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THE COMPANION SERIES.

# Our Country: West.



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Echo Mountain.

## A Road of the Sierras.

We looked doubtfully at the strange, white chariot, and then at the apparently perpendicular line up Echo Mountain, in southern California, where the cable slid over its succession of wheels. Should we venture on the ascent? The cable looked small and the mountain large, and the end of cable, track and journey was hidden in the clouds.

But for the fear of ridicule some of us would have refused to go higher; we could so easily have returned to the valley below in the same electric cars that brought us up to the foot of the cable road! But the driver or conductor of the white chariot was waiting; so we shut our eyes and stepped into one of the seats.

The conductor gave a signal, and suddenly the bottom began to drop out of everything, and we to rise over the tops of things in general. Awful cañons, big mountains and mighty plains rolled out beneath us; there seemed no reason why we should not continue to rise forever.

Up and up and up! Weights seemed on my eyelids; that horrible cable incline appeared to run from my eyes to my heart; I secretly longed to lie down on the floor, and I am sure the others felt similar sensations.

"We are now approaching the steepest part of the grade, a rise of sixty-two feet in a hundred," came soothingly to our ears; and the dreadful slant seemed to become truly perpendicular. Yet we held to our pretence of decent tranquillity, and were pulled steadily and gently over the crest of the mountain to the level top. There our chariot stopped, as noiselessly as it had started, and we stepped out and looked straight down from Echo Mountain to the world below.

I have seen some of the most famous and beautiful valleys of the world, but they all seem tame compared with the

great, glowing plain of tender green and soft purple which stretched its groves of southern fruit out to a golden, shimmering, distant something which was, we knew, the Pacific Ocean. Santa Catalina Island, sixty-five miles away, shone bright and clear in purple.

After we visited the menagerie on the top of the mountain, we gave ourselves up to gazing on the beautiful scenery, and to watching the white chariots skim swiftly up to the summit, or drop noiselessly over the verge.

Though this Echo Mountain cable road is said to be the steepest, it is considered the safest mountain railway of the world. The contrivance is practically a great elevator. Its ascending and descending coaches, welded to the cable itself, precisely balance, and pass each other at a given point by automatic switches.

As the cable has been tested to a hundred tons' strain, the white chariots when loaded to their utmost capacity are small weights for it. Should anything go wrong with the machinery the chariots would simply stop, and the occupants be enabled to dismount at their leisure. Though the structure looks quite unsafe, it is really perfectly guarded against disaster.

In the power-house the big wheels and revolving cable turn slowly, governed by the dynamo, but the primary force or motor of the cable road is water. Running through a six-inch pipe, and finally through an inch-and-a-half nozzle upon a wheel, it transmits a pressure so enormous that one might better go down the incline without a cable than stand in front of that harmless-looking nozzle. That inch and a half of water is capable of going through the body of a man.

We watched the light go out of the landscape and fade over the Pacific as we sat on the piazza of the pretty hotel, which, with all its refinements of modern luxury, must have travelled up piecemeal in the white chariots. It now sits perched on the very verge of space, a kind of stationary white chariot, itself. Round on the other side were softly

flying the echoes which give the mountain its name, but on our side it was very still.

A little higher up, on a rounded knoll, gleamed the metallic walls of the observatory, which we meant to visit after we had seen the great search-light, on the platform just below us. That long finger of light had come reaching through our windows down in the valley many a night. Its beam makes bright the streets of Los Angeles, twenty-five miles away, and carries a ray to distant Redondo, on the Pacific itself.

Now its ray of light went sweeping across the plain below, resting here and there where a red light signalled for a visit. Down below, that beam had almost dazed us with its brightness; here we could stare into the very eye of the monster without blinking, for the rays do not focus so near.

Away, back and forth, went the finger, now stretching out into a full band of light, now narrowing to so fine a line that it could be but barely perceived. Some spectators with intercepting mirrors caught and flashed a ray here and a ray there, into the shadows of the cañons, on the observatory roof, or back to the hotel piazza.

From watching the light we went to the observatory, which contains a beautiful sixteen-inch glass. The perfect clearness of the atmosphere makes southern California the paradise of astronomers. We had looked through larger glasses, but not at such a height, and the elevation of thirty-five hundred feet above the murky air of the sea-level seemed to bring the stars perceptibly nearer.

We had beheld the sea and the dry land and the heavens; there was nothing else but the wider land of dreams to explore. Since we planned to come forth again at sunrise, we took a parting glance at the constellation of cities on the plain at our feet. It was a fascinating sight, even after the other constellations, and a significant one as well; we could easily forecast the merging of twinkling city with twinkling city, and imagine the time when one great city, stretching from

mountains to sea, will be a chief glory of the country we will still call great.

An unkind fog saddened our sunrise the next morning, so that we were glad to console ourselves by talking with a workman, who looked over the terribly beautiful abyss and said wearily that folks came there and made a fuss about it, but he was sure he didn't see why.

At last we turned our steps toward the chariot, which was kindly waiting to drop us over the brink. This time, instead of the bottom dropping out of things, it was the top of everything which rose and soared away, while we went slipping down through space, until it was in a kind of wonder that we found ourselves above the ground when we stopped.

In eight minutes we were among the ferns and oaks of the cañon; in another fifteen we sped between the fields of wild flowers; in half an hour more we stood in our own rose garden, with the scent of the orange groves heavy about us; and from the tropic of our palms and bananas and lime and lemon we could gaze straight up to the snowy Sierras, and mark a slender white line cutting the purple side, the route of the white chariots.

GRACE ELLERY CHANNING.

