

My Dear Doctor

Jan Dec

1849

I want to give you a more particular account of my adventures than I could do in the few brief letters written to you since we parted.

I wrote to you that at the earnest solicitation of Dr Baker Capt French merely consented to give me transportation for my baggage about 400-500 pounds. So I started with the prospect of footing it most of the way. The first day of my travel from San Antonio I walked about 15 miles and begged my supper having arrived in camp late at night. The next day we went but a short distance to Castroville. There I was asked by the waggon-master if I had permission to put my things in the waggon. Being answered in the affirmative he remarked that they might remain till Capt French came up, thus intimating that they would be carried no longer. At Castroville it rained on us & I had no chance to air my plants till the expiration of two days when I found most of them wet. After five days I secured a place to board with one of the messes & then for a while I had an easy time. We stayed nine days on the Teona during which I gave that stream and the adjacent prairies a pretty good examination. For one month I got along pretty well. Meantime I had got in with Dr Baker and occupied a part of his tent assisting him in stretching & striking it & aiding him otherwise in loading & unloading his camp equipage. But about the 4th July the mess into which I had been admitted broke up in order to get rid of their noisy disagreeable cook & I was told that I could stay with part of it or join another. A short time before however the Dr had with two or three others formed a mess & wished me to join him which I did thinking it would be more convenient for me. My new mess however was soon broken up by the waggon-master who refused to allow the cook (who was an extra hand) to devote so much time to the work of the mess. I then tried to get back into my old mess but it was full & would not take me.

The Doctor had already tried to get into some of the more respectable messes. April 8 I was told at that time that no mess in the train would receive him. I could have got into almost any mess if I had drawn a nation. I saw then no other chance but to try and live the Dr & I in his nation with what we could buy from time to time. I then agreed to do most of the cooking and we formed a mess between us and all went on well for a while. It was not long however before the Dr began to quarrel with the cooking more than I thought was necessary in a camp. The tea was too strong or too weak the rice was killer with smoke the bread was dough or burnt to a coal & the coffee was muddy or else as ice. If anything fell it was smashed. If wood was scarce there was not enough to put in a humming-bird's eye. If any thing was cooking too slowly then was not a particle of fire under it. If anything was broken I broke it. So it was no wonder a remark intended for censure - it was couched in the most hyperbolic and language he was master of. He annoyed me most excessively, but by another practice to which he is much addicted - backbiting. His remarks on any subject whatever commonly ended by "don't you think so?" or "is it?" and if thus he wishes his hearer to endorse his opinions. I would sometimes dissent when an argument would surely spring up which ended by his silencing me economically me. I have frequently snored and pretended to be asleep to avoid acceding to his interrogations, after me had gone to bed. I had at last to beg him to cease asking me to backbite men who had done me no harm. At first we used to sleep together. Gradually we ceased to do so - then showing a cooling of our friendship. Sometimes we would read in the Bible to one another. Finally we parted entirely though later to do this. At last I was never so well pleased as when he was gone away. For three months I suffered thus till we were about to start back when I brought a nation's food and another mess with whom I then lived happily. I had not an unpleasant word all the way back. I suppose I should have no easier and pleasant time in future on good collector would be spared but I will try yet another campaign up to camp and transportation for my apparatus. & then censuring me for not collecting wood before coming into camp.

The Doctor is also exceedingly vain. On the Teona he asked me to assist him in coloring his white locks which show below his hair. I was disgusted at the vanity which led him to seek to conceal his age among a parcel of men and in a wilderness I believe he guessed my thoughts and he asked me but once more to do him the same far or - but continued to go through the operation alone. I believe he represented himself as younger - 48 - than he really is. It was also very annoying to him that any one should differ from him in opinion. Somehow he managed to gain the ill will of nearly every individual in the company. Now I could never exactly understand nor others either. He generally was attentive to the sick - but there was something in his manners ill suited to such a company as he was thrown among. At last he became a general subject of conversation and ridicule when several of the men would be assembled together. The subject of ducking him in the creek was once proposed seriously discussed even in the early part of the season on our outward march.

I was taken sick on Devil's river and he prescribed for me - how much good he did me I am not able to say. He almost strangled me by a new-fashioned way of giving me quinine. Certain it is I got well and as certain that I did not take his last prescription - quinine with which he had kept my head ringing for several days. I thought I had taken enough & the next proved the soundness of my opinion. I attribute my sickness to excessive labor & a little imprudence. I had botanized all the earlier part of the day before we left Devil's river. I then took my clothes through the process of ablation and then cooked till late in the night and went to bed with a pain in my side. The next day fever came on & continued five or six days reducing me as it always does very rapidly. After about ten days however I was able to attend to my plants. I lost by my sickness a very fine chance of examining a very interesting part of the route - that between Devil's river & the Pecos & I made a very imperfect

Survey of the Peers & the route for some distance beyond

On the return journey we started as if we should return by the upper or Fredericksburg route and followed that road to the Peers crossing two difficult ranges of mountains which however I found to contribute some interesting plants to my collection.

By degrees the vegetation as we came eastward assumed its autumnal dress offering few things of interest even the mosses & bulbs which you wished me to collect largely hardly appearing yet in consequence of the dryness of the weather.

I walked a good deal of the way - walking & riding by turns occasionally collecting plants as I rambled & now & then looking in the streams for mollusks. Before reaching S. Antonio however I had ceased to collect and my labors were confined to occasional cooking and attending to the few plants which were not quite dry.

Now to explain my quarrel with the Dr. As he could not bear contradiction & I could not help ^{sometimes} differing in opinion from him when an argument would arise or he would ask the oft repeated question "Does you think so?" I made a point of avoiding him as much as possible. Well in descending Devil's River we had some bad road - the mules at a certain place misred & fell I had gone a little ahead & sat down on a hill side and a little after the Dr. came on & took a seat near me - within reach.

After some criticism from him on the conduct of the waggon-masters &c and other remarks as a waggon ~~came out~~ which had been stalled came out on firm ground I made the harmless observation that "there was another waggon which had been stalled." He denied it & as I had been sitting for half an hour watching the efforts of the drivers to extricate their team I could not do otherwise than reassert my former remarks.

After two or three affirmations and denials he told me I lied & I struck him in the face one blow which I might if I wished have repeated but I was heartily sorry that he should

forget the gentleman and become rowdy enough to give
another man the lie and irritate me to become rowdy
enough to resort to fist cuffs to repel the charge
He went off abusing me as if I were the very opposite of
humanity and declaring I would repent it - which I already had

However we are now on speaking terms. He has honorably
paid me the \$150 for the draft I gave him on you - but I
want nothing more to do with him - He has many good
qualities but his excessive vanity ruins all. No allusion
to our quarrel or apology has been made on either side.

And now a few words respecting future operations.
I was requested by Capt French when leaving El Paso to
reduce my ~~my~~ baggage to the very minimum as few teams
would go back and these would be heavily loaded. So I gave away
the Flora & H. Reid. to Mrs Henry & all but a small quantity
of my paper (I had but little to keep or give away) also my press-
boards. Now I shall want at least ten reams of paper for
next year's operations - five or six of them of such texture that
the sheets can readily be lifted by one end without breaking
down - the rest may be of softer texture.

The books which I can parade are only Elliotts Flora, your
manual (which I left in S. Antonio about a year ago) your Chron. the
Pl. Linch. & the Botany of Dr. Wislizenus. I hope the more that you will
send me anything and everything that you can parade which
will assist me in acquiring a knowledge of the scene which
I am ~~aiding~~ ^{aiding} you and others to advance. I have been thinking of
proposing to Prof. DeCandolle to give him a set or part of a set of
my plants for a copy of the Prodomus but I will leave that to
your judgment.

Again it is no small sacrifice to seclude oneself for six
or twelve months at a time from all knowledge of the wide
world and of the events which are transpiring therein. The last
six months of the world's history is with me a blank or with only

here and there a speck to diversify the page and I do not know how I am to recover the time I have thus lost. If you could send me something containing a compendious account of the history of Europe for the last year of such a work can be so many it would be most acceptable.

I have collected a few shells fossil & recent which you can give to some conchological friend - perhaps he would send me some book on that subject by which I could gain some knowledge of that branch of natural science - and enable me to extend his. Some small work on other branches of natural science containing the elements of that science as Dana's Mineralogy would be very acceptable especially if I should spend the next winter in Mexico or any where beyond the Rio Grande. Any bill you may make for me in this way you can pay with the proceeds of the sale of specimens.

My new boards were left with my paper at El Paso - Will you therefore have some made for me and of such a size that they shall be not larger than the paper to be put between them - a little less would do - Then the corners & edge would not be ~~so much~~ worn off & washed by striking against other substances.

A good deal of that russia paper of which you gave me some quires I have used for my packages of seeds. If you would throw in some more into the main stock I would make use of it in the same way.

I have selected a portion of the seeds of the most showy plants and distributed them among friends one of which you will please ^{forward} to the gentleman to whom it is directed & I must beg of you to reserve a few for my sister such as you may think of easy cultivation - annuals - as Nyctaginia are some of which are very beautiful & I would venture to think I think you can do with very little trouble when you are examining them for yourself.

I could hardly help smiling at your remark that I must decide whether I should return or stay at El Paso. The truth is I was obliged to come back or starve - but I suppose you thought I had been living all this time on Irish Soda bread & butter and saving my money far from it - if Dr. Baker had not paid my bills & drags I could not have forwarded my packages to Port Llanos and then had money left to buy me a pair of shoes much less to pay my board here for a week (at \$1.50 per day) and then get passage on stage to Austin.

Now I shall pay 5-6 dollars for the carriage of my collection to Port Llanos - and as the briars of Mr. Taylor have picked nearly all my clothing in - not pieces or threads - but fibres I must lay in a new supply. Suppose you calculate what I need and its cost in Boston - then add 150-200 per cent. and you will come pretty near what I will have to pay. Then I shall have some travelling expenses and some liquor bills - probably - but I may collect a few debts - ^{though} it is mighty uncertain. Well put all these certainties and uncertainties together and then guess you are a Yankee or next thing to it a New Yorker all the same to a South-westerner north of Mason & Dixon's line) how much money I will have to start on in the spring. I shall start so light as I did last spring or summer. By the way would not Treasury notes be the best way of sending me money. Some of your rich fellows might send a few hundred and not feel it.

I hope you will get me some support from the Sec. of War and other great men at Washington for the next campaign in the way of instruction to ^{these} dependents to facilitate my operations. Capt. Finch will not be here I shall have to apply to some other Quartermaster for assistance. I think Pop. Henry might do much for me if he knew what difficulties I have had to encounter.

I promised Capt Greich that if I went North I would present a set of my plants in his name as a testimonial of my gratitude for the favors rendered me to the Smithsonian Institute or another Scientific association (I forget the name) in Philadelphia of which he said a committee of members of Congress were Curators. I can't ask you pressed as you are with your own business to do this but in the introduction to the account of my collection he and Dr Baker should receive great ~~credit~~ commendation for their assistance Dr B. brought to me while I was sick the first specimen of a new sp. of *Leucophyllum*. If it should prove to be new let it be named "Bakeri"

I send a magnifying glass which I wish you would get repaired for me

You will recollect that we went to the store of a gardener in Boston & bought some knives one of which had a saw in it that was stolen & I lost the other. Send me if you can a couple more with a saw in them

It will be best hereafter to make my shipping post ^{me} and any thing sent there for may be consigned to "Jonas Randall" You can send to New Orleans any day and a Steamboat runs twice a week from that place to Port Yavaca. Nevertheless ~~there~~ I should not expect to receive a package sent by those places under two months unless you have a more accommodating friend in New Orleans than I have any where in the South

My numbered list of plants with notices of localities, remarks, &c I shall keep & copy and then transmit to you by mail

I enclose a fragment of a plant Nat. Or. Solanaceae Can you give me its name

I hope to hear from you immediately on the various matters mentioned in this letter the length of which is enough to frighten you if you were not used to long letters. Meanwhile God bless you & prosper you. Best wishes to Mary

Affectionately Yours, Charles Wright



Wright, Charles. 1849. "Wright, Charles Dec. 1849." *Charles Wright correspondence with Asa Gray*

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