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CANTONMENT LIVING - NEAR FT. HALL, ORE TY.
APRIL 15, 1850/

DEAR MOTHER,

THE HASTY COMMUNICATION WHICH I LEFT BEHIND ME IN LEAVING THE SALT LAKE CITY, APPRISED YOU OF MY PROPOSED MOVEMENTS. I AM NOW SO FAR ON MY ROAD; AND IN FOUR DAYS AT THE FARTHEST THE PARTY WILL START FOR THE TRADING GROUND. AN EXPRESS WILL LEAVE HERE FOR THE STATES TOMORROW MORNING SO THAT I HAVE NO MORE THAN TIME TO GIVE YOU SOME IDEA OF MY WAYFARING SINCE I LAST WROTE, INDEED IT IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER THIS SHEET WILL NOT REACH YOU BEFORE THE OTHERS, AND THERE IS ALWAYS A STRONG POSSIBILITY OF THIS NOT REACHING YOU AT ALL.

I THINK THAT I MAY NOW FAIRLY CLAIM TO HAVE SEEN SOMETHING OF ADVENTURE, AND MORE OF HARDSHIP; SUCH HARDSHIP AS RARELY BEFALLS THE CIVILIZED TRAVELLER IN THESE REGIONS. WE SET OUT FROM THE CITY ON THE TWENTY SECOND OF FEBRUARY WITH A PICKED PARTY OF MEN AND TWO MOUNTAINEER GUIDES, TOGETHER WITH A COMPLETE EXTRA BAND OF SADDLE AND PACK ANIMALS TO RELIEVE EACH OTHER ON ALTERNATE DAYS; THE DISTANCE BEFORE US WAS A LITTLE OVER TWO HUNDRED MILES TO FT. HALL. THE FIRST PORTION OF OUR ROUTE, SO LONG AS WE REMAINED IN THE S. LAKE VALLEY WAS EASY AND PLEASANT - SIXTY OR SEVENTY MILES. WHEN WE TURNED FROM THE OPEN PLAIN AND THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE GREAT LAKE, TO MOUNT THE LOFTY RIDGE WHICH BOUNDS IT, WINTER MET US WITH ITS UTMOST SEVERETY, AND OUR DIFFICULTIES COMMENCED. YOU CAN HAVE LITTLE CONCEPTION OF THE GRAND SCALE ON WHICH THE OPERATION OF THE SEASON ACTS IN THESE REGIONS; THE LENGTH AND VIOLENCE OF THE STORMS, AND THE ENORMOUS DRIFTS OF SNOW WHICH THEY DEPOSIT IN THE RAVINES. TRAVELLING THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN IN WINTER IS ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE ON ANY OTHER ROUTE THAN THE ONE WE WERE ON; AND THE UNPRECEDENTED RIGOR OF THE PAST WINTER HAD RENDERED THIS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. ON THE EVENING OF THE THIRD DAY WE TURNED FROM THE VALLEY WHERE THE SNOW DID NOT AVERAGE MORE THAN 20 INCHES DEEP, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL DRIFTS HAD CAUSED US SLIGHT DIFFICULTY AND ONE OR TWO MULES HAD TO BE DUG OUT DURING THE DAY; AND AFTER MAKING A SUCCESSION OF LONG STEEP ASCENTS WE REACHED THE ELEVATED TABLES WHICH CAP THE RIDGE - HERE AT ITS LOWEST POINT, DIVIDING THE S. L. FROM CACHE VALLEY A DEEP TROUGH SHAPED BASIN - 20 MILES ACROSS AND 50 OR 60 MILES IN LENGTH. AS WE REACHED THE SUMMIT THE CHANGE OF TEMPERATURE BECAME INSTANTLY PERCEPTIBLE, AND THE INTENSELY COLD BLAST WHICH SWEEPED OVER THE HEIGHTS DIRECTLY INTO OUR FACES INCREASED IN VIOLENCE AS WE

ASCENDED. THAT NIGHT WE BUILT OUR CAMP FIRE BY THE SIDE OF A FEW DRY WILLOWS IN A DEEP RAVINE, SCOOPED EACH A HOLE FOR HIMSELF IN THE DEEP SNOW BANK TO PROTECT HIMFROM THE WRAPPED HIMSELF IN HIS BLANKETS AND TURNED IN TO SHIVER TILL DAYBREAK. THE NEXT DAY WE DESCENDED INTO CACHE VALLEY, OFTEN BEING COMPELLED TO DISMOUNT AND ASSIST OUR ANIMALS THROUGH THE DEEP DRIFTS WHEN THEY SANK TO THE MIDDLE, PLUNGING AND FDOUNDERING IN VAIN FOR A FOOT-HOLD. IN THE VALLEY THE SNOW LAY TO THE UNIFORM DEPTH OF FROM TWO TO THREE FEET. TOWARD AFTERNOON WE REACHED A CONSIDERABLE STREAM - A TRIBUTARY OF BEAR RIVER, WHICH WE EXPECTED TO CROSS ON THE ICE, AND FOUND IT COMPLETELY OPEN. AS THERE WAS NO PRACTICABLE FORD IN THIS VALLEY WE WERE COMPELLED TO RETRACE OUR STEPS, CROSS BACK INTO THE VALLEY WE HAD LEFT AND THEN, AFTER CROSSING THE RIVER, AGAIN REGAIN OUR ROUTE, TWO DAYS HARD MARCHING TO REACH A POINT ON THE OTHER BANK OPPOSITE WHERE WE NOW WERE. THIS PROVOKING IN ITSELF, BESIDES THAT IT WOULD EXHAUST OUR ANIMALS BEFORE THE SEVEREST PART OF THE MOURNEY COMMENCED, BUT THERE WAS NO HELP FOR IT; SO WE FACED DIRECTLY FOR THE MOUNTAINS AND AFTER ANOTHER TOILSOME ASCENT REACHED THE SUMMIT. THE WIND HAD SWEEPED THE SNOW PARTIALLY FROM A PRECIPITOUS MOUNTAIN SIDE WHICH EXTENDED UNBROKEN ALMOST INTO THE VALLEY BELOW, AND DOWN THIS WE STARTED AT AN ANGLE OF MORE THAN 45 - SO SLIPPERY THAT NOTHING BUT THE SURE FOOTED MULES COULD KEEP THEIR FEET FOR A MOMENT. DOWN WE WENT, PELL MELL, SLIDING AND ROLLING, PLOUGHING DEEP INTO THE LOOSE AND FEATHERY SNOW WHICH FLEW AROUND US AS IF A LOCOMOTIVE WERE DASHING IT RIGHT AND LEFT. OUR ONLY SAFETY WAS IN HANGING TO THE BRIDLE REIN AND TRUSTING TO THE MULE. A MORE RIDICULOUS GROUP CAN HARDLY BE CONCEIVED THAN SOME POOR FELLOW BROUGHT UP SUDDENLY IN THIS WAY ON HIS SEAT OF HONOR, AND GAZING SO HELPLESSLY UP INTO THE DEMON FACE OF HIS SHAGGY COMPANION WHILE SET RESOLUTELY ON HER HAUNCHES, SHE LOOKS DOWN ON HIM WITH HER KEEP WICKED EYE AND LONG EARS, AND QUIETLY ENJOYS HIS DISCOMFITURE. AT THIS RATE WE SOON "PRECIPITATED OURSELVES LIKE AN AVALANCHE FROM THE HEIGHTS OF THE APPENINES", AND EXTRICATING OURSELVES AT THE BOTTOM, TOOK THE TRAIL FOR THE FORD. OUR TRAIL, HOWEVER, WAS ALWAYS OF OUR OWN MAKING; THE STRONGEST AND HEAVIEST HORSE BEING ALWAYS PUSHED AHEAD WITH A GUIDE TO SELECT THE GROUND WHERE THE SNOW WAS SHALLOWER AND TO BREAK A ROAD FOR THE REST OF THE TRAIN. WE CROSSED BEAR RIVER AT A POINT WHICH WE HAD PASSED TWO DAYS BEFORE AND ABOUT THREE MILES FROM WHERE IT FORCES ITSELF THROUGH A DEEP GORGE IN THE MOUNTAINS TO REACH THE LAKE COMING OUT OF CACHE VALLEY, AND AGAIN WE TURNED SHORT ABOUT, WHEN THE SNOW GREW MUCH DEEPER AND WE WERE ALL COMPELLED TO DISMOUNT.

FOR THREE OF THE LONGEST MILES I EVER TRAVELLED WE STRUGGLED THROUGH A SNOW FIELD, A LONG ASCENDING PLANE WHERE THE SNOW WAS BETWEEN 3 AND 4 FEET DEEP STEADILY - OUR POOR PACK ANIMALS FLOUNDERING ON UP TO THEIR PACKS AS FAR AS THEY COULD AND THEN SINKING DOWN FROM UTTER HELPLESSNESS; OURSELVES UP TO OUR MIDDLE EVERY THIRD STEP AND DRAGGING OURSELVES OUT AS WE COULD. IT WAS PAINFUL AND LABORIOUS ENOUGH BUT THE PARTIALLY UNCOVERED HILLSIDES GAVE HOPES OF BETTER GROUND. IT ONLY GREW WORSE WHEN WE HAD REACHED THEIR LEVEL SUMMITS AND AT NIGHT, EXHAUSTED AND DISHEARTENED, WE WERE GLAD TO ENCAMP WITHOUT WATER ON THE BARE FACE OF A MOUNTAIN WHERE WE HAD TO FASTEN THE WHOLE CAMP EQUIPAGE TO A SOLITARY CEDAR TREE TO KEEP IT FROM SLIDING OFF DOWN HILL. EVERY NIGHT REGULARLY SO FAR IT HAS SNOWED MORE OR LESS, AND WE ALWAYS FOUND OUR BLANKETS COVERED A HALF INCH OR MORE, AND OUR HAIR MATTED WITH IT. TONIGHT IT WAS CLEAR AND CLOUDLESS AND THE BITTER COLD WAS INFINITELY MORE UNCOMFORTABLE. THE NEXT DAY WE REACHED THE HUT OF THE HERDSMEN WHO LAST FALL DROVE DOWN 900 QUARTERMASTERS GATTLE INTO CACHE VALLEY TO WINTER. THERE ARE ABOUT 150 OF THEM LEFT AND IF THE WEATHER HOLDS AND THE SNOW REMAINS ON THE GROUND THEY WILL ALL BE DEAD IN A FORTNIGHT. HERE WE HAD COMFORTABLE ACCOMMODATIONS - PROTECTION FROM THE STORM AND A "BUNK" OF LOGS TO SPREAD OUR COUCHES ON, AND WE REMAINED TWO DAYS TO ALLOW OUR ANIMALS TO REST AND RECRUIT A LITTLE BEFORE WE TOOK THE ROAD AGAIN. THE SECOND DAY AFTER STARTING AGAIN THREE OF THEM GAVE OUT - COULD NOT BE STIRRED, AND WERE LEFT BEHIND; THE REST WERE IN SUCH A CONDITION AS TO MAKE IT NECESSARY TO REMAIN IN CAMP FOR THE NEXT DAY. ONCE MORE WE MADE THE EFFORT TO TRAVEL AND IN THE NEXT TWO MARCHES LOST SEVEN MULES AND HORSES. THEY COULD ABSOLUTELY PROCEED NO FURTHER - WE WERE FIFTY FIVE MILES FROM THE FORT, AND HAD NOT THREE DAYS RATIONS FOR THE PARTY. IN THIS EMERGENCY IT WAS NECESSARY TO ALTER OUR ARRANGEMENTS - FOUR OF US WITH THE TWO GUIDES TOOK THE SEVEN BEST ANIMALS REMAINING AND STARTED TO PUSH THROUGH TO THE FORT AND FIND RELIEF, TAKING WITH US THREE DAYS SHORT ALLOWANCE. THE FIRST DAY WE MADE AN EXTRAORDINARY MARCH OF 18 MILES AND LEFT ONE HORSE. OUR FRUGAL MEAL WAS SOON DISPATCHED, AND A HOLE IN THE SNOW RECEIVED US ALL. AS USUAL WE WERE WAKED BY THE FLAKES DRIVING IN OUR FACES. THE STORM THIS MORNING WAS SO VIOLENT THAT THERE WAS SOME THOUGHT OF REMAINING IN CAMP, BUT IT WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. THE STATE OF OUR COMMISSARIAT AND THE CONDITION OF THE PARTY BEHIND EQUALLY HURRIED US ON. AT NOON LIEUT. HOWLAND'S PET HORSE STOPPED AND A FEW HOURS AFTER THE NOBLE ANIMAL WHO HAD SO FAR

LED OUR TRAIN AND BREASTED THE SNOW TO MAKE OUR ROAD, FELL, AND FOR A LONG WHILE ALL OUR EFFORTS TO ROUSE HIM WERE INEFFECTUAL. AFTER STRUGGLING HARD NEARLY ALL DAY, WE HAD MADE ONLY FIVE MILES AND ENCAMPED. WE WERE NOW IN DEEP RAVINE, A FEW HUNDRED YARDS ACROSS, AND WALLED IN ON EITHER SIDE BY ALMOST PERPENDICULAR BLUFFS - THE BASES OF TWO GREAT MOUNTAINS STANDING LIKE SENTINELS OVER THE GREAT NATURAL GATE THROUGH WHICH WE PASSED OUT OF THE "INTERIOR BASIN". THESE SEEMED TO COLLECT ALL THE MOISTURE OF THE REGION FOR MANY MILES AROUND AND TO DISTRIBUTE IT IN STORMS AROUND THEIR SIDES. REGULARLY ONCE EACH DAY WHILE WE WERE IN THIS PASS A SNOW STORM OCCURRED, SOMETIMES OFTEN, AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE. THIS HOWEVER, WAS THE SEVEREST PART OF THE ROAD, AND FROM IT ~~ON~~ WE ~~DE~~ ^{descended} INTO THE PORT-NEUF AND THEN INTO THE SNAKE RIVER VALLEY. WE CAMPED IN A SMALL CLUMP OF WILLOWS AND ONIGHT THE FARGE OF PACKING OUR PROVISIONS WAS ENDED AND OUR SCANTY STORE DIVIDED, TO LAST US - NOTHING MORE OR LESS THAN THE HALF OF A THIN CAKE OF BREAD. EACH MAN PUT HIS LARDER INTO HIS POCKET. THE NEXT MORNING OUR LEAD HORSE WAS ABLE TO GO - LED BEHIND THE REST, AND WE ALL SET OUT ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ AFOOT, LEADING OUR ANIMALS; HE BROKE DOWN FINALLY AT NOON AND WAS ABANDONED TO HIS FATE. ANOTHER DAY'S HARD WORK BROUGHT US FOUR MILES AND INTO THE PORT-NEUF, AND WE WERE IN THE VALLEY OF THE COLUMBIA. NEARLY ALL OF OUR ANIMALS GAVE OUT TODAY; BUT WE GOT ALL ALONG NEXT MORNING. NEXT DAY THEY WERE ALL LEFT BUT TWO AND AT NIGHT FALL WE HAD MADE 5 MILES, BUT WERE OUT OF THE DEEP SNOW AND BUT 15 MILES OF COMPARATIVELY EASY WALKING TO THE FORT. WE HAD EATEN OUR LAST MORSEL THE NIGHT BEFORE, AND TONIGHT WE DETERMINED TO REACH OUR DESTINATION IF IT TOOK US TILL MORNING TO DO IT. WE TURNED OUR HORSES LOOSE TO GRAZE AN HOUR AT DARK, ON A BARE HILLSIDE, AND CATCHING THEM UP AGAIN, PUSHED AHEAD LEADING THEM - A HORSE AND A MULE IN ALL. HOUR AFTER HOUR WE TRAMPED, STOPPING TO REST AT INTERVALS, FOR A MILE OF LABORIOUS DRAGGING THROUGH THE SNOW WOULD COMPLETELY WEARY US OUT; THEN STRUGGLING AHEAD A STORM OF DRIVING SNOW BEATING ON US - LOSING OUR WAY EVEN WITH THE GUIDE ONCE OR TWICE, TILL AT LENGTH WE HAD ALMOST GIVEN IT UP TO LIE DOWN ON THE TRAIL, WHEN THE ^BARK OF A DOG BROKE FAINTLY ON THE EAR, WE QUICKENED OUR PACE - STOPPED AND SHOUTED, THE SHOUT WAS RETURNED AND THE CHORUS OF THROATS WHICH JOINED IT - DOGS AND CHILDREN, ASSURED US THAT WE WERE ON AN INDIAN CAMP. SOON THE WELCOME LIGHT FROM THE DOOR OF A LODGE SHONE IN OUR FACES, GREETINGS WERE EXCHANGED BETWEEN OUR GUIDE AND HIS DUSKY FRIENDS, AND AT MIDNIGHT WE TUMBLED IN WORN-DOWN AND FAMISHED AMONG A MOTLEY CIRCLE OF SQUAWS, DOGS AND PAPOOSES AROUND THE

CHEERFUL FIRE IN THE CENTER OF A LODGE. FOOD WAS CALLED FOR AND THE OLD WOMAN PRODUCED FROM A HEAP OF SKIRTS A COUPLE OF LEAVES OF DRIED ANTELOPE MEAT ABOUT THE COLOR AND CONSISTENCE OF A PLUG OF TOBACCO. THEY WERE PASSED FROM HAND TO HAND AND EACH TORE OFF WITH FINGERS AND TEETH A PIECE AND WENT AT IT - NATURALLY - WITHOUT THE TROUBLE OF COOKING. I WISH YOU COULD HAVE SEEN THE CIRCLE AS WE SAT AROUND THE FIRE A HALF HOUR AFTER, TORPID WITH FATIGUE AND REPLETION, WHILE A SQUAW DRIED OUR LEGGINS AND MOCCASINS. OUR TOIL WAS OVER; THAT NIGHT A KING MIGHT HAVE ENVIED US THE LONG, SWEET, CREAMLESS SLEEP WE ENJOYED WRAPPED IN BUFFALO ROBES BY THE FIRE, WHILE AROUND US LAY OUR HOST - HIS TWO SQUAWS, AND A HOST OF SWARTHY BRATS OF ALL SIZES PILED PROMISCUOUSLY. THE NEXT MORNING, INDIAN HORSES AND A BOY FOR A GUIDE WERE FURNISHED. TWO OFFICERS FROM THE POST MET US AND WE SAT DOWN AT THE HOSPITABLE MESS TABLE OF CANTONMENT LIVING NEAR FORT HALL.

I HAVE BEEN HERE NEARLY A MONTH AND TOMORROW WE START GAIN AND WILL BE A MOTLEY CAV-ALCADE. OUR TWO MOUNTAINEERS HAVE THEIR SQUAWS AND LODGES AND BESIDES, MY FRIEND, MR. OWEN PACKS A LODGE FOR US TO OCCUPY. THERE ARE HALF DOZEN HALF-BREED BOYS AND GIRLS IN THE "FAMILIES", AND I SHALL ONCE MORE HAVE THE PLEASURE OF BEING A LADIES CAVALIER. WE SHALL CROSS SNAKE RIVER TOMORROW, MAKE OUR CAMP ON THE OTHER BANK AND STRIKE DIRECTLY OVER TO SALMON RIVER, ANOTHER TRIBUTORY OF THE COLUMBIA, WHERE WE EXPECT TO MEET THE WHOLE NEZ-PERIT ? TRIBE, ON THEIR WAY TO CROSS THE MOUNTAINS FOR HUNTING THE BUFFALO. PERHAPS WE MAY GO WITH THEM; IF NOT WE SHALL NEXT VISIT THE FLATHEADS AND COMPLETING OUR EXCHANGE FOR HORSES RETURN TO THE TRAIL OF THE NEXT SUMMER EMIGRANTS. THESE TRIBES ARE FRIENDLY AND NOT THE SLIGHTEST DANGER NEED BE FEARED; OUR ONLY RISK WILL BE THAT OF MEETING MARAUDING BANDS OF BLACKFEET, WHO ARE AT DEADLY ENMITY WITH THE WHITES, AND WHO WILL AT LEAST ATTEMPT TO PLUNDER US. BUT THIS IS A CHANCE MERELY AND WE ARE TOO STRONG TO FEAR THEM. OUR PARTY WILL NUMBER 9 MEN. AND NOW, MY DEAR MOTHER, I MUST CLOSE. I HAVE TO BUY A HORSE TO PACK UP TODAY. I HAVE CUT ALMOST ALL MY CORRESPONDENTS, ALL BUT THE FEW WHO ANSWERED MY LAST LETTERS. COUSIN LAURA HAS NOT WRITTEN, SHE HAS PROMISED, AND I AM HURT THAT SHE DOES NOT FULFIL IT. TELL HER SO. THE BOYS ALSO. MY LOVE TO PA AND THEM AND PLEASE LET THIS SERVE YOU ALL.

GOOD BYE FOR SOME MONTHS.

YOUR SON,

FRANKLIN R. GRIST.