

## FROM THE PLAINS.

### Mails Stopped by the Cheyennes—Colonel Sumner and the Indians.

By a late arrival in this City of parties direct from Santa Fé, we have dates from that place to the 1st September, with late and interesting intelligence from the Plains.

The difficulties with the Indians on the Plains have been aggravated by the ill-success of Colonel Sumner's late conflict with them. The facts of the encounter have been given, but the effects of the conflict upon the Indians have been in the highest degree unsatisfactory. Colonel Sumner, with a force of 500 men, encountered a body of 300 savages, but instead of opening fire upon them, charged with his cavalry. The result was almost nothing. The Indians scattered and fled, but nine were killed, and the opportunity of teaching them a useful lesson was lost. They have since infested the Plains in small bodies, robbing and murdering travelers, and marauding unchecked. Our informant left Santa Fé in company with four others, but on receiving information of the hostile attitude of the Indians, remained in camp for two days, when three days out. On the way to Independence, they came upon traces of an Indian encampment, and presently overtook the mail train which had been turned back and was retracing its path to the frontier.

A correspondence passed at Independence, on the arrival of the party, between Mr. HALL, the Mail Contractor, and Mr. Wm. P. BLAKE, who was in the party that had just crossed the Plains. At the request of Mr. HALL, a full statement of the present condition of the travel across the Plains was furnished by Mr. BLAKE. His letter is as follows:

INDEPENDENCE, Mo., Thursday, Sept. 24, 1857.

SIR: In compliance with the wish expressed in your letter dated 23d, I send you the following narrative of our experience with the Indians between this place and Santa Fé, premising, however, that neither our party nor the other fought with, or were violently assailed by the Indians, although our lines were unquestionably in imminent danger for a considerable part of the way.

The stage and a wagon in charge of Thos. FIELDS and three men, with one lady and child and myself as passengers, left Santa Fé on the morning of the 1st, and proceeded as far as the first crossing of the Cimarron River without seeing any Indians. At that place, while we were preparing breakfast, two mounted Indians came galloping up through the tall grass on the left and putting away their bows and arrows were allowed to come into camp. They said they were Kioways, and that they wanted something to eat. We fed them and gave them sugar, and they then wanted powder and lead and a "paper" or recommendation, which were refused and we drove off, leaving them much dissatisfied. They were equipped for war, and we regarded them as spies, a supposition which we afterwards had reason to believe was correct. Indeed, they were probably the same Indians that a few days previously had been in the camp of Col. Johnston and spent the night, and the next day seized an opportunity to kill the driver of the surveyor's ambulance and run away with the mules. This daring act was performed within 200 yards of a company of soldiers, which had turned the brow of a hill and left the ambulance out of view behind them. The soldiers being on foot, could not pursue, and the Indians made their escape with the mules.

Several miles beyond the point at which we were visited by these Kioways, we reached the encampment of a large ox-train, with provisions for Col. Johnston's command, also a wagon and a party of sixteen men which had preceded us on the road and were bound for the States. This party had been far beyond, but had turned back, retracing their steps for several days' journey, having learned from a Mexican captive in a band of Kioways, that a large force of Cheyennes had concentrated below, near the lower crossing of the Cimarron and on the Arkansas River, waiting for our party to arrive, intending to stop it. This Mexican reported that the Cheyennes were very angry and had declared that the mail should not pass through again. While waiting and consulting here, Col. Johnston and his force of about 500 men, infantry and cavalry—the escort of the Kansas Boundary Survey—passed us towards the upper crossing. From this officer we learned that the road was highly dangerous for small parties, and he advised us to remain until the return of the ox-train. We did so, and traveled with it one day, but the progress of the train was so slow that we concluded to push on in company with the party of sixteen men and their wagon.

We passed the Lower Springs of the Cimarron without seeing Indians, and were crossing the Jornada on the 13th when we saw a group of black objects on the verge of the prairie, and, by the aid of a glass, I could distinguish eight or ten Indians in full gallop towards us. Others were soon seen in different directions, and they all rapidly approached. The arms and ammunition were laid out in readiness, and we traveled on as usual. Before coming within rifle range several of the Indians turned off, and seven only came towards us and made signs for us to stop; but we kept on and they trotted behind us at a respectful distance. They saw that we were too strong for them, and after a little consultation they called for our conductor, the "captain." FIELDS conversed with them by signs, and ordered them to unstring their bows, which they immediately did, and then rode alongside of our party. They traveled with us for four or five miles, and then signified their willingness to leave us if we would give them a "paper," (a recommendation or good character.) We stopped for a few moments, wrote a few words for them, and gave out sugar and crackers. There were four old chiefs and three young warriors, finely formed men, and beautifully dressed in suits of beaded buckskin, and adorned by large plates of silver on their breasts. The chiefs sat down, and lighting a pipe, went through the ceremony of smoking all around. In this we observed that the young men did not participate, nor did they sit down or take any part in the proceedings.

We then drove on very cautiously, but rapidly, and reaching the Sand Hills after dark, found a double track, or the trail of the other mail party, which had evidently turned back. A great number of tracks of Indian ponies on each side also gave us reason to fear that this party had been forced to return by the Indians. Where we crossed the Arkansas River, the next morning, we found the road-way completely covered with moccasin tracks on each side of the trail of the wagons. Fragments of crackers and drippings of molasses in the road, showed plainly that the other party had been dealing out their provisions. There were two places where the party had been compelled to stop, as was evident by the tracks around, and the trailing or prints of the blankets in the sand. We also observed that subsequently to this, the Indians had changed their camp, for we found the marks made by the lodge-poles crossing the road. The trails bent off in the direction of Pawnee Fork, where we concluded a part of the Indians had gone. Our fears for the safety of the other mail party were now greatly excited, and we concluded that they had been driven down the river towards the ruins of Fort Atkinson, and there murdered and scalped. But we had not proceeded two miles further before we saw them approaching in the distance, in company with a large ox-train. On joining them we camped for breakfast, and exchanged many congratulations, especially when we learned the extent of the danger to which they had been subjected. There were four passengers in addition to KELLY, the conductor, and three men with the wagons, and they had waited on the banks of the river for our arrival; but becoming fearful that we had been attacked, they started to cross the Jornada. On reaching the Sand-hills they were suddenly set upon by Indians, and forced to stop, turn around and return. The Indians were so numerous, and well armed, that it was folly to fight them; and so KELLY quietly but unwillingly complied with their demands. Provisions were dealt out to them as they traveled along, and the mail party, watching their opportunity on reaching the bank of the Arkansas, dashed in and made the crossing in a full trot. But the Indians were not to be thus eluded, and with loud yells rushed across the stream after them, surrounding the wagons as they rose upon the opposite bank. Here the men were again compelled to give out provisions to the principal Indians. This done, they started again to be again surrounded and stopped. The Indians kept flocking in from below, and from the camp on the opposite shore, until nearly or quite one hundred warriors had collected. A council was then held by the Indians around, and the conductor was ordered to get down from his seat and join them. He objected to this, and was then violently seized hold of and jerked down and led to the fire, and then as unceremoniously made to sit upon the ground and write them a paper—a recommendation of them as good and brave Indians who ought to receive crackers and sugar from all Americans passing on the road. This desire was made known in part by signs and through one of the mail party who formerly lived among some of the tribe and could understand part of their language.

While the little party was thus separated, the passengers became convinced that they would soon be scalped, and wrote notes to throw out on the roadside—a few last words to their friends. They held their revolvers ready cocked, and were resolved to sell their lives as dearly as possible. An angry dispute arose among the Indians, and there were two parties, the old men counseling moderation, and the young men insisting on killing the party and taking the mules. At length one of the old chiefs arose and taking KELLY to the coach demanded more sugar. When the boot-leather was turned back, the Indian seized hold of the sack and dragged it out, shouting ramos, at the same time. The passengers say that this word never before was so welcome, and under a vigorous application of whip and spur the mules dashed off, seeming to know the danger, and to be as glad as the men to fly from it. They traveled at full speed up hill and down for several miles, and gained the vicinity of a train of wagons, before a party of the Indians, which started in pursuit a few moments after they left, could overtake them.

These Indians complain bitterly of Col. SUMNER, saying that he had burned up their provisions and lodges. They were very anxious to know where General HARNEY was and what he was coming out

into their country. They have heard of him through the Sioux and appear to have recently learned some thing of his movements, and were evidently afraid that his military operations were to be directed against their tribe. His name is a terror to them, and I do not doubt that they live in constant fear that he will pounce upon them at any moment.

We left the out-going mail party on the Arkansas, and they were going on to Santa Fé with the ox-train. When we reached the big bend of the Arkansas we left our escort of sixteen men and traveled the remaining distance alone, but camped with great circumspection in the dark.

These are the simple facts, and they may seem more trivial and unimportant to you than they did to our little party when we were on those Plains, so boundless to the vision, and peopled by hordes of savages alone. To us, the few Indians we saw were regarded as an indication of great and hidden danger, and from the crossing of the Cimarron until we left the Arkansas we knew not at what moment we should encounter an overwhelming force of this excited and angry tribe.

There is but one opinion upon the Plains among wagon-masters and intelligent men who have had experience among the Indians in regard to the recent encounter of Col. SUMNER with them. His course appears to have exasperated without intimidating the tribe, and they are determined to avenge themselves upon all small parties of Americans that they can find, and to levy tribute, at least, upon all they do not dare to openly attack. They are like a nest of maddened hornets, and if they had as little intelligence and caution, would kill and destroy at every opportunity. In my opinion, we owe our escape from these Cheyennes to our caution in remaining behind, and to our fortunate meeting with the party of sixteen men. If we had gone on alone, only five in number, we would, in all probability, have been murdered among the Sand-hills, or at the crossing of the Arkansas. The fear of General HARNEY and swift vengeance may have been the chief motive with the old men in allowing the other party to return. It is also most probable that the policy which has wisely adopted by your employes—that of uniform kindness to the Indians—together with the fact that on several occasions the mail hands have fought most desperately and with killing effect, had great influence with them in their deliberations on this occasion.

We are accustomed to regard the depredations of Indians as of little account, when life is not taken, but if white men were to conduct themselves as these Indians do—to become robbers on the highway—to forcibly stop and send back the mails, and to menace the lives of passengers—such acts would not be lightly regarded or long tolerated by the American people.

It is evident that this great highway to New-Mexico is not adequately protected. There is not a military post or permanent camp of soldiers upon it east of Fort Union, at the base of the Rocky Mountain chain, a distance of over 800 miles. It is undefended, while routes in Texas, over which there is less traffic, are dotted with military posts.

Fort Atkinson should either be rebuilt or a post established nearer to the upper crossing. The mail, also, should be escorted for the present from Walnut Creek as far west as the Point of Rocks.

You further ask my opinion as to the practicability of this route as a link in the great Pacific Overland Mail Route and Railroad. It has been the chief object of my journey this Summer to obtain information upon this great question by my personal observations; the results of these I hope soon to present to the public in a more full and connected form than it is possible for me to do in this letter. I have been astonished at the agricultural resources of this route and its adaptation to not only a stage road and mail route, but to a Railroad which may be prolonged to the Pacific.

The resources of this part of the great Rocky Mountain slope have in general been underrated, especially by scientific men upon theoretical considerations connected with climatology. The fact that you have maintained a regular monthly mail between Independence and Santa Fé for seven years, and during this time have failed to deliver the mails to their destination in time but twice, is certainly the best evidence that can be offered—amounting to a practical demonstration of the feasibility of the route for mail coaches at least. That the route is destined to form a link in the great through route to the Pacific, I have no doubt, and am prepared to show that it offers many advantages for a railroad not yet considered even in official reports. In fact this great route to the Valley of New-Mexico, upon which there has long been an established trade of over five millions a year, did not receive an examination in connection with the United States Pacific railroad explorations and surveys, and it has not received that attention which its importance to the great West and especially to Missouri and Kansas demands.

Very respectfully, yours,  
WM. P. BLAKE.

Col. JACOB HALL, Independence, Mo.