

RED SNOW

Stencil No. 64

By

Judge Walter Fry

What color is snow? White, is the natural answer, which may be right or wrong, as the case may be. Snow is generally white, so white that it has become a synonym for exceptional purity. But snow may also be red - blood red, as Judge Walter Fry recalls having seen it on one or two occasions in the Sequoia National Park.

Judge Fry first encountered bloody snow in July, 1905, when, with two troopers of U. S. Cavalry then stationed at Giant Forest, he went to the top of Mount Silliman, 11,188 feet, on a snow measuring trip. They had a hard trip to the summit, as everything above 8,000 feet was under a heavy snow blanket; so coming back down the mountain they cut some poles of foxtail pine which they used as toboggans or brakes to speed down the frozen slopes of snow.

They shot down at terrific speed. Trooper Lynch was ahead of Judge Fry, and left a white spray of snow in his wake. But when they were about at the 10,000 foot level, Judge Fry noticed that the snow spray behind Lynch had turned to a bloody red, and the marks left by his feet and the pole were, apparently, lines of blood. The sight sickened the Judge, who thought the pole had broken, stabbing Lynch and causing a terrible hemorrhage. But the red spray turned again to white, and, stopping to examine the phenomenon, they found a circular patch of red snow about eight inches deep and on top of over four feet of white snow.

A few days later Judge Fry returned to measure the red snow again, and found that it had spread in every direction thirty-six feet, and had added another inch in depth. Specimens were taken and sent to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, whose chemists found it due to a minute form of life of the genus *Sphaerella*.

On another occasion, in June, 1915, Judge Fry was looking over a proposed road with Ranger Carl Keller and found many patches of red snow in the Clover Creek basin, not far from what is now the route of the Generals' Highway from Giant Forest to General Grant National Park.

Red snow has been reported from various parts of the world, but is rare in the United States. Judge Fry remarks that as the Generals' Highway now passes within a mile of the place where he found the red snow in 1915, it seems likely that the phenomenon may appear this summer, particularly as we have had such exceptionally heavy snowfall, which seems to conduce to the appearance of this freak of nature.