

the tedium of the way was relieved by several adventures among the wild geese, which hovered near our path in immense flocks. Mr. Stewart, who is an excellent shot, brought several to the ground: with these trophies we camped for the night. Some watered and tethered the animals, others gathered wood, and others ground the coffee and picked the geese. Having in our panniers a few onions and potatoes, with a piece of pork, we prepared for a stew. But our geese must have been the goslings of those that went into the ark, for neither fire nor steam could make an impression on their sinewy forms. We tried them with the puncture of our long knives; found them tough as ever, and then swung off the pot. There was enough, with bread and coffee, without the geese, and as we threw the legs and wings this way and that, an owl watched the flying fragments, as much as to say, it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE GRAVE OF A GOLD-HUNTER.—MOUNTAIN SPURS.—A COMPANY OF SONORANIANS.—A NIGHT ALARM.—FIRST VIEW OF THE MINES.—CHARACTER OF THE DEPOSITS.—A WOMAN AND HER PAN.—REMOVAL TO OTHER MINES.—WILD INDIANS AND THEIR WEAPONS.—COST OF PROVISIONS.—A PLUNGE INTO A GOLD RIVER.—MACHINES USED BY THE GOLD-DIGGERS.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 28. We slept soundly last night. The sun had been up an hour before we finished our coffee and vaulted into our saddles. A short ride brought us to the San Joaquin river, which we crossed in the primitive way. We threw our saddles and packs into a boat, and then getting in ourselves, rowed off, leading at the stern one of our little mules, called Nina. The horses being driven in, followed in her wake and swam to the opposite bank. The moment they reached the shore, every one lay down and rolled, covering himself with a layer of sand. My own for once seemed to have caught the mine fever, and without waiting for the saddle, much less his rider, went snorting up the bank.

A mile or two further on, and we passed the grave of one whom I had known well in Monterey. He was a young man of many amiable and excellent qualities; was on his way to the mines; but in crossing a gulch, now entirely dry, but through which a freshet then swept, became entangled with

the gearing of his horses, and was drowned. An evergreen tree throws its perpetual shadows on the mound where he rests, and the wild birds sing his requiem. His widowed mother, who dwells by the rushing tide of the Missouri, will long look for his return, and still doubt in her grief the story of his death. But never will her eyes again rest on his. Till the heavens be no more he shall not awake, nor be raised out of his sleep.

Our road for ten miles lay through a level plain corresponding in its cheerless aspect to that we had passed on the other side of the San Joaquin. We encountered a drove of wild elk with their forest of branching horns, but they kept beyond the range of our rifles, and our horses were too tired to be put on the pursuit. We had only the satisfaction of venting, in words, our spleen on their speed, but little cared they for that. They run away at times, as it would seem, from their own horns, for our road was strewn with these cast-off coronets.

Leaving the plain we ascended into a rolling country lightly timbered with oak, pine, and birch. We wound rapidly forward, till we encountered a stream, and a plot of green grass which had escaped the fire that had been straggling about among the hills. We were without a guide, and on a trail which at times became rather faint and difficult, and no one knew where we might next meet with water, so we tethered, collected our wood for the night, and lit our camp-fire. We had no more potatoes or onions for

a stew, and made our supper on broiled pork, hard bread, and coffee. We had our saddles for our pillows, the green earth for our couch, and the bright stars to light us to our rest.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 29. One of our company discovered near our camp this morning a little lake, with fish darting about in its lucid waters. Our twine was soon out and hooked, the alder supplied us with poles, and we answered exactly to Dr. Johnson's definition of angling—"Line and rod, with a worm at one end and a fool at the other," for not a fish would bite; they were not to be caught with a poor wriggling worm, when golden flies were floating about. They were fish of a better taste; and we had to breakfast as we had done before, on broiled pork, hard bread, and coffee. A famished crow, as if in sympathy with our wants, rattled his bones near by on a dry limb.

The trail which we were following accommodated itself to the wild country through which it lay. The bold bluff and deep chasm bent it into a constant succession of quick circles and sharp angles. The head of our train was never in sight of those who occupied the rear, except when we wound over those more gradual slopes which here and there relieved the ruggedness of the landscape. We met a company of Californians about mid-day, on their return from the mines, and a more forlorn looking group

never knocked at the gate of a pauper asylum. They were most of them dismounted, with rags fastened round their blistered feet, and with clubs in their hands, with which they were trying to force on their skeleton animals. They inquired for bread and meat: we had but little of either, but shared it with them. They took from one of their packs a large bag of gold, and began to shell out a pound or two in payment. We told them they were welcome; still they seemed anxious to pay, and we were obliged to be positive in our refusal. This company, as I afterwards ascertained, had with them over a hundred thousand dollars in grain gold. One of them had the largest lump that had yet been found; it weighed over twenty pounds; and he seemed almost ready to part with it for a mess of pottage. What is gold where there is nothing to eat?—the gilded fly of the angler in a troutless stream.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 30. We camped last night in a forest, where a small opening let in the sun's rays upon a plot of green grass and a sparkling spring. Our slumbers were broken in the night by the discharge of a pistol by one of our company, who saw, or thought he saw, a wolf snuffling about his blanket. We seized our arms, thinking the wild Indians were upon us, but found no enemy. It was probably the phantom of a disturbed dream. We scolded the young man soundly who gave the alarm, and turned down on the earth again to finish our night's repose.

The scenery, as we advanced, became more wild and picturesque. The hills lost their gentle slopes, and took the form of steep and rugged cones: the mountain ranges were broken by dark and rugged gorges; over crags that toppled high in air, the soaring pine threw its wild music on the wind; while merry streams dashed down the precipitous rocks, as if in haste to greet the green vale below. A short distance beyond us lay the richest gold mines that had yet been discovered; and nature, as if to guard her treasures, had thrown around them a steep mountain barrier. This frowning wall seemed as if riven in some great convulsion. The broad chasm, like a break in a huge Roman aqueduct, dropped to the level plain; while the bold bluffs of the severed barrier gazed at each other in savage grandeur. Beyond this gateway, a valley wandered for some distance, and then expanded into a plain, in the midst of which stood a beautiful grove of oak and pine. Crossing this, we wound over a rough, rocky elevation, and turned suddenly into a ravine, up which we discovered a line of tents glittering in the sun's rays. We were in the gold mines! I jumped from my horse, took a pick, and in five minutes found a piece of gold large enough to make a signet-ring.

We had the unexpected pleasure of meeting here Gov. Mason and Capt. Sherman, who had arrived the evening before in their tour of observation; and Dr. Ord, recently of the army, and Mr. Taylor, of Monterey. They invited us to their camp and a supper

which we enjoyed with a keen relish. If you want to know what it is to have an appetite, which scruples at nothing and enjoys every thing, travel on horseback and sleep in the open air. Railroads and hotels are the graves of invalids. But I forgot our horses: we could find no grass; there was a poor pasture several miles distant; but it was now near sunset; we gathered acorns for them, which a horse will eat when pinched with hunger. Our camp-fire was kindled, and we rolled down for the night.

**SUNDAY, OCT. 1.** Another Sabbath, and our first in the mines. But here and there a digger has resumed his work. With most it is a day of rest, not so much perhaps from religious scruples, as a conviction that the system requires and must have repose. He is a blind philosopher, as well as a stupid Christian, who cannot see, even in the physical benefits of the Sabbath, motives sufficient to sanctify its observance. He must be a callous soul, who, with the hope of heaven in his dreams, can wantonly profane its spirit.

**MONDAY, OCT. 2.** I went among the gold-diggers; found half a dozen at the bottom of the ravine, tearing up the bogs, and up to their knees in mud. Beneath these bogs lay a bed of clay, sprinkled in spots with gold. These deposits, and the earth mixed with them, were shovelled into bowls, taken to a pool near by, and washed out. The bowl, in working, is held

in both hands, whirled violently back and forth through half a circle, and pitched this way and that sufficiently to throw off the earth and water, while the gold settles to the bottom. The process is extremely laborious, and taxes the entire muscles of the frame. In its effect it is more like swinging a scythe than any work I ever attempted.

Not having much relish for the bogs and mud, I procured a light crowbar and went to splitting the slate-rocks which project into the ravine. I found between the layers, which were not perfectly closed, particles of gold, resembling in shape the small and delicate scales of a fish. These were easily scraped from the slate by a hunter's knife, and readily separated in the wash-bowl from all foreign substances. The layers in which they were found generally inclined from a vertical or horizontal position, and formed an acute angle with the bank of the ravine, in the direction of the current. In the reverse of this position, and where the inclination was with the current, they rarely contained any gold. The inference would seem to be, that these deposits are made by the currents when swelled by the winter rains, and poured in a rushing tide down these channels. It is only the most rapid stream that can carry this treasure, and even that must soon resign it to some eddy, or the rock that paves its footsteps.

There are about seventy persons at work in this ravine, and all within a few yards of each other. They average about one ounce per diem each. They

who get less are discontented, and they who get more are not satisfied. Every day brings in some fresh report of richer discoveries in some quarter not far remote, and the diggers are consequently kept in a state of feverish excitement. One woman, a Sonoranian, who was washing here, finding at the bottom of her bowl only the amount of half a dollar or so, hurled it back again into the water, and straightening herself up to her full height, strode off with the indignant air of one who feels himself insulted. Poor woman! how little thou knowest of those patient females, who in our large cities make a shirt or vest for ten cents! Were an ounce of diamonds to fall into one of our hands every day, we should hold out the other just as eager and impatient as if its fellow were empty. Such is human nature; and a miserable thing it is, too, especially when touched with the gold fever.

TUESDAY, OCT. 3. We parted to-day with the society of Mr. Stewart and Mr. Simmons: they were on a tour of observation; were bound to Sutter's Fort, and availed themselves of the company of Gov. Mason and Capt. Sherman, who were going in the same direction; may they have an agreeable journey, and each find a lump of gold as big as Vulcan's anvil. We ordered up our own horses, packed our mules, and started for a ravine some seven miles distant. Our path lay over the spur of a mountain, so rugged and steep that we were obliged to dismount. The

soaring masses were piled around us in the wildest sublimity, presenting those thunder-scarred fronts which the volcano in its terrific energy throws into the eye of the sun. You had a dim persuasion that some fearful charm, some unseen treasure lurked in the sunless recesses of these stupendous piles; and so it seemed, for out walked a grizzly bear from a mountain gorge, and fixed his burning eyes steadfastly on us. Not being certain of our rifles, as we had not used them for several days, we deemed prudence the better part of valor, and gave the old monarch of the woods a pretty wide berth.

We examined several spots on our route for gold, but found none, either on the table-rock, or in the channels of the mountain streams. If it ever existed there, it had been swept below, or remained in the veins of the rock beyond the reach of pickaxe and spade. On the plain we fell in with the camp of Mr. Murphy, who invited us into his tent, and set before us refreshments that would have graced a scene less wild than this. His tent is pitched in the midst of a small tribe of wild Indians who gather gold for him, and receive in return provisions and blankets. He knocks down two bullocks a day to furnish them with meat. Though never before within the wake of civilization, they respect his person and property. This, however, is to be ascribed in part to the fact that he has married the daughter of the chief—a young woman of many personal attractions, and full of that warm wild love which makes her the Haide

of the woods. She is the queen of the tribe, and walks among them with the air of one on whom authority sets as a native grace,—a charm which all feel, and of which she seems the least conscious.

The men and boys were busy with their bows and arrows. A difficulty had arisen between this tribe and one not far remote, and they were expecting an attack. Though the less powerful tribe of the two, they seemed not the least dismayed. The old men looked stern and grave, but the boys were full of glee as if mustering for a deer-hunt. The mothers with Spartan coolness were engaged in pointing arrows with flint stones, so shaped that they easily penetrate and break off in the effort to extract them, and always leave an ugly wound. They project these arrows from their bows with incredible force, often burying them to the feather in the luckless elk; the deer gives his last life-bound and falls, while the unsuspecting foe drops unwarned from his saddle. I saw no signs of intoxication among these Indians, and was told by Mr. Murphy that he allowed no liquors in the camp. He said a trader brought there a few days since a barrel of rum, and that he gave him exactly five minutes in which to decide whether he would quit the grounds, or have the head of the barrel knocked in. He of course took his fire-curse to some other place.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 4. Our camping-ground is in a broad ravine through which a rivulet wanders, and

which is dotted with the frequent tents of gold-diggers. The sounds of the crowbar and pick, as they shake or shiver the rock, are echoed from a thousand cliffs; while the hum of human voices rolls off on the breeze to mingle with the barking of wolves, who regard with no friendly eyes this intrusion into their solitude. They resemble their great progenitrix, trembling in stone, as the Vandals broke into Rome. But little care the gold-diggers about the wolves, it is enough for them to know that this ravine contains gold; and it must be dug out, though an earthquake may slumber beneath. If you want to find men prepared to storm the burning threshold of the infernal prison, go among gold-diggers.

The provisions with which we left San José are gone, and we have been obliged to supply ourselves here. We pay at the rate of four hundred dollars a barrel for flour; four dollars a pound for poor brown sugar, and four dollars a pound for indifferent coffee. And as for meat, there is none to be got except jerked-beef, which is the flesh of the bullock cut into strings and hung up in the sun to dry, and which has about as much juice in it as a strip of bark dangling in the wind from a dead tree. Still, when moistened and toasted, it will do something towards sustaining life; so also will the sole of your shoe. And yet I have seen men set and grind it as if it were nutritious and sweetly flavored. Oh ye who lose your temper because your sirloin has rolled once too much on the spit, come to the mines of California and eat jerked-beef!

THURSDAY, OCT. 5. The rivulet, which waters the ravine, collects here and there into deep pools. Over one of these a low limb had thrown itself, upon which I ventured out with an apparatus for scooping up the sand at the bottom. But just as I had lowered my dipper the limb broke, and down I went to the chin in water. It was some minutes before I could extricate myself, and when I did there was not a dry thread on my body. The chill of the stream reduced the gold fever in me very considerably. I had brought no outward garments but those in which I stood; I wrung out the water and hung them up in the sun to dry, and wound myself, like an Indian, in my blanket. But I was not more savage in my aspect than in my feelings. This, however, soon passed off, and I could laugh with others at the gold plunge. But nothing is a novelty here for more than a minute; were a man to cast his skin or lose his head, no one would stop to inquire if he had recovered either, unless they suspected foul play, and then they would arraign and execute the culprit before one of our lawyers could pen an indictment.

FRIDAY, OCT. 6. The most efficient gold-washer here is the cradle, which resembles in shape that appendage of the nursery, from which it takes its name. It is nine or ten feet long, open at one end and closed at the other. At the end which is closed, a sheet-iron pan, four inches deep, and sixteen over, and perforated in the bottom with holes, is let in even with

the sides of the cradle. The earth is thrown into the pan, water turned on it, and the cradle, which is on an inclined plane, set in motion. The earth and water pass through the pan, and then down the cradle, while the gold, owing to its specific gravity, is caught by cleets fastened across the bottom. Very little escapes; it generally lodges before it reaches the last cleet. It requires four or five men to supply the earth and water to work such a machine to advantage. The quantity of gold washed out must depend on the relative proportion of gold in the earth. The one worked in this ravine yields a hundred dollars a day; but this is considered a slender result. Most of the diggers use the bowl or pan; its lightness never embarrasses their roving habits; and it can be put in motion wherever they may find a stream or spring. It can be purchased now in the mines for five or six dollars; a few months since it cost an ounce—sixteen dollars for a wooden bowl! But I have seen twenty-four dollars paid for a box of seidlitz-powders, and forty dollars for as many drops of laudanum.