



## **Picturesque America; or, the land we live in**

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

**Bryant, William Cullen**

**New York, 1874**

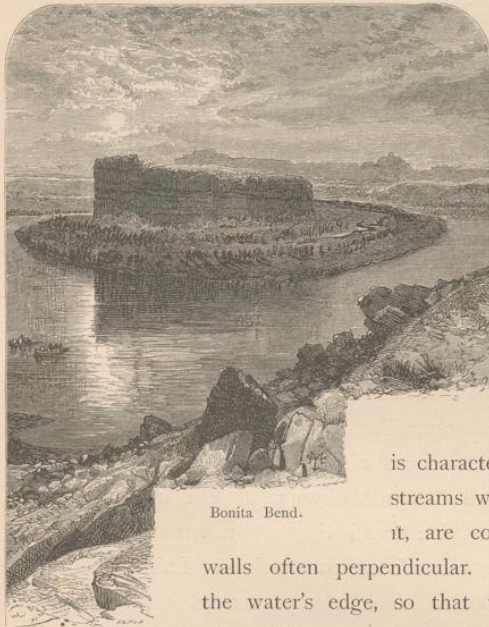
The Cañons Of The Colorado.

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## THE CAÑONS OF THE COLORADO.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOMAS MORAN.



Bonita Bend.

NONE of the works of Nature on the American Continent, where many things are done by her upon a scale of grandeur elsewhere unknown, approach in magnificence and wonder the cañons of the Colorado. The river-system of the Colorado is, in extent of area drained, the second or third in the United States. The drainage of the Mississippi is, of course, far more extensive, and the drainage of the Columbia is nearly equal, or perhaps a little greater. It is characteristic of the Colorado that nearly all the streams which unite to form it, or which flow into it, are confined in deep and narrow gorges, with walls often perpendicular. Sometimes the walls rise directly from the water's edge, so that there is only room between for the passage of the stream. In other places, the bottoms of the gorges widen out into valleys, through which roads may pass; and sometimes they contain small tracts of arable land. For the most part, the walls of the cañons of the Colorado-River system are not above a few hundred feet in height; and yet, there are more than a thousand miles of cañons where they rise ten or twelve hundred feet in perpendicular cliffs. The Grand Cañon, which Major Powell calls "the most profound chasm known on the globe," is, for a distance of over two hundred miles, at no point less than four thousand feet deep.

The Green River, which is familiar to every person who has passed over the Union Pacific Railroad, is one of the principal sources of the Colorado. The first successful attempt to explore the Grand Cañon was made by Major J. W. Powell, in 1869. He reached it then by descending the Green River with boats, built in Chicago, and carried by rail to Green-River Station. He accomplished the voyage of nearly a thousand miles in three months, one month being occupied in the passage of the Grand Cañon. Father Escalante had seen the Colorado in 1776, and the map which he constructed shows clearly the point at which he crossed. Fremont and Whipple had seen the cañon; and



Ives, in his expedition of 1857 and 1858, saw the Kanab, one of its largest branches, which he mistook for the Grand Cañon itself. But, previous to Major Powell's voyage of exploration, the course of a great part of the river was as little known as the sources of the Nile; and the accounts of the wonders of the Grand Cañon were held by many to be rather mythical, and greatly exaggerated.

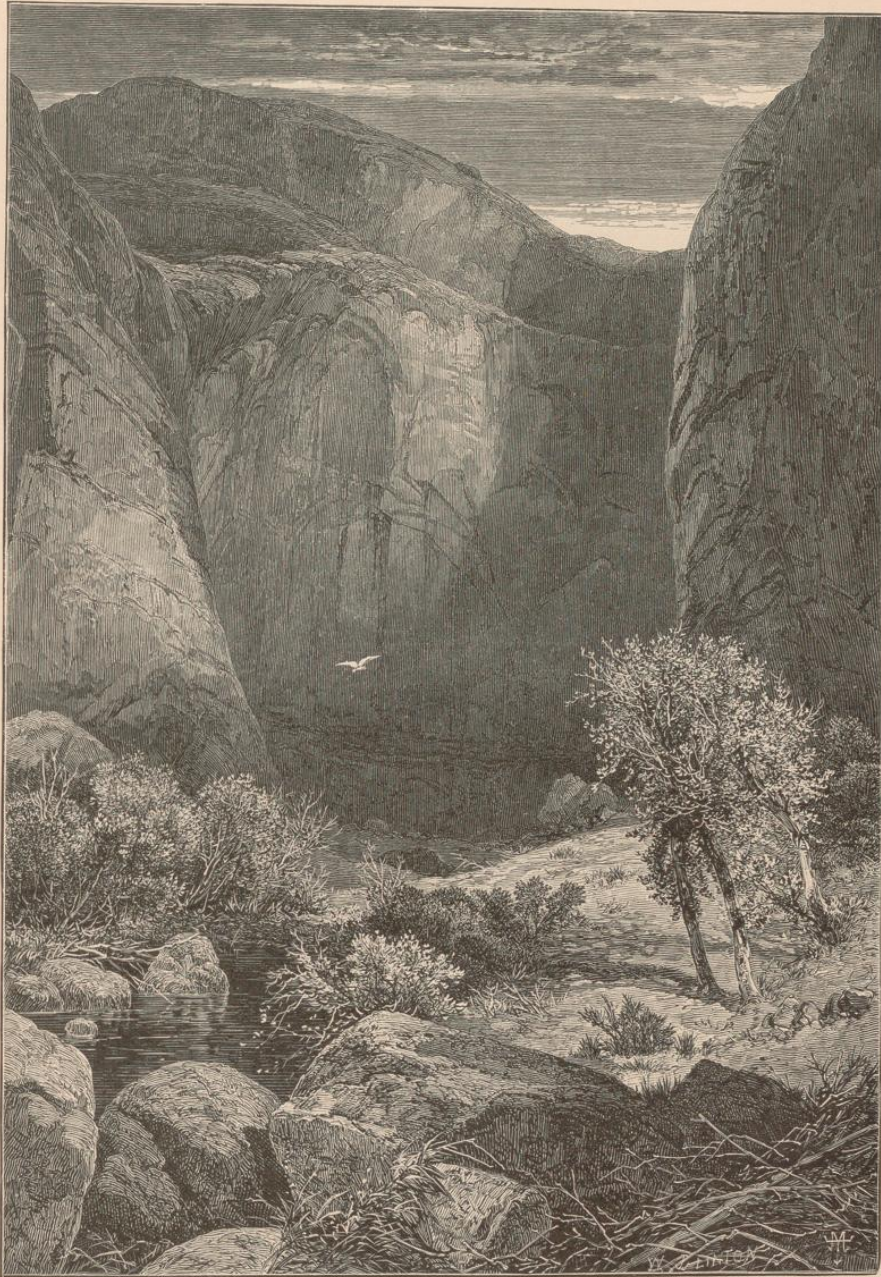
The Colorado is formed by the junction of the Grand and Green Rivers in the eastern part of Utah. The distance from Green-River Station, by the course of the river, to the junction of the two streams, is four hundred fifty-eight and a half miles. The cañons begin very soon after leaving the railroad, and in the series named are Flaming Gorge, Kingfisher, and Red Cañons, Cañon of Lodore, Whirlpool and Yampa Cañons, Cañon of Desolation, Gray, Labyrinth, Stillwater, Cataract, Narrow, Glen, and Marble Cañons. Each has some peculiar characteristic, which, in most instances, is indicated by the name. There is generally no break in the walls between the different cañons, the divisions being marked by remarkable changes in their geological structure. The cañons whose names above precede Cataract, are on Green River before it joins the waters of the Grand.

Labyrinth is one of the lower cañons of the Green River. It is a wide and beautiful cañon, with comparatively low walls, but perpendicular and impassable. Indeed, from Gunnison's Crossing, one hundred and sixteen miles above the junction of the Grand and Green, to the running out of the Grand Cañon, a distance of five hundred eighty-seven and a half miles, there are only two places, and they are not more than a mile apart, where the river and its chasm can be crossed. At one point in Labyrinth Cañon, the river makes a long bend, in the bow of which it sweeps around a huge circular *butte*, whose regular and perpendicular walls look as though they might have been laid by a race of giant craftsmen. At a distance the pile resembles a vast, turret-shaped fortress, deserted and partly broken down. This point in the river is called Bonita Bend, and a view of it has been drawn by Mr. Moran from photographs taken by Major Powell's party. The waters in this cañon are smooth and shoal, and afforded the explorers, for many miles, a grateful rest from the toil and danger of shooting rapids, or making wearisome portages of the boats.

The junction of the Grand and Green Rivers brings together a flood of waters about equal in volume to the flow of Niagara. The Grand and Green meet in a narrow gorge more than two thousand feet deep; and at this point the cañons of the Colorado begin.

The first is called Cataract Cañon. It is about forty miles long. The descent of the river through this cañon is very great, and the velocity acquired by the current is sometimes equal to the speed of the fastest railroad-train. Great buttresses of the walls stand out into the rushing flood at frequent intervals, turning the rapid current into boiling whirlpools, which were encountered by the adventurous boatmen with great peril and





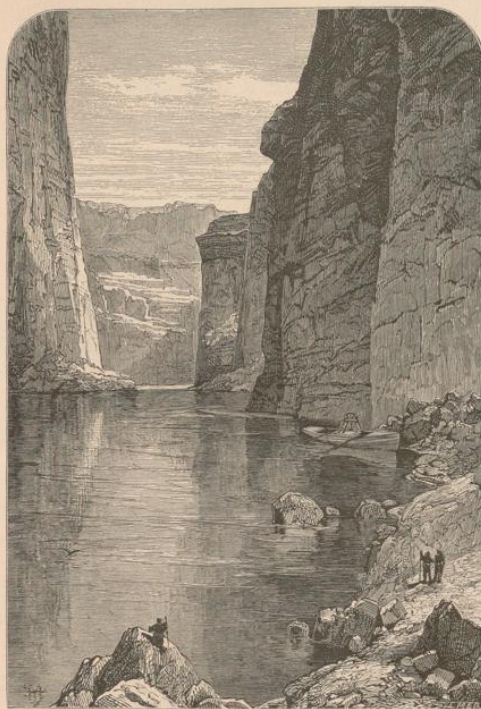


labor. At the foot of Cataract Cañon, the walls of the chasm approach each other, and, for a distance of seven miles, the water rushes through Narrow Cañon at the rate of forty miles an hour.

At the end of Narrow Cañon, the character of the gorge changes, and, from that point to the place where the Paria River enters the Colorado, a distance of a hundred and forty and a half miles, it is called Glen Cañon. At the mouth of the Paria, a trail leads down the cliffs to the bottom of the cañon on both sides, and animals and wagons can be taken down and crossed over in boats. The Indians swim across on logs.

A mile above the Paria is the Crossing of the Fathers, where Father Escalante and

his hundred priests passed across the cañon. An alcove in this cañon, which the artist has drawn, illustrates the general character of the walls, and the scenery from which the cañon takes its name. The smooth and precipitous character of the walls of Glen Cañon is well shown in the illustration. The chasm is carved in homogeneous red sandstone, and in some places, for a thousand feet on the face of the rock, there is scarce a check or seam.



Buttresses of Marble Cañon.

The most beautiful of all the cañons begins at the mouth of the Paria, and extends to the junction of the Little Colorado, or Chiquito, as it is called by the Indians. This part of the gorge is named Marble Cañon, and is sixty-five and a half miles long. The walls are of limestone or marble, beautifully carved and polished, and the forms assumed have the most remarkable

resemblances to ruined architecture. The colors of the marble are various—pink, brown, gray, white, slate-color, and vermilion. The beautiful forms, with a suggestion of the grand scale on which they are constructed, are given by the two views in this cañon, which the artist has drawn. But it is only on large canvas, and by the use of the many-tinted brush, that any reproduction can be made, approaching truthfulness, of the combination of the grand and beautiful exhibited in the sculpturing, the colors, and the awful depth, of Marble Cañon.





MARBLE CAÑON.



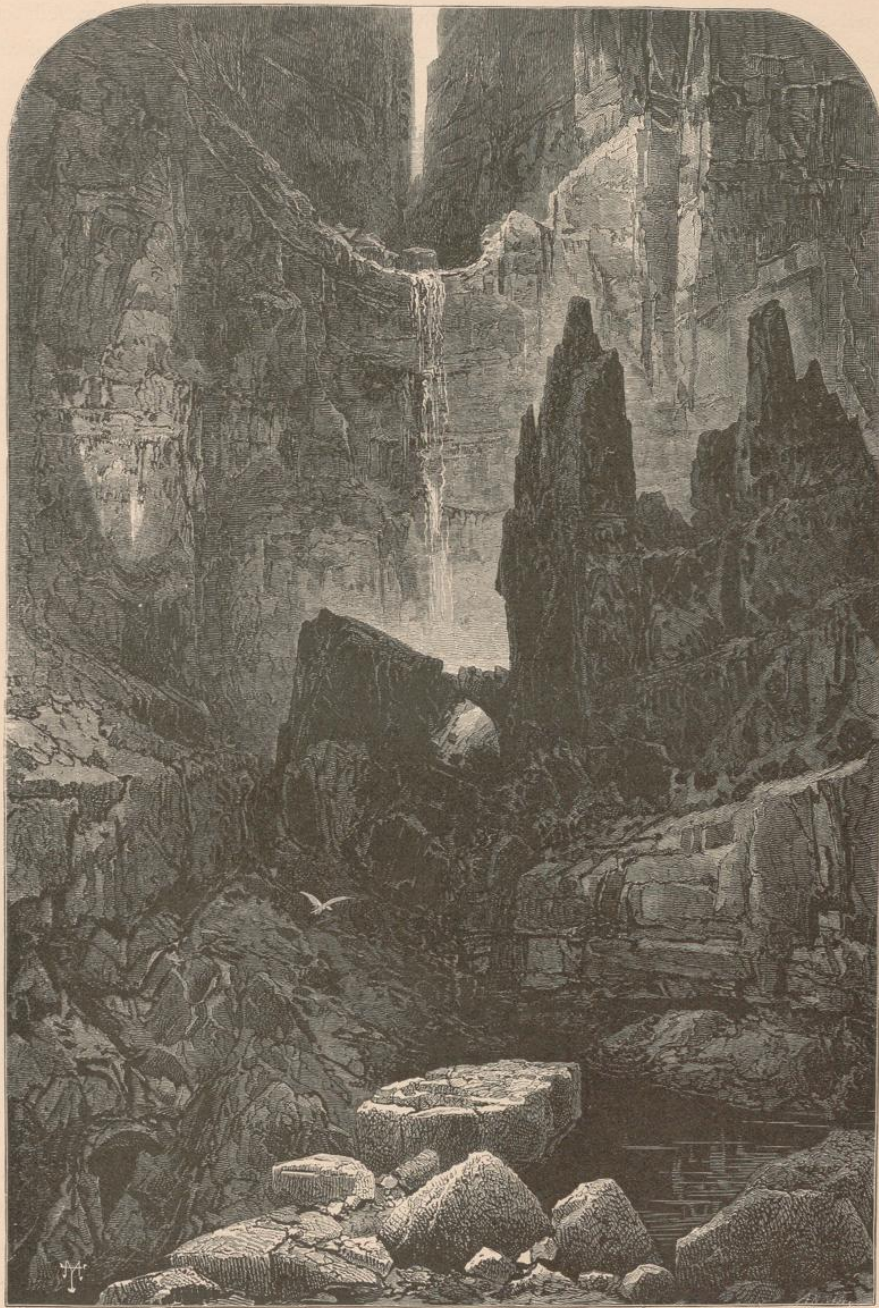
The Marble Cañon runs out at the junction of the Chiquito and Colorado, at which point the Grand Cañon begins. The head of the Grand Cañon is in the north-eastern part of Arizona, and it runs out in the northwestern part, lying wholly within that Territory. Its general course is westerly, but it makes two great bends to the south. It is two hundred and seventeen and a half miles long, and the walls vary in height from four thousand to six thousand two hundred and thirty-three feet. It is cut through a series of levels of varying altitudes, the chasm being deepest, of course, where it passes through the highest. There are in the cañon no perpendicular cliffs more than three thousand feet in height. At that elevation from the river, the sides slope back, and rise by a series of perpendicular cliffs and benches to the level of the surrounding country. In many places it is possible to find gorges or side-cañons, cutting down through the upper cliffs, by which it is possible, and in some instances easy, to approach to the edge of the wall which rises perpendicularly from the river. At three thousand feet above the river, the chasm is often but a few hundred feet wide. At the highest elevation mentioned, the distance across is generally from five to ten miles.

At various places the chasm is cleft through the primal granite rock to the depth of twenty-eight hundred feet. In those parts of the cañon, which are many miles of its whole extent, the chasm is narrow, the walls rugged, broken, and precipitous, and the navigation of the river dangerous. The daring voyagers gave profound thanks, as though they had escaped from death, whenever they passed out from between the walls of granite into waters confined by lime or sandstone. Mr. Moran has drawn a section of these granite walls, showing some of the pinnacles and buttresses which are met at every turn of the river. The waters rush through the granite cañons at terrific speed. Great waves, formed by the irregular sides and bottom, threatened every moment to engulf the boats. Spray dashes upon the rocks fifty feet above the edge of the river, and the gorge is filled with a roar as of thunder, which is heard many miles away.

Fortunately, the wonders of the Grand Cañon can now be seen without incurring any of the peril, and but little of the hardship, endured by Major Powell and his companions. The writer of this, and Mr. Moran, the artist, visited two of the most interesting points in the cañon in July and August, 1873. We travelled by stage in hired vehicles—they could not be called carriages—and on horseback from Salt-Lake City to Toquerville, in Southwestern Utah, and thence about sixty miles to Kanab, just north of the Arizona line. Quite passable roads have been constructed by the Mormons this whole distance of about four hundred miles. At Kanab we met Professor A. H. Thompson, in charge of the topographical work of Major Powell's survey, and, with guides and companions from his camp, we visited the cañon.

Our first journey was to the Toroweap Valley, about seventy miles. By following down this valley we passed through the upper line of cliffs to the edge of a chasm cut





WALLS OF THE GRAND CAÑON.



in red sandstone and vermilion-colored limestone, or marble, twenty-eight hundred feet deep, and about one thousand feet wide. Creeping out carefully on the edge of the precipice, we could look down directly upon the river, fifteen times as far away as the waters of the Niagara are below the bridge. Mr. Hillers, who has passed through the cañon with Major Powell, was with us, and he informed us that the river below was a raging torrent; and yet it looked, from the top of the cliff, like a small, smooth, and sluggish river. The view looking up the cañon is magnificent and beautiful beyond the most extravagant conception of the imagination. In the foreground lies the profound gorge, with a mile or two of the river seen in its deep bed. The eye looks twenty miles or more through what appears like a narrow valley, formed by the upper line of cliffs. The many-colored rocks in which this valley is carved, project into it in vast headlands, two thousand feet high, wrought into beautiful but gigantic architectural forms. Within an hour of the time of sunset the effect is strangely awful, weird, and dazzling. Every moment until light is gone the scene shifts, as one monumental pile passes into shade, and another, before unobserved, into light. But no power of description can aid the imagination to picture it, and only the most gifted artist, with all the materials that artists can command, is able to suggest any thing like it.

Our next visit was to the Kai-bal Plateau, the highest plateau through which the cañon cuts. It was only after much hard labor, and possibly a little danger, that we reached a point where we could see the river, which we did from the edge of Powell Plateau, a small plain severed from the main-land by a precipitous gorge, two thousand feet deep, across which we succeeded in making a passage. Here we beheld one of the most awful scenes upon our globe. While upon the highest point of the plateau, a terrific thunder-storm burst over the cañon. The lighting flashed from crag to crag. A thousand streams gathered on the surrounding plains, and dashed down into the depths of the cañon in water-falls many times the height of Niagara. The vast chasm which we saw before us, stretching away forty miles in one direction and twenty miles in another, was nearly seven thousand feet deep. Into it all the domes of the Yosemite, if plucked up from the level of that valley, might be cast, together with all the mass of the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and still the chasm would not be filled.

Kanab Cañon is about sixty miles long, and, by following its bed, one can descend to the bottom of the Grand Cañon. It is a very difficult task, requiring several days' severe labor. We were forced, by lack of time, which other engagements absorbed, to abandon the undertaking. The picture drawn by the artist of a pinnacle in one of the angles of the Kanab is from a photograph taken by Mr. Hillers. The pinnacle itself is about eight hundred, and the wall in the background of the illustration more than four thousand feet in altitude. A railroad is projected from Salt-Lake City to the southern settlements, and, when it is constructed, some of the most remarkable portions of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado will be as accessible as the valley of the Yosemite.





KANAB CAÑON.