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From Breckenridge, Col.

August 18th, 1890.

EDITOR REPUBLICAN,

Since my last, I have been very busy, and could find no time to write you of my many adventures till now. I will devote this letter to my trip to Decatur, a small mining town on the west side of the main ridge, across from Georgetown, and where the "Atlantic-Pacific Tunnel" emerges from under Gray's Peak. I was invited there by a gentleman to see the mines of that vicinity, and I gladly accepted the invitation, as I had often heard that it was a good mining region, and I wanted to see some large and well worked mines.

On Wednesday morning of last week I started on Billy for that Eldorado, about thirty miles away. The road runs along the Blue river to Dillon, and then up the Snake River, one branch of which heads in the gulches on the side of Gray's Peak. The road down the Blue is gently descending, and Billy galloped easily along until we reached a point about four miles below town, where I turned from the road, onto the bank of a ditch that meandered along the hill side, and ran into a flat some half mile to the right, where placer mining had been done by the use of the waters of the ditch. I had determined (as is usual with me) to take advantage of every reasonable cut-off, and make the distance as short as possible. Here I came into the road to Swan City, which I followed for a mile and a half, and then struck off into a path or trail between the mountains, and followed it for some three miles, until I came out into the main road on the Snake, at Soda Spring, three miles above Dillon. By this route I had saved several miles travel and arrived here at eleven o'clock. This is a fine soda spring, and I proposed to stop here and take my lunch and let pony take his on the fine grass which abounds, and drink freely of the mineral water. I had been here before, and knew of the quality of the water. It is a large spring, enclosed by a fence to keep the cattle out (for they like the water very much), stoned up some two feet high, and a platform partly around it. The carbonic acid gas comes bubbling up and impregnates the whole water, which gives it the taste of plain soda water of the fountain. It holds in solution iron and carbonate of soda and many other mineral substances. It is deficient in chloride of sodium (common salt) or it might rival some of the springs at Saratoga as a pleasant and curative water. I did full justice to it for the hour I remained there. There are two quite large deposits of trauertine rock from this spring close by.

About a mile from here is Keystone, the present terminus of the railroad in the direction I was travelling; and the place where all the ore above has to be shipped. There is one small house and barn in Keystone, and this uninhabited by man. The only live thing I saw about there was two burrows (jacks) grazing in an enclosure.

About two miles beyond I came to a quite pretentious house, exhibiting taste and refinement in its construction, in a pine grove, with a sign board nailed to a tree which read, "Elwood." I anxiously peered about to see if I could discover some human being whom I might recognize as a former resident of that nameless in Jersey; but all was as silent as death. No one was there to greet, and I passed on with a feeling of sadness at the desolation there. I soon overtook a man on a burrow, a miner, who was going over the Argentine pass, the pass just above Decatur, to Georgetown. So we jogged on together, he giving me much information in regard to the mines in the vicinity. About eight miles above Keystone the river and road separate, one going to Montezuma, the other to Chihuahua and Decatur. The railroad has been graded along as intervals, to this point, and there is quite an agitation among the people, especially mine owners, to have it completed to this place. Two miles beyond is Chihuahua (Chihuahua). This was quite a long, with an ore mill of

some kind, and stores, saloons, etc.; but last fall a fire in the woods swept away the mill, all the business houses, and many dwellings, and now a few blackened remains are all that is left of the once prosperous and quite populous town, except four families that still live there among the ruins. It was a sad and depressing sight.

Now the western sky became dark, and the mutterings of thunder were heard, and I galloped on and left my companion with his burrow behind. I reached Decatur just in time to get Billy and myself under cover before the rain came down. I found a miner here who had lived and worked in Breckenridge, and he told me much about the country and mines about Decatur. I had to go yet some two miles to the cabin of my host, and after an hour's waiting it seemed to clear up, and I started on to climb up above the timber line to my journey's end. The rain began again, harder than ever. Billy could only walk up the steep, and I got thoroughly soaked through my gossamer rubber overcoat. My friend was awaiting me with a good warm fire, and soon had all as comfortable as circumstances would admit.

This was the first time I had attempted to stay over night above timber line. Some of my readers may not know what is meant by timber-line, and I will have to explain.

TIMBER LINE

Means the line along the mountain side where timber ceases to grow. It corresponds to the frigid zone, where it is too cold for timber to live. So you can reach the frigid zone by going up, as well as by going north or south of the equator. Every 30 feet in height is equal to a degree in latitude, and by reaching a height of 13000 feet, timber ceases to grow in this latitude,—it has reached the frigid zone, where frost every night in the short warm season interferes with tree growth. This line is not regular, but varies from 11,000 to 13,000 feet, according to the cold and warm currents of air striking the spot. These currents are controlled by the contour of the surrounding country. A mountain may protect a spot from cold currents of air, and this line rises 1000 feet higher than where a low place lets a cold stream of air through to strike a mountain side. Such currents, when strong, cause the trees to trail along the ground like a vine. I have seen pine trees, 18 inches through, thus lying along the ground and throwing up limbs two or three feet high, the body attaining a length of perhaps twenty feet. So pressed to the ground, it can do no otherwise but grow in that manner. Such trees may be a hundred years old, or more. There is but a short time in the year that they can grow at all, and then but little. What struggling for existence! A precarious life is maintained along a narrow zone, and then as you ascend, conditions are too severe, and the hardy pine life ceases.

The tops of all the higher peaks and ranges, for a thousand feet or more in height, are free from trees; and below, along their sides, they are usually covered with pine, spruce, and fir. Grass and tiny flowers—mosses—persist to the very tops, where there is any soil in which to take root. The valleys and side-hills may have openings in the timber, that might be called prairies, but here are called parks. These untimbered spaces are sometimes very large,—the North, South, and Middle Parks are each from 50 to 100 miles long, and in places very large. We are between the South and Middle Parks.

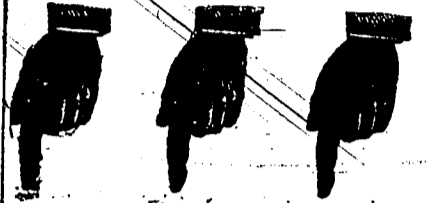
I have made a long digression from my story, to give my younger readers a correct idea of the country, and must reserve for my next letter a description of the mines and country about Decatur.

Yours, &c.,

A. J. KING.

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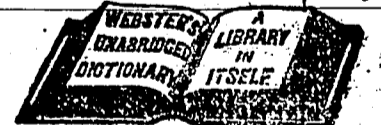
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