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John Muir

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A GEOLOGIST’S WINTER WALK.*

AFTER reaching Turlock, I sped afoot over the stubble-fields, and through miles of brown *Hemionia* and purple *Erigeron*, to Hope ton, conscious of little more than that the town was behind and beneath me, and the mountains above and before me; on through the oaks and chaparral of the foothills to Coulter ville, and then ascended the first great mountain step upon which grows the sugar-pine. Here I slackened pace, for I drank the spicy, resinous wind, and was at home—never did pine-trees seem so dear. How sweet their breath and their song, and how grandly they winnowed the sky. I tingled my fingers among their tassels, and rustled my feet among their brown needles and burrs.

When I reached the valley, all the rocks seemed talkative, and more lovely than ever. They are dear friends, and have warm blood gushing through their granite flesh; and I love them with a love intensified by long and close companionship. After I had bathed in the bright river, sauntered over the meadows, conversed with the domes, and played with the pines, I still felt merry, and weary, and tainted with the sticky sky of your streets; I determined, therefore, to run out to the higher temples, “The days are sultry,” I said, “and though now winter, no great danger need be encountered, and a sudden storm will not block my return, if I am watchful.”

*Note.—The friend with whom Mr. Muir shares his mountain studies, one of many who know the untiring patience with which they are pursued, is well persuaded that the readers of “Living Glaciers,” “Yosemite in Flood,” and other papers which have appeared in the *Overland*, will enjoy these unprepared letter-pages, warm from the pen of the writer, and takes the responsibility of their publication.

The morning after this decision, I started up the Cañon of Tenaya, caring little about the quantity of bread I carried; for, I thought, a fast and a storm and a difficult cañon are just the medicine I require. When I passed Mirror Lake, I scarcely noticed it, for I was absorbed in the great Tissiack—her crown a mile away in the hushed azure; her purple drapery flowing in soft and graceful folds low as my feet, embroidered gloriously around with deep, shadowy forest. I have gazed on Tissiack a thousand times—in days of solemn storms, and when her form shone with jewels of winter, or was veiled in living clouds; I have heard her voice of winds, or snowy, tuneful waters; yet never did her soul reveal itself more impressively than now. I hung about her skirts, lingering timidly, till the glaciers compelled me, to push up the cañon. This cañon is accessible only to determined mountaineers, and I was anxious to carry my barometer and chronometer through it, to obtain sections and altitudes. After I had passed the tall groves that stretch a mile above Mirror Lake, and scrambled around the Tenaya Fall, which is just at the head of the lake groves, and crept through the dense and spiny chaparral that plusses the roots of all the mountains here for miles, in warm, unbroken green, and was ascending a precipitous rock-front, where the foot-holds were good, when I suddenly stumbled, for the first time since I touched foot to Sierra rocks. After several involuntary somersaults, I became insensible, and when consciousness returned, I found myself wedged among short, stiff bushes, not injured in the slightest. Judging by the sun, I
could not have been insensible very long; probably not a minute, possibly an hour; and I could not remember what made me fall, or where I had fallen from; but I saw that if I had rolled a little further, my mountain-climbing would have been finished. “There,” said I, addressing my feet, to whose separate skill I had learned to trust night and day on any mountain, “that is what you get by intercourse with stupid town stairs, and dead pavements.” I felt angry and worthless. I had not reached yet the difficult portion of the cañon, but I determined to guide my humbled body over the highest practicable precipices, in the most intricate and nerve-trying places I could find; for I was now fairly awake, and felt confident that the last town-fog had been shaken from both head and feet.

I camped at the mouth of a narrow gorge, which is cut into the bottom of the main cañon, determined to take earnest exercise next day. No plush boughs did my ill-behaved bones receive that night, nor did my bumped head get any spicy cedar-plumes for pillow. I slept on a naked bowlder, and when I awoke all my nervous trembling was gone.

The gorged portion of the cañon, in which I spent all the next day, is about a mile and a half in length; and I passed the time very profitably in tracing the action of the forces that determined this peculiar bottom cañon, which is an abrupt, ragged-walled, narrow-throated cañon, formed in the bottom of a wide-mouthed, smooth, and beveled cañon, I will not stop now to tell you more; some day you may see it, like a shadowy line, from Cloud’s Rest. In high water, the stream occupies all the bottom of the gorge, surging and chafing in glorious power from wall to wall, but the sound of the grinding was low as I entered the gorge, scarcely hoping to be able to pass through its entire length.

By cool efforts, along glassy, ice-worn slopes, I reached the upper end in a little over a day, but was compelled to pass the second night in the gorge, and in the moonlight I wrote you this short pencil-letter in my note-book:

“The moon is looking down into the cañon, and how marvelously the great rocks kindle to her light—every dome, and brow, and swelling boss touched by her white rays, glows, as if lighted with snow. I am now only a mile from last night’s camp; and have been climbing and sketching all day in this difficult but instructive gorge. It is formed in the bottom of the main cañon, among the roots of Cloud’s Rest. It begins at the dead-lake where I camped last night, and ends a few hundred yards above, in another dead lake. The walls everywhere are craggy and vertical, and in some places they overlean. It is only from twenty to sixty feet wide, and not, though black and broken enough, the thin, crooked mouth of some mysterious abyss; for in many places I saw the solid, seamless floor. I am sitting on a big stone, against which the stream divides, and goes brawling by in rapids on both sides; half my rock is white in the light, half in shadow. Looking from the opening jaws of this shadowy gorge, South Dome is immediately in front—high in the stars, her face turned from the moon, with the rest of her body gloriously muffled in waved folds of granite. On the left, cut from Cloud’s Rest, by the lip of the gorge, are three magnificent rocks, sisters of the great South Dome. On the right is the massive, moonlit front of Mount Watkins, and between, low down in the furthest distance, is Sentinel Dome, girdled and darkened with forest. In the near foreground is the joyous creek, Tenaya, singing against bowlders that are white with the snow. Now, look back twenty yards, and you will see a water-fall, fair as a spirit; the moonlight just touches it, bringing it in
relief against the deepest, dark background. A little to the left, and a dozen steps this side of the fall, a flickering light marks my camp—and a precious camp it is. A huge, glacier-polished slab, in falling from the glassy flank of Cloud’s Rest, happened to settle on edge against the wall of the gorge. I did not know that this slab was glacier-polished, until I lighted my fire. Judge of my delight. I think it was sent here by an earthquake. I wish I could take it down to the valley. It is about twelve feet square. Beneath this slab is the only place in this torrent-swept gorge where I have seen sand sufficient for a bed. I expected to sleep on the bowlders, for I spent most of the afternoon on the slippery wall of the cañon, endeavoring to get around this difficult part of the gorge, and was compelled to hasten down here for water before dark. I will sleep soundly on this sand; half of it is mica. Here, wonderful to behold, are a few green stems of prickly Rubus, and a tiny grass. They are here to meet us. Ay, even here, in this darksome gorge, ‘frightful and tormented’ with raging torrents and choking avalanches of snow. Can it be? As if the Rubus and the grass-leaf were not enough of God’s tender prattle-words of love, which we so much need in these mighty temples of power, yonder in the “benmost b aire” are two blessed Adiantums. Listen to them. How wholly infused with God is this one big word of love that we call the world! Good-night. Do you see the fire-glow on my ice-smoothed slab, and on my two ferns? And do you hear how sweet a sleep-song the fall and cascades are singing?”

The water-ground chips and knots that I found fastened between rocks, kept my fire alive all through the night, and I rose nervously ready for another day of sketching and noting, and any form of climbing. I escaped from the gorge about noon, after accomplishing some of the most delicate feats of mountaineering I ever attempted; and here the cañon is all broadly open again—a dead lake, luxuriantly forested with pine, and spruce, and silver fir, and brown-trunked Librocedrus. The walls rise in Yosemite forms, and the stream comes down 700 feet, in a smooth brush of foam. This is a genuine Yosemite valley. It is about 2,000 feet above the level of Yosemite, and about 2,400 below Lake Tenaya. Lake Tenaya was frozen, and the ice was so clear and un-ruffled, that the mountains and the groves that looked upon it were reflected almost as perfectly as I ever beheld them in the calm evening mirrors of summer. At a little distance, it was difficult to believe the lake frozen at all; and when I walked out on it, cautiously stamping at short intervals to test the strength of the ice, I seemed to walk mysteriously, without any adequate faith on the surface of the water. The ice was so transparent, that I could see the beautifully wave-rippled, sandy bottom, and the scales of mica glinting back the down-pouring light. When I knelt down with my face close to the ice, through which clear sunshine was pouring, I was delighted to discover myriads of Tyn dall’s six-sided ice-flowers, magnificently colored. A grand old mountain mansion is this Tenaya region. In the glacier period, it was a mer de glace, far grander than the mer de glace of Switzerland, which is only about half a mile broad. The Tenaya mer de glace was not less than two miles broad, late in the glacier epoch, when all the principal dividing crests were bare; and its depth was not less than fifteen hundred feet. Ice-streams from Mounts Lyell and Dana, and all the mountains between, and from the nearer Cathedral Peak, flowed hither, welded into one, and worked together. After accomplishing this Tenaya Lake basin, and all the splendidly-sculptured rocks and mountains that surround and adorn it, and the great Tenaya Cañ-
NAPOLEON III.

SECOND PERIOD.—1865 to 1872.

The sagacity of Napoléon III. did not betray him, when, following the maxims he had published to the world while a prisoner, he chose and fostered the alliance of Great Britain, although that alliance failed him at the last. England had renounced the idola-
	

uous strides. The demo-


ratus notions of legitimacy which drove her into the coalition against Napoléon I. Her political advance had gone for-


ward with enormous strides. The demo-


cratic element was largely recognized, and being educated for further develop-


ment. Like France, she had adopted the maxim of free trade in food and in-


dustry. Napoléon III. remembered the
dying saying of his uncle, Napoléon I.,


"In fifty years, Europe will be republi-


like crest upon a ridge, which begins at Yosemite with Tissiack, and runs con-


tinuously eastward to the thicket of


peaks and crests around Tenaya. This


lofty granite wall, is bent this way and


that by the restless and wearless action


of glaciers, just as if it had been made


doof—semi-plastic, as Prof. Whitney


would say. But the grand circum-


ference of mountains and forests are com-


ing from far and near, densing into one


close assemblage; for the sun, their god


and father, with love ineffable, is glow-


ing a sunset farewell. Not one of all


the assembled rocks or trees seemed re-


mote. How impressively their faces


shone with responsive love!


I ran home in the moonlight, with


long, firm strides; for the sun-love made


me strong. Down through the junipers


down through the firs; now in jet-


shadows, now in white light; over sandy


moraines and bare, clanking rock; past


the huge ghost of South Dome, rising


weird through the firs—past glorious


Nevada—past the groves of Illilouette—


through the pines of the valley; frost-


crystals flashing all the sky beneath, as


star-crystals on all the sky above. All


of this big mountain-bread for one day!


One of the rich, ripe days that enlarge


one’s life—so much of sun upon one side


of it, so much of moon on the other.