

HARPER'S MAGAZINE



MAY

Alice Duer Miller's
new serial begins

John Spargo
What Bolshevism Has Become

Zane Grey
Through Death Valley

America Goes Back
To Work

By Edward Hungerford

Price 35 cents

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DEATH VALLEY

BY ZANE GREY

OF the five hundred and fifty-seven square miles of desert land in the Southwest, Death Valley is the lowest below sea-level, the most arid and desolate. It derives its felicitous name from the earliest days of the gold strike in California, when a caravan of Mormons, numbering about seventy, struck out from Salt Lake, to cross the Mojave Desert and make a short cut to the gold-fields. All but two of these prospectors perished in the deep, iron-walled, ghastly sink-hole, which from that time became known as Death Valley.

The survivors of this fatal expedition brought news to the world that the somber valley of death was a treasure mine of minerals, and since then hundreds of prospectors and wanderers have lost their lives there. To seek gold and to live in the lonely waste places of the earth have been and ever will be driving passions of men.

My companion on this trip was a Norwegian named Sievert Nielson. On most of my trips to lonely and wild places I have been fortunate in my comrades or guides. The circumstances of my meeting Nielson were so singular that I think they will serve as an interesting introduction. Some years ago I received a letter, brief, clear, and well written, in which the writer stated that he had been a wanderer over the world, a sailor before the mast, and was now a prospector for gold. He had taken four trips alone down into the desert of Sonora, and in many other places of the Southwest, and knew the prospecting game. Somewhere he had run across my story, *Desert Gold*, in which I told about a lost gold-mine. And the point of his letter was that if I could give him some idea as to where the lost

gold-mine was located he would go and find it and give me half of it. I wrote him that to my regret the lost gold-mine existed only in my imagination, but if he would come to Avalon to see me perhaps we might both profit by such a meeting. To my surprise he came. He was a man of about thirty-five, of magnificent physique, weighing about one hundred and ninety pounds, and he was so enormously broad across the shoulders that he did not look his five feet ten. He had a wonderful head, huge, round, solid like a cannon-ball, and his bronzed face, his regular features, square, firm jaw, and clear gray eyes, fearless and direct, were singularly attractive to me. Well educated, with a strange, calm poise, and a cool courtesy, not common in Americans, he evidently was a man of good family, by his own choice a rolling stone and an adventurer.

Nielson accompanied me on two trips into the wilderness of Arizona, on one of which he saved my life, and on the other he rescued all our party from a most uncomfortable and possibly hazardous situation—but these are tales I may tell elsewhere. In January, 1919, Nielson and I traveled around the desert of southern California, from Palm Springs to Picacho, and in March we went to Death Valley.

Nowadays a little railroad, the Tonapah and Tidewater Railroad, runs northward from the Santa Fé over the barren Mojave, and passes within fifty miles of Death Valley.

It was sunset when we arrived at Death Valley Junction, a weird, strange sunset in drooping curtains of transparent cloud, lighting up dark mountain ranges, some peaks of which were clear-

cut and black against the veiled in trailing storms, es were white with snow in the dingy little store I ters talk about float, wh on the surface; about hi, zinc, copper, silver, lead and how borax was min ago and hauled out of D teams of twenty mules. while Nielson packed the outfit, I visited the borax the property of an English work of hauling, grinding are went on day and night as dusty and full of a p here as an old-fashioned ore was hauled by tra twenty miles nearer the dumped from a high tre that fed the grinders. watched this constant s as it slid down into the h and I listened to the cha for who yelled in my ear. a piece of gypsum out of and the mill was getting hundred sacks a day. The not last long at such labor, six months appeared to human endurance. How enough of that choking where the borax was g found intolerable the p borax was roasted in h waling furnaces. When the cool, clean desert a measurable relief, and t me thoughtful of the co who labored, who were ch sity, duty, habit, or by l tasks of the world. It di These laborers of the b mills, like the stokers of diggers, and blast-furna thousands of men—kil outright or impaired the when they were gone or r others were found to ta Whenever I come in con phase of this problem of meaning of the lesson of i

cut and black against the sky, and others veiled in trailing storms, while still others were white with snow. That night in the dingy little store I heard prospectors talk about float, which meant gold on the surface; about high-grade ores—zinc, copper, silver, lead, manganese—and how borax was mined thirty years ago and hauled out of Death Valley by teams of twenty mules. Next morning, while Nielson packed the burros with our outfit, I visited the borax-mill. It was the property of an English firm, and the work of hauling, grinding, roasting borax went on day and night. Inside it was as dusty and full of a powdery atmosphere as an old-fashioned flour-mill. The ore was hauled by train from some twenty miles nearer the valley, and was dumped from a high trestle into chutes that fed the grinders. For an hour I watched this constant stream of borax as it slid down into the hungry crushers, and I listened to the chalk-faced operator who yelled in my ear. Once he picked a piece of gypsum out of the borax. He said the mill was getting out twenty-five hundred sacks a day. The men, he said, did not last long at such labor, and in the mines six months appeared to be the limit of human endurance. How quickly I had enough of that choking air in the room where the borax was ground! And I found intolerable the place where the borax was roasted in huge, round, revolving furnaces. When I got out into the cool, clean desert air I felt an immeasurable relief, and that relief made me thoughtful of the condition of men who labored, who were chained by necessity, duty, habit, or by love, to the hard tasks of the world. It did not seem fair. These laborers of the borax mines and mills, like the stokers of ships, and coal-diggers, and blast-furnace hands—like thousands of men—killed themselves outright or impaired their strength, and when they were gone or rendered useless others were found to take their places. Whenever I come in contact with some phase of this problem of life I take the meaning of the lesson of it to myself, and

as the years go by my respect and reverence and wonder increase for these men of elemental lives, these horny-handed toilers with physical things, these uncomplaining users of brawn and bone, these giants who breast the elements, who till the earth and handle iron, who fight the natural forces with their bodies.

That day about noon I looked back down the long gravel and grease-wood slope which we had ascended and I saw the borax-mill now only a smoky blot on the desert floor. When we reached the pass between the Black Mountains and the Funeral Mountains we left the road and were soon lost to the works of man. How strange a gladness, a relief! Something dropped away from me. I felt the same subtle change in Nielson. For one thing, he stopped talking, except for an occasional word to the mules.

The blunt end of the Funeral Range was as remarkable as its name. It sheered up very high, a saw-tooth range with colored strata tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees. Zigzag veins of black and red and yellow, rather dull, ran through the great drab-gray mass. This end of the range, an iron mountain, frowned down upon us with hard and formidable aspect. The peak was draped in streaky veils of rain from low-dropping clouds that appeared to have lodged there. All below lay clear and cold in the sunlight.

Our direction lay to the westward, and at that altitude, about three thousand feet, how pleasant to face the sun! For the wind was cold. The narrow, shallow wash leading down from the pass deepened, widened, almost imperceptibly at first, and then gradually until its proportions were striking. It was a gully where the gravel washed down during rains, and where a scant vegetation, grease-wood, and few low cacti and scrubby sage struggled for existence. Not a bird or lizard or living creature in sight! The trail was getting lonely. From time to time I looked back, because as we could not see far ahead

all the superb scene spread and towered behind us. Finally our wash grew to be a wide cañon, winding away from under the massive, lowering wall of the Funeral Range. The high side of this magnificent and impressive line of mountains faced west—a succession of unscalable slopes of bare ragged rock, jagged and juttied, dark drab, rusty iron, with gray and oblique strata running through them as far as eye could see. Clouds soared around the peaks; shadows sailed along the slopes.

Walking in loose gravel was as hard as trudging along in sand. After about fifteen miles I began to have leaden feet. I did not mind hard work, but I wanted to avoid over-exertion. When I am extremely wearied my feelings are liable to be colored somewhat by depression or melancholy. Then it always annoyed me to get tired while Nielson kept on with his wonderful stride.

"Say, Nielson, do you take me for a Yaqui?" I complained. "Slow up a little."

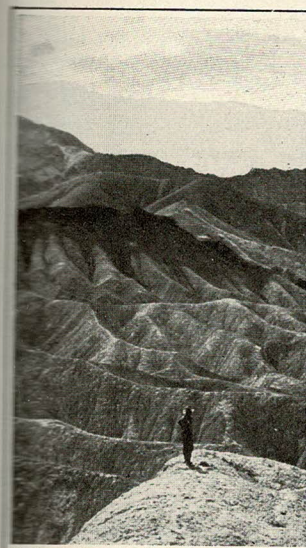
He obliged me, and to cheer me up he told me about a little tramping experience he had in Baja California. Somewhere on the east slope of the Sierra Madre his burros strayed or were killed by mountain-lions, and he found it imperative to strike at once for the nearest ranch below the border, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles. He could carry only a portion of his outfit, and as some of it was valuable to him, he discarded all his food except a few biscuits and a canteen of water. Resting only a few hours, without any sleep, he walked the hundred and fifty miles in three days and nights. I believed that Nielson, in telling me such incidents of his own wild experience, intended to inspire me to more endurance.

As we traveled on down the cañon its dimensions continued to grow. It finally turned to the left and opened out wide into a valley running west. A low range of hills faced us, rising in a long, sweeping slant of earth, like the incline of a glacier, to rounded spurs. Half-way up

this slope where the brown earth lightened, there showed an outcropping of clay—amber and cream and cinnamon and green, all exquisitely vivid and clear. This bright spot appeared to be isolated. Far above it rose other clay slopes of variegated hues, red and russet and mauve and gray, and colors indescribably merged, all running in veins through this range of hills. We faced the west again, and, descending this valley, were soon greeted by a region of clay hills, bare, cone-shaped, fantastic in shade, slope, and ridge, with a high, sharp peak dominating all. The colors were mauve, taupe, pearl-gray, all stained by a descending band of crimson, as if a higher slope had been stabbed to let its life blood flow down. The softness, the richness and beauty of this texture of earth amazed and delighted my eyes.

Quite unprepared, at a time approaching sunset, we reached and rounded a sharp curve, to see down and far away, and to be held mute in our tracks. Between a white-mantled mountain range on the left and the dark-striped lofty range on the right I could see far down into a gulf, a hazy void, a vast, stark valley that seemed streaked and ridged and cañoned, an abyss into which veils of rain were dropping and over which broken clouds hung, pierced by red and gold rays.

Death Valley! Far down and far away still, yet confounding at first sight! I gazed spellbound. It oppressed my heart. Nielson stood like a statue, silent, absorbed for a moment, then he strode on. I followed, and every second saw more and different aspects, that could not, however, change the first stunning impression. Immense, unreal, weird! I went on down the widening cañon, looking into that changing void. How full of color! It smoked. The tracteries of streams or shining white washes brightened the floor of the long, dark pit. Patches and plains of white, borax flats or alkali, showed up like snow. A red haze, sinister and somber, hung over the

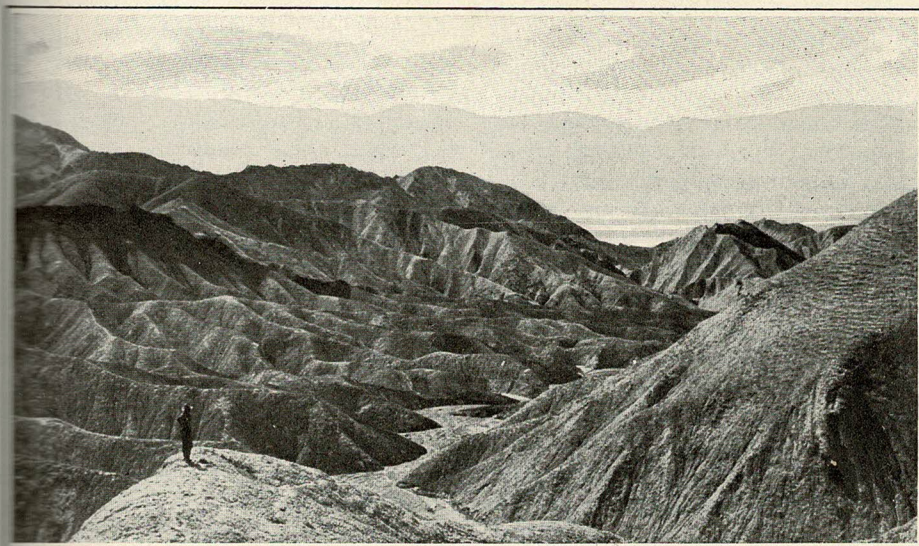


AN UPHEA

eastern ramparts of this valley the western drooped gray v like thinnest lacy clouds, thr shone gleams of the sun.

Nielson plodded on, min mules. But I lingered, a checked my reluctant steps high point with commanding nificent view. As I did not a impossible—to write down th sensations—I could remembe a few. How desolate and g far-away, lonely, and terrib the earth were the most be elevating. Life's little day easy to understand, so pitif sun began to set and the st moved across it this wond darkened, changed every brightened, grew full of lur light and then streaked gleams. The tips of the Panan tains came out silver above clouds. At sunset the momen ous—dark, forbidding, dim, mal, yet still tinged with gold any other scene! Dante's Inf ley of Shadows! Cañon of Pu

When the sun had set an upheaved and furrowed wor



AN UPHEAVED AND FURROWED WORLD OF ROCK

eastern ramparts of this valley, and over the western drooped gray veils of rain, like the thinnest lacy clouds, through which shone gleams of the sun.

Nielson plodded on, mindful of our mules. But I lingered, and at last checked my reluctant steps at an open high point with commanding and magnificent view. As I did not attempt the impossible—to write down thoughts and sensations—I could remember later only a few. How desolate and grand! The far-away, lonely, and terrible places of the earth were the most beautiful and elevating. Life's little day seemed so easy to understand, so pitiful. As the sun began to set and the storm-clouds moved across it this wondrous scene darkened, changed every moment, brightened, grew full of luminous red light and then streaked by golden gleams. The tips of the Panamint Mountains came out silver above the purple clouds. At sunset the moment was glorious—dark, forbidding, dim, weird, dismal, yet still tinged with gold. Not like any other scene! Dante's Inferno! Valley of Shadows! Cañon of Purple Veils!

When the sun had set and all that upheaved and furrowed world of rock

had received a mantle of gray, and a slumberous, sulphurous, ruddy haze slowly darkened to purple and black, then I realized more fully that I was looking down into Death Valley.

Twilight was stealing down when I caught up with Nielson. He had selected for our camp a protected nook near a spot where the cañon floor bore some patches of sage, the stalks and roots of which would serve for firewood. We unpacked, fed the mules some grain, pitched our little tent and made our bed all in short order, but it was dark long before we had supper. During the meal we talked a little, but afterward, when the chores were done and the mules had become quiet and the strange, thick silence had settled down upon us, we did not talk at all.

The night was black, with sky mostly obscured by clouds. A pale haze marked the west where the afterglow had faded; in the south one radiant star crowned a mountain peak. I strolled away in the darkness and sat down upon a stone. How intense the silence! Dead, vast, sepulchre-like, dreaming, waiting, a silence of ages, burdened with the history of the past, awful! I strained my ears

for sound of insect or rustle of sage or drop of weathered rock. The soft, cool desert wind was soundless. This silence had something terrifying in it, making me seem a man alone upon earth. The great spaces, the wild places as they had been millions of years before—I seemed to divine how through them man might develop from a savage to a god, and how, alas! he might go back again.

When I returned to camp Nielson had gone to bed and the fire had burned low. I threw on some branches of sage, the fire blazed up, but it seemed different from other camp-fires. No cheer, no glow, no sparkle! Perhaps it was owing to scant and poor wood. Still I thought it was owing as much to the place. The sadness, the loneliness, the desolateness of this place weighed upon the camp-fire as it did upon my heart.

We got up at five-thirty. At dawn the sky was a cold leaden gray, with a dull gold and rose in the east. A hard wind, eager and nipping, blew up the cañon. At six o'clock the sky brightened somewhat and the day seemed less threatening.

An hour later we broke camp. Traveling in the early morning was pleasant, and we made good time down the winding cañon, arriving about noon at Furnace Creek, where we halted to rest. This stream of warm water, flowing down from a gully that headed up in the Funeral Mountains, had a disagreeable taste, somewhat acrid and soapy. A green thicket of brush was indeed welcome to the eye. It consisted of a rank, coarse kind of grass, and arrow-weed, mesquite, and tamarack. The last-named bore a pink, fuzzy blossom not unlike pussy-willow, which was quite fragrant. Here the deadness of the region seemed further enlivened by several small birds, speckled and gray, two ravens, and a hawk. They all appeared to be hunting food. On a ridge above Furnace Creek we came upon a spring of poison water, clear, sparkling, with a greenish cast, which deposited a white crust on the margins. Nielson, kicking

around in the sand, unearthed a skull, bleached and yellow, yet evidently not very old. Some thirsty wanderer had taken his last drink at that deceiving spring. The gruesome and the beautiful, the tragic and the sublime, go hand in hand down the naked shingle of this desolate desert.

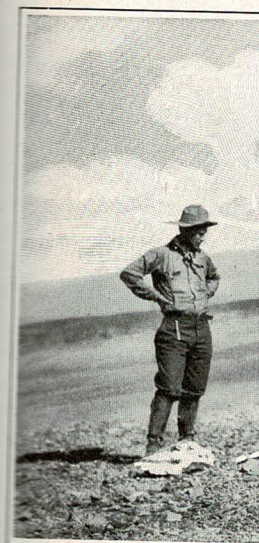
While tramping around in the neighborhood of Furnace Creek I happened upon an old, almost obliterated trail. It led toward the ridges of clay, and when I had climbed it a little distance I began to get an impression that the slopes on the other side must run down into a basin or cañon. So I climbed to the top.

The magnificent scenes of desert and mountain, like all the splendid things of life, must be climbed for. In this instance I was suddenly and stunningly confronted by a yellow gulf of cone-shaped and fan-shaped ridges, all bare, crinkly clay, of gold, of amber, of pink, of bronze, of cream—all tapering down to round-knobbed lower ridges, bleak and barren, yet wonderfully beautiful in their stark purity of denudation, until at last, far down between two widely separated hills, shone, dim and blue and ghastly, with shining white streaks like silver streams—the Valley of Death. Then beyond it climbed the league-long red slope, merging into the iron-buttressed base of the Panamint Range, and here, line on line and bulge on bulge, rose the bold benches, and on up the unscalable outcroppings of rock, like colossal ribs of the earth, on and up the steep slopes to where their density of blue-black color began to thin out with streaks of white, and thence upward to the last noble height, where the cold, pure snow gleamed against the sky.

I descended into this yellow maze, this world of gullies and ridges where I found it difficult to keep from getting lost. I did lose my bearings, but as my boots made deep imprints in the soft clay I knew it would be easy to back-track my trail. After a while this labyrinthine series of channels and dunes opened into a wide space inclosed on three sides by

denuded slopes, most of the slopes were smooth, gullies were cal, with tiny traces of each appeared to reflect yellow or cinnamon were always dominated of a different color. The region sloped and so amphitheater walled off by a mountain of bare hue, and of a thousand sloped surfaces. At its russets and yellows were ascending its slopes were ors—a dark, beautiful one side and a strange the other. Between the of the curve climbed heliotrope and amber, veins of green—green light—and tracery of the bold face of this amphitheater stood out a zigzag belt stain of which had run the other hues. Above the coloration upheaved the mountain, growing earthy browns, up to the ramparts.

This place affected me



MELANCHOLY,

denuded slopes, mostly yellow. These slopes were smooth, graceful, symmetrical, with tiny tracery of erosion, and each appeared to retain its own color, yellow or cinnamon or mauve. But they were always dominated by a higher one of a different color. And this mystic region sloped and slanted to a great amphitheater walled on the opposite side by a mountain of bare earth, of every hue, and of a thousand ribbed and scalloped surfaces. At its base the golds and russets and yellows were strongest, but ascending its slopes were changing colors—a dark, beautiful mouse color on one side and a strangely pearly cream on the other. Between these great corners of the curve climbed ridges of gray and heliotrope and amber, to meet wonderful veins of green—green as the sea in sunlight—and tracery of white; and on the bold face of this amphitheater, high up, stood out a zigzag belt of dull red, the stain of which had run down to tinge the other hues. Above all this wondrous coloration upheaved the bare breast of the mountain, growing darker with earthy browns, up to the gray old rock ramparts.

This place affected me so strangely, so

irresistibly, that I remained there a long time. Something terrible had happened there to men, I felt sure. Something tragic was going on right then—the wearing down, the devastation of the old earth. How plainly that could be seen! Geologically, it was more remarkable to me than the Grand Cañon. But it was the appalling meaning, the absolutely indescribable beauty which overcame me. I thought of those who had been an inspiration to me in my work, and I suffered a pang that they could not be there to see and feel with me.

On my way out of this amphitheater a hard wind swooped down over the slopes, tearing up the colored dust in sheets and clouds. It seemed to me that each gully had its mystic pall of color. I lost no time climbing out. What a hot, choking ordeal! But I never would have missed it, even had I known I should get lost. Looking down again, the scene was vastly changed. A smoky, weird, murky hell with the dull sun gleaming magenta-hued through the shifting pall of dust!

In the afternoon we proceeded leisurely, through an atmosphere growing warmer and denser, down to the valley,



MELANCHOLY, NAMELESS GRAVES ON THE WINDY DESERT SLOPE

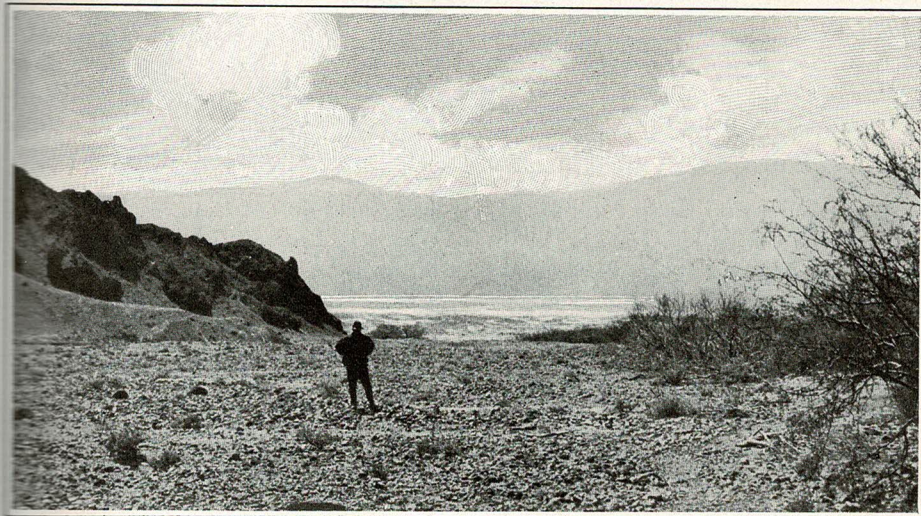
tied to keep him out of the water. To have drunk his fill then would have killed him. He had to be fed water by the spoonful. Another wanderer came staggering into the oasis, blind, with horrible face and a black, swollen tongue protruding. He could not make a sound. He also had to be roped, as if he were a mad steer.

I met only one prospector during my stay in Death Valley, a rather undersized man he was, yet muscular, with brown wrinkled face and narrow, dim eyes. He camped with us and seemed to be smiling to himself most of the time, and liked to talk to his burros. He was exceedingly interesting. Once he nearly died of thirst, he said, having gone from noon one day till next morning without water. He fell down often during this ordeal but did not lose his senses; finally the burros saved his life. This old fellow had been across Death Valley every month in the year. July was the worst; in that month crossing should not be attempted during the middle of the day.

I made the acquaintance of the Shoshone Indians, or rather it was through Nielson I met them. Nielson had a kindly, friendly way with Indians. There were half a dozen families, living

in squalid tents. The braves worked in the fields for Denton and the squaws kept to the shade with their numerous children. They appeared to be poor; certainly they were a ragged, unpicturesque group. Nielson and I visited them, taking an armload of canned fruit and boxes of sweet crackers, which were received with evident joy. Through this overture I got a peep into one of the tents. The simplicity and frugality of the desert Piute or Navajo were here wanting. These children of the open wore white men's apparel and ate white men's food, and they even had a cook-stove and a sewing-machine in their tent. Nevertheless, they were trying to live like Indians. For me the spectacle was melancholy—another manifestation added to my long list of degeneration of the Indians through the whites! The tent was a buzzing beehive of flies. Never before had I seen so many. In a corner was a naked Indian baby asleep on a goatskin, all his brown, warm-tinted skin spotted black with flies.

Later in the day one of the Indian men called upon us at our camp. I was surprised to hear him use good English. He said he had been educated in a government school in California. From him I



THE AIR HELD A SOLEMN STILLNESS

learned a great deal about Death Valley. As he was about to depart, on the way to his labor in the fields, he put his hand in his ragged pocket and drew forth an old beaded hat-band, and with calm dignity, worthy of any gift, he made me a present of it. Then he went on his way. The incident touched me. I had been kind; the Indian was not to be outdone. How that reminded me of the many instances of pride in Indians! Who yet has ever told the story of the Indian—the truth, the spirit, the soul of his tragedy?

Nielson and I climbed high up the west slope to the top of a gravel ridge swept clean and packed hard by the winds. Here I sat down while my companion tramped curiously around. At my feet I found a tiny flower, so tiny as almost to defy detection. The color resembled sage-gray and it had the fragrance of sage. Hard to find and wonderful to see was its tiny blossom! The small leaves were perfectly formed, very soft, veined and scalloped, with a fine fuzz and a glistening sparkle. That desert flower of a day, in its isolation and fragility, yet in its unquenchable spirit to live, was to me as great as the tremendous reddening bulk of the Funeral Mountains looming so sinisterly above me.

Then I saw some large bats with white heads flitting around in zigzag flights, new and strange creatures to me.

I had come up there to this high ridge to take advantage of the bleak, lonely spot commanding a view of valley and mountains. Before I could compose myself to watch the valley, I made the discovery that near me were six low, gravelly mounds. Graves! One had two stones at head and foot; another had no mark at all. The one nearest had for the head a flat piece of board, with lettering so effaced by weather that I could not decipher the inscription. The bones of a horse lay littered about between the graves. What a lonely place for graves! Death Valley seemed to be one vast sepulchre. What had been the lives and

deaths of these people buried here? Lonely, melancholy, nameless graves upon the windy desert slope!

By this time the long shadows had begun to fall. Sunset over Death Valley! A golden flare burned over the Panamints—long, tapering, notched mountains with all their rugged conformation showing. Above floated gold and gray and silver-edged clouds; below shone a whorl of dusky, ruddy bronze haze, gradually thickening. Dim veils of heat still rose from the pale desert valley. As I watched all before me seemed to change and be shrouded in purple. How bold and desolate a scene! What vast scale and tremendous dimension! The clouds paled, turned rosy for a moment with the afterglow, then deepened into purple gloom. A somber smoky sunset, as if Death Valley were the gateway of hell, and its sinister shades upflung from fire. The desert day was done and now the desert twilight descended. Twilight of hazy purple fell over the valley of shadows. The black bold lines of mountains ran across the sky and down into the valley and up on the other side. A buzzard sailed low in the foreground—fitting emblem of life in all that wilderness of suggested death. This fleeting hour was tranquil and sad. What little had it to do with the destiny of man! Death Valley was only a ragged rent of the old earth, from which men in their folly and passion had sought to dig forth golden treasure. The air held a solemn stillness. Peace! How it rested my troubled soul! I felt that I was myself here, far different from my habitual self. Why had I longed to see Death Valley? What did I want of the desert that was naked, red, sinister, somber, forbidding, ghastly, stark, dim, and dark and dismal, the abode of silence and loneliness, the proof of death, decay, devastation, and destruction, the majestic sublimity of desolation? The answer was that I sought the awful, the appalling, and terrible because they harked me back to a primitive day when to my blood and bones was bequeathed their heritage of

the elements. That was the secret of the eternal fascination the desert exerted upon all men. It carried them back. It inhibited thought. It brought up the age-old sensations so that I could feel, though I did not know it then, once again the all-satisfying state of the savage in nature.

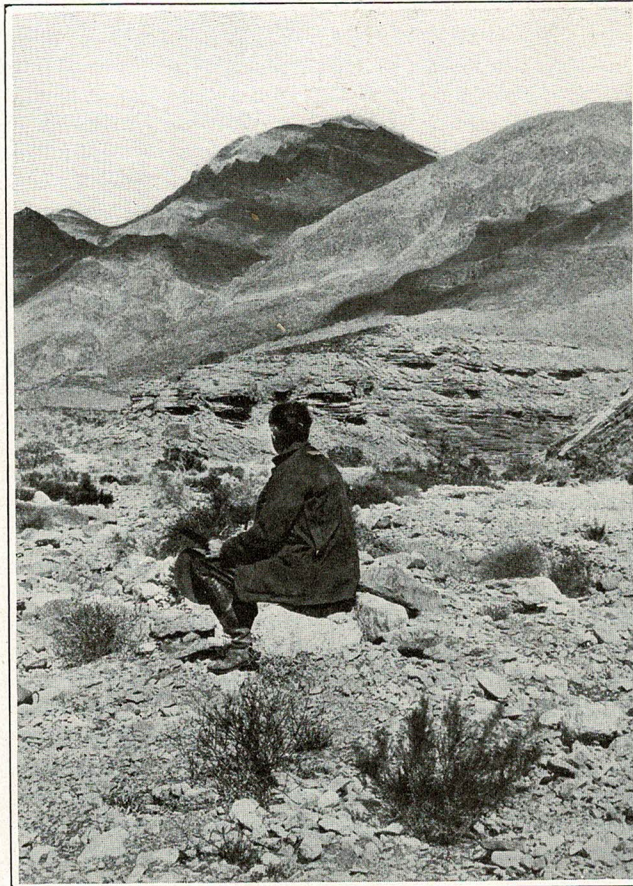
When I returned to camp night had fallen. The evening star stood high in the pale sky, all alone and difficult to see, yet the more beautiful for the difficulty. The night appeared to be warmer, or perhaps it was because no wind blew. Nielson got supper and ate most of it, for I was not hungry. As I sat by the camp-fire a flock of little bats, the smallest I had ever seen, darted from the wood-pile near by and flew right in my face. They had no fear of man or fire. Their wings made a soft, swishing sound. Later I heard the trill of a bat, the last sound I might hear in Death Valley. It was a high, pitched, melodious trill, like the music made by the birds of the Malipus Jungle of Mexico. It awakened that night—a memory. I heard this trill. Once again my ear caught faint movements. How strange, a sound like the trill! What a contrast to the infinite silence and loneliness of the swamps and the desert! What could he be doing in a place like Death Valley? Nature is inscrutable.

Next morning the m

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Next morning the marvel of nature



HOW BOLD AND DESOLATE A SCENE

was exemplified even more strikingly. Out on the hard, gravel-strewn slope I found some more tiny flowers of a day. One was a white daisy, very frail and delicate on long, thin stem with scarcely any leaves. Another was a yellow flower with four petals, a pale miniature California poppy. Still another was a purple-red flower almost as large as a buttercup with dark-green leaves. Last and tiniest of all were infinitely fragile pink and white blossoms on very flat plants, smiling wanly up from the desolate earth.

Nielson and I made known to Denton our purpose to walk across the valley. He advised against it. Not that the heat was intense at this season, he explained,

but there were other dangers, particularly the brittle, salty crust of the sink-hole. Nevertheless, we were not deterred from our purpose.

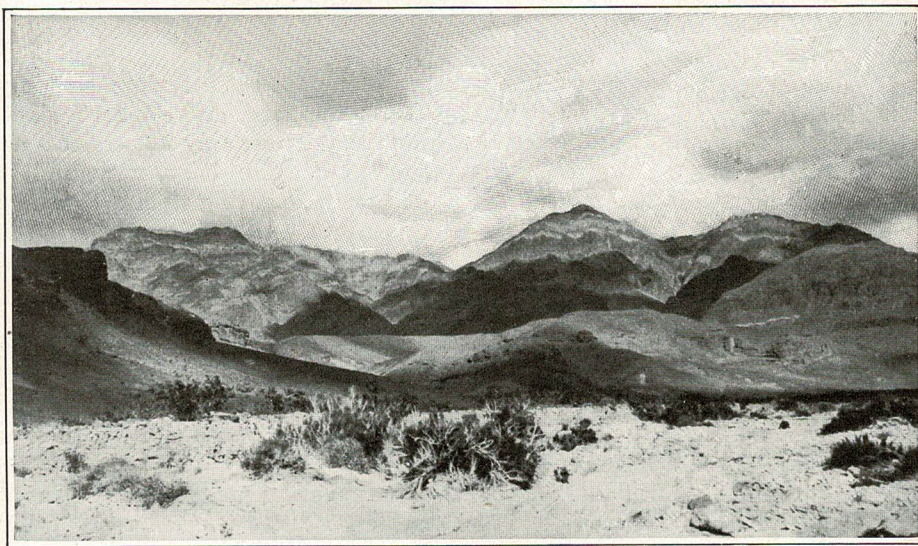
So with plenty of water in canteens and a few biscuits in our pockets we set out. I saw the heat veils rising from the valley floor, at that point one hundred and seventy-eight feet below sea-level. The heat lifted in veils, like thin smoke. Denton had told us that in summer the heat came in currents, in waves. It blasted leaves, burned trees to death as well as men. Prospectors watched for the leaden haze that thickened over the mountains, knowing then no man could dare the terrible sun. That day would be a hazed and glaring hell, leaden, copper, with sun blazing in a sky of molten iron.

A long, sandy slope of mesquite extended down to the bare, crinkly floor of the valley, and here the descent to a lower level was scarcely perceptible. The walking was bad; little mounds in the salty crust made it hard to place a foot on the level. This crust appeared fairly strong, but when it rang hollow under our boots I stepped very cautiously. The color was a dirty gray and yellow. Far

ahead I could see a dazzling white plain that looked like frost on a frozen river. The atmosphere was deceptive, making this plain seem far away and then close at hand.

The excessively difficult walking and the thickness of the air tired me, so I threw myself down to rest and used my note-book as a means to conceal from the tireless Nielson that I was fatigued. Always I found this a very efficient excuse, and, for that matter, it was profitable for me. I have forgotten more than I have ever written.

Rather overpowering, indeed, it was to sit on the floor of Death Valley, miles from the slopes that appeared so far away. It was flat, salty, alkali, or borax ground, crusted and cracked. The glare hurt my eyes. I felt moist, hot, oppressed, in spite of a rather stiff wind. A dry odor pervaded the air, slightly like salty dust. Thin dust devils whirled on the bare flats. A valley-wide mirage shone clear as a mirror along the desert floor to the west, strange, deceiving, a thing both unreal and beautiful. The Panamints towered a wrinkled, red, grisly mass, broken by rough cañons, with long declines of talus like brown



THE LAND OF PURPLE VEILS

glaciers. Seamed and structible by past ages, young to ruin! From this point see the snow on the peaks mountain range seemed a barrier of beetling rock. Range was farther away more impressive. Its effects dous. Leagues of broad slopes, scarred by slashes of cream, and shadowed by clouds, led up to the peaked and jugged summits.

Splendid as this was and I felt to leave, I soon joined we proceeded onward. reached the white, wind-swept had resembled a frozen river from afar had looked so stark. We found it to be a smooth stratum of salt ground powdered. It was not solid at pressure of a boot it shrank. Under the white crust lay a substance that was wet. Here an obstacle we had not calculated. Nielson ventured out on it and sank in several inches. I did not wave of the crust. It resisted under a weight. Presently I took a few steps, and did not deeply or make such deep impressions as Nielson. We retraced the solid edge and deliberated. That by stepping quickly without any great risk, it appeared reasonable that by a person would sink into it.

"Well, Nielson, you go ahead with an attempt at lightening weigh one hundred and ninety go through I'll turn back!"

Nielson started with a man courted peril. The danger must have been so alluring to him. I started caught up with him, and saved him. I could not have warned him over that strip of treacherous hole. If I could have done the adventure would have been to me. Nevertheless I was

glaciers. Seamed and scarred! Indestructible by past ages, yet surely wearing to ruin! From this point I could not see the snow on the peaks. The whole mountain range seemed an immense red barrier of beetling rock. The Funeral Range was farther away and therefore more impressive. Its effect was stupendous. Leagues of brown, chocolate slopes, scarred by slashes of yellow and cream, and shadowed black by sailing clouds, led up to the magnificently peaked and jugged summits.

Splendid as this was and reluctant as I felt to leave, I soon joined Nielson and we proceeded onward. At last we reached the white, winding plain that had resembled a frozen river, and which from afar had looked so ghastly and stark. We found it to be a perfectly smooth stratum of salt glistening as if powdered. It was not solid, not stable; at pressure of a boot it shook like jelly. Under the white crust lay a yellow substance that was wet. Here appeared an obstacle we had not calculated upon. Nielson ventured out on it and his feet sank in several inches. I did not like the wave of the crust. It resembled thin ice under a weight. Presently I ventured to take a few steps, and did not sink in so deeply or make such depression in the crust as Nielson. We returned to the solid edge and deliberated. Nielson said that by stepping quickly we could cross without any great risk, though it appeared reasonable that by standing still a person would sink into the substance.

"Well, Nielson, you go ahead," I said, with an attempt at lightness. "You weigh one hundred and ninety. If you go through I'll turn back!"

Nielson started with a laugh. The man courted peril. The bright face of danger must have been beautiful and alluring to him. I started after him, caught up with him, and stayed beside him. I could not have walked behind him over that strip of treacherous sink-hole. If I could have done so the whole adventure would have been meaningless to me. Nevertheless I was frightened. I

felt the prickle of my skin, the stiffening of my hair, as well as the cold tingling thrills through my veins.

This place was the lowest point of the valley in that particular location, and must have been upward of two hundred feet below sea-level. The lowest spot, called the Sink Hole, lay some miles distant and was the terminus of this river of salty white.

We crossed it in safety. On the other side extended a long flat of upheaved crusts of salt and mud, full of holes and pitfalls, an exceedingly toilsome and painful place to travel, and, for all we could tell, dangerous, too. I had all I could do to watch my feet and find surfaces to hold my steps. Eventually we crossed this broken field, reaching the edge of the gravel slope, where we were very glad indeed to rest.

Denton had informed us that the distance was seven miles across the valley at the mouth of Furnace Creek. I had thought it seemed much less than that. But after I had toiled across it I was convinced that it was much more. It had taken us hours. How the time had sped! For this reason we did not tarry long on that side.

Facing the sun, we found the return trip more formidable. Hot indeed it was—hot enough for me to imagine how terrible Death Valley would be in July or August. On all sides the mountains stood up dim and obscure and distant in haze. The heat veils lifted in ripples, and any object not near at hand seemed illusive. Nielson set a pace for me on this return trip. I was quicker and surer of foot than he, but he had more endurance. I lost strength while he kept his unimpaired, so often he had to wait for me. Once when I broke through the crust he happened to be close at hand and quickly hauled me out. I got one foot wet with some acid fluid. We peered down into the murky hole, Nielson quoting a prospector's saying, "Forty feet from hell!" That broken sharp crust of salt afforded the meanest traveling I had ever experienced. Slopes of weathered

rock that slip and slide are bad; cacti, and especially choya cacti, are worse; the jagged and corrugated surfaces of lava are still more hazardous and painful. But this cracked floor of Death Valley, with its salt crusts standing on end, like pickets of a fence, beat any place for hard going that either Nielson or I had encountered. I ruined my boots, skinned my shins, cut my hands. How those salt cuts stung! We crossed the upheaved plain, then the strip of white, and reached the crinkly floor of yellow salt. The last hour taxed my endurance almost to the limit. When we reached the edge of the sand and the beginning of the slope I was hotter and thirstier than I had ever been in my life. It pleased me to see Nielson wringing wet and panting. He drank a quart of water apparently in one gulp, and I took the longest and deepest drink of water that I had ever drunk.

We reached camp at the end of this still hot summer day. Never had a camp seemed so welcome! What a wonderful thing it was to earn and appreciate and

realize rest! The cottonwood leaves were rustling; bees were humming in the tamarack blossoms. I lay in the shade, resting my burning feet and aching bones, and I watched Nielson as he whistled over the camp-chores. Then I heard the sweet song of a meadow-lark and after that the melodious, deep note of a swamp blackbird. These birds evidently were traveling north and had tarried at the oasis.

Lying there, I realized that I had come to love the silence, the loneliness, the serenity, even the tragedy, of this valley of shadows. Death Valley was one place that could never be popular with men. It had been set apart for the hardy diggers for earth's treasure, and for the wanderers of the waste lands—men who go forth to seek and to find and to face their souls. Perhaps most of them found death. But there was a death in life. Desert travelers learned the secret that men lived too much in the world—that in silence and loneliness and desolation there was something infinite, something hidden from the crowd.

DANGER

BY E. E. SPEIGHT

BEAR with me, dear ones, for have I not seen
Red roads that lead where love hath never been?

Where ye have played upon the meadow grass
I have known ancient treachery come to pass.

And in the words of them ye thought were true
My heart hath heard most bitter hate of you.

Bear with me that I cannot take my ease
Nor leave my guard amid such challenges.

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