

BITS OF TRAVEL AT HOME.

Jackson, Mrs. Helen Maria (Fiske) Hunt, 1831-1915

By H. H.,

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MATTERS," "BITS OF TALK FOR YOUNG FOLKS,"
"VERSES BY H.H."



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BOWLDER CANYON.

CANYONS are known of their lovers. To their lovers they reveal themselves; to their lovers' eyes they are no more alike than fair women are alike in the eyes of their worshippers.

Also there is a right way to take a canyon, as there is to take a person. One must not be driven through, — no, not if a broad turnpike ran its whole length. Only by slow and humble toiling on foot can one see its beauties. Another is made for a swift and royal dash on wheels, or on horses' backs; as distinctly "set" to an allegro movement as was ever a joyous outburst of the soul of Beethoven or Mozart. Harmonies obey one law all Nature through, and when we learn and study Nature, as we study and love art, we shall know better how to "keep time" with her, and our voices will not be out of tune so often. We shall not pipe to her at high noon and expect her to dance, which is only a fantastic way of saying that, going out at midday to look at mountain ranges, we shall not pretend to know them; that we shall visit meadows of a morning, and not be seen driving eastward at sunset; and that, if we live in Colorado, we shall take our canyons right end foremost and be absolutely certain in which way they were meant to be read.

The more canyons one sees, the more this truth sinks into one's heart, the more vividly one realizes the intense individuality of each canyon. Carried blindfold into any one of them and set down midway, one knowing them could never mistake or be in doubt. But it is hard to find words in which these differences shall be distinctly set forth, harder even than it is to tell just how one

human voice differs from another ; yet who ever mistook a voice he knew ?

Boulder Canyon is one of the "allegro" movements. It is sixteen miles long and one should ride swiftly down it, — race, as it were, with the creek, which has never yet drawn a long breath since first it plunged into the gorge. To see Boulder Canyon aright, therefore, one must enter it from the Nederlands Meadows, at its upper mouth ; and to reach the Nederlands Meadows from Denver one must go by rail up the Clear Creek Canyon (hardly less beautiful than Boulder Canyon itself) and drive across from Central City to Nederlands. The road lies through tracts of pines and over great ridges, grand in their loneliness. From every ridge is a new view of the "Snowy Range," to the west and north. In strong sunlight and shadow these myriads of snow-peaks, relieved against the blue sky, are of such brilliant and changing colors that it must be a very dull soul indeed that could look on them without thinking of many-colored jewels. On the day that I saw this view, James's Peak was covered with snow and stood in full light. Its sharp pyramidal lines looked as fine cut and hard as if the mountain had but just been hewn from alabaster. A little to the north, Long's Peak, which is cleft into two peaks, was half in shadow and half in sun. The peak in the shadow was as dark a blue as blue can be and not be black ; and the peak in the sun was distinctly and wholly pink, — a rosy pink, with an opaline quality in the tint. The mountain did not look like a mountain. The colors were so intense that the line where they joined was as plainly marked to our sight as if it had been on a map in our hands ; but the mountain was twenty miles away.

Midway between Central City and Nederlands is a settlement, called Rawlinsville, which ought to be called Oasis Town. Between two bare and brown hill-ridges, a bit of meadow New England might own, and an amber and white trout-stream foaming through it. The meadow seemed fairly to be bursting into blade and leaf as

we drove in, so wondrous and so surprising green was it. A dusty brown road on its edge leads westward up the green vista. A gate shuts it off from the highway. It is the road into Colorado's beautiful mountain valley, the Middle Park. From Rawlins to Nederlands only ridges and hills and their connecting and interlocking spurs, pines, and firs, and everywhere loneliness and silence. "In" the mountains is a phrase we have come to use carelessly when we mean among them. But it is a significant thing that we say "in" and do not say "among." Among the Rocky Mountains it is especially significant. Hour by hour one sinks and rises and climbs and descends in labyrinths of wedged hills. Each hour you are hemmed in by a new circle of peaks, among which no visible outlet appears; and each hour you escape, mount to a new level, and are again circled by a different and more glorious horizon. You come to feel that you yourself are, as it were, a member of the mountain race; the sky is the family roof, and you and they are at home together under it. This it is to be "*in* the mountains."

Nederlands is a dismal little mining town,—only a handful of small houses and smelting mills. Boulder Creek comes dashing through it, foaming white to the very edge of the grimy street, reclaiming the land from dust and stones and making it soft and green for many an acre. As you drive eastward down this meadow, following but never overtaking the creek, the mouth of Boulder Canyon stands full in sight. Its gray stone walls rise up, fortresslike, from the meadow-sward,—the left-hand wall bare and gray; the right-hand one thick set with firs from base to top. It is a picture of vivid contrasts,—the green meadow, with ranks upon ranks of yellow and red willow bushes making belts of bright color upon it; between the yellows and reds, gleams of white foam flashing; and beyond, the high buttress fronts of the canyon mouth, adorned with evergreens, as for a triumph. One step past this gate and you are in a second meadow. A tiny spot, but green as the other, walled to the sky with gray stone

and fir trees, dainty and soft under foot, lighted by the flashing water and gay with flowers. Here spreads a gigantic cedar tree, broad like a banyan, with gnarled roots, that make seats, and low boughs, that make a good roof, as who should know better than we who sat composedly lunching under them while a shower of rain rattled away over our heads and did not wet us. It gathered blacker and blacker, however, and the canyon darkened fast, as a little room darkens when candles burn down. There is none too much light at best in a narrow, rift between rocks which are hundreds of feet high. When its strip of sky canopy turns black as ink and rain falls in white sheets, filling it in, day seems day no longer. Ahead of the storm, we dashed down the canyon. Looking back, we could see it following us in a strange mist wall, which advanced as solid-fronted and steady and swift as an army. The noises of battle were not wanting either, for the wind roared and shrieked, the trees gave out great sobbing sounds as they bent in the gale, and overhead the thunder crashed and echoed, sharp lightning leaped from side to side, seeming a fiery network over our heads. It was grand; but it was not safe, and we were glad to scramble, all dripping, into a deserted log cabin. The rain came into the open chimney-hole in the roof and fell in pitiless satire on the blackened hearthstone, where no fire could be. But the old bunks were dry; and on the edges of these we sat and peered out into the canyon. What a very carnival of waters it was! The creek leaped and danced as if it were mad with joy, flinging itself upward to meet the torrents of rain half way. All the green things leaped and danced also, swaying their supple bodies in rhythmic time to the tempest. The fir-trees seemed as lithe as the blades of grass, and the buttercups and daisies bowed down to the ground and up to their full height—down and up and down and up—and never a stem of them all broke in this storm, in which it was not safe for us to be out. So much stronger are the weak things of the earth than the mighty.

In the thickest of the storm an old man came slowly sauntering up the road. Long, white beard dripping with water; old leather trowsers running with water; old battered hat streaming water, as if it were a pail he had just put on, full of water,—he looked as if he might have had something to do with the storm. Seeing us, he entered the cabin, and, with a reticent nod, sat down on the three-legged chair. It was to see us that he came in; by no means to escape the storm. Yet he seemed in no wise disposed to talk. What use he did make of us, he knows, no doubt; it was not apparent. His steady, reflective gaze was embarrassing. He owned the little log cabin we had noticed at the entrance of the canyon. It stood in a clump of fir-trees, on a high bank a few rods from the creek. The vegetable garden looked flourishing, and we had said as we passed, "That is a spot where a king might spend the summer and raise his own peas." The king was before us. His last kingdom had been in Wisconsin, and he was "a-fixin' up this place to bring his family out in the fall. Didn't know as they'd like it. Calk'lated they'd think 'twas kind o' lonesome."

Long before we could see that the storm had lessened by a drop, he remarked that the "rain wuz about done," shouldered his heavy axe, picked up his flask bottle, and, with the same indirect nod with which he had sauntered in, sauntered out again and strolled away. He looked more actual and human out in the rain than he had in the cabin.

He was right. The rain was "about done." In the twinkling of an eye the clouds broke away, the blue sky shone out, the sun blazed in on the wet tree-tops and turned every leaf, every pine-needle, to a fretwork of diamonds. A bird, whose voice seemed to fall from the very sky, called out, "Tweep!" "Tweep!" in a fine, high note, like the first violin notes before an orchestra begins to play; and after him other birds sang out, and the joint symphony of sight and sound burst into its fullest.

Still twelve miles down the canyon, and this is the way they ran, — if I tell it breathless, it is because I try to tell it true, and if I could tell it really true, the words would leap and break into foam like the creek, — this is the way the miles ran : —

Now between walls made of piled bowlders, piled as if storms had hurled them where they hung, — bowlders poised, and bowlders wedged, and bowlders half welded together ; with great fir-trees crowded in among them, shooting out of crevices like spears thrust through from underneath ; clasping gnarled roots like anchors round edges of precipices.

Now a high pyramid of rock, only a few rods ahead, walled the way, and we said, "Where do we and the creek go? Surely, to the left." No ; to the right, and under rather than around the rock. Like a huge sounding-board, it ran out above our heads, its seams like rafters and its rifts like groined archways, mossy with age and now shining with the dripping water. We and our carriage and our horses could have been safely housed under it, with room to spare.

Round this, sharply to the left, and another just such wall juts out on the right ; and between the two we cross the foaming creek on a narrow bridge.

Fir-trees high up on the sides ; fir-trees walling the topmost edge ; fir-trees standing with their roots in the water ; fir-trees bent out across the stream, as if they had sought to clasp hands, — the air itself seemed of a verdurous color, from their masses of solemn dark green.

Now through wider spaces, where one or other of the walls recedes, and the broader slopes are green as meadows. Now through narrow passes, where the walls are straight hewn, and the narrow strip of sky overhead is like a blue line drawn on gray, so closely the rocks approach each other. In these rock-walls are ravines, packed full of fir-trees. They look only like fissures filled with bushes. Mid-way up these rock-walls are jutting projections which look like mere

ledges. They are broad plateaus on which forests grow.

Meantime the creek never slackens. Amber and white and black in the arrested spaces, it whirls under the bridges and round the corners, doubles on itself, leaps over and high above a hundred rocks in a rod, breaks into sheafs and showers of spray, foams and shines and twinkles and glistens; and if there be any other thing which water at its swiftest and sunniest can do, that it does also, even to jumping rope with rainbows.

And I must not forget that there are gardens all the way down. In the bends of the creek, round the buttments of the bridges, in sheltered nooks under the overhanging rocks, wherever there can be a few feet of ground, there spring all manner of flowers,—white spiræas and pink roses and blue larkspur, and masses of yellow for setting.

Sixteen miles, such miles as these, and never once the creek slackens! Said I not well that it was an allegro movement? And is one not to be forgiven who tells it breathlessly, with the marvellous Colorado air quickening his veins?

Suddenly, at the last, while the canyon walls are still high and the creek still foams, the road turns a corner, and lo! there lie the plains in full sight,—a belt of serene, dark, unfathomable blue. In a few moments you come out upon a foothill, and under a dome of sky which seems immeasurably wide after the narrow line which roofed the canyon.

Here lies the little town of Boulder, at the mouth of the pass. It is fast growing rich and big by the outcoming and ingoing from the mining region. But I hold the Boulder people lucky, not in that gold and silver are brought down into their streets every day, but that they can walk of an afternoon up into Boulder Canyon.