

## CHAPTER VI.

## "THE BRIDGE OF THE WORLD."

Our black eagle laboriously climbs up the steep inclines, groaning like a suffering, sensate thing. A boisterous, asthmatic monster, belching forth black smoke, 'she hugs the sides of the forbidding rocks. With "madly whistled laughter," the wild thing of strength and savagery dashes into the heart of the mountains. What a tempting of fate it seems to rush into the blackness. Over twin strips of shining steel, we swing around frightful curves, creep over timber trestles more than a mile long, or rattle along huge causeways roughly formed by throwing up pieces of blasted rock.

It is a yachting trip on wheels, and at times we tack so hard that we are actually progressing backwards. There is no observation car, and your blood is on your own head if you stand on the aft platform. Ach! so let it be, we *will* see these sights even if the verdict be "justifiable foolicide."

Two hours west of Banff, at Stephen, we reach the railway summit of the Rocky Mountains. We are 5,296 feet above sea-level. This is the highest point at which the British flag has floated officially upon this continent. Here, at the foot of Mt. Hector, we have reached "The Great Divide." Within a short distance of each other in this glacial field, rise three great rivers that flow into three different oceans. The Athabasca or Mackenzie River flows to the Arctic, the Columbia to the Pacific, and the Saskatchewan to the Atlantic.

At this station, I chatted with a trapper who had just come in with his year's harvest of peltry. Bronzed, seamed, and grizzled, the record of his hazardous life was writ roughly all over him. He offered the stone-marten skins for \$12.50, and the ermines at 50 cents. We agreed with him that they were "cheap as dirt." The animals trapped to the north are beaver, mink, wolverine, fox, land-otter, racoon, sea-otter, skunk, and bear.

This gamester of the wilderness was accompanied by his mate-woman, a dusky Indian. He was "a squaw man," who had been married without the accessories of bell,

book, and candle. This kind of wedlock doubtless has its advantages—for the man. If he makes a mistake, he doesn't have to live with it all his life. He can rectify it by "marrying" again. The Mormons are said to march their wives abreast, the Gentiles in tandems.

At Field, we were given all the time we wanted for dinner at the C.P.R. Chalet hotel. And such "halesome farin'", too. There was crisp-fleshed salmon of such fine flavor that we knew we never tasted the real thing down East; turkey and cranberries; chicken livers with a dash of tobasco sauce, succulent asparagus, luscious, sweet-blooded cherries served up in dishes of mountain cedar, sweets, too, and *such* coffee. Ah! the C.P.R. *can* do it.

They say that up 2,500 feet there is a wonderful fossil bed "principally trilobites and agnostus." I had no ambition to climb. It would be preferable to lie down, look up, and take it all for granted. Besides, time and the train wait for no woman.

At Palliser, the train and river plunge together down a narrow gorge, the perpendicular walls shutting out the sunlight. The roar of the water and the discordant bellowing of the steam devil make this terrible canyon a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Out into daylight the train emerges, and ahead are the beautiful waters of the Columbia flashing with metallic lustre under the dazzling radiance of the sun. To the south, the Selkirks, with their forest-clad bases and ice-clad peaks come trooping into view. It is an out-of-door magic-lantern scene, an opalescent, sun-shafted fantasia. The mountains are very kaleidoscopes in that they never reflect the same combination of colors. A color that is coppery brown blends with a coral-red, or a "toned-down" purple melts into a yellowish green. Here the rocks have a muddy gold stain, and further on one murmurs enraptured at the subtle play of amber, crimson, and violet.

On this afternoon, we pass through several snow-sheds, which while they afford complete immunity from danger of obstruction, also entirely shut out the view. They are what the man-milliner in Dickens would describe as "dem'd, moist, unpleasant" places.