

iar Letter from a Daughter to Her Mother (1871) by Alice Ives Va

Alice Ives Van Schaack

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A Familiar Letter from a Daughter to Her Mother **(1871) by Alice Ives Van Schaack**

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r THE YO-SEMITE VALLEY,r

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r Ar
r Familiar letter

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r FROM
r A DAUGHTER TO HER MOTHER,r

r r

r Describing a few days spent at the
r BIG TREES AND THE YO-SEMITE.r

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r r

r CHICAGO:r
r HORTON & LEONARD, 108 & 110 Randolph St.r
r 1871.r

r r

r r r

r OUR PREFACEr
r IS OURr
r Apology to the Authoressr
r for Putting in Typerr
r WITHOUT HER KNOWLEDGE OR PERMISSION.r

r r

r r r r

r A FAMILIAR LETTER.r

r r

r r

r San Francisco, *August*, 1871.r

r r

r My Dear Mother:r

r Ar r Familiar letter

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r r

r Tuesday, July 25, at four P. M., Peter, Kate, and your correspondent, took the boat for Stockton, distance 127 miles, arriving there early the next morning.

r r

r Before we sailed, Elder Hopkins, an “apostle of Primitive Christianity,” came on board, and Peter made such important inquiries about his tracts as the following : What does “Cal” mean? “You should not ask me too many questions,” the man good naturedly replied.

r r

r He shortly left us, and we were soon interested in watching numerous sea-gulls and *pelicans* (Chan’s favorite bird!), who were skimming over the water in search of their finny prey.

r r

r We had a lovely sail; and the next morning, at Stockton, took the seven o’clock train for Milton, distance twenty-six miles. At Milton we commenced our stage ride. For about twelve miles the trees were very stunted, but gradually increased in size, until we saw some respectable specimens before we reached Gibson’s, where we dined.

r r

r Doubtless you remember our road lay through a mountainous region, and after reaching quite a high altitude, by an abrupt descent, we would soon lose all we had apparently gained.

r r

r It seemed rather discouraging; and then the *miles* (sectional miles) are exceeding long, number at least twelve furlongs to a mile, the *bends* and *curves not being counted*. We found more to interest us in the afternoon, passing through a mining country. What a desolate scene it presents!

r r

r We saw a few men engaged in placer mining, but quartz mining is the most popular now. Did you visit the quartz mills at Angels?

r r r r

r One of our party has sad associations with that place, as his father invested in those mines, lost a large property, and died shortly after, broken-hearted.

r r

r A friend of Mr. G’s., a merchant at Angels, recently discovered \$4000 worth of gold on the site of his store.

r r

r Describing a few days spent at their BIG TREES AND THE YO-SEMITE.

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r The water used for milling purposes is brought such ar great distance, and the use of the sluices being about \$2.50r per day, many of those engaged in placer mining must haver made a mere pittance. The desolation they leave behindr them seems a fitting monument to blighted hopes.r

r r

r An intelligent elderly man in our party, who appearedr familiar with mining, told us that the “Amador,” which isr the richest gold mine in California, changed owners a fewr years ago, and paid for itself in three years. Another mentioned that gold was first discovered in this State, at Sutter’sr mills — a fact I was ashamed I had not learned before.r

r r

r There were no mountain streams to cheer us until we leftr Murphy’s, when a cheerful little brook kept us companyr nearly all the way to the Big Trees, and enlivened our dusty ride of seventeen miles.r

r r

r We saw some “Digger Indians” at Murphy’s, and passedr one on the road who was as motionless as a bronze statue,r when he first came to view, but Peter thought he should notr like to meet him “by moonlight, alone.”r

r r

r By the way, that reminds me we were well favored withr lovely weather, and moonlight, during our entire trip.r

r r

r But to return to the “Diggers.” They live principallyr on manzanitas (little apples), acorns, and pine nuts, whichr are collected by the women, dried, and then ground byr them in their stone mortars.r

r r

r The ascent from Murphy’s to the Big Trees is 2,500 feet.r We arrived at the Big Trees at eight P. M., and a ladyr described Peter (our “Boss”) as the dirtiestr r [Editor’s note: corrected in longhand to “dustiest”—dea]r man she hadr ever seen. It was a hard day’s ride. I must not forget tor tell you about our fellow-passengers. Peter was as usualr the life of the party, and as he thought our companions werer rather unsociable, he broke the ice by naming them.r

r r

r Of course, Rev. Dr. T., of New York, was known asr r r “Dr.,” Mr. B., a wealthy Benedict from the same city, wasr dubbed “Counsellor,” on account of his oracular sayings;r two brother Masons, from San Francisco, Messrs. P. and G.,r the latter having attained the degree of “Deacon” in ther ancient order of Masonry, and the former laying claim to ar title of somewhat different nature, in a San Franciscor church, namely, “Elder,” were clubbed respectively Elderr and Deacon; a gentleman from Stockton was namedr “Commodore;” a Quaker bachelor, the Principal of a Newr York school, was addressed as “Professor;” a lawyer fromr Indiana was called “Judge;” the two youths under hisr charge “Captain,” and “Corporal;” a newly married pairr from Ohio, “the Buckeyes;” and so on, until Mr. andr Mrs. C. of Niagara Falls, were named Duke and Duchess.r These representatives of the nobility joined us at Chineser Flat.r

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r Having introduced you to our fellow-travelers, I will pass on to the Big Trees.r

r r

r Wednesday evening we merely visited the house over the Big Tree stump, and the Sentinels. As I stood in the shadow of the latter and thought of the many generations that had passed away during their existence, for a moment I felt insignificant in comparison, until I remembered that I am *immortal*, and they are not.r

r r

r Thursday, A. M., we made the tour of the Big Trees, *riding on horseback through* the Father of the Forest. It was glad to see a noble, thrifty tree named for the Empire State. There is one youthful sturdy member of the family of "Sequoia Gigantea," called for Bishop Kip. Bishop Thompson, of the Methodist church, also has a namesake. Many of the trees were marked by marble slabs. Among others, a fine representative, "Wm. Cullen Bryant." Below the name is a line from his *Thanatopsis*:r

r r r r

r "The groves were God's first temples."r

r r

r "We all rejoiced the "poet of the woods" was not forgotten. Peter was particularly interested in the "Mother of the Forest," the bark of which was taken to England in sections, r r r r put together in the Crystal Palace near London, where he saw it ten years ago. There is a thrifty sugar-piner growing at the top of this barkless tree. We saw some very large sugar-pines during our travels. The gum, which is quite sweet, is used for medicinal purposes.r

r r

r Did you notice the face of the Old Maid on the trunk of the Old Bachelor?r

r r

r Sperry & Perry, the present proprietors of the Hotel and Big Tree Grove, bought the land (1,900 acres), on which the Big Trees are located, for \$5.00 per acre.*r

r r

r [*By late act of Congress, these mammoth tree groves have been conveyed to the State of California. A suit is pending which is hoped will result in a compromise, giving Messrs. S. & P. a fair remuneration for their outlay, etc., and that the grove will *forever* be protected by the State.]r

r r

r The South Grove, which is six miles from the one we visited, boasts of ten trees which exceed, in circumference, any of the giants in the latter. It was a sad sight to see so many noble monarchs of the forest charred by fire. The Professor, Mr. F., who was the pedestrian of the party, went on foot to the South Grove, Thursday afternoon, lost his way, and had a *ramble* of seventeen miles over hill and dale.r

r Describing a few days spent at the BIG TREES AND THE YO-SEMITE.r

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r r

r The Elder and Deacon, who started together on a trout-fishingr expedition, separated, and also missed the trail, andr wandered sometime among almost impenetrable thickets ofr chaparral. The Deacon hailed some men in the distance,r but they thought he was in pursuit of *lost cows*, so paid nor attention to his cries, and although Mr. P., the Elder, carriedr the compass, the Deacon reached the hotel sometime before his friend. These little adventures, of course, were morer amusing to outsiders than to the parties concerned.r

r r

r Thursday evening we heard that a Digger Indian, atr Murphy's, had cut the throats of two of another tribe, whor had attempted to rob him; and Friday, A. M., soon after leaving M. we saw, in the distance, the smoke from ther funeral pile curling among the trees.†r

r r

r [†Burning their dead, and washing their faces with the ashes, is the customr of these Indians, except in cases of cowardice on the *battle-field*, when they burry them face *downwards*.]r

r r r r

r We were sorry to miss the Natural Bridges, which werer a mile or two out of our way. The heat was very great andr Peter, who was in the front, was almost overpowered by oldr Sol, and gladly acted on Kate's suggestions to tie her broadr brimmed hat under his chin, and put his feet in the emptyr wooden water pail to prevent his polished (?) boots attracting the rays of the sun. The effect of the latter was marvellous, as his "piggies" soon contracted sufficiently forr him to share the bucket with a fellow-sufferer.r

r r

r We dined at Sonora. There are lead and gold mines inr that vicinity, and the country on either side of the road, forr miles, has been devastated in searching for those metals.r Sonora is twenty miles from Murphy's, and 1,250 feet higher.r We afterwards descended several hundred feet, and thenr ascended 1,200 feet in two miles, so you see we were forciblyr reminded of the "ups and downs of life."r

r r

r Soon after leaving Montezuma, our coach and six crossedr the Stanislaus in a primitive sort of a ferry-boat worked byr pulleys and one-man power. Then we came to Chineser Camp, where the Duke and Duchess, of Niagara, were sor condescending as to join us. We noticed there, as well asr at the other small towns through which we passed, that ther offices of Wells & Fargo's Express Company, and ther principal stores, had heavy iron doors to protect them,r either from the Indians, as Chan suggested, or, what seemsr more probable to me, from the "pale faces."r

r r

r A little farther on we again crossed the Tuolumne in a boatr similar to the one above described, with the "genus homo"r for motive power. In the "gloaming" we passed throughr Big Oak Flat, but we could see the lifeless Big Oak as it stoodr out in bold relief in the gathering darkness. The tree isr stripped of its bark, and bleached by many a rainy season.r

r r

r Describing a few days spent at ther BIG TREES AND THE YO-SEMITE.r

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r It was about nine o'clock when we arrived, weary and worn, at Garrote, and, in spite of the un-comfortable thoughts suggested by the name, we slept well until half-past two, A. M., when we were roused for breakfast. Like our dear John, I felt marvelously in the mood of saying: "Thanks, but I do not care to eat in the night." By four o'clock we were again on our winding way, and the spirits of the party seemed equal for any emergency. Witness the cheerfulness and sociability during our hot, dusty, uncomfortable ride on Wednesday, and on Saturday, when we rose long before the sun.

r r

r Saturday we drove, until noon, through forests of mighty trees, passing the grove known as Tuolumne, representatives of the Sequoias, one stump being *thirty-three feet* in diameter. The Sequoias, as you are aware, can be distinguished from their neighbors by the peculiar reddish brown shade of the bark, as well as by their immense size and straightness. The Tuolumne Big Trees have more branches covered by the bright yellow lichen, than those in the Big Tree Grove. We noticed several trees which were enlivened to their very tops by this gay parasite. The contrast with the bark is very fine. We carried away some beautiful trophies. There were several of us who thought we should advise tourists, whose time is limited, to content themselves with seeing the Tuolumne Grove.

r r

r At midday we reached a small hotel in the midst of the forest, and dined on half a bear. Bruin, who was only twenty months old, was killed near by. The "Boss" astonished our good hostess here by his capacity for milk — but more of said capacity hereafter.

r r

r Shortly before reaching Tamarack Flat, we arrived at the summit, 7,000 feet above the sea. On either side are massive rocks, many assuming fantastic forms. At two o'clock we reached the Flat, where we took the Saddle Train for the Yo-Semite. Mr. Hutchings was at Tamarack, "killing two birds with one stone," superintending the arrangements for the camping out of his family, who had not been away from the valley for *seven years*, and taking to pieces a *stage coach* which was to be transported in *sections* to the foot of the mountain, and is now running to his hotel! We rode on horseback two miles over a good carriage road,

r r

r I suffering agonies untold.

r r r

r Hope you appreciate the poetry, but above all my feelings, as I still retain the impressions!

r r

r Before we began the descent we stopped on a cliff overlooking the valley, to drink our fill of a wondrously lovely scene. I felt Heaven itself could not be much lovelier.

r r

r We then began the descent, our well trained Mustangs carefully picking their way, each following literally in the footsteps of the other. It took us two hours to descend the Sierras, three miles. The honored "Counsellor" left the reins loose on his horse's neck, calmly folded his arms, and trusted implicitly to his

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faithful steed. Several of the gentlemen walked part of the way. We will be generous, and say it was to carry out Mr. Hutchings' suggestion, to be merciful to his horses! Kate and I concluded ours were more familiar with the trail than ourselves, and neither dismounted, nor indulged in feminine shrieks. For fear the "Boss" should forget to mention in his addenda that he was proud of us, I will merely allude to it in passing, and add, his heart was in his mouth until we reached the foot in safety, when that *elastic member* bounded back to its place again. The chief of the Yo-Semites—that nearly extinct tribe—and a young Spanish boy were our guides. The latter, Emmanuel, regarded me as his peculiar charge, I being the greatest novice in riding, and was so kind and attentive while we were in the valley, I was really sorry to part with him. He used to speak quite encouragingly of my improvement, even when you could have seen "daylight between me and the saddle." However, after riding a few miles I gained sufficient confidence so as to be able to enjoy each opening view.

r r

r Well, it is about eleven miles from Tamarack Flat to Hutchings; two from the Flat to where the trail begins; three down the mountain, and six through the valley to that hotel.

r r

r As you will see by referring to the [map](#), page 111, Hutchings' Yo-Semite Guide Book, we took the Coulterville trail, following the left bank of the crystal waters of the Merced. It is well named, for mercy is ever pure.

r r r

r Opposite us was the Bridal Veil, now a mere ribbon, while the Ribbon Fall itself is only observable by the dark outline its waters have left on the rock. It was quite a disappointment to us all. I cannot describe, or even give you a faint idea of the grandeur of the huge masses of granite on either side of the Merced. After passing Tu-tock-ah-nu-lah, we came to Pom-pom-pa-sus—"three mountains playing leap frog"—otherwise known as the Three Brothers. Then we crossed the dry bed of a branch of the Merced, riding slowly along, studying the Cathedral Rocks which hemmed us in on the other side, the noble El Capitan on the left, the Sentinel on the right, a bold peak almost under the shadow of which nestles Hutchings' hotel and cottages. Only one lady has ventured to climb this mountain, and she was a bride. It seems strange she should venture her life so soon after giving it into the keeping of another.

r r

r Long before we crossed the bridge our cavalcade of sixteen was broken. Kate had galloped on with the "Boss," leaving me to the tender mercies of the "Deacon," so we jogged along with the "Dr." and "Counsellor" (neither of whom were skillful horsemen), in our rear. We reached our haven at nine o'clock, and were immediately treated to a glass of California wine by our host, ate a light supper, and then retired. In spite of my unusual fatigue, I was dressed by seven the next morning, while Kate and the "Boss" indulged in a longer nap. I felt our stay was so limited, it was a waste of time to remain in bed.

r r

r Mrs. H. B. Stanton came into the dining-room while we were at breakfast, and described her journey down the mountain in such a sprightly way we were all greatly entertained. She and Miss Anthony reached there the Thursday previous, and both experienced much difficulty in making the descent. In fact, as Mrs. S. expressed herself, "It was a hard day's work." Mrs. Stanton's figure is too portly for horseback, but she was surprised she could not ride with as much ease as twenty years ago. Susan is too long-limbed to be the

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personification of grace and elegance; besides, she was mounted astride. Well, I was very anxious to converse with Mrs. Stanton, whom I remembered seeing in Bloomer costume when a child, but I did not introduce myself until shortly before lunch. We occupied the same cottage, and when Kate and I passed in on our return from our Sunday morning ramble, she invited Kate to sit with her. (I came up another stoop.) Kate declined, and I did not have the courage to speak then; but ventured to do so after brushing off the dust. She was quite cordial, and inquired very pleasantly about you, Father, and Uncle B. Peter came, and I introduced him, but Kate was in our room writing Chan. She and the "Boss" seemed to take to each other kindly.

r r

Before going any farther I must tell you she sent word it *would not* be prudent for you to attempt the trip. She was *twelve hours* in riding and walking alternately over a trail of three miles, and a wagon met her at the base of the mountain, where she was found *sleeping*, perfectly exhausted. Mr. King (an artist from Auburn, N. Y.), who accompanied her on her return to Tamarack Flat, said she was very *serious* while making the descent. It is fortunate the two Grandmas did not attempt the trip last summer.

r r

It seems the "Counsellor" has a great horror of "strong-minded women," even of Mrs. Stanton, one of their brightest ornaments.

r r

I learned, Saturday afternoon, before reaching Tamarack, that Mrs. S., and Susan, were in the valley, at Hutchings, but only took Kate and the "Boss" into my confidence, fearing if that fact came to the "Counsellor's" ears he would immediately retrace his steps. Mrs. Stanton joined us at the lunch-table Sunday noon, and the "Boss," who soon spied his able "Counsellor," Mr. B., brought him to the vacant chair by Mrs. S., and introduced him to her ladyship. Peter only threw enough light on the subject to embarrass Mr. B., and mystify Mrs. Stanton, with whom he had an explanatory conversation afterwards. Mr. B. did not eat enough to satisfy even the cravings of a "sweet feathered warbler" (to speak *à la* "Boss"), and making a hasty exit, left the field to the strong minded.

r r r

Later in the afternoon, after our return from Lake Mono, Kate and I were at our cottage, she writing her husband, and I visiting with Mrs. S. and another lady, on the piazza, when some one exclaimed: "There is the chief of the Yo-Semites!" Not knowing he had been our guide, I ran first for Kate, and then for the "Boss," who was sitting in front of the hotel proper, with the "Dr.," "Counsellor," "Elder," and "Deacon." All came to see the chief; the glory of whose nation has departed — even Mr. B. who seated himself at a respectful distance from Mrs. Stanton. Mrs. S. was anxious to engage him in conversation, but he resisted all of her pleasantries, and declined talking, on the plea of a very sore throat, which he said unfitted him for it. I was fearful this little episode might cause unpleasant feelings between him and Peter, but the "Counsellor" seemed to feel, in regard to the "Boss,"

r r

r — "With all thy faults I love thee still,"

and has really a hearty liking for the delinquent.

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r r

r But to return to our Sunday morning ramble. About ten o'clock the "Boss," Kate, the "Buckeyes," and your correspondent, started on foot, under the escort of our host, r to visit the Yo-Semite Falls, *2,550 feet high, opposite the hotel, which look to be within a stone's throw, but are in reality nearly a mile away. After crossing the crystal Merced, we visited the log cabin in which Mr. Hutchings and his family spent the winter. It is a rude structure containing two rooms. The first you enter is a good sized apartment, with a loft above the rear, which is reached by a ladder, and probably used as a bed-room. An immenser fire-place attracted our attention. On one side are shelves containing books, among others a copy of Hutchings' Magazine, r which he edited five years before making his home in the valley, and, strange to say, the opening article in the first number is about the Yo-Semite. The inner room is used as a kitchen. In these limited quarters Mr. H. and r his family have spent many winters. Mr. Hutchings has lived in the valley sixteen years. Last winter his wife, r mother and two children, were alone in this cabin five months, while he was attending to business in Washington, r concerning his land claim in the valley. They say Mrs. r H. is an attractive, accomplished woman. She was only eighteen when she married Mr. H., a bachelor of thirty-six. r The "Boss" says Mr. Hutchings is an "enthusiast," and he declares his wife is quite as enthusiastic about the valley as himself. He is certainly an interesting man, and his wife must be a lovely woman, to bear so severe a test as this secluded life, and retain his love through all. I know r one woman who would be found wanting, and could not resist alluding to the story of the newly-married man, who, r in order to have his wife all to himself, took her to the woods, where they remained until he found she had a crooked nose! We saw home-made snow shoes of various sizes under the eaves, also mountain staves. Father will be interested in hearing that even the inhabitants of this quiet valley are not free from litigation, and that Mr. r Hutchings, though a pioneer, has his title disputed. r

r r

r [*When we consider Niagara is but 164 feet high, you will better realize this height.] r

r r

r After passing through the vegetable garden, we climbed rocks for some distance, until we finally had a view of the Falls. There are three, but the lower one is considered too insignificant to be counted. Last winter was unusually open, and Mr. H. told us that when the snow bank at the head of the upper fall is melted, which he thinks will be before long, there will be no more water to supply the Falls. r Even now the volume is very slight. May and June are the months to see these Falls in their beauty. Large trout were sporting in the clear waters of the basin below — a tempting sport for fishermen. r

r r

r Mr. H. pointed out, on the right, a projection of rock shaped like a thumb. It was difficult to realize it is over 200 feet above the main mass of granite. You cannot see it in the stereoscopic views. There is a fine echo at the foot of the Falls, and Mr. Hutchings' "Coo-Coo" was very musically repeated. r

r r r

r We then retraced our steps to the hotel, lunched, and as there was to be no service until evening, Peter, Kate, and I decided to go to Mirror Lake, a ride in all of six miles. r We passed a very small mirror lake on our way to Laker Mono, the mirror lake proper; but we did not dismount until we reached the second, which we crossed in a leaky boat, and then waited patiently until its surface was undisturbed by a ripple, when we were rewarded by two perfect dissolving views of the North and South Domes. The trees on their summits formed a fringe of living green. It was the most exquisite sight, I think, we saw in our wanderings. r That

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reminds me of the Claude Lorraine glass, Mr. King, the artist, showed us. It is solid plate glass, black throughout, and the reflections of the landscape on it are lovely.

r r

Lake Mono should be visited at sunrise. It is a small sheet of water, only covering two acres. Peter's only regret, in connection with our trip, is, he failed to secure a piece of the "petrified foam," which is sold on its banks. We passed the Royal Arches both in going and returning. I confess I was disappointed in them, having expected their arches to stand in bold relief, instead of being as they are, devices in that form. We rode through Lamon's garden, where, for 25 cents, you can eat freely of the fruits of the season; but we did not patronize him, as he only had apples and raspberries.

r r

As usual, Peter and Kate were ahead, and when they reached the bridge, the "Deacon," who was on the lookout for us, and had prophesied something would happen to me for going on Sunday, asked what had become of the others—meaning the guide and myself—who soon came along at a sober pace. I think he was rather disappointed when he learned we had seen two perfect reflections, but his face brightened when I admitted I was minus an earring, my horse had lost a shoe, and galloped me into a sideache. He showed his penitence, however, by going the next morning to look for the missing earring.

r r

Sunday evening we had a delightful service in the parlor of our cottage, the Rev. Dr. Hunt, a Presbyterian missionary, a pioneer in California, conducting it. He offered a prayer, read the 104th Psalm from my Church Service, made some very good remarks, and led in the singing. He mentioned that when a lady who had climbed Inspiration Point, was asked what she saw, answered: "I see God." This remark, he said, we should take home to ourselves, and be nobler and wiser after seeing some of the grandest, most awe-inspiring of our Creator's works. Mr. McLane, of Illinois, also spoke well, and Dr. T. made a few appropriate remarks. "Rock of Ages" was the unanimous choice of our little band of worshippers. We all enjoyed the services exceedingly, and I think every one present felt it was a grand thing to spend a Sabbath in the Yo-Semite. Afterwards I had a good Sunday talk with the "Deacon," during which a cannon was fired to show the power and wonderful reverberations of thunder in the valley. Surely it sounded like "Heaven's artillery." Then we joined our party who had gone to see the moon rise. The trees on the summit of the mountains often partially obscured the disc, and it was fascinating to watch how as one tree disappeared, as the moon slowly and majestically rose above the peaks, another would take its place. Kate compared it to moss agate. Lay moving gradually toward the hotel the effect was prolonged, so we had a satisfactory view of this interesting sight. I shall never forget it, or indeed anything of interest connected with our trip; it was pure, unalloyed pleasure, such as we rarely taste in this life, but, I trust, may ever be ours in the world to come.

r r

Monday morning, bright and early, we took horses for Mirror Lake, Vernal, and Nevada Falls. The "Boss," Kate, and I, who were ahead, were soon joined by the "Deacon." Kate and Peter only stayed a short time at the lake, but I remained with the "Elder" and "Deacon." We soon crossed the water to Dr. T. The reflections were, if possible, more perfect than on the previous afternoon. We had a charming ride over the mountains, enjoying their bold, magnificent views. Sometimes the trail was so winding we could see *five tiers* of equestrians. We passed the Pi-wy-ack or Vernal Fall, 350 feet high (the first that realized our idea of a waterfall, and a grand one it is), and before beginning the final and steepest ascent, our saddles were, as usual, carefully examined by the guides. Kate, the "Boss," and some others, who preceded us, left their

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horses here, and climbed on foot, reaching Snow's hotel (opposite the Cap of Liberty, and between the Vernal and Nevada Falls) nearly an hour before us. She bore her fatigue well, and one of the guides spoke in praise of her climbing abilities of a lady we called Katie. I was not at all tired after the ride of eight miles. In fact, a mountain trail, where you cannot ride fast, even if you wish, is an excellent riding-school for a beginner.

r r

r Mrs. Snow had a good substantial meal ready for us, and the "Boss" sat at the head of the table. She could not resist his *repeated* entreaties for *milk*, although she mingled a little bitter with the sweet by saying: "I declare, you better go home and tell your mother to wean you!" This sally turned the tables so nicely on Peter, that he lost his taste for the "lacteal fluid," and when asked, on her homeward trip, why he did not take it, said it "did not agree with him." It was the only time the "Boss" was really disconcerted during our travels.

r r

r After dinner we visited Nevada Fall. Of course, we saw all the falls at an unfavorable season, there was, however, a sufficient volume of water to give us pleasure, and I enjoyed watching the spray as it was blown down the stream. We then went on foot down a shorter trail (our horses being sent around), and had a fine view of the Vernal Fall from below. If you notice a lack of adjectives, please remember it was said I exhausted my stock in the valley. We had a charming ride home, at a comfortable pace.

r r

r At the dinner table the "Boss" announced he had collected the sum of 25 cents from each gentleman of our party, and he had telegraphed to San Francisco for a present for the *most deserving*, which gift would be presented with appropriate remarks after the banquet; and it was derided the happy recipient should treat the company to a wine and supper. After a great deal of discussion on the total question, and the patience of the "Boss" being *over-taxed* by the gentlemen not addressing him by the title conferred by Mr. B., his "Counsellor," a law was passed that each person who infringed the rule of addressing and speaking of his peers by their respective titles, should be fined two bits, and said fines should go into the treasury to make up the money advanced by the "Boss" for the present, telegram, and express charges, over and above the sum collected. Dr. T. was appointed Treasurer, and it was remarked that no one did quite so much to make up the deficiency as the "Boss" himself. After considerable bantering we adjourned to her parlor, where Peter, in his character of "Boss," made a neat little farewell and presentation speech, somewhat as follows:

r r

r Ladies and Gentlemen:—In all probability we meet together, as a company, to-night, for the last time, and I should be unjust to you, and my own feelings, did I not tender to you, individually, my most sincere thanks for your great kindness during the time I have filled the responsible position of "Boss" of this Expedition. To my "Counsellor" I am under repeated obligations in the trying scenes we have passed through. I have *ever* found him a safe and reliable counsellor; his sage advice has given me strength in the hours of perplexity and responsibility. The *little weakness* he has exhibited in his foulness and evident leaning towards the "strong minded" of the other sex, will be readily forgiven, when we recall his many staunch and sterling qualities—at parting it is with the hope that ere he returns to his Eastern home, that "very sore throat" may be cured!

r r

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r To the "Duke" and "Duchess," for the gracious suavity which has ever marked their daily intercourse with us "common folks," and for the nobler example which they set us plebeaus, by their right royal bearing, in all ther discomforts of the journey.r

r r

r To the "Commodore," for his safe conduct of my command over the ragingr Tuolumne River; for his splendid display of colors on his man-of-war in ther Merced. upon our arrival, we are thankful. A very interesting and laboredr report which he has made to the "Boss," of his intended construction of ar ship canal from the Yo-Semite to the Pacific, is a valuable addition to science;r more especially as he estimates the *entire expense*, including cigars for ther "Boss," at \$37.43.r

r r

r Of the "Dr.," what shall I say — "the least said the soonest mended."r

r r

r Ah! the "Deacon," he has proved a brother indeed, though I am almostr tempted to say, better follow his advice than example. We will all uniter most heartily in the good wish at parting, that he may not long continue hisr journey through life *singlehanded*.r

r r r r r

r As to the "Elder," he has proved himself to be the salt of the earth,r though, I am sorry to say, he has been obliged to confine himself to Californiar wine, as nothing stronger is to be had in the valley.r

r r

r And new "the Buckeyes;" my earliest recollection of *good potatoes* were ther "buckeyes." We have learned to think equally well of "buckeye people."r

r r

r The "Corporal," I am happy to inform you, is just in the line of promotion,r where, I fear, he is likely to remain.r

r r

r The "Professor," by his wise sayings, has placed us under many obligations.r He assures us that these huge rocks were, doubtless, cleft asunderr either before or after the flood, which important scientific discovery he claimsr to have made during his yesterday's solitary *ramble* of 32 miles!r

r r

r As to my distinguished friend, the "Judge," I can truly say the "Boss"r has had occasion to differ from him but once, and that was when he decidedr it required *three men* and *one boy* to see the tops of some of the big trees,r when I was compelled to overrule his decision, and decide *two men* and *oner boy* could do it.r

r r

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r I cannot be so *ungallant* as to take my seat without tendering the best wishes of our hearts to the *ladies* of our party. God bless them! Their good behavior during the whole of our toilsome and most fatiguing trip has been only exceeded by their good looks. May they always preserve the *latter*, we are sure of the former. In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, again thanking you for the generous support you have given me, in the arduous position your partiality has placed me in. I will make the long-promised presentation.

r r

r To the "Captain," for his unselfishness, for his great anxiety for the comfort and welfare of his fellow-voyagers, I present this testimonial.

r r r

r At the close of his impromptu address, the "Boss" presented a small packet to the "Captain," an Indiana youth, who, though the youngest of the party, had shown himself very disobliging and ungentlemanly, by refusing to change seats in the stage with one of his fellow-townsmen, a larger man, who was sandwiched by the "Dr." and "Counsellor." The two latter are large men, and the middle passenger good sized, but the "Captain," who is slight, although he knew the Dr. was suffering from the effects of an over-turn, on his way to the Geysers, was unwilling to oblige either his companion, or those older than himself. When the "Dr." asked him pleasantly to make the change, he answered, "Each man for himself." The "Dr." replied to the effect, if that was his rule, we ought to know it. The elegant and appropriate gift was a *penwiper*, on which was the head of a *donkey*, and below the inscription, "a *pair* of us."

r r r r

r After looking at it, the "Captain," unlike the New Jersey bride, visiting Niagara, was not able to "take it in at a glance," went out with the "Deacon" and "Corporal" for the wine; or, as it proved to be, water tinged with wine. The "Captain" was not bright enough to see the point at once, but we think it was clearly explained to him afterwards. We all felt the punishment was well merited, and it is a lesson that will probably last that son of a millionaire for a lifetime.

r r

r Our party separated; Kate and Peter looked over stereoscopic views, in company, at the hotel, while I was very pleasantly entertained by the "Dr.," "Elder" and "Deacon," on the piazza of our cottage. Dr. T. is a classmate of Dr. V., and knows Aaron well. He said: "My dear, I feel strangely drawn toward you since I heard Aaron married your sister." The "Dr." alluded to the "delightful entertainment Aaron gave for Dr. V. last winter," at which he was present.

r r

r Tuesday morning the "Boss," Kate, and I, left the valley in company with the "Duke" and "Duchess," and some acquaintances made in the valley. At least Kate and I met them, for the first time, in the Yo-Semite, but they were Peter's fellow-excursionists. Among others were a Mr. and Mrs. B., of Brooklyn, very pleasant, agreeable people. Has Addie met them; or rather heard of them?

r r

r The "Dr.," "Counsellor," "Elder," "Deacon," and "Commodore," also the "Buckeyes," were up to see us start, but *Indiana* was not represented! The "Counsellor" remained until Wednesday, and starting in advance of his party, without a guide, in order to ride slowly, he missed the trail, and, in consequence, reached

r Describing a few days spent at their BIG TREES AND THE YO-SEMITE.

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Tamarack too later to take the stage. The "Professor," who left the valley on foot, Tuesday morning, was fifteen minutes behind time, so spent the day at the Flat. The "Dr.," "Elder," and "Deacon" (Mr. G., with whom the "Dr." is staying while in San Francisco), left on Tuesday.

r r

r Now for the adventures of the "Duchess."

r r

r The "Duke" and "Duchess," of Niagara, being mounted on their gallant steeds, earlier than the rest of the party, thought that circumstance, as well as their rank, entitled them to the precedence. As the "Boss" appropriately quoted, the silence of his auditors confirming this application of the words of the wise man: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall," the "Duke" and "Duchess" wandered out of the right way, and the latter fell into the "Slough of Despond." The former stood with contending emotions on its brink, hesitating between his spouse and his love for immaculate clothing, when the former rose supreme, and he ceasing to regard the mire as a badge of disgrace, but rather as one of honor, rushed gallantly to the rescue. The "haughty spirit" of the "Duchess" was the least heinous of her faults, *as she lead others astray*, even when reaping the evil consequences of her pride, did not give her companions in danger a timely warning.* Fortunately, a *strong* man came, and, with a sigh of relief, Kate clasped her arms around his neck and never released him until he had carried her safely over. All this time I was jogging along very comfortably with my good friend Emmanuel. When we entered the valley we took the left, the Coulterville trail, and when we came out we followed the right bank of the Merced, passing Black's hotel. I omitted that, Monday A. M., while on our way to the lake, a carriage passed us. It seemed very strange to see one in the Yo-Semite.

r r

r [*The fearful leap of the "Duchess" over the head of the foundering steed (attitude *à la* bullfrog), and when fairly landed flat in the midst of the quagmire, was indeed a touching sight; while the ones proceeding lustily toward her disconsolate spouse, the "Duke," "Hold on, deary! hold on, deary!" only added pathos to the scene!]

r r

r We had an easy ride up the Sierras, and I was sufficiently accustomed to riding to enjoy each disappearing view. I still prefer the first glimpse of the Yo-Semite from Prospect Point.

r r

r "'Tis like a little heaven below."

r r

r At the Flat we took stages for Chinese Camp, where we arrived at 9 P. M. You will see by the map we did not deviate from our previous route, and as nothing of interest occurred it is unnecessary to describe the return trip. Of course, we could descend the mountains more rapidly than we ascended them, and, while on Saturday, we had a long day's journey from Garrote to Hutchings', Yo-Semite; on Tuesday we went to Chinese Camp, which is many miles farther.

r r

r Describing a few days spent at their BIG TREES AND THE YO-SEMITE.

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r A young lady in the stage mentioned that, last summer,r the guests in the Yo-Semite hotels were alarmed when theyr heard Piutes (I do not know how to spell it) were on ther war path. The supplies they had counted on for comingr winter had failed them, the whites having allowed theierr cattle to browse on their favorite wild vegetable, and therer being a decrease of a kind of insect they were accustomedr to collect on the lake, they became desperate. The “pale faces”r fled, but no one was attacked, I believe. The Piutesr roasted deer and had their war dances near Hutchings’;r was it not frightful?r

r r

r Wednesday, A. M., we left Chinese Camp, taking a crossroadr through Copperopolis to Milton, thence by cars tor Stockton, where we took the boat for San Francisco, arrivingr here in safety early on Thursday.r

r r

r Good-bye to thee, Yo-Semite!r

r r

r Your affectionate daughter,r

r r

r ALICE.r

r r r

r r

r

r r r r

r

r r

Dramatis Personae

r r

r Early visitors to Yosemite typically traveled in parties for safety and mutual support.r This was true for Alice, who traveled with her brother, sister-in-law, and several others.r To break the ice, they adopted aliases and mandated everyone in the party use them, although this wasn’t strictly followed by everyone.r The party consisted of:r r

- r
- r Alice Ives Van Schaack, “Your Correspondent,” from Manlius, New Yorkr

- r
- r Mrs. C. P. “Kate” Van Schaack,r wife of Alice’s brother Chauncey, San Francisco businessmanr

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r

- r Peter Van Schaack, “The Boss,” brother of Alice and Chicago businessman

r

- r L. Samuel “Commodore,” Sacramento (not Stockton) businessman

r

- r John D. Gougar “Judge,” lawyer from Lafayette, Indiana. r Husband of woman’s suffragette Helen Gougarr

r

- r Morell J. Earl “Captain,” a youth with lawyer, from Lafayette, Indianar

r

- r John W. Gay “Corporal,” another youth with the lawyer, Lafayette, Indianar

r

- r Timothy Dwight Hunt “Chaplain,” pioneer Presbyterian minister from San Francisco. Originally from Niles, Michiganr

r

- r Hugh Foulke, “Professor,” Quaker bachelor and school principal, New York Cityr

r

- r G. B. Cooley “I am so tired,” Nashviller

r

- r Alex B. Thompson “Doctor,” minister, New York Cityr

r

- r Wales L. Palmer “Elder,” San Franciscor

r

- r James O. Gordon “Deacon,” San Franciscor

r

- r W. W. Childs “Duke,” Niagara Falls (joined party at Chinese Camp)r

r

- r Elizabeth B. Childs “Duchess,” wife of W. W., Niagara Falls (joined party at Chinese Camp)r

r

- r Mr. & Mrs. H. S. Chapman “Buckeyes,” a newly married pair, Cassopolis, Michigan (not Ohio)r

r

- r M. Bird “Counsellor,” a man of oracular sayings and a wealthy Benedict (from Shakespeare, meaning a (usually newly) married man) from New York Cityr

rr r

r Alice mentions several people the tourist party met along the way, including:r

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r

r

- r Elizabeth Cady Stanton, woman's suffrage leader

r

- r Susan B. Anthony, woman's suffrage leader

r

- r George W. King, artist from Auburn, New York; friend of John Muir and William Keith

r

- r James M. Hutchings, Yosemite hotel owner (Hutchings House or Upper Hotel)

r

- r "Emmanuel" is Yosemite guide Manuel Flores, who worked for James Hutchings

r

- r "Chief of the Yosemite," r so-called, is Tom Hutchings, r a Yosemite guide and Mono Paiute, who worked for James Hutchings

r

- r Stephen M. Cunningham, Yosemite guider

r

- r Mrs. Emily Snow, Yosemite hotel owner (La Casa Nevada)

rr r

r

About the Author

r r

r The Author, Alice Ives Van Schaack, r was the daughter of Henry C. and Adeline Van Schaack, r who privately printed this booklet. r According to records of Christ Church, Manlius, N.Y., r Alice Ives was born April 14, 1844. r

r r

r Alice's father, H. C. (Henry Cruger) Van Schaack was a lawyer. r He was born in Kinderhook, NY 1802 and died 1887 in Manlius, NY. r He received legal instruction from his father, r Peter Van Schaack (1747-1832), also a lawyer. r Henry published a biography of his father, r *The Life of Peter Van Schaack, LL. D: Embracing Selections from His Correspondence and Other Writings during the American Revolution, and His Exile in England* (1842). r Peter Van Schaack was neutral during the Revolutionary War, r refused to take an oath of allegiance, and was banished to England for a few years. r Peter's house is now a B&B in Kinderhook, NY. r Henry also published several pamphlets, including this one, r and collected manuscripts and letters r [Appleton's *Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1887-1889)]. r r

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r r r

r Alice traveled to Yosemite in 1871 with her brother, Peter of Chicago, and his sister-in-law Kate (wife of her brother Chauncey) of San Francisco, and others. r A letter to Alice's mother about her trip was reprinted as this booklet. r The route they took, by railroad, stage, and horseback, r can be followed on [1872 map of rail and stage routes to Yosemite](#) and [1872 Yosemite Valley map](#). r Snow's hotel register for La Casa Nevada shows the Van Schaack party visiting Little Yosemite Valley on July 31, 1871. r This register entry allowed historian James Snyder to identify the author and others, r as the book only used first names and aliases. r

r r

r After returning from Yosemite, Alice married Rev. William F. Hibbard on June 25, 1879 at Christ Church in Manlius. r Sometime after, she moved to Chicago, where her brother lived, and she married William Robert Stirling on April 26, 1883. r What happened to her first husband, Rev. Hibbard, is not known. r Stirling was born March 30, 1851 in Dunblane, Scotland, r and came to America in 1879. r Stirling was an officer of Joliet Steel Company and Illinois Steel Company. r They had 3 children, Alice May, Dorothy, and Jean Wedderburn Stirling. r Alice Stirling died while her daughter Jean was in college (ca. 1912?). r

r r

r Stirling Hall in Lake Forest, Illinois (a Chicago suburb) r was named after Alice and her husband r by her daughter Mrs. Francis Dickinson in 1927. r It was originally a tuberculosis preventorium, and is now a community hall. r

r r

r More information about Alice Van Schaack and the tourist party to Yosemite is in the forward of the 2002 facsimile of this book, by James B. Snyder. r

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r r

Bibliographical Information

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r Alice Ives Van Schaack (1844-ca. 1912), *A Familiar letter from a daughter Describing a few days spent at the Big Trees and the Yo-Semiter* (Chicago: privately printed by Horton & Leonard, 1871). r 21 pp. 22 cm. Ill. Paper wrapper. r Six copies are known to exist—three in libraries (Huntington Library, r University of Pennsylvania Library, and Yosemite Research Library), r and three in private collections. r Call number F868.Y6 V36. r

r r

r Reprinted as *A Familiar Letter from a Daughter to Her Mother* (Emeryville, California: Havilah Press, 2002). r Foreword by James B. Snyder. r Preface by Peter E. Hanff. r Limited to 150 copies. r From the [Havilah Press catalog](#): r

A Familiar Letter from a Daughter to Her Mother (1871) by Alice Ives Van Schaack

r *A familiar letter from a daughter to her mother* is a facsimile of a letter printed in 1871 describing a trip to Yosemite Valley with a foreword by Yosemite Park historian James B. Snyder. r The authoress who was previously known only as “Alice” has been identified as Alice I. Van Schaack from Manlius, New York. r Her traveling companions included relatives from Chicago and San Francisco and women’s suffrage leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. r Snyder outlines the difference between Alice’s travel account and others of her day. r A digitized copy of the facsimile is bound into the center of the text which also includes eight photographs and illustrations. r The edition of 150 copies was printed on a Vandercook and hand bound in white linen and blue boards at the press in 2002. r

r r r

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r —Dan Anderson, www.yosemite.ca.us

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r http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/a_familiar_letter/

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