

thrive upon the scant grass they require a wide range. As much as ten acres of grazing ground for each animal is the ranchman's usual estimate.

Helena is a town of six thousand inhabitants, wedged in a cleft between base hills and debouching upon the plain as best it can among enormous piles of stones and dirt,—the débris of extensive placer mines. Scarcely have the miners spared room enough for the road to get into the town among their hideous heaps and holes. An unclean business this placer mining, carried on in mud and dirty water and leaving ghastly gashes and scars on the face of the country. The town is the outgrowth of a prosperous mining camp,—the Last Chance gulch, from which it is said more gold has been taken than from any other single locality in the world. Its situation as the nearest point in the mining region to the head of navigation on the Missouri River at Fort Benton made Helena a distributing center in the days when merchants brought in a year's supply of goods during the brief season of navigation. Thus it got a start as the chief commercial town of the territory. It still keeps the lead, and will continue to keep it unless the railroads should develop a larger town in the Yellowstone Valley. Ugly to the eye, with its scrambling, shadeless streets clinging to the steep hills; its narrow, crooked, ill-built business thoroughfare, and its blotch of a Chinese suburb, Helena is, nevertheless, an attractive place. The traveler can enjoy his ease in a comfortable hotel, read the news morning and evening in intelligent, well-printed daily papers, take his choice of seven churches on Sunday, read the new publications in a public library, supply his needs at stores as large and as well-stocked as are found in cities ten times as large in the east, and enjoy the society of people who add to culture that stamp of originality of character so common in the far West, and so rare in old communities. The town is singularly self-centered. Small as it is, it has metropolitan airs. It does its own thinking without reference to Chicago or New York, and has its own code of morals, which includes the toleration of public gaming-houses on the most eligible corners of the main street. People speak of "the States," as of some far-distant country in whose affairs they take but slight interest. The height of human felicity, in their opinion, is to live in Montana and "strike it rich" on a quartz lead. The highest title to distinction is to be an old resident. The red-faced miner or ranchman in a big clay-colored sombrero, who brings down his fist upon the bar and says, "I am an old Montanian," feels as genuine a pride as did

the Roman citizen of old when he boasted of a share in the empire of the world. To have come into the territory in 1862 is an honor here as great as a lord's title in England. The cordial hospitality shown to strangers by the better class of residents of the Montana towns is a pleasant surprise. Acquaintances are easily made; and the traveler who lately was glad of a chance to unroll his blankets at night on the floor of a ranchman's cabin finds himself entertained at bountiful tables, and surrounded by the accessories of a tasteful and comfortable home life. It is a thousand miles across vast, desolate spaces to the nearest city; but here are pictures, books, pianos, and luxurious furniture. The only noticeable difference in the talk of social circles observed by one fresh from the east, is that the current news and political discussion of "the States" are of slight interest here, and are rarely mentioned, and that local affairs, including the heroic days of the Vigilance Committee, are much dwelt upon. You will very likely learn that the prominent lawyer or banker who sits next you at dinner, was a leading vigilante and helped hang a dozen robbers and murderers. The papers give but a meager telegraphic summary of events in the world outside Montana, and the St. Paul and Chicago papers are so old when they reach here that they have few readers. Hemmed in by mountains and separated from the well-settled portions of the west by wide areas of vacant country, Montana has thus far been a region apart, and has worked out her own destiny without much help from beyond. Soon the territory will be traversed from east to west by eight hundred miles of railway. Population will pour in and the little mountain community, grown to the dimensions of a State, will assimilate with the nation at large.

We crossed the main divide of the Rockies at Frenchwoman's Pass, about fifteen miles north-west of Helena. The pass gets its name from a woman who was murdered by her husband in the early days of Montana settlement, and over it runs the main road between Helena and the Upper Missouri country, and the valleys watered by the tributaries of the Columbia. We went up the pass in fine style,—four handsome horses and the best driver in Montana, "Gib," a graduate of the Overland Mail service, a powerful man with bronzed face and the neck and shoulders of a Spanish bull-fighter, but with a soft voice, and an admirable dignity and quietness of manner. He talked to his horses in low tones, never a loud word or an oath, chiding or encouraging them as they deserved, and they seemed perfectly to understand every word he said. When we came to narrow places in