

from every chasm and cove of the ravine, rivalled the roar that went up around the tower of Babel. But night has come; the camp-fires burn dim; and the revellers are at rest, save here and there one who strides about in his delirium, commanding silence among the wolves who bark from the hills. What exciting, elevating, and expanding powers there are in a barrel of New England rum! It makes one to-day monarch of peopled realms, and their riches; but leaves him to-morrow in rags, and with only ground enough in which to sink his pauper grave.

"Thou sparkling bowl! thou sparkling bowl!
 Though lips of bards thy brim may press,
 And eyes of beauty o'er thee roll,
 And song and dance thy power confess—
 I will not touch thee; for there clings
 A scorpion to thy side that stings."

PIERPONT.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NATURAL AMPHITHEATRE.—NO SCIENTIFIC CLUE TO THE DEPOSITS OF GOLD.—
 SOIL OF THE MINES.—LIFE AMONG THE GOLD-DIGGERS.—LOSS OF OUR
 CABALLADA.—THE OLD MAN AND ROCK.—DEPARTURE FROM THE MINES.—
 TRAVELLING AMONG GORGES AND PINNACLES.—INSTINCTS OF THE MULE.—
 A MOUNTAIN CABIN.

FRIDAY, NOV. 3. At the head of the ravine, where our camping-trees wave, stands an amphitheatre reared by nature, and unrivalled in the grandeur of its proportions, and the stateliness and strength of its architecture. It unrolls its wild magnificence on the eye with a more majestic power than even Rome's great wonder. From its ample arena, circling ranges of crags soar one over the other to the lofty sweep of the architrave, where sentinel-trees toss their branches against the sky. Had nature reared this theatre on the banks of the Tiber, the beauty and bravery of Rome would have flashed over the arena's gladiatorial tumult. But it was here in California, where even the Roman eagle, in its earth-embracing circuit, flew not.

A new deposit was discovered this morning near the falls of the Stanislaus, and in the crevices of the rocks over which the river pours its foaming sheet. An Irishman had gone there to bathe, and in throwing off his clothes, had dropped his jack-knife, which

slipped into a crevice, where he first discovered the gold. He was soon tracked, and in less than an hour a storm of picks and crowbars were shivering the rocks. The accessible pockets were readily exhausted, but beyond these only the drill and blast of the practical miner can extend. And this is true of all the rock-gold in California; the present harvest glows near the surface; but there are under-crops, which the sunlight has never visited. Deep mining here, as elsewhere, will be attended with uncertain results; but a fount so capacious on its rim, must have its replenishing depths. The largest fish are taken with the longest line.

SATURDAY, NOV. 4. The deposits here baffle all the pretensions of science. The volcanoes did their work by no uniform geological law; they burst out at random, and scattered their gold in wanton caprice. Were not those old Vulcans dead, they would laugh at the blundering vanity exhibited around them. The old landmarks are the quartz; these are general indications, but too vague when applied to alluvial deposits, and frequently serve only to bewilder and betray. We have a young geologist here who can unroll the whole earth, layer by layer, from surface to centre, and tell the properties of each, and how it came to be deposited there, who unsuspectingly walked over a bank of gold, which a poor Indian afterwards stirred out with a stick. I have seen this *savan* camp down and snore soundly through the

night, with a half-pound piece of gold within a few inches of his nose; and then rise at peep of day to push his learned theory into some ledge of rocks, where not a particle of the yellow ore ever existed. I have seen a digger take from a bank of decomposed granite, in a space not larger than a man's hat, between three and four pounds of gold, while his only clue to it was a blast on the opposite side of the glen, through which he believed the deil had blown the gold into the bank, where he was at work. What a burlesque on all geological laws as applied to gold deposits! There is only one of these laws, in reference to alluvial deposits, worth a pin, and that is the simple fact that a heavy body will tumble down hill faster than a lighter one, or that a nut shaken from a tree will drop through the fog to the ground.

SUNDAY, NOV. 5. I rose this morning with the intention of proposing to the diggers a religious service. But mid-day came, and only here and there one broke from slumbers doubly deep from the overpowering fatigues of the week. In a shaded recess of the hills three of us found a little sanctuary: neither of the two with me was a professor of religion, but each retained in vivid remembrance the religious instructions of his childhood and youth. Time and distance had not effaced these impressions; each lettered trace remained as legible as the footprints of the primeval bird in the fossil rock. Such is the inscription of parental fidelity on the heart of a child: the wave may

wear away the mound which it laves, and the marble dissolve under the touch of time, but *that* inscription remains.

MONDAY, NOV. 6. Vein-gold in these rocks is as uncertain and capricious as lightning; it straggles where you least expect it, and leaves only a stain where its quick volume seemed directed. It threads its way in a rock without crevice or crack, and where its continuity becomes at times too subtle for the naked eye, and then suddenly bulges out like a lank snake that has swallowed a terrapin. The great Hebrew proverbialist says there are three things about which there is no certainty,—the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and he might have added—the way of a thread of gold in a vein of California quartz; but probably California, with its treasures, had not then been discovered, though some of our wiseacres are trying to make out that this *el dorado* was the Ophir of the Old Testament: if so, the men of Joppa must have been pretty good seamen, especially as they had no compass. It may be, but I somewhat doubt it, that the Hottentots or Patagians are the descendants of some shipwrecked men bound in a wherry from Tarsus to California. The adventurers, even in that case, would have been quite as sober in their calculations as some who put to sea on a gold-hunt in these days.



Degrees of fortune in the California Gold-diggings

TUESDAY, NOV. 7. The price of provisions here is no criterion of their market value on the seaboard, or even at the embarcaderos nearest the mines. The cost of a hundred pounds of flour at Stockton, only sixty miles distant, is twenty dollars; but here it is two hundred dollars. This vast disparity is owing to the difficulty of transportation and the absence of competition. But few can be persuaded to leave the expectations of the pick for the certainties of the pack—the promises of the cradle for the fulfilments of the freighted wagon. All live on drafts upon the future, and though disappointed a hundred times, still believe the results of to-morrow will more than redeem the broken pledges of to-day. Though all else may end in failure, hope is not bankrupt here.

The soil in the mines is evidently volcanic; it resembles in places the ashes which cover Pompeii. You can walk through it when dry, though every footstep stirs a little cloud; but when saturated with the winter rain you slump to the middle. No horse can force his way forward; every struggle but sinks him the deeper, and the miner himself retires to his cabin, as thoroughly cut off from the peopled districts of the coast, as a sailor wrecked on some rock at sea. Years must elapse before human enterprise can bridge a path to these mines, or render communication practicable in the rainy season; nor at any period can heavy machinery be transported here without an immense outlay of capital. The quartz rock

has yet some time to roll back the sunlight before it crumbles under the steam-stamper.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 8. Some fifty thousand persons are drifting up and down these slopes of the great Sierra, of every hue, language, and clime, tumultuous and confused as a flock of wild geese taking wing at the crack of a gun, or autumnal leaves strown on the atmospheric tides by the breath of the whirlwind. All are in quest of gold; and, with eyes dilated to the circle of the moon, rush this way and that, as some new discovery, or fictitious tale of success may suggest. Some are with tents, and some without; some have provisions, and some are on their last ration; some are carrying crowbars; some pickaxes and spades; some wash-bowls and cradles; some hammers and drills, and powder enough to blow up the rock of Gibraltar—if they can but get under it, as the monkeys do, when they make their transit, through a sort of Thames tunnel, from the golden but barren sands of Africa to the green hills of Europe. Wise fellows they, notwithstanding the length of their tails—they won't stay on the Congo side of the strait, to gather gold, when, by crossing, they can gather grapes. Wisdom is justified of her children.

But I was speaking of the gold-hunters here on the slopes of the Sierra. Such a mixed and motley crowd—such a restless, roving, rummaging, ragged multitude, never before roared in the rookeries of man. As for mutual aid and sympathy—Samson's

foxes had as much of it, turned tail to, with firebrands tied between. Each great camping-ground is denoted by the ruins of shovels and shanties, the bleaching bones of the dead, disinhumed by the wolf, and the skeleton of the culprit, still swinging in the wind, from the limb of a tree, overshadowed by the raven. From the deep glen, the caverned cliff, the plaintive rivulet, the croaking raven, and the wind-toned skeleton come voices of reproachful interrogation—

“Slave of the dark and dirty mine!
What vanity has brought thee here?”

THURSDAY, NOV. 9. Our baccaro came in this morning, and startled us with the intelligence that last night, while he was on the watch—sound asleep, of course—the wild Indians came, and stole all our horses and mules, save one, little Nina, whom he had tethered close to his post. Rather an awkward predicament for us, in the California mountains, three hundred miles from home, and our horses and mules in the hands of wild Indians, driving them off into some unknown fastness, to be killed for food! But I was on the trail of a small piece of gold, and followed it up with that sort of listless equanimity with which a man will sometimes pick up a curious shell on the rocks where his vessel floats in fragments. If you would acquire those habits which no disaster can disturb, come to California. One year here will do more for your philosophy than a life elsewhere. I

have seen a man sit, and quietly smoke his cigar, while his dwelling went heavenward in a column of flame. It seemed as if it were enough for him that his wife and children were safe, and that the green earth, with its bright-eyed flowers and laughing rills, remained; so let the old tenement pass off in smoke to pall some mountain peak, or throw its dusky shadow where—

“The owlet builds his ivy tower.”

FRIDAY, NOV. 10. The Sonoranian, who has been one of the most successful diggers in the ravine, besieged me to-day to sell him my pistols. They are an elegant pair, silver mounted and rifle bore, and good for duck or duelist—no matter which—for twenty or thirty paces. He offered me a pound of gold; so I determined to try the non-resistant principle, and let him have them. As he belted them about his waist, and strode off, you would have advised even a California bear to get out of his way. How well prepared for a last extremity is a man with a new weapon at his side, or a new patent pill in his pocket! The only difference is, that with the former he may chance to kill some one else, and with the latter he is pretty sure to kill himself. But I promised to make no more remarks; my apology must be the loss of our horses, the probable necessity of being obliged to pick our way home on foot, and the refuge which even an irrelevant thought affords

from such a dismal prospect. Men have betrayed flashes of humor on the block—an evanescent ray on the verge of endless night! Then why should not my poor pill have place in the pedestrian prospect of three hundred miles, and that, too, through a region marked only by the footprints which linger dimly in the trail of the wild Indian?

SATURDAY, NOV. 11. I encountered an old man to-day, sitting listlessly on a rock under the broken shade of a decayed oak. A few gray hairs strayed from under his camping-cap, and his face was deeply wrinkled; but his eye flashed, at intervals, with the fires of an unquenched spirit. He had not, as he told me, obtained an ounce of gold in this ravine, and was about trying some other locality. I advised him to roll over the rock on which he was sitting; he said he would do it to please me; but as for gold, he might as well look for a weasel in a watchman's rattle. The rock was easily rolled from its inclined position; beneath it was found a layer of moss, and beneath this, in the crevices of another rock, a deposit of gold, in the shape of pumpkin-seeds, bright as if fresh from the mint, and weighing over half a pound. The eyes of the old man sparkled; but he was thinking of his home and those left behind.

SUNDAY, NOV. 12. Could the parents of the youth in these glens cast a glance at their children, what a tide of affection and concern would rush through

their hearts! No treasured ship at sea was ever environed by deeper perils; storms lower in thick darkness above, and breakers thunder below, and no pharos throws its friendly ray from the shrouded cliff. The only light they have to guide them is in their own tempest-tost bark, and the lamp in the binnacle is dim. The merchant who should send his ship to sea without compass or rudder, would not be more frantic and foolish than the parent who sends his son out upon the world without any religion in his soul. These youths in these glens are to shape the destinies of California; under their hands her political, social, and moral institutions are to be reared. Unless religion lie at the foundations, these structures, though columned with gold, will fall. It was frailty and rottenness at the base that has left all the proud fabrics of the Old World a storied mass of ruins.

MONDAY, NOV. 13. A mounted company of gold-diggers arrived on our camping premises last evening, and we struck in for four horses, which we purchased at their own prices. Mine is an Indian pony from Oregon, full of heart and hardihood; but as for ease of motion, you might as well ride a trip-hammer. But an extremity makes the most indifferent gift of nature a blessed boon.

We reduced our effects to the fewest articles possible, and packing these, with provisions for three or four days, upon little Nina, were ready for a start. Two Oregonian trappers joined us, and before the sun's rays

struck the depths of the ravine, we were off, with three hearty cheers from the diggers. An hour brought us to the summit of an elevation, beneath which lay, in panoramic life, the ravines, rivulets, rambling paths, and roving groups of the gold-hunters. I have walked on the roaring verge of Niagara, through the grumbling parks of London, on the laughing boulevards of Paris, among the majestic ruins of Rome, in the torch-lit galleries of Herculaneum, around the flaming crater of Vesuvius, through the wave-reflected palaces of Venice, among the monumental remains of Athens, and beneath the barbaric splendors of Constantinople: but none of these, nor all combined, have left in my memory a page graven with more significant and indellible characters than the gold *diggings* of California.

Our route lay for several miles through a succession of narrow ravines, above which soared the stupendous steeps of a mountain-range, through which some convulsion of nature had sunk these shadowy chasms. Here and there some giant bluff had plunged into the winding abyss, as if to shut out the profane intruder from its silent sanctuaries. These granite gates became at last so frequent, that we determined to try the ridge, the table-rock, or less precipitous slope. We wound up the steep sides of the pass one by one, as a weary bird at sea scales the tempest-cloud; and at last emerged upon a lofty range of trap, feathered by the fir and low pine, and where the eagle had made himself a home. A wide sea of

chasms and cones lay around us. These were evidently the bleak monuments of volcanoes, which ages since had rested from their labors. The sun threw its level rays along their summits, while the abysses lay in perpetual shadow. No path threw its trail on the eye. Rounding a pinnacle, which stood as a fortress at the abrupt termination of one of the ranges, we discovered a slope which slanted off less steeply than the rest. Here, dismounting, we let ourselves down for several hundred yards by the bushes; Nina, sure of foot as a fox, followed first; my Indian pony next; and then the rest, as the docility or courage of each induced. All our horses had been trained by mountaineers, and well knew, if left behind, what must be their fate. What a strange affection for such an animal springs up at such an hour as this! As he comes down to join you, selecting you out as his rider, snuffing about you, and inviting you to mount again, you involuntarily throw your arms about his neck, and try to make him understand the kindness you feel for him.

We discovered in the last flashes of twilight a gush of waters from the rocks, which beetled over a cañada, where the grass was fresh from the showering spray. We had struck this spot through no sagacity of our own; Nina, snuffing the water long before it flashed upon us, had turned into the ravine, and dashed ahead upon the gallop. Here we camped for the night. The dried willows supplied us with fuel, the cascade

with water, and our panniers with a piece of pork, and a few pounds of flour, which the kneading-tray and embers soon converted into bread. The stones were made to grind our coffee, and we were soon seated to a supper from which the epicure might perhaps turn away, but which these rough mountains made a luxury. And then the repose, though on the earth with your saddle for a pillow, yet how refreshing and profound! Nor bark of wolf, nor murmur of cascade, nor rustle of the bear disturbed my dreams that night.

TUESDAY, NOV. 14. We were up, had taken our coffee, and were ready for a start, while as yet only the whispering trees on the higher cliffs had been greeted by the sun. Our course, which was determined by a pocket-compass, now lay among mountain spurs, till we reached the rollers, which ridge the plain of the San Joaquin. In a copse of birch, which shadows one of these, we discovered a spring, where we lunched and rested for an hour, while our animals refreshed themselves on the grass, still green on the marge of the fount. We were now off for a hard ride of several hours. My little Indian hammered into it with a resolution that paid but little heed to the discomfort of his rider. Our object was to reach before nightfall the cabin of an old friend, who had nested himself out here among these wild mountain crags. We dashed around this steep, and over that, like hunters in the chase; while Nina, without rein or rider, led

the way. We had no trail to guide us,—only the instinct of our animals, and that sagacity which a mountain life converts into a sort of prophetic knowledge. The day was dying fast, and no gleam of the cabin cheered the eye. The night would render all search hopeless. At last we struck the stream on which we knew the cabin stood, but whether up or down its current, we could not decide; but Nina, after pausing a moment, led quick and resolutely up the stream, and we struck in after. The step of a weasel may turn the balanced rock.

Three miles of fast riding brought us to a grove of oak, now wrapped in the purple twilight. Along this we streamed till reaching a bold bend, which circled up into its shadows, when the fagot flame of the cottage struck the eye. Our horses bounded forward on the gallop, knowing as well as we that the weary day was now over. Here we found my friend, Dr. Isabell and his good lady, who gave us a hearty welcome. True, their cabin had but one room in it; but what of that?—hearts make a home in the wilderness. Our first care was for our animals, which were soon watered and turned into a rich meadow, with a faithful Indian to watch them through the night. Our busy hostess soon announced supper—beefsteak, omelet, hot rolls, and coffee, with sugar and cream! If you want to know how that supper relished, come and live a month in the mines of California. We run over our adventures since leaving Monterey, and they chimed in well with those of our host in his

wild-wood home. Kindred and friends far away came sweeping down on the stream of memory, and gathered life-like and warm at our sides. We lived over again all our school-days, our rustic sports, our husking-bees, our youthful loves, and those stolen kisses, which the sterner rules of refinement have interdicted only to give place to Polkas, in which modesty is too much bewildered to blush. Our hospitable friends welcomed us to all the sleeping comforts which their cabin afforded; but we camped under the trees, and were soon afloat in the realm of dreams, amid its visioned forms.

“Alas! that dreams are only dreams!
That fancy cannot give
A lasting beauty to those forms,
Which scarce a moment live.”