

**A RAGGED REGISTER
(OF PEOPLE, PLACES
AND OPINIONS)**

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A Ragged Register (of People, Places and Opinions) by Anna E. Dickinson

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BY
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A RAGGED REGISTER.

I.

I WANT to go somewhere away from city walls and sewer smells and "L" abominations. Of that I am sure—but *where?*

"Where?" did I hear you, my invisible friend, echo? "Where! Why there are *fifty* places——"

Yes; I know. Unluckily, it is the things you *don't* want that are always accessible.

Let me consider. Let me sit down and ponder for a space over the ragged register of times and places that in some sort has been kept by my brain. A shabby-looking book, mutilated and half effaced, still it may help me from stand-still to action and—who knows?—serve as a bit of amusement to you by the way.

Shall we go a-fishing? No. To the sea? No. To the springs? No. Is it to the mountains we will wend? If so, by which path and to what ending?

It shall not be the Adirondacks, since I am sufficiently a sybarite to object to smoke and gnats and to look with disfavor upon manifold wettings with an insufficiency of drying sunshine.

Nor yet the White Hills. If they were lying under an autumn sun they would be tempting but now—?

Times a many have I made my pilgrimage to this summer shrine in summer weather, only to sneeze and shiver through dreary days and weeks, and leave with a strong determination to do penance nevermore; and yet have been tempted by renewed seasons to repeated efforts and exasperating disappointments.

Twenty-seven times had I gazed from the summit of Mount Washington at tossing clouds and sombre or ghostly mists, when the resplendent beauty of a summer morning tempted me to a tenth foot expedition and twenty-eighth ascent.

To be sure, if there is "luck in odd numbers" and the converse is also true, I had but an ill showing—but what of that! "He either fears his fate too much or his deserts are small" who does not dare much and also dare often.

With humility I have decided that, in this case

at least, my deserts are small. Doubtless I had too often scoffed at what this height could reveal to receive from it even justice, and certainly to be deemed unworthy of any display of generosity.

As I and my stick went our way to the mountain's base, the air was crystal clear. Crystal clear it remained as I tramped over the miles that wind through the trees dwarfed and tempest scarred. Crystal clear was its mood when—the woods abandoned, the scrub pines left behind, the last straggling spear of dreary vegetation vanished—the skirmish across the bleak ledges began.

Now or never! thought I, as I tramped out on the first of these. If the air *stays* clear I will abjure my heresies and subscribe to the faith of those who believe that New England mountains are to be reckoned in the same catalogue of saints as those that lift their solemn majesties toward the heavenly azure of the western skies.

I trudged along in a desperate faith, born perhaps of hope, certainly not of experience, and directly plunged into the soft fuzz of a nebulous cloud, and plunged out of it into chastened sunshine.

Up and down drifted mists and vapors lovely enough in themselves, and objects to be admired,

had I not had a surfeit of them in past times ; but, here and there, as I paused at this or that ledge, some such royal views broke upon the vision as to assure me of imperial splendor at the mountain-top.

Alas for faith and hope together ! When within two miles of the summit I fell into the close embrace of wind and cloud—and liked not the companionship.

Not a foot could I see from me, around, above, below. No rain fell, but the clouds penetrated garments and body together till both felt sodden. The wind flapped and veered, blowing not from one quarter, nor yet as from a distance, but slapping and striking, now on face, now on feet, in chest or back or side as with a solitary hand of some huge creature who stood close to play his painful pranks, and in an instant vanished to assail from fresh vantage ground.

Long before the cone was reached, giant and pranks had fled. The air was dense and dark to a palpable gloom, and the wind seemed a tangible wall that was not broken through by strenuous effort, but that merely gave way before it, inch by inch, and sullenly. I would thrust my pole forward, brace, *run* the intervening steps to its

rest, halt, take breath, and so on with a new struggle.

It was rough work, but the sense of solitude and uncertainty, of fighting the wild elements—the wild elements themselves in their first rigor, their fury newly wrought and unexpended—was more than ample pay.

Still, as I went my devious way up the final climb, the road and its guidance ending with the base of the cone, knowing not whether I was nearing my destination, or was *aimlessly* contending with difficulties, I was not sorry to hear a cheery voice call :

“What ho!—Comrade!”

“What ho!” called I in return, and with divers shouts and salutations heard with difficulty through the noise of the storm, my friendly seeker found me, and we trudged over the scanty space remaining with ease and good cheer.

We had alike climbed in the Sierras, and the Coast Ranges, and the Rocky Mountains, “but,” said he, “never found I aught more forbidding and tiresome than the merciless harshness of this ragged granite, and the frightful impenetrability of this fog. I have been wandering for hours on the Crawford side, before reaching the summit,

and when I heard that you intended coming up to-day, and that a lady had been seen on the lower ledges some time before the storm shut down, I thought, she will find this harder work than she has found higher climbs, and if she is half as lonely and blue as *I* felt before getting out of the beastly fog, she won't object to the word and the sight of a friendly human being."

Sight and word were welcome.

II.

As I went, that afternoon, over to the Signal-Service house, I wondered what one of the young fellows there would have given for a touch of human companionship through some dread days and nights that, to him, were filled with worse than solitude.

The cabin was small, yet too large to keep warm or dry; contracted, yet too extensive to grasp and hold even a show of comfort. The outer division filled with supplies, the centre devoted to stove and cooking necessities, the little room at the inner end crowded with the scientific apparatus, writing-table, bed, stove, living and working tools of two men. The carpet rotted to shreds, the paper and canvas hanging in festoons