

Overland. Feb. 1884.

2

NOTES ON THE FRAZER RIVER.

It was a clear, warm day early in June that I boarded the steamer for Frazer River. Leaving the pleasantly suggestive little town of Victoria, and passing through a narrow channel, we enter the broader and nobler strait of Juan de Fuca. The course lies among low, rocky islets, occasionally wooded but never deeply so; open glades predominate; the shores of Vancouver itself are also low and covered with a thin growth of trees. Room here is given for the fancy to swell, which takes more delight in such warm, generous spaces, resting places for the sun, and in woods where the trees stand well apart, admitting light and air with no tangled undergrowth, than in dense, impenetrable forests.

Sailing is perfect. We wind busily among islands of all shapes and sizes; they come and go in all their green array, with their lovely bits of scenery, always different, never tiresome. Most are now heavily wooded and drowsy with the weight. One we are at present passing is like a huge monster asleep. At the feet of all, gray rocks descend, gently enough at first, but of a sudden plunge into the sea. It is a pretty combination, where the green of the silent woods on the ridges meets the blue of the sky. The strait has narrowed to a ribbon—shores slowly sloping on one side, abrupt on the other: looking ahead no opening is to be seen: we seem to be entering a harbor, when the steamer turns, a rift appears, and we glide out, pursuing an irregular track, pass within easy stone's throw of a rock-bound but pleasing coast, with little beaches clinging to it here and there, sway round a point, the land falls lower and lower, drifts away from us, and we are looking towards wide waters. Glancing back, one fails to see where we came from, unless out of the forest itself; the door has been closed behind. The color of the sea has changed: before it was a deep azure, now it is a dirty

yellow, which becomes more and more sordid as we approach the cause—the muddied discharge of the great river, for miles and miles apparent.

We enter the mouth; on either hand lie the shores, very low, flat, and far-spreading; a thin film of green shows beyond the water, for the meadows are all but drowned in the overflow; and behind, bushes and small trees. A thunder-storm is brooding over the mountains toward the north; you may see where the rain is pouring down; a faint rainbow is visible, three-fourths blotted out, for the sun still shines upon us also and upon this bronze flood. Half submerged lands stretch away in every direction. The approach is not to be compared with the Columbia, a contrast that the traveler fresh from that noble stream is constantly and involuntarily making. Yet the Frazer possesses even here a certain majesty; the width is considerable—two or three miles—yet the termination strikes one as unworthy of so great a river.

The clouds have closed in upon us, and are sending down a shower that well-nigh conceals all defects; but this rapidly moves away as we draw near fairer scenes. Low, bushy islands, green as emeralds, resorts no doubt of many birds, prime places for the naturalist, come in sight; to the north the Cascade range of mountains—a grand background, touched with snows and with long veils of clouds, half concealing, half revealing their huge forms; eastward a few glorified peaks soaring upwards from the sunset; rank vegetation on both sides, dense as in South America. Igaripes, as they might be termed, cut through, intersecting and fertilizing the great broad forests. Sometimes when the land sinks, you get a view over miles upon miles of heavily timbered country, looking as to the general effect, where all things are combined in mass, not unlike the eastern prairies, in their great flatness.