

CALIFORNIA TRAITS.

CALIFORNIANS of the olden decades have never been surpassed in spontaneous, princely generosity. If a miner were killed by a "cave," or premature explosion, it only took a few hours to raise five hundred or a thousand dollars for his widow. The veriest sot or tramp had only to get sick to be supplied with all that money could buy. There never was another people so open-handed to poverty, sickness, or the stranger. They were wild, wicked fellows, and made sad havoc of the greater part of the Decalogue; but if deeds of charity are put to the credit of the sinner, the recording angel smiled with inward joy as he put down many an item on the credit side of the eternal ledger. This trait distinguished all alike—saints and sinners, merchants and miners, gamblers and politicians, Jews and Gentiles, yankees and Southerners, natives and foreigners. Here and there would be found a mean, close-fisted fellow, who never responded to the appeals of that heavenly charity which kept the hearts of those feverish, excited, struggling men alive. But such a man was made to feel that he was an object of intense scorn. The hot-tempered adventurer who shot down his enemy in fair fight could be tolerated, but not the miserly wretch who hoarded the dollar needed to save a fellow-man from want. Those Californians of the earlier days showed two traits in excess—a princely courage and a princely generosity; and their descendants will have in their traditions of them a source of inspiration that

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will serve to perpetuate among them a brave and generous manhood.

A notable exhibition of this spontaneous and princely generosity in the Californians took place in 1867. The war had left the South decimated, broken, impoverished—a land of grief and of graves. Already in 1866 the gaunt specter of famine hovered over the fated South. The next year a general drought completed the catastrophe. The crops failed, there was no money, the war had stripped the Southern people of all but their lives and their land. It was a dark day. Starvation menaced hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children.

A poor widow in Sonoma County, reading in the newspapers the accounts given of the suffering in the South, sent me six dollars and fifty cents, with a note saying that she had earned the money by taking in washing. She added that it was but a mite, but it would help a little, leaving it to my discretion to send it where it was most needed. Her modest note was published in the *Christian Spectator*, of which I was then editor. The publication of that little note was like touching a spark to dry prairie grass. The hearts of the Californians were ready for the good work, and the poor Sonoma widow showed them the way to do it. From all parts of the State money poured in—by hundreds, by thousands, by tens of thousands of dollars, until directly and indirectly over ninety thousand dollars in gold was sent to the various relief committees in Baltimore, Macon, Nashville, Richmond, and other cities. The transmission of all this money cost not a dollar. The express companies carried the coin free of charge, the bankers remitted all charges on exchange—all services were rendered gratuitously.

The whole movement was carried out in true California style. A single incident will illustrate the spirit in which it was done. A week or two after the widow's note had been published I had occasion to visit San José. It was Saturday, the great day for traffic in that flourishing inland city. The streets were thronged with vehicles and horses and men and women, sauntering, trading, talking, gazing. The great center of resort was the junction of Santa Clara and First Streets. As I was pushing my way through the dense mass of human beings at this point, I met Frank Stewart*—filibuster, philosopher, mineralogist, and editor.

"Wait here a moment," said Stewart to me.

Springing into an empty express wagon, he cried, "O yes, O yes, O yes," after the manner of auctioneers. A crowd gathered around him with inquiring looks. I stood looking on, wondering what he meant. "Fellow-citizens," said Stewart, "while you are here enjoying prosperity and plenty, there is want in the homes of the South. Men, women, and children there are starving. They are our own countrymen, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. We must send them help, and we must send it promptly. I tell you they are starving! In many homes this very night hungry children will sob themselves to sleep without food! But yonder I see an old neighbor, whom you all know," pointing to me. "He has recently visited the South, is in direct communication with it, and will be able to give us the facts in the case. Get up here where you can be seen and heard, and tell us what you know of the distress in the South."

*Stewart was with Walker in Nicaragua, and wrote an entertaining narrative of that romantic and tragic historical episode, entitled "The Last of the Filibusters."

I attempted a retreat, but in vain. Almost before I knew it they had me on the express wagon, talking to the crowd. It was a novel situation to me, and I felt awkward at first. The whole proceeding was a surprise. But there was sympathy and encouragement in the upturned faces of those Californians, and I soon felt at ease standing in my strange pulpit in the open air. My audience kept growing, the people deserting the street auctioneers, the stores, the saloons, and the sidewalks, and pressing close around the express wagon. After describing scenes I had witnessed, I was giving some details of the latest news from the distressed localities, when a dark-skinned, grave-looking little man pressed his way through the crowd and silently laid a five-dollar gold piece on the seat of the express wagon at my feet. Another, another, and another followed. Not a word was spoken, but strong breasts heaved with emotion, and many a bronzed cheek was wet. I could not go on with my speech, but broke down completely. Still the money poured in. It seemed as if every man in that vast throng had caught the feeling of the moment. Never, even in the consecrated temple, amid worshiping hundreds and pealing anthems and fervent prayers, have I felt that God was nearer than at that moment. At length there was a pause. Mr. Spring, the lively and good-natured auctioneer, rushed into his store across the street, and bringing out a gayly painted little cask of California wine, put it into my hands, saying: "Sell this for the benefit of the cause."

This was indeed a new rôle to me. Taking the cask in my hands, and lifting it up before the crowd, I asked: "Who will give five dollars for this cask of wine, the money to go to help the starving?"

"I will," said a man from Ohio, standing directly in front of me, advancing and laying down the money as he spoke.

"Who else will give five dollars for it?"

"I will"—"And I"—"And I"—"And I"—the responses came thick and fast, until the gallon cask of wine had brought in eighty-five dollars. The last purchaser, a tall, good-natured fellow from Maine, said to me as he turned and walked off: "Take the cask home with you, and keep it as a memento of this day."

The crowd scattered, and I gathered and counted the silver and gold that lay at my feet. It filled the canvas sack furnished by a friendly storekeeper, and ran high up into the hundreds. That was California; the California in which still lingered the spirit of the early days. I descended from my impromptu rostrum, invoking a benediction upon them and their children and their children's children, and it is reëchoing in my heart as I write these lines, thousands of miles away on the banks of the Cumberland in Tennessee.

It ought to be added here that in this work of relief for the South Northern men and women were not a whit behind those from the South. The first subscriber to the fund, and the most active worker in its behalf in San Francisco, was Thomas H. Selby, a New Yorker of noble and princely spirit, whose subsequent death robbed California of one of its richest jewels. I am glad to claim national kinship with such people.

On the afternoon before Thanksgiving Day, in eighteen hundred and sixty-something, two little girls came into my office, on Washington Street. One was a chubby, curly-headed little beauty, about five years old. The other was a crippled child, about ten, with a pale, suffering face and

earnest, pleading blue eyes. She walked with crutches, and was out of breath when she got to the top of the long, narrow staircase in the third story of Reese's building, where I dispensed "copy" for the printer and school law for the pedagogues in those days. The older girl handed me a note which she had brought in her thin, white hand. I opened the paper, and read these words: "I am lying sick on Larkin Street, near Sacramento, and there is not a mouthful to eat nor a cent of money in the house."

I recognized the signature as that of a man I had met at the Napa Springs two years before. He was then, as now, an invalid.

I took my hat and cane, and followed the children. It was painful work for the crippled girl, climbing the hill in the face of the heavy wind from the sea. Often she had to pause and rest a few moments, panting for breath and trembling from weakness. When we reached the house, which was a rickety shanty, partly buried in the sand, a hollow-eyed, hopeless-looking woman met us at the door. She had the dull, weary look of a woman worn out with care and the loss of rest. On a coarse bedstead lay the invalid. As soon as he saw me he pulled the quilt over his head, and gave way to his feelings. Looking around, I was shocked to see the utter absence of everything necessary to the comfort of a family. They had parted with every article that would bring a little money with which to buy food. Where the children, five in number, slept I could not conceive. Making a short stay, I went forth to send them relief. A genial, red-bearded New Hampshire man kept a grocery and provision store on the corner of Jackson and Stockton Streets. I liked him, and sometimes patronized him. I gave him

the address of the needy family, and instructed him to send them everything they needed. Before sunset a heavy-laden wagon deposited such stores of eatables at the sand hill shanty as made the inmates thereof wonder. When the bill was presented it was evident that he had not charged half price. I knew my man.

The next day my purpose was to go to Calvary Church and hear a sermon from the brilliant Dr. Charles Wadsworth, with whom striking and eloquent Thanksgiving sermons had long been a specialty. On my way to church I thought of the helpless family in the sand hills, and I resolved to change my Thanksgiving programme. The thought was suggested to my mind that I would go up one side of Montgomery Street and down the other, and ask every acquaintance I should happen to meet for a contribution to the family on Larkin Street. The day was lovely, and all San Francisco was on the streets. (You must go to California to learn how delightful a November day can be.) Before I had gone two squares so much specie had been given me that I found it necessary to get a sack to hold it. On the corner of California Street I came upon Col. Eyre and a knot of other brokers, ten in number, every one of whom gave me a five-dollar gold piece. By the time I had gotten back to my starting point the canvas sack was full of gold and silver. I took it at once to Larkin Street.

The sad, hollow-eyed woman met me at the door. I handed her the sack. She felt its weight, began to tremble, staggered to the bed, and sinking down upon it burst into a fit of violent weeping. The reaction was too sudden for her—poor, worn creature! The sick man also cried, and the children cried; and I am not sure that my own

eyes were dry. I left them very soon, and wended my way homeward to my cottage on the western edge of Russian Hill, above the sea. My Thanksgiving dinner was enjoyed that day.

About seven years afterwards a man overtook me on the street in San Francisco, and, grasping my hand warmly, called me by name: "Don't you know me? Don't you remember the man to whom you brought that money on Thanksgiving Day, seven years ago? I'm the man. That money made my fortune. I was able to obtain medicines and comforts which before I had not the means to buy; my mind was relieved of its load of anxiety; my health began to improve from that day, and now I am a well man, prosperous in business, and with as happy a family around me as there is on earth." What more he said as he held and pressed my hand need not be repeated.

If we search for the cause of this California trait of character, perhaps it may be found in the fact that the early Californians were mostly adventurers. (Please remember that this word has a good as well as a bad sense.) Their own vicissitudes and wrestlings with fortune gave them a vivid realization of the feelings of a fellow-man struggling with adversity. It was a great Brotherhood of Adventure, from whose fellowship no man was excluded. They would fight to the death over a disputed claim; they would too often make the strong hand the test of right; they gave their animal passions free play and enacted bloody tragedies; but they never shut their purses against the distressed, nor turned a deaf ear to the voice of sorrow. Doubtless the ease and rapidity with which fortunes were made in the early days also contributed to produce this free-handedness. A man who made, or hoped to make, a fortune in a

week did not stop to count the money he spent on his schemes, his passions, or his charities. Cases came to my knowledge in which princely fortunes were squandered by a week of debauch with cards, wine, and women.

A sailor struck a "pocket" on Wood's Creek, and took out forty thousand dollars in two days. He went into town, deposited the dust, drew several thousand dollars in coin, and entered upon a debauch. In a day or two the coin was exhausted, the gamblers, saloon keepers, and bad women having divided it between them. Half crazed with drink, he called for his gold dust, and, taking it to the "Long Tom," he began to bet heavily against a faro bank. Staking handfuls of the shining dust, he alternately won and lost until, becoming excited beyond control, he staked the entire sack of gold dust, valued at twenty-eight thousand dollars, on a single card, and—lost, of course. He went to bed and slept off the fumes of his drunkenness, got money enough to take him to San Francisco, where he shipped as a common sailor on a vessel bound for Shanghai. He expressed no regret for the loss of his treasure, but boasted that he had a jolly time while it lasted.

In Sonora there was a rough, whisky-loving fellow named Bill Ford, who divided his time between gambling, drinking, and deer hunting. One day he took his rifle and sallied forth in search of venison. He wandered among the hills for several hours without finding any game. Reaching a projection of Bald Mountain, a few hundred yards below the summit, tired and hot, he threw himself on the ground to rest under the shade of a stunted tree. In an idle way he began to dig into the rotten quartz with his hunting



"It's gold!"

knife, thinking such thoughts as would come into the mind of such a harum-scarum fellow under the circumstances. "What's this?" he suddenly exclaimed. "Hurrah! I have struck it! It's gold! It's gold!"

And so it was gold. Bill had struck a "pocket," and a rich one. His deer hunt was a lucky one after all. Marking well the spot, he lost no time in getting back to Sonora, where he provided himself with a strong, iron-bound water bucket, and then returned with his treasure, which amounted to forty thousand dollars. The "pocket" was exhausted. Though much labor and money were expended in the search, no more gold could be found there. Bill took his gold to town, and was the hero of the hour. Only one way of celebrating his good fortune occurred to his mind. He went on a big spree—whisky, cards, etc. He was a quarrelsome and ugly fellow when drinking. The very next day he got into a fight at the City Hotel and was shot dead, leaving the most of his bucketful of gold dust unspent. The time and manner of Bill's death was, in its result, the best thing known of his history. A strange thing happened: the money found its way to his mother in Pennsylvania, every dollar of it. Public sentiment aided the public administrator in doing his duty in this case. It was a common saying among the Californians in those days that when an estate was taken charge of by that functionary the legal heirs had small show of getting any part of it. It is but just to say, however, that there was a latent moral sense among the Californians that never failed to condemn the faithless public servant. They did not take time to prosecute him, but they made him feel that he was despised.

FATHER ACOLTI.

I FIRST met him one day in 1857 in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Stopping at a sort of way-side inn near the summit to water my horse, a distinguished-looking man, who stood by his buggy with a bucket in his hand, saluted me: "Good morning, sir. You wish to water your horse; may I wait on you?"

His manner would have melted in a moment a whole mountain of conventional ice, it was so cordial and so spontaneous. Disregarding my mild protest against being waited on by my senior, he filled the bucket from the sparkling fountain, and gave it to the thirsty animal, still panting from the long climb up the mountain side. In the meantime we had exchanged names and occupations. He, Father Acolti, a priest and teacher in the Jesuit College at Santa Clara; and I, the writer of these humble Sketches. As he stood there before me, he looked like anything rather than a disciple of Ignatius Loyola. He was sturdy and fat, yet refined and graceful in appearance. His features were large, his head massive, his expression one of great benignity, illuminated with frequent flashes of good humor. There was also about him a something that suggested that he had suffered. I fell in love with Father Acolti on the spot. When he drove down the mountain on the one side, and I on the other, it really seemed as if the grand redwoods had caught a friendlier look and the wild honeysuckles a richer fragrance from the sunny-faced old priest. The tone of human

companionship wonderfully modifies the aspects of external nature.

Father Acolti and I met often after this. On the highway, in the social circles of the lovely Santa Clara Valley, and especially in the abodes of sickness and poverty, I crossed his path. He seemed to have an instinct that guided him to the needy and the sorrowing. It is certain that the instinct of suffering souls led them to the presence of the old priest, whose face was so fatherly, whose voice was so gentle, whose eye melted so readily with pity, and whose hand was so quick to extend relief.

There was a tinge of romance in Father Acolti's history, as it was told to me. He was an Italian of noble birth. A beautiful woman had given him her heart and hand, and before one year of wedded happiness had passed she died. The young nobleman's earthly hope and ambition died with her. He sold his estates, visited her tomb for the last time, and then, renouncing the world, applied for admission into the mysterious order of the Society of Jesus, an organization whose history makes the most curious chapter in the record of modern religious conflict. Having served his novitiate, he was ready for work. His scientific attainments and tastes naturally drew him to the work of education, and doubtless he heartily responded to the command to repair to California as one of a corps of teachers who were to lay the foundations of an educational system for the Roman Catholic Church. But in reality the Jesuits had entered California nearly ninety years before, and laid the foundations upon which their successors are now building. The old mission churches, with their vineyards and orchards, are the monuments of their zeal and devotion. The California

Digger Indians were the subjects of the missionary zeal of the early Jesuit fathers; and whether the defect was in the methods of the teachers or in the capabilities of their Indian neophytes, the effort to elevate these poor red brethren of ours to the plane of Christian civilization failed. They are still savages, and on the path to extinction. The Digger will become neither a citizen nor a Christian. In the conflict of vigorous races on the Pacific Coast he has no chance to survive. The Jesuits deserve credit for what they attempted in behalf of the Indians. We Protestants, who claim a purer faith and better methods, have as yet done but little to arrest the process of their extirpation, or elevate them in the scale of humanity. I fear we have been but too ready to conclude that these poor people are not included in the command to preach the gospel to every creature. The sight of a Digger Indian camp makes a heavy draft upon Christian faith—but did not Christ die for them?

One fact in Father Acolti's history invested him with peculiar interest in the minds of the people: he was of noble blood. I do not know how many persons in the Santa Clara Valley whispered this secret to me as a fact of great importance. Democrats and Republicans as they are in theory, no people on earth have in their secret hearts a profounder reverence for titles of nobility than the Americans. From Father Acolti himself no hint of anything of the kind was ever heard. He never talked of himself. Nor did I ever hear him mention his religious views, except in very general terms. It is said, and perhaps truly, that the Jesuits are all propagandists by profession; but this old priest made you forget that he was anything but a genial and lovable old gentleman with fine manners and a magnetic presence.

After my removal to San Francisco, he too was transferred to the metropolis, and assigned to duty in connection with the Jesuit church and college, on Market Street. Here again I found his tracks wherever I went among the poor and the miserable. Whether it was a dying foreigner in the sand hills, a young man without money hunting for work, a poor widow bewildered and helpless in her grief, a woman with a drunken husband and a house full of hungry children, a prisoner in the jail, or a sick man in the hospital—Father Acolti's hand was sure to be found in any scheme of relief. Meeting him on the street, you would catch a glow from his kind face and friendly voice, and in most instances leave him with a smile at some little pleasantry that rippled forth as he stood with his hand resting familiarly on your shoulder. He loved his little joke, but it was never at the expense of any human being, and his merriment never went farther than a smile that brightened all over his broad face. There was that about him that repelled the idea of boisterous mirth. The shadow of a great sorrow still lay in the background of his consciousness, shading and softening his sky, but not obscuring its light. As his step grew feebler, and it became evident that his strength was failing, this shadow seemed to deepen. There was a wistful look in his eyes that spoke of a longing for Italy, for his buried love, or for heaven. There were tears in his eyes when we parted in the street for the last time, as he silently pressed my hand and walked slowly away. I was not surprised when the news reached me soon after that he was dead. I trust that our next meeting will be where no shadow shall dim the light that shines on us both.

CALIFORNIA WEDDINGS.

IF the histories connected with the California weddings that I have attended could be written out in full, what tragedies, comedies, and farces would excite the tears and smiles of the susceptible reader! Orange blossoms and pistols are mingled in the matrimonial retrospect. The sound of merry wedding bells, the wails of heart-broken grief, and the imprecations of desperate hate echo in the ear of memory as I begin this chapter on "California Weddings." Nothing else could give a better picture of the vanishing phases of the social life of California. But prudence and good taste restrain my pencil. Too many of the parties are still living, and the subject is too delicate to allow entire freedom of delineation. A guarded glance is all that may be allowed. No real names will be called.

Mounted on "Old Frank" one clear, bracing morning in 1856, I was galloping along the highway between Peppermint Gulch and Sonora, when I overtook a lawyer named G—, who was noted for his irascible temper and too ready disposition to fight, but whose talents and energy had won for him a leading position at the bar. It was an exhilarating ride as we dashed on at a swinging pace, the cool breeze kissing our faces, the blue sky above, the surrounding hills softened by shadows at their bases and glowing with sunshine on their tops. The reader who has never had a gallop among the foothills of California in clear weather has missed one of life's supremest pleas-