

AN ENGLISH WOMAN IN COLORADO.*

THE author of this volume is an Englishwoman of the traditionally plucky type, who, having completed a six months' visit to the Sandwich Islands, crossed to the United States at San Francisco, and plunged into the recesses of the Rocky Mountains in search of such scenes and adventures as the region might afford. Entirely alone, with no little experience of life in the rough, fearless and resolute, an accomplished horsewoman, possessed of a ready tact which enabled her to fit into the most incongruous and difficult circumstances, carrying herself everywhere with unfailing dignity, and withal the mistress of a strong common sense, she was equipped as few women are for the rude and exhausting, and sometimes perilous, situations in which she was constantly placed. There is not one woman in a thousand capable of achieving such an adventure, or indeed who would be likely to live to tell the story of it. Miss Bird's letters home to her sister, which are the basis of the present volume, were first published in an English periodical, and richly deserve reproduction in this more permanent form.

The book makes no delay in San Francisco, but begins promptly with the ascent of the mountains on the way to Colorado, where the author was to seek and make her first acquaintance with the wonders and beauties of the great American wilderness. At Truckee she bravely left the train in order to pay a visit to Tahoe and Donner Lakes. It was near midnight as she entered the rough hotel, with its crowded and noisy bar-room. She made the best of such accommodations as could be provided for her, and slept the sleep of the just, notwithstanding the tumult around her. The next morning she donned her riding suit, called for a horse, and set out unattended for Lake Tahoe. The horse proved unsuitable, was frightened by a bear which crossed the path, threw his rider, and ran away, leaving Miss Bird to shift for herself as well as she could until the fractious steed was captured by some friendly wagoners and finally restored to her. At last she reached the

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irregular wooden inn, by the side of the lonely lake, and here established herself for the night. Returning to Truckee, on another day she made a similar excursion to Donner Lake, and then resuming the cars rode on by way of Ogden and Fort Laramie to Cheyenne, and finally brought up in Estes Park, a romantic but remote and inaccessible spot, where she settled down, with great zest, into the life of the ranchman's family who were its only settlers. A cabin was assigned her for her exclusive use, though an unsavory tenant of the empty space beneath the floor gave her occasional uneasiness, not to say trouble. She paid eight dollars a week for board, but was less of a boarder than a member of the family, sharing in the domestic work of the household like a sensible woman, and even taking a hand with the men when there was a hard day's work of herding cattle to be done. The excitement and exhilaration of these occasions may be understood from a single glimpse like this:

After a 6.30 breakfast this morning, we started, the party being composed of my host, a hunter from the Snowy Range, two stockmen from the Plains, one of whom rode a violent "buck-jumper," and was said by his companions to be "the best rider in North America," and myself. We were all mounted on Mexican saddles, rode, as the custom is, with light snaffle bridles, leather guards over our feet, and broad wooden stirrups, and each carried his lunch in a pouch slung on the lassoing horn of his saddle. Four big, badly-trained dogs accompanied us. It was a ride of nearly thirty miles, and of many hours, one of the most splendid I ever took. We never got off our horses, except to tighten the girths, we ate our lunch with our bridles knotted over our saddle-horns, started over the level at full gallop, leapt over trunks of trees, dashed madly down hillsides, rugged with rocks or strewn with great stones, forded deep rapid streams, saw lovely lakes and views of surpassing magnificence, startled a herd of elk with uncouth heads and monstrous antlers, and in the chase, which was unsuccessful, rode to the very base of Long's Peak, over 14,000 feet high, where the bright waters of one of the affluents of the Platte burst from the eternal snows through a canyon of indescribable majesty.

This was in no sense an exceptional excursion. Miss Bird's days were filled with such, the most serious of which perhaps was the ascent of Long's Peak, a feat of which she magnanimously makes light, as being one which a member of the Alpine Club would hold of no account, but which, even from the modest story she gives of it, was evidently no girl's play.

One may well wonder how pleasantly a woman, a *real* woman, could get along in such scenes as these, mingling with the roughest characters on terms of everyday familiarity, and being exposed to all the haps and mishaps which such a life would seem to involve. But in the present instance there was no difficulty whatever. That the woman maintained all the delicacy and reserve of her sex, and all the peculiar worth of her own personality, is evident on every page, while quite as evident is the respect which was everywhere paid to her by the men with whom she came in contact. In fact nothing is more impressive in all this

book—not even its always graphic and sometimes powerful and beautiful descriptions of the grand natural scenery of the Rocky Mountains—than the testimony it bears to man's innate reverence for every woman who reveres herself. At no point perhaps does this fact come out more forcibly than in the semi-friendship which sprang up between Miss Bird and Jim Nugent, or "Desperado Jim," as he was more commonly and suggestively called, a degraded villain of the most positive sort, who yet paid to this honest Englishwoman the most chivalrous respect, and even, at last, softened by her grace and purity, laid before her, as if she were a sort of sister-confessor, a full confession of the crimes that had stained his life, and hardened his heart, and made his name a by-word and a terror in the mountains.

Miss Bird saw a very different phase of Rocky Mountain life and character from that which usually appears in books of this description, and the views which her pages open are as entertaining as they are unconventional. No human contrast could be stronger than that between this spirited woman, glowing with health and healthy animalism, and the dyspeptics and consumptives who make so marked a strain in the Colorado population—at least in the community of visitors. The lovers of the literature of nature and adventure owe to the American publishers a debt of gratitude for rescuing this very racy narrative for them out of the relative obscurity of an English periodical.