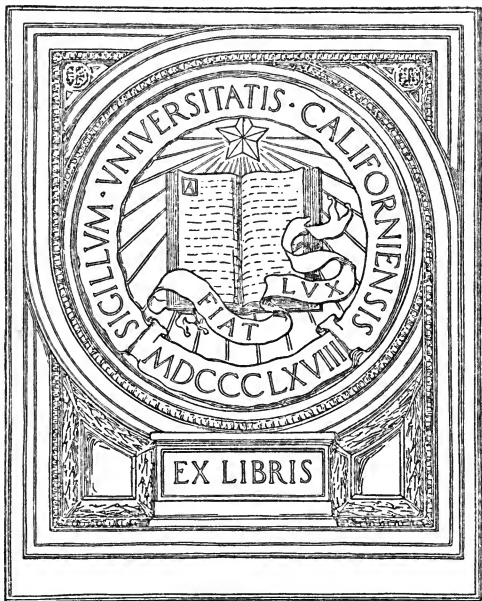


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MARCH, 1902

WESTERN ADVENTURES

Three Hundred Miles

...on the...

Colorado River

*An account of a hunting, camping and exploring trip by the boys
Agassiz Hall*



[Price .

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ENTERING MOJAVE CANYON

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INTRODUCTION.*

THE American boy demands and should receive, for his benefit and ours, an education that shall fit him to live acceptably and effectively in America. And no curriculum of English public school or German gymnasium or French lycée, however tested and developed through long years and found good in the sight of English or German or French masters of teaching, can be transplanted and thrust intact upon any American school, and that school be the best sort for American boys.

Life in America is different from life in England or Germany, and American schooling should be a particular fitting for American life. Schooling and education are got from other sources than schools, and from other men and things than professed educators. We grown-ups are still wedded to education from books and precepts from pre-

*I am indebted to Professor Vernon L. Kellogg, Associate Professor of Zoölogy, Leland Stanford Junior University, Author of Elementary Zoölogy, Insect Anatomy, Etc., Etc., for the kindness of writing this "Introduction." W. W. P.

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ceptors. But give the boy his chance, and see him get educated from things and learn the laws of fit living from life and Nature ! The boy is the real original investigator ; he is the questioner of the realities and verities as he sees and feels them ; he asks no authority better than the things that are, no stimulus to go to school to the world which he finds about him. Some direction he needs to save time and occasional dissipation of energy ; some traditions it is well that he should know and respect, but give him a fair length of picket-rope for varied browsing, and if he come not to the best food for him, and that which shall nourish him to the best stature and quickest blood, he will do less than the beasts of the field, and the outcome of him, despite ever so much nursing, is to be feared.

And in this American land of old and new civilizations a-jostle, where one and the same man is to-day in the college yard at Harvard under the shadow of the traditions and the books, and to-morrow is astride the uncocked bronco on the Bar X ranch, or somersaulting

the flapjack in its warm pan near the prospect hole on the Sierran flanks, it is well that the American boy begin to learn to know Nature and Things in the same hour with his beginning to learn the alphabets of deceased, and except from school and college class-rooms, departed tongues. Nor is the American boy educated to live most effectively in America unless he gets this other and untraditional part of his education. Our country has still its frontier, its pioneer life, its "most primitive wilderness;" and its men have still to be to themselves sufficient in many and various things. That progressive civilization which specializes our life, and makes of one of us a tailor for all, and of the other a cook for all, and of the other the towncrier, has not yet and will not for long to come fasten its beneficence on all of this broad land. And in half of it the man must still be ready to care for himself in forest and on plain, on water and in desert; to care for the horse that bears him, the rifle that gets him food, the canoe that floats him over the blue depths or threads his way through the white rapids. He must

be his own cook over his own pine-cone fed fire, and know so well from long familiarity with its star-and-leaf-set hangings his sweet-aired bedroom that the outdoor night around shall not keep him wakeful with its strangeness. The American boy must learn to *do* as well as to *know* before he is educated.

Agassiz Hall is apparently a good example of a school in which boys do things; and especially do wholesome and righteous things outdoors. In that glorious and unique outing, to an account of which this wee book is devoted, that two weeks of paddling and drifting in rowboats for three hundred miles through the Great Desert, the Agassiz boys let me hear of summer camps in the Sierras, of canoeing on Tahoe, that cleanest and purest and most grandly set of American lakes, of monthly campings in the forests near the school. They discussed with animation and full technical knowledge the fatal merits of various traps; they called, in the mornings, the roll of the night's visitors about camp from the footprints on the sand and in the soft mud of the river bank; they named the

birds from their flight and their cries; they learned how to read on the faintly lettered surface of the river whether sand bar or snag or safe, deep channel lay beneath; they learned the inexorable laws of the desert and saw how plant and animal bow to these laws for life's sake. And the things they knew had come from "original sources" filtered through no stupid or sentimental teacher; and the things they learned were knowledge become a part, and a usable part, of them. Nor is the knowledge less inspiring for its practicalness, less stimulating to soul than helpful to mind and muscle.

* * * * *

The Desert! "But what tongue shall tell the majesty of it, the eternal strength of it, the poetry of its widespread chaos, the sublimity of its lonely desolation! And who shall paint the splendor of its light; and from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the moon over the iron mountains, the glory of its wondrous coloring!" Truly, not my tongue, though with keener realization of its majesty or eyes more full of its splendrous

light than those with which I sit, these weeks away from it, no teller of its story could ask to be endowed.

And the great "silent river!" "The voiceless river! From the canyon to the sea it flows through deserts, and ever the seal of silence is upon it. Even the scant life of its borders is dumb—birds with no note, animals with no cry, human beings with no voice. And so forsaken! The largest river west of the mountains and yet the least known. There are miles upon miles of mesas stretching upward from the stream that no feet have ever trodden, and that possess not a vestige of life of any kind. And along its banks the same tale is told. You float for days and meet with no traces of humanity. * * * Slowly, patiently winding about obstructions, cutting out new channels, creeping where it may not run, the bubbleless water works its way to the sea. The night winds steal along its shores and pass in and out among its sedges, but there are no whispering voices; and the stars emerge and shine upon the flat

flow of water, but there is no lustre. The drear desolation of it!"

Where the poet halts there is left to be told simply the annals of the days, the facts of the rocks, the birds and the plants. These Mr. Price has written, and such need no introduction. And so without doing more than introduce the Introduction I was asked to write, and have not, I stop, premising only that Mr. Price tells truths in his diary, and that his companions tell only less than the truth, in expressing to him their gratitude for his leading of them to the Desert and the River.

VERNON L. KELLOGG.

Stanford University, Cal., January, 1902.

THREE HUNDRED MILES ON THE COLORADO RIVER.

IT was past midday, the 21st December, 1901, when our party of nine, in three row-boats (a black canvas boat, a red boat and a green boat), pushed off from the muddy bank of the Colorado at the town of Needles, and began our journey of three hundred miles to the southward. The smoky little railroad town was soon left behind, and we were passing through a level country clothed with a dense growth of arrowweed five to eight feet high, with now and then willows and cottonwood rising to the dignity of trees. The current was swift with many shoals and sand-bars, but with a little practice we soon learned to keep the channel.

We camped a few miles below Needles on the Arizona bank, under cottonwood trees, in a dense jungle of arrowweed, young willow and thorny mesquite, in places impenetrable. After a few nights we had become adepts in hewing a comfortable camp-site in the jungle,

no matter how dense. Before supper some of the party scattered off in search of game, bringing back three quail and a woodpecker. Ernest thought he saw the tracks of a wild hog and heard one crashing through the undergrowth. The tracks of coyote, fox and raccoon were abundant along the river, but the traps set for the animals were not molested.

The morning of the 22d was very cold, the coldest on the trip, and ice formed an inch thick in our camp bucket. By a little after sunrise we were off down the river, the jagged "Needles" rising sharp on the southern horizon. At one point where the Santa Fe Railroad runs close to the river bank, a long train passed, the passengers waving to us from the windows. Then the magnificent steel bridge over the Colorado came in view, and on the rocky hillside beyond we drew up our boats for luncheon. On this hill we found several kinds of cactus plants, some large and barrel-shaped, others long and slender, growing close to the ground. Here we noticed that some curious white ants had covered little

sticks and dead bushes with a thin coating of mud, beneath which they had eaten galleries in the wood. Professor Kellogg said this mud-coating was to protect the little creatures from heat and light and from their enemies.

How desperately bare all this region is! It seems doubtful if three rains fall during the entire year. On all sides the barren desert mountains shut in close about us. Southward it seems impossible that any river could force its way through such piled confusion of rock. This is the beginning of Mojave Canyon; the bare cliffs in places rise abruptly from the water, in others a narrow rim of soil, fringed with willows, lies between the cliff and the water. The river is usually deep, the current even, making no sound except around jutting points where it forms small eddies.

Midway in the canyon we passed the little steamer "Aztec," which had all the morning been aground on a bar. The Captain warned us about a place in the canyon below, where an abrupt turn makes a dangerous whirlpool, but in the present low water we had no diffi-

culty whatever. In fact we saw no place on the river which at all alarmed us. But in floodtime, in spring and early summer, the river should be navigated only with an experienced guide.

The rock all seems of volcanic formation, of breccia chiefly, and most brilliantly colored. The reds, browns, greens, and yellows of a dozen shades, are colors never seen except in the desert, where the rock masses are so completely exposed to all climatic conditions. The cliffs, often rising hundreds of feet, are worn by the wind and the weather into fantastic shapes—pictured by the imagination into birds, beasts, and Indian heads. There were several “natural bridges” along the tops of the ridges, and caves were common on the face of the cliffs.

The canyon with its towering walls was all too soon left behind us, and we floated down past Pulpit Rock with deserted nests of the heron scattered over it, and on to the double Mojave Rock famed in Indian tradition, to the more open country at the head of the Chimuhuevis Valley, where we camped,

distant from Needles about *28 miles, 14 miles from the Santa Fe Bridge.

We made camp in a little cove where a short ravine came down from the steep volcanic hills. It was a capital place for game, and a dozen quail fell to our guns. These birds were Gambel's quail, similar to the valley quail of California, but more bleached in color, the males having a chestnut crown. They run over the rocky ground with surprising rapidity. When thoroughly alarmed they cannot be overtaken, and they often will not take wing. We saw tracks of rabbits in the sandy wash back of camp, and in traps set for small animals caught a desert wood rat and a long-tailed mouse. A few ducks flew down the river and quail alighted in the willows about camp at dusk, but bird life was extremely rare during the whole trip, at which we marveled.

[*All the distances given in these notes are taken from the reports of steamboat men and may not be accurate. There has been no accurate survey or chart of the river, so far as I am aware. An interesting account of the region is given by Lieutenant J. C. Ives in "Exploration of the Colorado River of the West," Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1860; but this is a rare publication, only to be had in the largest libraries.]

Two prospectors had their camp on the Arizona bank, a short distance above us. We had called to them in passing and learned that they were prospecting a mine back in the hills. We met many of these men on the way. At Needles a party of four just preceded us down the river. We passed them in Mojave Canyon with their boats drawn up under the willows. None of them cared to give us any information. They seem a silent, taciturn folk, suspicious of any stranger, who may also be in search of hidden treasure.

The 23d of December dawned sharp and clear, but the piping of quail on the hills drew the most reluctant of us from his sleeping bag. After hunting an hour we returned to breakfast of cornmeal mush, coffee, potatoes, bacon and quail. While we were eating, an old Indian, probably attracted by the reports of our guns, came into camp. He squatted a little distance apart, watching our every move. He was very old and bent, and dressed in nondescript clothing perhaps begged at Needles. He had rawhide sandals on his crooked feet. When we offered him

coffee and food, we noted that he had no teeth. He saved the scraps of bread from our table, wrapping them in an old rag wound about his matted gray hair. We asked him if he was a Mojave, to which he indignantly replied, "No! Me Chimuhuevis. Mojave no bueno, ladrones!" (Mojave no good, robbers!) In his answer was the story of the Chimuhuevis, a simple, agricultural tribe, who with their near cousins, the Colorados, a few miles to the south, had been from time immemorial raided and robbed by the fiercer Mojaves, dwelling to the north of Mojave Canyon. We left the old man sitting on the bank, and when a bend in the river a half mile below shut out the view, he was still there.

The Indians have many camps along the river on both banks; their huts are thatched with arrowweed and plastered with mud. We saw a few fences of the thorny mesquite branches tied with wisps of willow twigs and sometimes rawhide, where they raised pumpkins, melons and beans. Several times we saw lone Indians perched upon hills near the

river, evidently watching us. A strange sight, these black figures, motionless, silhouetted against the sky. We did not get close enough to speak with them, but some children we surprised at a distance on the river bank went skurrying away into the brush like frightened rabbits.

The valley passed we again entered low rocky hills with rocks coming to the water's edge, and sometimes only partially submerged. The mountains to the south and west were very rugged and imposing in the sunset, while those eastward were resplendent in gorgeous colors, reds and browns. We camped again on the California bank just above Drennan's quartz mill, forty-two miles from Needles.

More quail shooting at supper time ; more quail before breakfast. We make an early start down stream, getting a few ineffective shots at ducks. We passed close to the mill, which was small, near to the water on the California side. There was a tent and a rough frame house on the bank. A few miles below we came to Boat Rock, an oblong jut-

ting mass of lava in the middle of the river. Great heaps of drift were piled ten or fifteen feet high on the upper face, showing the enormous volume and rush of the water in floodtime. A few birds were seen in the open places, feeding on mistletoe berries, abundant on the mesquite bushes. The most common were the western bluebird and the phainopepla, a slender black bird with white patches on its wings and a crest much like that of the waxwing. A few white-crowned sparrows were also seen along the brushy banks.

At Friant's ranch, on the Arizona side, three miles above Williams Fork, was the first attempt at agriculture we had seen. Here Mr. Friant has a few acres of alluvial soil, above high water, to which he pumps water with an engine and windmill. The wonderful fertility of the soil and the great heat of summer enable him to raise several crops of garden vegetables, where a single crop only could be grown in colder regions. He owns a little steamboat and carries most of his produce to Needles, a distance of fifty-five miles.

Below Friant's the mountains on the California side come close to the river, presenting everywhere a black, scorched front, almost wholly destitute of vegetation. When a plant can obtain a foothold it is usually a barrel cactus, ("bisnaga" of the Mexicans) a scrawny palo-verde, and a pallid, thin-leaved composite. The Arizona side is alluvial, with dense jungle of arrowweed and mesquite, in which quail were very abundant. We shot several drinking at the edge of the water; it was impossible to follow them back into the jungle.

Bill Williams Fork, though it drains a region as large as the State of Massachusetts, is a little alkaline streamlet that one may step across. We were told that part of the year it was completely dry. A few fish, minnows, I think, were in the pools in this stream. They were the only fish seen on the three hundred miles of river, a surprising fact, due chiefly to the muddy water and a lack of food in the Colorado. A few song sparrows and woodpeckers were noted here, and some ducks were seen on the river.

A beautiful canyon begins at Williams

Fork, in grandeur scarcely surpassed by the Mojave Canyon. We entered it about noon, a strong wind springing up from the north. Cliffs rose hundreds of feet above the water, and here for the first time we saw the candelabra form of the giant cactus. White-throated swifts darted here and there high among the cliffs, where probably in summer time they nested, and a great hawk or eagle was soaring above the peaks. The wind increased to a gale before we had passed through the canyon, and on some of the north turns, blowing against the current, piled up great waves, making progress slow. Many of the cliffs had holes and caves in them through which the wind whistled and roared. On the alluvial banks the fine sands blow in a yellow cloud, and drifts behind obstructions like wind-driven snow. The whole sky was filled with the smoky haze of dust, the sun was dimmed.

Some prospectors had camps here on both sides of the river, their numerous water barrels and kegs mute evidence of the extreme aridity of the region back from the river. A few donkeys were nibbling at the willow

twigs, or looking with longing eyes at some hay bales protected in a pole corral. A three-stamp mill, rusty and deserted, was on the left bank. We saw no persons about the place as we swept on down the river. A few miles further we came to Empire Flat, amid clouds of blowing sand. A copper company have built several houses here and expect soon to put up a smelter for the mines a few miles back in the hills. Like most embryo mining camps, they were waiting for "more capital." The directors had a well-built house with wide veranda, lace curtains and piano, but the watchman told us it had not been occupied.

As night drew near, we camped behind a sheltered point opposite Mack's mill, seventy miles from Needles. The wind went down with the sun; a full moon rising over the eastern mountains made Christmas Eve one of the most delightful of the trip. After supper we built a huge fire and sat about it late into the night listening to tales of adventures of big game-hunting in the Rockies. The fire lighted up a large cottonwood over us,

rustling the golden leaves and bringing out the white trunk and branches in fine contrast. Behind us the cliffs magnified in the moonlight towered majestically ; in front the river swept a gleaming sheet of silver ; and round about us the desert, immense, unknown, fascinating, lay silent as midnight.

The mill, standing on a little rise above the water, has not crushed ore for some years; its owner, Billy Mack, has a little ranch a half mile from the river, where a spring, the only one in scores of miles, trickles out of a grassy sidehill. Here he has a few acres of pasture and some fruit trees, a tiny oasis. While we paid him a call we were told of the times thirty years past when he first settled on the land. How the mountain sheep used to pass from range to range over well-defined trails, but all are gone from the region now ; he had not seen a track in a dozen years.

Christmas on the Colorado! Our friends in civilization have pitied us. Banks of gravel rose abruptly from the water, many of them covered with the retort-shaped nests of the cliff-swallow. Judging from the deserted

nests, swallows must be very abundant in the summer time. Corner Rock passed we soon came into a broad river-bottom and to the pumping station at the Indian reservation at Parker. A little back from the river we saw the large school building with the American flag. We kept on several miles, passing Indians poling their boats up stream, keeping in the shallow water and making surprising headway against the swift current. Some Indian lodges of poles and arrowweed were here and there on both sides of the river, whole families staring at us as we passed. We camped for Christmas dinner in a thicket of willows in the riverbottom on the California side, there cooking a royal meal of quail, mushrooms, cranberries, plum pudding, candy and nuts, so that the younger boys verily believed themselves as well off as at the home table. Quail were so common that they were shot from the camp; after dinner some of the party made a way by an old cattle trail back to the desert mesa a half mile from the river. Here the vegetation abruptly changes. On the sandy or gravelly mesa grow iron-

wood, palo-verde, ephedra and greasewood, in direct contrast to the cottonwood, willow, mesquite and arrowweed of the riverbottom.

After passing Williams' Canyon some imposing mountains came in view on the right, Mt. Whipple and "The Monument." The latter is a huge finger, rising from a rugged mountain, and visible for a hundred miles down the river.

Saturday, December 28th, found our party at the village of Ehrenberg, 150 miles from Needles. We were delayed a whole day in a snug camp in the jungle by a terrific north wind. The whole region has been one of great sameness, an almost continuous succession of flats and bars and divided channels. We had killed a horned owl, ducks, quail, pelicans. Charles shot a large Canada goose, which made us two excellent meals, cooked in the "dutch oven."

Ehrenberg, a "city" of the past, is now a ragged collection of ruined adobe houses with two or three families. It once had a population of thousands, when in the early sixties the placer mines of La Paz were running full

blast. A few Mexicans hung about the settlement, and an old prospector had come in at the store for supplies. We take lunch at the so-called "boarding house," and wish we hadn't. We visit the graveyard on the hillside and note that the marked graves are nearly all those of men. Did they die of "natural causes?" A young mining man told us about old La Paz, a few miles to the north, its long streets of adobe houses roofless now and utterly deserted. The Indians would not even allow the thatched roofs to remain, but burned them and tore out the hewn beams. In its palmy days this town had as many as four thousand population, and hundreds of thousands of dollars were taken from the dry washes thereabout.

Saturday afternoon we ran down the river eight or ten miles below Ehrenberg and camped for two nights under a sand bluff at the edge of the desert, on the Arizona side. These were the red-letter days of the trip, The boys killed numbers of ducks, snipe, quail and pelicans. We rambled far over the desert picking up curious cactus plants, little

fuzzy fellows with recurved spines, pieces of petrified wood, and fragments of carnelian and agate. The place, too, was "birdy," in contrast to all our other camps. Several kinds not before seen were collected and skinned, but the exciting adventure was the trailing of a huge buck, a mule deer of the largest size. The story of our hunt, though we did not get him, is exciting to us even now.

It happened this way. A party of us had gone up one of the sandy washes which come down to the river from the gravelly mesas, shooting quail here and there and examining the strange desert shrubs. Professor Kellogg had gone ahead, while we had stopped to rest on a little gravelly knoll. After a time we halloed to our companion, who answered and began to retrace his steps to our outlook. Suddenly Miss W., who was with her sister, Mrs. S., exclaimed, "Look at that deer!" Within fifty yards of us an enormous buck broke from a little thicket of ironwood, and loped off leisurely into the middle of the wash and was soon lost in the shrubbery. Our

guns were loaded with quail shot. For half an hour the deer had been within easy range, and had not retreated. Reloading our guns with buckshot we took the trail down into the wash, then up a side ravine and over a little divide from which he had probably looked back and seen us on his trail. The first half mile he ran, then he settled down to a walk, which he did not break for the next ten miles. We felt it little use to follow him with shotguns, so building a fire to mark the spot where the trail was left, we returned the mile and a half to camp for the boys and rifles.

Armed with three rifles, a canteen of water, some hardtack and prunes, which we had hastily seized in camp, we retook the trail and followed it until dark. For a short distance the buck was followed by a doe, her hoof-prints not one-fourth so large as her antlered companion's. Then the doe took a bye-path and the track was not seen again. At dusk, when we gave up the trail for the night, we were three miles from where we had first seen him.

We built a fire of dead mesquite and lay

down on the bare ground, using our hunting-coats for pillows. We drank sparingly, munching our hardtack and prunes, and made plans for the morrow's trailing. We were to walk abreast on the trail of the buck, keep absolute silence, and shoot whenever the deer was sighted. The moon rose after a time, lighting up the gray-green iron-wood and smoke-bush, and throwing sharp shadows across the glittering sand-washes. The scattering giant cactus stood sentinel-like over all the waste of desert. As the fire burned dim toward midnight, some prowling night animal came close to camp; its footfalls on the loose gravel awakened us to replenish the fire and warm the "other side." Thus we passed the night without cover of any kind, but not with much discomfort. Towards morning a coyote yelped in the distance, a screech-owl called, but none came near camp.

At daybreak we were on the trail, following it up a little side-wash over a flat-topped ridge into the adjoining wash to the north. The deer was walking leisurely, nibbling at times at the mesquite and iron-wood, probably get-

ting his evening meal, and did not seem to be at all suspicious. His enemies were miles behind. After following him two or three miles, in which his course was down the wash toward the river-bottom, we found his night-camp under a dense iron-wood on a slight rise and overlooking the wash. He now began breakfast, as his hesitating tracks about certain bushes showed. We even found, partially chewed mouthfuls of tender twigs with saliva still wet upon them. These were fresh signs, surely, and we rushed silently along the trail with eye and ear alert for any strange movement or sound. Still, the deer kept to a walk, making a great oblong loop, crossing his trail near his night-bed. Once or twice he had lain down in this morning walk to rest, and we felt we were close upon him, but he soon turned here, heading up the wash toward the desert mountains, some ten miles distant. On, on we trailed, now over the smooth, sandy floor of the old water-course, where his tracks seemed as large as a cow's; now up a little gravelly side gulch, where his hoof-marks were scarcely visible, and back again to the

main wash, ever eastward toward the mountains.

Each moment, strung with intense excitement, we expected to see those immense antlers (a six-pointer, certainly) rise from some gully and race bounding over the desert. Once Charles thought he saw a movement in a thicket of mesquite a quarter mile ahead, but it was not repeated. When we reached the thicket by a circuitous path, there were the fresh marks in the sand where the deer had lain down; now he no longer walked, but reached the gravelly summit of the mesa with a few short bounds and took a course straight for the mountains along the open mesa. Far in the distance a faint object was seen moving from us, then it faded into the gray haze to be seen no more. Its track was lost on the hard gravelly soil. We looked at each other in helpless dismay, but Walter broke the silence. "Give me three days," he said, "and I'll get that deer!" We could not spare the time. But the buck, far off at the edge of the mountains, tossed his antlers contemptuously. "What funny trailers these boys are! I wish I had fooled them a little longer."

That same afternoon we loaded baggage on our boats and made a dozen miles down the river, camping near some woodcutters who were getting out cottonwood timbers for a little railroad at Picacho, a mining town sixty miles below. Opposite our camp were some cottonwood trees filled with the bulky nests of the great blue heron. We had seen these birds sparingly on the river. In the summertime they are perhaps abundant. Owls hooted all night and little animals scampered over the dry leaves about our beds.

The next morning, Dec. 31st, we passed the pump-house at the little settlement at Cibolo, and, taking the left-hand channel of the river, gained some five miles on our companions, who took the right-hand or main channel. We found ducks and geese abundant in this by-way, but did not have time to stalk them, though we got a few shots from the boat as they flew by. At noon, at a deserted ranch on the Arizona side, we waited three hours for the other boats, which had evidently been delayed on the river. This ranch had been a famous stopping place in early days when

there was much travel to the mines at La Paz and Ehrenberg. It stands on a gravel hill, a hundred feet above the river, and has a grand view both north and south. Now everything about it was ruined, the court-yard wall broken down in a dozen places and much of the roof fallen in. Treasure hunters had dug up all the fireplaces and great holes in the packed earthen floors. As we waited in the shade of the wall for the boats, the black and the red, to arrive, a little gray lizard ran from a broken wall into the sunlight, the only living creature, save one raven croaking past, about the premises.

The black boat arrived about the middle of the afternoon, but it knew nothing of the whereabouts of the red with three boys. Somewhat alarmed, we dropped down stream a couple of miles, camped, and made a huge fire for a signal. At dusk the truant boat was sighted far up the stream. The rowers had broken an oarlock. They were lazy, they said, and wanted to have some fun, so they had drifted since ten o'clock in the morning, a distance of fifteen miles. They had scarcely

touched an oar, and, when grounded on bars, had let the boat swing around and around till they were free again. The boys declared that it was the best day of the trip. New Year's Eve, a big fire, stories, and all so tired that we slept till dawn.

This morning, the first of the New Year, we passed into the Chocolate Mountains with the abrupt chimney peaks of Picacho directly down the river. Lighthouse Rock, rising boldly from the water, is at the beginning of an almost continuous canyon for thirty miles. This landmark, sixty miles from Ehrenberg, was the first rocky formation on the river for a distance of 135 miles. Much of the intervening country had been through desolate flats, the channel often hard to follow even with rowboats, and nigh impossible to the river steamers at this low water. But there was ever a charm about the region, ever something new,—a sand-bluff sculptured by the wind, beaver-cuttings and slides, great flocks of pelicans and geese, which at times arose with deafening roar of their wings; a solitary figure on the bank, wondering at our strange

flotilla; cottonwoods, in golden foliage and silver trunks and branches; willows in a dozen shades of green, sunrise a glory of opalescent coloring, sunset amid cloud masses of pink and gold, with purple shadows reaching across the distant mountains, and then twilight deepening into night,—no two days in the fourteen the same.

We lunched this day under Precipice Bend just above the town of Picacho. We climbed the bluff from the north and walked out to the point where it rises 300 feet sheer from the water. On every hand rose the most ragged of mountains, wholly volcanic, and of the most vivid colors, browns, blacks, reds, yellows, greens, with streaks here and there of white volcanic ash. It has long been a noted mining region. At the town we saw the foundation of an immense mill in course of construction.

Our camp was made below Canebrake Canyon on a bank ten feet above the river, so difficult to reach that the boys called it the "elevator camp." We heard coyotes here, and saw their tracks everywhere in the dry dust.

We left early, passing Castle Dome Landing, the strange mountain of that name, a score of miles to the left. We were to see its vast dome for many miles. The chimney peaks of Picacho, however, were hidden by the near-by hills, and we did not see them again.

We spent our last night with "Tomato Charley," who has a little farm on the bank of the river, where he raises garden vegetables, chiefly tomatoes. He grows them summer and winter alike, but in winter, at great personal labor, he covers an acre of the growing plants with a pole and brush house to protect them from the frosts. But now in spite of all his labor, an unprecedented frost had ruined the season's work. We bought watermelons and sweet potatoes from him, and hunted birds in his clearing. In the evening we walked back a half mile from the river to the old dry placers, where some prospectors still wash out a few dollars from the underground pockets. The hills rising about were mostly of decomposing granite with numerous quartz veins; the latter probably furnishing the gold.

From the top of one of these hills we had

the grandest view on the journey. The sun was low in the west amid great cloud masses piled high above the Californian Cordillera, which bold range extended north and south till it blended in the horizon. This great mountain chain, which is the continuation of the Sierra Nevada of Central California, rises very abruptly from the desert to a height of five or six thousand feet, and culminates in the south at the lofty peak of San Pedro Martir, thirteen thousand feet above the Gulf. This peak was plainly visible, a hundred and fifty miles away, its cone rising sharp above the haze of the desert. Between our hill and this southernmost point of vision lay a great space, unbroken by any mountain range, the wild, little known desert at the head of the Californian Gulf,—a strange land filled with wonderful sights, the ever-present mirage, acres of boiling mud springs, inland lakes floored with rock salt crystal clear, endless mud flats, level sandy wastes, a land of fish and game, but with never a drop of water to drink. The low, barren mountains hereabouts all have their tales of fabulously rich lost

mines, and this Fata Morgana yearly draws gold-fevered miners into the forbidden land.

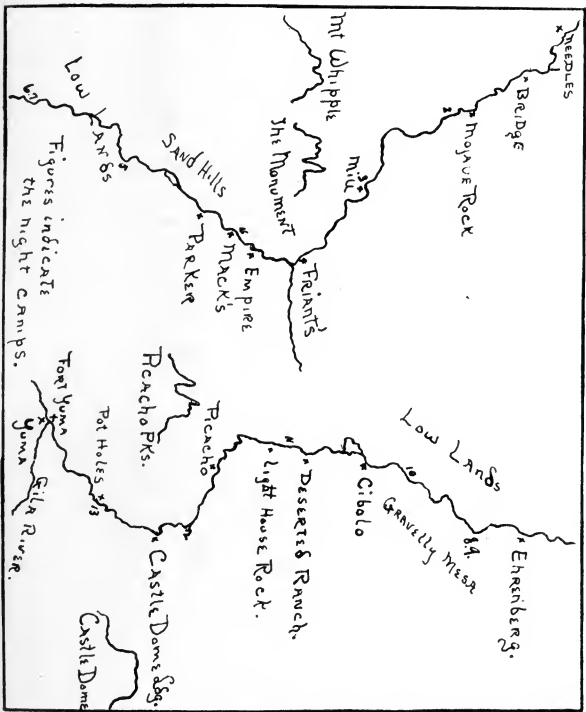
Dusk appeared as we were yet upon the hilltop. The watch lights at Yuma, a dozen miles away, glittered on the prison walls, and a train on the Southern Pacific toiled slowly over the plain. All the glory had gone from the western sky, and San Pedro Martir had blended into the gray of the desert. Only about us near at hand was there vivid coloring; the river-bottom at our feet was brilliant in silver and gold on cottonwood and willow, and the pale green of the arrow-weed contrasted with the dark mesquite. A solitary horseman galloped over the plain trailing a cloud of dust; at our right the river flowed, and there gleamed our camp-fire.

The next morning, a few miles from our camp, we passed a solitary trapper laboriously coming up stream, his leaky tub requiring almost constant bailing. We answered his questions about beaver sign and "varmints," and left him at the bank still bailing with a slow, painful stroke.

We stopped at midday a few miles above

Yuma for our last meal. With not a little regret we drew out the black canvas boat, knocked in its ribs and gunwales and rolled it up for baggage. It had been a companion on many trips of wild adventure, and this not the least. Our camping together had ended. The fourteen happy days had passed without accident or misfortune of any kind. We had shared all uncomplaining the little hardships, the dust and the dirt, and none aided more to the success of the trip than the two ladies, who were ideal campers.

A few hours later we drew up under the shadow of a great iron bridge, our three-hundred-mile journey on the "Silent River" ended. We had learned to know it and to love it, and in the hearts of every one of us was a wild desire to leave all civilization and follow the mighty current still further to the south, past those boundless canebrakes and mud flats till merged into the blue Gulf.



COLORADO RIVER FROM NEEDLES TO YUMA

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