

AN INTRODUCTION TO CLARENCE KING'S
"THE THREE LAKES"

BY FRANCIS P. FARQUHAR



IT will never cease to be a matter of regret that Clarence King did not more often apply himself to writing down the fascinating tales and vivid descriptions with which he so generously entertained his friends in conversation. His early enthusiasm gave us *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*; the rising tide of his professional experience produced *Systematic Geology*; but there the record stands, except for a few "occasional pieces," among which *The Helmet of Mambrino* stands out as an example of what might have been.¹

Several years ago, in the course of gathering material relating to the Whitney Survey of California (1860-1873) and King's Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel (1867-1879), I heard rumors of a poem called "The Three Lakes," but was unable to find a trace of anything substantial or even a printed reference to it. Then, one day I learned that George Gibbs, Jr., a member of the Sierra Club, had in his possession an album of photographs in which there were some poems and letters of Clarence King. I eagerly sought it out and was rejoiced to find that here was, indeed, "The Three Lakes." The reason for the obscurity now became apparent, for it was disclosed that only three copies had been made: one each for three little girls for whom the three lakes were named — Marian, Lall, and Jan. It was from two of these little girls, the Misses Sarah and Joanna Williams, of Yonkers, New York, that Mr. Gibbs had received the album, together with a letter from which the following paragraphs are quoted:

When we were *very* young Mr. and Mrs. Howland and their two children, Marian and George, came to live in Irvington,

¹ *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*.—First edition, 1872; in 1874 an addition was made to the chapter on Mount Whitney in an edition called the fourth; another edition in 1902; a new edition, with preface and notes by Francis P. Farquhar, 1935. A number of the chapters first appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1871.

Systematic Geology.—Volume I of *Report of the Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel*, 1878.

The Helmet of Mambrino.—A letter written by King from Spain to his friend Don Horacio (Horace F. Cutter, of San Francisco), in *Century Magazine*, May 1886; included in *Clarence King Memoirs*, published by The Century Association in 1904; reprinted with introduction by Francis P. Farquhar, by the Book Club of California, 1938.

New York, in a house near us. Mr. Clarence King was Mrs. Howland's son by her first marriage. When Mr. King came home after climbing the Sierra Nevada, and later from his "United States Geological Survey of the 40th Parallel," he used to come to our house and relate his adventures to an enthralled audience composed of our grandmother, father and mother, and especially of our two small selves. One of his fellow-workers later said, "He had a gift of narration," and he surely had, to a remarkable degree.

Marian Howland and we often played together and our friendship was embodied in "The Three Lakes." Mr. King wrote the book and had *three* copies of it made, one for his sister, and one for each of us . . .

One thing more — In his letter to "Lall and Jan" (our childish names) he wrote "to *demoralize* your devoted friend." On one of his visits to our home, after his family left Irvington, he said he *must* return to New York in the afternoon, in spite of urgent entreaties to him to remain. However, after our noon dinner, when we had for dessert a boiled indian pudding, with a sauce of sour cream and molasses, he declared the pudding had demoralized him and that he would not go to the city. It was long a joke with us . . .

The album contains twenty-two leaves of stiff paper bound in heavy covers of red leather with ornamental tooling. The leaves measure $16\frac{1}{8}$ x 12 inches. The contents consist of two poems, each one page, two letters each four pages, and twelve mounted photographs. The poems, title-page, and half-title are printed; the letters are reproduced by lithography from King's elegantly handwritten copy. The letters are dated 1870, as is the title page.

Here, then, was "The Three Lakes." But, of the lakes themselves, where were they? Were they still known as Marian, Lall, and Jan? The poems and letters stated very clearly that Lake Lall and Lake Jan were in the Uinta Mountains of northern Utah, but Lake Marian was not so easily placed. A granite rock-basin chiseled by ice, in a desert region, suggested the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada. But, for that location, the date was wrong. In 1870 King was working farther east on his Fortieth Parallel Survey. Perhaps his reports and maps would furnish a clue. King was always very sparing of narrative and dates in his reports, but his descriptions were usually very full and specific. Turning to *Systematic Geology*, it took but a

few minutes to find references to Lake Marian and to locate it in a general way in the Humboldt Range of eastern Nevada, now known as the Ruby Mountains.² Moreover, an illustration, in chromolithograph, corresponded closely with one of the photographs in "The Three Lakes." The atlas which accompanies the reports narrowed the search still farther, for on one of the maps the name appears at the head of a stream which flows into Franklin Lake on the easterly side of the range. At the point where this stream reaches the valley there is the name "Overland Ranch," and one has only to turn to maps of the present day to find this stream shown as "Overland Creek." Overland Lake and Lake Marian, then, must be the same.

There the matter stood when Mrs. Farquhar and I set out last September to visit the three lakes, if they could be found. At Elko, Nevada, we were fortunate in securing the assistance of Mr. E. M. Steninger, publisher of the *Elko Daily Free Press*, whose intimate knowledge of the Humboldt country enabled him at once to confirm the identification of Lake Marian with Overland Lake. He helped us on our way by telephoning to Ruby Valley for horses and a guide. That night we lay in our sleeping bags on the shore of the little lake amid the familiar surroundings of ten thousand feet, just as if we were in the Sierra, certain that we were at the scene of Clarence King's adventure of long ago in "the Stone Giant's Bowl." In the morning we wandered around the lake and took photographs from precisely the same points as those in the album, even identifying the rocks in the foreground. Time did not permit of our climbing to the head of the Giant, however, for we still had before us the search for Lake Lall and Lake Jan.

In Utah we fared not quite so well. We knew that our lakes lay near Mount Agassiz, and there was no difficulty in locating that mountain on the map. There were many lakes thereabouts, among them Mirror Lake, at the head of Duchesne River, where we knew that there were good accommodations. At Mirror Lake we did, indeed, find a pleasant lodge and a fine view of Mount Agassiz. But there we also found that the lakes we sought were on the other side of the range, well out of reach save by a pack trip. Reluctantly we gave up our visit to Lake Lall and Lake Jan and to Strawberry Hill until such time as we might have more leisure to explore this

²*Systematic Geology*, pp. 62-65, 475-476.

beautiful region, either from Mirror Lake or from the northerly approach at the headwaters of Bear River.

Marian Lake, Lake Lall and Lake Jan — they are there still, just where Clarence King found them nearly seventy years ago. But their names have faded away and are no longer to be found on the maps. Perhaps the names will be restored. Or, perhaps it is just as well as it is — that they should remain a little apart from reality, resting lightly on those lovely lakes in the land of poesy, once a fairyland to three little girls.

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THREE LAKES

MARIAN LALLMAN

and how they were named.





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THE STONE GIANT'S BOWL.



FAIR in the heart of the desert, over a desolate lowland,
Looms, in the purple of evening, the glorious crest of a mountain;
Snowy the locks of the monarch, and over his broad rocky shoulders
The green perpetual forest hangs close, like an emerald vesture.
The white-haired motionless statue, sitting with gaze never turning,
Holds in his rock-arms a basin, cut from the silvery granite,
Chiselled by ice and by tempest, trimmed with the fir and the pine tree.
Carefully, year after year, this giant pours from the basin
A streamlet as clear as a crystal, which, hour by hour descending,
Reaches at last to the lowland, there by the feet of the statue,
Quenching the thirst of the desert, making for ever a garden.
Thus from his castle of granite, the old stone king of the mountains
Silent and motionless sits, and from eyes never closing
Looks downward and east on the desert, and over the bright blooming garden
Where close to the skirts of his garments and over his sandals of granite,
Blossoms and soft waving grasses, and silvery whispering willows,
Hide in their shadowed recesses the mother-bird patiently sitting,
And waft to the rose of the morning the welcome of carolling thrushes.
The white-haired motionless statue sits with lips ever speechless,
And watches from morning till evening, and on from evening to morning,
The outstretched plain of the desert, where patient and wearily marching
The trains of emigrant people, seeking for ever the sunset,
Urge onward the slow-plodding oxen and long for the cool of the evening
When the sun, low descending, gilds crown-like the brow of the mountain,
And twilight on mountain-side gathers, and far falls the lengthening shadow.
There then burns brightly the camp-fire; there, too, the weary and foot-sore
Rest from their toil of the desert—forgetting the sun and the whirlwind;
Over them sail the slow stars, through peaceful, sheltering heavens,
And the kindly Stone Giant pours from his bowl, never failing,
The silvery, musical brooklet, singing the weary to slumber.

My dear Marie

When I camped at the foot of the great mountain which sits over the desert like a statue holding the stone-bowl and while I sat in my tent door I wondered why so full a brook should forever flow from the the basin without draining it all. I looked up to the snowy head of the peak and resolved to climb there and make the old fellow's acquaintance.

So the good Jim saddled our two mules Minnie and Max and we rode up the mountain gorge, following as closely as we could the willow covered bank of our brook. As we ascended the cañon grew dark and narrow, its huge rocky walls towering up against the sky and covering us with deep gloomy shadows. At last we reached the lap of the mountain and came there upon the edge of the stone-bowl and were charmed to find the brook flowing from a lovely mountain lake. A clear sparkling basin of blue water, surrounded by crags of granite, about whose feet the perpetual snow lay in deep white banks. The slender shafts of alpine pines gather in clusters, sheltering a carpet of pleasant grass. Here and there the snow sloped down to the margin of the lake and thrust the edges of its drifts into the very water.

From above, the snowy head of the mountain looked pleasantly down, as if he would like to ask "well young man what do you think of my lake?" Such a lake as yours, I told him, should have a name and I am coming up to whisper one which will please your granite majesty.

So up I climbed all alone, while Jim rambled about the shores of the lake and the mules kept their noses in the tender grass.

Up over a rocky shoulder of granite and through the green pine of the giant's coat I made my way till I came to a rough cliff, too high to jump over, too steep to scramble down, and here I tied my climbing

rope and went down band over band like a sailor, but it was tiresome
and when I found a chink I put my foot in it and rested a moment.
At last I stood on the head of the statue and whispered, "old fellow,
I name your rock bowl down there LAKE MARIAN." The sun
just then streamed through the clouds and the whole face of the
mountain smiled as if he quite liked the name.

But the good natured old fellow said never a word, he only kept
smiling about it more and more, as the clouds cleared away.

So my little sister your name is given the pretty lake: all the way
home Jim and I kept saying, what a pleasant joke it all was.

Sometime you shall go up and see my granite friend with

Your loving brother

Clarence

The desert

1870

THE ICE DRAGON'S NEST.



IGH in the sapphire heaven, where the heart of America rises,
Up o'er a green waved ocean of limitless plain and of prairie,
Bright with the snows of the ages, as the crest of a tumbling breaker,
Tower the luminous summits of grand and rocky Uinta.
Why do they watch the red sun from the far off Atlantic arising
Up from the golden aurora, on over desolate deserts
And far white lines of Sierras, till into the starlit Pacific
He sinks, and the twilight behind him glows pale in the purple horizon?
Why thus love they the sunlight—fearful of cold and of darkness?
This is the answering story told by the high Rocky Mountains.
Ages long gone and forgotten, when young were the lofty Uinta,
Born of the snow-cloud and tempest, a white-ice terrible dragon
Rested his hard frozen body, and grew on the flank of the mountain;
Cased in an armor of granite, strong armed—ice-hearted and cruel—
He grew while the sky, ever clouded, buried the peaks in a snow-drift;
Then, dragging his long icy body with slow irresistible movement,
Crawled through the crags and the gorges, till, from his den in the mountain,
Reaching the verdurous valley, froze with his breathing the pine tree.
Wild burst the snow-cloud above him, white were the rocky Uinta.
Then from the far azure heaven, high above mountain and snow-cloud,
Shone the red sun in his brightness, warming the icy Uinta,
Melting the snow from their shoulders, dispelling the storm-bearing vapors;
Thick, and like spears swiftly flying, fell the red arrows of sunlight,
Smiting the ice and the armor—slaying the glacier dragon.
Vanished the snow, and to-day—where the terrible monster
Crawled, and with armor of granite, blasted and smote on the snow-cliff,
Wearing huge tracks in the mountain, chilling the air with his breathing—
Green grow the pines, and the flowers breathe their perpetual fragrance
Up to the sun as he sails through the cloudless and sapphire heaven,
And forever the rocky Uinta glow red in the evening and morning.

Dear Lall and Jan

The rocky Uinta towered above my camp and the sparkling Bear River flowed past my bed. In the dim night I could see the summits traced against a sky full of flashing stars. I made up my mind to climb the highest peak next day and then I fell asleep. Quite early I was in the saddle and rode alone up into the heart of the Uintas. The deep valley I followed was carved out of the solid rock and its whole surface was strangely polished by the old glacier which ages ago, the sun had melted away. At every step I saw the tracks of the ice monster, here the surface of the granite would shine like a marble mantel and there lay great trains of boulders just where they had fallen when the glacier perished.

Pine trees and little velvety lawns bright with apline blooms—gentians—wild strawberries grew now and then in the valley but high above and all about rose the mighty cliffs of solid unbroken rock their summits sharp and terrible, piercing the clouds and catching a glow from the far unrisen sun.

I scanned the highest peak from tip to base and saw as I thought a possible way to climb it, so I "picketed" my mule Minnie knee deep in some jolly grass and set out.

It seemed to me I'd never reach the summit and I think now and then I was a little scared, for it is nice work making one's way up sliding debris slopes, where at any jump you may start a young avalanche and when you watch a rock go bounding down a thousand feet or so, it is no sort of comfort to think how odd you would look yourself, spinning and bumping along after the same style.

I was tired and hungry when I reached the top and walked to the brink of the great precipice, but I forgot all that, when I looked down into the valley and saw all of the Ice dragon's nest. There among the polished rocks and pines lay two beautiful lakes, side by side in the

very tracks of the glacier. I ran along the cliff to a long field of snow and down I slid like a wild creature, the snow flying in clouds and I going heels over head. Down through the pines I ran, till I reached the glacier tracks and stood on the ridge between my two lakes.

At my feet grew wild strawberries!

I looked a moment and then I remarked to a friendly sort of pine tree near by, who seemed to be the oldest inhabitant, "if any one comes up here ever, just please say that this one is LAKE LALL and that LAKE JAN and this pleasant green slope I should like to have you remember is STRAWBERRY HILL." The pine tree nodded more than I think could be accounted for by the wind. As I cooked my solitary supper that night "Minnie", who was tied in the pines, looked wistfully through the falling snow, but there was nothing in that frying pan, which could comfort her or demoralize

Your devoted friend

Clarence King

The Uintas

1870