AFTER DARK IN A MINING CAMP.

Queer Sights of Night Life in the Gold Regions.

A Look at Cripple Creek and Its Golden Streets—How the Town is Being Rebuilt—Its Queer Citizens and Its Curious Houses—The Dwighton and the Darker Side—The Gambling Halls and the Dance Halls—A Curious Chautauqua Where The Model of Jerusalem is a Roulette Table—How a Philadelphian Made $16,000—A Visit to the Cripple Creek Jail, etc.

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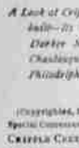
Special Correspondence of the News.

CRIPPLE CREEK, September 1st, 1896.

THE GOLD REGIONS are the only live part of the United States today. Business is dull in the cities. The history free in many parts of the country are dead. The farmers are grumbling at hard times and the laborers are either out of work or almost ready to strike for more wages. This is not so in the Rockies. New prospects are being opened and the output of gold from the Cripple Creek district is averaging about a million dollars a month. There are 20,000 men now living and working within a radius of six miles of this town, and what few years ago was a cattle ranch has become one of the busiest parts of the United States. Miners now receive from $3 to $3.50 a day, and the mines are worked by day and by night.



IN THE HEART OF THE ROCKIES.

You hear little talk of politics and little growling about the business depression. Every one is crazy for gold, and the chief subjects of conversation are the outputs of the mines or the new strikes which are promised on the hills all about you.

I wish I could show you this Cripple Creek region. It lies, you know, just back of Pike's Peak, and as the crow flies, within less than one hundred miles of Denver. It is two miles straight up in the air above the people who live on the edge of the sea, and its great gold treasures lie, as it were, on the very roof of the United States. You are very close to the sky. The air is so clear that you can see many miles. It is dry and pure and full of ozone. You seem to be breathing champagne, and you go on and on climbing the hills hour after hour until the night comes, when you feel all at once that the stimulating atmosphere has worked your system to more than its full and you are ready to drop. Cripple Creek itself lies in a nest in these hills. The country surrounding it is in some places not much wilder than parts of Pennsylvania. New York and Ohio and in others it is composed of mountains which rise gradually upward until the snowy caps of the northernmost peaks almost touch the clear blue sky.

THE GOLDEN STREETS OF CRIPPLE CREEK.

The whole region surrounding the town contains gold. From it, in 1894, was shipped $200,000 worth of ore. In 1895 the shipments jumped to $600,000, in 1895 to $2,000,000, and this year to more than $3,000,000. The output this year promises to be at least one-third larger than that of 1895, and now the hills on every side are honeycombed with holes. You could not chase a fox over any one of the old grazing fields without hooking your nurse's legs. Here and there you see great shafts standing out against the blue sky with piles of rock beside them. These are working mines, and those big frame buildings which frown down upon you from the hills are more productive of gold than was Aladdin's palace when it contained the wonderful lamp. The hills are covered with rocks, nearly all of which contain a small proportion of gold, and the very streets of the town are underlaid with low-grade ore. Cripple Creek is built upon the rocks, and the dusty streets over which you walk are, I am told, worth from $3 to $10 per cubic yard. If the processes of reducing low grade gold continue to improve, the town may some time have to be moved for the gold upon which it stands. A friend of mine took me behind a building in the heart of the city the other day, and in the wall of the excavation showed me a strata of light color running through the darker rock. "That," said he, "contains gold, and it would pay to mine it. You can follow the vein and see how it crops out here in the alley beyond."

That same afternoon I met Mr. Frances, the editor of the Cripple Creek Mining Journal. He took me through the little pine building in which his paper is gotten out and then showed me in its back yard a shaft, above which there was a pile of dirt. "That shaft," said he, "marks a prospect which our newspaper company owns. Some of the rock has assayed $40 a ton, and it may be very rich lower down."

CRIPPLE CREEK AND THE FUTURE.

The town of Cripple Creek is a wonder. It is less than five years old, but it contains 10,000 people. It was burned down three months ago, but it is now ten being rebuilt. Some parts of it are being substantially constructed, and the people are evidently here to stay. To-day it is a hodge-podge of a town. It has all kinds of buildings, made of all sorts of materials thrown together in all sorts of shapes. The town lies on the sides of the hills. It is laid out along wide streets which are filled with dust in the summer and which in the winter become almost rivers of mud. Some of the streets in its business section are some like cow ways then houses. You can stand on the sidewalk and almost touch the roofs of the houses. Others are substantial two-story brick buildings, and an excavation is now being made for a hotel which will cost $100,000 to build. The cellar has to be cut out with blasting powder, and every foot of the rock is drilled and boxed out with dynamite. There is gold in the granite that is thrown out, it is true, but it is not too low a grade to pay for sending it. A little further on rock has been blasted out for a mining exchange, and good buildings are going up in every part of the town. All of the main streets have wide board walks which are filled with men from daylight until midnight, and along which you may see many people moving along the wee small hours of the morning. What a cosmopolitan crowd it is that walks these streets! There are Frenchmen, Germans, English and Americans; cowboys from the west and miners from the east, moving along to and fro, trying to keep out of the dark. There are men in velveteens with laced boots coming up to their claims, and there are men in broadcloth who tramp past you in coaches. There is the plug hat of the Wall street broker, the bicycle cap of the clerk and the sombrero of the half man from Texas mixed in and out with the mass. Every one moves fast. There is some pushing and shoving, but you are impressed at the good order everywhere kept. Now and then you hear a man swear, but there is no shouting, no yelling and abundant good nature. This is the mining camp of 1896 and not that of 1859.

THE HOUSES OF CRIPPLE CREEK.

Back from the business streets you see the homes of Cripple Creek. The hills about the stores for a radius of half a mile on each side are dotted with huts, cabins and frame houses of all descriptions. Some are respectable cottages, costing hundreds of dollars. Others are mere store fronts, covered with red roofing paper, tacked on to keep out the rain. The most of the houses are still unpainted, and the fresh yellow pine shives out amid the shacks which are covered with this roofing cloth or red or pink. There are many log cabins. These are fair-sized, and the earth is piled up around their walls to keep out the rain. There is no little dooryard here, you can sleep on the ground, and the only danger is from the cold winds of the winter. Some of the frame houses are of the shape and size of a street car without wheels, and others are more shods, knocked up for the time. There are hundreds of people living in tents, and there are boarding houses and lodging tents, in which from fifty to sixty men pay from 25 to 50 cents a night for a cot and a cover. Hundreds lodge in Cripple Creek. There are no vacant stores or houses, though building is going on everywhere. Some stores, which are not more than eight feet square, rent for from $60 to $100 a month, and any kind of a sleeping room would rent you from $3 to $5 a week. Real estate is very active, and the town is now doing business with the least of public improvements. About three thousand dollars a month are spent in improving the streets by blasting away the rocks by dynamite. A number of new school buildings are going up, and there are five different religious organizations which propose to erect new churches. The town has a Y. M. C. A., a Salvation Army, and its police organization is such that a lady might walk alone through its business streets at any hour of the night and not be insulted. There are many nice families living here, and some neighborhoods are as good as one will find in any part of the country.

THE DARKER SIDE OF CRIPPLE CREEK.

So much for the bright side of Cripple Creek. The camp has also its darker side. I am told that it is not worse than that of other rich mining camps, but it is bad enough, and, to say the least, it is a disgrace to Colorado and the United States. Along the main business street nearly every other house is a saloon, and in these saloons gambling goes on from daylight until dark and from dark until daylight. There are all kinds of games to catch the money of the miners. You can play any kind of a game, from five cents to a thousand dollars, and in addition to faro, roulette and poker, there are wheels of fortune, poker games and games of crap. The miners work only eight hours, and as the work goes on day and night in each mine, three gangs of miners being employed throughout twenty-four hours of eight-hour shifts, there are always crowds upon the streets, and the saloons are always full.

Each saloon, it is safe to say, has at least three gambling games going on within it, and as the saloons number about eighty, there must be at least 240 games at which you can lose your money in the town. All kinds of vices are rampant. The saloons, I am told, pay $100 a year for the privilege of selling liquor, and every game pays its license of $10 a month, so you see the town has an income of about $26,000 a year from its saloons, and of nearly $30,000 a year from gambling.

IN THE DANCE HALLS.

It is on "Easy street" that you find the most of the dance halls of Cripple Creek. There are dozens of them in the town, and they would be a disgrace to any Christian community. You enter a saloon, at the back of which is a big room, in which a screaching band plays. The saloon is filled with men and women, some poker, some bad drinks, others loitering with associates. The women are young, and not a few are pretty. Some wear long Mother Hubbards. Some are even more scantily clad. The latter of all are flushed with drink, and some of the women almost stagger as they push their way in and out among the men, begging them to dance and drink with them. In most cases the men refuse, for many are here only to see. There is no charge for the dancing, but the man who dances is expected to treat his partner, and the girls are held out as a bait to sell the liquor and to get the drunken miners to gamble. Stop a moment and watch the dance! There are quadrilles and waltzes, and cowboys with their hats on are hopping about in heavy boots over the sawed floors and swinging their drunken partners. Listen a moment and you can hear their conversation. It is not fit to print, and oaths and slang are mixed with the vilest of language. I have seen some of the famous wicked dances of the world. I have been in the Moulin Rouge in Paris, and have seen the cancan, but this is worse. The Parisian's vice is to a certain extent refined and artistic. Here it is open and disgusting in its extreme.

THE CRIPPLE CREEK CHAUTAUQUA.

Gambling goes on everywhere. There is a new game now being played in the back of the Cripple Creek Hotel. Bills are scattered around the streets advertising the home rush, and there are club rooms to enter which you must know the password, and in some club rooms poker is played. The rock club is known as the Chautauqua. I have lectured at Bishop Vincent's great Chautauqua summer school on Chautauqua Lake, N. Y. It is one of the chief Christian institutions of the world, and it has its branch circles in almost every county of the United States. In walking down the street the other day with a newspaper friend I saw the sign "Chautauqua" above a door across the street, and I said that I would like to go over and call and pay my respects to the members of the circle. A queer smile came over the newspaper man's features and he said: "All right, I am a member of this Chautauqua, and I will introduce you." We entered a narrow hall, through one door of which I could see into a saloon where at least 200 men were gambling. We passed this and went upstairs and stopped before a door which was closed. "I carry a key," said my newspaper friend, as he opened the door with a huge key and led me into a large room, on the tables of which were papers from all parts of the world. I saw a copy of the Cosmopolitan Magazine, a Harper's Weekly and the Chautauqua Magazine, and I was told by a copy of the Police Gazette. Before I could realize how such an impudent paper as the latter came to be taken by a Chautauqua circle a tall, fine gentlemanly young man, with a brown moustache and cold blue eyes, came in. I was introduced to him as the manager of the Chautauqua. He gave me words of welcome in a voice like oil, and asked me to step into the next room. I did so, and I there saw the biggest and most popular social circle in Cripple Creek. It was a literary circle to some extent, and its members were hard at work. They sat about little tables, each with several baskets in his hand. As I looked I saw that the leaflets were illustrated. They were covered with red and black spots and with pictures of kings, queens and knaves. It was a poker chautauqua and the chips on the table represented many dollars. In another part of the room was what I thought at my first entrance an object lesson class standing around what seemed to me to be a model of Jerusalem or some ancient city. The professor sat down as he lectured. I drew nearer. The professor was a cripple and the wheel he was turning was not a model of Jerusalem, but that which has led so many green horns so much money in the game of roulette. The scholars were the players, and the money on the table showed me that the game was a high one. A young fellow from Philadelphia came into this Chautauqua one night. He had but a few dollars, but he began to bet on the red and black. Luck was in his hair and he doubled his stakes. He left the money on the table, changing it from one color to the other now and then. It was doubled again and again, until he had at last won $16,000. This was all the cash the bank had on hand. The croupier stopped the game and went out and got $20,000. He brought this in and dared the young gambler to put up his $16,000 on a single turn of the wheel and to double or quit. The Philadelphian, however, replied that he had got enough and that he did not care to play any longer. He took his money off with him to eat it in all probability, in some future game. The majority of the gamblers lose in the end. The percentage in every game played here is in favor of the bank, and the most of the games are rigged to cut and cut.

IN THE CRIPPLE CREEK JAIL.

And still Cripple Creek is some respects is an orderly town. You can walk alone at all hours of the night, or if you cultivate it too much it may possibly land you in jail. There are better jails than that at Cripple Creek. The visit I paid to the prison was just before the fire. The marshal took me to the police station, a building which looked for all the world like the tower of a windmill founded up. We passed through this, and at its back, in a little shed, I found the jail. There were at least a dozen prisoners, who were caged up like so many wild animals. The whole twelve were kept inside of an iron framework made of two-inch bars crossed like a lattice work and bound together so as to form two tiers of cages, and so that you could look through all of the cages at once. Each cage was just about high enough for a man to stand upright within it, and each contained from two to three men. There was no chance for seclusion or privacy for any one. All were huddled in together, and a burglar and a murderer sat side by side with two foulish drunken boys who had raised a row at a dance hall the other night.

Frank G. Carpenter

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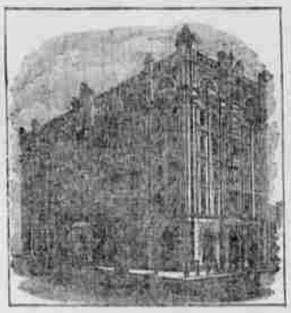

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