

1.
Sacramento May 9. 1854.

My dearest Mother

By last week's Atlantic mail, I received your excellent letter of March 11th. Though it appears to have been promptly mailed yet through some strange cause of delay, it was 7 1/2 weeks on the way, - when 4 weeks is the ordinary time. Your letter gave me more pleasure than any I have received for a long time from any of my correspondents, - though indeed your letters always take the preference over all others. There is nothing so gratifying to me as the assurance that though I have been separated from home so far and for so many years, yet it has not sufficed to destroy the remembrance of my existence, nor weaken that affection which is one of its sweetest delights. Without the belief that there are many hearts that would be quickened by a joyous throbbing at my return home, I should be robbed of one of the sweetest anticipations of my present life: and I should never indulge the wish to revisit a land where all old faces were estranged, however numerous, powerful and attractive might be the associations connected with it.

I regret very to hear by your letter of your having

suffered so long and surely with sickness during the winter. It was the first intimation I had had of it, though having received nothing from you for a long time, I was inclined to fear ~~it~~, ^{your sickness} might be caused by bad health. But I hope from the tone of your own letter, and from what Mr Anderson wrote that you are by this time entirely well again. He said he thought as soon as the pleasant spring weather set in, that it would prove very beneficial to you. I hope you have had a more genial spring than ours this year: for unusual as it is for me to bring complaints against this climate, I am bound to confess for once that our weather has been for the past two months, unpleasant and backward.

I am glad to hear that father has enjoyed so good health this winter, that his business is so good, and that he has Joe's assistance in the more laborious parts of his duties. I would suppose that unless he has his eye fixed upon some other employment at present, he could do a very large portion of father's Agency Business. By the way, what does Joe think of doing? Is he going to remain in Palmyra or will ^{he} go back to Jacksonville? You mentioned that he intended to write me soon and would tell me more news. I wonder if I have any idea of what some of his news may consist of: I suppose however that I have not. I hope to get his letter soon for he handles a pen with so much ease and freedom, that it certainly can be no trouble to him to write a letter of 8 or 10 pages, and they are always interesting. I sometimes wish for my own selfish gratification that he would come to

California; for I feel somewhat alone in the world, having no relatives of my own blood within 2000 miles; but I think again that we can be of great assistance to each other, and that you both have a better claim upon his society than I have, and I yield without a murmur. Speaking of relations however reminds me that I have discovered several branches of the Griswold family in this city, one at least, of which, claims a host of relatives of that name in Meathensfield Conn. - and I am going to write to Joe. to obtain from father, a statement of our relationship with that family, and to trace it back as far and as fully as he can, for I have forgotten nearly everything about ~~the~~ our Griswold connections, except that "Uncle Reiah" once transported my youthful heart with delight by promising me a "yoke of steers" if I would go and live with him three months "over the mountain". Perhaps I can scare up a 49th cousin among those in this city.

You say that there is a strong probability, that I will hear from Fanny soon. I am very glad to hear it, for it is such a delightful long time since I received anything from her that I have almost come to think of her as a very distant and dignified sort of personage, that admits of no familiarity; though I am perfectly conscious at the same time that she is the same kind, devoted and generous sister that she always used to be, I have been waiting with as great deal of patience and more impatience for the last two years, for a dear message,

But your mentioning that Fanny would go to
the Daguerrian Rooms as soon as she could
get leisure, encourages me to hope that my faith
will ere long be rewarded. And I want every
one that can be obtained, without too much
trouble and expence. The Three Gannies I must
have at all costs, and then all the rest
that I can get. By the way, if this reaches
you before they are sent, let me suggest a plan
by which they will come perfectly safe. If there
are more than two, do not trust them to the
mail. Have them securely done up in one
package, and address it thus,

{ Daguerriotypes. E. C. Winchell
South side of O Street, between
7th & 8th streets
Per Wells & Fargo's Express } Sacramento,
Cal.

Let some friend take it to St. Louis, and give to the
clerk at Wells & Fargo's Express Office, and it will
be brought safe and sound, to my very parlor door.

I regret now very much that I did not send
ours to Sam. Glover, or some other Palmyrene in St.
Louis, who could then have sent it safely by sea.
In California, the Express Companies, do three
fourths of the inland letter & newspaper carry-
ing. The public have far more confidence in
them than in the U.S. mail: they are more speed-
y, prompt and certain, and deliver ~~the~~ our letters
to us at our residences.

I fear our daguerriotype rush has been

pretty thoroughly ruined. I should think the breaking
 of the glass must have almost completely obliterated
 the picture, Did the plate also become bent? Was the
 case fractured? Did any moisture penetrate the envelope?
 The artist who took it is now here, and has in his
 office, a ^{similar} picture taken at the same time on another plate
 If I knew the extent of the injury sustained by the
 other I would get this plate and send it to you. It
 would fit the same case. At any rate, if the picture is
 materially injured, trade off the plate to your artist &
 I will send another. Let you write me about this im-
 mediately

Before I close I must give you a sketch of a trip, to
 the mountains which Laura and myself took about 10
 days ago. Since her confinement and the loss of her
 infant, her health had been delicate, and her spirits
 at times depressed; and I was inclined to agree with
 her physician, that a jaunt into the wilderness and
 a few days among the pine forests in the pure air of
 the mountains, would be beneficial. Being furnished
 with an easy, covered buggy, and a strong horse, ~~we~~
 -equipped with a little extra clothing, and some pro-
 visions in case of emergency, - duly provided with fire
 arms and munitions of war, we set out in nearly an
 easterly direction for the foot-hills of the Sierra. We found
 an excellent road through the flowing plain, - crossed
 the Cosumnes River at noon on a viro-bridge, and at
 11 stopped for the night at the Buckeye House, in a

Pleasant Valley 28 miles from the city, Good accommodations
The next day we were fairly among the foot hills
and day gradually beginning to ascend, By noon
we had reached the lower skirts of the pine, which
began to dispossess the sturdy oak, Reaching a lonely
spot called Lone Valley, we found ourselves at once in
a community of mines. On either hand near the road
the claims were staked off, and groups of men engaged
with all their paraphernalia of ditches, sluices, hose, long
toms, cradles, pans, picks and shovels, in the life
long, eternal search for gold, From this point, on all
our journey we did not cross a clear stream of water, big
or little. All was thick with the red mud thrown
out by the miners, who are to be found wherever water
runs, Passing through Jackson, and Moselunne Hill,
both large towns in the midst of a wild and almost
desolate looking country, we reached just at dusk
the Bay State Ranch, kept by a Jerseyman, Among
the members of his family, were two ladies, who though
reared in luxury, were evidently delighted with their
home in the wilderness. The country was now ~~now~~
extremely hilly, though the road was excellent, and
we made good progress. We proposed to stop at
noon under the forest trees, and take our lunch and
rest our young, Laura bore the fatigue admirably,
and evidently improved each day, But I need
not mention that we were constantly passing over
rich mining tracts, where rough looking men with

uncouth habitments, Iron burnt faces and grizzled
beards, were constantly at work, - sometimes knee
deep in mud and water, Their appearance would
never had you to suppose they were more than half
civilized, but there is no class of hard working men
in the world equal in points of intellect, education
and energy, to the miners. Very seldom we met with
one that was not more than ordinarily intelligent, -
farrin' the Spanish, Chilianz, and Chinese, of
whose attainments we could not so easily judge.

The third day the only towns we passed through were
San Andreas, (pronounced San Andrace) and Angel's
Camp. Stopping at the last place an hour or
two, we pushed on through a rugged hilly country
abounding with miners, mines and dirty brooks,
to a locality, once famous for the richness of its gold
deposits, - Murphy's Diggings. One of Wells &
Fargo's Clerks told me that it was once not unusual
for them to buy 700 ounces of gold dust ^{at this place} by 10
o'clock on Sunday Mornings - the traders' principal day
in the mines. But at present the yield was much
smaller, and like all mining towns, ^{under such cir guncs tapery} Murphy's was
beginning to languish with the decrease of its life
blood. But it was lively nevertheless, - and the groups
of men going to work in the morning, the sluices &
ditches running through the town in every direction
and the extensive preparations made for heavy opera-
tions, showed that the gold was not entirely exhausted

The landlord had an interesting family, including two young ladies, and our accommodations were excellent. We had now reached the altitude of 2000 feet, above the Bay of San Francisco. - But we were ~~now~~ ^{soon} to enter upon the task of climbing the side of the Sierra, in right good earnest. We were to leave the stage road here, - which we had kept from Sacramento, - and pursue a track cut ^{through} ~~over~~ the ravines and gorges by individual enterprise. The "Union Water Company" at an expense of \$200,000. had cut a ditch from a point a thousand feet higher up, and brought the waters of a mountain stream 12 miles to the village, (Murphy's) and thence by means of smaller ditches distributed it all over the surrounding diggings, - supplying thousands of miners with water to wash their gold, - and then conducted it on to other camps and villages for 30 or 40 miles. They built a saw-mill at the head to furnish their lumber, for fluming, or making aqueducts to convey their water across the glens and valleys; and on the mill road, at the mouth of a gorge, ^{between,} ~~between,~~ two hills, high, and rocky and abrupt, we found ourselves, soon after breakfast the next morning, commencing the slow ascent. Passing ~~several~~ an Indian village, and advancing farther on, we found the gorge a wild and rugged glen, down which a mountain stream, whose ~~clear~~ sparkling purity showed that no miners troubled its upper waters, dashed and roared most furiously. The road which had been

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cut along the steep side of the ravine, with immense labor, (considering that it was an individual enterprise) was so narrow as barely to afford a safe passage for a single vehicle. Had we met a wagon, we should have ^{been} in an awkward position, from which we could have escaped only by unharnessing, turning around & going back to the bottom, or by finding some spot where we ^{could} roll our carriage over the edge, against some log or tree, that would have kept it from dashing in hot haste down to the waters of the angry little creek, until the wagon had passed, and then dragging it up to the road again, But fortunately the only team we met was on a level spot where we passed easily, and after a long and tedious pull our pony brought us to the top, we had now reached the upper limit of the oaks which had been growing smaller and more insignificantly from the time we struck the foothills, and here guided their title of "Monarch" to the lofty and graceful pines, that seemed almost to sweep the heavens with their tops. A short space of level road brought us to the foot of another steep ascent, which in turn was followed by another, so that we were most of the time continually ascending a steep acclivity, Now and then we passed the log hut of some wood chopper, but the forest was mostly sleeping in its primal solitude and silence. But for the enterprise of the "Union Water Company" (whose great aqueduct we crossed over and over, and again we found stretching across a deep valley far above our heads)

those probably forests would probably have remained ~~un~~
undisturbed until now. At length we were glad-
dened by the sight of the saw mill, and found that we had
progressed 10 miles in 4 1/2 hours, - it being now one o'clock,
Here we were at the end of the road, or at least it
was not worked any further. One of the men however
pointed out the track and we loaded on, though our
pony was tired and we had to go slow. The forest increased
in grandeur and beauty at every step; and though our
progress was toilsome, we could but be interested. Upward
and onwards, slowly and ^{six miles further} ~~gradually~~ until reaching at
length the brow of a long ascent, ^{at 13 o'clock,} we looked down into a
wild valley beyond with deep interest. Surrounded by Al-
pine hills, and wholly occupied by a magnificent forest of
pines, cedars, balsams, firs, yew, arbutus & other conifers,
it was as romantic and solitary a spot as a hermit
or a grizzly could desire for his abode. Pausing a mo-
ment, far down in its depths rang the measured strokes
of an axe; and gladdened by its familiar sound we pushed
onwards. A few steps and my fall upon a glittering white
mass among the top of a yellow tree, - which upon hand-
ling and tasting, and moulding it into a ball, I found
to be genuine, brittle snow. When we left Sacramento
the snow had danced the mercury up to 90° and flowing
had been covering the valley for weeks. This was
an awful change, - from May to December in 3 days.
But the sky was clear and the air delightful.

We reached the bottom and found a small chaos

of prostrate logs, dismantled boughs, and unsightly stumps,
produced by the attempt to clear away about 10 acres of
the forest. At the edge was a large and comfortable,
though somewhat rude house made of pine clapboards, we
stopped at the door, alighted, gave our horse to the landlord
walked into the house, had a snug little room assigned
by the landlady
us, and were at our journey's end!

"Where were you", you ask,

On the south fork of the San Antonio river, in Lat. 38° N,
Long. 120° 10' west, 5000 feet above the Bay of San Francisco,
105 miles from Sacramento.

The only name the spot has at present is Mammoth Tree
Valley; and its chief attraction its gigantic trees. You have
read of one of them which was cut down, & the bark stripped
off for 50 feet, and sent to New York for exhibition. I have
no hope of giving you any correct idea of their magnitude
but I will give their dimensions. After resting an hour
the landlord took us out & showed us the tree. The one
that was cut, lies near the door, in the midst of the
chaos of fallen trees, & like a Leviathan among herrings.
We mounted the stump, which is leveled off, and I prom-
ised around ^{on} it for some time. It measured before the
bark was taken off, $29\frac{1}{2}$ feet across the stump, the
bark was 15 inches thick on each side. I walked
around on the outer edge of the stump and took 33 or
40 many steps in going around. The tree was bored down
by 5 men with pump-log augers. It took them 23 days to
fell it. The height of it was about 375 feet. The pro-
strate body if divided off would make a road for a
six horse team. We climbed upon it, and found
ourselves almost at a dizzy height from the ground,

Then with ~~the~~ ~~lead~~ a young lady at the house we
were taken into the tangled depths of the forest to
see the others. There are about 80 large ones,
and 35 smaller ones of this species, on a tract
about 50 acres, and these are alone on the east.
Nothing of the kind has ever been known to Botanists.
And a presumptuous Londoner who examined it, has
given the species the lofty title of "Wellingtonia
Gigantea". The one that was cut, was estimated from the
number of its yearly rings, to be 3000 years old, and
from my own observation I do not doubt it. But I can only
give you the briefest inventory of the others.

The "Pioneer's Cabin" is 300 feet high and 90 feet in
circumference.

The "Three Sisters" measure together 92 feet in cir-
cumference; 300 feet high; 200 feet to the first
limb.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin", 150 feet high; top broken off:
the cabin is large enough to accommodate 25
persons.

The "Hermit" 320 feet high - 75 feet in cir.

"Hercules" is 350 feet high - 107 " " " The
largest tree standing. Would make 175,000 feet
of inch lumber.

"Husband & Wife" 250 feet high - 60 feet in cir.

The "Royal Family" - a group of 26. The
largest is dead & fallen, circumference 110 feet
supposed higher when standing 450 feet. It looks
as though it might have fallen hundreds of years ago.
It is hollow for 250 feet & contained water
enough to paddle a canoe with all ease. At
some seasons it contains a living spring.

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Luxuriant wild gooseberry bushes grow on top of the log.
It is the skeleton, the wreck of a monster, whose
immense proportions, even now, astound the beholder,
Ages upon ages have passed away since it first
sprang forth, and now driving it the mind almost
unconsciously ^{reaches far back into the past} to grasp some incident coeval with its
birth. How little does man with all his boasted wisdom
know of the march of the ages that have gone by.
The history of one of these trees would comprise the greater
portion of what we know of the history of the earth.
Then, man's littleness. How insignificant a thing he is by
the side of one of these monsters, his proudest works, his
grandest edifices, how feeble, how like children's paste
board houses, compared with the majestic columns
and evergreen dome of this most magnificent of forests.
I could not help thinking of Bryant's reflections, constantly.

"The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned
To hew the shaft and lay the architrave
And spread the roof above them, - ere he framed
The lofty vault, to gather, and roll back
The sound of anthems, - in the darkling wood
Amidst the cool and silence he knelt down
And offered to the Mightiest, solemn thanks
And supplication

Father! thy hand
Hath reared these venerable columns; thou
didst weave this verdant roof. Thou didst look down
Upon the naked earth, and forthwith rose

" All these fair ranks of trees, Thy in thy sun
Budded, and shook their gown leaves in thy breeze
And shot towards Heaven, The Century living crow
Whose birth was in their tops, grew old and died
Among their branches; till at last they stood
As now they stand, massy, and tall and dark -
Fit shrine, for humble worshippers to hold
Communion with his Maker. - - - - -

This mighty fir.
By whose immovable stem I stand, and seem
Almost annihilated, - not a prince
In all the proud old world beyond the deep,
Ere wore his Crown, as loftily as he
Wears the green coronal of leaves with which
Thy hand hath grac'd him. "

But I fear you will be tired with any
further description. As we came back to the house
we ~~next~~ passed many other trees of similar size and
height. A singular feature is the mound of earth
piled around the foot of each, - 8 or 10 feet higher
than the level of the forest, and composed as I con-
jectured of the mass of leaves and cones that have
fallen each year through so many ages. The seed
of these trees is very similar to parsnip seed, - equally small
and light.

Reaching the house an excellent supper was
awaited us. Our landlord was very sociable and
told us his plans. He had taken up 324 acres of land

and was charring off and breaking up a portion. A tract of 50 Acres, including all the large trees was to be felled out, felled and stocked with deer. A round house 30 feet in diameter was to be built upon the stump of the fallen tree: and upon the prostrate ^{wooded off} body, he intended to build a bowling alley. Preparations were to be made to accommodate a large number of visitors this summer. For the spot is beginning to attract many from all quarters.

"The hour for retiring" came soon, for we were fatigued with our mountain scramble, and we were to get off for home as early as practical the next day. At dark it had clouded over and was raining some, but as they said it was not unusual to have showers at night, we did not sleep the less soundly.

On waking in the morning the rain had ceased; but a novel light gleamed through the light window curtains, & I sprang to draw it aside. Pres-to! what a scene. The bright green verdure of the trees, half smothered with snow, the ground 3 inches out of sight, and the air filled with clouds of great white flakes that came whirling down with tremendous vigor unceasingly. I assure you, though it did not promise much very fair for our speedy exit from the valley, yet it was a sight that brought spontaneously a thousand pleasant recollections and feelings, with a very little aid from the imagination, I was at "home again" and "a boy again". The last snow storm I had seen to fall was while we were encamped on the bank of a dirty

little creek, in the edge of Chariton Co. - where we
were 3 or 4 days out from Paris in April 1850,
- more than 4 years before. But I must hasten,

After breakfast Laura and myself, taking a
hoe, made our way into the thickets, and raking
off the snow, dug up about 150 wild strawberry
roots, (of which there are, literally, millions) and a
large supply of wild gooseberries, currants and
raspberries, which we packed safely into a small
tin chest to bring home. At 9 o'clock the
sun burst through the clouds and tree tops, &
the aspect of things began to change. The broad
white fleas stopped coming down; and those
that were down, took to water and ingloriously
ran, as though affrighted at the great King of Day.
By good fortune our landlord had to send a two
horse wagon down to Murphy's, and we waited for
it to pilot the way and break the track. At one
o'clock, we left with rigors, for the mountain scen-
ery was so enchanting to us dwellers in the dusty,
noisy city, that we could have spent a week very
pleasantly. We found "coming down" vastly
easier than "going up" and reached Murphy's at
5 o'clock - in 4 hours instead of 6 1/2. The next
day we reached Mokelumme Hill, a busy mining
town. Good accommodations. The next we reached
a little Paradise, Lone Valley, and staid all night
with a farmer and his wife, old friends of
Laura's people. The 8th day at 6 o'clock P.M. we reached home
Safe and Sound! Laura's health & spirits greatly improved.



Well, now I think I had better finish in as decent haste as possible. A word or two of itunes & I am done.

By the papers I sent, you have probably seen that I am "City Assessor" for the present year. I got into the office, ^{almost} accidentally, and without much wish or intention to do so. - for it looks as though I had given up my profession which is not the case. It will take about 4 months to do my work, and the salary is \$3000 cash, with office rent free for the year. As soon as I have done I shall go into practice and stick to it. Laura is anxious to have something to do, and her health not permitting her to teach, she is bent on taking some school children to board. Her mother is with us, and preparations are now in progress. I hope with health & the blessing of God, to be able to do enough this year, to cancel my debts, and place myself on independent ground with a fair footing. My health is excellent, and although ever since I came to California, my progress has been one continual struggle against many obstacles, I do not feel like murmuring or pining in despair. Hope on, hope on.

Moreover, some day when you have nothing to do, will you ask him to hunt up the old papers containing my first and last attempt at writing romances, and enclose them securely in one package, and send them to me. I don't know what I may do with them, but I don't think they ~~will~~ will set our wooden cities on fire.

And tell him to write me a good long letter about himself &c &c.

May 15. Items. The steamer leaves to day. The
Legislation is to adjourn this afternoon but it is expected
they will pass a final bill fixing forever the location of
the Capital at Sacramento. The past session has done
the state but little honor, or good. The Sabbath
schools of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches
had a grand exhibition the a few nights since, &
was a ~~of~~ magnificent affair. Schools of all kinds
are springing up very rapidly in the city, with
the very best of teachers. We have had two free
schools, all ~~summer~~ ^{this year}, and ~~two~~ others are soon
to be put in operation. Next winter it is ex-
pected a State University will be established by
the Legislature, and located in the beautiful
valley of San Jose, - at the southern end of the
Bay of San Francisco.

The Baptists are building a new church; the
Methodist Church South, gives a supper on
Tuesday night next, in their own behalf. A
railroad is about being commenced from
here to Mormon Island, a mining town, 20
miles up the American. The cars will be running
by fall.

We are all in excellent health now; Laura and
her mother send you much love. Laura will
write you, as soon as she finds leisure time. Give
my love to all, and write me as often as your strength
will allow. Very affectionately, Your son
Elisha