

Alighting from the dusty stage and refreshing ourselves with one of those deliciously toothsome meals that are to be had only in these mountain retreats, we commit ourselves to the care of our host. In a few days the moon is in the right quarter, and, provided with all the necessities for the journey, we start out in the afternoon and begin climbing the mountain side, following a well-worn trail through the towering pines. After a tramp of several miles in the gradually diminishing forest we arrive at a comfortable cabin, where we eat a hearty supper, smoke our pipes, and then roll snugly up in our blankets and go to sleep. Soon after midnight we are awakened, make our simple preparations, and resume the upward journey.

As we emerge from the last belt of timber that fringes the mountain side, the great white peak rises up before us seemingly higher than from the valley. The moon, now well beyond the meridian, irradiates the scene, and its beams are reflected like sparkling diamonds from the snowy crystals we crunch beneath our feet. The steady climb of an hour begins to tell upon us, yet the top seems as far above us as before, sharply outlined against the background of twinkling stars and the deep blue firmament of night.

"How far have we gone now?" I ask, as we stop for a brief while to catch a breath.

"Oh, we've made a good start," the guide replies. "We are about a quarter of the way up."

With a sigh I thrust my alpinestock into the snow and again toil upward. Though our exertions keep us warm, almost uncomfortably so, we can feel that it is becoming colder as we ascend. The air, too, is more rarified, and we feel a burning sensation as we inhale great draughts of it. Higher and still higher we climb. Just ahead the sharp outline of the snow can be seen against the sky, and encouraged by the apparent nearness of the top we push on with renewed vigor and soon gain the point, only to find it but a ridge, with the apex still looming up beyond, though sensibly nearer than before. Now the cold begins to tingle our noses and finger tips, and the frozen snow is very slippery. Great care has to be exercised, for a false step might send us gliding down the slope with but little chance of stopping.

"This is about the coldest place in California," I assert with the air of a man who feels the confident pride of having made a statement admitting of no dispute.

Softly the guide chuckles to himself as he remarks, "It's the hottest place in California."

"What!"

"If you should do to-morrow noon what you are doing now you would think it the hottest place in the world. The sun's rays beat upon the snow, and though they only soften it a little for the depth of two or three inches, they are reflected back again so bright as to dazzle you almost to blindness, the heat reminding you forcibly of a cook stove. The skin would peel off your nose and cheeks the next day like scales from a fish. That is why we always come up at night or early in the morning."

Mentally resolving to hazard no more assertions, I

struggle along in spite of fatigue and the difficulty of breathing. Suddenly my nose begins to bleed, and little drops of blood ooze from my ears, but the guide laughingly remarks: "A little rest will fix that all right. So long as you do not bleed from the mouth you need have no fear."

The top is now visibly near. The moon sinks below the horizon, and, making a last crowning effort by the light of the stars, we stand on the brink of the hot springs, nearly an hour ahead of the sun's schedule time. We begin to realize the intensity of the cold in this high altitude, and find that to keep warm we must continue our physical exertions; and so we walk forward and back along the margin of the springs and climb to the extreme apex, impatient for the coming of the sun.

The mountain's snowy sides stand out clear and bold in the starlight, while all beneath is darkness, the sloping field of white fading into the black abyss below. In the east the first gray tints of dawn appear, and as they brighten the stars gradually fade from view, though we know that to the few who are watching them from the valley they shine as brightly as before. Soon the east is all aglow with light, while to the west the lofty peak casts a pyramidal shadow of intense gloom, its sides being clearly defined by the increasing light. As the sun steadily mounts the crimson vault, the higher peaks within the mighty shadow pierce through the gloom, while below them still reigns midnight darkness. One by one they thrust themselves up into the light; the mountains slowly evolve themselves, then the valleys, then the ocean, until at last the darkness is conquered and the full beams of the sun irradiate every object. The magnificence of the scene is beyond the power of words to portray, and we can only stand in mute admiration of the power and glory of the celestial warrior as he marches from the east to conquer the kingdom of darkness in the west.

Our attention now turns to the grand panorama spread out beneath us. The great Pacific, a hundred miles to the west, appears as calm as a mountain tarn. So distant is it that the billows blend into one even and apparently unruffled surface. For three hundred miles up and down the coast we can see an unbroken sheet of blue. Turning to the south, the Sacramento Valley lies like a long hollow in the embrace of two parallel hills. With here and there a peak thrusting itself up into prominence, the mountains fuse into one solid mass. Vainly we try to locate well-known objects, for with the exception of Monte Diablo and a spot we take to be Lake Tahoe, we feel a decided uncertainty. Lassen's Peak, near at hand, catches the eye at the first glance. It is the only snow-capped companion Shasta has in Northern California, but is so inferior that companionship can hardly be presumed. Away to the north rise several more worthy associates—Mount Pitt, the Three Sisters, Jefferson, the graceful Mount Hood, Adams, St. Helens and the rugged Tacoma, though several of them are so distant as to sink below the horizon or blend into its dim outlines.