UP THE COLUMBIA BY LAND.

W. D. LYMAN.

To one having seen the shores of the Columbia from the steamer only, it never occurs that those towering cliffs are really pieces of rock, that those trailing spray clouds are actually water, or that those passing evergreens are composed of pitch, bark and fiber—a phantasmagoria of sky, rocks and water! A kaleidoscope fifty miles long, pointed at the morning sun and curtained by the mists of the ocean! Such is the Columbia between Cape Horn and Hood River. Can a man walk behind the scenes? Can such a puny thing set foot on those shining crags or quaff the froth from the waterfalls bubbling out of those goblets of the gods? Could I, for instance, enter into that land of stone giants and frozen temples two thousand feet high, and come forth alive?

Such were the thoughts that agitated my brain one August afternoon, when after having left the effete and enervating civilization of Portland in the early morning; after having ridden through the great dairy farms eastward therefrom; after having put behind me the river Sandy, stained with the dregs of Mt. Hood's morning cup; after having crept through ten miles of jungle stretching eastward from the Sandy, I suddenly emerged and stood on the edge of a beautiful plateau, five hundred feet above the sacred waters. There it was. The land of the unknown. The soft alluvial soil with its vine-maple jungles, the cheese-factories and cow pastures, the houses, barns and fences, were all behind.

Before us was the first of those gigantic piles of basalt which from the deck of the steamer had seemed so picture-like, so fantastic, so unreal.

We were actually behind the scenes. Now we can see what hands shift the scenery. Now we can find the pots of colors where the changing hours dip their brushes. Now we can see where the waterfalls get their wondrous whiteness, and where the rainbows hide. Now we can enter the dressing-room of the pine trees where they deck themselves with moss and sunbeams. The first scene is Rooster Rock and the lofty cliff behind it which has no name, but might be called Cape Eternity. Eternal it looks in its shaggy grandeur. It seems to frown down upon the twenty miles up and down and the two miles across of yellow water. Other still mightier bastioned heights up the river frown back. But these rocky frowns are softened by clinging ferns and trailing vines.

Wherever the water comes trickling over the precipice, there the greenest of moss and the brightest of flowers hide the black bareness of the rock. A break-neck road down from the plateau leads us to the river-bank.

It is the flood-time of the mighty stream. The water comes swashing through the long rows of cottonwoods and makes great sport of the fences, barns, and such other little tokens of inhabitancy as happen to be in the vicinity.

There is a polished log fairly protruding into the road. That log grew in Idaho or British Columbia. A century's growth on the fertile bank of some mountain creek had carried its branches high and its roots deep.

But an evil time came in the history of that tree. Snow, sunshine, deluge. These three degrees of comparison washed the standing-room from beneath its feet. One frightful plunge, and the ill-starred forest-king set out on his funeral march of a thousand miles. A wild journey for one accustomed to a quiet life, a journey involving rapid changes and admitting of no lay-over checks. Through the torrents to the quiet lakes of the Upper Columbia, from the lakes again to the torrents, with occasional half-way rests. Through the Dalles, through the Cascades, and, stripped of bark and of every branch, it drifts at random on the solemn current of the lower river. And to what end has the tree sought such a resting place? The next day, some salmon-spearing Siwash or some sore-footed tramp kindles a fire against it, and amid the whirl of smoke and the crackle of flame, that long-travelled tree vanishes in the air.

I would remark, at this point, that the road up the river is a trail. There are points where it seems hardly even a trail. Nevertheless the pedestrian finds no great difficulty in parting the maple copses and climbing over the gigantic blocks of rock that have rolled down from their too lofty heights. Almost constantly we see the shimmering of the river behind the willows and cottonwoods. Neverthless, it is only at a very few points that the cliffs come right down to the water's edge. Through almost the entire distance from the Cascades to Rooster Rock, there is a most excellent railroad route. At points where my observation from the steamer had led me to suppose that there was hardly level land enough for a squirrel to stand safely, I found fertile flats one quarter of a mile wide.

Fourteen miles from Rooster Rock, and the curtain rises on scene second of the great scenes. That fourteen miles has exhibited numberless little scenes which would be great anywhere else. Huge cliffs, streaked with snowy cascades, mountain streams of wondrous clearness, overgrown by vegetation of almost tropical luxuriance.

But we forget these varied beauties as we stand in wonder before that marvel of beauty, Multnomah Fall; triple-named. Some longing swain would have that snowy vail albeit somewhat large, to hide the face of his beloved, hence it was called the Bridal Vail. Some other bold genius, seized with an equine frenzy, named it—tell it not in Oregon City, publish it not in the streets of Salem—Horse Tail Fall. What a horse the mind's eye of that chap must have witnessed, pawing the crest of the Cascade mountains, and dipping his eight-hundred-foot tail in the Columbia! But the Indian name is most beautiful. There is a sweet ripple to those liquid sounds, Multnomah, and a sonorousness to their whole effect that well suggest the soft plash mingled with the wild majesty of the fall. This musical splash—not a roar—is the first intimation to the traveler that he is approaching anything unusual. Then perhaps casting his eyes upward, he sees a dusky cliff fringed with trees. Scarce discernible among the trees, a moving whiteness. A few steps more and he stands before a sundered wall, 200 feet high on one side, and 30 on the other, through which flows a limpid stream. For a few yards, he follows the alternate pools and rapids of the creek through this rocky corridor. Then he suddenly emerges into a little bit of a valley, edged with a little bit of a beach, and covered with the greenest grass.

The little valley terminates in a wall of rock seventy feet high, over which the creek comes tumbling into a deep