

Slow Indian

A small cumulous cloud just missed the mountaintop, catching its bottom on the tip, as though straining to make enough altitude to clear it. After all, the valley was at 11,000 feet. The summit of that hill must pass 13000 feet at least, I thought. Gazing at the cloud caused me to notice the Indian family descending the trail toward the valley where I had been hunting game birds.

I abhor laziness. Whether among the idle rich or the indolent poor, it provokes me to want to teach a lesson. These Indians were walking so slowly; it would take them most of an hour to get down to the valley at that rate. I decided to show them the right way to walk a trail. It would be rude to say anything to them, so I decided to set an example.

I grabbed the shotgun resolutely by the breach and started up the hill at a determined pace. The dusty path meandered around the bunchgrass and rocks, climbing steadily. Without a doubt the Indians would get the point.

A hundred yards later I collapsed on the path, gasping for breath, my heart pounding dangerously. Something had gone wrong in my calculations. Surely a mere 11,000 feet would not make so much difference. So I stretched out on the grass to consider the matter as the Indians descended the trail.

The valley stretched for miles, a small stream meandering around smooth boulders at the bottom. Gray-brown cattle yanked at the hardy shrubs on the far side as a cowbell, barely audible, floated over on the breeze. Tall Eucalyptus trees waived at the occasional passing cloud, and I stretched out on the grass in a pensive pose as the lead Indian approached.

“Are you out for a stroll today, sir?” he said. I looked up at his thin frame and elderly face and replied, “Yes, I thought I would just stop here for a minute and enjoy the scenery.” He turned toward the valley and gazed briefly. “Yes, it is truly beautiful. We are blessed to have such fine scenery where we live,” he said. “I hope you have a nice day.” He said with a respectful nod. With that, he turned and started back down the trail.

His lanky legs took only a couple of steps, though, before he turned halfway around, looked over his shoulder, and said, “Oh, by the way. You WILL walk slowly, won’t you, sir?”

“Sure, of course,” I answered. I managed to keep the chagrin out of voice. After all, the missionary must always appear respectable.

