
The Valley of Passengers

By F. G. AFLALO.

JOHN MUIR, born at Dunbar in the year before Queen Victoria came to the throne, has issued a passionate appeal to the land of his adoption, California of the sierras, to save the Yosemite Valley from those politicians who have already earmarked this glorious rift in the Pacific Slope as the future source of water for that thirsty phoenix San Francisco. To myself, sundered by flag and ocean from those to whom the veteran cries, his prayer appeals for two reasons. First, because, some fifteen years ago, Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, with whom I was having tea in his library at Parkstone, begged me to read Muir's beautiful tribute to the water-ousel in his book on the "Mountains of California." Second, because, having done as he bid, enjoying the whole book almost as much as I had enjoyed others by Dr. Wallace himself, I could not rest until I had seen the Yosemite for myself. Another ten years went to the locusts before I could gratify this ambition, and then I went and worshipped, drinking in the glory of its perspectives, with its little river

tumbling in rainbow waterfalls, three thousand feet sheer, and its glassy lake, rightly called Mirror, since a photograph taken with the sun at a particular angle can be held either way up without prejudicing the effect.

If the Americans really let the Yosemite go to the engineers, they will surprise their friends more than their enemies. Apart from the purely sentimental claim of what is perhaps the loveliest scene in a State famous for its varied beauty, this Valley must be a tremendous asset during the tourist season, when it is packed with sightseers from almost every State of the Union, dotted with mushroom camps and patrolled by crowded coaches that run between the terminus of the toy railway at El Portal and the great sequoias that grew leaves in the days of the dinotherium. These vegetable giants were accidentally discovered by Galen Clark, who told me all about his first sight of them. He was born the year before Waterloo, and now he lies buried in a grave dug by his own hands at the foot of the Yosemite Falls. Well, he should sleep in peace, for his life's work was crowned by the decision of Congress to make the Wawona trees national property and to establish a permanent patrol of cavalry to protect them from desecrating hands.

The Yosemite is surely worth preserving. America, or so much of it as lies, without unearned increment from the Monroe Doctrine, under the forty-five stars, is a huge territory, yet I doubt whether, in all the two- and three-quarter millions of square miles of the Union, there is anything else quite like this Californian dreamland, four thousand feet above the ocean, its sandy soil planted thick with pine, fir, balsam and cedar, its green carpet patterned with iris and "Indian paintbrush," its thickets loud with the pleasant song of birds and sweet with the clinging scent of lilac. Little squirrels, fearless and confiding, run over the feet of sleeping idlers, and sometimes, at night, an old bear comes shambling down from the woods round Glacier Point and noses among the ashes of a dead camp fire.

To the ultra-fastidious, no doubt, the summer peace of this sweet canyon is something desecrated by the jargon of Broadway and Van Ness Avenue, but the ultra-fastidious are not in the majority among its admirers. What it provides is a wonderful sanctuary in which Pittsburg millionaires may avert a threatened brainstorm.

That an extended water supply for a growing city like San Francisco is called for passes doubt, and it is also obvious that the basin of the Merced is the nearest and cheapest source. Yet surely America is not so poor in either engineering genius or dollars that it must needs sacrifice this little paradise. Economy in such case would be a crime, and I hope, as I never more may hope to set eyes again on that happy valley, that John Muir will so rouse public opinion as to ensure the permanent peace of the Yosemite.
