

OUR WILD WESTLAND.

POINTS ON THE PACIFIC PROVINCE.

(BY MRS. ARTHUR SPRAGGE.)

DEPARTURE FROM DONALD FOR COLUMBIA LAKES AND KOOTENAY VALLEY; GOLDEN CITY; THE OLD AND NEW DUCHESS; NAVIGATION OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER; ITS CHARACTER; GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENTS; EXPEDITION UP THE RIVER; THE HOG RANCHE, SPILIMACHENE.

III.

It was during the summer of 1886 that my husband and I decided to visit the interior of the Kootenay district lying between the Canadian Pacific Railway and the American boundary, a region at that time and even now practically unknown to the tourist. We had as our object and destination the ranche of Col. James Baker, late of the Blues, who had at that time resided for two years at Kootenay and who still represents the district in the Provincial Parliament. I had made his acquaintance at Donald during his election campaign and received the warmest invitation to visit Cranbrooke, which seemed to me a most visionary project, as it was two hundred miles from the railway and involved a long journey by land and water. However, my husband was anxious to convince me that British Columbia was not a "sea of mountains," so we started on our adventurous enterprise, in which I had both the fear of Indians and the discomforts of camping prominently before me. We left Donald on the 28th of August, by the afternoon express, for our trip to the Columbia lakes and Kootenay Valley with a regular camp outfit, consisting of two large bundles containing blankets, buffalo robes and waterproof sheets for bedding, a tent, a valise, two saddles and saddle-bags, two guns, an axe, one sack of flour and one of canned provisions for our hundred miles ride, and another of cooking and eating utensils and miscellaneous odds and ends. Golden City, where the navigation of the Columbia southwards begins, is but seventeen miles east of Donald and is beautifully situated at the base of Pilot Mountain, which rises, almost a detached mass of granite, behind the growing town. The setting sun, as we stepped on to the platform at the station, was gilding the surface of its reddish yellow rocks with colours that might have given the city its golden name, which, however, to be strictly candid, was *Oreiferous*, not *Auriferous*, in its origin.

The rosy and purple shades of the near and distant ranges would have charmed an artist's eye, and the aspect of the Duchess as she lay at her picturesque moorings, opposite a high wooded bluff on the Columbia river, was extremely inviting. To me she was a new nautical experience, being a small edition of the stern-wheel steamers used in the shallow navigation of the Mississippi and Missouri, a flat-bottomed boat of light draught, with a promenade deck supported on light pillars, having a hurricane deck above on which stood the wheelhouse. This scion of the aristocracy is now a memory of the past, and her place is supplied by a newly created Duchess, 82 feet long and 17 feet beam (22 feet longer than the old boat.) She is built of the lightest timber that could be procured; consequently her draught is very small, but 14 inches. Her cabins are of British Columbia cedar, oiled and varnished. She has accommodation for twenty passengers, including berths and staterooms, the latter being considerably larger than those in ordinary steamers of a similar class. There is a smoking-room forward and a good promenade deck aft, rendering her a most comfortable boat for her size. Her Chinese cook is a western *chef* who has established a widespread reputation for the superiority of his *cuisine*. The Duchess runs twice a week from Golden City to the Columbia Lakes from May till September in connection with the C. P. R., the round trip taking three days only. All information concerning her dates of departure may be had from Captain Armstrong, Golden City, B.C. Traffic upon the Columbia river has increased so wonderfully during the last two years that another smaller boat called the Marian is now run by the enterprising captain of the Duchess at the beginning and end of the season, viz., in the

early spring and late autumn, when the water, which rises and falls at these times is still too low to float the larger steamer. The Marian carries freight only and draws 11 inches, being probably the lightest draught steamboat in the Dominion. There are several new landings on the river, where numbers of miners are constantly embarking and disembarking, while parties of tourists from Banff, only a few hours distant now, patronize this newly opened route to the Kootenay district, which is considered one of the greatest attractions of the mountains, and the new Banff Springs Hotel.

Steam was up when we embarked, and a few minutes later the Duchess was cast loose from the bank and we were launched upon the bosom of the far-famed Columbia. Running up the river some seven miles to Canyon Creek, where we took on a supply of wood, the steamer's engines were stopped and she was tied up to a tree for the night, as darkness was dropping its sombre curtain over land and water. There is much that is delightfully primitive in the methods of new countries where time is no particular object; every individual is a law unto himself, and this go-as-you-please atmosphere is remarkably infectious, as the casual traveller will soon discover. The navigation of the Columbia two years ago, however, it must be remembered, was curiously involved in a network of snags and sandbars, impossible to penetrate at nightfall; so that it was rather necessity than inclination that called all hands to rest undisturbed till dawn. Now that the Dominion Government have turned their attention to improving the course of the river by granting an appropriation for the purpose, this cessation of labour and noise will no longer probably be enjoyed by passengers and crew. There are some novel features, by the way, about the execution of these improvements, of which Captain Armstrong has had charge. The steamboat channel, for instance, was dug out last autumn by horses and scrapers, somewhat original factors in the creation of navigation. The outlet of the Lower Columbia Lake, which is the commencement of the Columbia River, is the favourite spawning ground of the salmon, who come up hither from the sea; they have by their continual burrowings so elevated its gravelly bed as to form a series of shoals rising at low water quite above the surface. Through these it was imperative to excavate a passage for the steamboat, which was accordingly dug out in the manner above described, and, though such a channel may be despised by the eastern navigator, it meets, nevertheless, all the requirements of a western shipper. At another place below the salmon beds the Columbia has been diverted from its original course by means of brush dams built across the old channel. In the same way all the smaller channels will be blocked this year along the entire length of the river from the Lakes to Golden City. These dams are most simple and inexpensive. Two rows of piles are driven across the river, and the space between these is filled in with brush cut from the banks. At first this does not arrest the water's passage to any very perceptible extent, but the amount of sand brought down by the first high water renders the dam a solid bar, the brush forming eddies which deposit the sand.

We were roused at dawn on Sunday morning, August 29th, from our refreshing slumbers by the rattle of chains, the working of machinery, and the soft swish of the water against the steamer's sides, indicating that the Duchess had been released from her ignominious position and was again underweigh.

Emerging on to the promenade deck, we were able to appreciate the perfection of a summer day, bright, cloudless and freshened by a light spicy breeze, which swept back the soft veil of smoke that had drifted down from the forest fires west of Donald, and gathered it into a silver haze upon the distant mountains, against which the adjacent trees were defined in strong relief. The beauty of the scene was entrancing and indescribable. It is impossible to do justice in words to the picturesqueness of the Columbia river, winding, as it does, between two mountain ranges, the Rockies, on the east side, standing out in bold peaks and rugged bluffs, and the Selkirks, on the west, losing gradually their massive outlines, and falling away in wooded heights sloping to the water's edge. The

course of the river, with its swift current, flowing, now wide, now narrow, between low banks overhung with willows, cranberry bushes and tall cottonwood trees (similar in growth and appearance to the poplar), is strangely peaceful and secluded. Its varying extent never exceeding 300 feet, except at high water, is a strange contrast to the breadth and volume of eastern waters.

The first pause was made at 11 o'clock at Johnson's Hog Ranche, which does not, as the name would imply, refer to the porcine quadruped, but is the western slang for a whiskey resort. That insidious stimulant, in 1885, was a contraband commodity, whose sale was prohibited within 20 miles of the C. P. R. construction camps. Hence the establishment of the Hog Ranche without that magic circle. It is beautifully situated at the base of a superb peak of the Rocky Mountains, on one of the numerous channels of the Columbia, 25 miles from Golden City. We stopped 20 minutes at this delectable spot to add to our decreasing wood pile, then ran down the channel in the full force of the current for some hundred yards at a tremendous pace, crashing so close against the bushes, as we were swept into the main stream, that their branches fairly crackled against the sides of the Duchess.

Near this spot the Columbia develops into numerous branches, and the Selkirk range disappears behind high wooded foot-hills, which rise from the water in broken lines for upwards of ten miles. The river increases, if possible, in beauty the farther its tortuous course is ascended, the Rocky Mountains being outlined in an almost incredible depth of distance on the right bank, recalling some of Turner's Italian landscapes. In one place the main channel is divided by numerous islands, all so exactly alike it seemed impossible to discriminate between them as our captain did. Selecting, apparently, the narrowest course, we coasted along a low island, bordered by an extensive reed-bed, a likely haunt for wild fowl; indeed, the constant popping of a gun from the hurricane deck overhead, as flocks of ducks and geese, roused by the approach of the steamer, flew across her bows, was a constant source of excitement. I regret to admit that on these occasions no game was secured.

Higher up the river we found ourselves entangled in a network of islands and channels, with trees, in some places, hanging so far over the water that they barely escaped contact with the upper works of the Duchess. On one occasion, Captain Armstrong informed me, having entrusted the wheel temporarily to a competent member of the crew, the latter cut a point too short (in nautical parlance) and the steamer, striking against one bank, swung off on to the opposite side, passing, in her course, beneath a bending tree, which promptly tripped up the smokestack and deposited it at the river bottom. He and his men spent 24 hours fishing for it in twelve feet of water, whence it was eventually recovered and restored to its original position.

The even tenor of our way was broken by occasional soundings with a long pole accompanied by shouts sent up from the lower deck, and repeated at the wheelhouse, of "No bottom! No bottom!" "Six and a half! Six and a half!" "Six feet!" with other variations of lesser degree, as we swung over the numerous sandbars that obstructed the Columbia. Captain Armstrong's skilful navigation of the river's numerous and tortuous channels, all looking exactly alike, and his thorough knowledge of all its snags and shoals, were simply marvellous. We stopped a second time, late in the afternoon, at Spilimachene Landing, where a couple of cabins only lay at the foot of a stupendous mass of rock, clothed almost to its bare summit with a scattered growth of evergreens; indeed, we were so immediately below it that my eyes grew wearied and strained in the effort of investigating its rugged crags. Pausing but a few minutes to disembark some enterprising miners, we steamed on up and up the wonderful Columbia, winding from one side of the valley to the other like a folded ribbon, now finding ourselves at the base of the Rockies, and again at the foot of the Selkirks.

Soon after leaving Spilimachene, however, the valley opens out as the lake country is approached, and away to the south rises a conical blue hill, like a gigantic sugarloaf, from whose height the Selkirk