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THE SCENERY OF CALIFORNIA.

By John Muir.

At first sight of the fashionable scenery habit, it would seem that the people of the East need not come West seeking fine scenery, for they have plenty of it at home. God never made an ugly landscape. All that the sun shines on is beautiful, as long as it is wild; and much in every landscape is unchangeably wild, especially light, which falls everywhere. In no place on all this continent, from Florida to the Arctic Ocean, have I seen finer, diviner, more enchanting landscapes than in the Great American Desert, with its broad, hot, alkaline levels, and mountains and hills rising farther and farther beyond each other in smooth, billowy ranges, robed in light as a garment. And so the lover of nature, wandering at will or remaining steadfast like a rock, is always content with the fullness of beauty about him in any wild place, wherever he may chance to be. Every heaven-born want of scenery is satisfied, and there is no aching void to excite longing or curiosity concerning any other country or star.

To the sane and healthy, therefore, it seems hardly worth while to compare the scenery of the two sides of our continent. Each has its own beauty, like the two sides of a rainbow; but to defrauded toilers, grown dull and blind in duty and business, the need is different. Like sick children who can no longer eat bread or recognize their own mothers, the wearied workers of civilization, weak and giddy in the whirl of cities, stupefied by doing good and making money, recreation for body and soul is found only in what is novel. Their own beautiful and enchanting scenery no longer nourishes them. Their thousand miles of coast, with marvelous wealth of picturesque bays and headlands, kept in perpetual song and bloom of foam and spray by the waves of the blue Atlantic; the charming round-headed trees—oaks and elms, hickory and ilex, tulip and magnolia, fringed with rhododendron and sassafras, stretching in lovely forests along the flowing folds of the Alleghanies; the spiry spruce and pine woods of New England, with countless lakes and streams shining like silvery embroidery; the woods of the Middle West, the richest in species in the world, and the grassy plains and prairies, and chain of great lakes—all these, good enough for gods or men, at length become of noneffect. Seen so often through clouds of care and the stupor of business, they at length are not seen at all, and
marking the extension of the main forests, and along the base of the range a broad belt of rose-purple and yellow, where lie the miners’ gold and the foothill ranches and gardens. The Sierra is about 500 miles long, seventy miles wide, and from 7000 to nearly 14,700 feet high. In general views like this one no mark of man is as yet visible, nor anything to suggest the richness of the life it cherishes, or the grandeur of its sculpture. None of its magnificent forested ridges seems to rise much above the general level. No great valley or lake or river is seen, or group of well-marked features of any kind as distinct pictures. Even the summit peaks clearly defined on the sky seem comparatively featureless. Nevertheless, glaciers are still at work on the snowy peaks, and thousands of lakes and meadows shine and bloom beneath them, and the whole majestic range is furrowed with canyons to a depth of from 2000 to 5000 feet, in which once flowed magnificent glaciers, and in which now flow and sing a band of beautiful rivers. 

Though cut in granite and of such stupendous depth, these canyons are not raw, gloomy, jagged-walled gorges, savage and inaccessible. On the contrary, with rough passages here and there, they make delightful pathways for every walkable traveler, conducting from the fertile lowlands to the highest icy fountains. They are mountain streets, full of life and light, graded and sculptured by the ancient glaciers, and present throughout all their courses a rich variety of beautiful and attractive scenery, the most attractive ever yet discovered in the mountain ranges of the globe. In many places, especially in the middle region of the western flank, the main canyons widen into spacious valleys or parks, like artificial landscape gardens. The largest of these are called Yosemite valleys, only one of which is far-famed as yet. Beautiful groves and meadows and thickets of blooming bushes diversify their level floors, while their lofty, retiring walls, infinitely varied in form and sculpture, and springing abruptly into the sky, are fringed with ferns, delicate flowers of many species, and hardy oaks and evergreens, while rejoicing streams come down over their sunny brows in glorious array to join the tranquil river that flows through the middle of every Yosemite park. They are like immense halls or temples, lighted from above. Every rock seems to glow with life. Some lean back in sublime repose; others, absolutely vertical, or nearly so, for thousands of feet, advance their brows in thoughtful attitudes, giving welcome to storms and calms alike — types of permanence, yet ever associated with beauty of the frailest and most fleeting forms, as if into these sublime mountain mansions Nature had taken pains to gather her choicest treasures to draw her lovers into close, confiding communion with her.

Here, too, in the middle region of the range where the canyons are deepest are the grandest trees — the *Sequoia gigantea*, king of conifers, the noblest of a noble race; the majestic sugar and yellow pines, Douglas spruce, *libocedrus*, and silver firs, each a giant of its kind, assembled together in one and the same forest, surpassing all other coniferous forests in the world, both in number of species and in the beauty and size of its trees. The winds flow in melody through their colossal spires, and they are everywhere made yet more charmingly vocal with the songs of birds and falling water. Fragrant ceanothus and manzanita bushes of many species bloom beneath them, and lily gardens and meadows and damp ferny glens, compelling the admiration of every observer. Sweeping on over ridge and valley in glorious exuberance, these noble trees extend, a continuous belt, from end to end of the range, interrupted only by the sheer-walled canyons at intervals of about fifteen and twenty miles. Here the great, burly, brown and grizzly bears delight to roam, harmonizing with the brown-barked trees beneath which they feed. Deer also dwell here, and find food and shelter in the ceanothus tangles with a multitude of smaller people. Above this region of forest giants the trees grow smaller, until the utmost limit of the timber line is reached at a height of from 10,000 to 12,000 feet above the sea, where the dwarf pine is so lowly and hard pressed by wind and snow that you may easily walk over the top of its heath-like tangles, as if walking over a brushy meadow. Below the main forest belt the trees likewise diminish in size, frost and burning drought repressing and blasting alike.

The rose-purple zone along the base of the range comprehends nearly all the famous gold fields. Here it was that miners from nearly every country under the sun came in wild excitement to seek their fortunes. On the banks of every river, gulch, and ravine they have left their marks. Every gravel and boulder bed has been desperately riddled and sifted over and over again. Since civilization began, no more violent storm of human energy ever fell on mountains. With stout faith they drew rivers out of their channels
onto the tops of the ridges or along their sides, and made them work in the mines like slaves; and thus they removed hills about as big as mountains and cast them into the sea. But the pick and shovel, once wielded with savage enthusiasm, have been mostly laid aside, and only quartz mining is now being carried on to any considerable extent.

The gold zone is a region of tawny foothills, roughened here and there with hardy bushes and oaks and outcropping masses of lichen-colored slates. In early spring, from February to April, it is a paradise of bees and blossoms. Refreshing rains then fall freely, the birds are busy about their nests, and the sunshine is balmy and delightful; but before the end of May all the landscape seems as if it had been baked in an oven, most of the herbaceous vegetation crumbles to dust beneath the foot, and the small stream channels are dry; the ground is covered with a network of cracks, while the snowy summits looming along the eastern horizon look hazy and tremulous through the burning glare.

Every winter the high Sierra and the middle forest region get snow in abundance, and even the foothills and the central valley are at times whitened. Then the range looks like a vast beveled wall of purest marble, clean as the skies; and though silent in its flight from the clouds, and when it is taking its place on rock and tree and grassy meadow, how soon the gentle snow finds a voice! Slipping from the heights, gathering in avalanches, it booms and roars like thunder, and makes a glorious show, arrayed in long, silken streamers, and wreathing, swirling films of crystal dust.

The north half of the Sierra is mostly covered with floods of lava, and dotted with volcanoes in various stages of decay. The south half is composed of granite nearly from base to summit, while a considerable number of peaks in the middle of the range are capped with metamorphic slates. Mt. Whitney, the culminating point of the range, lifts its helmet-shaped crest to a height of nearly 14,600 feet, near the southern extremity. Mt. Shasta, a colossal volcanic cone, rises near the northern extremity of the range to a height of 14,440 feet, and forms a noble landmark for the surrounding country within a radius of a hundred miles. Residual masses of volcanic rocks occur throughout most of the granitic southern portion, and there are a considerable number of old volcanoes on the east flank, near Mono Lake and southward. Here, also, there are numerous hot springs and mud volcanoes; but it is only to the northward that the entire range is mantled with lava. From the summit of Mt. Whitney only granite is seen. Many nameless peaks and spires, but little lower than its own storm-beaten crags, rise in groups like forest trees, segregated by chasms and canions of tremendous depth and ruggedness; but on Shasta nearly every feature in the view speaks of the old volcanic fires. Craters and cones of every size are seen, the highest being Lassen Butte, rising to a height of about 11,000 feet above the sea. The Cinder Cone near Lassen Butte marks the most recent volcanic eruption in the Sierra. It is a symmetrical truncated cone, about 700 feet high above its base, covered with gray cinders and ashes, and has a regular crater in its summit, in which a few small pines are growing. These trees show that the age of the cone is not less than a hundred years, though it looks fresh and unwasted. It stands between two lakes, which before the eruption were one. Before the cone was built a stream of rough vesicular lava was poured into the lake, cutting it in two, and then advancing into the adjacent forest, overwhelmed the trees in its path, the charred ends of some of which being still visible, projecting from beneath the snout of the lava stream where it came to rest. Later there was an eruption of ashes and loose obsidian cinders, probably from the same vent, which, besides building the Cinder Cone, covered the ground in the surrounding woods for miles to a depth of from six inches to several feet. The history of this last volcanic eruption is also preserved in the traditions of the Pitt River Indians. They tell of a time of darkness, when the sky was black with ashes and smoke that came out of the ground and threatened every living thing with death, and that when at length the sun again appeared it was red like blood. Less recent craters in great numbers roughen the adjacent region, some of them with lakes in their throats, others with trees and flowers, Nature in these old hearths and firesides having literally given beauty for ashes.

Along the base of the range a telling series of sedimentary rocks are now being studied, which contain much of its early history; but leaving for the present these first chapters, we see that only a very short geological time ago a vast deluge of molten rocks poured from many a crater and chasm on the flanks and along the summit of the range, filling river channels and lake basins, and obliterating nearly every existing feature on the northern portion. At length, when these broad lava floods ceased to flow, but while the
great volcanic cones built up along the axis still burned and smoked, the whole Sierra passed under the domain of snow and ice. Then over the bald, featureless, fire-blackened mountains, glaciers began to crawl, covering them from the summits to the sea with a mantle of ice, and then, with infinite deliberation, the work went on of sculpturing the range over again and making new scenery. These mighty agents of erosion crushed and ground the flinty lavas and granites beneath their crystal folds, working on through un-numbered centuries, until in the fullness of time the mighty Sierra was born again, brought to light nearly as we behold it to-day, with its glaciers and snow-crushed pines at the top of the range, wheat fields and orange groves at the foot of it. This change from icy darkness and death to life and beauty was slow as we count time, and is still going on over all the world wherever glaciers exist; but in no country, as far as I know, may these majestic changes be studied to better advantage than in this land of sunshine. Towards the close of the Glacial Period in California, when the snow clouds became less fertile and the waste from sunheat greater, the lower folds of the ice-sheet, discharging fleets of icebergs into the sea, began to grow shallow and recede from the lowlands, and then more slowly up the flanks of the Sierra, in compliance with changes of climate. The great white mantle of ice on the mountains at length broke up into a series of glaciers, more or less river-like, with many tributaries, and these again were melted and divided into still smaller glaciers, until now only about sixty-five of the smallest of the grand system are left on the cool, northern slopes of the snowiest peaks. Plants and animals, biding their time, followed the withdrawing ice, bestowing quick animation on the new-born landscapes. Pine trees marched up the snow-warmed moraines in long, hopeful files; brown-spiked sedges fringed the shores of the young lakes; new rivers roared in the canions; flowers bloomed around the feet of the great burnished domes; while mellow beds of soil, broadly outspread, furnished food to multitudes of Nature's waiting, hungry children, great and small—squirrels, marmots, deer, bears, elephants, and birds, etc. The warm ground burst into bloom, and the green, aspiring groves were haunted by songful birds; and life in every form grew richer and happier and more beautiful as the eventful years passed away over the land so lately suggestive of only consummate desolation.

And now man has come with science and religion, arts and crafts, preaching, plowing, planting, building. Farms and towns, with homes and factories, churches and schools, parks and gardens, are spreading over the fertile lowlands, and wildness is going away. The dawn of a new day is breaking. Like the features of a landscape emerging from floods of fire and ice, the mountain tops of civilization, rather barren as yet, are rising over ignorance and vice, to develop, we hope, as harmoniously in accordance with divine law as did the noble scenery of California.

CALIFORNIAN FORESTS.

By Charles Howard Shinn.

SUPREME among the glories of the Golden State are its immense coniferous forests. Wonderful also are its great groves of oak, madrono, laurel, and maple, and historic are its marvelous single trees, such as the Hooker oak, the Felton redwood, and the Grizzly Giant of Calaveras. Those who visit us, and fail to see these things, have not only missed a great pleasure, but have lost one of the clews to the nature of California and the Californians. Our mountains, our forests, and our horticulture are linked together in one vast alliance. If we can keep our superb forests as the orchards of the mountains, gathering the surplus timber crop there, as we gather the annual fruitage below, fruit-tree belt and forest-tree belt will meet, and every acre of our waste lands will finally become valuable.

For more than a hundred years botanists and foresters have been studying with ever-