

A WINTER GLIMPSE OF ESTES PARK.

"It has always seemed to me," wrote the good Father De Smet, "that when one travels over the plains, he feels more inclined to prayer, meditation, confidence in God." The days of those long and solitary journeys are gone by; we lie down at night in the roaring cavern of the train, and when, in the morning we look out of our curtained window, the mountains are already there. Such was the wonderful sleep, "likest to death," that overcame that ancient wanderer, when after a nightmare of twenty years, he was shipped by those mysterious islanders upon a vessel, and in the morning found himself, he knew not why nor how, at the port of his long desire.

There is, however, something left of the sentiment that inspired the Jesuit father, as one approaches the Rockies from the east, especially by the northern route. They are so high, so far removed from the affairs of daily life, so very lovely in the early light; they rise from the plain in such a sudden wall, and the chain of them reaches so suggestively to the limit of vision, with single peaks rising into view even further beyond; they always hint that they are guarding another and a different world, a land of healing, where it would be good for us to be.

There are those who maintain that certain individual mountain peaks exert a hypnotic influence upon the worshipper at their bases. Certainly there is character among mountains, and this is the cause why each has its admirers. People will go year after year to Estes Park, and sit contentedly day by day watching the Lily, the giant Mummy or great Long's himself, and will tell you that each continually grows upon them as they watch them.

I can testify that familiarity with the chiefs of the snowy range does not by any means breed contempt, but rather a distinct awe and dread. Others have spoken of a certain reluctance that grew upon them, in the course of a sojourn among those tremendous objects, to mention one of them familiarly by the name of any man. General Pike was a most admirable soldier, Major Long was equally a pattern of all incompetence; the more you move about either of the mountains that have borne their names now for eighty years, each a whole world of rock and ice, the more remote and unapproachable do they appear, and the less fit for association with the names of those or any other men.

It is lonesome in the mountains in winter. As you draw near you miss the prairie-dogs, who lie sleeping their long sleep in a hundred thousand holes, with the snow piled over them. You can walk where you will, and be wholly free from care lest clump of brush or bunch of weeds hide a hostile snake.

The pine-tree and the quaken-asp are there, but the noisy magpie and the crested jay-hawk are gone, and they are empty and silent. The mountain-side is bare and still; no chipmunk frisks over the rocks, no woodchuck watches you from their recesses to mock you at a safe distance.

But in compensation, you find that there are more people in the mountains than you had supposed, and you see them leading their own lives, free from the oppression of the summer tourist. When the torrent of travelers, with their tastes and their needs, and their adjectives and exclamation points, breaks over this devoted land, one may imagine the inhabitants shutting their eyes and holding their breaths until fall; and then coming forth, when the last tourist has taken his trunk eastward, and the last invalid followed the receding sun with his rug and his medicine bottle, to resume the interrupted current of their lives.

The rivers are there, but pitifully shrunken and enfeebled. Their voices are weak and old; how different from the fierce tumult that fills the gorges as they riot over rocks in their summer strength. The canyons themselves are vastly changed. Their sides are gray and cold; the prickly ball of the wild cactus nestles into crevices and shows no spurts of variously-colored blossom; the skeletons of the wild currant bushes throng the roadside, but none of them display those showers of cool and tempting fruit that glow under the August sun; nowhere can one find the wild strawberries and the little red raspberries, so stony and so sweet, that reward the search of the wayfaring man in the Moon of Bucks.

There is life in the mountains, but you can hear more of it than you can see. As soon as night falls the plaint of the coyote begins; and if you sleep with a window open, for the sake of the life-giving air of the place, and the sound of the pine-trees and the river in the infinite stillness—you may hear from somewhere in the dark a hideous cry, which they will tell you in the morning was the yell of the mountain lion that is bothering around their cattle.

Then, too, from the number of natives you meet wandering about the mountains with guns—man's size rifles—it is safe to infer that something good for food is going up and down on four legs in that snowy wilderness; having due regard for the game laws, let us say rabbits.

But the only specimen of animal life that actually appeared to me was a little feathered oddity which I suppose I shall always remember, as a complete embodiment of the desolateness of the mountains in winter. I was walking up the canyon of the St. Vrain, which, in summer a soul-stirring gorge, is in winter a

gloomy cavern. It was late in the afternoon, nearly dark, in fact; it had snowed all day, and the flakes were still falling, while the mountains were already enfolded in night and snow; the boisterous St. Vrain was ice-locked, sheeted across in the stiller places, while elsewhere the rocks in mid stream were heaps of ice, and plates of it projected from either bank as far as the current would permit; and upon the thin edge of one of these sheets there danced a tiny bird. He was no bigger than a hen's egg all told, and was of a dark slate-color; he was round as a ball, and his head was so withdrawn into the shelter of his feathers that his sharp little bill projected upwards; he seemed not to be watching me nor the water, but stood first on one foot, then on the other, and from time to time I saw a silvery-gleaming film drawn over his eye; and there he stayed, at the edge of the black rushing water in the gathering darkness, as long as I chose to watch him. Nothing, one would suppose, but the exigencies of a livelihood, could keep a sentient creature there; and I wondered much, as I trudged back to Mrs. Howe's fireside, and her warm supper and sitting-room lamp, what provision the creator had made for that feathered atom in the waters of that pitiless stream.

Every day it snows, and it is snowing somewhere in sight all day. Every morning the porch of the ranch-house is covered with light fresh snow; the sun may shine enough during the day to melt it off, but that is the limit of his potency. One must walk, however, in the Rockies, and so you travel up the hillside, or perhaps essay an ascent into the land of rocks, and seat yourself on the bare ground, where some boulder shelters you from the wind, and look over the landscape. It is not the summer view. The empty stillness of the region is oppressive under the dull sky. Probably somewhere there is a blue gap, and you watch a dash of sunshine as it travels over the panorama; but it does not go far toward relieving the deadness of things. The mountains about you grow more and more dim as they stand further from you, and their outlines vanish and reappear as the sea of cloud drifts about them, so that they look only the bigger and more formidable. Toward the interior your view is entirely shut off by the smother of darkness that hides the main range, where the great peaks are engaged in their endless brewing of storms, piling up the snow that is to make next summer's rivers. And as you look about you, you are startled to find that a gray cloud has come over from behind the mountain top above you, and that a deadly mist is stealing down the hillside toward the spot where you are lying.

In rain, snow or sunshine, Hubbell's