

## CHAPTER XXI.

LUMP OF GOLD LOST.—INDIANS AT THEIR GAME OF ARROWS.—CAMP OF THE GOLD-HUNTERS.—A SONORIAN GOLD-DIGGER.—SABBATH IN THE MINES.—THE GIANT WELCHMAN.—NATURE OF GOLD DEPOSITS.—AVERAGE PER MAN.—NEW DISCOVERIES.

SATURDAY, OCT. 7. I had come to the mines without a pick, but this morning fell in with a trader who had one for sale: his price was ten dollars in specie, or eighteen in gold dust. I gave him the specie; the pick weighed about four pounds, was of rude manufacture, and without a handle; but this appendage was readily supplied from the limb of an ash. Thus accoutred I strode down the ravine, not doubting but what I should, before night, strike upon some deposit which would fill my pockets. Passing groups who were engaged in digging into this bank and that, I fell in with a sailor, whom I recognized as one of the men who had been honorably discharged from the Savannah. He was groping about as if in quest of something he had lost. "What is the matter, Jones?" I inquired; he sprung to his feet, gave me his rough hand, and pointed to a cliff which overhung the glen. "There, on that crag," said he, "I have been at work ever since the peep of day, and got out several bits of gold, and one good-sized lump: I put them in my tin cup, when, striking away again, my pick glanced,

struck the cup, and knocked it, gold and all, half-way across this ravine; and I might as well hunt a clam in the Pacific as that gold, though it was a jewel of a piece—the biggest I have seen here." So I laid down my pick, ascended the cliff, ascertained, as near as possible, the direction in which the cup flew, and commenced the search. Every bunch of leaves, every hole and gulley were examined, and the cup recovered, but the gold was not in it.

Fatigued, I threw myself into the shade of a scrub-oak, and went to sleep; but the gold of poor Jones glanced through my dreams. I saw, in that fantastic realm, a small birch-tree, a bubbling spring at its root, and in its fount a piece of gold. I seemed to know at the time it was only a dream; still the picture remained in my mind so clear, so distinct, that on awaking I identified at a glance the birch, and springing to its root found the little fount, and with a hoe fetched up the piece of gold!—the same that had been lost, for none other could answer so exactly to the description which had been given. It weighed about three ounces, but did not seem larger than the sparkling eye of the sailor as I placed it in his hand. They may laugh who will at dreams, but now and then some Sibyl leaf floats through them. I tried to dream again where gold might be found; saw plenty of birch-trees and fountains, but never discovered an ingot in either.

MONDAY, OCT. 9. On returning to our camping-

tree this afternoon, I found three wild Indians quietly squatted in its shade. They had been attracted there by a red belt, which hung from one of the limbs. They could speak only their native dialect, not a word of which could I understand. We had to make ourselves intelligible by signs. They wanted to purchase the belt, and each laid down a piece of gold, which were worth in the aggregate some two hundred dollars. I took one of the pieces, and gave the Indian to whom it belonged the belt. They made signs for a piece of coin; I offered them an eagle, but it was not what they wanted,—a Spanish mill dollar, but they wanted something smaller,—a fifty-cent piece, and they signified it would do. Taking the coin they fastened it in the end of a stick, so as to expose nearly the entire circle, and set it up about forty yards distant. They then cast lots by a bone, which they threw into the air, for the order in which they should discharge their arrows. The one who had the first shot, drew his long sinewy bow and missed; the second, he missed; the third, and he missed,—though the arrow of each flew so near the coin it would have killed a deer at that distance. The second now shot first and grazed the coin; then the third, who broke his string and shot with the bow of the second, but missed; and now the first took his turn, and struck the coin, whirling it off at a great distance. The other two gave him the belt, which he tied around his head instead of his blanket, and away they started over the hills, full of wild life and

glee, leaving the coin, as a thing of no importance, in the bushes where it had been whirled.

TUESDAY, OCT. 10. My companions, who have been out on a gold-hunt for several hours, have just returned, bringing with them about an ounce of gold each. They are so thoroughly fatigued they prefer sleep to a dinner, connected with the trouble of preparing it. And there is no other way here; every man is obliged to be his own cook. We have our henchman, it is true, but he is in a ravine some four miles distant, in charge of our horses and mules. If he will keep them from straying, or being stolen by the wild Indians, we shall be content to wait on ourselves. Several of the persons at work in the ravine turned their horses adrift on their arrival, which they might safely do, for the poor things have not got strength enough to climb its steep sides. They subsist on the acorns which they gather, and a few tufts of grass as dry and scorched as the clover over which the flames of Sodom rolled. But what think men of the hunger or thirst of dumb animals, when the gold fever is throwing its circle of fire around the soul.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 11. It is near sunset, and the gold-diggers are returning from their labors, each one bearing on his head a brush-heap, with which he will kindle his evening fire. Their wild halloos, as they come in, fill the cliffs with their echoes. All are merry, whatever may have been the fortunes of the

day with them. Not one among the whole can anticipate a more luxurious supper than a cake baked in the ashes, with a cup of coffee and a bit of jerked-beef, except in the case of a new-comer, who has brought with him a few pounds of buckwheat flour; he can have a pancake, that is if he has any thing with which to grease his pan, which is extremely doubtful. There is not a bottle of liquor in the ravine, and every one must, per force, turn in sober. Every streamlet preaches temperance, and the wind-stirred pine sings its soft eulogy on the charmed air.

THURSDAY, OCT. 12. I found near our camp this morning a boulder of trap and quartz which had evidently travelled some distance, as nothing of the kind existed in the ravine. I had no means of demolishing the mass, and could with my pick only dislodge a few of the quartz: these I found veined with gold. But it is the only specimen of this combination with which I have met. Where the fellow came from, I know not; but had he tumbled into New York or Philadelphia, instead of this cañada, the whole community would have been filled with prattling wonders. How much the marvellous depends on circumstances!

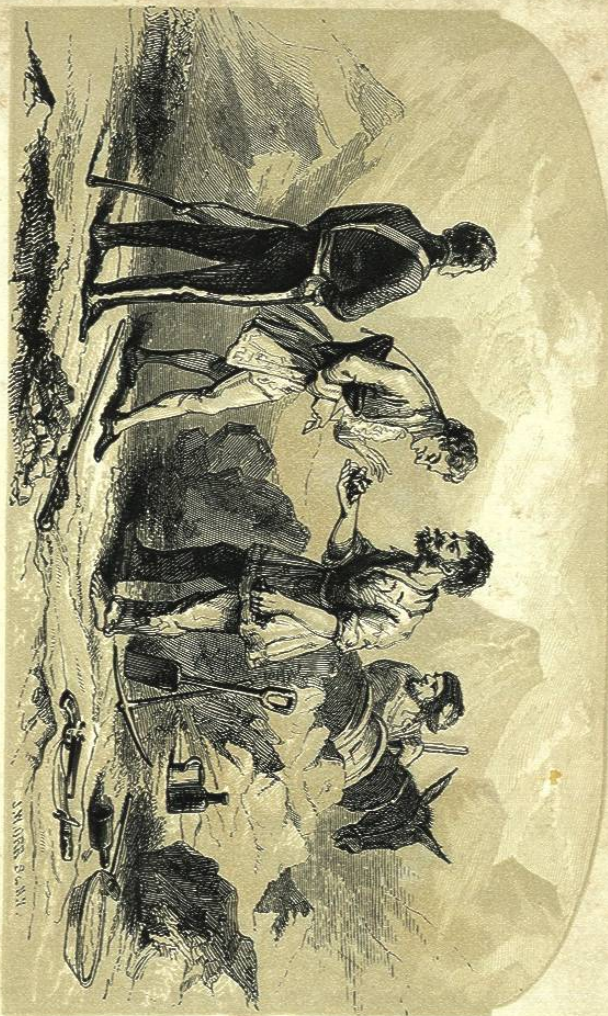
FRIDAY, OCT. 13. I passed a few days since a Sonoranian at work against a steep bank of decomposed granite and clay, which was so firm that he could hardly make an impression upon it with a

heavy sharp-pointed crowbar. "And what, my friend," I inquired, "are you going to get out there?" to which he replied, "A pocket of gold, sir, as soon as I can reach it." "And what makes you think," I continued, "that you will find a deposit there?" to which he responded, "Do you see that blow-hole on the other side of the ravine, where the slate rock stands out so rough, with a savage mouth in the centre? Well, sir, *that* was the devil's blow-hole, and he blowed the gold straight across the ravine into this bank, where I will find it, if I work long enough." I thought him some half-crazy fellow, and passed on. He dug away all that day without reaching his pocket; but on the following day took out two pounds of gold, in small pieces, resembling in shape the seeds of the watermelon. As soon as this was known, four of the New York volunteers struck in each side of the Sonoranian, and dug him out; and the old man very quietly retired. The intruders dug away through the remainder of the day, but found no gold, and then quit the spot, concluding that the Sonoranian had got out the only pocket which existed there. The next morning, however, the Sonoranian renewed his attack on the bank, and with his sharp-pointed crowbar and pick, penetrated beyond the layer where the volunteers had knocked off. Before night he struck another pocket, and took out a pound and a half of gold of the same shape and size as the other. The volunteers were now roused, and returned to the spot, determined to dig down the whole bank; but one day

of hard work, unrewarded by a single particle of gold, was enough. They quitted the bank in disgust. The old Sonoranian told me it contained no more pockets. His theory about the blow-hole is by no means confined to his own wild imagination; a man by the name of Black, who is one of the most successful gold-hunters in the ravine, is guided, in his researches, by the same seemingly absurd theory. It is possible that these blow-holes, as they are called, were the vents of volcanoes, performing the same functions as those found beneath the shaking cone of Etna.

SATURDAY, OCT. 14. A party of seven Americans are just in from the higher slopes of the Sierra, where they have been prospecting for gold. They penetrated to the snow, tearing up roots, overturning rocks, and draining fountains, but discovering no gold. It is the foot range of the Sierra that contains the deposits; this has been cut into segments by rapid streams, rising higher up, and which have sunk their channels into deep gorges. The larger portion of the gold, subjected to the action of these torrents, has been swept out upon the plain, or buried deep in some nearer undulation, where it will remain undisturbed till the deposits nearer the surface have been exhausted. These deeper treasures, like the inhumed remains of a Herculaneum, will then be brought to light.

SUNDAY, OCT. 15. A quiet day among the gold-diggers; but few are at work with pick or pan;



An Alcalde at the mines examining a lump of gold—catches the fever—drops his staff of office, and tells his sheriff to go home and hang the prisoner whom he left at the bar, and he will sentence him afterwards

small parties have gone over the hills "prospepecting," but the masses are beneath the oak and pines, which shadow the cañadas. Missionaries might find a field here in this rolling population; the waving grain, as well as the still, falls before the sickle of the reaper. There is something inspiring in wild-wood worship; you are with nature and nature's God: every thing around you trembles in the breath of the Almighty: the glad rivulet whispers his name, and the pine-grove pours its sweeping anthem; your spirit soars on lighter wings, and religion becomes, as another has beautifully expressed it, the play of the soul in the sunbeams of God.

MONDAY, OCT. 16. I encountered this morning, in the person of a Welchman, a pretty marked specimen of the gold-digger. He stood some six feet eight in his shoes, with giant limbs and frame. A leather strap fastened his coarse trowsers above his hips, and confined the flowing bunt of his flannel shirt. A broad-rimmed hat sheltered his browny features, while his unshorn beard and hair flowed in tangled confusion to his waist. To his back was lashed a blanket and bag of provisions; on one shoulder rested a huge crowbar, to which were hung a gold-washer and skil-let; on the other rested a rifle, a spade, and pick, from which dangled a cup and pair of heavy shoes. He recognized me as the magistrate who had once arrested him for a breach of the peace. "Well, Señor Alcalde," said he, "I am glad to see you in these dig-

gings. You had some trouble with me in Monterey ; I was on a burster ; you did your duty, and I respect you for it ; and now let me settle the difference between us with a bit of gold : it shall be the first I strike under this bog." I told him there was no difference between us ; that I knew at the time it was rum which had raised the rumpus. But before I had finished my disclaiming speech, his traps were on the ground, and his heavy pick was tearing up bog after bog from the marl in which it had struck its tangling roots. These removed, he struck a layer of clay : "Here she comes!" he ejaculated, and turned out a piece of gold that would weigh an ounce or more. "There," said he, "Señor Alcalde, accept that ; and when you reach home, where I hope you will find all well, have a bracelet made of it for your good lady."

He continued to dig around the same place, but during the hour I remained with him found no other piece of gold—not a particle. This is no uncommon thing ; I have seen a piece weighing six ounces taken from some little curve in a bank undulating in its bed, while not another of any size, after the most laborious search, could be found in its vicinity. This holds true of the larger pieces, but rarely of the scale gold. Where you find half an ounce of that, you may be pretty sure there is more near by. The same law which deposited that, has carried its results much further ; and you will find a clue to them in the curves of the channel, or the character and posi-

tion of the rocks which project into it. If the projection is smooth, or forms an obtuse angle with the current, there is no gold there, and you must look to the eddy directly below it. This eddy, or its deposit, can be examined only when the water has subsided. During the rainy season, and when the snows are melting on the Sierra, no such investigations can be successfully prosecuted. Of all metals the most difficult to reach and secure under water is gold. It has a thousand modes of eluding your search, and escaping your scooping implements.

TUESDAY, OCT. 17. A German this morning, picking a hole in the ground, near our camping-tree, for a tent-pole, struck a piece of gold, weighing about three ounces. As soon as it was known, some forty picks were flying into the earth all around the spot. You would have thought the ground had suddenly caved over some human being, who must be instantly disenchanted or die. But the fellow sought was not the companion of the digger, but the mate of the yellow boy accidentally found by the German. But no such mate was discovered ; the one found had slumbered thus alone like Adam before the birth of Eve. How solitary that couch, though in Paradise ! Think of that, ye devotees of celibacy, who people your dreams with fairies, and imagine a bliss amid the wrecks of the fall, which was not the portion of man even before that moral catastrophe.

But I forget the piece of gold ; no fellow was found

for it here; but in a ravine, seven miles distant, a little girl this morning picked up what she thought a curious stone, and brought it to her mother, who, on removing the extraneous matter, found it a lump of pure gold, weighing between six and seven pounds. The news of this discovery silenced all the picks here for half an hour, and set as many tongues going in their places. Twenty or thirty started at once to explore the wonders of this new locality. Gold among hunters, like a magnet in the midst of ferruginous bodies, attracts every thing to itself.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 18. We are camped in the centre of the gold mines, in the heart of the richest deposits which have been found, and where there are many hundred at work. I have taken some pains to ascertain the average per man that is got out; it must be less than half an ounce per day. It might be more were there any stability among the diggers; but half their time is consumed in what they call prospecting; that is, looking up new deposits. An idle rumor, or mere surmise, will carry them off in this direction or that, when perhaps they gathered nothing for their weariness and toil. A locality where an ounce a day can be obtained by patient labor is constantly left for another, which rumor has enriched with more generous deposits. They who decry this instability in others, may hold out for a time, but yield at last to the same phrensied fickleness. I have never met with one who had the strength of purpose

to resist these roving temptations. He will not swing a pick for an ounce a day, with the rumor of pounds ringing in his ears. He shoulders his implements to chase this phantom of hope.

THURSDAY, OCT. 19. All the gold-diggers through the entire encampment, were shaken out of their slumbers this morning by a report that a solid pocket of gold had been discovered in a bend of the Stanislaus. In half an hour a motley multitude, covered with crowbars, pickaxes, spades, rifles, and wash-bowls, went streaming over the hills in the direction of the new deposits. You would have thought some fortress was to be stormed, or some citadel sapped. I had seen too much of these rumored banks of gold to be moved from my propriety, and remained under my old camping-tree. Near this I pecked out from a small crevice of slate rock, a piece weighing about half an ounce. It had evidently travelled some distance, and taken refuge from the propulsive storms of ages in this little hiding-place, as a good man from the persecutions of the world glides down at last to his sainted repose. But I have no compunction for having disturbed this piece of gold; it may yet be shaped into an ear-drop, and kiss the envied cheek of beauty; or it may be studded with diamonds, and swell on a billow that seems to blush at the flash of its ray; or it may be shaped into the marriage-ring, and set its seal on the purest bliss that greets the visits of angels; or it may be stamped into a coin,

and as it drops into the hands of the widow or orphan, prove that—

“The secret pleasure of a generous act  
Is the great mind’s great bribe.”

But evening is returning, and with it the gold-diggers from their pursuit of the new deposit. Their jokes, as they clatter down the slopes of the ravine, are sufficient evidence that they have been on a wild-goose chase. Disappointment will make a single man sober, but when it falls on a multitude, is often converted into a source of railery and fun. There is something extremely consoling in having the company of others, when we have been duped through our vanity or exaggerated hopes. This comfort was deeply felt by the diggers this evening. All had lost a day, and with it the most enchanting visions of wealth. All had returned hungry as a wolf on a desert; or a recluse listening in his last penance to the sound of his cross-bones, shaken by the wind.

## CHAPTER XXII.

VISIT TO THE SONORANIAN CAMP.—FESTIVITIES AND GAMBLING.—THE DOCTOR AND TEAMSTER.—AN ALCALDE TURNED COOK.—THE MINER’S TATTOO.—THE LITTLE DUTCHMAN.—NEW DEPOSITS DISCOVERED.—A WOMAN KEEPING A MONTÉ TABLE.—UP TO THE KNEE AND NINE-PENCE.—THE VOLCANOES AND GOLD.—ARRIVAL OF A BARREL OF RUM.

FRIDAY, OCT. 20. I threw myself into my saddle at an early hour this morning, and started for a cañada, about ten miles distant. The foot-trail which I followed, lay over several sharp ridges to the quick waves of the Stanislaus, and then up a steep mountain spur. I was obliged to dismount, draw myself up by the bushes, and trust to the fidelity of my horse to follow. At last we gained the summit, but it was only to gaze down a wild precipitous descent, where the cliffs hung in toppling terror. A vein of white quartz run along the ridge, like a line of unmelted snow, with here and there spangles of gold glittering in the sun. I had no implement with me but my hunting-knife, and vainly broke the point of that. I tried one of my pistols; the bullet knocked out the gold-drop, but jewel and lead went over the steep verge together. I let myself down by the bushes, blessing every lythe limb and steadfast root, while my horse, more sagacious, fetched a circuit, and reached the plain before me.