

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST TRIP TO THE PACIFIC COAST

The next summer, partly for a vacation but more to get background for a lecture, Grandfather made a trip to the Pacific Coast. Grandmother had started on a trip to the Pacific Coast with a Christian Endeavor group before we were married. The train had been wrecked just out of Chicago and several people in the car with Grandmother were killed. Fortunately Grandmother was not seriously hurt and, shortly after we were married, had availed herself of a pass issued by the railroad to make her deferred trip to the Pacific Coast. Now she gallantly offered to stay with the children while Grandfather went. So Grandfather started with a young man named Kuhlman, who taught History in the high school.

It is not the purpose of this article to tell you of the wonderful things on the Pacific Coast - the flowers and the big trees and Yosemite Valley, but merely to relate a few incidents. It was a terribly hot spell. At Needles it was 120 in the shade. "What is it in the sun?" "Brother," says a bystander, "the thermometer won't register what it is in the sun." They tell a story of a bad Indian from Needles who died and went where bad spirits go. When asked through a medium by one of his friends whether he wanted anything done for him, the bad Indian replied: "Yes, send up my blanket."

Before reaching Needles we visited the Grand Canyon. This is one sight which never disappoints. Many things of which you read seem smaller than you imagined they were. But no one can imagine what a large path through the earth the Colorado River cut in Arizona, and as one stands on the rim of the chasm and looks fourteen miles across to the ..

other side and then two miles deep to a silver thread of a river below it, all seems utterly impossible.

We rode on mules down Bright Angel Trail. In the earlier day this trail led right out along the sides of the cliff where there was a sheer drop of 2,000 feet. One man got heart failure, and Kuhlman, who on account of his greater weight rode a horse, had his horse fall down under him. Fortunately neither Kuhlman nor the horse went over the cliff and there was no further incident worthy of note except that due to the hot spell there was an unusual demand on the water bottle and one fat man suffered terribly before he got back to the rim of the canyon. Grandfather is not talking about himself, for in that day he weighed less than 120 pounds.

We were at San Francisco shortly after the great earthquake and fire. Most of the city was a smouldering ruin. We stopped at Oakland across the bay and Grandfather was reminded of a story told him by a friend of his, Mr. Powell, for many years manager of the California Fruit Growers Exchange. Mr. Powell had gone with another man to San Francisco and quarters in Oakland being in great demand, he and his friend had taken a room which contained one single bed and one cot.

They flipped a coin. Mr. Powell lost and being an uneasy sleeper, he got to thinking of various practical jokes his friend had played on him and determined to try one in return. Crawling under his friend's bed, he rose on his hands and knees until he lifted his sleeping friend and then swayed to and fro. Shortly his friend awoke and thinking it was another earthquake, rushed out on the street in his night clothes. Grandfather never thought much of practical jokes, but that seemed funny to him.

From San Francisco to Portland, Kuhlman wished to go by boat,

for he had never had an ocean voyage. Grandfather persuaded him to go by train in order to see Mt. Shasta. The boat we would have taken - the S. S. Columbia - went down and most of its passengers were lost.

An ice-capped mountain is an odd thing for which to have a warm spot in your heart, but when Grandfather passes Mt. Shasta, either by train or in the air, he looks with affection upon the mountain which probably saved his life.

From Portland Kuhlman returned home, and Grandfather went on to Alaska with a man he had met in Yosemite Valley - Tibbitt. We started too late and encountered much rain. Does it always rain in Alaska? "I don't know," said one, "I have only lived in Alaska fourteen years." "No," said another, "it sometimes snows." All the Pacific Coast has a wet and a dry season. At Los Angeles the wet season is only about three months - January through March, with many bright days in those months. In Seattle the rainy season is about six months - from the end of September to the end of March, and in Alaska it rains nearly all the time except for some nice weather in June and July.

If you ever go to Alaska, try if possible to make the trip at the full moon nearest the end of June. The weather is likely to be best at that time and at Skagway the sun on June 21st is below the horizon only about four hours. Hence, between the long hours of sunlight and the full moon you can see the magnificent scenery throughout the twenty hours and get some idea of what it is like further north in the land of the Midnight Sun.

A story is told in Alaska of a man who had laid the foundation of his fortune by discovering the hotels had no ice and dragged in an iceberg, cut it up and started himself in the ice business. Electric refrigeration had not yet been invented. Frozen sea water is salt. But, as explained

elsewhere, icebergs are pieces of glaciers and always come from the land and hence are always simply fresh frozen water. When the outside of an iceberg which has been in touch with the sea water is chopped off, the inside is just like ice from a frozen river, which in truth is what a glacier really is.

You would have been greatly interested at one of the stops to see the salmon. Salmon hatch out from eggs laid in fresh water streams, and when the little fish are partially grown, they swim out into the salt water. Four years later the fish which have survived the perils of life in the ocean return to the fresh water streams, deposit eggs and die.

The salmon were just running into a fresh water stream, and the basin below a little waterfalls was literally full of fish. You could not exaggerate. If you exaggerated the number you would have to decrease the size. The fish were struggling for a place in the water and crowding each other upon the bank just as perhaps you may some day see tadpoles struggling in a pool which had nearly dried up. You could easily grab a fish in your hand, but the fish were strong (averaged about ten pounds each in weight) and would wiggle out of your grasp.

Now and then a fish would jump up the waterfalls into the less crowded waters above. Doubtless long ago a fishway was built to prevent this traffic jam of fish. But was it not an interesting sight?

Grandfather was sure Grandmother must make the trip to Alaska. He did not know how long it would be, but she went with Ruth and Grace, and Ruth will write about the trip in another chapter.