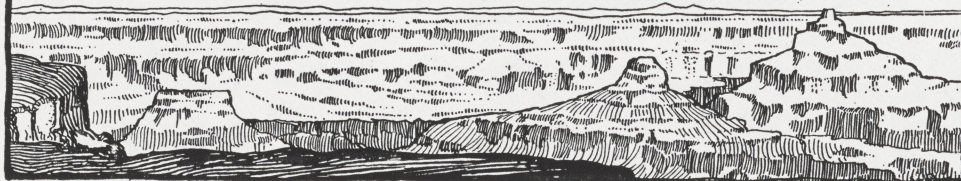


AFOOT DOWN THE GRAND CANON

BY WILLIAM S. RICE



ORIGINALLY it was my intention to descend the canyon in the usual, conventional style, with a guide and a burro train, but when two gentlemen in the tourist party from Bright Angel Hotel announced their intention of following afoot, I promptly made up my mind to be one of them. Before the caravan started to slowly file down the zigzags that seemed to drop almost over the edge of a sheer precipice, the two would-be pedestrians, whose timidity overcame them at the last minute, left me to make the journey alone. But it was better so, to view the awful grandeur of this tremendous gap in the face of nature alone with my own thoughts and my faithful camera to record my various impressions from stand-points not to be gained by traveling on muleback or with the average tourist, whose intentions are simply to "do the canyon" in a hurry.

I wanted to take my own time going down and wander off the beaten path when a certain composition struck my fancy for a snapshot. This I knew would be impossible when one went with a party, for guides usually travel on schedule time and grow impatient if one does not always keep in sight of the tourist party.

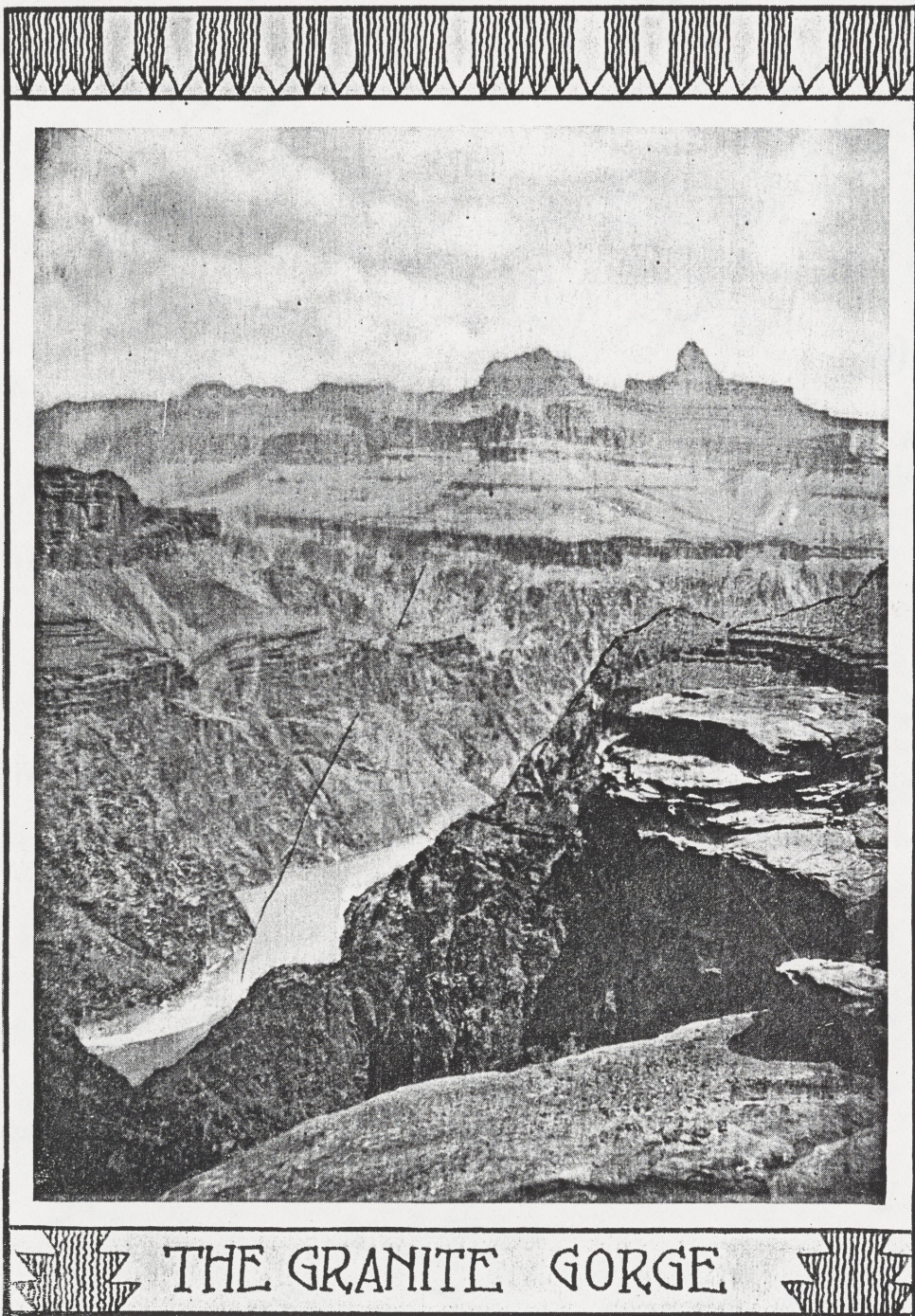
I was told that the trail was a perfectly safe one, and the distance was only four miles from the hotel on the "rim" to the top of the granite wall overlooking the great "gorge" through which the river sullenly roars.

Shortly after sun-up the caravan started; and when the last one disap-

peared over the "rim," the leader of the party passed me several hundred feet below the top where I made my first halt to view the panorama from a favorable outlook. Fifteen miles across at the distant horizon was the opposite "rim" which I could trace by a line of light gray stone. How unbelievable it all seemed! And yet only the day before I had seen through a telescope a cluster of tents in the canyon, that from this outlook appeared like several little scraps of paper. These, I was told, were three miles distant. This fact established in mind might have given me a basis upon which to make a comparison; but there are times when well established facts make no impression upon one's mind, and this was one of them.

Halting for breath upon this natural rock observatory, shaded by Douglas spruces, I stood long and gazed intently at the wonderful panorama spread beneath. All around and above me for hundreds of feet towered the jagged rim, while below, more than a half mile, stretched the great plateau over which zigzagged the narrow trail. The place was silent as the tomb—save at intervals when the faint voices of the descending tourists stole upwards through the morning air. A stray bird now and then chattered in the Pinon trees, but aside from these, there were no other noises save the crunching of the stones under my feet as the course ever led me downward.

Above to the very edge of the "rim" the growth of yellow pine and juniper was never lost sight of. Below this fringe of



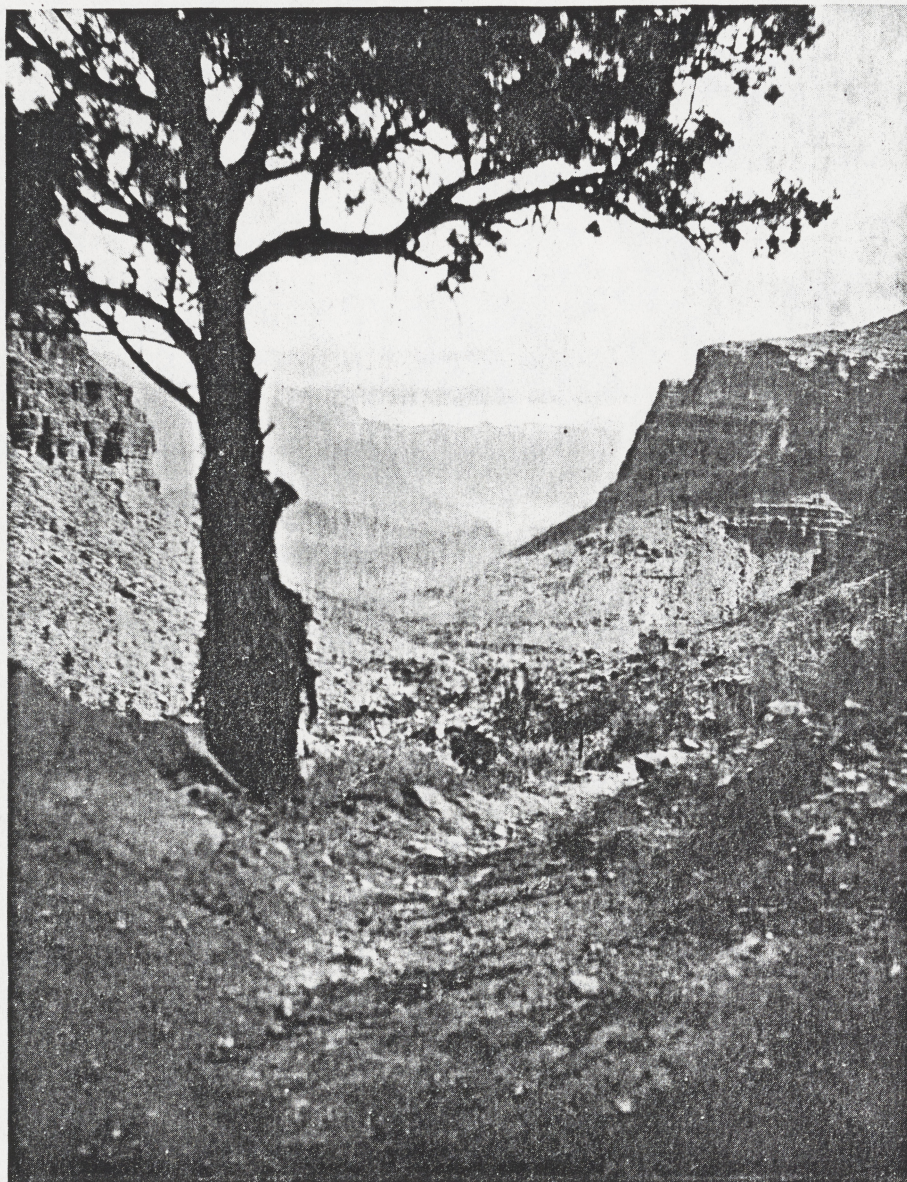
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sombre green are vertical walls of sparkling white, blue, pink and red sandstone. These are the faces of solid strata, some of them hundreds of feet in thickness, through which the main, or upper, canyon is cut. The sloping banks of broken stone, known to the geologist as taluses, which lie between the various perpendicular strata bear trees and bushes. The dry bottom of the upper canyon, some thirty-five hundred feet below the rim, supports a stunted growth of sage, yucca, cactus and other desert plants. Thus mingling with the brilliant colors of the vertical rock faces, are the dull greens and grays of the taluses and bottom of the upper canyon. The entire effect, under a brilliant sun in a perfectly clear atmosphere, is gloriously beautiful. Then when great billowy cumulus clouds, purple-toned on the under side, cast their fantastic blue-violet shadows over table lands, peaks and minor canyons, the effect is like one vast, rare mosaic. These constantly changing effects linger long in one's memory. Beautiful—the most evanescent of gradations of lights and shadows strangely blending with the soft buffs, blue grays, pinks and dull Indian reds of the canyon recur at every morning and evening hour. Towards noon the lightest rocks appeared almost white in the glare of the Arizona sun; but, as afternoon cast long, purplish-blue shadows across side canyon and across perpendicular walls, the pinks and buffs and dull Indian reds grew warmer. About four in the afternoon, the low rumble of thunder broke the death-like stillness of the apparently bottomless pit filled with this marvelous mixture of colors, dark below and light above.

From every turn in the trail new vistas opened out; now it was a butte of reddish brown-stone that stood out prominently from the trail—the "Battleship," so named from its fancied resemblance to a modern man-of-war. After passing the awful grandeur of the upward gorge, with many a backward turn at the gradually increasing height of the tawny cliffs, the tributary canyon of Bright Angel Creek loomed up in the distant perspective, a dark, violet zig-zag gash in the canyon walls on the opposite side of the river. Soon the trail became less precipitous. It brought me to the spot known as the Indian Gardens,

where the colony of tents mentioned heretofore cozily nestled amid a cool growth of willows. The presence of running water here was very welcome to my parched tongue as nowhere else on the trail was there the slightest suspicion of a spring. After inspecting a ruined stone building and refreshing myself with the lunch put up by the hotel people, and copious draughts of the delicious mountain water, I decided to take the trail to the left and view the river from the top of the great granite gorge, 1200 feet overhead, instead of going the remaining distance to the bank of the river itself. The rest of the distance was mostly along the banks of Willow Creek and then over a rather level plateau sparsely covered with talus, sage brush, cactus and other desert growths. No friendly junipers nor pinon furnished me with their grateful shade once I left the willow-fringed banks of the creek and struck out over the dimly defined trail across this miniature desert. To add to the sun's uncomfortable rays the unapproachable cacti often thrust their stinging spines unceremoniously into my nether limbs in a most aggravating fashion. For a while the scenery did not impress one, but when the end of the journey was reached, like a climax in a great story, the granite gorge opened up beneath the jagged, rocky shelf that hangs dizzily over the terrible abyss and offered a magnificent point of observation from which to obtain photographs. The panorama here is less extensive than from the rim, and shows up to better advantage on a 4x5 ground-glass focusing screen than the latter, which, outside of an 8x10 and a telephoto lens is a mere jumble of inconsequential ridges and furrows.

Dwarfed by such prodigious mountain shores, which rise immediately from the water's edge at an angle so acute that would deny footing to a mountain sheep, it is not easy to estimate confidently the width and volume of the tawny, muddy flood whose dull, sullen roar faintly reached my ears. I wandered up, although spell-bound, upon a mighty monolith or shelf of rock that commands a view up stream and down for many miles. Beyond, the river disappeared, apparently behind the mountain walls. Beneath me it slipped by with an oily smoothness for a



A VISTA FROM THE TRAIL

space, and then suddenly broke into violent waves that combed back against the current and shot unexpectedly here and there, while the seething volume swayed tide-like from side to side, and long curling breakers formed and held their outline lengthwise of the shore, despite the seemingly irresistible velocity of the river. The stream is often laden with drift huge tree trunks which it tosses like tooth-picks in its terrible play.

warningly against a longer delay. With many a backward glance I hurried across the plateau and soon began the ascent of the zig-zags. The little spring at the Indian Garden again quaffed my thirst and bridged over another possible water famine until the summit of the rim should be gained. The thunder shower raged in the canyon far below, but only a few stray drops managed to reach me and moisten my clothes. For myself I did not fear,

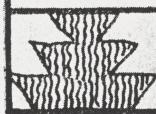
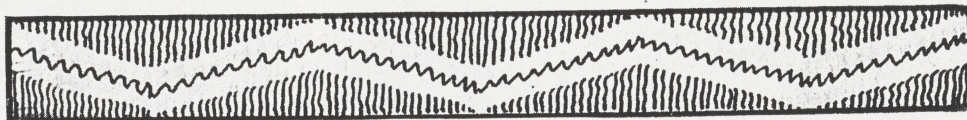


BRIGHT ANGEL TRAIL

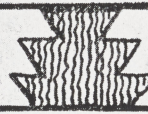
Long could I have loitered on this dizzy edge and gazed on that scene of strange fascination, but the thought of the most strenuous part of the trip afoot, the climb upward, kept constantly reminding me that the journey must be retraced long ere the shadows lengthened into twilight. Moreover, a threatening sky and low and distant thunder murmurings protested

but the camera would be a wreck should there be a downpour such as we had had a few days previous.

Nature was very kind; she waited until I was snugly quartered at the log cabin about the roaring fireplace before her tears fell. It was no gentle downpour, either. The lightning flashed and the thunder boomed and reverberated from crag to crag



THE RIVER FROM PLATEAU



in a deafening bombardment. At times the log house trembled like a pine tree in a gale, and the rain came down in torrents. By and bye the rage of the storm was spent, the sun peeked out through the golden rifts in the gray blanket overhead, tinging the remarkable peaks and "ruined castles" in a deep orange-red glory. Now the whole face of nature was changed. The multitude of spires, peaks, side canyons and walls, all blended into one harmonious whole—a deep, unfathomable gorge of purple gloom, and only the most elevated peaks—the leading actors in the calcium light of this marvelous amphitheatre, caught the blood-red tints of the after-glow.

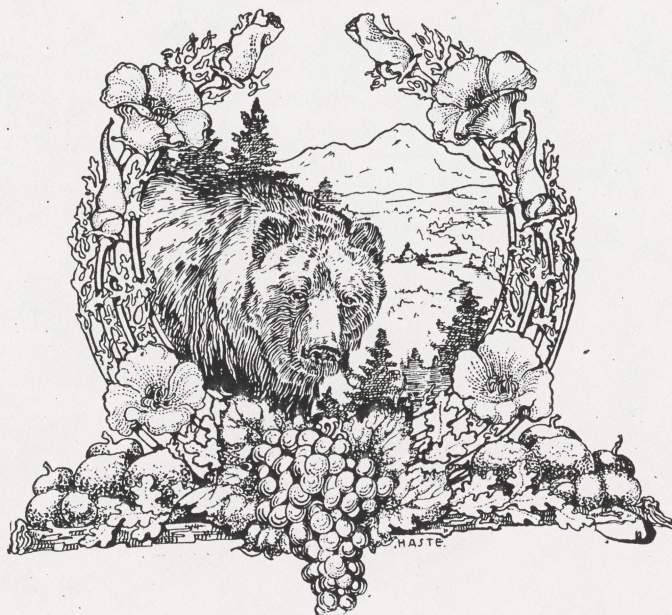
Finally even these sun-fires died away, leaving the whole scene a monochrome of sombre violet. Just as the scene was dissolving from twilight to moonlight, several great, white, balloon-like, cumulus clouds floated up from the river, until they overflowed the rim. Slowly, majestically in spectacular grandeur they moved! The stars and the moon came out, and another phase of the canyon's moods lay spread before us, as the daylight scene in part revived in silver light, and a thousand spectral forms projected from the impenetrable gloom—"dreams of mountains, as in their sleep they brood on things eter-

nal."

Long might I have gazed and never tired of the scene, but there was a crisp, frosty tang in the September air, and I tore myself away from this enchanting scene to snuggle around the blazing fireplace at the inn where, in the cheery atmosphere of indoors, fellow tourists drawn hither from all quarters of the globe to witness this, the greatest of all scenic wonders, exchanged tales of travel that were both interesting and thrilling.

There was the middle-aged couple from a farm in Nebraska, a prominent New York educator, tourists from Phoenix, Denver, St. Louis, Chicago and the East, Presidents of railroads, bankers, and last, but not least, many ladies and a few children.

All who had been down to the river were enthusiastic about the trip, although none of them were unmindful of being sore from the saddle. The few new arrivals who contemplated taking the trail on the morrow, listened eagerly to the various experiences, but to not one of them did my method of "hitting the trail" appeal. It was "too strenuous," they all declared, even the sore ones, and yet on the following morning I could have made the trip again without the slightest feeling of soreness or fatigue.



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