

THE BLUE RIDGE OF OREGON.

BY T. R. MERRY.

The illustrated press of the Eastern States has, from time to time, sparkled with glowing sketches of the Appalachian ranges, while the Sierras of California have furnished a fruitful theme alike for the wondrous poetry of Miller and Bayard Taylor, and the graphic pencils of Bierstadt, Hill, Munger, Butman and Bush. But, when the sun of July warns the denizens of the crowded city away to purer air and cooler water, how few heed, if they hear, of a fairer summer land than either of these, nestled away in the vast seclusion of our own Oregon. I refer to the Blue Mountains, the fairest August garden on earth.

This range begins somewhere in the great desert at the southern end of Wasco county and runs northeasterly towards the mouth of the Grande Ronde, where Snake river snaps in two the ever verdant chain. The range does not run anything like parallel to the Columbia river. At Weston, it is less than fifty miles from the great River of the West, while at Camp Watson, in Grant county, it is 138 miles away. Of all mountain ridges between the two oceans it pleases the senses best. It is loftier than the Green Mountain range of Vermont and greener than either the Cumberland of Tennessee or Ozark ridge of Missouri. Lower than the Sierras or the Rockies, it has a grace of outline and a luster of foliage unknown to either.

My own idea of a summer's *dolce far niente* was never fully realized till I had spent two months in the Blue Ridge of Oregon. There is a sniff of ozone right in the hottest of noontide, a balm of inspiration in the purple and gold of twilight, and a dreamy dropping off to sleep at dark, such as would have charmed Sancho Panza himself. No other fair land of earth ever before lulled my senses to a dreamless slumber, or awoke me to a giant's strength for the morning's chase. It has invited for years untold the weak-kneed cripple and the sour-faced dyspeptic; it has poured forth its dewy incense and called in vain to the invalids of Oregon to come and drink in the new life that lurks in its crystal streams; and it has waved the branches of its consecrated pines, (for the groves are still God's own temples,) and will ever

wave them as they drop their fragrant needles on the sod's soft carpet, calling in vain to the dwellers amid soulless bricks and mortar, to come and be born anew.

Nestled away in the heart of this pine-crowned range where the deer bounds in his peerless grace, lies Lake Wallowa, mirroring on its calm and tranquil bosom the soft tints of the cloudless sky. Above it rise steep basaltic walls and above them, in turn, the saw-tooth peaks of the ridge, piercing the azure clouds and crowned with the tempests of centuries untold. Floating on the unruffled breast of this rock-walled sea, which is six miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide, you wonder, as the fleecy cloudlets sail slowly past you, whether it is sea or sky on which floats your tiny canoe; for whether Aurora gilds the sullen crags above you, or midnight hovers in the skies and mirrors every star on the lake, you realize the presence of the Infinite. Heaven rears the throne of silence over you in either case, and a portion of God's domain seems to encircle you as the crystal dome of skyland dips its edges in the placid flood.

The lake is very deep and seems like a vast crater whose smouldering fires were long since forced to yield to the supremacy of the floods. It debouches into a large river of the same name, and it, in turn, mingles with the waters of the Grand Ronde, and the two lose their identity in the tortuous mazes of the Snake. Its waters are clearer, smoother and deeper, than those of the Saratoga lake where the favored belles and curled darlings of fashion sport their figures, while I drift out into the silence of this sequestered mountain sea and selfishly behold a lovelier picture than ever greeted their narrow and unsearching gaze. A score of fathoms below me are trout that weigh twelve pounds, while the *salmo fontinalis* or brook-trout is to be found in every rivulet that trickles down these grassy slopes. And here dwells my Lord Cardinal, too, the mysterious red-fish, found only in four lakes of America—one in Oregon, two in Idaho, and one in British Columbia. Apart from here, you must search for him in Hungary and Poland alone.

It would be a trespass upon the patience of the reader and a perversion of the extent of this article to enter upon a long-winded discussion of this fish

and his habits. It is enough to know that he is of the salmon family and rarely bites at a hook, but you will find him in his mantle of red in August, fat and lazy as his prototype that basks in the galleries of the Vatican and murmurs, "When Leo dies—what?" I am no *savant*, no taxidermist. I loved Agassiz because Agassiz loved Nature, not because men called him great—hence I refuse to enter into the learned contest over the habits of this fish, now going on in the *Forest and Stream*, in which genial Charley Bendire more than gains the mastery over the Eastern piscatorial knights who have entered into this vexatious joust.

Over the bosom of that crystal lake I will plow next August in a quaint craft that my own fancy has modeled and my own hands shall hew from out the forest gloom. She is to be of the "Catamaran" style, two hulls decked over, and a big mainsail. She will be light as the *balsa* of the Chincha Islands and swift as the flying *proa* of the swarthy Malay. Then I shall revel in my retreat at the sequestered Lake Wallowa, where peace descends upon mankind with the slanting shadows that fall as the day declines—

"Few know its quiet shelter—none like me
Do seek it out with such fond desire;
Poring in idlest mood on flower and tree,
And listening as the voiceless leaves respire
Where the wayworn breeze, done wandering
Stoops adown to rest his weary wing."

But, says yon scented Belgravian, who cannot tolerate a summer away from Leasington or Brighton, where are your springs? My answer is, everywhere. Famed, as is Virginia, for the abundance of her native mineral fountains, the western slope of Oregon's Blue Mountains is fully equal to them in abundance and diversity. At the northwest corner-stone of the Malheur Reservation is a soda spring, strongly tempered with magnesia and chalybeate of iron. It effervesces slightly and is a most palatable drink in the dog-days. For my own part, I greatly prefer it to the famed Apollinaris, as a diuretic. If you want sulphur baths, I can only say, in Pike parlance, that "the woods is full of 'em." There is one in John Day valley, about twelve miles below Canyon City, and another about twenty-four miles above it, between Prairie City and Strawberry Valley. On Indian creek, (and, by the way, that is the very finest trout stream