

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LADY IN THE MOUNTAINS.—TOWN OF STOCKTON.—CROSSING THE VALLEY OF THE SAN JOAQUIN.—THE ROBBED FATHER AND BOY.—RIDE TO SAN JOSÉ.—RUM IN CALIFORNIA.—HIGHWAYMEN.—WOODLAND LIFE.—RACHEL AT THE WELL.—FAREWELL TO MY CAMPING-TREE.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 15. Another day had dawned fresh and brilliant; we breakfasted with our friends, who ordered up their horses, and started with us for Stockton, twelve miles distant. Our lady hostess and myself led off; she had crossed the Rocky Mountains on horseback into California, and was, of course, at home in the saddle. She was mounted on a spirited animal, and my little Indian almost blew the wind out of him to keep up. My companion, though accomplished in all the refinements of metropolitan life, was yet in love with the wild scenes in which her lot had been cast. The rose of health blushed in her cheek, and the light of a salient soul revelled in her eye. "I would not exchange," she said, "my cabin for any palace in Christendom. I have all that I want here, and what more could I have elsewhere? I have tried luxury without health, and a wild mountain life with it. Give me the latter, with the free air, the dashing streams, the swinging woods, the laughing flowers, and the exulting birds; and

"Let him who crawls enamored of decay,
Cling to his couch, and sicken years away."

We were now at Stockton, the nucleus of a town at the head waters of a narrow arm of the San Joaquin. The site is well chosen; its central position to the gold mines, the broad fertile plain which spreads around it, and the water communication which connects it with the commerce of the Sacramento and San Francisco, will lift it into a town of the first importance. Charles Weber, a gentleman much esteemed for his liberality and enterprise, is the owner of the land now occupied by the town, and many leagues adjacent. He has given spacious lots to all who would erect buildings. His policy is marked with wisdom; he will find his advantage in the results. His ample store is well filled with provisions, groceries, and ready-made clothing. The amount of business is immense, and the profits would phrensy our Philadelphia merchants.

We found Stockton without a hotel, the private houses unfinished; and, caring but little for either, camped under the trees. We took supper with Mr. Weber, and, at a late hour, wound ourselves in our blankets for repose. The dew fell heavy, but we slept through it without the least harm. A hydropathist might have exchanged his sheet for a twist in one of our wet blankets. But we had no rheumatic joints to be relaxed, and no bone-burrowed mercury to be douched. What an envied lot, that of the pearl-diver! He gets not only his bath, but a pearl besides. And what a happy fellow is a fish! He is always head and tail in the hydropathic process. I

wonder if it is not this that gives the shark such an appetite, and lends wings to the flying-fish. Even the bullfrog comes up only to twang his joy, and the whale to blow off his excess of pleasure, while the mermaid, lost in transport, sings in her coral hall till the listening naiads feel

"Their souls dissolve in her melodious breath."

THURSDAY, NOV. 16. Replenishing our panniers with hard bread, and a few pounds of dried venison and coffee, we bade adieu to our Oregonian friends and the hospitable proprietor of Stockton, and were off for our distant home. Our trail for sixteen miles lay through an arid plain, when we brought up on the bold bank of the San Joaquin. Our saddles, bridles, packs, and persons were thrown into a boat, our horses driven into the stream, and over we dashed to the opposite bank, where we paid two dollars each for our ferriage, and mounted for a fresh start. It was near sunset when we reached the line of trees which belt, with their thick umbrage, the great valley which stretches in barrenness beyond. Here we camped for the night, and soon found, to our pleasurable surprise, our friends Lieut. Bonnycastle and Lieut. Morehead, of the army, in a camp not more than an arrow's flight distant. They were on their way to the mines, and if excellent qualities of head and heart can secure success, must return with fortunes. Night deepened apace, and our simple repast

finished, we wrapped ourselves in our blankets, and were soon in sound sleep.

FRIDAY, NOV. 17. The day glimmered over the hill-tops: a cup of coffee, a cake of hard bread, and a scrap of dried venison, and we were under way again. Our trail lay for fifteen miles over the prairie of the San Joaquin. Though now in November, yet the heat was oppressive. We encountered groups of disbanded volunteers, on their way to the mines. The soldiers' improvidence had left but very few the means of procuring horses, and they were generally on foot, and crippled with blisters. Going to the mines is one thing; returning *from* them is another. A dream of victory animates the soldier, and visions of gold stimulate the digger. It is only the result under which the heart droops and the muscles give way.

It was mid-day when we struck the hills which roll their low forests to the verge of the prairie. In a glen, where sparkled a spring and the pine threw its shadows, we encountered an elderly man and his little boy. The parent was silent, downcast, and abstracted, and his boy was evidently trying to cheer him. The father, in reply to our inquiries, informed us that they had been in the mines, where, by great industry and good fortune, they had got out twenty pounds of gold; that on their return they had camped for the night near Stockton; that leaving their camping-tree for a few hours to renew their

stock of provisions, they had buried their bag of gold under the tree; but on their return their gold could not be found! that the most diligent search had led to no results; that he had been robbed! that the loss was less for him, but that he had eight motherless children, dependent on him for a support. Who could listen to such a tale as this and not feel his blood tingle at the callous wretch who could thus ruin another? Even the forgiving Uncle Toby would deliver him over to the avenging angel, to be driven down under double-bolted thunder: nothing could rescue him, unless the Universalists catch him in their creed, which saves a man in spite of the Evil One, and in spite of himself, too.

We invited the father and son to join our company; and when on the way, the little boy, who was mounted on a pony at my side, told me a subscription had been started at Stockton for his father, and that Mr. Weber and Dr. Isabell had subscribed a pound of gold each. Blessings on those liberal men! such a charity will throw a circle of light around misfortune, should it ever be *their* lot. The sun was far down his western dip when we reached the hospitable hearth of our friend Mr. Livermore; but finding that he had no grain for our horses, and that the grass around had utterly perished under the summer's drought, we determined to push on; and, crossing a plain of eight miles, reached the mountain rollers, where we struck into a ravine, through which a streamlet murmured, and where a plot of grass still

preserved some portion of its freshness. Here we tethered and camped. The brief twilight that remained had passed into night's bosom before we had gathered sufficient wood for our camp-fire: and we needed a large pile; for the air was chill and penetrating. We made our supper on hard bread, dried venison, and coffee; while clouds, the sure precursors of the winter rains, drifted above in sluggish masses. Our camp-fire threw its column of waving flame on the beetling crags; not a sound from cavern or cliff disturbed the silence; we gazed into the fire, lost in pensive musing; and a more melancholy group seldom gathers over that face—

“Where life's last parting pulse has ceased to play,”

when an owl perched near, gave a deep hoot! Each broke into an involuntary laugh. The philosophy of that transition I leave to those whose metaphysical acumen can split the shadow which falls between melancholy and mirth.

SATURDAY, NOV. 18. Another morn full of rosy charms comes blushing over the hills; at the glance of her eye the shadows flee away, and the birds awaken into song. The stir of preparation rustles the leaves under our camping-tree, and while the dew yet gems the grass, we are up and away. What salient freshness and force are in the heart which takes its pulses from the waving wild-wood and the dashing stream! The exhilaration in its fullest tide never

ebbs; it bears you on with sympathies and enjoyments still expanding, till all nature, with her intense life and rapture, is yours.

Our path, which lay through a mountain gorge, bent its line to a winding rivulet, laughing and singing through the solitude. Little cared *that* for marble fount or sculptured dolphin; it was happy in its own free life, and the kisses of the enamored pebbles, which danced in its limpid wave. And now the white walls of the old church, where the mission of San José reared its altars, glimmered into vision. Fast and far the separating interval was left behind, when we dashed up to its welcome portal. Here we found an Irish restaurant, and set its culinary functions in motion—

“Nothing’s more sure at moments to take hold
Of the best feelings of mankind, which grow
More tender, as we every day behold,
Than that all-softening, overpowering knell,
The tocsin of the soul—the dinner-bell!”

SUNDAY, NOV. 19. My companions pushed on last evening to San José—fifteen miles distant. My old Russian friend, who occupies one of the mission buildings, invited me to spend the Sabbath with him; an invitation which I gladly accepted, as it afforded a refuge from the restaurant, with the roar of its revelry and rum. The United States have sent out enough of this fire here to burn up a continent. The conflagration, kindled by the battle-brand or bolt of

the electric cloud, may sweep a forest, or lay a city in ashes; but from the smouldering ruins new structures will rise, and a new generation of plants spring; but where the spirit of rum hath spread its flame a desolation follows, which the skill of man and the reviving dews of heaven can never reach. It is barren and verdureless as the sulphurous marl which paves

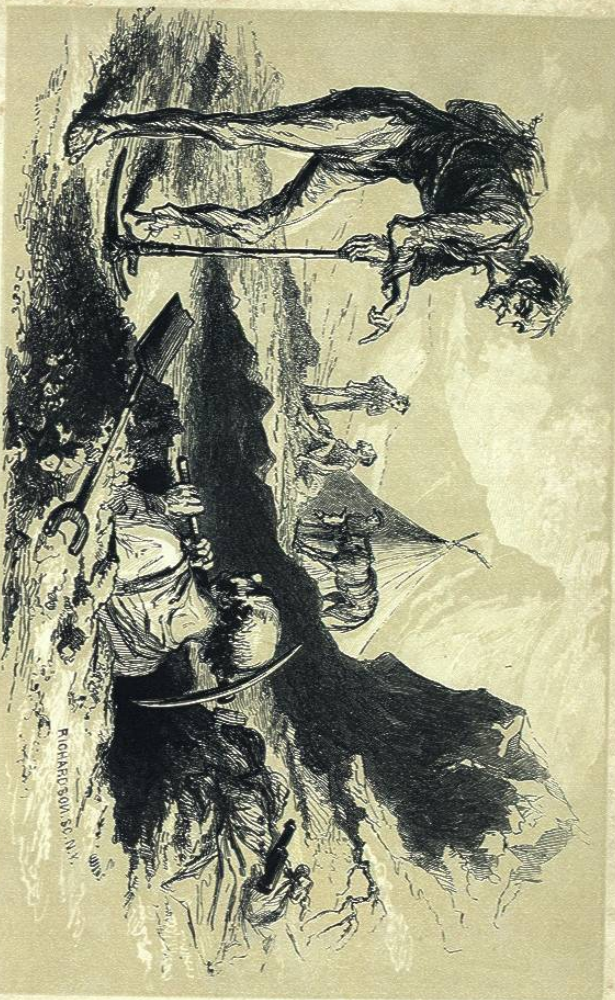
“The deep track of hell.”

MONDAY, NOV. 20. For a moment this morning I regretted having parted with my pistols, and thrown myself on the non-resistant principle. I was alone, and on my way to San José, when two horsemen suddenly broke from the covert of the woods on my left, and swept down upon the line of my path. They were well mounted, and had the dare-devil air of the brigand. It was near this spot, too, that a young friend of mine had been recently murdered. To attempt flight on my Indian pony from the lightning hoof of my pursuers, would have given to consternation itself a hue of the ludicrous. I determined to die decently, if die I must. My supposed assailants dashed close to my side, and then, without uttering a word, spurred back to the forest, from which they had debouched. They were foreigners, disguised as Californians; for a native always salutes you, and would, were his hand on the trigger of his pistol. They went as they came, and the secret of their impetuous visit is in their own keeping. I was quite willing to part with

their company, and ascribe their intrusion to a violent curiosity, or any other motive untouched by crime, so that they would let me pass in peace to the Pueblo of San José.

TUESDAY, NOV. 21. Arriving at the Pueblo, I found my companions had hired four horses, accustomed to the harness, attached them to the wagon, which we had left here, on our way to the mines, and were ready to start for Monterey. I threw my saddle, bridle, and blanket into the wagon, and parted with my Indian pony: he had done me good service, and got me out of a bad fix in the mines; he had pounded me some, it is true; but that was no fault of his; nature never intended him to tread on flowers without bending their stems. May his new owner treat him kindly; and when age has withered his strength, not turn him out on a public common to die! Had we as little mercy shown us as we extend to the noblest animal committed to our care, we should never get to heaven.

The sun was far down his western slope when we reached the rancho of Mr. Murphy, and camped for the night under the evergreen oaks, which throw the soft shade of their undying verdure over a streamlet that murmurs near his door. The old gentleman invited us in to share his restricted apartments, but we had so long slept under trees, that we preferred the free air, the maternal earth, and the stars to light us to our slumber. Truly I never slept so soundly on the



"Come, old fellow, you had better knock off, and go home with me."—"No, I'll be dinged if I do. I'm in for the gold, and will find it, or dig out the other side. I'm told it is only eight thousand miles through; so, have goes!"

garnished couch, and never found in sleep such a renovating refreshment. I can now comprehend why it is the hunter clings to his wild life, and prefers the precarious subsistence of his rifle to teeming stalls. He lives out of himself; his sympathies are with nature; his sensations roll through boundless space. It is for *his* eye the violet blooms, and the early cloud catches the blush of morn; it is for *his* ear the bird sings from its green covert, and the torrent shouts from its cliff; it is to cheer *his* footsteps that the twilight lingers, and the star blazes in the coronet of night: all the changes of the varied year are for *him*; and around his wild-wood home the seasons lead the hours in perpetual dance; and when his being shall resign its trust, the dirge of the deep wood will sing his requiem, and the wings of the wind, filled with the fragrance of flowers, bear his spirit to its bright abode.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 22. We broke camp at sunrise, took our coffee, harnessed up, and began to lumber ahead. Our driver, who owned the dull steeds which he reined, was a native of New England, and betrayed his origin in the perpetual hum of a low plaintive tune, which spun on for hours in the same unconscious monotony. Even the crack of his whip, which came in frequently, had only the effect to give some note a slight emphasis, while the low dirge still murmured on, true to its unbroken flow as the tick of the death-watch to its admonitory errand. Thus the

hours of the day, their tender requiem being sung, stole silently into the past.

But now occurred a wayfaring incident which could not thus be charmed to rest. Our team, about half way up the long hill of San Juan, balked, and the wagon began to roll back to its base. We jumped out and clogged the wheels, for we had no idea of returning again to the mines. Having breathed a moment, we made another attempt, but without success; we now put our shoulders to the wheels, while the lash fell fast on the flanks of our horses. But no pushing, coaxing, or whipping availed; our journey for the day was done, and abruptly too as that of a migratory goose struck by a rifle ball. The shadows of the mountain pines were lengthening fast, and we retired into a glen at a short distance, and camped. It was my duty to procure water for coffee; the spring where the horses drank was too full of impurities; I followed up the unseen vein marked by the green willows, till its flowing wave murmured on the ear from the depths of a shadowy chasm. But the method of reaching it puzzled me as much as the faithful proxy of the Patriarch would have been, but for the pitcher and line of the gentle Rachel. How free of affectation and false alarm that daughter of Israel, as her snow-white arms drew the limpid tide to quench the stranger's thirst! How free of a distrustful spirit, or disdainful pride, when told that one whom her father loved, sued for her bridal hand! The wave which swelled in her milk-white bosom may

have trembled a moment, like the leaf stirred in the rosy twilight, and the dream of her pillowed slumber may have flushed through the snow-curl of her cheek, but with the early lark, she was up and away—happy in her own youth and innocence, and in the thought that these were inwoven with the happiness of another. How hollow the pretexts of protracted delay, when touched by the light which glimmers down through ages from the example of this primitive maiden! But where am I?—in the infant world instead of these chasmed rocks, which frown through the wrinkles of its decrepitude and age. How thought annihilates time and space! The flower that first bloomed on the verge of the globe, as it emerged from chaos, and the cinder that will fade last in the embers of its final conflagration, lie side by side in the domain of thought; and the star that hailed its birth, and the planet that will guard its tomb, are twin-born in the eternity of time. But I am off again in a philosophic revery, and must come back to my coffee-pot and chasm! With the aid of a long riata, my bucket was lowered sufficiently to dip the unseen stream; but drawing it up I discovered in its wave, as the surface became tranquil, what might well startle any one whose nerves were not of steel. It was a human face of bronze hue, half covered with tangled locks, and a beard of hermit growth, and so like that bent above, there was a relief in the ripple that destroyed the resemblance. But my camping companions will never, at this rate, get their coffee.

THURSDAY, NOV. 23. We escaped this morning another balk of our animals by a circling road which in the dusk of the last eve we had missed. It was mid-day when we rumbled from the hills of San Juan upon the plain of the Salinas, and near sunset when we reached the river, which rolls its yellow wave fifteen miles from Monterey. We might have pushed through, but why be impatient over a night's delay? I had no one there watching a husband's return, or waiting a father's kiss. These objects of endearment were in other lands, and oceans rolled between. More than three long years had worn away since I waved my adieu, and weary moons must set before my return. I may find the eyes that beamed so kindly, closed forever; the bud of infant being, on which their last light fell, withered.

We were roused in the night by screams from the river; an ox-cart, with three women in it, had tumbled down the opposite bank. The cattle seemed as much frightened as their passengers, and fared better, as they had struck a shallower bottom. We plunged in and reached the cart. Our first impulse was to take the women out and *tote* them ashore, but their great size and weight forbade. We wished to carry the thing through as gallantly as it had been begun; but after casting about—the cold stream all the while lowering the thermometer of our enthusiasm—we concluded to drive the team out, and scramble out ourselves.

FRIDAY, NOV. 24. We broke camp at an early hour, and were off for Monterey. I left my camping-tree as one parts with a tried friend. It was the last of a vernal band, that had thrown over me, at burning noon and through the chilly night, their protecting shade. While our driver hummed his low monotonous stave to his steeds, my neglected reed murmured in the counter—

TO MY CAMPING-TREE.

Farewell to thee, my camping-tree,
The last to shade this breast,
Where twilight weaves, with tender leaves,
Her couch of rosy rest.

Thy trembling leaf seemed shook with grief,
As on it gleamed the dew;
As woke the bird, by night-winds stirred,
The stars came dancing through.

In lucid dreams I caught the gleams—
Through chasmed rocks unrolled—
Of gems, where blaze the diamond's rays,
And massive bars of gold.

I saw a ship her anchor trip,
All stowed with gold below,
Depart this bay for Joppa's quay,
Three thousand years ago!

A star-lit dome, of amber foam,
Loomed in the liquid blue,
Where reigned of old, on thrones of gold,
The Incas of Peru.

The midnight moans, and phrensied groans,
Of miners near their last,
In tones that cursed the gold they nursed,
Came trembling on the blast.

While one apart, with gentler heart,
His still tears dashed aside,
That he might trace a pictured face,
At which he gazed, and died.

On steep and vale, in calm and gale,
Like music on the sea—
Sweet slumber stole, within my soul,
Beneath the camping-tree.

A low-voiced tone, the wind hath thrown
Upon my dreaming ear,
Of one, whose smiles, and gentle wiles,
Are still remembered here :—

Of one, whose tears—where each endears
The more the heart that wept—
From swimming lid in silence slid,
And on her bosom slept.

A blue-eyed child, with glee half wild,
In infant beauty's beams,
And lock that rolled, in waving gold,
Came glancing through my dreams.

Farewell to thee, my camping-tree ;
Till life's last visions gleam,
Thy leaves and limbs, and vesper hymns,
Shall float in memory's dream.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAUSE OF SICKNESS IN THE MINES.—THE QUICKSILVER MINES.—HEAT AND COLD IN THE MINES.—TRAITS IN THE SPANISH CHARACTER.—HEALTH OF CALIFORNIA LADIES.—A WORD TO MOTHERS.—THE PINGRASS AND BLACK-BIRD.—THE REDWOOD-TREE.—BATTLE OF THE EGGS.

SATURDAY, DEC. 2. I found Monterey, on my return from the mines, under the same quiet air in which her green hills had soared since I first beheld their waving shade. Many had predicted my precipitate return, from the hardships and baffled attempt of the tour ; but I persevered, taking it rough and tumble from the first, and have returned with improved health. I met with but very few cases of sickness in the mines, and these obviously resulting from excessive imprudence. What but maladies could be expected, where the miner stands by the hour in a cold mountain stream, with a broiling sun overhead, and then, perhaps, drinking every day a pint of New England rum? Why, the rum itself would shatter any constitution not lightning-proof. I wish those who send this fire-curse here were wrapped in its flames till the wave of repentance should baptize them into a better life.

I have missed but two things, since my return, from my goods and chattels—my walking-cane and my Bible ; both have been carried off during my absence.