

RAILWAY TO THE CLOUDS.



DOUBTLESS there are some readers who will consider the caption of this article a figure of speech; but it really expresses an accomplished fact. When, in the New Hampshire legislature, session of 1866, a member introduced a bill, to charter the White Mountain Railway Company, facetious legislator moved to amend, by allowing the company to extend their track from the top of Mount Washington to the moon. The enterprise had no antecedent for novelty and daring; its projectors were ridiculed, and the public incredulous. All the discouragement of wiseacres had, however, no effect in turning the resolute applicants from their purpose. The charter was granted, and the promoters started on their bold engineering enterprise. Ground was broken at once at the base of the mountain, forests cleared, chasms spanned, ledges levelled, and in three years the first locomotive climbed the dizzy height, and rested on the highest land of the continent, east of the Rocky Mountains.

The purity and rarity of the air, the crystalline clearness of the mountain streams, the absence of farms or clearings, and the grand and sombre evergreen forests extending to every point of the compass, give the visitor a new experience of a mountain life. A few miles farther, and the railway terminates at the Fabyan House, from which point the first glimpse of the whole side of Mount Washington is seen in all its grandeur, six miles distant, its famous railway, like a faint thread, being just discernible in a nearly straight line, on the crest of a spur of the mountain, lying on its southwest face. The peak of this noted mountain is the highest of several summits, in a chain about twenty miles long, extending in a northeast and southwest direction, and yet such is the purity of the air, that the whole range seems but eight or ten miles in length. No crags or precipices break the contour against the sky, but grand undulating lines, forcible from the sombre green of the forest, and broken, mossy rock, with here and there a light streak of ochreous soil, produced by a land slide. Six miles of carriage ride over a turnpike, through a forest of

spruce and fir, brings you to the base of the mountain and the station of its railway. Here, looking up the rail track, rising like an interminable ladder to the summit, you first realise the magnitude and grandeur of the mountain. At the station are about half-a-dozen buildings, including a hotel, saw-mill, etc., but the interest of the tourist is now all centred in the ascent.

A small car, capable of carrying about fifty passengers, is on the track, with a locomotive of rather small dimensions, quaint and original in form, and arranged to go below the car both in the ascent and descent.

The company seat themselves, with the back towards the summit, on inclined seats, and the engine starts, pushing its load up the ascent.

This is not ordinary steam travelling: the engine works laboriously, and the sharp metallic rattle of the cog-wheels on the central rail gives a new feature, as the car slowly rises up the steep grade. The sensation of fear, which some anticipated, is lost, for the road-bed and trestle-work seem strong and substantial, and everything in starting and working the train is managed slowly and deliberately. You pass the small river and enter a mountain forest, the hardy trees of which along the track, being deprived of the shelter of their fellows, have succumbed to the terrific winters, and peeled and lifeless, fringe the roadway. The undergrowth is dwarfed and mossy. Not a bird enlivens the scene, save, perhaps, a wood-pecker startled at the noise of the engine. The trees have very small tops, but trunks of enormous size, covered with lichens and mosses, and are of so small height that your seat in the car gives you a free range of vision over them to an extent of forest and mountain that begins to assume the character of a topographic map. In half an hour the vegetation is dwarfed to Arctic proportions; the hardy spruce, no larger than

a lady's fan, hugs the rocky ground, and struggles with the mosses and the lichens for an existence.

It is at this point that the full grandeur and sublimity of the view burst on the beholder. Emotion must find utterance, and passengers who sit side by side in conventional decorum now suddenly get acquainted. Fear, there is none; though the fearful gulf separating Mount Clay and Mount Washington seems almost under your feet; the forests are like green velvet, and the eagle sailing on motionless wing, though but an atom to the spectator below, is now beneath you, and you look down on his pinions as he sails in graceful evolutions over the awful abyss.

The air, pure and bracing, now becomes cool from your high altitude, and a sudden demand is felt throughout the car for overcoats and shawls. The conductor tells you that at the water-tank, where you now stop, the ice was half an inch thick the previous night, though the time is midsummer. At this section the track commences, on the bare rock, its steepest grade, and takes the name of "Jacob's Ladder." The rise is here thirteen and a-half inches to a yard. To get an idea of it, place a yard-stick on a table and raise one end of it the requisite number of inches.

The appearance of the hotels at the top now gives you intimation of the end of your trip. A sudden turn in the road and a change from your straight course to the east and south-east, brings you to the region where stunted grass amid the rocks, with a few minute white flowers, are all the signs of vegetable life. Passengers jump from the car at favourable points, gather the flowers, and step at their leisure back to their seats, the engine, meanwhile, going steadily upward.

A hundred rods from the summit, you pass Lizzie Bourn's monument, a pile of stones with a white board at its apex, and so near the track that the passenger

can almost touch it in passing. This commemorates a melancholy incident, the inscription reading as follows:—

“Lizzie Bourn, daughter of Judge Bourn of Kennebunk, Maine, perished here Sept. 14, 1855.”

The conductor, who obligingly answers all questions, tells to the passengers the story of the young lady, aged about twenty, who, in the days before comfortable houses were on the mountain, was with a companion overcome by fatigue and a storm, and before assistance could be had perished from exhaustion, while her friend was saved.

By a curve in the track you mount the summit or “tip-top” as it is called, and find yourself before a hotel, nearly two hundred feet in length. Around are stables and old structures which, with the United States signal station, make quite a little village of seven or eight buildings.

The grand, sublime view of the west side is now repeated on the east, where the carriage road winds down to the Glen House, which looks a white dot in the valley far below. If the weather is clear, you will be repaid for all your painstaking by one look in any direction; if storm and cloud should greet you, the rain and lightning around or below you will be a sight no less sublime.

Make your plans to spend a night on the mountain. In the new hotel you will find the luxuries of a city, first-class restaurant, rooms well furnished, and warmed day and night in July and August by steam-pipes; a spacious parlour richly furnished, and kind attendants, plenty of blankets and other bed covering, and no mosquitoes to annoy your midsummer sleep.

About daybreak all the guests are

aroused to see the grandest sight on earth—a sunrise on Mount Washington.

This railway, the great convenience of which brings a large tide of travel, is carefully managed. Only one car is allowed to a locomotive; if the number of visitors requires more, other engines, of which there are five, are ready for duty with additional cars. No steam is used in the descent, but hot-air in the cylinders and atmospheric brakes give great steadiness to the train. The engine and car can be separated at any point in the route and either remain secure on the track at its steepest grade. Great care is taken in the inspection of the machinery, and in the four years of operation no accident has occurred. No car is allowed on the track at the summit, that could by any possibility get started on a fearful coasting-trip. Coasting planks are sometimes used by adepts, and the descent of three miles made in five or ten minutes. This fearful velocity is dangerous to a beginner but simple hand-brakes effectually regulate the speed.

The length of the railway is three miles, and the time occupied in the upward trip about one hour and a-half, including two stops at the water-tanks; the descent is made in somewhat less time.

The side rails are the ordinary railway pattern, but the centre rail is of strap-iron, made hollow and constructed in the strongest manner with one-and-a-quarter-inch bolts at intervals of three inches; in these the cog-wheels of the engine and car play, and control the movements of the train. For further safety, guards run beneath this rail on a flange, making it impossible for the train to be displaced from the track.