[Winter in the Yosemite Valley.]

Samuel Kneeland
Lebright's, Lagrange, Roberts's, and Martin's at 1 1-2 P.M. After dinner we took the cars at 2-10 on the Visalia branch road, and reached Stockton at 4-15 P.M — passing through a region rich in large fields of golden wheat, which the machines were cutting wherever we looked. Next day we started for San Francisco, distant 91 miles.

**Winter in the Yosemite Valley.**

Most persons naturally suppose that the residents of the Valley in the winter are cut off from all communication with the outside world, and must suffer greatly from cold, if not from hunger. We now know, from the experience of Mr. John Muir, that there is not only no hardship in passing a winter there, but positive enjoyment for any one who can appreciate beauty in nature. As the number of visitors annually increases, and better accommodations are provided, no doubt some will be induced to spend a winter in the Valley; in 1870, the visitors numbered 1,700; in 1871, 2,150; in 1872, at least 2,700; but all leave by the middle of November, for fear of being snowed in. In the winter of 1871-'72, 26 persons remained in the Valley, of whom two were women, and six children; there were also two Digger Indians. The employments are getting out lumber, and building; the amusements, petty quarrels by day, whiskey, card and storytelling sociables by night.

After the last travellers left, the weather was very fine, the thermometer ranging to 70 degrees Fahrenheit at noon, though the nights were frosty. The first snow storm was on November 24th, followed by a three days' rain; the rain and melting snow gave rise to innumerable cascades, many of them equaling the summer falls, and of course the great falls were very much increased. At this season immense masses of rock, disintegrated by the slow and silent action of the summer, loosened by the first rains, descend with a noise like thunder into the Valley, crushing trees to splinters, and masking for the time the roaring of the cataracts. A foot of snow often falls in a night, and the beauty which is thus given to the rocks and domes, trees and bushes, can be imagined from the common snow scenery of our Northern winters. Splendid avalanches from the surrounding peaks greet the eye; the highest coming from Cloud's Rest, with an unbroken fall of 5,000 feet.

From Mr. Muir's observations last winter, we know that for the month ending December 25, 1871, the highest morning temperature was 42 degrees Fahrenheit — the lowest 13 degrees, the average 33 degrees; the highest noon temperature 55 degrees, the lowest 34 degrees, the average 33 degrees; the snow-fall for the period being 41 inches, and the rain-fall 21 inches. From January 1 to 24, 1872, the average sunrise temperature was 32 degrees, the highest being 56 degrees, the lowest 22 degrees; the average noon temperature was 49 degrees, the highest 52 degrees, the lowest 32 degrees. During this period there were many of what Mr. Muir calls "wind cataracts," so powerful as on one occasion to arrest the flow of the Yosemite Fall at
one-half its height for three minutes, the water apparently suspended in mid-air by a violent horizontal current, driving the water away from the eye of the observer.

From February 1 to 14, the average sunrise temperature was 29 degrees, the highest 37 degrees, the lowest 23 degrees; the average noon temperature 40.4 degrees, the highest 49 degrees, the lowest 34 degrees. The snow-fall was 3 inches, the rain-fall 2.37 inches; three days were rainy, three cloudy, two snowy, the rest fine and sunny. Frogs croaked every night in the meadows; upon the warm slopes of the northern wall young grasses were an inch high, the cedars shedding their pollen, the early willows pushing out their catkins, and azalea buds opening; flies and moths were dancing in the sun, and the ants and their enemies busy — and this when the south side of the Valley was covered with snow, and bleak New England with not a sign of spring.

From February 14 to March 14, the average sunrise temperature was 30 degrees, the highest 46 degrees, the lowest 15 degrees; the average noon temperature 46 degrees, the highest 62 degrees, the lowest 36 degrees; the snow-fall was 14.5 inches, the rain-fall 3 inches. The lowest observed temperature of last winter, 9 degrees Fahrenheit; the sunrise temperature of the northern, does not vary much from that of the southern side; but the noon temperature of the northern, in clear sunny weather, is 20 degrees higher than that of the southern. Owing to different heights and angles of various parts of the Valley walls, and the irregular form of the bottom, both sides have several well-marked climates; the delta at the base of Indian Cañon is the warmest, both in winter and in summer. In the middle of March, 1872, the weather was delightful; the willows were in full bloom, and the manzanita bells purple, and almost ripe; the sedges along some of the meadows were six or eight inches high; flies, bugs, and three species of butterflies were active, and many robins, sparrows, jays, woodpeckers and kingfishers were busily engaged in searching for their favorite food. In the bottom of the Valley were numerous lakelets and shallow ponds, small and irregular, whose surface reflected, as in a mirror, the rocks, and peaks, and falls, making it difficult to distinguish the lower and the mock Yosemite from the upper and real one.

These observations on the weather were taken by Mr. Muir, at Black's Hotel, in the Valley.

It is not difficult to get into and out of the Valley in winter, nor to make excursions about it; Indian women, with children on their backs, go in and out of the Valley in every winter month. The hardships of winter life here are purely imaginary; school children in New England are more exposed in an ordinary snow-storm. For the last three winters the snow has never been more than two feet deep, and on an average not more than eight inches; the ground is often bare every month on the north side, though on the mountains and around the top of the Valley, it may be 10 feet deep. It would be as easy to keep open a sleigh road by Harden's and Big Oak Flat, over an extent of 15 miles, as in Northern New Hampshire or Vermont; by the river
trail the snow-belt is not more than 6 miles long, and is easily passed on foot.

The ice scenery about falls— with which we are familiar at Niagara— at the base of the upper Yosemite, is singularly beautiful. Mr. Muir describes an ice cone, on the last of January, which was about 200 feet high, with a diameter of 600 feet at the base; it was truncated, and the side next the rock wall deeply flattened; into a tolerably regular mouth poured the whole water column of the fall, escaping by several jagged openings at the bottom, which, meeting again about 150 yards down the cañon, continued as splendid cascades to the lower fall. This ice cone he attempted to scale—a perilous adventure—which he was prevented from accomplishing only by the fragile character of the ice, and the occurrence of strong wind blasts.

This experienced mountain climber finds the winter the most beautiful and most enjoyable period of the year. He glories in such exploits as ascending the Glacier Cañon in mid-winter. On one occasion, having safely passed through the dangers of falling rocks, avalanches, and icicles, he found himself near the top of the cañon, at a point where ten minutes in summer would have enabled him to reach the summit; but he could get no higher by wading, or swimming, in the mealy snow, which was like a quicksand under him; and, night coming on, he was forced to return, but by a kind of locomotion best described in his own words: "Hawthorne speaks of the railroad as a spiritualizer of travel; but, despite the springs and cushions that are slipped between our bodies and the iron wheels, modern travel is anything but spiritual; and since my Yosemite locomotion in the meal of Glacier Cañon, even the flapping progress of the birds seems coarse. I cast myself upon my back, feet foremost, and moved away through space, softly as a cloud. The snow gave no sound from pressure, and on I sailed, noiseless and effortless, over logs, and rocks, and woven chapparal, as unbruised and unjolted as a full-grown thistle-seed in a sunny wind. Let Hawthornes choose for spiritual travel their wheels, and cushions, and wheezing steam; my choice shall always be a slant of mountain snow." He gained the top on another trial, a week afterward, and beheld a scene of winter mountain magnificence rarely seen by mortal eyes.

Another glory of the Yosemite in winter is the singularly bright white light emitted by the crystals of snow, as they eddy about the rocks and trees. Writes Mr. Muir: "A tall fir, arrow-like and snow-laden, clearly set forth against the blue sky, would suddenly burst into white fire, so dense, so pure, so intense, that the whole tree seemed to have changed to molten silver, in trunk and branches. Sometimes the brightness would begin at the centre, deepening like a slow pulsation, and, dissipating in crystal dust, strangely leave the tree dark and unchanged in its old terrestrial body."

Christmas holidays are generally but little observed in the Valley; last winter the children were presented with a few trinkets from Santa Claus, and crusted cakes were mysteriously dropped in bachelors' cabins; but, "upon the whole," writes our friend, "our holidays were sorry, unhilarious, whiskified affairs. A grand intercamp Christmas
dinner was devised, on a scale and style becoming our peerless Valley. Heaps of solemn substantials were to be lighted and broidered with cookies, and banked by countless cakes as big as boulders; and a craggy, trough-shaped pie was planned, the chief ornament of the feast, which was to have formed a rough model of Yosemite, with domes of duff and falls of gravy. It was all very well conceived, but alas! like all other ladyless feasts, it was a failure."