

A TRAMP OVER THE MOUNTAINS

It was the middle of November, 1857, before they left the cañon. The donkey which carried their baggage strayed away, and it was the 20th before they left Washoe Valley. They had now but three days' provisions with them. In the valley the weather had been warm. Ascending the mountains they cut through six inches of ice the first night to get water. Next day, they crossed the eastern summit of the Sierra, about 9,000 feet high. Down 2,000 feet lower, to Lake Tahoe, and then on the following day, around the lake to its outlet through Trucksee river, they trudged on. The trail crossed the river and then Squaw Valley. Undeterred by twenty-four hours of rain, they attempted the western summit. The rain turned to snow, the trail was covered, was lost; the adventurers turned back to the valley, and, drying themselves as best they could in the still falling rain, lay down by their fire till morning.

Next day it was colder and snowing in the valley. They were obliged to encamp here for a week, the almost continuous snow hiding the trails and even the mountain summits. The donkey was killed for food. A tent was improvised of blankets. Its site served as a fire-place during the day and as their bed at night. The young men made themselves snowshoes, but these proved a failure and were thrown away.

On the 28th, the sky being bright and clear, they climbed all day to a high summit. "During a great part of the ascent the ground was too steep for walking. In such places our mode of procedure was to clear away the snow, catch hold of the bushes, and with hands and feet together climb up." Then they found a ravine, at least a thousand feet deep, with perpendicular walls, between them and the main ridge to be crossed. Again they went back to camp, reaching it about ten o'clock at night, tired out.

Finally, on the 29th, "after a terribly hard uphill walk of some ten or twelve miles, through deep snow and over rough ground, we gained the western summit about two o'clock in the afternoon." In the teeth of the intense cold and a bitter west wind, they crossed the three-mile plateau to the western edge. That night they camped down the slope in a forsaken cabin. Their matches had spoiled in Squaw Valley. They lighted their fire with a gun.

Two days of hard snowing followed. Again they made snowshoes, and again their efforts were doomed to failure, and the shoes were abandoned. Their meat failed. Four days of absolute starvation were before them. The trail now was a blazed one, and easily missed; the snow was three to four feet deep, and even more in places, along the side of a high ridge. Then the ridge spread into a broad plateau. Soon the trees failed them, there was no trail, and the cold was intense. Near sundown they came on fresh tracks, and hope sprang up in their hearts.

Then they discerned the truth; they had wandered in a circle, and the tracks were their own. They were off the trail. It was snowing hard, obscuring objects a hundred yards distant. They tried to make a fire, but their gun failed them. It had got damp and refused to go off. Then they found that they were frost-bitten.

The first necessity now was immediate shelter from the cold. Hope died in their hearts. The wealth of Golconda had no further charms or even interest. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." The gun was thrown away. Allen's papers, containing the records of his discoveries and titles to claims, were abandoned. Others might reap where he had sown. Nothing was kept but the blankets, a tin cup and its contents, and a butcher's knife. In the tin cup was a miserable remnant of their meat.

They struck for the nearest edge of the ridge and down the steep slope full speed through deep snow, to an evergreen valley. Here they spread their blankets on the ground, covered them a foot deep with snow, crept under the blankets feet first, and lay until morning. The warmth of their bodies thawed the snow, and they did not get dry again for several days.

On the 3rd December they followed down a ravine, hoping to find a river. A muddy current would indicate a mining camp up stream. The walking was through snow two and a half feet deep over very uneven ground. Sometimes they

walked into low bushes they could not see. For two days longer they kept on their toilsome way down the ravine to the Middle Forks of the American river and still farther down until it ran through a deep rocky cañon, where they were forced to leave it, and walk over a ridge to and across another large stream. The travelers were famished and their strength was almost gone. The snow now did not average a foot deep. Grosh was so weak, that Bucke walked in front to make the tracks for his feet. "Exhausted and despairing, I sat down, and, weeping, proposed to give up and lie down and die where we were." But Allen was determined to push through, and encouraged the despairing boy, reminding him of their friends in the East. When they camped at night, they were too weak to talk much. The younger hardly expected to live till morning, and thought that even if he survived the night, he would be unable to walk. "Let us make up our bed for the last time," he said to Allen, "for we shall never leave this place." But Allen still cheered him as best he could with the hope of reaching shelter somewhere yet. They slept but little.

Next morning, after "horrible and extravagant dreams . . . we were barely able to crawl along, and went almost as much on our hands and knees as on our feet." The snow was now only a few inches deep. Once Allen said he heard a dog bark; Maurice refused to believe it. Then they came to a ditch with running water, and knew they were near a mining camp.

In a few minutes Allan said, "There is smoke." They had walked or crawled just three-quarters of a mile that day. The name of the camp was "Last Chance."

The miners showed their proverbial generosity; but the exhausted youths could not eat. Next day they were unable to walk. In a few days they became delirious. On the twelfth day Allen Grosh died.

"No knowledge survived of the work of the Grosh Brothers in Gold Cañon and its neighbourhood, except the bare fact that they had found silver. Two years afterwards in 1859, this knowledge, by making the miners watch for indications of silver, led to the finding of the Comstock lode, and that discovery to others, until the faint and soon almost extinguished spark of knowledge, struck from the rocks of Utah by the intelligence and perseverance of these two young men, resulted in the enormous silver-mining industry of western Nevada."¹

Maurice's powerful physique stood him in good stead under the trying ordeal. He was obliged to lie in bed all winter. The miners sent down

¹ A letter signed Duncan Gordon, published in the New York "Sun," November 29, 1897, and entitled, "The Tragedy of the Comstock," was contradicted or varied in many of its statements by Dr. Bucke in an interview published in the London (Ont.) "Advertiser" of December 16, 1897. Gordon connected the Groshes and Dr. Bucke more closely with the discovery of the Comstock than the facts, according to the latter, appeared to justify.

the mountains for a surgeon, "who found it necessary to amputate one of my feet, and a portion of the other." "For months," says one who knew him well, Dr. T. J. W. Burgess, superintendent of the Protestant Asylum for the Insane, Montreal, "the stricken man lay in that mountain cabin, tended only by rough, yet gentle, hands, and there it was that he first had time to think. The miners made a collection of gold dust and nuggets to send him on his way to San Francisco. 'I was born again,' he once said, in speaking of this period of his life, 'It cost me my feet—yet it was worth the price.'"¹ The stumps did not thoroughly heal for more than forty years. The sufferings he endured can be better imagined than described. But never was suffering more heroically borne, and uncomplaining, he suffered in silence.

¹From a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the American Medico-Psychological Association, held at Montreal, June, 1902, and reprinted in pamphlet form from the published proceedings.