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Cog Railroad

Ernest Kroll

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ERNEST KROLL

COG RAILROAD

"A change in elevation of 1,000
feet equals a north-south differ-
ence of 300 miles"

Checking their thick gold watches
Gravely, as in the age of Palace Cars,
Conductor and brakeman usher us
Aboard to groan in just nine miles
By rack and pinion to the Arctic zone.
Cactus and prickly poppy see us off
For pine and aspen, spruce and fir,
And windy tundra over timberline.
The chill completes the paradox
That, twisting round a shelf of cliff,
The engine, at the rate of snails,
Works us up the rack and rails,
Up, up the steep incline,
As far as rocket travelers
Might get along a level line:
We tumble out on ice and rocks—
While marmots bark and conies squeal,
And overhead cold eagles wheel—
In just an hour from the plains.
Only thought's as slowly fast,
Even faster much more slowly,
The fastest, really, even standing still.
We think ahead, while spanning zones, downhill.