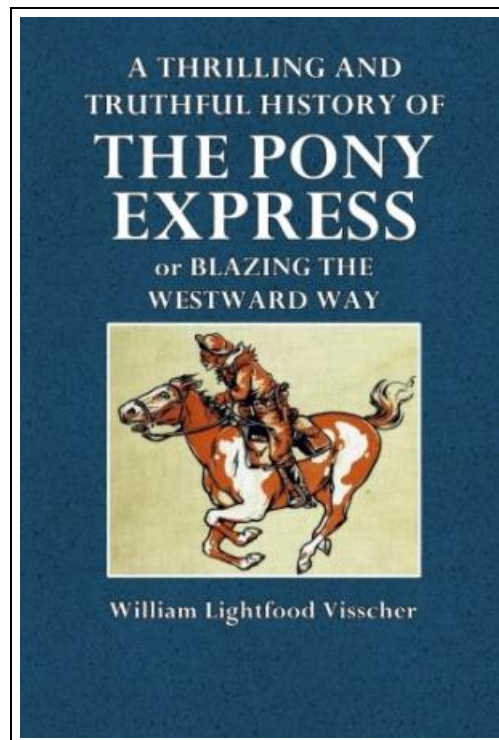


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An excerpt from the beginning of CHAPTER I. THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT THE school-boy of half a century, and more, ago was taught by his geography that a large area west of the Missouri River, and not very far from the banks of that dark stream, was the Great American Desert. In somewhat uncertain lines that arid waste was shown on the map of the republic in his atlas, less known than the sirocco-swept Sahara. But before this almost unknown territory had been eliminated from his books, he began to learn through the everyday sources of information that this region was being encroached upon by the advance skirmishers of civilization. The boy did not comprehend it all, but as he stepped along in years it became plainer and plainer, and by the time he had reached manhood and its affairs, his own progress and that of the far West had so broadened and improved that what he had learned of the Great American Desert had become a dim reminiscence. First, the boy had seen a few of the volunteer soldiers of the Mexican War, who had come back to the States, and who had brought with them a mustang pony, curious Mexican jewelry and Indian trappings, a sombrero, and a serape of bright colors, a buffalo robe, and other things that specially impressed his youthful fancy. He heard the returned soldier talk to the old folks about the West and Southwest - not yet touching the Great American Desert, but getting quite close to it. This set the boy to looking westward. Then he heard of the discoveries of gold in California. Sutter s mill-race was his...



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