A Vacation among the Sierras (1962) by Thomas Starr King

Thomas Starr King
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About the Author

Rev. Thomas Starr King was born in New York City in 1824. He was a Universalist and a Unitarian minister from Boston who went to San Francisco to become pastor of San Francisco's First Unitarian Church in 1860. Rev. King was a frail man, but a gifted, strong speaker who was much beloved. That summer he visited Yosemite and wrote a series of eight entertaining letters for the Boston *Evening Transcript,* and which are reprinted in this book. Many early accounts were either published only locally in California or discredited by Easterners as "humbugs." However, as Rev. King was a well-known and respected figure in New England and he previously wrote a book on the White Mountains, his word was taken at full value.

Rev. King spoke strongly for keeping California in the Union during the Civil War and had much influence. The lecture circuit exhausted him and he died unexpectedly in 1864 of diphtheria and pneumonia in San Francisco. His statue is one of two representating California in the U.S Capitol.

- More information on Thomas Star King (Unitarian Universalist Association)

Bibliographical Information

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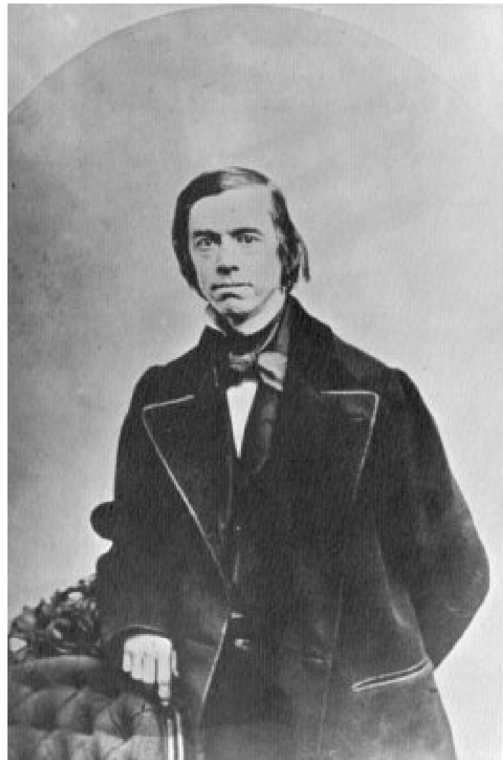
—Dan Anderson, www.yosemite.ca.us

A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS

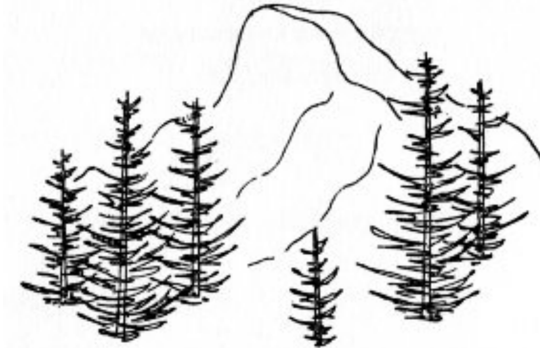


Bancroft Library Photograph

THOMAS STARR KING
About 1859

A Vacation among the Sierras

YOSEMITE IN 1860



BY THOMAS STARR KING

Edited, with an introduction and notes, by

JOHN A. HUSSEY

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Introduction

On April 28, 1860, a diminutive, unhandsome young man with long, lank hair and the luminous eyes of a spaniel stepped ashore in San Francisco to take up his duties as pastor of the First Unitarian Church. He had come, he told a friend, because "I do think we are unfaithful in huddling so closely around the cosy stove of civilization in this blessed Boston, and I, for one, am ready to go out into the cold and see if I am good for anything." [1]

The next morning, as he walked to the pulpit to deliver his first sermon in his new church, the curious and somewhat disappointed congregation wondered if this unimpressive figure could indeed be Thomas Starr King, the famed minister of the Hollis Street Church in Boston, the brilliant lecturer who shared the lyceum platform on equal terms with such giants as Henry Ward Beecher and Wendell Phillips, and the writer of so many graceful travel letters to the *Boston Evening Transcript* and of the recently published book, *The White Hills.* But once his "manly and sonorous" voice was heard, the audience sat spellbound, and when his sermon—not highly polished but displaying a "broad and liberal Christian charity"—was finished, "every thoughtful hearer felt that a new spiritual force was added to the community" The listeners knew, said one who was present, "they had a great man before them" [2]

From that moment Starr King's reputation grew rapidly in California. The press, in general, was friendly toward this newcomer who was ever ready to lend his eloquent tongue and to open his purse for worthy causes. During his first few weeks in San Francisco he lectured on behalf of the Mercantile Library Association and the Ladies' Seamen's Friend Society, among others. The only sour notes came from a few of the more conservatively orthodox in the community and from the pro-Southern papers, for it was known that King had long been an ardent opponent of slavery.

"I have given the people one or two decided intimations in that line wh[ich] frighten the timid parishioners" he wrote to a friend during May, 1860, "but still the church is crowded." The Southerners refused to attend his lectures, he continued. "They . . . said that I must not be countenanced. Result: crammed houses. How powerful the Southerners must be!" [3] It is not surprising that this scrappy little man with the broad mouth and pudgy nose soon became known to California's pro-slavery editors as the "Yankee poodle." [4]

King arrived in California committed to stay only a year. It was soon apparent, however, that more time would be required to pay off the church debt and place the Unitarian Society on a sound basis. By summer he

was talking of remaining for two years, but he was far from jubilant at the prospect. [5] “I am not homesick” he wrote bravely with tongue in cheek to a New York friend during May; but he was—desperately. “People are very kind.—But it isn’t New England. I wonder why I came” he confessed a few months later. [6]

His wife, Julia, was patently unreconciled to her “banishment” in San Francisco. The climate, the dust, the fleas, the high prices, the streets “bilious with Chinamen"—all upset her. “She often bursts out into a storm of wrath on the city” her husband confided to a friend on May 20. [7] It appeared that California might not long hold the Thomas Starr Kings!

But there were aspects of life in the West which the new preacher found appealing. One was the open-hearted manner in which he was immediately welcomed into some of the inner circles of San Francisco. In the words of another, and obviously impressed, “Liberal Christian minister” King’s parish was “soon unequaled in the city for the social and business standing, and the intellectual and moral worth of its membership.” [8] It was among such people of substance and merit that King found his new friends. And, somewhat to his surprise, he discovered that they listened with respect to his opinions, not only on religion and literature but on politics and civic affairs as well. He quickly realized that it was within his power to become a leader for good throughout the community and even beyond it.

By July, 1860, this newcomer was boldly urging the Dashaways, a San Francisco temperance society, to seek state financial support for their Home for the Inebriate. “I think” he stated in a public address, “by every consideration of justice, of honor and of duty, (regardless of mercy) the Legislature is bound to foster such an institution.” [9]

Such calm assurance in civic matters had not been his habit in Boston. Although he had performed many public services and had spoken often on public and political subjects, King never reached the first ranks of community leadership before coming to California. Despite his eminence in the pulpit and on the lecture platform and despite—or perhaps because of—his friendship with such men as Emerson and Wendell Phillips, he was never gathered in whole-heartedly by the Brahmins of Beacon Hill and Back Bay.

The son of a respected but impecunious Universalist minister, he had been forced to leave school to help support his family when his father became too ill to continue his duties. The death of his father when King was only fifteen had ended all hope of attending college, and he had spent the remainder of his youth as a clerk in a dry goods store, as a school teacher, and as a bookkeeper in the Charlestown Navy Yard. In his spare time he continued his studies for the ministry under the supervision of several learned preachers who recognized his remarkable intellectual gifts.

When he was called to his first church at the age of twenty-two he was considered by his peers in the ministry to be better prepared for his duties than most divinity school graduates; but this fact was no substitute in Boston for family connections and a Harvard education. “The circle of fashion could hardly comprehend his transcendent merit;” admitted one of King’s friends.” [10]

“Any attempt of his to assume the position of a leader of public opinion in Boston” wrote another long-time associate, “would have been crushed by the mere superciliousness of the educated and fashionable classes. All that would be necessary to teach him his subordinate position would have been a few blandly ironical sneers, a little lifting of the eyebrows, a slight shrugging of the shoulders, and, in the clubs, an expression of apathetic wonder as to who was the Unitarian parson who talked in such ‘tall’ language.” [11]

King, outwardly buoyant and humorous, was inwardly sensitive. He knew that he was sometimes slightingly referred to as the “graduate of the Boston Navy Yard;” and he tempered his actions accordingly; but he was too sound and too sensible to let the situation mar his life and work. He laughed when a Worcester church made him an offer at double his salary"—provided he would first study for a year at the Harvard Divinity

School. [12] During 1850 Harvard College granted him an honorary Master of Arts degree. “Only think of it” he joked; “A.M.? Wonder when I shall be P.M.? Probably not till after the *Meridian* of life.” [13]

Nevertheless, it was a heady experience for King to find that in San Francisco he was judged solely on the basis of his own intrinsic merits. “I am wanted for several societies” he wrote to a New York friend on June 4, 1860. “In fact” he added, “I am quite in demand, & am very near being ‘somebody’ out here.” [14] Elbert Hubbard was sometimes mistaken in what he wrote, but he was right when he said, “Starr King was that kind of Plant which needs to be repotted in order to make it flower at its very best.” [15]

Another aspect of San Francisco life which aroused King’s enthusiasm was the opportunity to explore and enjoy the yet almost pristine beauty of California. When he sailed into the Golden Gate he brought with him an already secure reputation as a keen observer of the natural scene and as a mountaineer of tested ability.

At the age of thirteen he had visited the White Hills of New Hampshire. That first look, evidently, kindled within him an enthusiasm which endured nearly as long as life itself. After he became a minister, he spent his vacations either on the New England coast or in the mountains of New Hampshire, but in time he concentrated on the latter. It was in the highlands that he found his greatest refreshment and inspiration. “Oh God! how wonderful are thy works!” he wrote after an excursion through the White Hills in 1849. “One passage of Scripture seems to be written on every cliff, and echoed to the soul from every ridge.” [16]

Before long he knew every summit and valley in the range, much better, it is said, than even the native guides. A noble peak and a ravine which he was the first to explore still bear his name. The memory of his exploits and presence yet lingers in the hills of New Hampshire, though not always in accurate form. “Starr King did climb” notes one recent book on the region. “From his youth on into his sixties he climbed most of our big peaks over those early God-awful trails and often with no trail at all"—a truly prodigious feat for one who did not reach his fortieth birthday! [17]

In 1853 he began sending articles on his mountain excursions to the *Boston Transcript.* These pieces proved popular and formed the backbone of his book, *The White Hills,* which was published in 1859, only a few months before his departure for California. King made arrangements with the editor of the paper, one of his good friends, to continue supplying articles during his trip to the West Coast and after his arrival. Thus, at least partly to find interesting material for his Boston audience, he soon began to “tap the scenery of the state” by making little journeys out into the rural districts from San Francisco.

Before a month passed he drove around the southern arm of San Francisco Bay and visited a newly discovered limestone cave in El Dorado County. This last trip carried him into the Mother Lode region, and at one point he obtained a panoramic view of the snow-capped Sierra Nevada. The dazzling array of soaring peaks was stunning to the newcomer. If you think the mere mention of the range is impressive, he wrote in a jocular vein to a correspondent in New York, “what then when you see it fitly described by the great prose-poet of mountains?—I mean, of course, *myself.*” [18] Other visits, to Napa Valley and elsewhere on the north shore of the bay, soon followed, all to be pictured in glowing terms for the readers of the *Transcript.*

King may have been disappointed in his first impressions of the raw and bustling San Francisco, but he at once fell in love with the rural countryside. His letters and articles are almost rhapsodic when they describe the great fields of wildflowers, the orchards and vineyards, the rolling hills, and the calm bays of central California. “I shall enjoy my work here, and the country will be a perpetual resource and delight,” he predicted on May 11; and at least as early as May 20 he had determined to write a book on the state.” [19]

These two streams in Starr King’s new life—his growing intimacy with the more substantial members of his parish and community, and his rush to see as much of California’s scenery as possible during the two years he planned to remain—appparently merged during the late spring of 1860 to start him on the road to the

Yosemite Valley. Several of King's new friends—men of property and broad experience in the world—were intrigued by the reports which had been floating about San Francisco for nearly ten years of the great cliffs and waterfalls to be found along the upper Merced River. They wanted to "see the elephant" and they wanted the new minister to go with them. King was anxious to go. He had heard of the wonders of this Sierra gorge while still in Boston and hoped to measure its glories against those of his own White Hills. A meeting of minds quickly resulted.

Little is known concerning the origins of the excursion. Evidently the travelers at first hoped to make the trip during late May or June, but King's commitments, largely speaking engagements, caused a delay until nearly the middle of July. Then, a preacher had to be found to take King's pulpit during his absence. The Reverend Samuel D. Simonds, pastor of the Folsom Street Methodist Church, agreed to fill the gap for one Sunday. On the evening of July 10 King lectured in his own church on behalf of the "Inebriate Asylum" of the Dashaway Association, whose members had sworn solemnly to "dash away the cup." When he stepped down from the lectern his calendar was clear for nearly two weeks ahead. [20]

The next afternoon he and four companions boarded the steamboat *Cornelia* for the pleasant ride up the bay and the San Joaquin River to Stockton. An hour before departure time King was still at his eternal writing of letters to friends. "But I must stop, & run for the boat & the Sierras" he at last told one correspondent. "Hallelujah." [21]

In addition to King, the only member of the party who thus far has been positively identified was Squire P. Dewey, a forty-niner and San Francisco resident who had prospered in real estate. Probably also one of the party—at least he accompanied King during a walk in Yosemite—was Alpheus Bull, another arrival of 1849 who had made his "pile" as a merchant and miller in the upper Sacramento Valley. At any rate, besides King and [22] Dewey there were two other mature men in the company and a "supple youth of sixteen," a son of one of the excursionists, evidently Dewey.

A trip to Yosemite in 1860 was still a pioneering experience. Although miners undoubtedly saw the valley during the restless search for gold in 1849 and 1850 and may even have descended to its floor, the effective discovery was not made until 1851 when the volunteer troops of the Mariposa Battalion went in to round up the local Indians. The discoverers were impressed by the great domes and cliffs of the Yosemite, but newspaper accounts of their find attracted little attention. Other visitors entered the valley during the years immediately following, but they all seem to have had some utilitarian purpose in mind—prospecting, punishing renegade natives, or, even, hunting grizzly bears.

The first recognized party of tourists did not reach Yosemite until 1855. It was headed by James Mason Hutchings and included Thomas A. Ayres, the first artist known to have sketched the valley. Due to the reports spread by the Hutchings party, other groups of sight-seers entered later in the same year, and during 1856 rough horse trails were completed into the gorge from both Mariposa and Coulterville. A hotel of sorts was erected in the latter year, but no adequate accommodations for travelers were available until Beardsley and Hite's Upper Hotel was fully opened for business during the summer of 1859. The visitors of 1860, therefore, were reasonably near the front of the [23] trickle of tourists which has since swelled to a mighty flood.

The *Cornelia* reached Stockton very early on the morning of Thursday, July 12; and at six o'clock King and his friends were aboard the stage for Coulterville, about seventy-five miles to the southeast. The route through Knights Ferry and Don Pedro's Bar was then a field of operation much favored by highwaymen, and the preacher from New England could not repress a thrill at the possibility of participating in that quintessence of frontier experiences, a holdup. "Our stage took a box of treasure & it was guarded by double-barreled rifles all *capped,*" he wrote to a friend that evening. [24]

But the party reached its day's destination without unusual incident; and the next morning the travelers mounted horses for the long, hot ride through the Sierra foothills to Mariposa. That tourist travel to Yosemite was still in its infancy is amply attested by the fact that the San Franciscans considered it necessary to hire two guides to accompany them beyond Coulterville, neither of whom, it turned out, had ever been into the valley by the Mariposa route.

High point of the day's journey for King was the stop at John Charles Frémont's Mariposa Estate. As an abolitionist, he had supported the Pathfinder's bid for the Presidency in 1856; and a firm friendship between the Kings and the Frémonts was even then developing in San Francisco. He was pleased when he learned that two places on the estate, Benton Mills and Bullion Mountain, had been christened in honor of the Pathfinder's father-in-law, Thomas Hart Benton. "Capital names!" he exclaimed." [25]

On the morning of July 14 the travelers rode from Mariposa over the Chowchilla Mountains to Clark's Ranch at the present Wawona. They hired a local pig driver as a guide and spent the afternoon exploring the nearby Mariposa Grove. Always the inveterate correspondent, King stopped amidst the giant sequoias to write a letter to one of his Eastern friends, the Reverend William R. Alger. His words to Alger perfectly reveal not only his own wonder at the natural beauties about him but also his capacity to convey those beauties to others.

"It is Saturday evening, 5 1/4 p. m. (8 1/2 p. m. with you)," he wrote, "and the delicious afternoon light is pouring down the snuff-colored back of the Titan over my head, who is as old at least as Christianity. . . . The voices of the party—seven men— with me, sound strangely, hallowing in the distance, in this natural temple in which man is a mite. Above their noise swells the musical melancholy of the old conservatives, wakened by winds that sweep from the snow-capped granite of the Sierras which we see across a mighty gorge, by a walk of but a few rods distance. I can scarcely credit my senses that I am here. . . . The Guide, who looks like Henry Ward Beecher, and would serve as his double, asks: 'Gettin' putty well through, mister?' I say, 'Yes' so I must stop." [26]

The next day the company pushed on into Yosemite Valley. King's first view of the gorge, obtained from the top of the south rim at or near Old Inspiration Point, was a thrilling but shattering experience. "Poor White Mountain Notch" he quipped to a correspondent that evening. "Its nose is broken. If you can find any copies of King's book on the New Hampshire ant-hills, I advise you, as a friend to the author, to buy up the remaining edition & make a bonfire of them in the park." [27]

King and his companions devoted Monday and Tuesday, July 16 and 17, to an examination of the valley itself. Like most tourists even today, they visited Mirror Lake and the principal waterfalls. Somewhat to his surprise, King felt at ease beneath the towering rocks. "I supposed that grotesqueness would be the prominent characteristic of the cliffs and pillars. But the forms are very noble" he told a friend on the evening of the seventeenth. "We have persons in our party who have scoured Switzerland, and travelled extensively among the Peruvian Andes; and they say that no such rock-scenery is offered by Alps or Cordilleras." Yet, even amidst all "the beauty and wildness" which he appreciated with every fiber, he could not forget his old home. "My heart is in New England" he confided as he sat beside the waning campfire, lulled by the distant roar of Yosemite Falls. [28]

The homeward journey was begun on the morning of July 18. Riding through Crane Flat on the north side of Yosemite Valley, the party reached Coulterville by evening on the nineteenth. Few details are available concerning the remainder of the trip, but presumably San Francisco was reached by the twenty-first, since the newspapers of that date announced that King would preach the next day.

King returned home jubilant. "Back from the Yo Semite!" he exulted on July 22. "Sunburned, blistered, tired, but strong & full of enthusiasm for the glorious notch & the Sierras! I shall preach about it next Sunday,—&, in time, write two or three letters to the *Transcript* concerning it. Undoubtedly it is the grandest piece of rock-

& water-scenery in the world.” [29]

The trip to Yosemite was an important event in King’s career. The impact of the endless forests, the massive granite walls, and the serrated peaks was as deep as it was immediate. Something of what the experience meant to him can be gained from the sermon on Yosemite which he delivered a week after his return. “A sermon on Yosemite?” asked the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin* in anticipation of the scornful smiles of the orthodox. Yes, the editor answered. “Did not He preach a sermon on the mount?” [30] As may be judged from his text, “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,” for King the wonders of Yosemite were one more magnificent revelation of God’s eternal glory.

The Sierra Nevada became a force in King’s life. Although parish, community, and wartime labors did not permit many mountain journeys during the four additional years allotted him on earth, he did make several other Sierra visits. There were, for instance, a trip with his family to the Calaveras Grove and, notably, one to Lake Tahoe. “Next to the Himalaya” he said in one of his sermons, the Sierra Nevada, “bears the most noble name of all the mountain-chains on the globe.” [31]

His feelings about the range were summed up in two powerful sermons preached during 1863, “Lessons from the Sierra Nevada” and “Living Water from Lake Tahoe.” In the latter he made the statement that the great scenes in nature are not wasted even though put to no secular service or even though never observed by human eyes. God’s purpose in creating such glories, he said, is not to receive “our poor appreciation.” Rather, he continued, “it is to express the fullness of his thought, the overflow of his art, the depth of his goodness, and to enjoy the expression of it, that God compacts the globes in space, and adorns them with splendors like the Himalaya and the Andes, and sprinkles upon them the brilliance of lakes and seas, and binds them into mighty harmonies, and beholds them obey his central will.” It is our “sovereign privilege,” King observed, “that we are called to the possibility of sympathy with his joy.” By love of nature, “we go into harmony with God.” [32]

These words came close to being, if indeed they were not, a plea for scenic conservation. One wonders what effect, if any, they may have had upon the California gentlemen “of fortune, of taste and of refinement.” who during the next year successfully sponsored the Congressional bill which set aside the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove for “Public use, resort and recreation . . . inalienable for all time.”

As far as available sources reveal, it appears that after the Yosemite trip King thought less and less of writing a book about California and more and more of one concerning the Sierra. “Had he lived another year,.” said one of his most intimate friends, “we should have had the pendent of his ‘White Hills’ in an adequate picture of the Sierra Nevada.” [33]

It perhaps would be going too far to say that Starr King started to become a Californian during his Yosemite visit. Till his last breath he maintained his affection for New England and continued to speak of returning there “on a vacation of one, two, or a dozen, or thirty years.” [34] Yet, Yosemite made a powerful impression on him, and his love for California scenery undoubtedly was one of the reasons he kept extending the term of his San Francisco residence. At the time of his death in 1864 the former Bostonian was planning to leave California for a vacation in Europe, but he said that after two years he “would be glad to return and remain.” His close associate, R. B. Swain, said, “I am sure he had no intention of leaving us permanently.” [35] Something had wooed Starr King from the White Hills. Could it have been the Yosemite?

If the Yosemite visit of 1860 was important for Starr King, it was perhaps even more significant for Yosemite. During the fall of that year King got around to describing the journey for the readers of the *Boston Evening Transcript.* Instead of two or three letters as originally planned, the account occupied eight, all of which were printed in scattered issues of the paper between December 1, 1860, and February 9, 1861.

King's lively narrative, which has been termed "the first really thorough description of an extended Yosemite trip," was, as were all his California letters, well received and widely read. Oliver Wendell Holmes told King, "We read all you write from California with great pleasure," and asked for a stereoscopic picture of the "Great Pines." John Greenleaf Whittier also told King of his interest in "thy occasional letters in the *Transcript.*" King's longtime friend, Henry W. Bellows, said shortly after the preacher's death, "You will find the newspapers in which his portraiture of these sublime and charming scenes are found, carefully laid away in hundreds of New England homes, as permanent sources of delight." [36]

King was by no means the first person to call the wonders of Yosemite to public attention. The volunteer soldiers who first entered the valley during 1851 and members of later expeditions gave accounts of their exploits to the California newspapers, but little was said in these letters about the scenery observed. However, the "fortuitous" mention of a thousand-foot waterfall by one of these early writers caught the eye of James Mason Hutchings, who was planning to publish an illustrated monthly magazine. Seeing possibilities for story material, he and four companions, guided by two Indians, visited the valley during the summer of 1855. While returning from this pioneer tourist excursion, the party stopped at Mariposa, and Hutchings wrote a "full rehearsal" of all the sights observed for the local press. His sketch appeared in the *Mariposa Gazette* on July 12, 1855, and was reprinted by "most of the leading newspapers of the day." [37]

Hutchings did not maintain that his was the first article about Yosemite, but he asserted that as a result of it "for the first time the attention of the public, *generally,* was awakened towards the marvelous scenery of the Yo Semite Valley." The later flourishing and lucrative Yosemite tourist trade was, he claimed, a direct result of the description he wrote for the *Mariposa Gazette.* "It was therefore my good fortune to start this scenic and financial ball rolling," he once declared with due modesty to the members of the California State Legislature." [38] And no one has ever successfully contradicted him.

Stimulated by the reports circulated by the Hutchings party, other sight-seers pushed into the gorge that same summer. As a result, the "incomparable valley" received additional publicity. One of the 1855 visitors, the Reverend W. A. Scott of San Francisco, produced several "tersely written" articles upon his return; and in October, 1855, a drawing of Yosemite Falls made by Thomas A. Ayres during the Hutchings trip was published as a lithograph and was widely circulated throughout the nation.

The first extended description of the valley was printed during July, 1856, by Hutchings in his own *Hutchings' California Magazine.* That same summer the ill-fated Thomas Ayres visited Yosemite again, and on returning to San Francisco he gave the press an account of his trip which occupied almost two columns of densely spaced type. By that time word of Yosemite's wonders was beginning to be distributed along the Altantic seaboard, and before the end of 1856 at least one enthusiastic description of valley scenery had been published in the East." [39]

The next year James Denman, principal of a San Francisco school, ventured to Yosemite with a company of sight-seers. In a six-part article entitled "The Sublime and the Beautiful of California" he advised the readers of the San Francisco *Bulletin* that those "who can only find pleasure and recreation in the richly carpeted halls of luxury" should visit Napa Springs; and then he proceeded to recount in infinite detail the joys and delights of roughing it on a camping trip to the Yosemite. Dr. Lafayette Houghton Bunnell, a member of the Mariposa Battalion of 1851 and historian of Yosemite's discovery, later maintained that Denman's account "was the first description that gave the public any definite idea of the magnitude of the scenery, or any accuracy of measurements of the heights of the diffs and waterfalls." [40]

Another candidate for the honor of producing the "first" substantial published description of a trip to the new wonderland was the unnamed "special reporter" of the San Francisco *Alta California* who during the summer of 1858 wrote a lengthy narrative entitled "The Yo-Semite Falls—A Ramble Thitther." [41] The prominent California author, John S. Hittell, disregarded all of these earlier accounts and in his once-popular guidebook

to Yosemite asserted that the Reverend Ferdinand C. Ewer produced "the first long description of the scenery" as the result of a visit made during 1859." [42]

But undoubtedly the most important account of a trip to Yosemite produced during that year was the one written by Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Tribune,* during his famous overland journey to California. Greeley's experiences while rushing through Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove during August, 1859, were recounted in a series of letters published in the *Tribune* that same season. The next year these articles were gathered together to form his book, *An Overland Journey, from New York to San Francisco, in the Summer of 1859.* Greeley did not "multiply details" in his description of the valley, and he pronounced Yosemite Falls a "humbug" because there was little water in it at the time of his visit; but the total impression of the scene upon him is summarized by his words: "I know of no single wonder of nature on earth which can claim a superiority over the Yosemite" Greeley's articles reached a wide audience in the East. One reader was a Boston minister named Thomas Starr King.

It is plain, therefore, that by the time King came along in 1860 the Yosemite Valley had been frequently described in print and that a number of detailed accounts of visits to the gorge had been published. At least one of these travel narratives had been circulated extensively in the eastern part of the United States. The importance of King's letters in making Yosemite known, then, lay not so much in their early date, their length, or in their numerous readers. His narrative marked a milestone in Yosemite literature because of his ability to make others visualize the scenes described and because of his already established reputation as a nature writer.

If the naturalists who interpret our nation's great scenic parks have learned anything from years of dealing with the public, it is that there are many persons who must be told that a view is beautiful before they will be impressed. Accounts of Yosemite's wonders circulated through the country for some years without creating much of a stir. No recognized authority on scenery had told people that here was something worth looking at.

As the editor of the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin* said at the time of King's death, his *White Hills* "had made the White Mountains classical, and brought them within the circle of all Eastern summer tourists." When this man spoke of the beauties of Yosemite, New Englanders were inclined to listen. "No one had really seen the Sierra Nevada, Mt. Shasta, the Yo Semite Valley, or the coast of Oregon and the region of Mt. Hood," said Henry W. Bellows, "until his fine eye saw and his cunning brain and hand depicted them"," [43] It was not without reason that writers of promotional literature and Yosemite guidebooks soon began to use King's words and name to give authority to their statements. [44]

Perhaps this point should not be too long belabored, since, after all, it is difficult to prove that any significant number of the tourists who later poured into Yosemite were motivated by reading King's letters. Yet he undoubtedly helped to bring the valley into the national consciousness as a place worth seeing— and worth preserving. In the words of one authority, King's articles "acquainted the Easterners better than anything else could with the fabulous beauties of Yosemite." [45] And aside from their importance in making Yosemite known, King's letters are significant today as historical source materials, for the intimate glimpses they give of such places as Coulterville, the Mariposa Estate, Clark's Ranch, and the Yosemite Valley itself.

One other value of the letters must be noted. They throw an illuminating shaft of light upon the personality of Thomas Starr King. Most of King's biographers speak of his ebullient, infectious sense of humor. "A casual acquaintance might suppose," wrote one of these chroniclers, "that to tell stories was his great ambition." [46] A favorite method of expressing his love of fun was to imitate others. On one recalled occasion, for instance, he mimicked the preaching of Henry Ward Beecher for Emerson, to the mutual delight of both himself and the Sage of Concord. [47] "He had the keenest eye for the odd, eccentric and ludicrous in the speech and conduct of his fellow-creatures," said Charles W. Wendte. "No one had such a fund of anecdotes and comical experiences, and no one could tell a story so inimitably." [48]

This trait is admirably illustrated in King's Yosemite letters. His gleeful sketches of the valley hotel proprieter, Charles Peck, who naively described a cascade-streaked cliff as "jest like calico," display all the story-telling talents claimed by the biographers. Yet the anecdotes also seem to show something more.

King's mimicries, claimed his associates, were made in the kindest of spirits. "His wit, however telling, was so genial that it never wounded a heart or lost him a friend," explained one of his parishioners. [49] But to present-day ears, unaccustomed to nineteenth-century humor which often ridiculed people of certain classes, races, or nationalities, these stories may seem to show a trace of condescension on the part of their scholarly Boston-oriented narrator. King may have meant no slight, but one wonders what landlord Peck may have felt if anyone bothered to point out to him his naked soul exposed to the readers of the *Evening Transcript.*

It may not be amiss to suggest that King's biographers have thus far failed to give the full measure of their man. In fact, one is inclined to feel that few persons have suffered so much at the hands of their friends. "Keep my memory green," charged King as he lay on his deathbed. His admirers to the present day have striven faithfully to carry out that injunction. In the process they have come near to praising their subject into oblivion.

Beyond a doubt King possessed all the essential inner goodness and most of the talents claimed for him. But portraying him almost exclusively in the robes of a saint has not tended to make him a personality of unalloyed appeal to those not fortunate enough to have known him during his lifetime. One of King's boyhood teachers later recorded his impressions of the youth for the benefit of posterity. "I can call to remembrance no act or word in his school-days to censure or disapprove," said this worthy man. "Always cheerful, industrious, and conscientious, he left no duty unperformed. . . . I always felt that I had at least one pupil whose whole influence was on the side of nobleness, justice, and truth; and whose example in all respects, by the wayside, on the playground, and in the schoolroom, was exerted in sustaining and upholding wise and judicious regulations." [50] Even though this picture may be true, it does not serve to whet the appetite for more information about the subject.

Good, wise, and generous though he was, Thomas Starr King was no plaster saint. He was very much a man, with some of man's failings and shortcomings. To recognize this fact does not detract from his stature but only serves to make him more tangible.

It might be well to acknowledge openly, for instance, that King was not always charitable, forgiving, and tolerant. When the cause of evil, as he saw it, was to be combatted, he was no man to live and let live.

This aspect of his personality is illustrated by an incident which occurred while the minister and his family were *en route* from New York to California. It was discovered that a fellow passenger aboard ship, a "Madame Doremus" was in reality the notorious Mrs. E. A. Cunningham, whose trial for the murder of Dr. Harvey Burdell in 1857 had for months been the sensation of New York. She had been acquitted in triumph after a mishandled prosecution had made her somewhat of a heroine, but all public good will was lost when she was detected attempting to pass off a borrowed infant as her child by Dr. Burdell in order to gain possession of the victim's not inconsiderable estate.

King's diary appears to show that he helped expose this woman who, "her name an epithet of approbrium on every tongue" was seeking to make a new start in life on the distant shore of the Pacific. The unrelenting minister of Jehovah would have no part in sheltering one whom he considered to be a "lying wretch." [51]

Ordinarily in political debates or in theological arguments it was his habit to state the position of his opponent in clear, rational, and disinterested terms before he proceeded methodically and rapidly to demolish it in phrases quite as temperate. But under the stress of great issues his calm often gave way to impatience, his reasoned argument to invective. In the heat of crisis "his love of a fight was far from Christlike." [52]

And sometimes it did not take too great an issue to arouse his ire. Shortly after his arrival in San Francisco he fell into a dispute with the officers of the Episcopal Diocese of California. These gentlemen, it seems, were displeased because King, a Unitarian, had been invited by the Episcopal Sunday School to deliver a Fourth of July oration. King was humorous and reasonably polite in the rejoinders which were printed in the newspapers, and he did give the speech; but the matter rankled in his breast. A few months later he told a friend, "the Episcopalians must be put in *their corner,* & not be suffered to swagger over the whole field & bully the rest of us." [53]

Appalled by the unsafe and uncomfortable conditions on the Vanderbilt ships to the Isthmus, King called the owner a "shark and a wolf intermixed" who "ought to be dragged after the ship, in the sea" He characterized Vanderbilt's son-in-law as a "liar," and advised a friend to be charitable and try to think of the shipping magnate as "a genial old gentleman full of the spirit of brotherly kindness at ten per cent." [54]

But it was the Civil War that most aroused King's impatience and fighting spirit. Pray for Jefferson Davis as president of the seceding states? he asked on one public occasion. "Pray for him! As soon as for antichrist! Never!" During 1862 when the fight in the East was going badly for the Union, King became despondent. "What louts & boobies are *[sic]* leaders are!" he complained. "Pope is a swaggering braggart; McClellan a slowpoke; Lincoln a wretched tavern-joker in the most serious hours of history." [55]

Such words reveal a flesh and blood man who knew what he believed to be right and who was willing to fight for it. He had a crusader's intolerance for those whom he considered to be immoral, traitorous, proud, lazy, or vain. "The dandy," he once said with scorn, "is entitled to stand in the first rank of ghosts—he is a whiskered essence, an organized perfume." [56] Such human qualities are shared with many another of the world's heroes, and Thomas Starr King's biographers have no need to be ashamed of them.

It is difficult to anticipate what history's final judgment will be in the case of Thomas Starr King. As an orator he moved thousands. Even the least educated could feel the power of his inner conviction. "Them's idees," a man was heard to say at one of his lectures. Yet "orators live but in memory"; and as we read his speeches a century later some of them still sway us, in places we catch the glint of his fire, but for the most part the themes, though lofty, worthy, and logically developed, seem dully unoriginal and the pace pedestrian. We must conclude that it was less what was said than when it was said and who said it that was the key to his greatness on the platform. A woman who carried the treasured memory of one of King's lectures for twenty-five years confessed that "it wasn't the address so much as the man" that captivated her." [57] Evidently Bret Harte wrote better than he knew when he pondered "On a Pen of Thomas Starr King":

> "But all in vain the enchanter's wand we wave:
> No stroke of ours recalls his magic vision;
> The incantation that its power gave
> Sleeps with the dead magician." [58]

"Do we inquire who is greatest as a preacher?" Starr King once asked. "The definition should be," he continued, "he who can enlighten most dearly the minds of men in regard to duty, thrill them with a conviction of responsibility, and draw them by the sweetest persuasion to the law of God and to purity of life." [59] A minister who set such an ideal for himself could scarcely help but be a good preacher, and Starr King was far more than good. A disciple of William Ellery Channing, he "was one of the great propagators of the Unitarian faith." [60] Churchmen of his persuasion even now say that his sermons and his theological discourses are as valid as the day they were written.

These are matters a layman hesitates to judge, but one hazards the guess that not even many churchmen read Starr King's sermons today. Certainly the average man, if he could be brought to study them, would find little to thrill him in King's treatises on "The Trinity" or "The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment"; and even the best

of his sermons are rather hard going. Eternal truths remain the same, but ways of explaining them change from generation to generation.

At first glance, King's position as a great Civil War patriot seems secure. Largely in recognition of his services to the Union cause, his likeness, along with that of Father Serra, represents California in Statuary Hall in the nation's capitol. His portrait in Sacramento bears the inscription: "The man whose matchless oratory saved California to the Union." A typical statement of his biographers asserts: "Historians everywhere agree that Starr King, almost single-handed, saved a great state for the Union." [61]

As a matter of fact, historians are in no such agreement. Most of the general histories of California pay rather scant attention to King's rôle as a patriot during the conflict. Sober, solid research has demonstrated to the satisfaction of many scholarly and professional historians that California would have remained in the Union had there been no Thomas Starr King— or Colonel E. D. Baker, or the Sacramento *Union,* or any of the other single forces which have been advanced as the "savior" of California." [62] The sweeping assertions by King's admirers may actually have harmed his reputation. Because of the controversy generated by these claims, one suspects, King's very real services in arousing active patriotism and in raising funds for the Sanitary Commission, and his part in the development of the new Republican party in the state, have not been given the unbiased, scholarly attention they deserve. The final verdict on King the "savior of California" must await a new trial.

It would be ironic if, in the long run, King should be remembered principally as a nature writer. Except for a few eulogists at the time of his death, not even King's most enthusiastic advocates have claimed that he was a great author. Yet he has a recognized place among the group headed by Emerson and Thoreau which during the mid-nineteenth century caused Americans to see the world with "new eyes."

King was an ardent admirer of nature, both in the field and as described on the written page. "I envy you your approaching rapture," he once told a friend who was about to read Thoreau's *Walden.* [63] For him nature was a continual revelation of God, an exciting confirmation of the dignity of human nature, and a lesson in the meaning of immortality. [64]

Early during his visits to the White Hills he became convinced that the "rare beauty" of this region should be better known to the people of Boston and the Eastern states, and he began to describe the mountains for the readers of the *Transcript.* His purpose in writing these articles and his later book, *The White Hills; Their Legends, Landscape, and Poetry,* was, he said, "to help persons appreciate landscape more adequately" and to provide a guide and a stimulant to the enjoyment of particular "noble landscapes" in New Hampshire." [65] His effort was successful. He carried his readers with him through the White Hills describing scenes, and events of history and legend, in clear and animated, and sometimes brilliant, prose.

His book was recognized as "a classic in every respect." [66] It was, said one reviewer, "the most elaborate attempt to picture to the mind's eye the grandeur and beauty of natural scenery which has graced our native literature" and it was called "a volume of aesthetic teaching, thus far without a rival." [67] Following *Walden* by only five years and Beecher's *Star Papers* by only four, roughly contemporaneous with the articles of Wilson Flagg and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and preceding by six years the first nature essay of John Burroughs, King's *White Hills* was a representative product of one of the greatest periods of American nature writing. King's method of presentation, says one careful student, "was not only enjoyed by his contemporaries but was copied by many a later writer." [68]

Unfortunately for the book's long-range popularity, certain aspects of King's writing were not entirely in accord with later literary tastes. His work reveals a decided tendency to force upon White Hills visitors "all the emotions they ought to feel and all the imaginations they ought to shape, in viewing magnificent scenery." [69] King pillories at length people who hurry through picturesque landscapes or otherwise fail to appreciate

sublime views. “A large proportion of the summer travellers in New Hampshire bolt the scenery, as a man, driven by work, bolts his dinner in a restaurant,” he scolds in one typical outburst.

Another of his aims was to “associate with principal scenes poetic passages which illustrate, either the permanent character of the views, or some peculiar aspect in which the author of the book has seen them.” After all, he explained, “one cannot carry a poetic library on a journey among the hills"; and he attempted to supply the deficiency by liberal quotations from the great poets of America and Europe. He also followed Ruskin in believing that landscapes should be judged according to arbitrary rules of art. Thus, he said in describing a certain view, “the spot would be perfect” if only the scene could be amended to place a lake in the foreground. [70] Some of these same characteristics mark his later Yosemite letters and may explain why they have failed to remain alive in California literature.

The scholarly and systematic study of nature writing in America is still a relatively recent development. [71] King’s reputation in this field has survived the test of the pioneer surveys; it may increase as the work continues. In any new assessment, King’s Yosemite letters may play a significant part.

After their first publication in the *Boston Transcript,* King’s eight articles on his visit to the Yosemite gradually fell into obscurity. [72] Brief excerpts from them have appeared in several Yosemite guidebooks and in biographies of King, and longer parts were presented in Charles W. Wendte’s *Thomas Starr King, Patriot and Preacher;* but as far as the present editor has been able to determine, the series has never before been reprinted in its entirety. The letters are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the Transcript, except that obvious typographical errors have been corrected and present-day usage has been followed in italicizing the titles of publications, in the spelling of Latin plant names, and in the placing of accent marks.

In republishing Starr King’s Yosemite letters, The Book Club of California has been assisted by many persons and institutions. Above all, the Club acknowledges its indebtedness to Dr. Hans Huth, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago. It was through Dr. Huth’s perceptive study, *Yosemite: the Story of an Idea,* that the present editor first became aware of the importance of King’s narrative. Dr. Huth had hoped to publish the letters himself, but he cheerfully yielded his prior claim and even lent his photostats of the *Transcript* articles.

Special thanks are also due to Dr. James D. Hart, Acting Director, and to the staff of the Bancroft Library for research assistance and for permission to reproduce items from the library’s superb collection of early Yosemite and Mariposa photographs. The Club also expresses its appreciation to Mrs. Helen S. Giffen and Dr. Elliot Evans, of the staff of the Society of California Pioneers; Mr. Douglass H. Hubbard, Chief Park Naturalist, Yosemite National Park; Mrs. Sarah W. Flannery, Mr. B. Joseph O’Neil, and Mr. Michael J. Venezia, of the Boston Public Library; Mr. John M. Mahoney, of the Western Regional Office, National Park Service; Mr. Allan R. Ottley, California Section Librarian, and the staff of the California State Library; and the Yosemite Natural History Association for information concerning Thomas Starr King and the early history of Yosemite.

John A. Hussey

Piedmont, California
August 8, 1962

Letter One
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 1

SAN FRANCISCO, October, 1860.

Dear Transcript: I sit down to write you a long account of a short vacation. But when I tell you that the mammoth trees, the Frémont gold estate, and the Yo-Semite valley and cataracts, are among the objects to which the nine runaway days introduced me, you will see that I have a tolerable excuse for prolixity in the record, even if I fail to interest your readers through the tameness of the report.

The season for pleasure-travelling in California is very short. In the winter, when it is the most delightful in San Francisco, the roads of the interior are so muddy or worn with rains, that travelling in the stages is decidedly the reverse of luxurious, and all the mountain passes are packed with snow. In midsummer and early autumn, the roads are nearly knee-deep with dust; the sun rays seem to fall through a lens upon you; and the land looks parched as though it lay under a curse of perpetual barrenness. From the first of May to the middle of June the conditions are favorable. The roads are neither muddy nor dusty; the hill-sides are green and spotted with bloom; the air is not that of a furnace; the oaks bend their tasselled arches over young grass or grain; the snow has been dislodged from all but the supreme summits of the Sierras, and thence it feeds quietly the waterfalls near the passes, which, in midsummer, are dry. Whoever would enjoy a journey into the interior, must not let this golden season slip.

I was severely disappointed, therefore, when I found that it would not be in my power to leave San Francisco during May or June, for the Yo-Semite valley among the Southern Sierras. Two or three descriptions which I had read of the wonders of this pass, particularly Mr. Greeley's report of it; a painting of one of its waterfalls that was once on exhibition in an Art-Collection in Boston; and the eloquent adjectives and ejaculations of some friends here, who intimated with the genuine California extravagance, that whoever had not seen the Yo-Semite, had gone no further than the Court of the Gentiles in the great natural temple of sublimity, made me eager to seize the first opportunity of standing in the shadow of its cliffs, and within "earshot" of its tremendous cataracts. [73] When I found that June must pass without yielding me the privilege, and foresaw that I could not visit the distant valley before the latter part of July, I supposed that I must either relinquish the project for the year, or see the scenery divested of all its cascade draperies, and at the expense of a journey through barrenness, and torrid heats, and smothering dust.

But the summer in California, this year, has been a season—so everybody tells us—of "exceptional weather." The rains held on late. June was damp and cold. Overcoats were not uncomfortable during that month in Sacramento. Parties that left for the Yo-Semite in May were nearly buried by snow storms. [74] On the first of July the flowers on the long and moderate slopes of the mountains, which usually have withered by the middle of June, were only beginning to interweave their color with the thin grasses; and the snow was still heavy on the peaks that crown the ridge. The middle of July, therefore, was practically as early for setting out on such a journey as the last of May is in ordinary seasons. People complain here that the climate is changing, and that as New England people get control of the reins of influence and power—as schools multiply and churches increase, and temperance societies spring up, and better stock is introduced, and cows get milked, and literary associations germinate, and gambling hells and drink shops are pushed from prominence into shadow—the climate is becoming Yankee-ized—more variable, more chilly and more damp in the summer months, as the moral forces grow more steady and fruitful. The State can certainly bear more moisture in summer without damage to the soil. It can evidently bear more of the genuine New England spirit without detriment to its moral status and its hopes of prosperity. And if more sleet and less dust in early summer are the inevitable accompaniment of better farming and more schools, let us hope that every year will be as propitious as this one has been for a July vacation visit to the Yo-Semite walls.

Not only were the summer heats tardy, but in the very middle of July, on the night before I was to start on the trip, there was rain in California;—not a shower, but a long, bounteous rain of many hours, and extending over the whole State, from the Oregon line to the vineyards of Los Angeles, from the mountains that dip toward Utah to the seaward slopes of the Pacific range. [75] Such a baptism was hardly less than a miracle to the

astonished citizens here. The oldest inhabitant could remember nothing like it. Our party did not confidently believe that the clouds were conjured to lay the dust for us along the tedious track of the stage in the interior, and to freshen the foliage and flowers which our horseback journey was to introduce to us, and to fill for our joy the fountains of the far-off cascades. But how could we help reflecting on the fact that no such elaborate preparation, breaking the long customs of barometer and winds, had ever before been made for any party of midsummer tourists? The burden of proof that it was *not* a special providence is on any sceptical opponent. Such a rain was never known before in the State, and such a party as ours never started before from San Francisco to traverse the State. It came just when it could serve us best. It ceased just when our convenience demanded. It poured just freely enough to make the conditions of a successful visit perfect. Until such a marvel occurs again, and we are *not* specially interested in its dust-laying beneficence, have we not the logic on the side of our lurking faith that we were intentionally favored by the spirits that preside over the clouds, and that usually look for months without pity on the parching counties between the Golden Gate and the crest of the Cordilleras?

The Yo-Semite valley, or pass through the Sierra range, lies on the Easterly borders of the county of Mariposa. It is two hundred and fifty miles from San Francisco. The first half of this distance is travelled by steamboat through the upper portion of the beautiful bay, and by the San Joaquin river (pronounced San Ho-a-keen) to Stockton, one of the larger and most thriving towns of the interior. Going to Stockton, however, has a peculiar and unpleasant significance, as a phrase in this neighborhood. The only insane asylum of the State is there. Alas! it has no lack of inmates, and is not likely to have any of its rooms empty for some time to come. Life is so fast or intense among us, that candidates for its wards multiply at a rate which it is not pleasant to contemplate; and the saying that a man is “on the way to Stockton” means that he is spending his nervous capital at a rate that will soon dissolve the copartnership of Reason and Will. If more persons would go to the Yo-Semite, fewer would “go to Stockton” Less working, more work; less grasping, more gain; less speed in living, more life; less waste of constitutional capital, more, a hundred fold more, return in dividends of manly growth, contentment, and joy in existence; —this is what the business men of every leading American city, especially of San Francisco, need to learn as the law of the mental world, certain and inflexible as the multiplication table. This is what the frequent knocks for admission to the asylum that towers over Stockton are trying to emphasize to the California scramblers—mostly from our Northern States—who are overtasking their muscles for a speedy fortune, with which they are to go East again to be miserable.

It was a very sane party—little likely to be sent on physicians’ tickets to the Stockton asylum—that took their seats on the stage for Coulterville, at six in the morning, after leaving the steamer “Cornelia” The distance to Coulterville is over seventy miles; the fare eleven dollars each seat. We were to make the distance over a steadily rising road—many miles of it true mountain climbing—before dark. Leaving the town, and striking out into a level prairie, mostly unfenced, and soon upon an immense district of rolling prairie, with the foot-hills of the Sierras but a few miles ahead, we had as favorable a view as one can ever have of the inland California landscape in mid-summer. The stage was easy, the breeze cheering, the roads free from dust. But the vast expanse, or the mighty swells of barrenness,—how can the eye take any comfort in it? Green trees over a universal desert! What right had the trees to be so green and thrifty? How can June maintain itself in those branches so near the boundless November on the ground? It takes a long time for an eye accustomed to the combinations of summer hues in New England to get adjusted to this harsh discord of green and grey, as harsh at first as if one should drive into a land where the trees are all of ash-color, and the fields that nourish them carpeted with luxuriant grass. Quite frequently we saw cows lying dead on the dry mounds. The first thought was that they had starved. But the driver told us that all the desolate looking fields yielded still good nourishment to the cattle, and that the creatures had killed themselves in the spring by eating green wheat and over-drinking of water. The land certainly looked as though nothing could live there except horses that had been educated to feed on shavings.

One of our passengers told us that the landscape was very like what one sees for days in crossing the plains on the overland mail route. The frequent and immense mule trains which do the commerce between the highest

mountain towns and the river depots, gave a rough and flavorsome wildness to the scene. Huge wagons, often two or three lashed together, were pulled by a string of twelve or fourteen mules, which the drivers inspirited with the most preposterous whips. Often I saw a whip over a stalwart wagoner's shoulder which would be a good load for ordinary city muscles. The drivers take great pride in the length and weight of their whips, and acquire singular skill in cracking them with both hands from the wagon-wheel over the ears of any one of the fourteen mules that is disposed to shirk duty. There are about forty thousand of these faithful, tough, patient creatures in the State; and we must have seen a large percentage of them pulling the huge store-houses that supply the highlands, during our forenoon ride to Knight's Ferry, on the first slope of the mountains. Though generally quite cheap, the best specimens fetch very high prices. There is one mule team in Stockton, eight in number, seventeen and a half hands high, that cost six thousand dollars.

We dined at twelve o'clock in Knight's Ferry, and were served at dessert with apple pie made from large fresh apples which were ripe before the first of July. I write this late in October in San Francisco, with recollections of strawberries today at breakfast and dinner, raised within the city limits in the open air. And in "apple-pie order" we crossed the Stanislaus river and set out for "the Crimea" and the "Kentucky Ranche" our next prominent stopping place. [76] The Stanislaus river and the Tuolumne which we crossed in the afternoon, as well as the Calaveras, lose themselves in the sand in midsummer, before reaching the San Joaquin,—though they are powerful streams.

The last eleven miles of the ride to Coulterville were over a road which is a sign of the enormous amount of labor that has been performed in California during the last eight years. It led up, up and up, by frightful precipices, over desolate mountain sides, till we began to believe that Coulterville was on the apex of the monarch of the Sierras. What was our surprise to find that after gaining the ridge, the road dipped toward an unbroken wilderness beyond. Where were we going? We were beyond the outskirts of civilization. No hut, no clearing, no miner's camp, no stray cow or mule was visible. Before us, in the after-sunset glow, towered, a few miles off, the higher bulwarks of the great mountain range. Night was settling on the intervening ravine. It was like driving down the southeastern sides of Mt. Franklin or Monroe into those gaping gorges of the Coös wilderness, expecting to find a continuous path and a welcome. We had a treasure-box of Wells, Fargo & Co., on board, and a messenger with a double-barrelled rifle to guard it; as the stage had been robbed a week or two before of eleven thousand dollars, and that very day, a single wagon had been stopped, and the driver relieved of his ready cash. [77] But down we went at a fearful rate into the hollow, and before nine o'clock brought up in a pleasant village in a mountain bowl quite similar to that where old Abel Crawford lived in the Saco valley. This was Coulterville. It has over six hundred inhabitants, and offers to travellers an excellent hotel. [78] There are rich quartz mines in the neighborhood, which accounts for the good road and the tempting organized hospitality. We jumped from the stage into the office of the hotel, which is also the post-office, and found it crowded with miners and the fat-cheeked Chinese waiting for letters and newspapers. How the clerk makes out the Mongolian chirography and alphabet belongs to the mysteries of education. In spite of hostile laws and hate, the constant pressure of social injustice, these yellow Orientals pour steadily into every valley and byway of the State, and thrive on the leavings "tailings" as they call them here—of the Saxon miners. They are the best patrons of the stages; and the proprietors take a very exalted Pauline view of the equal rights of all races, and the necessity of encouraging their ingress into the State.

I had not been ten minutes in the hotel before an invitation was extended to me, in due form, to remain and lecture, either on "Substance and Show" or Temperance. [79] But all business on the Yo-Semite trip, was respectfully declined. I slept soundly in a well furnished chamber, under a counterpane covered with pictures of the most rampant dogs. How we were mounted the next morning, and what road we took for the wonderful valley, and how long we were on the way, and what we saw—really, friend *Transcript,* I'm afraid your readers are doomed to half a dozen letters signed

K.

Letter Two
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 2

SAN FRANCISCO, November, 1860.

Dear Transcript: Let me see: the last letter landed us in Coulterville, Mariposa County. We are now two hundred miles south-east from San Francisco, and have travelled more than seventy of them by stage—the last twenty over wild mountain roads. From Coulterville to the Yo-Semite Valley, by the nearest route, is about sixty miles. There is no wagon-road, and as the forest trail leads up and down over the rolling outworks of the Sierras, it is a good two days" journey on horseback.

But shall we take the shortest route? There are two trails which enter the remarkable pass. One has been opened from the town of Mariposa, is a little over fifty miles in length, and conducts us into the valley on the right hand or southerly bank of the Merced river, which flows between the mighty battlements of rock. The other or Coulterville path enters the valley over the northerly or left bank of the Merced, and, as we have said, is about sixty miles in length. It is as if there were no stage road to the White Mountain Notch, but two horseback routes; one from Centre Harbor, which should strike in fifteen hundred feet above the Willey House, on the side of Mt. Willey and over the west bank of the Saco; the other from Wolfboro," and leading to the very top of Mt. Webster, opposite the Willey House, and descending into the gorge down that precipitous wall to the east bank of the Saco. The Coulterville trail to the Yo-Semite valley corresponds to the first of these imaginary paths; the Mariposa trail to the second.

It is over twenty miles, however, to Mariposa from Coulterville, and if we decide to take that route, we must be one day more on horseback, and cannot reach the Yo-Semite until the third day. But then we shall have the opportunity to see the celebrated gold estate of Col. Frémont, and also the great grove of Giant Trees in Mariposa County, which lies only five miles off from the Yo-Semite trail. I vote now for the longer route, although I foresee that it involves the infliction of two additional letters upon the columns of the Transcript. I do not say "upon the readers," for they need not join our party, if they do not choose to. They can keep their eyes off all the letters, and thus protect themselves against the literary fatigues of the excursion.

At half-past seven in the morning, our party were mounted for Mariposa. First, a portly and very handsome gentleman of San Francisco, who has had the good fortune, in amassing real estate, to keep and enjoy a refined taste for the wider real estate of natural beauty, which cannot be monopolized or mortgaged. Second, a banker from the metropolis, astride of a charming black mule, and oblivious of the charms of three per cent. a month in the enjoyment of the more opulent dividends from the landscape. Third, a more elderly gentleman, but as young in heart as any, probably a Republican in principle, but in hair and complexion a delightful specimen of the "silver grey." Fourth, a youth who belongs, as personal estate, to our portly friend first mentioned, a thorough horseman and a constant fountain of cheer to the whole party. Fifth, the slight proportions of the secretary of the expedition. Two excellent mounted guides and a pack mule almost invisible under a mound of blankets, overcoats, and general camping conveniences, completed our caravan. [80]

We struck at once into a mountain path, and soon found ourselves winding around the side of a curved and very steep ravine whose walls, it is said, strikingly resemble the Scottish Trossachs. Gold is found in all the beds of the little streams which plunge down the sharp slopes of the pass. Miners' tents were visible here and there in the furrows beneath us, enlivening the ravines with signs of nomadic life, but not suggesting very brilliant profits. Probably the majority of those who work there in the favorable season do not earn more pay than good Boston wages for mechanics, and not nearly so much as the San Francisco return for tolerably skilful labor. But there is poetry in the toil, and the constant hope of striking some rich stratum or "pocket" where Nature had hoarded nuggets or dust. We were soon attracted to the beauty of the pines shooting up their leaden green spires among the bright verdure of the bushes and scrub-oaks. This, however, was only the

prelude to the great chorus of evergreens which the next two days were to furnish, and I will not speak of them here. But I must record the joy we felt when, on making a sudden turn in our wild and lonely path, about six miles from Coulterville, we found the noble Merced River immediately beneath us. Our path was several hundred feet above its bed. It was larger than the Androscoggin is in Gorham, and was roaring in right leonine majesty. This was the first clean river I had seen in California. No placer or hydraulic mining on its banks have polluted it yet. It is as pure at the point where we saw it, as when it bursts through the granite ramparts of the Yo-Semite, with not room even for a horseback-path along its edge. No stream, except possibly the Sutlej in Northern India, is shadowed, in its earlier career, by such sublime walls and stupendous cliffs. I thought of these, only some twenty-five miles distant, which our party must make a detour of sixty miles to reach, and it made the white flecks on its olive green tide more exhilarating to the sight as they flashed in the hot forenoon sun, and the music more fascinating which it poured up into the air of the lonely glen.

But although the Merced is not discolored and choked with mining mud, it is compelled to lend its strength to the task of unlocking gold from the granite veins of its neighboring hills. Three miles from the point where we first heard its roar we were startled with a noise that competes with its own rapids. We had reached the great quartz mill belonging to Col. Frémont, the largest in the world. [81] There are two mills on the bank of the river, the larger having forty-eight stampers for crushing quartz rock, the smaller having sixteen stampers and bearing on a large sign the title for both, “Benton Mills” [82] The rock that feeds them is torn from the mountain which towers over the southerly bank of the stream, and appropriately named “Mt. Bullion.”

The last Agricultural Report by the State Society here tells us that “Col. Frémont has *damned* the Merced River in the most substantial manner, where the stream is three hundred feet broad, commencing fifteen feet below low water mark, and ending twenty-two feet above.” This, when I read it, seemed to me the most comprehensive and intense instance of profanity in literature,—although I have no doubt that a great many capitalists in this State, who have engaged in quartz mining, have felt prompted to exuberant and emphatic utterances contrary to the directions in the Sermon on the Mount. But in observing the noble work near the “Benton Mills” which forces the river to turn the power-wheels of these money factories, I saw that the great man referred to had been engaged in better business than uttering maledictions on the stream, and that the intention of the Agricultural Report, as well as his own enterprise,

Bancroft Library Photograph

FREMONT’S BENTON MILLS ON THE MERCED RIVER

This photograph, probably taken late in 1860, shows the sign mentioned by King.

Bancroft Library Photograph

MARIPOSA ABOUT 1860

The town must have looked like this on the hot July afternoon when King trotted at a "respectable rate" up the main street past the white-painted store fronts in search of a hotel and a hot bath.

would be more clearly expressed by substituting the word "*dammed*."

The two mills on the Merced are able to crush between five and six hundred tons of rock per week, which ought to yield a profit of ten thousand dollars. We gave our horses and mule a long rest, while we looked carefully through these admirably managed works. I will not repeat what was written in the Nevada letters by an attempt to describe the process of extracting gold from the milky fluid into which the quartz is beaten by the heavy pestles in the batteries. [83] It is not probable, however, that half the gold which goes into the mill in partnership with the rock is arrested by all the cunning traps that are set for it. The "tailings" of the mills which flow off into the river carry as much of the precious metal as is detained for the owner's profit and the world's use. It is this wasted California that the scientific metallurgists are now concentrating their skill upon. Whoever can set the chemical trap which will detain this fugitive dust will practically double the gold hills of the State, and make the forty-five thousand acres of the Frémont manor worth treble their value today on the stock-exchange. So solid and marketable a commodity is genius!

When we remounted to continue our journey toward Mariposa, we had a very striking revelation of the engineering enterprise and genius of the distinguished proprietor. We rode for four miles up the side of Mt. Bullion, and around an enormous ravine called "Hell's Hollow" upon a railroad track which was nearly ready for the cars, and was to be dedicated on the first of August. [84] This road connects the Benton Mills by the Merced River, with their feeders—the Pine Tree Mine and the Josephine Vein on Mt. Bullion. The latter vein is nearly sixteen hundred feet above the river, and it was a very tedious and costly process to haul the rock to the mills over such roads as the winter rains and storms softened and gullied. Col. Frémont saw the necessity of a railroad, and determined that the mountain should be girdled by a substantial iron track. The scheme was

laughed at. The difficulties were too great. In fact, good judges decided that from the nature of the ground it was impracticable. The cost, too, if the plan were feasible, would be enormous, and the mines would not yield rock enough to justify the extravagance. But the genius of the engineer conquered the opposition of the mountain, while administrative energy surmounted the pecuniary obstacles which threatened to be even more intractable. And today the railroad, built on an original plan, is in successful operation. The glistening rock from the four levels of the great Josephine vein, and the five galleries of the noble Pine Tree mine below, is not hauled by plodding oxen to be disenchanted of its wealth, but hurries to the river down a grade of one foot in seven by its own gravity, and pours into the mills faster than they can pound it into paste.

Thus the man who first taught the country how a railroad might connect California with the Mississippi, is the first who has bridled one of the savage Sierras themselves with an iron rein. It was an exciting and brilliant scene in that wild region, when on the first of August, at the dedication of the road, the first train of cars, laden with guests and adorned with banners, swept around the last curve of the mountain, upon the bridge near the mills. The whole force of the estate were drawn up in order to greet them. Their lusty cheers were accompanied by the roar of cannon. The mills started all their stampers to increase the applause; and a gentleman who describes the scene at length assures us that even "the liver in its mad career whirled and twisted in extra ecstasy." We have more respect for the river hereafter on account of its enthusiasm; and if there are any Naiads in its current, no doubt they rose and clapped their hands intensely at the first sentiment offered at the feast by its banks, where a few years ago the grizzly lapped the water undisturbed:—"The enterprise we commemorate by this celebration, characteristic of the spirit and indicative of the energy of 'the "Pathfinder!"

It is useless for me to attempt any detailed description of this largest gold estate in California, and perhaps the most valuable mining property in the world. Only a geologist skilled in such writing can give an accurate account of the veins and outcroppings over its ten square leagues, and the characteristics and working of the opened mines. The yield of gold, from the few points where its bounty is tapped, is now $2500 a day, which may very soon be doubled. But "it takes a mine to work a mine." As a witty friend who has had ample experience said to me, not long ago, "it is easy to have half a million in a quartz lead, but difficult to get it *out.*" With capital enough to handle Mt. Bullion properly, and make it bleed at every vein, the Frémont estate would yield millions a year, and pay more than the highest California rates of interest. Let us hope that the day is not distant now when the proprietor shall receive the fitting pecuniary return for the capital of genius, courage, and indomitable heroism, to say nothing of suffering, which he has invested in its development.

No romance could be more exciting, or hold the reader with more varied interest, than the story of this estate and its management during the last few years. The strange history of California in all its strata, financial, legal, social and moral, is illustrated by it in one "sectional view," as the geologists say. A cool narrative of all the difficulties that have been surmounted, the perplexities that have been cut through, the perils that have been breasted, the agonies of thought and heart for weeks and months that have been endured, the genius that has been pledged and expended in securing the title to this estate, clearing it of squatting ruffians and buccaneers, postponing the grasp of angry or treacherous creditors, and opening channels for the flow of its fettered wealth, would show that, if it pays at last a million a year to its master, it will only be a just return for the immense investment of gifts, suffering and toil.

No country has ever seen in larger measure than California, the conflict of refinement with the coarsest and most repulsive hardships. Clergymen who preached in mining districts years ago, have told me that, in some places, more than a third of their audiences were from New England colleges, and that a large portion of these cultivated adventurers either sunk under the hardships of the mining life, or gained just enough, after two or three years of misery, to return dispirited to their Eastern home. Gold is costly when you must fight for it in the raw with delicate and naked hands. And as I rode by the charming Frémont cottage in Bear Valley, overtopped by the wedgy summit of burly Mt. Bullion, and thought of the cares and the anguish which had been experienced under its roof, by those who belong to the inner circle of the most cultivated, not only of our

country, but of our time, I felt that the pilgrim record of California has leaves as dark and bitter as any that belong to the early annals of New England. Reader, have you ever followed the vivid chapters of Charles Reade, in the second volume of “Never too Late to Mend,” detailing the brutalities and distresses of Australian life in the gold region? Now imagine the utmost refinement and culture thrown into that maelstrom of savageness and depravity for two or three years! Qualities framed in *that* setting, that were made to flash in the most brilliant society which civilization can produce! Tennyson living in a coal pit! Ariel with his wings clipped condemned to the society of Caliban! Let us rejoice that the morning has dawned over all this gloom, and join in the cheers of that first of August over the emancipation of the Frémont estate from its fetters. [85]

K.

Letter Three
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 3

SAN FRANCISCO, NOVEMBER, 1860.

Dear Transcript: I have often debated with myself what occupation I should seek, if I should, some day, be disabled by bronchitis. Our horseback ride from Col. Frémont’s cottage in Bear Valley to the town of Mariposa added another string to my bow of possibilities. At what a gait we put the road behind us in the sultry noon,—your correspondent and our portly capitalist from San Francisco! We distanced the other members of the party an hour in twelve miles. My horse was a four-legged churn, when kept on a moderate trot; but I discovered that he rode as easy as a rocking-chair if put to a John Gilpin gallop; or to such a pace as the cadets at West Point show you when the drill officer gives the word, “as skirmishers, charge!” I verily believe that one or two of the miles we made in less than two minutes each, (California truth is different from Eastern truth, —so deduct from the story by adding to the time if you see fit,) and I enjoyed the rush so thoroughly, that I intend to seek employment as a Pony Express rider through the country of the Pah-Utes and Shoshonees, if my throat, which begins to be unruly, breaks down. But I have decided, in that case, to wear trousers with straps.

You will not err, friend *Transcript,* if you imagine that it was hot, *ob* and *sub*-jectively hot, when we slackened speed and trotted at a respectable rate into the streets of Mariposa, in search of a hotel. The same showy, white-painted ten-footers, with square fronts extending above the ridge-pole, which we had noticed in other villages, lined the street here. One sign I enjoyed especially, as I rode along. You must not charge anything for the advertisement. It was “Mme. Cavasso, milliner, *Modista.*” Would you be likely to see such a sign in Milan, N. H., or on Jefferson Hill, or in a Vermont village under the shadow of Mansfield Mountain? Think of “Modista” millinery just at the foot of the western slope of the Sierras, an arrowshot from the billowy wilderness which catches the sun’s last amber from the Pacific, and where the “Grizzly” roams undisturbed! But some of the five hundred inhabitants are able to pay handsomely for fancy goods *á la mode.* The quartz veins in the neighborhood, though they do not pay so steadily as some, have rich “pockets.” There is a small vein running through the town only about two feet thick, and very snakey in its winding. Not many months ago, three men working in this vein about sixty feet below the surface, struck a “pocket” from which they took in six days twenty-six thousand dollars. I think we should soon see the “Modista” signs in Jefferson and Shelbume, if there were comers in the geological cellar of those villages where a farmer could “pick” fifteen hundred dollars a day in solid cash. Yet there are few that grow permanently rich from these capricious bounties. The names of the men who opened this Mariposa vein are Mock & Searle. And “Mock” is a very suggestive word to California capitalists, thus far, who have indulged hopes of speedy and easy wealth from quartz-leads.

How delightful was the shadow, and the coolness, and the sofa in the little “Union Hotel” in Mariposa during

the hottest hours of a July afternoon! If I do look to the possibility of becoming a Pony Express-man, I suppose that I may confess to an aching in every muscle and ligament of the body, when I dismounted from my twenty-two miles ride from Coulterville, as intense as if all the powers of suffering in the frame had been turned on at once. But Mariposa, besides the "modista" shop, supports a warm bath establishment, for the refreshment of which, re-tasted in memory as I write, I invoke the blessing of a perpetual line of "pockets" in every ledge that runs in ribbands from their hills.

The landlord of the hotel was a Portuguese from Pico, near Fayal. As Pico, which rises nearly 8000 feet from the mid-Atlantic, was the first mountain I ever saw, when I visited Fayal in 1848, we soon fell into sympathy. [86] The landlady was from England. The hotel seemed to be composed of four or five wooden cottages, with one brick, iron-shuttered fire-proof addition, where the good woman told me she kept "all the valuables." There I alone of all the party was put for the night, whether becaues she discerned that I was a valuable, or more in danger of fire than the others of the party, I could not decide. But one of our companions could not help overhearing a conversation through the thin partition of his room which explained this peculiar case. They had discovered that I was a lecturer; and then the landlady recollected having heard me speak often *in England,* and enumerated the cities which I had enlightened! Now, where's the use of going to England, if you get treated just as well as if you had made the voyage, and save your reputation besides? Our listening companion, however, took delight in telling me that they confessed I didn't look like a lecturer, and that they should have much sooner suspected "the good looking, dignified gentleman" of wearing your correspondent's initials.

We all slept powerfully, and were on hand and on horseback at six in the morning for a thirty miles' ride to "Clarke's," where we diverge from the Yo-Semite trail to visit the "Big Trees" five miles out of our way. The sky was deep blue and cloudless and it was already oppressive, when we mounted. "You'll have a nice 'lope (meaning gallop) to Clarke's" said a Mariposa acquaintance, as we started; "it 'aint going to be hot today." "Why" said I, "it's hot now, and the day will certainly be a scorcher, by noon." "No" said our friend, "You may depend it won't be above ninety today." "What do you call *hot* in this neighborhood?" "A hundred and ten; ninety's moderate." Such I believe is the fact in that region. We didn't waste much thought on the heat, however. We knew that we should have no clouds, and were *sure it wouldn't rain;* and so we turned our horses' heads away from the last village toward the mountain walls and wilds with jubilant spirits. There were no more settlements between us and Utah.

How shall I tell or hint the surprises of beauty, the difference of charm during the seven or eight hours of this ride to Clarke's? Soon we left the county road for a rough wagon road, and after a few miles of this struck into a simple bridle trail which led over spurs of the great hills, away from all squatters' huts, away from all mining camps and prospectings, away from all ravage of axes, into the solitudes of the glorious wilderness. De Quincey tells us that the supreme charm in nature for him would be the sense of a vast and trackless forest. That which we entered stretches hundreds of miles north and south. East and west, it heaves into tremendous swells and subsides in mighty troughs of green. Range after range is covered by its squadrons, till the parallel lines of the snow-sprinkled rocks of the sovereign heights break through to crown it, and to cover with shadow its retreating waves on the Eastern slope, when these desolate spires catch the rose flush from a Pacific sunset. De Quincey's spirit could find no region on this globe so attractive as a haunt, if it retains its earthly sympathies.

Perhaps, however, there is too much beauty mingled with the vastness and majesty of the Sierra forests, to suit the sombre imagination of the great Essayist. For the pervading impression, as we rode along, was that of beauty, and the influence a continual cheer. Now and then we gained some height from which we could look off upon the companion hills and spurs, southward and west. They were long and heavy. We could not quote as applicable to these outlooks the passage from Young Bulwer, in "Lucile,—"

> "Then he lifted his eyes and saw round him unfurled
> In one moment of splendor the leagues of dark trees,
> And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees."

The dark trees were visible by the league, but all the aspect of the Sierras, until you reach the ridge from which the topmost turrets stood, are dull. Their forms are ponderous, their rolls whale-like, but with no fins to crown their heavings. We cannot even quote of their armies of pine, the superb lines of Keats—

> "Far, far around shall those dark-clustered trees
> Fledge the wild-ridged mountains, steep by steep."

They are not "wild ridged," and they do not rise "steep by steep" They roll in tremendous ground swells, and their immense trenches and surging heights are covered with such evergreens as cannot be paralleled probably on the globe. Mr. Greeley said to me on the morning I left New York, "You are going to a divine country, and there is nothing on the earth equal in beauty to the pines of the Sierras." As to the adjective "divine," there may be doubts; as to the eulogy on the evergreens, I believe that the eminent Tribune of the people is not far out of the way.

But whenever the distance views were denied us, and we were shut in by the immediate surrounding forest, it was difficult to believe that we were in the aboriginal wilderness. For miles we would ride up a gentle slope, undisturbed by stones, upon which it would seem that thousands of dollars had been spent in clearing the underbrush, and giving the flowers a field to sport and revel. It was late in July; the fields around San Francisco and the bay looked as though they were strewn with ashes: but here the acclivities of the mountains, under the shadow of the evergreens, bloomed with ruby and saffron, with violet and orange. Ruskin teaches us to call the pines "Sword-builders"; truly, we found the saying of Mohammed verified— "Paradise is under the shadow of swords."

Yet the flowers were obliged to yield in charm to the sugar-pines of that glorious region. I suppose that in three hours we saw ten thousand which were more than two hundred feet high. In the mountain districts of New Hampshire it is very rare to find a hemlock or fir more than three feet in diameter. Time and again we dismounted and put our measuring line around columns, fit to uphold an entablature of Phidias, that were twenty-eight and thirty feet in girth, supporting their topmost spray nearly three hundred feet above us. Trees of eighteen and twenty feet circumference could have been counted by hundreds. And they stood apart, with ample room to show their symmetry, and generous enough to let the glad light kindle the flowers around their feet. Every five minutes at least, we came in sight of a sugar-pine so marvellous in grace that we were obliged to stop and pay obeisance to its stately and consummate beauty.

I wonder if such trees grow in Greece. They enabled me to understand one element of the Greek mythology which I could never sympathize with before. I mean the faith in Hamadryades, the nymphs that vivify and inhabit trees. One of the Homeric hymns describes them:

> Straight pines,
> Or oaks high-headed, spring with them upon
> The earth man-feeding, soon as they are born;
> Trees fair and flourishing; on the high hills
> Lofty they stand; the deathless sacred grove
> Men call them, and with iron never cut.
> But when the fate of death is drawing near,
> First wither on the earth the beauteous trees,
> The bark around them wastes, the branches fall,
> And the Nymph's soul at the same moment leaves

The sun's fair light.

Now, think of imagining the life of an oak as a feminine spirit! What an Amazon the creature must be,—anything but a nymph! It should be a masculine energy, some burly, double-fisted genius, a Hercules of sprites, that personifies the knotted and angular strength of an oak. How, either, can we conceive the tough-fibred ash as inhabited by and created from an elegant forest belle? And a grove of stately and solemn pines,—is it by a natural play of the imagination that we fill them with damsel properties? Do they not look rather like a council of swarthy Brahmins, in their dark energy of delicate life, and what Mr. Ruskin calls their "monotony of enchanted pride?"

But these sugar pines of the Sierras, however bulky, do seem to be filled from root to topmost feather with feminine vitality. It would afflict the imagination to associate any form or type of masculine energy with them. Such lightness in their spring! Such exquisite grace in the double curve of their wide-stretching branches! Such fascinating proportion and poise in their outflow from the stem! The cones they bear are often twelve or fifteen inches in length, and singularly lovely in shape. Think now of one of these queens of the wilderness, two hundred and fifty feet in height, with branches of correspondent rhythm, wrought in curves which contain the utmost spirit that will blend with tenderest grace, and each branch, up to the crowning twigs, holding out, as if with taper fingers, a pair of drooping cones! A thousand such we saw during our morning ride. One such tree conspicuously placed in the Saco valley would be the mother of at least fifty poems a year. I forgot that we were on the way to the colossal trees. Why hurry from the Muses to see the Titans? I forgot the Yo-Semite; and should have been content and overjoyed to learn that our journey was to stretch out a week longer, if the trail was to be adorned with these exquisite forms. While gazing at them, the Greek myth was no mystery. There was no sense of imprisoned or fettered energy. The grace was that of a posture in a dance. We should not have been surprised at any moment, in looking at one of these perfect pines, to see the soul of the tree step out a sunny and joyous nymph, beautiful as Hebe.

We reached Clarke's—a little log house and canvas tent on a meadow in the wilderness—at one o'clock. [87] Here we were to dine, and from this resting place diverge to see the "Big Trees," which are five miles from his camp. As we rode up to this rough shelter, the first object I saw among the majestic evergreens, was Henry Ward Beecher in a wild forest costume. So it seemed at the first glance, and the more I looked at him the more striking was the likeness. It was not Mr. Clarke, but a pig driver, who was staying in the tent with him for a few days. I thought at once of Mr. Hale's charming story in the *Atlantic,* "My Double and how he Undid me." [88] If the Brooklyn autocrat is anxious to engage a "Double" let him apply to me, and I will start off for the Sierras and this man. No one could mistake the compound in that countenance of noble heartedness, impudence and fun (I am speaking of the pig driver, not of the divine). We engaged him at once to pilot us to the Big Trees, and during all the excursion we called him, not by his own name, but "Beecher." [89]

Mr. Clarke we found a very intelligent man, living alone in the wilderness. To my amazement he knew me. He was born under the shadow of Monadnoc, and has two brothers, I soon learned, who are Unitarian ministers. One of our witty friends in Boston, whenever he has occasion to speak of any man who is worth half a million or so, always says, *sotto voce* and in parenthesis, "he isn't to be despised for *that,* you know." That's what I said to myself when I learned about Mr. Clarke's brotherhood. I could easily have heard tidings that would have pained me more. But "The Big Trees!" Patience, friend *Transcript;* you wouldn't, surely, have me bore you any longer now. No, another letter.

K.

Letter Four
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 4

SAN FRANCISCO, November, 1860.

THE BIG TREES

Dear Transcript: We were very tired when we dismounted at Clarke's log hut and canvas dining tent in the glorious forest, thirty miles from Mariposa. Tired in body and in brain,—tired by our seven hours of horseback riding, and by the perpetual feast of floral beauty and sugar-pine magnificence which had delighted eye and heart. But it did not require a long time to restore us. Half an hour's rest under one of the stately firs that tower above the cabin, and a cup of tea with our noon meal, fit for a mandarin, (almost as delicious, friend *Transcript,* as our excellent hostess in West Cambridge has often prepared for us) put us in good working trim for the afternoon's excursion. We were only five miles from the Mammoth Trees. An easy upland ride of an hour would lead us to the grove where the vegetable Titans, we had so often read about with a wonder tinged with unbelief, held their solemn court.

And I confess that I began to doubt, as the time for mounting again approached, as to the existence of the marvels. Was it possible that, before sunset, I was to stand by a living tree more than ninety feet in circuit, and over three hundred feet high? Think what these figures mean, my hasty reader, when transformed into solid bark and fibre. Take a ball of cord, measure off a hundred feet from it, cut it and tie the ends, and then by the aid of four or five companions, stretch it into a circle, (if you have a parlor spacious enough to permit the experiment), and imagine that space filled with the column of a vigorous cedar. Now conceive this tree rooted on the Common near the Park street entrance. What do you say to the idea of looking up its smooth trunk to a point higher than the topmost leaf of any elm on the Tremont street mall, and of seeing there a bough thicker than the largest of those elms shooting out from it? What do you say to the fact that its plume would nod a hundred feet above the vane of Park street spire? What do you say to the possibility, if it lay hollowed on the ground, of driving a barouche and four through it, without their being able to touch the highest point of its curved ceiling "with a ten foot pole?" Then think of it cut up into six thousand cords of wood. I forget how much space the iron fence encloses around the great Elm on the Common. If it is not so much as thirty-four feet in diameter the fence would not encircle the tree we are speaking of. At any rate, if such a Colossus should spring near the frog pond, the old elm would look, by the side of it, like General Tom Thumb at the knee of Hercules. When I recalled the wonder and delight I had felt in seeing a hemlock six feet in diameter near the Dixville Notch in New Hampshire, and thought what a tree must look like that is more than five times such bulk, I confess that, although I was strangely excited at the possibility, I was prepared to find that all visitors had greatly exaggerated, and that as to such structures and the marvel of them, we must "walk by faith, not by sight."

At any rate, we will enjoy the ride in search of the grove. The flowers are plenteous along all the steadily rising trail. Here and there we must pause before one of the seductive sugar pines, which looks so full of melody that it seems as if the first breeze that brushes it would make it break forth into a Mozartish song. Then we must begin to train our eyes to the general scale of the structures in the forest. There lies now part of a tree trunk on a slope near our track. How long is it? I measured it two or three times with my eye, and said, "seventy-five to eighty feet." Another of the party said, "a hundred." A third, who was a better mathematician than the others, insisted that it would reach a hundred and twenty-five feet. I laughed at him, and then the banker dismounted from his mule, and paced the side of the trunk. It was *a hundred and fifty* feet long. We had not learned to allow for the fact that the ordinary trees we were riding under were two hundred feet tall. What if we should meet a grizzly on a flowery bank under one of the graceful sugar pines? While we were discussing this possibility, we came upon fresh traces of a very large one. I was eager to get a glimpse of him,

but the majority of the company prayed that they might not see one of the shaggy monsters, and their prayer was answered.

There are two large groves of the mammoth trees in California. The one which is usually visited is in Calaveras County. It contains hardly a third as many trees as the Mariposa cluster which we are in search of in this letter, but is much more easy of access. [90] It covers about as much space as the Common, and a good carriage road leads to the heart of it. At the portal of the grove stand a pair of sentinels, twenty-five feet apart, which are sixty feet in circumference and three hundred feet high. They are well named the "Two Guardsmen." What a pity, for Dumas's sake, that there is not one more! Passing these warders, you drive up to a hotel, and find the grounds trimmed up and the trees named and labelled for guests. Some of the labels are of gilt letters on marble, we are told, and are tastefully inlaid in the bark from six to twenty feet above the ground. The "Hercules" in this group is ninety-three feet in circumference. The

Bancroft Library Photograph

GALEN CLARK AT THE BASE OF THE GRIZZLY GIANT
MARIPOSA GROVE

This photograph probably was taken within a year or two of the time when the King party took leave of the hospitable host of Clark's Ranch with a hearty "God bless you!"

Bancroft Library Photograph

THE UPPER HOTEL IN YOSEMITE VALLEY
JUNE 22, 1859

A year after this picture was taken Starr King and his companions enjoyed a dinner of oysters and lobster here and noted that the only ornamentation provided by landlord Charles Peck was a lithograph of the great prize fighters of the world.

"California" seventy-three feet in circuit, shoots up straight as an arrow three hundred and ten feet. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is a tree which has been burnt out; it is eighty-three feet in circumference and will lodge twenty persons. The "Mother of the Forest" is three hundred and twenty-seven high and nearly eighty feet in girth.

The bark of this empress of the grove, to the height of one hundred and sixteen feet, is now in the English Crystal Palace at Sydenham. [91] One of our party saw it there some two years since, and heard an indignant Englishman exclaiming to the exhibitor that it was never taken from a single tree; that no tree ever could have grown so large. Our companion mildly interfered in the dispute, and assured the Englishman that he had stood in the grove a year before; that there were larger trees in it than this one thus flayed; and that, in spite of the fact that the bark had been completely removed to the height of over a hundred feet, the tree was as green as any of the majestic fraternity. The Englishman gave one look of rage at our honest-eyed friend, and bolted from the neighborhood. Our friend told the simple truth, for the tree flourished two years after the spoliation, which, we rejoice to say, is longer than the villainous speculation did. One of these Calaveras trees, three hundred feet high, was cut down a few years ago, eight feet from the ground. [92] Part of the trunk is used as a bowling-alley, and the stump, twenty-five feet in diameter, covered with a canopy of green boughs, is now a dancing saloon. To cut it down, pump augers were used from either side, until the tree was completely severed from the base. But so nicely poised was it, that it would not fall. Only by driving in large wedges with immense battering rams could its equilibrium be disturbed sufficiently to make it top-heavy. Five men were at work twenty-five days in this wretched drudgery of destruction.

The Mariposa grove stands as the Creator has fashioned it, unprofaned except by fire, which, long before the advent of Saxon white men, had charred the base of the larger portion of the stalwart trees. We rode on for an hour, climbing all the time, till we reached a forest plateau five thousand feet above the sea. This, in New England, is the height of Mt. Madison, where not a shrub can grow. Riding on a few rods, through ordinary evergreens with dark stems, we at last catch a glimpse of a strange color in the forest. It is a tree in the distance of a light cinnamon hue. We ride nearer and nearer, seeing others of the same complexion starting out in most impressive contrast with the sombre columns of the wilderness. We are now in the grove of the

Titans. The bark has a right leonine effect on the eye. We single out one of them for a first acquaintance, and soon dismount at its root.

I must confess that my own feeling, as I first scanned it, and let the eye roam up its tawny pillar, was of intense disappointment. But then I said to myself, this is doubtless one of the striplings of the Anak brood—only a small affair of some forty feet in girth. I took out the measuring line, fastened it to the trunk with a knife, and walked around, unwinding as I went. The line was seventy-five feet long. I came to the end of the line before completing the circuit. Nine feet more were needed. I had dismounted before a structure eighty-four feet in circumference and nearly three hundred feet high, and I should not have guessed that it would measure more than fifteen feet through. It did not look to me twice as large as the Big Elm on the Common, although that is only eighteen feet in circumference, and this was twenty-eight feet in diameter. During the day I had seen a dozen sugar pines which appeared to be far more lofty.

The next one we measured was eighty-nine feet and two inches in girth; the third was ninety feet. There are nearly three times as many of the giant species in this grove as in the Calaveras cluster. Divided into two groups, there are six hundred and fifty of them within a space of one mile by three-quarters. Col. [James Lloyd La Fayette] Warren, the faithful and self-sacrificing friend of agricultural interests in the State, proprietor and editor of the *California Farmer,* measured the principal trees of one group on this ridge, some three years ago, and found one of 102 feet, two of 100 feet, one of 97, one of 92, one of 82, one of 80, two of 77, three of 76, and thus gradually diminishing, till more than a hundred trees were on his list that measured fifty feet and upward in circumference. [93]

This crowd of majestic forms explains the disappointment in first entering the grove. The general scale is too immense. Half a dozen of the largest trees spaced half a mile apart, and properly set off by trees of six and eight feet in girth would shake the most volatile mind with awe. Four days afterwards, on the homeward path by another trail, I struck off the track with one of our party to see some "big trees" that were reported to us as a mile from the path, near "Crane's Flat." We found them. [94] The first one we approached was the only one of the species in the range of vision, and reared its snuff-colored column among some ordinary firs. How majestic it swelled and towered! My companion and I both exclaimed, this is the largest tree we have yet seen; this will measure more than a hundred feet. We gazed a long time at its soaring stem, from which, a hundred feet above us, the branches that shot out bent suddenly upwards, like pictures of the golden candlesticks in the Hebrew temple. It seemed profane to put a measuring tape upon such a piece of organized sublimity. But we wanted to know how much more than a hundred feet could be claimed for it, and I made the trial. It was just fifty-six feet in circuit,—but little more than half the size of the monarchs in Mariposa which it seemed to excel so much in majesty. There were a hundred trees in the Mariposa grove larger than this, and all of them together did not make half the impression on me that this one stamped into the brain at the first sight. We need to see the "Mother of the Forest" towering near Trinity Church in New York, and over-topping its spire with a column whose life is older than the doctrine of the Trinity, to appreciate its vastness.

We ought to see the "Fountain Tree" of the Mariposa grove, a hundred and two feet in circuit, rising near the Bunker Hill monument, and bearing up a crown eighty feet above it, to feel the marvel of its bulk and vitality. Think of that monument as a *living* structure. Conceive it as having grown from a granite seed, whose outpouring life absorbed from the earth and attracted from the winds fine granite dust, to be slowly compacted, by internal and unerring masonry, into the solid squares of its strength and its tapering symmetry! A work far more marvellous than this has been wrought by each fragment of a cone that took root five thousand feet on a ridge of the Sierras, centuries ago, and now is represented by an organism of thirty feet diameter. Indeed, it is quite probable that there have been a few trees in both the Mariposa and Calaveras groves, which have built their sublime columns out of the air through the energy of a single seed, in whose trunk Bunker Hill monument could have been inserted and hidden, while the stem would still spring more than two hundred feet above its apex-stone. For the ruins of one now lie in the Mariposa grove which was forty feet in diameter, and must have towered more than four hundred feet high.

Many of the *Transcript* readers know already that a petrified cedar has been discovered near Honey Lake, over the eastern slope of the Sierras, which measures forty-two feet in diameter at the butt, and is over six hundred and sixty feet long. [95] I have conversed with one of the prospecting party who discovered it, an intelligent and reliable man. He showed me specimens of the petrifaction from different parts of the tree. The bark is nearly snow white, and I took in my hands a piece from a heavy and gummy knot which was knocked off five hundred and twenty feet on the stem. By pacing, the trunk measured over six hundred and sixty feet, as it lay on the sloping and barren ground. At that point it was four feet in diameter, the residue, probably forty feet, being hidden by sand. Think now of a tree seven hundred feet high! Reared by one seed out of air and cloud, and then turned to solid stone! Here are three Bunker Hill monuments already built of enchanted rock. Is the Greek fable of Proteus, who changed from shape to shape to escape his pursuers, a mere fantasy? And the conception of the Medusa's head,—how does it read by the side of that solid tree upon which the Gorgon face of nature has been turned?

The afternoon hours we passed in the Mariposa grove were strangely short. One needs a long summer day for the proper study even of half a dozen of the chief senators in the group. What is an afternoon among six hundred? I lay for half an hour alone at the root of the most colossal bole—my companions out of sight and hearing—and watched the golden sunshine mounting the amber trunk, and at last leaving a hundred feet of it in shadow to flood its mighty boughs and locks with tender lustre. What silence and what mystery! How many centuries of summers has such evening splendor burnished thus the summit of the completed shaft? How long since the quickening sunbeam fell upon the first spear of green in which the prophecy of the superb obelisk was enfolded? Why cannot the dumb column now be confidential? There comes a breath of wind, cooled by the snow on higher swells of the Sierras, which can be seen from the western edge of the grove;—why will not the old patriarch take advantage of that ripple through his leaves and whisper to me his age? Are you as old as Noah? Do you span the centuries as far as Moses? Can you remember the time of Solomon? Were you planted before the seed of Rome took root in Italy? At any rate, tell me whether or not your birth belongs to the Christian centuries; whether we must write "B. C" or "A. D." against your infancy. I promised the stalwart greybeard that I would tell nobody, or at most only the *Transcript,* if he would just drop into my ear the hour of his nativity. Perhaps he would have told me, if my party had not returned to disturb the conditions of a communication. Possibly he would have said that his memory was treacherous, and that I must ask the scientific men.

I have asked them, and they differ. One calculation led Mr. Greeley to believe that the oldest of these trees were of substantial size when David danced before the Ark, when Theseus ruled in Athens, when AEneas fled from the burning wreck of Troy. In an English journal they were estimated by a distinguished botanist at three thousand years. Dr. [Jacob] Bigelow, by counting the rings in a section of the trunk of one of the largest, which had been felled, and computing from that, reduced these pretentions materially. He made it about 1900 years old,—a tender contemporary of Cicero and Julius Caesar. But since then, a merciless savant, Dr. [John] Torrey the botanist, declares that he has counted every ring on the tree that was cut down, and his figures have felled a vast pile of our poetry. Why must there be scientific men, who delight in bothering theologians, and in erecting their *chevaux de frise* in the path of all galloping romance? He makes our tree about eleven hundred years old. If this calculation be trustworthy, the column at whose root I sat took its first draught of sunshine in the time of Charlemagne. It is three hundred years older than the Norman Conquest and the great Hildebrand. [96] It was a giant in the time of the first Crusade. And it antedates the foundation stone of the oldest Gothic spire of Europe. A genial evening of life to the Methuselahs of the wilderness, who were babies of a century a thousand years ago.

K.

Letter Five
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 5

SAN FRANCISCO, December, 1860.

THE APPROACH TO THE YO-SEMITE

Dear Transcript: It was just sunset when we reached again Clarke's hospitable cabin, on the meadow at the foot of the ridge which is crowned by those Olympian cedars. The day had been hot, for it was mid-July; but the air grew cool at a very rapid rate after the sunshine burned off from the plumes of the firs, two hundred feet tall, that stood as grenadiers around the green little intervale. We needed all the overcoats and blankets that our pack-mule would disburse from his liberal bale, to keep us warm in the bunks beneath our roof of cotton cloth. Just before going to bed, as we sat around a camp fire in the gloom, two foot-travelers arrived with the tidings that the bodies of two men had been found, a few miles off, who had been recently murdered and chopped in pieces by a party of Chowchilla Indians. Perhaps it was the effect of this not oversoothing intelligence, perhaps it was the excitement of the superb scenery that had been crowded into the day, possibly it was due in part to our host's hot biscuits at supper, that I waked in strange terror about midnight, with the feeling that a huge grizzly was pawing away the hired blue blankets packed over my breast, and growling his hot breath on my face. The night-mare—or, more strictly speaking, the night-bear—was so vivid and terrible, that it was like miraculous deliverance literally from the jaws of death, when I found that the only sign of animal life near my bunk was the snarling of a large wolf-dog, back of the tent, which Clarke was cuffing about the ears, and ordering to "shut up."

No more grizzlies that night, goblin or real. At four we were up from our couches, and before six were mounted for the Yo-Semite,—just as the sunshine was beginning to slip down the file of dark, slim and stately evergreens that stand sentinel on the western bound of the lovely meadow in the heart of the wilderness. We all shook hands cordially with Clarke, each adding a hearty "God bless you!" to the formal "good bye" and, with the sincere hope that we might again enjoy the hospitality of his "tented field," crossed the south fork of the Merced, and struck cheerily into the lonely mountain trail. [97] It was not long before we found a pretty rough and steep ascent before us, in fact an irregular and jagged stairway, not much more civilized in aspect than the Cone of Mount Washington. Nowhere on our track before, had we encountered any slope, or eminence, where the skin had been worn away from the bones of the mountains. And at this first difficult steep we came very near a disaster that would have spoiled all our pleasure.

A California horse of the old Spanish stock never becomes thoroughly civilized. He may be ever so well broken, and seem completely meek and docile; he may be worn down and nearly worn out in an omnibus or a dray,—but he carries a drop of savage and untameable blood in his heart that will sometimes make him vicious and insane in a moment, after years of good behavior. It is, therefore, always "dangerous to be safe" with one of them, especially on a wild mountain path. Our horses had plodded along with us so patiently and faithfully, for two days over all the swells and ridges of the wilderness, that we had no thought of peril from their untrustiness, and rode on generally a mile or two ahead of the pack-mule and guides. But when we were half way up this dangerous rocky slope, the beast that carried the oldest member of the party, our genial and excellent "Silver Grey" companion, became suddenly enraged and ungovernable. He reared, jumped stiff-legged, shook himself, kicked and whirled as though he was suddenly possessed by a demon. Our friend was a capital horseman;—but on a jagged steep of fifty degrees with an insane brute under him, a circus-rider could not keep his seat; and before any of us could dismount, our companion was thrown among the sharp-edged rocks, and the beast rushed down the cliff, plunging and kicking in utter fury. The guides behind managed to stop him and save him from dashing his brains out, while we gathered around our prostrate friend. There were severe wounds on his hand, arm, and cheek, and a large swelling from a blow very near the

temple. We feared that his back was broken, or that he was seriously injured internally. As he lay pale, bruised and faint on the desolate slope, we felt sure, for some minutes, that the joy of our excursion was ended; and that we should have the sad, difficult duty of returning over the horseback path, forty miles, with the lifeless or the suffering body of our companion, to Mariposa.

As soon as he could speak after the first faintness, we asked him if he were suffering in the back or limbs. I shall never forget the pathos of the answer. His voice has a singularly plaintive and delicate quality and cadence. He lay among the rocks with his face pale and bloody, with his eyes still closed, and only able to speak a few words in a very feeble tone. And he said, very gently and slowly,—"I think no bone is broken; but it would have been a slight matter if I had broken my neck, for I am a bachelor, without a relative on earth to mourn my death." It was an unspeakable relief to us to find, on lifting our companion, that his limbs and back were uninjured. We had great need of plaster and bandages for the flesh wounds, and we found that the thoughtful wife of one of our members had supplied a package of just the essentials in case of such an accident. We dressed the wounds of our companion, with most emphatic and cordial eulogies on all excellent and "motherly" women, such as her whose hand was thus stretched two hundred and fifty miles from her kind heart, to supply our pressing want in the wilderness. And to our joy, we found that in less than an hour strength had returned to our friend, so that we could start. He insisted on riding the horse that had thrown him, and the beast during all the remainder of the journey was as gentle as a lap-dog. But fifty times since my return, the scene has come back fresh—the most vivid picture of the excursion—of that pale face and grey head pillowed possibly for their last breath on those lonely rocks, and of the words that broke from a greater loneliness of the heart.

The trees on the path were again an undrainable feast, and the sugar pines, as before, were supreme in size and beauty. In size some of them were Goliaths,—measuring from twenty to thirty-two feet in girth; but in symmetry and grace the most stalwart were Apollos. Now and then we saw a very large one whose straight stem for a hundred feet seemed to have been bored with an auger, till the bark was honeycombed with holes. These were the savings-banks of the woodpeckers. In each of these holes a nut or acorn is deposited for winter stores by the prudent birds. I saw some trees that were prepared each for thousands of these deposits, and it was vexing enough to learn that the lazy, good for nothing, Digger Indians often rob one of these stately magazines, just after the birds have stocked it with an autumn store. This is literally being fed by the Providence that supplies the "fowls of the air." But many a Californian, if the question were up between the Diggers and the woodpeckers, would not hesitate in deciding the point of the "more value" in favor of the plundered birds.

The higher we rose on the flank of the mountains, the nobler the average of these sugar pines seemed to be. In science I believe they are the *Pinus lambertiana.* They find their perfection about five thousand feet on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada chain. From San Bernardino to Oregon, more than five hundred miles, they stripe the majestic wall with their beauty, looking down a mile upon the plains, and overhung nearly two miles above by the brilliant desolation of perpetual snow. If one is not responsive to the poetry of their mass and symmetry, he may be interested in knowing that they furnish timber equal to any other tree in the world. The grain is so straight that thousands of houses in California are weather-boarded with shingles from them, which are simply split without any other expense or work.

The flowers, too, continued as luxuriant and various as on the previous days. And the youngest member of our party, a supple youth of sixteen, kept us well supplied with each variety without the trouble or delay of dismounting. He would put spurs to his California nag, strike off to the right or left of the trail among the scattered evergreens, gallop through a bank of flowers, and gather a lupine, or a mariposa, which is the butterfly-flower, or a little short-stemmed scarlet beauty, by leaning over the side of the horse and holding on by the heel. Sometimes he would dip a cup of water from a shallow brook, with his horse at full speed. In this way we had circus-exercises in the forest, connected with the outgush of as cheery a disposition and the constant exhibition of as graceful a courtesy from this admirable youth, as ever distinguished a young knight

in the forests of Normandy.

After four hours of this moderate climbing through the glorious woods, we began to be on the watch, for some signs of the rocks that wall in the Yo-Semite Valley. We had reached a level plateau with here and there a large patch of pretty treacherous marsh, bounded by thicker growths of smaller trees—mostly balsam-firs. Through occasional openings we caught glimpses of barren walls of rock spiring into peaks whose roughnesses were white with snow. I supposed that we had yet to climb a thousand feet or more in order to reach the top of the rampart down whose side we were to descend into the valley. But we rode on and on, and yet saw no line ahead of a rocky acclivity. Our guides from Coulterville had never been over this Mariposa trail; and after half an hour of such level travelling, I began to feel almost sure that we had missed the track, and ought to return in search of some diverging path. Just when I had become certain of a mistake, and was about to call a council of war, we passed out from among the stripling trees, and found ourselves,—where, think you, reader? On the edge of a trench in the Sierras, four thousand feet deep and six or eight miles long! Imagine yourself on a horseback tour in search of the White Mountain Notch, and suddenly riding out from a thicket of young birches upon the edge of the wall of Mt. Webster, looking down upon the Saco and the Willey House.

But there you would look down upon a curving line, meeting or flowing into a curve from Mt. Willey that faces it. We came to a precipice of sheer rock, which is twenty-seven hundred feet deep. Immediately opposite, about a mile across, a portion of that northerly wall stands up thirty-eight hundred feet high. And it does not abate a jot from the perpendicular. It is clean, naked granite. A plummet could be dropped straight from its pediment to its base. On our southerly side the wall rises gradually in height to the right hand or east of us, and in some portions rears a tower or spire sixteen hundred feet higher than where we emerged from the forest; and the great dome of smooth, unspotted rock, eight miles distant from us by air-line on this southerly wall, lacks a few yards only, by measurement, of five thousand feet above the stream that winds beneath it. But it is everywhere abrupt and sheer.

How can I express the awe and joy that were blended and continually struggling with each other, during the half hour in the hot noon that we remained on the edge of the abyss where the grandeurs of the Yo-Semite were first revealed to us? The whole trench is seven or eight miles long, as we have said, between the highest walls. But the ramparts curve so much that we could not see more than half that length on the east. At our left, on the west, we could follow the course of the beautiful Merced for a dozen miles, as it flowed down from its grim prison, between the gradually dwindling ramparts. No, let me take back both words, the “prison” and the “grim.” It ought to look so, but it does not. [98] There was a grave cheerfulness in the general aspect of the tremendous furrow, in spite of the bareness of the scraped walls, and the desolation enthroned upon the lofty summit springing three thousand feet higher into the bleak air from the most northerly portion of the opposite battlement.

I had read in a volume of travels among the highest Himalayas of the singularly blue tone of the cliffs and rocks. This was very striking in the first sight of the Yo-Semite. There was a delicate and most charming blue tint spread over the walls and heights. Look steadily at a cliff and it would wear a deathly ash color; but this spirited azure hue was a lambent light, vivifying it to the general glance. Then at the bottom we looked, not upon desolation, but upon the loveliest meadows skirted by stately trees and veined by a river as large as the Connecticut at Bellows Falls. On the ramparts opposite, streams were plunging with headlong fury to the Valley. To our eyes, however, there was no fury:

> “But like a downward smoke, the slender stream
> Along the cliff to fall and pause did seem.”

There was the murmur of a heavy waterfall beneath us. A slight change in our position showed us a sudden sag of the rock line on our southerly wall, and there, fifteen hundred feet below us, was the head of a cataract

which took one plunge of nearly a thousand feet before its spray was shattered on the rocks. [99] The scene was sublime, but it was not lonely, desolate or sombre, as I had expected. And all the angularity and hardness of line in the ramparts was soothed by some indefinable, mystic grace. I was not surprised, therefore, to learn that this spot where this magnificence bursts on the vision is named "Inspiration Point."

At the close of this long letter, the reader, of course, will ask to be excused from descending on horseback into the valley on the steep bridle path. I must leave him on "Inspiration Point." And I will take the liberty to leave with him a little California-born rhetoric in honor of the view from this eminence. I quote from a recent report to the State Agricultural Society. The italics are mine. "We will not attempt any description of *the thing* as a whole. *The thing is there* away up in the Sierras; and all we have to say is that he who has threaded the streets of Nineveh and Herculaneum, scaled the Alps, and counted the stars from the top of Egypt's pyramids, measured the Parthenon, and watched the setting sun from the dome of St. Peter's, *looked into the mouth of Vesuvius, and taken the key-note of his morning song from the thunder of Niagara,* and has not seen the Yo-Semite, is like the Queen of Sheba before her visit to King Solomon—the half has not been told him." Shall I attempt to improve on that? No, verily.

K.

Letter Six
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 6

SAN FRANCISCO, December, 1860.

THE YO-SEMITE VALLEY

Dear Transcript: The Yo-Semite valley is a pass about ten miles long, which, at its eastern extremity, splits into three narrower notches, each of which extends several miles, winding by the wildest paths into the heart of the Sierra Nevada chain. For seven miles of the main valley, which varies in width from three quarters of a mile to a mile and a half, the walls are from two thousand to nearly five thousand feet above the road, and are nearly perpendicular. The valley is of such irregular width, and bends so much and often so abruptly, that there is great variety and frequent surprise in the forms and combinations of the overhanging rocks, as one rides along the bank of the stream. The patches of luxuriant meadow with their dazzling green, and the grouping of the superb firs, two hundred feet high, that skirt them, and that shoot above the stout and graceful oaks and sycamores, through which the horse path winds, are delightful rests of sweetness and beauty amid the threatening awfulness,—like the threads and Rashes of melody that relieve the towering masses of Beethoven's harmony. The ninth Symphony is the Yo-Semite of music. The Merced, which flows through the main aisle we are speaking of, is a noble stream a hundred feet wide and ten feet deep. It is formed chiefly of the streams that leap and rush through the narrower notches above referred to, and it is swollen also by the bounty of the marvellous waterfalls that pour down the ramparts of the wider valley. The sublime poetry of Habakkuk. is needed to describe the impression and perhaps the geology of these mighty fissures: *"Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers."*

Now let us descend from "Inspiration Point" by a very steep trail to the level of the Merced, and ride up between the cliffs to such rude hospitality as the isolation of the region may afford. If our readers don't like the title, "Inspiration Point" they are welcome to the Indian name of that perch, on the Mariposa trail, Open-eta-noo-ah. I would tell them what it means, if I knew. The first portion of it, "Open" is certainly appropriate, as we look down into the granite-lined abyss.

At the foot of the break-neck declivity of nearly three thousand feet by which we reach the banks of the Merced, we are six miles from the hotel, and every rod of the ride awakens wonder, awe and a solemn joy. First, we come within the sound of a sweet and steady thunder which seems to pour from heights at our right hand. The trees allow only glimpses of the wall, but not the cause of the continuous music. Soon we cross a fair sized rivulet that flows merrily athwart the trail; then another, and another, and another, each of them large enough for a quartz-mill stream. Again and again we meet and ford them. There are a dozen such, and soon in a wider opening among the trees we see the parent stream. But it is no prosaic water. It is a gush of splendor, a column of concentrated light from heaven. Of course, we turn our horses' heads straight toward it. Soon we dismount, and clamber over the boulders and debris around which its dishevelled strands are briskly leaping. The rich bass deepens as we rise, and before long we are in a cloud of spray that mounts

> and thence again
> Returns in an unceasing shower, which round
> With its unemptied cloud of gentle rain,
> Is an eternal April to the ground,
> Making it all one emerald.

Not a very "gentle" rain, however, as our soaked clothes soon attested. I did not stay long amid the glories of the flashing iridescence, for I wished to stand by the wall itself and look up. So I pushed ahead through the blowing rainbows, and soon reached the smooth-faced rampart. I was entirely safe now from the spray, which fell forty feet in front upon the boulders, and I could look up steadily, with no mist in the eyes except what the wonder of the picture stimulated. I am not going to describe it. The ponderous and the sentimental adjectives shall be undisturbed in my Worcester's Dictionary, which has come to me "around the Horn." The wall is here about a thousand feet high, for a distance of an eighth of a mile. It sags in the centre, and there, eight hundred feet over my head, was the curve of the cataract, as it pours from the level stream for its unbroken descent of a sixth of a mile. Not a single projection from the wall, or bulge in it, is there to fret or mar the majesty and freedom of the current. It was probably fifteen feet wide where it started its descent; it kept its curve and a concentrated life for some three hundred feet; and then gravitation got hold of it, shook it apart, and made it tumble headlong through the air for five hundred feet more, scattering millions of pearls, and whole sheets of filmy mist, to be smitten with splendor by the sun.

This cascade is called "The Bridal Veil." A worse name might be given to it. In fact a worse name was given to it; for I find that in 1856 it was christened "Falls of Louise" by some explorers, in honor of "the first lady of our party that entered the valley." Thank Heaven, the cataract wouldn't stand this nonsense; and it seemed to me to be Pleading with us to have the "Bridal Veil" folly thrown aside, that it might be known forever by its Indian baptism, "Pohono." As I think of it, I lose quickly the impression of the widening of its watery trail before it struck the rocks to strike thunder from them; I do not dwell, either, on the fascinations of its evermelting and renewing tracery, nor on the brilliance of the Iris-banners that are dyed into its leaping mists and flying shreds; I can recall for my supreme delight only the curve of the tide more than eight hundred feet aloft where it starts off from the precipice, and the transparency of its "vitreous brink" with the edge now and then veiled with a little curling, dusty vapor when the wind blew hard against it, but generally tinged with a faint apple-green lustre. Thus, before we had been twenty minutes in the Yo-Semite valley, we were at the foot of a fall as high and more beautiful than the celebrated Staubach, the highest in Europe. [100]

Still we have five miles of horseback riding to the hotel. Is there such a ride possible in any other part of the planet? Nowhere among the Alps, in no pass of the Andes, and in no cañon of the mighty Oregon range, is there such stupendous rock-scenery as the traveller now lifts his eyes to. The Sierra Nevada has very few peaks that make the impression which fourteen thousand feet of height ought to leave on the mind. But it may challenge any portion of the globe, except the awful gorges of the Himalaya through which the gloomy Sutlej pours, to rival the savageness and sublimity of these bluffs and spires. The Saguenay river shores are the best suggestion of the rocky sides of the Yo-Semite valley; but their grandest headlands are not half so high as

portions of these battlements. Drain the black tide of the Saguenay from its bed, and cover the bottom of the chasm thus revealed with brilliant meadows and groves two hundred feet high, and Canada could show a twin Yo-Semite.

After leaving the nook in which the Pohono tumbles, we found ourselves soon under a cliff twice as high. We were obliged to turn our heads back, to see its crest, two thousand feet of sheer height above us. The first view was so terrible that I supposed this must be the most striking scenery in all the valley, and I was greatly astonished at learning the absolute measurement of the precipice. Opposite this cliff, on the left or northerly bank of the river, stood the sublime rock called “El Capitan” or the Chieftain—a Spanish rendering of the Indian name “Tu-toch-ah-nu-lah” a sachem of one of the early tribes. This wonderful piece of natural masonry stands at an angle with the valley, presenting a sharp edge and two sides in one view. And how high, think you? 3,817 feet! [101] Can’t we honestly put an exclamation point there? Remember, too, that it stands straight. There is no easy curve line as in the sides of the White Mountain Notch—to a picture of which I lift my eyes as I write in my library. In fact, the monstrous mass beetles a little. You can stand on the summit and drop a plumb-line to the base. I called it just now a piece of natural masonry; but the word is inaccurate. The immense escarpment has no crack or mark of stratification. There is no vegetation growing anywhere on it, for there is no patch of soil on either front, and no break where soil can lodge and a shrub can grow. It is one block of naked granite, pushed up from below to give us a sample of the cellar-pavement of our California counties, and to show us what it is that our earthquakes joggle. But on one face the wall is weather stained, or lichen-stained with rich cream-colored patches; on the other face it is ashy grey. A more majestic object than this rock I expect never to see on this planet. Great is granite, and the Yo-Semite is its prophet!

We ride along a little further on the right bank of the river, and find another portion of the wall over our heads on the right hand, from which two immense obelisks are upreared. They are called “The Sisters!” [102] Bah! One is named Udola, the other Tululah,—not Indian namings, but white men’s sentimental nonsense. These “Sisters” with soft liquid titles, look down upon you from an altitude of thirty-five hundred feet, and occasionally send their respects to the meadow in a flake or two of a thousand tons, dropping perpendicularly more than half a mile! Miss Udola will excuse us for not tarrying long in the neighborhood of her charities. Another mile, and we are under the shadow of “The Sentinel” Look up to that “pinnacled silence!” *There* is a height greater than the twin obelisks last left, and even overlooking by five hundred feet the wall “El Capitan” on the left bank below. How charmingly the frosts have gnawed and ravaged its upper edges! We drive close to the base, hold our heads back at a right angle with the back-bone, and gaze long at the delicate points and lines of those splinters in the zenith. The highest of those needles is 4347 feet over our heads. [103] Reader, do you appreciate that height? Probably you have been in “The Glen” among the White Mountains, and you remember the sharp peak of Mt. Adams, whose pyramid is so symmetrical, seen from the porch of the Glen House. But on that porch you stand at least three miles from the Centre of the mountain’s base. Imagine Mt. Adams cloven by Omnipotence from that apex to its lowest stone, so that you could ride on horseback within a few rods of the smooth wall, and look up from plinth to crown! That summit is not quite forty-three hundred feet above the Glen; and you can now judge what it is to turn your eye to the dim turrets of “The Sentinel” in Yo-Semite.

The wall opposite the Sentinel has a height at one point of 4480 feet. [104] The valley is about a mile wide. If the two sides could be pried from their foundations and tipped toward each other, they could not fall. They would meet and support each other, and convert the valley into a mighty cave, with a roofing more than three-quarters of a mile high. In fact, early in the Summer afternoon, the opposite wall is in gloom, and throws its immense shadow athwart the meadows beneath, robbing them of four hours of sunshine which the fields under the Sentinel enjoy. These shadows divide our attention with the continuous line of rampart under which we ride still three miles before reaching our goal. And the hotel is not the end of the valley or its wonders. Still beyond, as we catch sight of it, are two immense domes of bare and glistening granite. How high are they? What is the measure of that Southerly one which the declining sun is sheathing with impalpable gold? If it were 23 feet higher it would be 5000 feet! I look for an earthquake to make it stand on tiptoe yet, and add

the requisite amount to the present 4967 feet which the surveyors allow to it. [105] But as it stands, it is three hundred feet taller than Mt. Washington, from the points nearest its base, and the side of St. Peter's is not more perpendicular than the wall which it crowns. But as we approach the hotel and turn toward the opposite bank of the river, what is that

> Which ever sounds and shines,
> A pillar of white light upon the wall
> Of purple cliffs aloof descried?

That, reader, is the highest waterfall in the world, the Yo-Semite cataract, 2500 feet in its plunge, dashing from a break or depression in a Cliff 3200 feet sheer! [106] Of course, we must not commence a description of it here. It won't run dry—at least the memory of it will not—before another letter can be written. With its music in our ears we will go into the Shanty-Hotel, and ask for rooms, and water, and a meal. The hotel is a two story institution about fifty feet long, and fifteen feet deep. The front is clap-boarded; the back wall is common cotton cloth. The hall upstairs is not finished off into chambers, but has spaces of eight feet square divided by cotton screens, within which beds without sheets are laid upon the bare floor. There are two rooms below which have beds on posts, and furniture for ladies. But what care we for rooms and furniture, when the windows are open, and we look out upon that opposite wall and the marvellous cascade, whose glorious music floods the air? [107]

"Mr. Peck, can you give us a broiled chicken, some bread and butter, and a cup of tea with fresh milk or cream?" Clover grows six feet tall on the Yo-Semite meadows, but landlord Peck replies: "Gentlemen, I have no milk, for I do not keep a cow. There is no butter in the house, and chickens were never seen here." What, O *Transcript,* do you think our meal consisted of? Stewed oysters and lobster! I hold up my pen and make oath. Among those wilds of the Sierras we had on the table oysters and lobster from New York, with a bottle of Boston pickles. And the shellfish were cooked for us by a Chinaman! The crustacea finding their way from the Atlantic, and the cook from the Pacific, to that magnificent glen—so lately the undisturbed camp of the grizzlies—is it not a sign of the union which California is destined yet to celebrate between the remotest East and West?

K.

Letter Seven
A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 7

SAN FRANCISCO, December, 1860.

THE YO-SEMITE VALLEY

Dear Transcript: It is a long time since we took our dinner of lobster and oysters, cooked by a Chinaman, in the rough refuge where Peck dispenses his Yo-Semite hospitality. But we will imagine that the meal is swiftly despatched, and that we hurry out of doors, to lie on the grass near the deep, calm, greenish tide of the Merced, and, shaded by a clump of firs, each more than two hundred feet high, gaze till we are tired on the waterfall that fronts the house. We shall find that hours win fly by without bringing fatigue, or affecting our admiration and joy other than by enlarging and deepening them.

The Yo-Semite cataract is the highest in the world, yet known. The portion of the granite wall of the valley which rises opposite the hotel, is more than three thousand feet high. In a superbly arranged nook or bend, in the precipitous rampart, the cataract is framed. Mr. Greeley, in the account of his very hurried September visit

to the valley, a year ago, calls it a mere "tape-line" of water dropped from the sky. Perhaps it is so toward the close of the dry season; but as we saw it, the blended majesty and beauty of it, apart from the general sublimities of the Yo-Semite gorge, would repay a journey of a thousand miles. There was no deficiency of water. It was a powerful stream thirty-five feet broad, fresh from the Nevada, that made the plunge from the brow of the awful precipice; and as the valley is only a mile in width, our delightful resting place, on the southerly bank of the Merced, in the pass, afforded us the most favorable angle for enjoying its exhaustless charm.

Like sheet lightning,
Ever brightening,
With a low melodious thunder,
All day and all night it is ever drawn
From the brain of the purple mountain,
Which stands in the distance yonder.

The thunder, however, though certainly melodious, is by no means low, as our readers may imagine, when the measure of the fall is reported to them. At the first leap it clears 1497 feet; then it tumbles down a series of steep stairways 402 feet, and then makes a jump to the meadows, 518 feet more. The three pitches are in full view, making a fall of more than 2400 feet. [108]

But it is the upper and highest cataract that is most wonderful to the eye, as well as most musical. The cliff is so sheer that there is no break in the body of the water during the whole of its descent of more than a quarter of a mile. It pours in a curve from the summit, fifteen hundred feet, (the height of six Park street spires, remember,) to the basin that hoards it but a moment for the cascades that follow. And what endless complexities and opulence of beauty in the forms and motions of the cataract! It is comparatively narrow at the top of the precipice, although as we said, the tide that pours over is thirty-five feet broad. But it widens as it descends, and curves a little on one side as it widens, so that it shapes itself, before it reaches its first bowl of granite, into the figure of the comet that glowed on our sky two years ago. More beautiful than the comet, however, we can see the substance of this watery loveliness ever renew itself, and ever pour itself away. Our readers have seen the splendid rockets, on Fourth of July nights, that burst into the serpents of fire. This cataract seems to shoot out a thousand serpentine heads or knots of water, which wriggle down deliberately through the air, and expend themselves in mist before half the descent is over. Then a new set burst from the body and sides of the fall, with the same fortune on the remaining distance; and thus the most charming fretwork of watery nodules, each trailing its vapory train for a hundred feet, or more, is woven all over the cascade, which swings, now and then, thirty feet each way on the mountain side, as if it were a pendulum of watery lace. Once in a while, too, the wind manages to get back of the fall, between it and the cliff, and then it will whirl it round and round for two or three hundred feet, as if it were determined to try the experiment of twisting it to wring it dry. We could lie for hours before Mr. Peck's door, never tired in gazing on this cataract, but ever hungry for more of the witcheries of motion and grace that refine and soften its grandeur.

Especially if landlord Peck himself will join our circle, now and then, and drop a word or two of quaint and savory comment on the scene. There has been a deal of mighty rhetoric born in California from the Yo-Semite and its wonders. The cataracts are responsible for much more spouting than is seen. I have quoted one description of "the thing" in a former letter, which is "hard to beat" But here is a gush of the genuine Yankee eloquence, concerning the falls. A writer, not content with the old method of appreciating cataracts singly, informs us that "the aggregate height" of the cascades in the valley "measures 4728 feet" and then assures us that "the concentrated echo of their continuous roar outsounds a hundred fields of artillery."

Perhaps I did not happen to stand in the focus where the echo is concentrated. Perhaps the writer meant to say "concentrated essence." Any way, I think he must deduct a field or two of artillery, else I must criticise his account, or blame the Echo for some bronchial weakness during my visit. But Mr. Peck assured us that "when

there's a freshet, the Yo-Semite fall fills this valley with a roar as if all the stampers in the world were agoing in it like mad." "Stampers" are the batteries in quartz-mills that pound the rock to dust. You see, therefore, that friend Peck's image, although not up to the "hundred fields of artillery" has a better local flavor, and is by no means disrespectful toward the glorious baritone of the cascade. At any rate, if you could hear the roar of the Benton Mills on Col. Frémont's estate, when their "sixty-four pounders"—for that is the exact number of their stamping irons—are trampling the rock to powder, you would prefer, for the health of the tympanum, to visit the Yo-Semite at some other time than in a freshet.

In the rough unplastered hotel, was a lithographic picture, fresh from New York, of the great prize-fighters of the world. I judged from this work of art, by a not very forced or unnatural logic, as it was the only ornament of the establishment, that friend Peck had a lurking love, not unlike the *Atlantic* "Professor," for the ambiguous science, which may degenerate into "shoulder-hitting," or rise into "muscular Christianity." But I soon learned that, however strong our host's passion may be for "the ring," his poetic sentiment is stronger. For he talked to us, with genuine enthusiasm, of a thunder storm that raged in the valley, a few weeks before our visit. It seemed to concentrate, he said, near the tower of rock over the Yo-Semite fall, which is three thousand feet high. "Jerusalem! how the fire flew, and how the thunder did butt that cliff! It was a great fight. Every now and then, the fog would kinder back off, to let the thunder see whether the rock was down, and then it would close in and let fly again. I tell ye now, the champion fight between Europe and Ameriky was nothin' to it!" I looked on Mr. Peck with respect from that moment, for his poetic feeling, and upon the bare and sombre precipice, too, with increased reverence, not untouched with sympathy, in thinking of the Heenan hits from the thunderbolts which it stands up to so manfully, and has resisted for a thousand centuries or more. But it needs our sympathy more for the frosts that insinuate their cunning levers among its fissures. The spears of the lightning break harmless upon it usually, though they ride against it with the roar of the bursting cloud. The insidious frost, without noise, fastens its fulcrum on a little water, and now and then tumbles off a chip weighing twenty tons or so, which wakens a heavier thunder than that which has burst fruitlessly upon it so often from the breast of the storm. The debris around the base of the walls in the Yo-Semite bears witness to the sharpness of the tooth of the cold, which has wrought a thousand times more ravage in the valley than the combined wrath of earthquake and lightning.

Of course I visited the foot of the lowest fall of the Yo-Semite, and looked up through the spray five hundred feet to its crown. And I tried to climb to the base of the first or highest cataract, but lost my way among the steep sharp rocks,—for there is only one line by which the cliff is scaleable. But no nearer view that I found, or heard described, is comparable with the picture from the hotel of the comet-curve of the upper cataract, fifteen hundred feet high, and the two falls immediately beneath it in which the same water leaps to the level of the quiet Merced. Each day that I staid, the view was more fascinating, and it would be Mr. Greeley's "tapeline" rather than even the tremendous walls of the gorge, that could draw me most powerfully to the Yo-Semite valley again.

Is it not delightful, O reader, that the highest cataract in the world bears so noble a name,—Yo-Sem-i-te? It is Indian, and signifies "little grizzlies." A grizzly is named variously, by the Indian tribes of the neighborhood—O-Sum-a-tah, Yo-ami-tah, and Yo-Sem-i-te. The valley derives its name from the fact that it abounded once in these majestic beasts. [109] And think what an escape the cataract has had! It was once named, by the earliest party that visited it,—what think you? "Melissa's Falls!" Then the cliff opposite, the majestic "Sentinel-Rock," forty-three hundred feet high, would soon have been christened "Alonzo" no doubt; and we should have had the great "South Dome" and the magnificent walls that line the way to the falls of the middle fork of the Merced, for which I must beg one more letter, baptized with titles from the "Three Spaniards!" Let the last music that we hear, in turning from the great cataract, be an accompaniment to our gratitude and joy that it keeps the name, "Yo-Sem-i-te."

K.

Letter Eight A VACATION AMONG THE SIERRAS—NO. 8

SAN FRANCISCO, January, 1861.

THE YO-SEMITE VALLEY

Dear Transcript: I have already told your readers that the Yo-Semite gorge is a huge trench in the Sierras, eight or ten miles long, leading at the upper or eastern end into three narrower passes, each of which is several miles in extent. Through the long and principal furrow, the Merced river winds among rich meadows, which are overhung by the precipitous granite that sometimes reaches a height of more than four thousand feet from the base. Into this main valley the Pohono, or "Bridal Veil" fall, and six miles above it, on the opposite cliff, the great Yo-Semite cataract, pour their splendor,—the first from a height of nine hundred feet, the second, in three leaps all visible at once, of fifteen hundred, four hundred, and five hundred feet. These walls and cataracts, with the noble river flowing through meadows that bear grasses seven feet high, and clover six feet tall, and skirted with the stateliest trees in the world, would seem to be enough to repay a visit.

But now we must say a word of the three upper passes, or notches, whose streams combine to form the Merced.

The North Fork, as it is called, rushes down a wild and desolate chasm, and just before it bursts into the larger valley, sobers itself into a placid lake of a few acres in extent, between two bare mountains of granite, called the North and South Domes. [110] A ride of three or four miles from the shanty-hotel conducts us to this rift, where the awful walls and their barren crowns are mirrored in a little basin but little larger than Profile Lake, in Franconia. The North Dome, called by the Indians To-coy-ar, is 3700 feet above the water. Tis-sa-ack, the South Dome, which, however, is only half a dome, soars 4967 feet over its image in the Lake Ah-wi-yah. A lake in front of the Glen House, in which the cap-stone of Mount Washington might take a peep at itself, would reflect a height of only 4685 feet. But to make that spot resemble the surroundings of Ah-wi-yah, Mount Washington would require to be hewn so as to show a smooth wall of twenty-five hundred feet, springing over the lake, and supporting, a little back of it, the summit with a smooth face again of two thousand feet. And then Mt. Carter would have to be pushed up to the line of the Glen House itself, stripped of its verdure, and split down into a sheer precipice of two or three thousand feet, to front its frightful antagonist.

The whole ride from the hotel to the lake is under ramparts and battlements ranging from two thousand to thirty-five hundred feet high, that would exhaust all the adjectives appropriate to rock majesty which the new "Worcester" could supply, in their description. Indeed, I was most agreeably disappointed by the variety of form and grandeur in the whole Yo-Semite gorge. The descriptions and lithographs I had read and seen gave me the impression of monotonous and gloomy majesty in the walls, and of an Egyptian heaviness and grotesqueness of build and shape in the chief cliffs, which, I supposed, would be dispiriting, and soon, perhaps, wearisome. But no portraiture by pen or pencil has done justice to the "infinite variety" in the forms of the rocks, and their inspiring livingness of aspect,—if such an expression means anything. What the valley is worth to a geologist I do not know; but an artist who loves rocks might revel in it for a dozen life-times.

The walls, as I have said, bend and are set at such angles that the visitor does not look up several miles of a furrow at once, but studies and enjoys the granite casing in divisions of a quarter or a half mile at a time. They vary in barrenness and in texture. Here is a patch without a tree or a vine on it, but it is crinkled with cracks. Opposite, perhaps, is a sheer front of three thousand feet, on whose bald surface the frost would try in vain to insert the tiniest of its destructive needles. And the walls support all sorts of crowning figures and ornaments. Cones are set on them; domes swell from them; turrets and towers overhang them; aiguilles and spires shoot

above them; pyramids are based on them; and the raggedest splinters, a thousand feet in height, start up from them, and drop a few hundred tons of granite, every winter, to adorn the base of the rampart with picturesque ruin.

The variety of colors, too, on the walls and cliffs, is rich and charming. Some of the heights are of dark bluish tint; some are ashy grey; some are striped and stained with lichens, seemingly; some are creamy; others almost white; while here and there black stripes and orange stains give grimness or cheerfulness to a few thousand square feet. The texture and cleavage of the rocks are equally various and attractive. One buttress will have folds on it like a rhinoceros's hide. Another has narrowing lines that run up aslant and end in a spire. A third has straight lines marking it. Then a front of a quarter of a mile is broken with portions of majestic arches. Soon conic sections are illustrated in a score of experiments which earthquakes and frosts have tried. And here and there is a cliff, higher than either wall of the White Mountain Notch, which seems to have been smitten by a Titanic battle-axe, and split smooth for a thousand feet, and then the axe, finding a granite knot which couldn't be cloven, was wrenched sideways, tearing off the remainder of the covering as the fibre of wood is wrenched off, flowing over the knot which bulges stubborn and invincible. I say nothing of the heads, and quaint figures and features, and queer looking animals that are seen, with more or less help from the fancy, on the heights; but certainly the rock sculpturing and hues on the Yo-Semite are various and strange enough, sublime and grotesque and lovely enough to make a week too short even for a superficial acquaintance with them.

Imagine that all this talk about rocks has been made while we were in the boat on the lake at the outlook of the North Fork, and under the frown of the two domes which we have described. The second pass or notch I wish to refer to is that of the South Fork of the Merced River. To make an excursion into this from the hotel, which is itself in the upper part of the main valley, would require a day. Horseback-riding is practicable only to the portals of the pass, about three miles from the hotel. Then we must scramble between the cliffs for three miles more, and be repaid by the wildness and splendor of the great cataract, Too-lu-lu-wack, which pours over a sheer precipice 500 feet. [111] But I must not stop to give any details of this excursion.

The central of the three subordinate notches, the pass of the Middle Fork of the Merced, demands all the space we can devote to it. An exploration of this also requires a day; and the hours we devoted to it remain, with our party, the most delightful reminiscence of the Yo-Semite tour. On the way to it, we passed an immense face of rock three thousand feet high, down which streams were singing merrily. We were exultant over its wildness and splendor; but landlord Peck, who went as guide with us, told us that the view was nothing to what it is in Spring. "Then" said he, "the streams come slipping down them steep stripes, and I tell ye it's beautiful, *jest like calico*!"

Leaving our horses about four miles from the hotel, in a charming grove, we climbed along the track of the Middle Fork, which is the main feeder of the noble Merced, for some five miles, all the way overhung by walls as high as those of the White Mountain Notch, but much closer, and as rocky as the front of Mt. Willard. [112] This pass is so much narrower than the main Yo-Semite valley, that the effect of height is as great as under the loftiest of the cliffs below. We found, in fact, that when a battlement or crag is perpendicular, so that you have to hold your head nearly at a right angle with the spine to look up to the summit, it makes little difference whether it is 2500 feet or 4000 in elevation; 2500 feet sheer is about as much as the eye can appreciate when looking up.

The first great reward in this Notch, after three miles or so of tramping and scrambling by the side of the raging stream, is the fall of Pi-wy-ack, abused by Yankees with the name of "Vernal," and of which it is said the true Indian title means "Shower of Sparkling Crystals." A tide sixty feet broad pours here some three hundred feet over a perpendicular and crescent rampart that joins the two sides of the Notch. [113] All of our readers who have seen that beautiful jet on Boston Common, which falls over as from a wide vase in separate drops, will know how this river is broken in making its dead pitch into a dell of rainbows over this glorious

precipice. We climbed the face of the rock by ladders, (which is the next thing to walking Blondin's rope over Niagara) stood by the fall, leaned over a natural parapet and watched for half an hour the sheet, sixty feet wide, falling three hundred feet without a tint of color on it, and seemingly with no fleck of foam. It was a sheet not of "Sparkling Crystals" begging the Indians' pardon, but of dead white pearls.

All day one might linger there looking off down the Notch, and beneath at the cascade. But once turn round and look further up the Notch, and you will leave the prospect and hurry on. What for? See that stream of light on another wall that joins the sides of the Notch, still a mile beyond. Ah yes, the river takes a more formidable leap there. We must hasten to that; and, in walking along the easy slope that leads to it, we have first a lake, in which the stream spreads and suns itself; then a flat granite race-way, over which, for a quarter of a mile, it rushes like a swift tide of thin molten glass; and then a flume down which it roars with fury. Passing this flume, we stand at the base of the great Nevada fall, called by the Indians "Yo-wi-ye" Seven hundred feet, they tell us, the river jumps and slides in this passage of its history. I doubt the figures a little, but the fall is of marvellous majesty. [114] Of course the height will not compare with the Yo-Semite cataract, but there is ten times the quantity of water, and the power of the fall as from "the head-long height it cleaves the wave-worn precipice" seems as great as any portion of the American fall at Niagara. Truly,

> "The flashing mass foams shaking the abyss,
>
> * * *
>
> As if to sweep down all things in its track,
> Charming the eye with dread—a matchless cataract!"

Just about the time we made our visit, Mr. [Nathaniel Parker] Willis was publishing in the *Home Journal* his criticism on the defects of Niagara—not of the cataract, but of its surroundings. Its *lack of a mountain,* he says, makes the natural sovereignty of the spot unrecognizable at any distance. "How much more properly Niagara would catch the eye, if quotation-marked with the Hudson Highlands on either side of the Fall, and emphasized with one high mountain peak for a note of admiration!" The great Nevada cataract is arranged on Mr. Willis's principles. The Sierras have put their exclamation point at precisely the right spot. For on the northwest, immediately over it, springs an obelisk of bare granite two thousand feet high, utterly unscaleable on the front, and on its back-line, repeating with surprising exactness the contour of the Matterhorn on its longer side, as drawn in the fourth volume of Ruskin's "Modern Painters" and in Hinchdiff's "Summer Among the Alps." [115] I do not know what splendors of cascade or sublimities of rock the Himalayas hide; but I would venture something on the faith that nowhere on the globe is there a mile of river scenery that will compare with this Sierra glen, through which the Middle Fork of the Merced makes its two glorious plunges under the shadow of granite walls and soaring pinnacles.

Tourists generally are content with the toil and the views that are gained when they reach the foot of the "Nevada." I climbed with one of our party above it, and on a mountain behind it, up and up, till we overtopped the obelisk that shoots from the side of the cataract. And still up we climbed in the hope of seeing a line of the kingly summits of the Sierra chain. My companion killed a rattlesnake that buzzed generously near our legs before making us acquainted with his fangs. And dangling his seven rattles as a trophy, without fear of any others, we still mounted, till we stood on a ridge that showed other obelisks of naked granite shooting up at the east, and very near us on the north, the great "Castle Peaks" which stand guard over the Mono silver region,—themselves frosted with silver on their summits that are bome up nearly 14,000 feet above the sea. [116] With this picture of the taller "exclamation notes" of California in our mind, we hastened down to the base of the Nevada fall; then to the parapet of the beautiful Piwyack where we rejoined our companions; then down the frightful ladders, and through the notch, to our horses in the larger gorge of the Yo-Semite;—and around our camp-fire in the evening, in front of the hotel, I, for one, believed what travellers

from Europe, from Sinai, from the wildest passes of the Peruvian Andes, told us, while the music of the highest cataract was in our ears,—that nowhere had they seen such rocks and such waterfalls as those among which we had passed three glorious summer days. But I am sure our readers will be glad to see a party of five riding *out* of the Yo-Semite, and to know that one of them is

K.

Notes

[1] Charles W, Wendte, *Thomas Starr King, Patriot and Preacher* (Boston, 1921), 69.

[2] Thomas Starr King, *Christianity and Humanity: A Series of Sermons,* edited by Edwin P. Whipple (Boston, 1877), xlii; Arnold Crompton, *Apostle of Liberty: Starr King in California* (Boston, 1950), 25-26.

[3] Thomas Starr King to Randolph Ryer, San Francisco, May 20, 1860, MS, in Thomas Starr King Papers, Bancroft Library.

[4] Franklin Walker, *San Francisco's Literary Frontier* (New York, 1939), 104.

[5] Oscar T. Shuck (ed.), *Representative and Leading Men of the Pacific* (San Francisco, 1870), 183; King to Ryer, San Francisco, August 5, 1860, MS, in King Papers.

[6] King to Ryer, San Francisco, May 20, 1860, MS, in *ibid.*; King to Ryer, San Francisco, September io, 1860, MS, in *ibid.*

[7] King to Ryer, San Francisco, May 20, 1860, MS, in *ibid.*

[8] Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 88.

[9] Shuck, *Representative and Leading Men,* 210. It is interesting to find that in this address King advocated the treatment of alcoholism as a disease. The state should provide institutions for the inebriate, he stated, as it does asylums for the insane.

[10] Richard Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King* (Boston, 1865), 98.

[11] King, *Christianity and Humanity,* xlvi.

[12] Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Eminent Orators* (New York, 1916), 326.

[13] King to Ryer, Concord, N. H., July 22, 1850, MS, in King Papers.

[14] King to Ryer, San Francisco, June 4, 1860, MS, in *ibid.*

[15] Hubbard, *Little Journeys,* 336.

[16] Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King,* 142.

[17] Ernest Poole, *The Great White Hills of New Hampshire* (New York, 1946), 333.

[18] King to Ryer, San Francisco, May 20,1860, MS, in King Papers.

[19] *Ibid.*; Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 89.

[20] *Golden Era* (San Francisco), July 8, 15, 1860; A. L. Bancroft & Co., *Bancroft's Tourist Guide: Yosemite* (San Francisco, 1871), 127. An excerpt from the Dashaway talk is in Shuck, *Representative and Leading Men,* 207-211.

[21] King to Ryer, San Francisco, July 11, 1860, MS, in King Papers.

[22] *Golden Era,* July 15, 1860; Society of California Pioneers, Memorial Record, vol. 14, pp. 139-141, MS; and other biographical files in the Society of California Pioneers.

[23] Carl P. Russell, *One Hundred Years in Yosemite* (Berkeley, 1947), 179-181.

[24] King to Ryer, Coulterville, July 12, 1860, MS, in King Papers.

[25] King to Ryer, "Mariposas County" July 13, 1860, MS, in *ibid.*; Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 90.

[26] Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 114-115.

[27] Postscript to King to Ryer, "Mariposas County," July 13, 1860, MS, in King Papers.

[28] Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King,* 186.

[29] King to Ryer, San Francisco, July 22, 1860, MS, in King Papers.

[30] *Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), July 30, 1860; excerpts from this sermon are printed in Oscar T. Shuck (comp.), *California Scrap-Book* (San Francisco, 1869), 446-457.

[31] King, *Christianity and Humanity,* 293.

[32] *Ibid.*, 322-323.

[33] Henry W, Bellows, *In Memory of Thomas Starr King* (San Francisco, 1864), 22.

[34] King to Ryer, San Francisco, June 30, 1862, MS, in King Papers.

[35] Shuck, *Representative and Leading Men,* 189.

[36] This paragraph is based on the following sources: Hans Huth, *Yosemite: The Story of An Idea* (reprint from the Sierra Club Bulletin, March, 1948; San Francisco, n. d.), 65; O. W. Holmes to King, Boston, April 13, 1862, MS, in Society of California Pioneers; J. G. Whittier to King, Amesbury, "5th, 6th mo." 1861, MS, in *ibid.*; Bellows, *In Memory of Thomas Starr King,* 22.

[37] James Mason Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras* (Oakland, Calif., 1886), 60, 80, 92. The Hutchings party may not have been the first tourist party to enter the valley. For mention of a reported 1854 company which is said to have included five women, see Irene D. Paden and Margaret E. Schlichtmann, *The Big Oak Flat Road* (San Francisco, 1955), 271.

[38] J. M. Hutchings, Notes to Accompany an Illustrated Lecture to "Gentlemen of the Senate and Assembly," MS, in the Yosemite Museum.

[39] *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), August 6, 1856; for details of Eastern mentions of Yosemite, see Huth, *Yosemite: The Story of An Idea*, 64, and as modified by Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley, 1957), 144.

[40] *Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), June 15, 18, 24, 27; July 8, 9, 1857; Lafayette Houghton Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite* (4th ed., Los Angeles, 1910, 314.

[41] *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), July 13, 22, 24, 1858. There may have been more parts to this series, but only three have thus far been seen by the present editor.

[42] John S. Hittell, *Yosemite: Its Wonders and Its Beauties* (San Francisco, 1868), 41.

[43] *Shuck, Representative and Leading Men,* 167; Bellows, *In Memory of Thomas Starr King,* 22.

[44] For examples see Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras,* Hittell, *Yosemite,* passim.

[45] Huth, *Nature and the American,* 145. It has been said that King was a leader in the campaign to have Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove set aside as a park, an effort which resulted in the Yosemite Grant of 1864 to the State of California. There are indications that such could well have been the case; but, in the opinion of the present editor, at any rate, further research is needed to define the extent of King's contribution to this significant step in the conservation movement. See Huth, *Yosemite: The Story of An Idea*, 65; Hal Curtis, *Starr King, Patriot and Mason* (San Francisco, 1951), 11.

[46] Richard Frothingham in Thomas Starr King, *Patriotism, and Other Papers* (Boston, 1864), 20.

[47] King to Ryer, Boston, March 2, 1854, MS, in King Papers.

[48] Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 57.

[49] *ibid.*, 58.

[50] Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King,* 238.

[51] King, Journal of Voyage from New York to San Francisco, part II, p. 29, MS, in King Papers.

[52] Walker, *San Francisco's Literary Frontier,* 103.

[53] King to Ryer, San Francisco, October 29, 1860, MS, in King Papers.

[54] King, journal, part I, pp. 18-19, MS, in *ibid.*; King to Ryer, San Francisco, July 11, 1860, MS, in *ibid.*

[55] King to Ryer, San Francisco, September io, 1862, MS, in *ibid.*

[56] Oscar T. Shuck, *California Anthology: or Striking Thoughts on Many Themes Carefully Selected from California Writers and Speakers* (San Francisco, 1880), 86.

[57] Hubbard, *Little Journeys,* 316.

[58] Shuck, California Anthology, 335.

[59] King, *Patriotism,* 181.

[60] Huth, *Nature and the American,* 101.

[61] Dust jacket of Crompton, *Apostle of Liberty.*

[62] For an analysis of the literature on this subject, see Benjamin Franklin Gilbert, "California and the Civil War: A Bibliographical Essay," in *California Historical Society Quarterly,* XL (December, 1961), 289-307. See also *University of Southern California, Abstracts of Dissertations . . . 1951,* pp. 9-11.

[63] Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 46.

[64] Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King,* 71.

[65] Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills; Their Legends, Landscape, and Poetry* (Boston, 1870), vii.

[66] Huth, *Nature and the American,* 120.

[67] Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King,* 147.

[68] Huth, *Nature and the American,* 102.

[69] King, *Christianity and Humanity,* xxxiv.

[70] King, *The White Hills,* 114.

[71] A recent survey is to be found in parts of Dr. Hans Huth's perceptive and stimulating book, *Nature and the American.*

[72] The letters originally appeared in the issues of the *Boston Evening Transcript* for December 1, 15, and 31, 1860; January 12, 19, 26, and February 2 and 9, 1861.

[73] Horace Greeley's visit to Yosemite during 1859 and the publication of his description of the journey in the New York *Tribune* have been discussed in the introduction. Who the painter of the picture seen in Boston by King could have been is an engaging subject of speculation. Thomas A. Ayres made the first known sketches of Yosemite scenes in 1855 and 1856; and the first lithograph based on them, a view of Yosemite Falls, was published in October, 1855. Although there are a few references to Ayres' "paintings" of Yosemite, it is not known that he made any paintings of Sierra scenes for Eastern buyers. William S. Jewett, a pioneer California artist, is reported to have made sketches in the valley during 1859, and from them he painted several Yosemite pictures. One of these paintings, a view of Yosemite Falls inscribed "1859" on the back, was found in the East years later, but there is no record of when it left California. Elliot Evans, "Yosemite Paintings of William S. Jewett" (typescript), 2-3.

[74] By 1859 the convention had already been established that the best time to visit Yosemite was between May 15 and June 10. But the "unprecedented" rains during May, 1860, and the prospect of more rain during June, caused the *Mariposa Star* to predict on June 5 that, for the 1860, season, "any time, from the present to the last of July will do." It was reported that a few parties had already been to Yosemite and had returned "without danger or serious difficulty:"

[75] It started to rain, a few drops, at 5 o'clock on the evening of July 10, 1860, in San Francisco. By 8 o'clock the downpour started in earnest, and it continued "with considerable violence and without intermission" until at least after midnight. San Francisco Herald, July 11, 1860. Although they generally disagreed on most subjects, the San Francisco papers were united in finding the unseasonable precipitation "quite unusual."

[76] The Crimea House was a stage station and inn for freighters on the Mound Springs Road between Keystone and Chinese Camp in Tuolumne County. Although the original station building has long since disappeared, the barn and stone corral may still be seen near the intersection of the Mound Springs Road with the La Grange highway.

[77] During 1860 the road between Knights Ferry and Coulterville was a favorite scene of operations for highwaymen. Probably the driver of the single wagon mentioned by King was the Stanislaus County teamster, John Wilson, who was robbed of all he had—about $11—on the road between Mound Springs and the Crimea House on the morning of July 12. Toward evening on the same day a lone horseman, Henry T. Allen, was forced to deliver about $65 to highwaymen near Knights Ferry. *San Francisco Herald,* July 16 and 18, 1860; *Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), July 16, 1860.

[78] Originally known as Banderita, Coulterville derived its name from an enterprising Pennsylvanian, George Washington Coulter, who established a store there in 1849. The town had been destroyed by fire during 1859, but by May, 1860, it was reported to be "handsomely rebuilt" with brick. *San Francisco Herald,* May 12, 1860. The town's principal hostelry, the Coulter Hotel, or Coulter's Hotel, was operated by the same G. W. Coulter after whom the town was named. In August, 1860, it was described as a wooden structure, 40 by 60 feet, lathed and plastered, and boasting a cuisine "unusually excellent for the interior." *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), August 17, 1860.

[79] "Substance and Show" was one of King's first and best-known lectures. Written in 1851, it had been delivered many times in the East, where it is said to have "almost equalled" Wendell Phillips's "The Lost Arts" in popularity. King delivered it in San Francisco shortly after his arrival from Boston, and excerpts from it had been widely circulated on the West Coast. He was also a powerful speaker against the evils of liquor. Two evenings earlier he had told the Dashaway Association of San Francisco that the battering of a human face in a boxing match was "not half so disfiguring as the traces of one *night's orgie.*"

[80] The first member of the party as listed by King probably was Squire P. Dewey; the fourth, the youth, may have been Dewey's son, Eugene E. Dewey; the fifth, the secretary of "slight proportions" was, of course, King himself. Alpheus Bull, of San Francisco, probably was with the group, but he does not seem to fit King's descriptions of either the second or third members.

[81] John Charles Frémont purchased Rancho Las Mariposas from Juan B. Alvarado in 1847 through the agency of Thomas O. Larkin. He began mining in the Mariposa region during the spring of 1849 and soon determined that the lasting mineral wealth was not in the placer gold but in the rich quartz veins which traversed the district. A steam-driven stamp mill was operating on the property by September, 1850. The boundaries of the huge rancho—it contained about 44,387 acres—were not defined, and the grant had not been confirmed by the United States Government. Thus Frémont was not able to prevent others from mining on the land, and large-scale development was hampered. After years of costly litigation, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the grant in 1856. Frémont had the rancho surveyed to stretch from about the Merced River at Bagby southward and eastward to include the town of Mariposa. Then followed another period of contest—physical as well as legal—to assert his rights to the mines within the grant boundaries. Only after this matter was substantially settled in his favor could he proceed with the full development of his estate.

Improvements—largely financed by borrowed money—were pushed rapidly in the latter part of 1858. The great wooden dam—built of timbers, tree trunks, brush, gravel, and rocks—mentioned in the next paragraph of King's letter, was begun in December, 1858, and completed during March of the next year. By August, 1859, a mill of 12 stamps was in operation on the Merced River, and more stamps were soon added. The mill by 1860 was "reputed" to be the largest in the state.

[82] The site of Benton Mills, named by Frémont for his father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, is in the present town of Bagby. The foundations of the mills are still visible on the south bank of the Merced River directly below the Highway 49 bridge. The mountain mentioned by King in the next sentence is now called Bullion Mountain. It also was named for Thomas Hart Benton, whose nickname in politics was "Old Bullion;" shortly. after the statesman's death in April, 1858.

[83] King had already visited the Mother Lode district of California, and one of his earlier letters to the *Transcript* had been devoted to a detailed description of the gold mines and the methods of mining. "Nevada" was the name King habitually used for Nevada City. Wendte, *Thomas Starr King,* 191-192.

[84] Hell Hollow, a steep-walled gorge tributary to the Merced River, lies immediately to the west of the present Highway 49 as it climbs southward from Bagby up the wall of the Merced canyon in the direction of Bear Valley. The grading of Frémont's railroad had caused some grumbling among merchants and miners in the Mariposa area since it in places obliterated the old trail which had long been in public use. As King mentions, the ore cars descended the railroad by gravity, but they were drawn up again by mules. This railroad was not, as is sometimes stated, the first in California. For a detailed description of the road and the entire Frémont Estate during 1860, see the *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), August 2-17, 1860.

[85] As is evident from the tone of this letter, King was an ardent partisan of Frémont and of the Pathfinder's wife, Jessie Benton Frémont. Upon the appearance of this letter in the *Transcript* Mrs. Frémont wrote King a "gem of a note" thanking him for his sympathetic presentation of the estate's turbulent history. "I was brought low as a little child by your vivid summing up;" she said, adding, "My great reward has come to me every time Mr. Frémont has told me that but for me, he could not endure through it." Jessie Benton Frémont to T. S. King, [San Francisco?], [January?] 16th, [1861.], MS, in Society of California Pioneers; King to Ryer, San Francisco, January 20, 1861, MS, in King Papers. Unhappily for the Frémonts, the financial troubles of the Mariposa Estate were not ended by the completion of the railroad, and the Pathfinder soon lost control of the property.

[86] Early in the summer of 1848 King's health had failed due to "nervous prostration." Through the generosity of a friend he was able to make a voyage to Fayal, an island of the Azores. The recovery of his strength on this trip enabled him to accept a call from the Hollis Street Church of Boston.

[87] Clark's Ranch, later known as Clark's Station, was in the beautiful forest opening now called Wawona. Its founder, Galen Clark, had visited the region during 1855. The next year, his health broken by his experiences as a miner and surveyor, he sought relief in the mountain air at Wawona, and in 1857 he established a ranch there. A tourist who passed through Wawona on May 25, 1857, commented: "Mr. Clark intends to erect a house to accommodate visitors." *Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), June 27, 1857. Clark's place quickly became the main way station on the Mariposa trail to Yosemite. In 1866 he was appointed guardian of the Yosemite Grant, and he remained closely identified with the valley and with the Mariposa Grove, of which he was said to have been the effective discoverer, until his death in 1910 at the age of 96.

[88] The fictional piece, "My Double; and how He undid Me" by Edward Everett Hale, appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly,* IV (September, 1859), 356-366.

[89] Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), the famous Congregationalist minister who for 43 years was pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, was one of the most noted orators in the United States. He, King, Wendell Phillips, and Dr. E. H. Chapin were the acknowledged "luminaries of the lecture platform" during the great lyceum era before the Civil War. Although rivals on the lecture circuit, Beecher and King were warm personal friends who "not infrequently" joined with other jovial companions for outings in the White Hills. Beecher had not yet become involved in the scandal which shadowed his later life.

[90] The grove King describes at this point is the present North Grove of the Calaveras Big Trees. This grove, extending over about 50 acres, contains 103 “larger trees;” more than 80 of which are 15 or more feet in diameter. By comparison, the Mariposa Grove consists of “no less than 200 trees 10 feet or more in diameter” Although seen at least as early as 1850, the Calaveras Big Trees were not effectively discovered until 1852. The North Grove, then generally known as the Mammoth Tree Grove, quickly became a tourist attraction, and a hotel was soon erected. There were, of course, a number of other large Sequoia gigantea groves in California, including the 1,000-tree South Grove of the Calaveras Big Trees and the stands now preserved in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks; but in 1860 the North Calaveras Grove and the Mariposa Grove were the only large groves generally known and reasonably accessible. A tree in the North Grove was later named for Starr King.

[91] The tree called “The Mother of the Forest” was stripped of its lower bark during the summer of 1854 to provide material for a commercial exhibit. According to the Whitney Survey, this tree was 315 feet high, and its circumference at the base, after the bark had been removed, was 84 feet. The reassembled bark was displayed in New York in 1855. Two years later the exhibit was placed in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, England, and there it remained until the building burned in 1866. Francis P. Farquhar, *Yosemite: the Big Trees, and the High Sierra: A Selective Bibliography* (Berkeley, 1948), li-13.

[92] The stump of this tree, the first Sequoia gigantea known to have been deliberately destroyed by man, may still be seen in the North Calaveras Grove. The tree was felled during 1853 at the direction of W. H. Hanford. The bark was stripped off to a height of about 60 feet and shipped to New York for exhibit. Even at the time there was a considerable feeling on the part of the public that Hanford had committed a “sacrilegious act,” and he received little sympathy when the venture proved to be a financial disaster.

[93] King’s version of the Warren list differs in several particulars from that given in James M. Hutchings, Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California (London, 1865), 146.

[94] Probably this group of sequoias was the small Tuolumne Grove, located about a mile north of Crane Flat. It had been brought to public attention by a party from Garrote during May, 1858, and by i 860 it was a regular “sight” for tourists traveling the Coulterville-Yosemite trail. The Merced Grove, about 2 miles southwest of Crane Flat and not far off the trail, apparently was not generally known in 1860; it was discovered, or “rediscovered;” about 1871 or 1872.

[95] During 1860 considerable attention was given in the press to “Munchausen stories” concerning a “Big Petrified Tree” which had been found near High Rock Canyon in northwestern Nevada. The most frequently circulated report said the tree was “666 feet long and 40 feet in diameter” During July, 1860, several members of Colonel F. W. Lander’s wagon road expedition visited the site of the discovery and found the so-called tree to be an “unmistakable petrifaction;” with the several parts —bark, heart, and even resin—all perfect in form and color. Close examination, however, convinced these engineers that the apparent tree was actually made up of the parts of at least 3 trees, broken in pieces and lying nearly in a line. “Still;” they concluded, “it was a great curiosity” even with the “ridiculous exaggeration” indulged in by the discoverers. One member of the group, however, pronounced the tree an “unmitigated humbug;” and the only wonder to his mind was how so many large tree sections “ever came there, where a two-inch sage brush serves as a back log to a campfire” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco[)], September 1 and 5, 1860. It is interesting to note that during October, 1860, King performed the marriage ceremony uniting Lander with “Miss Davenport the actress” Evidently the occasion did not provide King with the opportunity to discuss the Honey Lake petrifaction with the explorer.

[96] Hildebrand, the eleventh century churchman who became Pope Gregory the Seventh, was one of King’s favorite characters in history and was the subject of one of his lectures.

[97] In 1860 the usual route of tourist travel from Wawona to Yosemite Valley was the horse trail completed by Milton and Houston Mann in 1856. After crossing the South Fork of the Merced River near Clark's, the trail climbed steeply northward up the face of a ridge to a "plateau" at an elevation of about 5,500 feet. Following this contour for several miles it reached Alder Creek which it then ascended through Empire Meadows to its source and crossed to the Bridalveil Creek drainage. Passing through the present Peregoy Meadow, it turned northwestward and approached the south rim of Yosemite Valley along the Meadow Brook drainage, a short distance east of Old Inspiration Point. Turning westward past this latter promontory, the trail then descended sharply to the floor of the valley near Bridalveil Meadows. The present Alder Creek and Pohono Trails follow parts of this old route.

[98] King was not the only early traveler to be reminded of a prison by the high, gray cliffs of Yosemite. The Rev. John C. Holbrook visited the valley in 1859 and was much impressed by the precipitous rock walls. "The thought occurred to me that it would be an admirable place for a penal colony or State prison;" he wrote in all seriousness to a San Francisco paper. The Pacific, July 7, 1859.

[99] The view was of Bridalveil Fall as seen from the present Old Inspiration Point.

[100] The Staubbach Fall, in Switzerland, is now generally stated to have a total height of 980 feet, substantially more than Bridalveil's 620 feet. In the past, however, the height of Staubbach has often been given as 600 feet. It is no longer described as the highest in Europe, since at least two falls in Norway and one in France are considered to be higher.

[101] The height of El Capitan is now generally given as 3,604 feet above the valley floor. The sheer drop, however, is only about 2,898 feet.

[102] The name "The Sisters" is no longer applied to any landscape feature in Yosemite Valley. From King's description of the "two obelisks" he may have been referring to the present Cathedral Spires. A map of 1869 shows a feature called the "Three Sisters" along the south valley wall between Cathedral Spires and Sentinel Cascade, at a spot which would correspond with King's estimate that "The Sisters" were a mile west of Sentinel Rock. Charles Carleton Coffin, *Our New Way Round the World* (Boston, 1869), 486. Support for the Cathedral Spires hypothesis appears to be found in the words of an 1857 visitor who wrote: "Just above the Bridal Veil are three craggy peaks, rearing their heads far above the surrounding columns, presenting the appearance of lofty triangles. They are called the 'Brothers' [Evidently the present three Cathedral Rocks, not the present Three Brothers, which are on the north side of the valley.] A few yards to the right of the Brothers are the 'Twin Sisters' They are worthy of notice from their resemblance to each other. When viewed from any position, except directly in front, they appear like one spire or needle peering far above this great cathedral of nature. just above the Sisters is the 'Sentinel Rock'" *Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), July 8, 1857.

[103] King greatly overestimated the height of the present Sentinel Rock, which rises a little more than 3,000 feet above the valley floor. Sentinel Dome, nearly a mile southeast of Sentinel Rock, is about 4,200 feet higher than the valley floor, but it can scarcely be described as a "needle."

[104] King's estimate here is about 1,000 feet too high. It should be remembered that no official surveys of Yosemite had been made by 1860.

[105] This figure for the height of Half Dome above the valley floor is reasonably correct. At the present time the summit of this peak, often called South Dome during the 1860's, is considered to be about 4,888 feet above the ground level at the site of the Upper Hotel, where King's party lodged.

[106] Yosemite Falls, 2,425 feet high, are no longer ranked as the highest in the world. Angel Falls in Venezuela, 3,212 feet in height, now is the unchallenged holder of this honor.

[107] The hotel at which King and his friends stopped was the famed Upper Hotel, the second hostelry erected in the valley. It began as a blue tent erected in 1857 by Buck Beardsley and G. A. Hite on the south bank of the Merced River near the present Sentinel Bridge. There the two men conducted a general merchandise business and, perhaps, put up guests while preparing timbers and whipsawing lumber for a new hotel. Construction was started during the spring of 1858, but the work went slowly, and the hotel was not ready for business until the summer of 1859. It is usually said that the first guests were accommodated during May of that year, but a traveler who reached the valley about June 9 reported that "Hights Hotel" was not yet completed. When C. L. Weed, the pioneer photographer of Yosemite, and J. M. Hutchings arrived before the end of the same month, however, the establishment seems to have been operating.

Debts contracted during construction and the failure of an elaborate Fourth of July party soon placed Beardsley and Hite in financial difficulties, and they assigned the hotel to their creditors, two San Francisco merchants named Sullivan and Cashman. Then it was leased for two years, probably 1860-iMi, to Charles Peck, who was the proprietor at the time of King's visit. In subsequent years the building had a succession of lessees and owners, among the best known of whom were James Mason Hutchings and J. K. Barnard. Long named "Cedar Cottage;" it stood until demolished in 1940.

[108] As now measured, the parts of Yosemite Falls have the following heights: Upper Falls, 1430 feet; Intermediate Cascades, 675 feet; Lower Fall, 320 feet; for a total height of 2,425 feet.

[109] The meaning and spelling of the name "Yosemite" have been the subjects of much dispute. See Farquhar, *Yosemite, the Big Trees, and the High Sierra,* 18-19; and Erwin G. Gudde, *California Place Names* (2nd ed., Berkeley, 1960), 352.

[110] King's North Fork of the Merced River is, of course, the present Tenaya Creek; and his "placid" Lake Ah-wi-yah is the Mirror Lake of today. North Dome, the Indian name of which was generally spelled "To-coy-ae;" actually rises 3,449 feet above Mirror Lake, while the top of South Dome, today's Half Dome, stands 4,770 feet above the reflecting waters. It is interesting to note that the name "South Dome" was first applied, by the valley's effective discoverers, the members of the Mariposa Battalion, to the present Sentinel Dome. It was later employed by many persons to designate today's Half Dome; and it was also given by some to the present Mount Starr King.

[111] The stream known as the South Fork in 1860 is today's Illilouette Creek. The cataract then usually called the "Too-lu-lu-wach;" or "South Branch Waterfall," is the present Illilouette Fall, 370 feet high.

[112] King's Middle Fork is the main Merced River. In 1860 and for a number of years thereafter the principal trail to Vernal Fall ascended the south bank of the stream.

[113] Vernal Fall is 317 feet high.

[114] Nevada Fall has an actual height of 594 feet. The lake mentioned by King as being between Vernal and Nevada Falls is the present Emerald Pool.

[115] Liberty Cap, directly north of Nevada Fall, rises 1,102 feet above the top of the waterfall.

[116] The ridge to which King climbed above Nevada Fall is difficult to identify, there being more than one possibility. Undoubtedly, however, he saw the symmetrical, 9,166-foot peak about 1 3/4 miles southeast of the fall which as early as 1865 carried in his honor the name "Mount Starr King:" His companion on this climb was Alpheus Bull of San Francisco. Frothingham, *A Tribute to Thomas Starr King,* 187.

The name "Castle Peaks" is no longer in use in the Yosemite region, but in 1860 the present Tower Peak, on the northern boundary of Yosemite National Park, seems to have been known as Castle Peak, although the name for some years was somewhat peripatetic. Francis P. Farquhar, *Place Names of the High Sierra* (San Francisco, 1926), 23, 95.

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http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/vacation_among_the_sierras/