



THE COLORADO ROCKIES : THE YANKEE DOODLE LAKE AND THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE.

## THE COLORADO ROCKIES.

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The Rocky Mountains comprise a series of great mountainous ranges running across the western portion of North America and constituting the "backbone" of the Continent. A continuation of the Cordilleras of Mexico, they stretch from New Mexico to Alaska, traversing a number of the Western States and the western and north-western provinces of Canada. Since the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian Rockies have come to be fairly well known, owing to the numerous descriptions by travellers of the magnificent mountain scenery through which the line passes. So extensive, indeed, is what may be called the "reading" acquaintance with the Canadian Rockies that it is occasionally accompanied by the belief that the Rocky Mountains exist wholly and solely in the Dominion. This notion, of course, is entirely erroneous. There is a very large and very grand section of the Rocky Mountains in the United States, particularly in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana; and though Mr. James Outram, in his "In the Heart of the Canadian Rockies" (See *C.C.J.*, v., 146-8), claims superiority for the section in the Dominion as "more Alpine in its vast areas of glacier and striking grandeur of pinnacle and precipice," he has to concede that the highest individual peaks and the greatest mean elevation are found south of the Canadian border-line.

The Colorado Rockies extend across the State of that name from north to south for a distance of about 280 miles. The state itself is a very elevated tableland, lying between 5000 and 6000 ft. above sea-level, and it is not surprising therefore that mountains rising from this plateau should attain heights that, nominally, are stupendous. There are no fewer than 40 peaks, for instance, upwards of 14,000 ft. high, and a hundred between that height and 13,000 ft., while many summits range from

11,000 to 13,000 ft. Even allowing for the "mile high" base on which they stand, mountains of these elevations are necessarily, by their very height alone if by nothing else, grand and imposing. In the main, however, these mountains are grand rather than picturesque. Sometimes their lower sides are thickly wooded, generally with varieties of pine and spruce, and thus have a scenic attractiveness, but on the upper heights the wood becomes thin and scanty, and above the timber line (somewhere about 10,000 ft.) barren rock and broken crags (mostly granitic) are the prevailing feature. In other places, however, trees, shrubs, and foliage will be entirely absent, and the mountains will be wholly rock, possibly with a covering of detritus, or with shoulders boldly thrown out consisting of stones and debris. The name of "Rockies" indeed, as a writer has put it, is exceedingly appropriate, "for on these mountains and their intervening plateaus naked rocks are developed to an extent rarely equalled elsewhere in the world. . . . Enormous crags and bold peaks of bare rocks mostly compose the mountains, while the streams flow at the bases of towering precipices in deep chasms and canyons filled with broken rocks."

The barrenness of this mountain region is attributable to the great elevation and the extreme aridity, and these factors also cause much disintegration of the rock material. Excessive denudation is likewise produced by storms; and Mr. Enos A. Mills, in an interesting work on "Wild Life on the Rockies," furnishes the following striking account of the denudation process—"One of the most remarkable things connected with this strange locality is that its impressive landscapes may be overturned or blotted out, or new scenes may be brought forth, in a day. The mountains do not stand a storm well. A hard rain will dissolve ridges, lay bare new strata, undermine and overturn cliffs. It seems almost a land of enchantment, where old landmarks may disappear in a single storm, or an impressive landscape come forth in a night. Here the god of erosion works incessantly and rapidly, dissecting the earth and the rocks. During a single storm a hilltop

may dissolve, a mountain side be fluted with slides, a grove be overturned and swept away by an avalanche, or a lake be buried for ever. This rapid erosion of slopes and summits causes many changes and much upbuilding upon their bases. Gulches are filled, water-courses invaded, rivers bent far to one side, and groves slowly buried alive." One result of the denudation that goes on is that the rock in some places has been "weathered" into strange and fantastic shapes, noticeable specimens of curious formations thus produced being observable in the "The Garden of the Gods" at the foot of Pike's Peak. All is not barrenness or denudation, however, for within the mountain ranges are many exquisite valleys, or "parks" as they are called, with lakes and streams, wooded glens, and picturesque canyons or ravines. These parks are largely resorted to by sportsmen as well as by people seeking rest or recuperation. Although the facetious Mr. Dooley says he has "always thought iv th' beasts iv th' forest prowlin' around an' takin' a leg off a man that'd been sint to Colorado f'r his lungs," the only dangerous animals to be encountered are (occasionally) bears and mountain lions; and according to Mr. Mills, they are not particularly ferocious, but are apt rather to be scared at the sight of man.

Very fine views of the Rocky Mountains are obtainable from Denver, the foothills being only twelve to twenty miles distant. The range is visible from the steps in front of the State Capitol, situated on a slope above the business portion of the city. On one of these steps you may read "The top of this step is one mile above sea level"; and it is perhaps as well to bear that in mind in looking over to the mountains. A much better view, however, is to be had from the crest of the Cheesman Park, higher up the hill, with a clear prospect above the intervening houses. Here a long stretch of the range is spread out—something like 170 miles—extending from beyond Long's Peak, a shapely mountain of pyramidal form in the north, to Pike's Peak in the south—a huge rounded mass with bulky sides, long believed to be the monarch of the Colorado Rockies (14,147 feet high), but now deposed, Long's Peak even

being higher. Between these two is a veritable "sea of mountains" of varying shapes, the contours and skylines greatly diversified. In a recent visit to Denver, I had many an opportunity of looking at this magnificent panorama of mountains, and seeing it under various aspects—in brilliant sunshine, with a sky of Italian blue overhead, or shrouded in lowering clouds pierced by vivid lightning flashes; or again, when slowly emerging from a pall of mist, or when coated with snow, with every peak and ridge and corrie thrown up in the bright, clear frosty air. And always, and in whatever aspect, was the view superb and entrancing, especially when the mountains were

Bathed in the tenderest purple of distance,  
Tinted and shadowed by pencils of air.

To be fully appreciated, however, mountains have to be seen close at hand. Unfortunately, my opportunities of inspecting the Colorado Rockies from the inside, so to speak, were limited to the crossing of some the ranges by the railways that now penetrate their recesses. Marvels of engineering are these mountain railroads, and many are the striking pictures of scenery that are revealed by their aid. One in particular, the Denver, North-Western and Pacific Railway, claims special attention because of the altitude to which it ascends and the numerous loops and zig-zags by which it makes the ascent. It is designed to connect Denver with Salt Lake City by a new and shorter route, but it is being built in stages, and for the present the terminus is at Steamboat Springs, 214 miles from Denver. Striking across the plains, the railroad line, passing through numerous tunnels, finds its way within the mountains, steadily ascending as it proceeds, opening up to the view of those travelling by it a remarkable diversity of scenery, all of it highly attractive, and some of it even awe-inspiring. I may repeat a description of the route in general terms which I have already given elsewhere—

"There is a constant succession of mountainous slopes, some of them sparsely clothed with slender pines, others bare and rugged, huge aggregations of detritus. Streams

flow far down below, dashing their way through deep and rocky defiles. The wooded slopes give way occasionally to precipitous cliffs. Far-off peaks come into sight, and at times a glimpse is obtained of a spreading 'park' or valley encircled by mountains. One of these smiling valleys, Boulder Park is reached at Tolland; and here begins one of the principal of the many engineering feats that mark this railroad—the ascent to what is known as the Continental Divide. The train climbs to the summit of the range by a series of loops, one above the other, three railroad tracks being plainly discernible. A lake called Yankee Doodle Lake is completely encircled by a band of steels rails, and, after passing it, the summit of the Divide at Corona is gained by a loop nearly five miles long. This final climb takes one high above the timber line, up, indeed, to heights that nearly make one giddy as one looks down the almost precipitous slopes that descend from the railroad track. A particular spot here bears the significant title of the Devil's Slide, and near it may be seen the old stage-road across the range at Rollins Pass; it is easy, after seeing it, to realise the dangers of the stage routes and the skill and daring of the drivers. Corona is 11,660 feet above sea level, and is the highest point reached by any standard-gauge railroad."

Several noble mountains are skirted by the railroad, including James' Peak (14,242 ft.) and the Arapahoes (13,520 ft.); and the line winds its way through two canyons—Byers Canyon and Gore Canyon—in each of which a rushing, dashing mountain stream makes a circuitous route for itself through massive walls of rock on either side.

A journey to the San Luis Valley, in the south of the State—near the borders of New Mexico in fact, and no very great distance (as distances are reckoned in America) from the Rio Grande—involved the crossing of the Sangre de Cristo range of mountains by La Veta Pass, a height of 9242 feet being attained. The weather changed suddenly two days before I set out (it was towards the end of October), a very decided fall in the temperature being

accompanied by a fall of snow even in Denver, while the mountains seen from the city were thickly coated. Here, as elsewhere, mountains become more beautiful than ever when draped in snow; but the crossing of them then by train is not always—as an American would put it—“a practical proposition.” We succeeded however, keeping fairly well up to time too, and I had the pleasure of witnessing the gradual dawn of day in these stupendous heights. Though occupying a berth in a sleeping-car (I travelled over-night), I wakened very early and got too much interested in my novel surroundings to think of sleeping again. The train was labouring through a succession of hills, thinly timbered and covered with snow, these hills being backed by high mountain tops. Crossing a trestle-bridge, one looked down into a deep ravine; anon, we would be toiling up a steep gradient along a track cut in the mountain-side. Gently the morning light began to steal over the scene, irradiating what had formerly been cold and bleak and repellent. Soft saffron hues touched the sky, and then a delicate pink flush suffused the snow-clad mountain-sides. Inexpressibly beautiful was the indication thus afforded that the sun had risen.

I left the train at Blanca, a little town at the foot of the Sierra Blanca (or White Mountain). This mountain is on the north side of the San Luis Valley, an extensive plateau, about 100 miles long from north to south, and 75 miles across from east to west. The mountain is a magnificent one, the highest in Colorado. It attains a height of 14,463 feet, but the effect of such a height is lost by the fact that the San Luis Valley has an altitude of from 7500 to 8000 feet. Still, a height of over 6000 feet from its nominal base makes a very considerable showing, which is greatly augmented by the circumstance that the Sierra Blanca stands by itself and is not part of a range. Height and isolation are by no means the sole or even the principal features of the Sierra Blanca, however. They give it majesty and grandeur, it is true, but the mountain has a massiveness and a beauty all its own. The friend with whom I was travelling, who has a wide



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knowledge of the State, declares it the most lovely mountain in Colorado, and having seen something of the Colorado mountains myself, I am disposed to concur in his opinion. It consists of half-a-dozen peaks linked together by ridges and projecting buttresses, while a seventh peak to the east rises somewhat independently and detached from the others. The charm of the mountain lies in its graceful proportions—(I am speaking of it, of course, as seen from a distance)—in the sharp lines of its slopes and buttresses, which were in all likelihood accentuated by the Sierra being completely enshrouded in snow. Many a view had we of this majestic mountain as we drove up and down the valley, but my most vivid recollection is of the colours thrown out around it during a brilliant sunset. Behind the summits of the peaks there stretched what appeared a lake of light green colour surrounded by pale gold. The shade of the gold deepened, overspreading the lake, and becoming ultimately transmuted into a rich copper tint. Gradually the sun sank, the colours vanished, and the Sierra stood out white and cold.

The San Luis Valley, by the way, is almost completely enclosed by high mountain ranges. Circumstances rendered us more familiar with the Culebra range, running along the east side of the valley. This range is one of very considerable length, presenting nearly every variety of mountain form—sharp peaks and rounded domes, cones and haystacks, precipitous cliffs, and corries and ridges in abundance; and, like the Sierra Blanca, it is never the same—you perceive some new feature every time you look at it, or the altered light will throw up something in a different aspect or different proportion. The principal summit is Culebra Peak (14,200 ft.), also higher than Pike's Peak. It bears—at a distance—a slight resemblance to Cairngorm as seen from Aviemore, with the ridge sloping upwards, the precipices to the west, and the crest along to the Lurcher's Rock; but the similarity is perhaps fanciful—it became greatly modified the nearer one approached the Peak.

Automobilism gives promise of leading to a better knowledge and increased appreciation of mountains and mountain scenery. Everybody who is anybody in America has his automobile—he does not call it a motor-car!—and in the mountainous region of Colorado the towns are vying with each other in laying out “sky-line drives”—drives along the ridges of lower hills from which views are to be had of the higher mountains on the sky-line. I had a delightful automobile drive from Colorado Springs to Canon City along a road skirting the Rocky Mountains—a road which had been newly widened and improved by convict labour, the State Penitentiary being located at Canon City. Both Canon City and Penrose—the latter as yet a city in embryo, awaiting development by the taking up of adjoining land as the outcome of a large irrigation scheme—have their sky-line drives, but Canon City has just “gone one better.” It has constructed a ten-mile drive to the summit of the towering cliffs, about 2000 feet high, which constitute the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River. Not the least delightful of my experiences in the Colorado Rockies was to be driven in an automobile one forenoon to the top of the Royal Gorge, and then to ride through the gorge in the afternoon on a train running along so narrow a roadbed between the cliffs and the river channel that at one point it has to be carried over the latter by a rather celebrated hanging bridge.