Glimpses of three coasts

Jackson Helen Hunt
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Author: Jackson Helen Hunt

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GLIMPSES OF THREE COASTS.

25/6

BY

HELEN JACKSON (H. H.),

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ABOUT HOME MATTERS;" "BITS OF TALK FOR
YOUNG FOLKS;" "NELLY'S SILVER
MINE;" "CAT STORIES;"

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CALIFORNIA AND OREGON.
GLIMPSES OF THREE COASTS.

I.

CALIFORNIA AND OREGON.

OUTDOOR INDUSTRIES IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

Climate is to a country what temperament is to a man,—Fate. The figure is not so fanciful as it seems; for temperament, broadly defined, may be said to be that which determines the point of view of a man’s mental and spiritual vision,—in other words, the light in which he sees things. And the word “climate” is, primarily, simply a statement of bounds defined according to the obliquity of the sun’s course relative to the horizon,—in other words, the slant of the sun. The tropics are tropic because the sun shines down too straight. Vegetation leaps into luxuriance under the nearly vertical ray: but human activities languish; intellect is supine; only the passions, human nature’s rank weed-growths, thrive. In the temperate zone, again, the sun strikes the earth too much aslant. Human activities develop; intellect is keen; the balance of passion and reason is normally adjusted: but vegetation is slow and restricted. As compared with the productiveness of the tropics, the best that the temperate zone can do is scanty.

There are a few spots on the globe where the conditions of the country override these laws, and do away with these lines of discrimination in favors. Florida, Italy, the South of France and of Spain, a few islands, and South California complete the list.
These places are doubly dowered. They have the
wealths of the two zones, without the drawbacks of either.
In South California this results from two causes: first, the
presence of a temperate current in the ocean, near the
coast; second, the configuration of the mountain ranges
which intercept and reflect the sun’s rays, and shut South
California off from the rest of the continent. It is, as it
were, climatically insulated,—a sort of island on land. It
has just enough of sea to make its atmosphere temperate.
Its continental position and affinities give it a dryness no
island could have; and its climatically insulated position
gives it an evenness of temperature much beyond the
continental average.

It has thus a cool summer and a temperate winter,—
conditions which secure the broadest and highest agricult-
ural and horticultural possibilities. It is the only country
in the world where dairies and orange orchards will thrive
together.

It has its own zones of climate; not at all following
lines parallel to the equator, but following the trend of its
mountains. The California mountains are a big and inter-
esting family of geological children, with great gaps in
point of age, the Sierra Nevada being oldest of all. Time
was when the Sierra Nevada fronted directly on the Pa-
cific, and its rivers dashed down straight into the sea.
But that is ages ago. Since then have been born out of
the waters the numerous coast ranges, all following more
or less closely the shore line. These are supplemented at
Point Conception by east and west ranges, which complete
the insulating walls of South, or semi-tropic, California.
The coast ranges are the youngest of the children born;
but the ocean is still pregnant of others. Range after
range, far out to sea, they lie, with their attendant valleys,
biding their time, popping their heads out here and there
in the shape of islands.

This colossal furrow system of mountains must have its
correlative system of valleys; hence the great valley divi-
sions of the country. There may be said to be four groups
or kinds of these: the low and broad valleys, so broad
that they are plains; the high mountain valleys; the
rounded plateaus of the Great Basin, as it is called, of
which the Bernardino Mountains are the southern rim;