

OUR WILD WESTLAND.

POINTS ON THE PACIFIC PROVINCE.

(BY MRS. ARTHUR SPRAGUE.)

IX.

THE SUMMER OF 1887—RECREATIONS IN THE COLUMBIA VALLEY—"AIDE TOI ET DIEU T'AIDERA"—VARIETY OF SCENERY IN A SMALL SECTION OF THE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT.

Having the fear of want of exercise before my eyes from the experience of 1886, I took out with me to Donald in June, 1887, a tennis net, and poles, balls and racquets, with the determination to establish an earth court, the peculiarities of bunch-grass vegetation prohibiting the possibility of a grass one. There was sufficient real estate in the neighborhood of our house to afford the proper measurements for the courts, and having pressed some of the C.P.R. officials into our service, with the inducement of prospective recreation, which was badly needed in the Columbia Valley, we cleared the ground and prepared for action. This same preparation consisted in the uprooting of bushes and stumps, the filling in of the holes from which they had been extracted, so as to render the courts firm and solid; this last process furnishing us with a land question somewhat difficult of solution, owing to the nature of the soil, which is so sandy. It refused to bind or harden in any way. Some one suggested pounding with a heavy log, which was accordingly procured and manipulated by means of an iron bar handle, resulting only in the dispersion of the necessary matter in clouds of dust. Water alone would settle the soil satisfactorily, and to obtain the aqueous fluid, the skies not being propitious, was easier in theory than in practice, since it was brought from a spring in the town and delivered by the barrel, costing a quarter for every replenishing, when the wagon made its bi-weekly rounds. It was, consequently, too dear and precious a commodity to be lightly bestowed upon mother earth. An improvised roller of a ponderous log of wood was employed with great success in the generally levelling process; but failed utterly to amalgamate the soft spots with the hard ones, and when the net was first set up for play, service and returns often resulted in a dead drop of the ball where the ground was not solid, and we finally decided to possess our souls in patience and pray for rain. In about ten days it fell, a long heavy downpour, lasting twelve hours, which made the court as hard and firm as a wood floor. Henceforth tennis was established and played regularly every day. During the months of July and August we turned out before breakfast, thereby avoiding both heat and mosquitoes; and, as the season advanced and the power of the sun and insect decreased in quality and quantity, we moved our hours of exercise onwards from before breakfast to before dinner, and finally, in October, backwards again to noon. The temperature was always delightfully fresh in the early morning, sweeping down from the Selkirk range immediately above us over its icy snowfields in waves of almost chilling coolness. The lights and shades, too, on mountain and valley, with the exquisite pearly tints of dawn thrown upon misty clouds rising from the warm valleys below, gave us ideal pictures, which were never seen at any other hour, and amply rewarded early rising. Our tennis court runs north and south, facing at one end the Rocky and the other the Selkirk mountains, enabling us to enjoy all the benefits of scenery as well as exercise. Fortune favored me so greatly in 1887 that I felt a practical illustration of the French proverb, "Aide toi et Dieu t'aidera." Having provided myself with one form of amusement, I had another thrust upon me.

I noticed soon after my advent in Donald a nice looking pony running loose, apparently unappropriated. A rider from my youth upwards, I had a keen eye for a bit of horseflesh, and soon discovered that the vagrant belonged to an itinerant carpenter, no longer a resident of the town. I suggested to my husband that he should communicate with him, having learnt his address at a neighbouring town, and ask the loan of the pony which we had caught and I had tried, happening

to have brought my saddle, bridle, and habit out with me. I found the cayuse a most tractable little beast, and, on condition that we fed her with oats, a costly article of diet in the West, our request was granted and Peggy added to our establishment. That she thoroughly appreciated her luxuries was evident from the fact that she came regularly twice a day to receive her appointed portion from my husband's hands, when there was no difficulty in securing her for my afternoon ride. Peggy proved as successful as the tennis court, which is saying not a little, and an equal source of enjoyment to me. She was a well made little chestnut, about twelve hands high, very surefooted, gentle, willing, and capable of jumping or scrambling over any obstacle half as big as herself. She could negotiate bad places and enormous logs, provided her rider would stay with her, that would puzzle me even to contemplate, and I often used to amuse myself and vary the monotony of my rides by diverging from the trail and taking her across country to see what she could and would accomplish. Every afternoon regularly at five, on the warm July and August days, my head enveloped in a mosquito net, my hands encased in thick doeskin gloves, I sallied forth on Peggy's back, and, thus armed, fairly defied the mosquitoes, which I need hardly say swarmed at that hour. The current of air promoted by rapid riding enabled me to support with equanimity the oppression of a full net veil, confined by one elastic band round a stiff Christy, and by another round my devoted neck below the collar. Fortunately, the pony was hard as nails and in good condition, so that a fast pace did not come amiss to her, and was really a kindness, preventing, as it did, the mosquitoes from settling upon her. Indeed, she was quite intelligent enough to recognize the fact herself, and it was always a difficult matter to induce her to walk at all, and no wonder poor beast, when the tender spots about her eyes and nose were black with the venomous insects. So much did they annoy her that, in appreciation of my sympathetic attempts to remove them with my hunting crop, she would often turn her patient head round to the saddle, when frequent convulsive shakings failed to relieve her sufferings.

There were unfortunately but two available trails in the vicinity of Donald. One called the Wait-a-Bit, the other the Golden City trail, tending as their names indicated: the former toward the Rocky Mountains, following the course of the Wait-a-Bit River; and the latter in the direction of the auriferous town, 17 miles east of Donald, at the junction of the Kicking Horse and Columbia Rivers. Over either of those so-called roads it would have been impossible to ride any but a native horse except at a foot's pace, they having both for the first few miles been cut out of the pine woods, not from the primeval forest, which represents trees of girth and stature, but from that second contemptible growth of juvenile evergreens that springs up in the track of forest fires, and consists of slender poles, about 12 inches at the most in circumference. Stumps of this class, not being sufficiently formidable to the traveller's progress to remove, are left in the trail just as they were cut off, projecting about a foot or more above the ground, and a similar distance from each other. The first time I cantered down one of these roads, I must confess, I did so in fear and trembling, with my heart in my mouth. It seemed a choice between mosquitoes and sudden death, so I gave Peggy her head and let her go, and she never made a false step, picking her way most cleverly between the stumps, planting her fore-feet here and hitching her hind-feet there with jerks and shuffles that rendered a firm seat a matter of some importance to the equestrian. I rode always alone; indeed, neither mountain trails nor horses are conducive to company—the former being narrow and the latter accustomed to travel in single file and to select their own path according to their own ideas, and are opposed to the customs of civilization. The scenery of the Columbia Valley, however, is so beautiful that it compensates, in a great measure, to the solitary equestrian for the absence of a congenial companion. The Wait-a-Bit trail had been made originally to a silver mine six miles from

Donald, subsequently abandoned by its owners, not proving the El Dorado anticipated. A mile below it a pretty little lake, set like an emerald in a circle of thick woods, at the base of a steep foot-hill, lay shimmering in the sun a mirror of green harmonies, very deep and very still. I rode thither scores of times, yet never saw its bosom ruffled by the slightest motion; it was always calm and silent like the face of Death. The road to it was the ascending scale, penetrating first through a mile or more of wood, north of the town, where stumps congregated abundantly,—a barren, dreary region, through which a fire had swept, leaving desolation, as yet unrepaired, behind. An area of bare blackened poles, tangled together in wild confusion, having fallen across and against one another in their dying throes, their twisted and contorted branches were curiously suggestive of possible sufferings endured. They grew so close together and the flames of bush fires spread so rapidly, leaping from one tree to another, that many remained still upright, slender charred sticks of really uninjured wood. Among these relics the inhabitants of Donald found in the winter a fine harvest of firewood, which they had reaped level with the snow, leaving thousands of these stumps, some four feet high, in different localities where the spirit had moved them to hack and hew, marking by their height the snow line of the season. In addition to the stumps in this trail, which was also a wagon road, were stones of all sorts and conditions, sizes and shapes, making it unusually suicidal in character. Once traversed, however, a poplar wood, rich in shade and cool green tints, mingles its leaves with the bare poles of the outer district, showing some curious whim of the fire fiend, which had passed along its outer edge in a straight line, leaving this favoured grove untouched. It always reminded me of a desert oasis, so fresh and fair did it feel and look, with its luxuriant tangle of undergrowth, grasses, and long-leaved plants, impervious to the keenest eye. Riding through half a mile of greenery, a steep ascent was reached, up the face of a foot-hill; the top of this plateau attained, another had almost immediately to be surmounted, which was steeper than the first, and was circumvented by a slanting track up its side, instead of the perpendicular road that rose from the level of the lesser foot-hill. Both these elevations were of a gravelly nature, which did not facilitate the climb. From the brow of the second, however, the road wound gradually higher through a low scattered growth of pines and poplars—among which a few of the lords of the forest still proudly reared their plumed heads and gnarled branches. Up and up by more gentle ascents, till at last level ground was reached, and the top of a high foot-hill attained, which stretched away to another succession of foot-hills leading up to the Rocky Mountains. Here a panoramic view of the whole Columbia Valley rewarded the rider or pedestrian which is worth any amount of exertion to enjoy. The track now turns sharply to the west and follows the course of the Wait-a-Bit River, which dashes along through a deep canyon hundreds of feet below, its waters being distinctly visible from many points in the road, now really good and free from the stones and stumps of the valley below. It leads eventually to the mine and lake at the base of the foot-hills, which are bounded by the mighty barrier of the Rocky Mountains. My homeward ride was always the most beautiful, for then Peggy's head was turned towards the Columbia Valley—above which I found myself—with its southern boundary of the noble Selkirk range glowing near and far in the glorious crimson and gold of the setting light, which turned its walls of rock into crags of liquid gold. One peculiarity of the Selkirks is that they look immeasurably grander and higher from the elevation of the Rocky foot-hills than from the valleys in which Donald nestles, as they towered in gilded heights against the firmament. The bird's eye view I enjoyed of the entire valley, intersected by the silver threads of the Columbia and Wait-a-Bit Rivers gleaming in the sunlight amid masses of dark foliage, possessed beauties to which I cannot pretend to do justice.

The Golden City trail is so different in character to the Wait-a-Bit, that some account of it will