

Below are two passages from Sarah Royce's retrospective account of her journey to and initial settling in California. The first appears at the opening of her recollection, describing their first night on the trail. The second appears much later, as they approach California through the Great Basin. As you read, consider what they suggest about her perspective on this journey, her view of herself and her role as a woman, and the contrast with Tamsen Donner.

"I had for months anticipated this hour, yet, not till it came did I realize the blank dreariness of seeing night come on without house or home to shelter us and our baby-girl. And this was to be the same for many weeks, perhaps months. It was a chilling prospect, and there was a terrible shrinking from it in my heart; but I kept it all to myself and we were soon busy making things as comfortable as we could for the night. Our wagon was large, we were provided with straw and plenty of bedclothes; and soon a very tolerable resting place was ready for us. Our little Mary had been happy as a lark all day, and now sank to sleep in her straw and blanket bed, as serenely as though she were in a palace, on a downy pillow!

"At first the oppressive sense of homelessness, and an instinct of watchfulness, kept me awake. Perhaps it was not to be wondered at in one whose life so far had been spent in city or town surrounded by accompaniments of civilization and who was now, for the first time in her life, "camping out." However, quiet sleep came at last; and in the morning, there was a mildly exultant feeling which comes from having kept silent through a cowardly fit, and finding the fit gone off."

* * *

"I had now become so impressed with the danger of the cattle giving out that I refused to ride except for occasional brief rests. So, soon after losing sight of the dust of the envied little caravan, I left the wagon and walked the remainder of the day. For a good while I kept near the wagon but, by and by, being very weary I fell behind. The sun had set before we reached the Sink, and the light was fading fast when the wagon disappeared from my sight behind a slight elevation; and, as the others had gone on in advance some time before, I was all alone on the barren waste. However, as I recognized the features of the neighborhood, and knew we were quite near the Sink, I felt no particular apprehension, only a feeling that it was a weird and dreary scene, and instinctively urged forward my lagging footsteps in hope of regaining sight of the wagon. Suddenly I caught sight of an object a few rods distant on the left of the road, moving steadily but rather stealthily toward the road, in a line that would intercept it some paces ahead of me. I stopped, the creature stopped too, looking steadily at me. It was a Coyote. I had several times during the journey heard them howling at night but, as the season had advanced, they had been seldom heard, and to meet one thus almost face to face with no human being in sight was a little startling. But, calling to mind what I had heard of their reluctance to face a steady look and determined resistance, I lifted my hands with threatening gestures, raised a shout, and sprang forward a step or two. Mr. Coyote stood a moment as if questioning the resistance offered; but when I repeated, more violently, the gestures and shouts, he turned and retraced his steps into the dim distance, only looking back once or twice to see if the enemy retained the ground. As he disappeared I hastened forward, and in a few minutes came within sight of the wagon, now halted for the night near the camp-fire, which the men had just lit."