

Down the Columbia.

ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL RIVERS IN THE WORLD—MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS—THE CURIOUS INDIAN CANOE.

The Columbia is one of the most beautiful rivers in the world. Perhaps one of the things that makes it seem so is the fact that so few people know it to be the case. Before many years, most likely, its waters will be churned by the swift paddles of excursion steamers, villages and factories and saw mills and smelters, will pop into existence along its banks, its magnificent forests will be swept away and the Columbia will become as well known as the Rhine and Hudson. I allude to that part of the river that flows through British territory, for the lower reaches of the stream are familiar enough by this time. Bursting out of the earth as a full river, and navigable within a few rods of its source, it takes an impetuous way to the northward, flowing between the Rockies and the Selkirks, then, turning sharply south, between the Selkirks and the Gold range, it descends into our country, foams through the Dalles, turns westward and rolls in state to the sea. The steamers that ply up stream from Golden and down from Revelstoke do not promise much to the eye, but they are more comfortable than they look, and so long as you have a clean berth with plenty of cover at night, a lamp to read by and enough to eat, even though the cooking be done by Chinamen, who are fond of pork and fat and butter, you are doing as well as you must expect to do out west. While the propulsive power is a large, old fashioned wheel at the stern, that throws a cloud of spray behind it and that is rimmed with rainbows in the morning, the space is not much behind that of our side wheel boats.

Though apprised by the trembling of the timbers that the steamer was under way, for the captain starts as soon as there is light enough, either of dawn or moon, to see the way clear, as no gleam came through the window I did not turn out until it was manifestly day. Then, going on deck, I found that the boat was near the upper of the two expansions known as the Arrow lakes, in water as smooth as a mill pond and that reflected the landscape like a mirror. Fancy the Hudson, with the Catskills pressed to the edge of the edge of the water, with glimpses of snow peaks over the tops of the nearer mountains, with occasional valleys opening a magnificent perspective of Alps, with a huge forest clothing the hills to timber line, with stony caps and crags jutting into the flood with little beaches where a boat could be drawn up, but with never a house or hut or tent, and you have the Columbia. The morning had dawned cold and crisp and clear and as the sun peered over the Selkirks the rosy light on the glaciers paled to silver, and the russet mists grew pink, then white, then vanished altogether. Inaccessible wastes of rock and snow loomed on the western side, and on the east a bare mountain rose from the river's edge in one immense slant to a beetling peak higher than Mount Washington and splashed with snow about the top. Two or three sharp twists among an archipelago of sand spits and islands were necessary in keeping to the channel, and in some places the way was

so narrow that the need of going through by daylight was obvious. At the end of one pebbly bar lies a rustic boiler. It belonged to a little steamer that lost her way here, broke up on this island and disappeared, leaving only this piece of iron to show where she struck. Had she gone over that bar in time of a spring melt or freshet, she would have had no trouble, for then the river rises fourteen feet and a Sound steamer could be urged through. As the river widens to about two miles in each of the Arrow lakes, there is no sign of current in ordinary weather, and the mountains, standing apart, form a series of the loveliest scenes that can be imagined. Below the lakes the hills come nearer, shutting out the view of the higher peaks, but presenting a view of forest growing with almost tropic rankness, as wild and high as before the white man's keel ever fretted these waters and the whole northwest was vaguely known as a lonesome wilderness, "where rolled the Oregon and heard no sound save his own dashings."

About noon interest centres on the apparition of a canoe containing a solitary Indian who is catching fish for his dinner. He is only a frowsy Indian, and his boat is shabby, but, because he is the first man to be encountered on that day, everybody appears on deck to look at him. He returns the gaze with a careless eye, for he has evidently seen the great fire canoe before, and resumes his fishing, after bringing the head of his frail bark round to take the swell of the wheel more easily. Odd boats, these Columbia river Indians have—shaped like ironclads without turrets, wider and longer at water line than at the gunwale, but made of bark and fragile looking. They are propelled by double bladed paddles. The Chinese cook summons to meals by creating a din in all parts of the boat with a gong, and the company that assembles about the table, though coarsely clothed and brown faced, is as well behaved, as simple mannered and as considerate as any that you would find on an Albany steamer, I'll be bound. There are no visible settlements along shore, and few places to plant them, but row and then the boat "runs her nozzle agin the bank," after blowing the whistle to notify somebody of her intention to do so, and a man runs out of the woods to take her lines and tie them to stumps. Then the roustabouts, Indian, half breed, Kanuck, Italian and Irish swarm ashore over the gang planks, that are dropped into mud, marsh, sand or gravel as the case may be, and presently stock the holding space with fragrant logs that are fed to the avid furnace by the sweating firemen. At one place a young fellow comes down the river out of the forest and waves a rag at the boat, which immediately bumps into the bank and waits for him to announce his business. He is a wood-chopper and he says he wants to write to his best girl down at Little Dalles, and wants to know if the captain will take the letter. The captain says "Cert'ly," and the boat waits there while he indites a more or less fervid epistle, seals it, addresses it, runs up to his shack to get a piece of money for the stamp, delivers it and thanks the skipper for his courtesy. Nobody shows the least impatience. The roustabouts converse, or from inability to understand each other's language sit and stare at

each other; the Chinamen in the cabin unbosom themselves to a white passenger on the subject of the laundry business and the anti-Chinese law in the States, and is more than suspected of an intention to get into Washington through the leak that exists somewhere on the border; the captain and the purser gaze tranquilly at the scenery and the passengers gossip, doze and smoke. It is all idyllic and it would not do for American waters. Occasionally during the wooding up process the men go ashore with guns, and echoing reports through the cool dark aisles of the forest announce that they have fired at something, but whatever it is they always miss it, unless it is a tree or the atmosphere.

As night comes down and the mystery of green and ruddy half lights gather over the water and the hills and the rivers take on an aspect of utter peace and you can imagine that on shore this would deepen into an almost frightening degree of loneliness. Fish dapple the surface of the river and little breezes mar its polish, but patches of calm, reflecting and darkness of the hills float on like rafts. Star beams glance along the ripples, like silver flaming torches waved by naiads down below, then the twilight dies and the river shores resolve themselves into silhouettes of blackness that may represent rocks near at hand or mountains far away, for all effect of recession and atmosphere has gone out of the picture, save when a misty glare shoots from the furnace door and shows the giant forest, ghostly. Half the passengers disembark at Robson, 165 miles below Revelstoke, to go over to the Kootenay country, and they loiter about the place for an hour waiting for the train. Robson consists of a wharf, a station and a boarding house. The railroad of which it is the terminus is a new one, following the Kootenay river to Kootenay lake, on whose shores great "strikes" of silver have recently been made, and trains were running twice a week. It is only twenty eight miles to the lake, but the train took three hours to run it, for the ballasting of the track had not been finished, and part of it had slid off into the woods, killing a Chinaman or two, so that the train proceeded cautiously, giving time enough to see the river. This stream is of exquisite beauty, deep zinniber green in color shoaling into beryl, fretted with rapids and broken by great water-falls that pitch over cliffs in masses of foam, then coiling in deep pools where fish are fond of hiding. Stony mountains rise from the water's edge and are thinly covered with evergreens, but since metal was found in the neighborhood prospectors have been going over the hills, and in order to bare the rock for observation have been recklessly burning off the woods. The crash and thunder of falling timber could be heard as the fires ate their way along the mountain sides, the noise being so sharp and quick at times that one would have declared it to be the report of a gun, while the smoke so completely drowned the landscape that the scenery of the lake, which is said to be especially fine, was lost. A lateral valley with a stream bursting out of a cave, a village or two of Chinese—huddles of rag and canvas huts supported on wicker work—and three or four hunting stations built by the railroad company are seen before the train reaches the end of the