felt raw and burning. The trail was graven across the brow of the rock in zigzags forming a succession of hills, in climbing which we were compelled to dismount and lead our mules. But a little farther on, the cañon

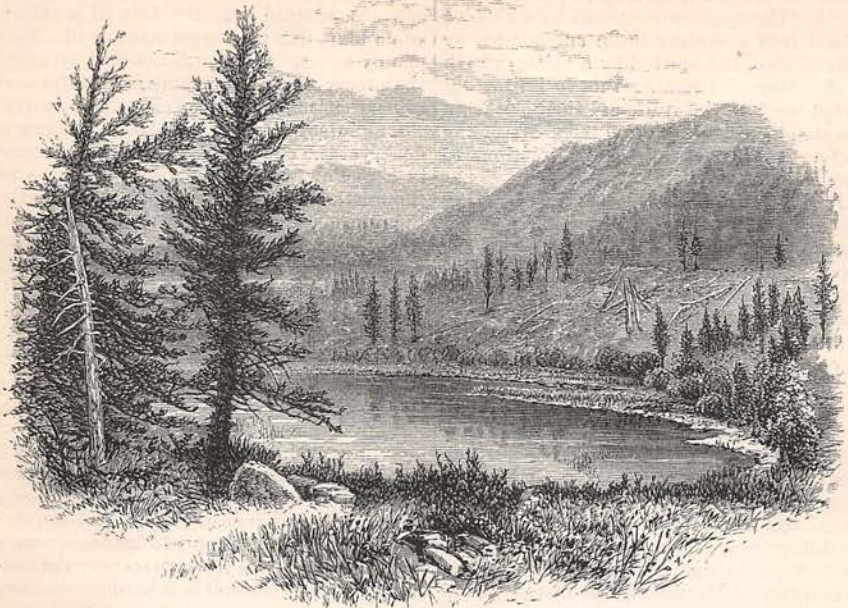
turned to the east, leaving in its curve an opening through the west wall by which we passed into a marshy basin surrounded by hills of pine and matted by a thick growth of shrubbery. Crossing this to its farther divide, we lost the trail, and the pack train was detained while several members of the party started off in different directions to look for it.

Just ahead of us, apparently separating two outlets of the valley, was a knoll, which I ascended in order to get a glimpse of the surrounding country. The wind had fallen by this time, and there was only a gentle sighing among the pines and firs. The path was strewn with logs, some so far decayed that they crumbled to dust under my feet, and others the fresh wreck of the last tempest. The air was balmy with the strong scent of resin, and ministered a grateful ease to my wearied lungs. Several brown squirrels, startled at my approach, darted into their hiding-places with a timid cry, and stared me out of countenance with their sparkling eyes. The least sound fell with distinctness in the hush, and awoke ghostly reverberations among the fastnesses of rock surrounding. I climbed leisurely to the crest of the hill, and came suddenly to the very edge of a cliff looking down upon a scene that must have made a life-long impression on the most trivial mind. Seven or eight hundred feet below me was a chasm extending twenty miles in a straight course, and imprisoned by precipitous heights heavily timbered with dusky trees. Far away into a dreamy space of blue these two chains of mountains rose and fell like the billows of a sea, with their ridges drawn against the sky as clearly as a silhouette, and their thick mantles of dark green, that seemed beds of soft mosses in the distance, spangled with rainbow crags of basalt and sandstone. The cliff on which I stood was a blood-

red, and opposite to me were three sharp spires supported from the face of a yellow stone bluff, like the turret window of a Normandy house. But it was not the extent of the prospect nor the grandeur of form and color that made this scene so impressive. The sun was still high, and the sky without a fleck, yet the silent space below was steeped in a mellow, cloistral twilight. It was as though the earth had gone back in a dream to the time when men's feet were circumscribed by one garden. I was on the edge of a world where human heart had never beaten, and where human hand had never worked to take away the melancholy and sanctity of primitive nature. What influence was it that exerted itself upon me as I looked over those waves of hills, the dark ravine between, and the stilly forests enveloped in a profound haze? I felt a wild despair, a heaviness of heart, that I was glad enough to relieve in answering the call of the men with the pack train. And it is this element of extreme remoteness, this perfect sequestration from the softening influence of man's presence, that gives Western scenery the sentiment which I think it is so hard to describe.



ALPINE LAKE ON THE SIERRA BLANCA.



BEAVER LAKE, CONEJOS CAÑON.

The trail had been found again, and turning to the right of the knoll, a few hundred feet farther on we entered a grove of noble pines with brown-red bark, the shadows of which made a blackness so deep and silent that we glanced around warily as we passed under them. This fear-inspiring quality was increased by the booming note of the screech-owl that anon broke out among the topmost branches with the muffled sound of a death-bell. The grass here was profuse again, and the wild flowers flashed out in greater variety than ever. By-and-by we reached the crest of a steep hill covered with cottonwoods, and descending this, we were underneath the cliff on which I had stood half an hour before, locked in a glen inclosed on three sides by pine-covered walls; the fourth side abutted on the ravine, with its vista of hills and mysteries of blue. A little way below another cañon ran into the main, and two noisy brooklets joined arms to form the head waters of the Rio Chama.

Amidst this solitude, so far away from home and friends, we pitched our tents and lit our camp fire. On one side of us there was a bank of supple shrubs several feet high, with vagrant daisies bestrewn in the moist earth around, and, though no water could be seen, the voice of a stream arose from under this bowery canopy in a lightsome trill. The air was clear and exhilarating, and scented with the pungent balsam of the pine and the languishing sweetness of the wild rose. A sprightly humming-bird stole among the flowers, and robbed them of their

honey with his dainty bill. But far prettier to me than this gandy fellow, with his airs and graces, were the butterflies, especially those of a tiny species, bluish in color, looking like violets that had been torn from their stems by the wind, and by some fairy power endowed with wings. I think these beauties must grow by what they feed on, for hosts of them fluttered about the clusters of bluebells that are more plentiful in this piny mountain valley than on the heathery hills of Scotland.

And soon the night came—the night that in this region reveals as many wonders as it hides. The first indication of its approach was a glow on the sandstone bluffs, deepening every moment, until these masses of red and yellow seemed like jewels in the green surrounding them. The azure sky faded away into a sea of pearl, in which some stray patches of white were floating lazily. Beneath this tranquil space of exquisite color the pines in the cañon remained heavy and dark, wrapped in an unaltered gloom. But anon—marvelous touch! marvelous change!—the west was lighted by a sensuous crimson, growing warmer each moment and fast overspreading the whole heaven. The sky, the clouds, the bluffs, were suffused in the passionate light, and by degrees the dim ravine lying so coldly in the earth was struck by the ruddy glow that kissed the embattled forests on the slopes, until the red pines blushed like maples in the autumn. For a sublime moment all the earth and heaven was swept by the flame, and

the white tents in the glen confessed it in a shade of pink. Then it expired by as many changes as it came, and the sky became wan and cold. The shadows spread out their arms farther and farther, and the ravine became fathomless in a mysterious darkness that, impenetrable as it was, seemed to admit the vision into its depths.

The blaze of the camp fire leaped high, and the pine logs crackled merrily in the frosty air. By-and-by the stars came out, and the mountain ridges were illuminated by a phosphorescent light like that of St. Elmo, which men at sea sometimes see burning on the yard-arms, and believe to be the spirits of their dead comrades.

From this memorable camp we struck down the cañon, which widened greatly about five miles from its head, while the stream, growing in volume and power, began to sink a deeper channel for itself. The hills were rounder than those above, and glossy lawns receded from the timber-line of cedar, pine, and fir to the hollow of the river, which went on delving until its bed lay two hundred feet below the foot of the mountain. The waters were boisterous and foamy, combing over mossy rocks, and occasionally reposing for a moment in pools flashing with the silver and red of mountain trout.

Our march was short, as we had to await some members of the party who were absent on neighboring peaks, and we pitched our tents where the west fork of the Chama enters the east between two high embankments of rocky soil. We lay here for several days, and here we had our first taste of sport.

The country was full of game, and a trained hunter need not have gone far in any direction to obtain an interview with either black, cinnamon, or grizzly bear. A Mexican who joined us at the town of Conejos borrowed ten cartridges and my carbine from me. He returned eight of the cartridges, and brought into camp a grouse and a magnificent deer. But a military exploring party finds no time for sporting—at least, ours did not find any; and unless the game came into camp, or ran against us on the road, we seldom had a chance to spend our powder.

One afternoon, however, Sam Abbey, one of the packers, ran into camp, with a pale face and his revolver drawn. "I—saw—a—bear—within—six—feet—of—me—and—it—laughed—at—me!" he exclaimed, breathlessly. "Come—along—boys—an'—let's—have—a—shot!"

He had been lying asleep on the grass a short distance away, when a panting sound awoke him, and as he opened his drowsy eyes he saw an enormous cinnamon bear gazing at him and smacking its rough lips. No wonder he was scared. A cinnamon bear is a terrible antagonist for a man with only a revolver to defend himself; and as Sam raised himself on his elbows, the ruthless monster studied him, with the intention of selecting a soft part to begin with evident in its small, ferocious, hungry-looking eyes.

Our valiant comrade sighed, and sorrowfully cocked his six-shooter, for he knew that if he fired and missed a vital part, the subsequent proceedings would have no pleasurable interest for him. But the bear



SAM AND THE BEAR.



UTE INDIANS OF SOUTHERN COLORADO.

pricked its ears at the click of the hammer, and with a laudable desire to avoid difficulties, waddled away down the hollow of the river. Sam could now feel the earth under him again, and sped to camp with the news of his adventure.

Mr. Karl responded to his call for volunteers, and went to the scene of the encounter with the hero, who now averred that the bear did not laugh, but "kinder grinned."

Poor Bruin had crossed the river, and was quietly ascending the opposite bank, when his pursuers espied him and pointed their carbines at him. Apparently understanding their intentions, he turned round and ran down the bank to have fair fight with them, but before he reached the bottom three bullets plowed through his body, and he rolled against a boulder—a dead bear. May he rest in peace! Better eating we never had in our mess. His meat was stewed, roasted, and fried. It was palatable in every form, tender as a spring lamb's hind-quarter, juicy as the standing ribs of a prime Herefordshire ox, and of as agreeable a flavor as venison.

The night following this episode was starlight and frosty, and our little company, re-

duced in number to six by the absence of Lieutenant Morrison, Mr. Clark, and two others, gathered around a sparkling fire of logs. The mountain ridges were pale with nebulous light, like the gleaming white of the aurora borealis. The ravine was profoundly dark and silent, and our voices sounded with singular clearness in the crisp air. We were instinctively drawn nearer to our companions by the knowledge of our loneliness, like castaways on an ocean, and the men who had been utter strangers to each other six weeks before were united as closely as brothers. Suddenly a wild, despairing, horrible clamor broke the silence of the cañon, and was repeated thrice in muffled echoes from the sandstone cliffs.

Our conversation abruptly ceased, and we—or those of us to whom this far Western life was new—listened in dreadful suspense. The mules rushed past us, with dilating eyes and ears erect. A second time the cry, loud and demoniac as the glee of an escaped madman, awoke the ringing echoes. "Coyotes," some one suggested, and it was these mongrel wolves that made this dismal chorus in their revels over the carcass of the dead bear. Many a night afterward they stole about the outskirts of our camp, and disturbed us with their devil-like howling. Alone they do not often venture to attack a man, but in large numbers, and especially when led by a white wolf, they are dangerous company. Their bark is curiously deceptive, and sometimes when we were startled by an outcry that seemed to come from a pack of wolves, we looked back to see two or three mean little coyotes trotting away, with a hang-dog confession of cowardice in their bushy tails.

From the station at the forks of the river an excursion was made to some of the highest peaks in the San Juan range. Our route lay up the western branch of the cañon, between the high embankments before al-

luded to, which were so regular that they seemed the work of artifice rather than of nature, and resembled the deep cuttings of an English railway more than any thing else. A narrow bed of shining pebbles and sand, with a noisy stream foaming in the centre, divided them for a distance of a mile, beyond which they expanded into a beautiful valley, with a shady border of swarming fir and pine, and overhanging cliffs of carmine sandstone. Farther on they almost interlocked each other again, and became so steep that our animals could no longer find a secure foot-hold on them, in consequence of which we were compelled to make a circuit of several miles through a closely packed forest and by the borders of a marsh before we again reached a clearing. In places the mountain torrents had washed a rough channel nine feet deep in the earth, and great lifeless trees, with their long-armed roots dissevered, were piled in confusion across our path. Something opposed us at every step. At one moment we were netted in a thick growth of shrubs, the elastic branches of which switched our faces like a birch rod, and the next moment our nerves were disturbed by the unpleasant sensation of the mules sinking from under us in a bog. There is no telling a Western marsh. The ground before you appears as firm as rock itself, and there is nothing to indicate or excite the least suspicion of its treacherous character. Your mule quakes and snorts, and before you are well aware of what has happened, he has, with good luck, dragged himself through the mire, and stands, quivering in every muscle, on solid ground again.

But these were minor difficulties, and if there be a mountaineer among my readers, he will think such commonplace matters too trivial for notice. In truth, the real hard work of the day had not begun, although noon found us toiling toward the end of our eighth mile. The sierras ahead of us, viewed from the high ground in the rear of our camp, looked scarcely more than a mile or two distant, so delusively clear was the atmosphere, and now they seemed to be as far away as ever—far away, yet near; so near that it seemed possible for an outstretched arm to reach them. Their heights of stratified rock overshadowed the shady green foot-hills and the red-lipped cliffs. The floods of sunshine pouring down upon them softened their asperities and warmed the beautiful mauve color and lustrous snow-fields of the peaks.

Anon we came to a halt for the purpose of deliberating on our farther progress. The right bank suddenly twisted itself inward, and compressed the cañon to half its former width. On one side we were obstructed by a bluff, almost precipitous, and completely netted by a most prolific growth of cotton-woods; on the other side by a

great sandstone cliff, eight or nine hundred feet high, with a projecting shelf overhanging the river that rushed through these narrows with overwhelming impetuosity. It was impossible to drive the pack animals through the cotton-woods, and though a mule is capable of any ordinary feat of agility, it is not equal to the task of walking the sheer walls of a cliff. The current of the river was deep and strong, the bottom a pitfall of slippery rocks, and wherever a little soil had drifted, a swarm of small trees crowded off every other thing. But the river was our only way out of the net, and, trusting to luck, we splashed into the giddy rapids. At one moment our animals plunged up to the shoulders in the fierce tumult of waters; the next moment they staggered as if about to fall, with their hoofs caught between two ledges of rock; the next they were secure on a shoal; and so, with alternations of excitement and confidence, we reached a low embankment, steep, and thick with cotton-woods, but passable for a short distance. The cliff at the gateway of the upper cañon receded from the river, and, acquiring greater height, ended in a line of lucid peaks, which effectually inclosed the cañon on one side with a wall about two thousand feet high, unbroken, except at the foot, where there was a wave of low hills. About four miles above, another range extended from this, and guarded the river with a varied and beautiful series of pinnacles and domes, barren, and hoary with snow also; and to the left of these again, on the right bank of the river, several yet higher and more graceful peaks rose with clearly defined outlines against the sky that they seemed to pierce.

Starting in the morning from an elevation of about 8000 feet, where the air was warm even to sultriness, we had muffled ourselves in three suits of winter under-clothing, and a keen wind sweeping through the gulches proved the wisdom of our precaution early in the afternoon. Not only was the air cold; the sentiment and color of the scene were bleak also. Here, in contrast with the deep coloring of the cliffs, the heavy gloom and massive foliage of the undulating hills at the head waters of the east branch, the mountains were bare, and as pinnacled as icebergs, and as polished as the track of a glacier. The snow lay in rings on their summits like a fringe of ermine, and down the face of a kingly cliff, apparently sheltered from the sun in a deep fissure, was a ribbon of the same fleecy white. The hue of the rocks alternated between gray and a delicate shade of mauve, darkening in the recesses to purple. Overhead the sky was an impassive blue. The opposite wall of the cañon rose from high cotton-wood bluffs, extending into high table-lands, and serrated by another battle-



A MINING TOWN NEAR THE SAN JUAN RANGE.

ment of snowy peaks. The form of every object was marvelously distinct in the rarefied air, and stood out from the rest in clear relief, with the chilly sentiment of a marble statue about it; and our eyes searched in vain for a bit of warm color or a manifestation of nature's softer mien.

We picked our way on either side of the stream as opportunity offered, crossing from the right to the left by turns, climbing and descending cliffs by thread-like paths, cutting a passage through tangles of cottonwood, now trusting to the bed of the river or following its rim of loose rocks, and then running in a semicircle over the table-lands to avoid some insuperable obstacle in the ravine below. We had been on the march ten hours, and the sun bent nearer the obdurate peaks of gray as if to salute them; the ridges burned scarlet, and the snow-fields and all things were swept by a cosy glow. But the glory was evanescent, and, passing away, it left the cañon colder and whiter than ever. We made camp on a bit of level ground near the turning of the stream to the south, with barricades of rock on four sides, and innumerable peaks drawn in a zigzag line on the sky. Not the faintest sound broke the utter solitude, neither the flap of a wing, the cry of beast, the rustle of the cotton-wood, nor the clamor of the swollen river. A mighty water-fall pouring for a thousand feet down the vertical front of a cliff in a continuous line of white, so smooth in its motion that it was scarcely distinguished from snow, and a rougher torrent leaping over a high ledge into a chasm, were alone heard in a low ringing sound, like the dying vibrations of a bell. All else was silent and motionless, and as the sky was transmuted to a dark blue, as the stars gaining lustre with the advancing night shone on the frigid peaks and edged them with light, as the gloom and iciness worked upon us with depressing influence, we bet-

ter understood the melancholy that Mr. Ruskin attributes to all mountain scenery.

Among the members of the expedition was a young man from one of the Middle States, a fresh graduate of Georgetown College, who was destined for the profession of law. He was bright, generous, and amiable; but if a "fiend in human shape" ever existed, it was in this self-same innocent youth. His

great ambition was to write thrilling letters, depicting the perils of our life, to his friends at home, and he rode along from day to day plotting horrors that might by some disastrous mischance befall us. When our rations were reduced to dry bread and coffee, he smiled with diabolic complacency—a willing sacrifice himself, on account of the compensation he derived from the materials our sufferings afforded him. He was not satisfied with swallowing mud for water; he had a secret wish that we might all be prostrated by thirst, and opportunely rescued a few seconds before the minute when help would be too late. He pined and lost his appetite if there were no rattlesnakes near camp, and he was overjoyed when one morning he found a deadly centipede in his bed. I believe a chasm was never safely passed that a pang did not enter his heart—not that he would have rejoiced over a brother's broken neck, for he was a sensitive and sympathetic fellow in most concerns, but he was as sorry when we escaped a catastrophe as he would have been had we suffered it. His mania was for abundant discomforts and "hair's-breadth 'scapes," such as are nowhere so common as in the daily newspapers; and I have no doubt that he framed, if he did not write, the words of many an imaginary dispatch to the Associated Press describing how the whole expedition tumbled over a precipice, and bounced from rock to rock for a distance of several thousand feet, "narrowly escaping fatal injuries, and with all the instruments undamaged."

He did not accompany us on this side trip to the San Juan range, or he might have curdled the blood—a mysterious process discovered by some astute story writer since the time of Mr. Hervey—of his little audience at home. Our limbs were all sound in the end, but we had a surprising number of little accidents and inconveniences, which must have excited his imagination

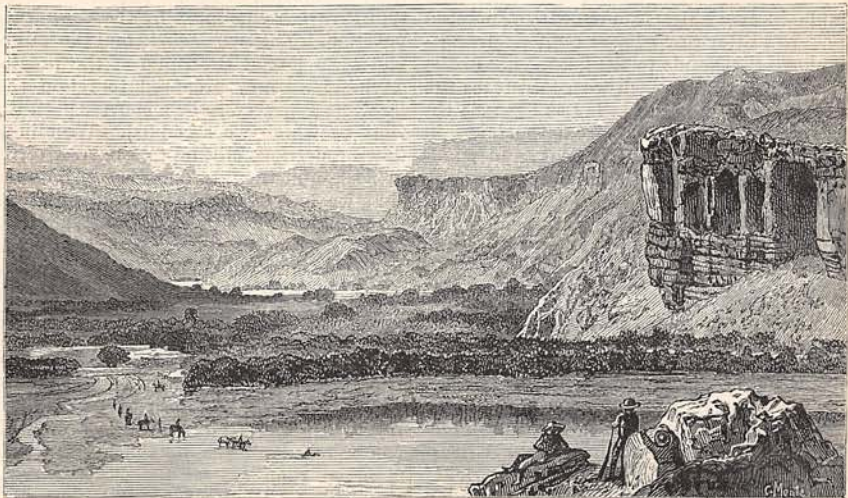
to the point at which authorship of a dime novel is possible.

After a sound sleep in the frosty open air, we started early next morning through a gorge some distance to the left of the greater cataeraet, reaching from the level to the summit of the cliff under the shelter of which we had rested during the night. The lower part was at an angle of repose, and was roughly paved with detritus, but the upper part was a mere crevice in the cliff, revealing the bare sides of the mountain. We succeeded very well, however, until we were within a few hundred feet of the top, when we encountered a vast quantity of ice and snow, which compelled us to unload the mules and carry the packs by hand—a task which occupied us four hours. The first bench reached, we found a wild-looking valley undulating before us, with a dense undergrowth, and wide marshes wavy with tall blades of emerald grass swaying in the wind. A little farther on we saw ourselves reflected on the clear surface of a blue lake, separated from another circle of crystal water by a narrow isthmus, and dotted on its borders by a variety of wild flowers, which spread their gay ranks forward until they were tipped by the ripples, and backward until their pliant little stems were seen sprouting out of the snow, as if that crust-ed mass of icy white yielded them their miracles of lovely color. One pretty little thing we christened the nun-flower, because of its sweet, modest colors—a ring of rich brown near the stamen, and lavender fading into white near the edge.

Farther on still, we regained solid footing on some cropping rock extending to the base of another cliff, about four hundred feet above us, the ascent of which was made by a trail over loose rocks tramped into

shape by game—a narrow, dangerous trail, but the only one that we could follow. And here again a large bed of snow stood in our way, varying in depth from a few inches to twenty feet, with a brittle surface of ice, over which the mules labored painfully. The summit was rounded into another basin, set with several more lakes, bearded by light green marsh grass, and so smooth and wonderfully clear that the rock-ribs of the valley and the sky and mountain-tops seemed repeated in their depths. Snow lay every where, prismatic in the sunshine, and melting, as the day warmed, into hundreds of tiny rivulets. But we were still between high walls, with a few sharp pinnacles above us, and no extended view of the surrounding country. We climbed a hill on which not a grain of sand or soil could be seen, and from the top of this we went along a saddle of rock to camp under the protection of a rising peak. But we had scarcely unpacked the mules when the wind changed, and beat against us with pitiless violence during the rest of the night. And thus ended our second day of mountaineering in the San Juan range. We had made four miles in eleven hours of continuously laborious travel, which fact is the best criterion of the difficulties of the route.

On the next day we attained by some perilous climbing a truncated cone of rock, about thirty feet in diameter, without a bit of moss, a blade of grass, or a shrub on its plainly marked stratification. And this was the summit of Banded Peak, 13,500 feet above the level of the sea, rising among a multitude of other peaks so close together and numerous that Lieutenant Morrison well compared them to the pipes of a great organ. In the far south was Mount Taylor, 158 miles away, in New Mexico; in the west,



NEAR THE HEAD WATERS OF THE NAVAJO.



A RAPID DESCENT.

the Chasca range, on the borders of Arizona; in the north and east, Sierra Blanca, Baldy, and the Sangre del Cristo, near Fort Garland—in every direction clusters of pointed rock, row after row of peaks, thrust defiantly above the clouds to the heavens. In the same magnificent reach we could trace the Navajo, the Chama, and the Los Piños, gathering their head waters from the lakes in the basins around Banded Peak, and winding all aglitter through the blue and white mazes of ravines and cataracts. The wind blustered about us as though it would drive us over the ledge, and several ptarmigan tamely approached us, and hopped aside in utter bewilderment when we threw some stones at them, so unused were they to the sight of man.

The nearer objects in the sublime outlook appeared to be so very near, and the farther objects so very far, that we could easily imagine that it was not an area of 200 miles we gazed down upon, but the world itself. And a cheerless, tumultuous, grief-stricken world it seemed to be—the sky a frosty blue, the adjacent rocks purple in the shadow,

gray or mauve in the light, and the lowlands confused blots of brown and heavy green. Even these colors were subdued in the distance to a dull yellow spread over the swelling plains, from which the precipices were exalted as out of a shipless sea.

But this was in the flood light of the afternoon, and as the brisk wind swept up some clouds in the west, the whole scene was changed. The mountains were wrapped in the folds of a mist of the purest white, and their outlines loomed upon us in vapory phantoms. The clouds were rent into columns of gray, and instead of looking down on to the chaotic upheaval of a continent, it was as though we were on the verge of a fairy-land. And when the sun burst through the storm, the rocks streamed with moisture, which, reflecting the brazen light, gave them the appearance of having a glittering armor of burnished silver, and a gorgeous rainbow spread its triumphal arch across the sky, while all the lowlands were vague and moist under the masses of cloud that drifted far below us.

After taking a series of observations with the gradient-rod, aneroid, and barometer, we made a record of our visit, and placed it in a tin tube under a cairn or monument, for the information of future explorers—a custom invariably adopted by the Wheeler expedition. The two packers and the animals had been left at the camp of the previous day, and we now prepared to rejoin them by what appeared to be a shorter path than that by which we ascended. We climbed down a perilous cliff on to a narrow terrace of rock, and then, to our dismay, we found that we had overlooked a field of ice and snow lying at as acute an angle as possible on the face of the mountain for a distance of several hundred feet.

We tried to retrace our way, and to regain the summit, but we could not scale the cliff without endangering our lives, and the only feasible plan that suggested itself was to cut a series of steps in the snow. We stood cogitating at the brink of the blinding white sheet, undecided as to which course to take, when Mr. Clark incautiously stamped his heels on the edge to try its brittleness. His foot slipped from under him, and the next moment we were thrilled

by seeing him sliding down the mountain with the velocity of a flash of light. He was in a sitting posture, his hair was blown back, and his hat slowly rolled down after him. At the bottom of the slope was a narrow gutter, leading up from which was another snow-bank. If the impetus of the descent had been great enough to force him up this, he would have been shot into a deep chasm. But he carried a spiked tripod, which made an excellent alpenstock, and with fine presence of mind he plunged this into the snow between his legs (looking like a bearded baby riding a hobby-horse), slid half-way up it, and suddenly came to a stop. He felt himself with his hands, in a dazed manner, as though he was under the impression that he had left something behind—which he had done; the same thing, in fact, that lushes Tatters's voice when the Shaughraun announces in the play that the Fenian's refuge is discovered; in short, "the sate of a man's breeches."

The rest of the way was passed in safety, and the following day we rejoined the main camp at the forks of the Chama, soon afterward crossing the boundary line of New Mexico.

There is much desolate scenery in Southern Colorado, and much that is superlatively grand. People who stay only a short time in the State, and travel in the common way, will probably see more of the alkali flats than of the mountain valleys and the sublime sierras that I have tried to describe. They will go away with their lips still parched and blistered from the effects of the dry, invigorating air, and, looking back from their own firesides to summer in Colorado, their recollections will be mainly of bleak nights in Denver, the fruitless soil, the scantiness of vegetation, and the harsh chain of mountains in the background. But people with the heart to explore, who travel as it was my good fortune to travel with the Wheeler expedition—people who really care about Nature, and have the sensitiveness to understand her even when she transcends pastoral prettiness and tells her history in the heart-breaking language of the hoary peaks—these will come away better pleased, and will be haunted in the after-years by memories of a region of wonderful pathos and unsurpassed grandeur.

In conclusion, a word may be said about the work of the expedition. It is in charge of Lieutenant George M. Wheeler, of the Corps of Engineers, and under the direction of the War Department. Its primary object is to discover the most available routes for the transport of troops and wagons between interior posts, and, incidentally to this, it includes the most extensive geological, zoological, botanical, and archaeological researches by noted specialists. The topography of the whole country west of the



GEORGE M. WHEELER.

100th meridian is being secured by triangulation, and illustrated in a magnificent series of maps, which have been highly complimented by General Von Moltke, the Prussian commander. The States and Territories thus far explored and surveyed are Colorado, New Mexico, parts of Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Southern California, not the faintest trail or smallest drain being omitted. Like all work intrusted to the Corps of Engineers, this is carried on with remarkable economy. Last year (1875) six parties, each commanded by a military officer, were in the field from the middle of June to the middle of November, although the total appropriation awarded by Congress for the expenses of the expedition, including the cost of publications and office-work, amounted to only \$40,000. The publications consist of photographs, maps, and reports, and are by far the most valuable contribution that has ever been made to the geography of North America.

MNEMOSYNE: A SONNET.

Ort have I thought, musing, my love, on thee,
 And all the dear delights that I have known,
 Love-crowned, since first I knew thee for my own,
 That, if by cruel Fate's adverse decree
 (Not mine, nor thine, for that can never be)
 I ne'er should hear thy voice's dulcet tone,
 Nor kiss nor clasp thee more—not all alone—
 Companioned still by sweet Mnemosyne—
 To her I'd cry, "O goddess who hast power
 To bring again my darling to my sight,
 And from the Past evoke each vanished hour
 That blessed the day or glorified the night,
 I envy not the joys a king may boast,
 Who ne'er possessed the treasure I have lost!"

JOHN G. SAXE.