

### Tobogganning Down A Volcano.

**P**OPOCATAPETL, the great volcano of Mexico, which rears itself in gaunt majesty 17,816 feet above sea level, and which keeps watch and ward over Ixtaccihuatl—"The Sleeping Lady"—who lies below draped in snow from head to foot, is a unique and worthy personality in many respects. But concerning its past glory and present majesty there is nothing that more forcibly appeals alike to those who have toiled up its rugged sides, and to those who haven't, than the fact that whereas a wearisome journey of six hours is occupied in the ascent, you may toboggan sheer from top to bottom in six minutes by the watch! Six hours up—six minutes down. Six hours, which seem like six days, over steep and slippery paths, rugged rocks, broken lava, through freezing cold, blistering winds and the overpowering fumes of sulphur, causing insufferable mental oppression and nauseating physical weariness—six minutes, which seem like six seconds, of a lifetime's sensation, rushing through air with only the sky above and the snow below, and a feeling as though the greater part of your body had been left at the top of the volcano.

The volcano is the private, personal property of Senor Ochoa, a Mexican general, who gained possession by making good use of his knowledge of the curious mining laws of the country. It is a mine of wealth, in the matter of ice and its great sulphur deposits; these, by the way, were first utilized by Cortes, whose men mixed the sulphur with saltpetre and charcoal, and so made up a powder that was evidently of good effect, judging by results, as far as the Aztecs were concerned.

The ascent of Popo commences from Amecameca, the exquisite, Swiss-looking town, about four hours' ride from Mexico, where guides, horses and provisions may be found. Armed with a permit from Popo's owner, "El General," who holds the natives in immense awe, you start up an old, deep road running to the first hut through a beautiful valley, dotted with Indian hovels and gardens, and patches of grain and alfalfa. The real discomfort of the trip lies in the few hours spent at Tlamacas, the terminus of the horseback ride, and the general "all-night" place. It is miserably cold here—and the stench of sulphur is overpowering. You lie at night in a little wooden hut, before a blazing fire, with your back freezing; and gradually the cock-crowing and the howling of the pariah dogs from distant, far-down Indian villages, ceases; perfect quiet reigns, until it is time to start upward.

Straight up before you, apparently within a stone's throw, the great cone of seemingly melted snow and silver towers up majestically into the deep blackness of the sky, with stars twinkling brightly about it. The guides go before, cutting steps in the snow. Hitherto the altitude has not affected you seriously, provided that you have been careful in the matter of food—but now begins a perceptible difference in the heart's action, and every few seconds you must needs stop and rest. The air grows thinner and thinner; you can hardly breathe; and the usual singing in the ears begins. You grow drowsy, and stumble awkwardly as you lift your feet, which seem weighted with heavy iron. The guides who are extraordinarily strong men, are often forced to carry climbers, who have lost nerve and strength, bodily up the mountain.

Six hours climbing—hours which seem like months, or years, according to your condition—and then comes the joyful sound of the guide's voices, heard as in a dream, calling back encouragingly: "Hemos llegado, senores"—Here we are. There you are—and there you remain for the time being, lying flat on your back and gasping, until the guides solicitously administer cognac and biscuits—after which you feel somewhat more alive.

No mere printed words could give an adequate description of the beauties of the views you gain from old Popocatapetl's hoary top, over which you will be lost in admiration. "Ya vamos, senores, ya vamos!" The cries of the guides recall you from the trance in which you have fallen in the face of all this grandeur; and you make your preparations for a decent which will furnish you with the sensation of a lifetime.

The Indian guides look complacently round, and puff unconcernedly at their eternal cigarettes, as they begin to unroll their

"petates" on the snow. These "petates" are Indian mats of strong, tough fibre, which the guides have carried up on their backs. You realize now that there are also toboggans. Now the guides make this toboggan trip, the most remarkable one in the world, and the only one down the side of a great volcano, week in and week out whenever the sides of the volcano are not so frozen over as to prevent it. It is nothing to them. But for you it is a different matter—and the more you look at the frail "petates," and and at the long, glittering descent, the less you like the idea of tobogganning down.

Nervously, you watch the preparations—the smoothing down of the "petates," when they will persist in curling up at the corners, and the testing of the heavy "palos," or alpenstocks, of which each guide carries two, with extra ones strapped on his back, in case of loss. One of these slips from a guide's hand and goes clanging down the side of the mountain, gathering force until it whirls along at a speed which makes you dizzy to contemplate. You put your self in the place of the alpenstock, and it is not pleasant—and the complacency of the guide only adds to your irritation. You wish you had never come. Then you hear the fatal words: "Ya vamos, senores"—"We go, gentlemen"—and you have to "vamos." Quakingly, you seat yourselves at the rear end of the mats. Complacently, the guides placed themselves firmly in front of you, push the ragged old sombreros over their eyes, light fresh cigarettes for the down trip, caution you to sit still and have care, take a sturdy grip on the alpenstocks, which serve them as steering poles—and you are off. Perhaps, on the way up, it had your intention to race each other down—you have no jocular thoughts now, and as the mats slip over the snow, slowly at first, then faster, gathering momentum at every inch, you grab desperately at the guide's waist, and hold on for dear life. The speed quickens, until you are going faster than express train rate. Clouds of soft snow fly up, at times almost blinding you, and calling forth much Indian profanity from the guides. The sensation, when you take it quietly, with closed eyes (supposing you can bring yourself to do this), is not unpleasant—there is a sense of extraordinary exhilaration, of mad recklessness. But if you dare to look up or about, the sense of sea-sickness becomes almost overpowering; mingled with that other, indescribable feeling which you may have experienced in a miniature way before, if you have ever dropped from a fifteenth floor in a rapidly-moving elevator—about as nasty a sensation, by the way, as there is. By the time you have done half the trip the breath has completely left your body—your mouth and eyes are wide open, you can neither see nor hear. Then the end comes, with a bang and a shock, at the very edge of the snow, and you roll helter-skelter through the stiff saccation grass—bruised wrecks. People take the end differently. Some sit up, rub their heads and laugh; others relieve their overstrung nerves with copious tears—for my part I lay still and gasped.—G. C. Cunningham in *Pearson's Magazine*.

#### Yachting Song.

Yoho! for a breath of the sea,  
For a taste of the flying spray,  
As with swelling sail we flee  
O'er the foam-crests far away,  
Away o'er the foam, away!

As we dive to the depths of each emerald wave  
With a heart that is free as the wind,  
With never a thought that is sober or grave,  
All sorrow is left behind.

With a heart that is free as the wind that blows  
Sorrow or Trouble, over it goes,  
And is left to sink behind.  
As we flee on the wings of the wind.

Yoho! for a breath of the sea,  
For a taste of the flying spray,  
As with swelling sail we flee  
O'er the foam-crests far away,  
Away, o'er the foam, away!

ALLAN DUNN.