

C.—“The following extracts, taken from most reliable sources, will show the character of the tract of country commonly called

“THE AMERICAN DESERT.”

“The progress of settlement, a few miles west of the Upper Missouri River and west of the Mississippi, beyond the 98th degree of longitude, is rendered impossible by the condition of climate and soil which prevail there. . . . The Rocky Mountain region, and the sterile belt east of it, occupies an area about equal to one-third of the whole surface of the United States, which, with our present knowledge of the laws of nature, and their application to economical purposes, must ever remain of little value to the husbandman” (Dr. Henry, Smithsonian Institution.)

“The arid districts of the Upper Missouri are barren tracts, wholly uncultivable from various causes. . . . Along the 32nd parallel the breadth of this desert is least, and the detached areas of fertile soil greatest in quantity; but the aggregate number of square miles of cultivable land amounts only to 2,300 in a distance of 1,210 miles.” (Professor H. Y. Hind).

“The arid plains between the Platte and Canadian Rivers are in great part sand deserts. The sage plains, or dry districts, with little vegetable growth except varieties of artemesia, begin in the western border of the plains of the eastern Rocky Mountain slope, and cover much the larger portion of the whole country westward.” (Army Meteorological Register, U. S., page 684).

“The sterile region on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains begins about 500 or 600 miles west of the Mississippi, and its breadth varies from 200 to 400 miles; and it is then succeeded by the Rocky Mountain range, which rising from an altitude of 5,200 in lat., 32° reaches 10,000 feet in lat., 38° and declines to 7,490 feet in lat., 42° 24', and about 6,000 in lat., 47°. Along this range isolated peaks and ridges rise into the limits of perpetual snow, in some instances attaining an elevation of 17,000 feet. The breadth of the Rocky Mountain range varies from 500 to 600 miles. The soil of the greater part of the sterile region is necessarily so from its composition, and were it well constituted for fertility, from the absence of rain at certain seasons. The general character of extreme sterility likewise belongs to the country embraced in the mountain region.” (Explorations and Surveys for a Railway Route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, page 6.)

As regards the project of a Southern railroad to the Pacific, we find the following description of the Colorado Desert, given by the State Geologist of California:

“Its area is some 9,000 square miles, and excepting the Colorado, which cuts across its lower end, is without river or lake. It stretches off to the horizon on all sides without one glimpse of vegetation or life. Its surface is ashy and parched; its frame of mountains rise in rugged pinacles of black rock, bare even of soil. Words are unequal to the task of describing its apparent expanses, the purity of its air, the silence of its night, the brilliancy of the stars that overhang it, the tints of the mountains at daybreak, the looming up of those beyond the horizon, the glare of the mid-day sun, the violence of its local storms of dust and sand. Parts are entirely destitute even of sand, being smooth, compact, sun baked clay; other parts are covered with heaps of sand, disposed like snow-drifts in waves of 50 or 80 feet in height.” (Professor W. P. Blake.)