

by steam. The "Billings," notwithstanding her great size, draws but three feet two inches, and when loaded with a train of eight cars her draught is increased only four inches. Her length over all is 222 feet, width, over all, 41 feet, with thirty-six feet beam. She is an admirably built steamer, and cost nearly \$50,000. The precision with which she is handled is remarkable, as shown by the almost perfect connection made by the tracks laid on her deck with those upon the inclines on either side of the river. About half a mile above the mouth of the Snake are large piles of granite gotten out preparatory to the construction of an immense bridge over the Snake, of iron and stone. The contract for the piers is being vigorously pushed by Duncan McBean. The stone work alone will cost \$240,000; the iron work much more. Its construction will require nearly two years. When completed the Northern Pacific will have a clear run to the east from Wallula Junction. Arriving at Ainsworth, we found it a straggling town of a variegated population, formerly the distributing point for construction material for the N. P. R. R. It has within the year fairly held its own. The soil is as sandy as eight-cent sugar, but with irrigation can produce as if born in Ireland.

Before going further it may be stated that in building railroads the first concern of a wise engineer is to secure an even grade. To obtain this desideratum, for many miles from Ainsworth northward, the N. P. R. R. follows the old beds of streams which undoubtedly were a part, in time long past, of the mighty Columbia, but which, by natural causes, became mere trickling rivulets, and finally slipped from their beds and left naught but worn pebbles and drift to tell us of their former Baptist predilections. This will explain why, until we reach Ritzville, there are few signs of cultivation and American farmers. So it is on each side of the Columbia. On the south, from the Dalles all along—from the base of the Blue Mountains, to within a mile or so of the Columbia, no better soil, or more productive country, lies out doors. Yet hundreds pass it by judging of the country by the bare banks of the Columbia. What is true of Wasco and Umatilla counties on the south applies with equal force to Klickitat county on the north of the Columbia. The best way to examine

the country is to see it, and not judge of it from railways or water courses. If the incoming settler will go off from the main trunk line he will find land of rich soil and ample depth, and he will thank us for the hint if he has a soul big enough to burst a flax seed.

Some forty miles above Ainsworth we reached Twin Wells, near which the Colfax or Moscow Branch taps the main line, and running northeasterly enters the renowned Palouse country, passes Endicott, branches northerly toward Steptoe and Farmington, and southeasterly to Colfax and Moscow. The Palouse country is rolling prairie land, exceedingly productive, well watered, and rapidly settling up. At Moscow, Farmington and Colfax, timber is easily accessible. Easterly the soil is rich, deep and of lasting qualities. Crop after crop of flax has been sown and harvested, and yet the soil retains its power undiminished in yield or quality.

At Ritzville, ninety-six miles from Ainsworth, we ate breakfast. For some distance before reaching this station we noticed thriving young trees set out by the company. All seemed to be doing well, notwithstanding some complaints about the lack of rain. Near Ritzville Mr. Ritz has several hundred acres in wheat, which will reach a very fair yield to the acre. When one reflects that this land, by others than Mr. Ritz, has been declared worthless almost, his perseverance is entitled to credit. He has demonstrated that this soil is capable of producing wheat in paying quantities.

Twenty miles beyond Ritzville we run along Colville Lake, a beautiful sheet of water. Here timber, which we lost sight of on leaving the Dalles, appears in scattered groups. The land grows better, the foliage greener, the people less dusty, less begrimed, and occasionally, by a half glance, you may see in a cabin window a bright face and a whole smile. Just beyond Lake Colville we reach Sprague, and whatever of monotony we may have is here broken by the activity and bustle which our arrival has stirred. Baggage, freight and express were hurried off, wide-awake young fellows were about, intent on doing what was their portion. No yelling; just a little profanity we heard. Sprague seems to be well situated and equipped as a shipping point. The railroad company have met every requirement to that end. The imposing office-building

was a surprise. It will compare with those of many eastern cities having ten times the population of Sprague—now about 900. The headquarters of the superintendent, H. W. Fairweather, are shown in our illustrations. They are upon the left side of the track, while the shops, where several hundred men can be employed, are on the right. Almost every branch of trade and barter, gain and loss, is represented at Sprague. Besides the large general merchandise houses of Fairweather & Sprague, there are seven or eight other establishments, all doing a fine business. Clothing, hardware, furniture, drugs are here in large stocks. The banking house of Fairweather & Brooks does a large exchange business. Sprague has lawyers and petifoggers, little pill and big pill physicians, excellent restaurants and vile saloons. It has a bright newspaper, the *Herald*, edited by W. H. Smallwood, a gentleman of ability. Sprague has all the conditions necessary to give it a solid, permanent future. Her citizens are public-spirited and in live earnest. Sprague is the outlet to a fine country in the Crab creek region on the west. The Crab country is rapidly settling up, and is free from any climatic reproach. On the southeast of Sprague, after crossing a narrow strip of rocky country, there is also a fine country extending sixty miles toward Colfax and Farmington. Mr. H. W. Fairweather, although a comparatively young man, has had a large experience in railway and river navigation. In his position as superintendent he exhibits marked executive ability and a thorough knowledge of details.

About twenty-five miles northeast of Sprague we reached the flourishing town of Cheney, now the county-seat of Spokane. Between Sprague and Cheney the fields are dotted with every variety of flowers, we counted over twenty different kinds including the graceful blue bells, the running honey suckle and lupin, the cheery violet, the shapely clematis, the softly bright and striking anemone, the nodding wind flower and the Oscar Wilde sun flower—all gladdening and full of welcome.

Cheney is two years old. It has a population of about seven hundred. We use the pronoun "it," for the reason that some way or other, "she" don't seem to fit Cheney. In its progress it has shown progressive powers, not exactly consenting to the feminine