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Letter from John W. H. Baker to Julia Ann Baker and his children, 1853 Sept. 3

John W. H. Baker

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Panama, Sept. 3, 1853

My Dear Wife & Children

Knowing that you will feel constantly anxious about me in my progress to California I thought I would write you again from this place. We arrived here day before yesterday about dark, having made the passage from the Atlantic side to the Pacific in two days. We spent the night at Cruces where we met the Company which came down from San Francisco numbering some 400 which made the accommodations at the place very poor. We took mules at Cruces and came through the distance of about 25 miles in about 10 hours while some of our company were obliged to stop over night and came in the next day before noon. We got along very well from the fact that we got no rain that day but mud was abundant. Our trunks came in about dark last night in a terrible muddy condition externally but pretty well within. They look as though they had encountered some hardships as well as ourselves. We are expecting to go on board the Steamer Winfield Scott this P. M. and start on the way to Cal. where we shall probably arrive in 15 or 18 days. Our journey thus far has been full of interesting incidents but I cannot relate them now. I will endeavour to make some of them known when I arrive at the end of my journey. Mary displays a great deal of courage and most excellent skill at keeping in the saddle while passing through the deep ravines & gulches from Cruces to this place. I wrote a note and sent it to Rev. Joseph Rowell who is the American Missionary at this place. He came immediately to see me and I felt quite rejoiced to see him. He seems in good health and has a small society about him

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~~Hexxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ with which he is doing everything that a man can, situated as he is among a people who are mostly Catholic although there are many representatives here from all nations. There seems to be one very discouraging thing in practice among the American population, that is the common use of profane language -- It does no doubt have a very bad influence upon the extension of the principles of the religious society established here by the American Missionary Society. I think such a practice should by all means be avoided in passing through foreign countries. There is no doubt much that would be interesting in this place to me but I have been trying to reserve my strength and get somewhat rested and therefore I have been about but little. I expect to call and see Rev. Mr. Rowell about 11 o'clock today. I should have gone to see him yesterday but I did not feel ambitious or energy sufficient to stir from the Hotel where we are stopping. The climate here at this season is very relaxing to the muscles and one feels as though it was impossible to make an effort for physical exercise. Spanish is the language of the place and it seems quite strange to me to hear so much talk and noise and understand not a word hardly of it. The Spanish is not a difficult language to acquire and I think I could soon obtain a smattering of it but to stay in this place would be something I could not be hired to do. The natives have frequent bull-fights which is an old Spanish amusement. I understand that a man was killed day before yesterday by a bull in one of their fights. I saw a little exhibition of the manner in which this sport is carried on yesterday, and it looked most foolish to me that human beings should be accustomed to enrage such poor dumb beasts and get them maddened

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and then fight them and be destroyed. I looks to me like heathenism rather than anything like Catholocism. I have taken out my miniatures this morning and taken a look at them for the first time since I left N. Y. I did wish to have them where I could look at them oftener but from the fear of injuring them I have kept them closely packed. I want to hear from you very much but I suppose I must wait patiently for the next steamer after I arrive at Cal. Tell Fredy to be a good boy and I will try and write him a letter when I get to Cal. I want he should go to school and learn as well as he can and Laura Maria must improve as fast as possible. Kiss all the children for me and do not distress yourself for the welfare of your

Husband

John W. H. Baker

Mary sends her best love to yourself and the children. Remember us to all our friends.

J. W. H. B.