

RECOLLECTIONS OF  
CALIFORNIA MINING  
LIFE.

*By HENRY DeGROOT.*

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WRITTEN FOR THE MINING AND SCIENTIFIC PRESS,

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PRIMITIVE PLACERS AND FIRST IMPORTANT DIS-  
COVERY OF GOLD. THE PIONEERS OF THE  
PIONEERS—THEIR FORTUNE  
AND THEIR FATE.

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SUTTER'S MILL, WHERE GOLD WAS FIRST DISCOVERED.

## RECOLLECTIONS OF CALIFORNIA MINING LIFE.

### Early Legends and First Important Discovery of Gold.

Although the grand discovery of gold in California occurred not until 1848, there were traditions of its existence here centuries before that time. For nearly three hundred years the impression that this was a gold-bearing country obtained among both English, French and Spanish-speaking peoples, being founded on the reports of navigators along the North Pacific coast, magnified, as was their wont, by the chroniclers of these early times. In the summer of 1579 Sir Francis Drake, the English navigator, entered the bay which now bears his name, and anchoring his vessel remained there several weeks. Before departing he took possession of the country in the name of his sovereign, Queen Elizabeth, and called it New Albion. On his return to England, with a view, probably, to giving importance to his new possessions, Drake represented the country as abounding in gold, so much so that Hakluyt, the historian, in speaking of it declares that "there is no part of the earth here to be taken up wherein there is not a reasonable quantity of gold or silver." Inasmuch as there is no gold or silver anywhere about Drake's Bay, which lies nearly in latitude 38°, and 30 miles north of the Golden Gate, the the above statement is clearly a fabrication of the great navigator. Had Sir Francis went ashore a hundred or two hundred miles further north, where the gold bluffs and beaches occur, there might have been some ground for the representation so made. But as the bay called after him is as far as he voyaged in that direction, the existence of these auriferous deposits avails not to save his veracity from successful impeachment.

But this notion about gold in California did not originate with Drake and his contemporary

historian. In the same year that he visited this coast a book was published at Lorraine, in which occurs the following passage. "The soldiers of Vasquirus Coronatus having found no gold in Vivola, in order not to return to Mexico without gold, resolved to come to Quivera (California), for they had heard much of its gold mines, and that Tataraxus, the powerful King of that country, was amply provided with riches."

After the conquest of Mexico, the Spaniards, incited by the vague stories told them by the natives of the country, were ever engaging in expeditions off this way in search of the precious metals. And when these adventurers arrived in Arizona, here again the inhabitants gave them to understand that the gold producing lands they were so eager to find lay still further to the northwest. In so advising their unwelcome visitors these people might themselves have believed what they said to be true, though possibly this was a ruse to induce these marauders to move on and thus rid the country of their presence. Between the years 1610 and 1660, more than twenty expeditions were sent out from Mexico to explore and occupy the regions to the northwest, under the impression that they abounded not only with gold and silver, but also with pearls, diamonds and other precious stones.

How signally these efforts failed of their object is denoted by the fact that prior to 1848 only a few placers, poor and of comparatively limited extent, were ever found in California; so unimportant, in fact, were these gold finds, that not much was ever heard of them outside the country and very little in it. The first of these placers, which was discovered by the Mexicans as early as 1775, is situated near the Colorado River, in the extreme southeastern angle of the state. Fifty-three years later, de-

posits of free gold were found at San Isidro, a hundred miles further west, in San Diego County. In 1833, some little gold was gathered in the valley of the Santa Clara river in the northwestern part of Los Angeles County. Five years later, the San Franciscoquito placers, located in the Sierra San Fernando, at a point 45 miles northwest from the Pueblo Los Angeles, were discovered. These, the most productive deposits yet met with, were afterwards worked in a small way for a period of twenty years or more. The deposits at the other places mentioned, owing to their poverty and a lack of water in the neighborhood, were never much worked. And thus it was, that with all these legends and reports about gold in California, the country, prior to the discovery at Sutter's mill, produced very little of that metal, not more perhaps than forty or fifty thousand dollars worth, all told.

As it has been surmised that the Mexican government were not well informed as to the existence of gold in California at the time that they parted with the country under the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, to it may be pertinent state here that such was not the fact. The late Gregory Yale, in preparing his well known work on the legal titles to mining claims and water rights in this state, being obliged to make extensive research among early Spanish archives, discovered there the following document, showing that the Mexican authorities were at that time not only advised as to the existence of placer mines in California, but that the extent and importance of these deposits were greatly exaggerated by the party communicating this information. This document, which consisted of a letter addressed to the President of the Republic by Manuel Castanares, Representative in the National Congress from the Department of California, was published in the city of Mexico in 1845, though it bears the date of March 2nd, 1844, nearly four years before the Marshall-Sutter discovery of gold. This letter, translated for the above work by the expert Spanish scholar, Charles G. Yale, reads as follows:

"The gold placers discovered in the course of last year have attracted the greatest attention, for they extend nearly thirty leagues. The good quality of this metal is made manifest by the certificate of its assay, which was made at the Mint of this Capital, and by the sample which I send to Your Excellency. In order to develop the great elements of wealth in which California abounds, measures ought to be taken only after mature deliberation. I therefore shall have the honor within a few days of presenting to Your Excellency a memorandum detailing these elements, and the means of developing them with very little sacrifice."

A few months later Representative Castanares addressed to the President of the Republic the following additional paper on the same subject:

"The mining interest in California is of great importance, and I have the satisfaction of assuring you that it forms one of the most valu-

able resources of that department. Besides the silver mines which are found there, and various other mines which have actually yielded metals, the gold placer, especially, is worthy of great attention, which, extending nearly thirty leagues, was discovered lately, together with mines of mineral coal. It is painful for me to have to confess that mining is in a worse state than agriculture; the latter is in its infancy; the former, it can be said, is not yet born, notwithstanding that, according to the nearest estimate of reliable persons in Los Angeles on my departure from that town in December, 1843, there were in circulation about 2,000 ounces of gold, which had been extracted from the above-mentioned placer, the greater part of it destined to go to the United States. This metal contains, according to the certificate of its assay by the Mint of this Capital, which I sent to the government at the beginning of this year, twenty-two carats two and a half grains of gold, fifteen grains of silver.

September 1, 1844."

The foregoing, though a gross exaggeration of the real facts, establishes how thoroughly the Mexican authorities were posted as to any and all gold discoveries that had up till that time been made in California.

Owing to various incidents and events connected with the acquisition of this country by the United States, and the efforts made by our government for establishing steam communication with the Pacific Coast, some have thought that the authorities at Washington had some unpublished advices in regard to the existence of gold here prior to the consummation of the treaty with Mexico and to their contracting for steamers to ply on the routes between New York and San Francisco. In support of this theory, the fact is cited that within six weeks after the time that gold was discovered at Sutter's mill, the treaty ceding to us this country was signed by the contracting parties, the Mexican Commissioners being ignorant of this important event, and our government affecting ignorance of it also. Then, the vessels of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company were required to be ready for service by the month of October, 1848—just the time when the news of the gold find, having excited the more adventurous, had inspired thousands with a desire to emigrate to the new El Dorado. Pointing to this singular contatenation of events, it is argued that the American government must have been actuated by some special reasons for hurrying treaty negotiations to a close, and for requiring the steamship company to have their first vessel ready to sail at this particular time. In the absence of any stronger evidence than the above, it is fair to presume, however, that officials at the national capitol were no better posted in regard to the existence of gold in California than was the general public, the events cited being mere coincidences, such as might easily happen in transactions of this kind.

That the government was in possession of more full and perhaps accurate information in

regard to the mineral and other material resources of this country than the world at large is likely enough, as it would naturally take measures while negotiating the purchase of so much territory to ascertain some thing in regard to its probable worth. In the month of March, 1846, Thomas O. Larkin, then United States Consul at Monterey, in an official letter to James Buchanan, Secretary of State, writes as follows: "There is no doubt but that gold, silver, quicksilver, copper, lead, sulphur, and coal mines are to be found all over California; and it is equally doubtful whether, under their present owners, they will ever be worked." In this expression of opinion, so temperate compared with the statements contained in the letters of Manuel Castanres, our Consul may be understood to convey the idea that these various metalliferous deposits, until then so neglected, would be actively worked were the country owned by the United States.

In 1841, James D. Dana, mineralogist to the Exploring Expedition under Commodore Wilks, which that year visited this Coast, made an overland trip from Oregon to San Francisco. In a book on Mineralogy, published by him the next year, this author states that gold was to be found in the Sacramento Valley, and that he had observed auriferous rocks in Southern Oregon, but that he did not consider these deposits of any practical importance. That Consul Larkin, in his letter to the Secretary of State, was speaking in an indefinite way, having but vague ideas as to the extent or value of the deposits he alludes to, is evident from the fact that he makes mention of silver, quicksilver, coal, and sulphur mines, concerning which nothing certain could then have been known. He had, probably, no more exact knowledge of such mines than was common to the inhabitants of the country at that day. They had observed in certain places indications of the presence of these metals and minerals, and surmised that there might be valuable deposits at these points. With regard to gold, Mr. Larkin could speak with more assurance, as small quantities of that metal had for a number of years before been taken out at the San Francisquito placers and brought to Los Angeles, where it was sold at the rate of about twenty dollars per ounce. As these were the placers to which Señor Castanres must have referred in his communications to the Mexican government, the extravagance of his language in describing them becomes manifest, when we reflect upon their limited extent and the sorry showing they have since made in the gold product of the country.

The foregoing comprises about all the knowledge extant touching the occurrence of gold in California prior to January, 1848.

#### Why Fremont Failed to Discover Gold.

Having related all that was known as to the existence of gold in California prior to January, '48, we come now to consider some of the principal actors in, and the circumstances that led to, that event. Before entering upon this subject,

it may, perhaps, be proper to state that some surprise has been manifested that John C. Fremont failed to discover gold at an earlier date, seeing he was sent out by our government to explore the country, was accompanied by a competent mineralogist and geologist, and arrived here nearly two years before the find occurred at Sutter's mill. It is argued that, having been dispatched on such special mission, and being aware that some placers had previously been found and worked in the southern part of the state, he ought to have struck gold somewhere along his route, inasmuch as it led down the south fork of the American River, on which the great discovery was afterwards made. But to this it may be replied: General Fremont, with his command, consisting of sixty-two frontiersmen, scientists and guides, entered the country in an exhausted and famished condition, having been forced to slaughter his pack animals to save himself and his men from starvation, and to cross the Sierra in the dead of winter. He was therefore obliged to push on to Sutter's Fort with all possible expedition, and having stopped there for a few days to recuperate his men and animals, he hastened forward to Monterey. Arrived at that place, then the capital of the Department of Alta California, the Mexican authorities, suspecting that Fremont meditated some revolutionary movement, at once attempted to drive him and his party out of the country. What with resisting this attempt and the active part he took in effecting the conquest of California, the Great Explorer had quite enough on his hands for the next two years, without thinking about or hunting after gold. That General Fremont actually did make an important discovery of gold, and refrained from giving publicity to the fact, as a few have surmised, is, for obvious reasons other than the above, a hypothesis with hardly the shadow of a reason to rest upon.

#### General John A. Sutter.

The most prominent character connected with the epoch in California history under consideration, and the most noteworthy of all our pioneers, was born in Switzerland, in the year 1805. Bred to the life of a soldier, after distinguishing himself as a captain in the armies of France, he emigrated to the United States. Arriving at New York in 1834, he at once proceeded west, going as far as New Mexico, where he tarried for a time. Not liking that country and having heard much of California, he joined a party of trappers and crossed the continent, going, contrary to his intention, first to Oregon. From the rebe took ship to Honolulu, whence he voyaged in like manner to California. This circuitous route was taken to reach his point of destination for the reason that there were then no vessels running between Oregon and Yerba Buena, while the overland journey was one not easily made. On reaching California our adventurer at once made his way up the Sacramento River, and there, near the junction of that stream and the American Fork, erected, in

August, 1839, the fort that afterwards bore his name, he having been guided to this spot by the descriptions of the old beaver hunters, with whom it had been a favorite camping ground, and who had recommended it to him as an eligible site for an agricultural establishment and trading post.

This accomplished, Sutter engaged in carrying out his purpose of growing wheat and manufacturing it into flour for the Russian settlement at Bodega, and of raising horses and cattle on an extended scale. For effecting his plans, a flouring and a saw mill became necessary. The former, a large three-story frame structure, was built only a few hundred yards without the walls of the fort. The nearest place at which timber suitable for making good lumber could be obtained being on the south fork of the American River, distant about 35 miles from the fort, Captain Sutter determined to put up a saw mill at that point. The business of getting out the timber and constructing this mill was intrusted to

James Wilson Marshall,

Who, assisted by a small company of white men and Indians, commencing work in the fall of 1847, had the building about completed and ready for running by the end of that year. Marshall, who was born in New Jersey, in 1812, and brought up to the trade of his father, a coach and wagon maker, emigrated, when about twenty-one years of age, to Indiana, where he worked for a time at carpentering. Leaving that state, he sojourned for a while in Illinois, whence he made his way to the Platt Purchase, in the state of Missouri. Here he engaged in farming and trading, and being tolerably prosperous, made up his mind to settle permanently. But a severe and protracted attack of fever and ague shook this good resolution out of him, and, as a means of escaping the dread disease, he finally concluded to come to California. This determined upon he made due preparation, and joining a company having a train of a hundred wagons, left about the first of May, 1844, on his journey overland. As the safest way for reaching California, Marshall with a portion of the company, took the route through Oregon, where they wintered, and starting out the next spring came on to California. Reaching Sutter's Fort in the month of July, 1845, Marshall there made a halt, working afterwards most of the time for Captain Sutter.

When the Bear Flag war broke out Marshall joined the American party, and did good service in the field. Hostilities ended, he returned to the fort and was soon after employed to take charge of the mill-building business, an enterprise that he had some time before strongly urged Captain Sutter to engage in.

Finding the Gold.

In regard to this event there are several versions extant. All, however, agree as to the main facts, their differences relating for the

most part to unimportant particulars. Marshall's account of this affair, which has been generally accepted as entitled to credence, is about as follows: Finding the race he had dug below the mill not quite deep enough, he had adopted the plan of hoisting the gate and letting on a full head of water, for the purpose of washing it out to a greater depth. Walking down the race one morning to see what progress he was making with this work, he noticed a small piece of yellow metal lying in a crevice of the soft granite, which at that point composed the bottom of the race. Picking it up, he began to ponder what it might be, having an impression from the first that it was gold. Its weight and the crude tests he was able to make of this metal—such as pounding it between two stones and finding it malleable—so tended to confirm this idea that Marshall thought it best not to say much about the matter just then, for fear it might cause the men employed under him to quit work and go to gold digging. But for all that the notion that this metal might be gold gradually spread among the men, who failed not to notice that Marshall continued to look after and pick it up, he having in the course of a few weeks collected from the mill-race several ounces of it. This incident, afterwards fraught with such momentous consequences, occurred on the 19th day of January, 1848—not 1849, as stated in Hittell's excellent and generally accurate work on California—this error in date being a mistake of the printer, and not of the author.

Peter Wimmer, who was with Marshall when he found the first piece of gold, had also gathered a small quantity. Taking a portion of this, his wife, who did the cooking for the men, had subjected it to what was considered a crucial test, boiling it in a decoction of strong lye. As the stuff stood this trial without tarnishing, it was concluded on all hands that it must be gold; and so a feeling of interest began to show itself among the employees about the mill, despite the efforts of Marshall and Wimmer to conceal the real facts and suppress the growing excitement.

Meantime, Marshall having occasion to go to the fort, took some of the metal he had collected along with him, and showed it to Captain Sutter, who proceeded to test it with nitric acid, whereby its true character was fully established. Comprehending the importance of the find, Sutter accompanied Marshall on his return to the mill, where he soon satisfied himself that the precious metal existed in such quantity as would be likely to work an early revolution in the then existing state of things. Nevertheless he found the men still at work, and affecting to treat the gold find lightly, managed to keep them busied for some days longer, until the mill was fully completed and a small stock of logs gotten in.

By this time the news of the discovery had reached San Francisco, to which place a man named Bennett, one of the hands at the mill, had gone, taking some of the gold dust with





ANTHONY & BAKER

DIFFERENT FORMS OF PLACER MINING.

him. Among others who happened to see this sample was Isaac Humphrey, who, having formerly worked in the gold diggings of Georgia, as soon as he beheld it not only pronounced it good gold but expressed the opinion that much more would be found where this came from. Such was the confidence of this Georgia miner in the new discovery that he left San Francisco about the end of February, and in company with Bennett went up to the mill. Arriving there on the 7th of March he found the men still at their work, none of them having as yet gone to gold digging. After prospecting a little with a pan, Humphrey constructed a rocker, such as he had been accustomed to use in Georgia, and, commencing on dirt taken from the mill race, washed out from one to two ounces of gold dust daily.

#### The News Spreading, and Its Effect.

This result of Humphrey's few days' washing put an end to all further operations on and about the mill. Work of every kind was in fact abandoned, all the whites in the vicinity building rockers and betaking themselves to gold washing. Even the mill, which Sutter and Marshall had so exerted themselves to complete, for a time stood idle. Getting in logs came to an end; building ceased; every thing but gold digging was for the time being suspended. Everywhere, as the tidings spread, business came to a standstill. San Francisco was emptied of its adult male population. The American settlers residing in the valleys geared up their teams and set out for the mines, some of them taking their families with them. The rancheos and the vaqueros mounted their mustangs and started for the new El Dorado, driving their pack animals before them. And thus the country, before so quiet and inanimate, was now all astir; the whole population being moved by a single impulse—the eager thirst for gold.

So extensive was this movement, which may be said to have commenced about the middle of March, that there were collected in the mines before the end of the year as many as ten or twelve thousand men. While the most of these were residents of California, many of them came from Oregon, Mexico and the Sandwich Islands, with a few from Central and South America. As population flowed rapidly into the mines, so also was the business of gold gathering speedily extended over a broad stretch of country, having been in the course of a few weeks engaged in at widely distant points. Coming to Sutter's Fort about the middle of March, from his ranch at the head of the Sacramento Valley, Pearson B. Reading visited the site of the new gold discovery. Finding the appearance of the country similar to that in the vicinity of his ranch, he returned home, and taking his domesticated Indians, was engaged before the end of the month washing out gold on Clear Creek, nearly two hundred miles to the northward of Coloma. John Bidwell, another large ranch owner in the Upper Sacra-

mento Valley, having, in like manner, visited Sutter's Mill, returned and went to work with his Indians on the bars of Feather River, nearly midway between Clear Creek and Coloma. Towards the south the gold-seeker also made his way, pushing out in that direction as far as the Tuolumne before the season was over; so that mining by the end of the first year was being pursued at intervals along a linear extent of more than two hundred miles.

#### General Sutter's Account of the Gold Find.

Before going on to further notice the changed condition of things produced by the discovery of gold in California, it may not be out of place to say a few words touching the accounts of that occurrence as given by different parties who had some agency in bringing it about or were in a position to speak authoritatively on the subject. General Sutter's version of the affair, as imparted by him to the writer, varies but little from that of Marshall, as already recounted. According to General Sutter's statement, Marshall, leaving the mill sometime near the end of January, 1848, came down to the fort, where he arrived towards evening wet, and covered with mud, the day having been stormy. His visit was unexpected, as he had been to the fort not long before. After talking a little about other matters he told his employer or partner—Marshall always claiming to have been interested with Sutter in the saw-mill business—that he had some important information to impart to him, so much so that he wished to see him apart and where no one could see or overhear them. Complying with his request Sutter took him into his private room, but having neglected to lock the door, a clerk entered just as Marshall, plucking a rag from his pocket was about to exhibit its 'contents. Alarmed at the interruption, he quickly replaced the package, and when the intruder left insisted on having the door to the apartment locked. This done, he again pulled out the package, and undoing a much soiled rag, exhibited two or three ounces of yellow metal, which he informed his employer he believed to be gold. Sutter was of the same opinion, and after reading a description of that metal in an encyclopedia which he happened to have at hand, proceeded to experiment on the dubious material with nitric acid, whereupon he found it to be unmistakably gold. So much was Marshall excited over the matter that he declined to remain at the fort over night, but left at a late hour and in a heavy rain to return to the mill, after exacting from Sutter a promise that the latter would follow him in the morning, which he did.

General Sutter relates that, despite the storm, which still continued, he started at an early hour the next day for the mill. While on his way, and when out about twenty miles, he saw to his surprise a man come out of the chaparral a short distance ahead of him. Riding up to the spot, he found this to be Marshall, who had already since leaving the fort been to the mill, and, there procuring a fresh horse, had



GROUND SLICING.

returned thus far, when, overcome with fatigue and loss of sleep, he made a halt, crawled into the bushes and took a nap. When Sutter came up, having so refreshed himself and rested his animal, he had already gotten into the saddle and was about resuming his journey towards the fort. When interrogated as to his object in returning so soon, nothing very definite could be gotten out of him; the pretense that he had come on to meet the General and see that he did not miss the trail being evidently no part of his real purpose, as Sutter had already been over the road, which, being well marked by wagon travel, could not easily be missed. The truth was, that Marshall had become so excited when it was shown that the stuff he had picked up in the mill-race was really gold that he could neither sleep nor rest until he had his partner on the ground and something as to their future course of action had been determined upon. Hence this speedy setting out again for the fort, the poor man, in his anxiety, fearing that Sutter, an easy-going sort of person, might delay his coming, or, not fully appreciating the importance of the occasion, might fail to come altogether. This frame of mind on the part of Marshall sufficiently refutes the idea entertained by some that he was long in doubt as to the character of the metal he had found, and little conscious of the consequences likely to grow out of that event. He was not long in taking measures to confirm, what from the first he suspected, that the metal was gold, nor did he fail to comprehend the results that might be expected soon to follow.

On reaching the mill Sutter entered the race with Marshall, and walking down it picked up with his own hand several particles of gold. Adding these to some other pieces given him at the time by the workmen, he had a ring manufactured therefrom, on the inside of which was engraved the following inscription: "The first gold discovered in January, 1848."

**The First Piece of Metal Picked up by Marshall, and Mrs. Wimmer's Version of the Gold-Find.**

While the sentence as above inscribed was in some sense true, this ring of General Sutter did not actually contain the first piece of gold picked up by Marshall, though that is still in existence, and capable of being identified by many persons who at different times have seen and handled it. Owing to its size, shape and other peculiarities, persons who have once seen this piece of gold have no difficulty in recognizing it when shown to them again. It is rather flat, rough on all sides, of irregular shape and weighs about a quarter of an ounce, its intrinsic value being not quite five dollars.

Mrs. Jane Wimmer, wife of Peter Wimmer, who, as already stated, was cooking for the men at the mill, gives the following account of the discovery of gold, the circumstances under which it occurred and the history of the first piece of metal picked up. Her husband and Marshall, she says, were walking together down the race, when they saw this piece of metal,

both at the same time, though Marshall being a little ahead was the first to pick it up. Neither of them knew what it was, though both surmised its true character, her husband being so impressed with the belief of its being gold that he brought it to her and insisted on her boiling it in lye, which was accordingly done. After standing this test so well, Wimmer, satisfied that it must be a noble metal, urged Marshall to take some of it to the fort and submit it there to further trials, which the latter consented to do, Wimmer staying at the mill and looking after the men and the work during his absence.

Marshall carefully preserved this first piece of gold for a time, saying he intended to have a ring made from it for his mother. But finally, being about to go away, having taken out a good deal of gold dust, and fearing he might lose this first piece of gold, he gave it to Mrs. Wimmer, both as a souvenir and as a means of greater security against its being lost. This occurred in the summer of 1848, and Mrs. Wimmer, who is still living, being a resident of San Luis Obispo County, has retained the specimen in her possession ever since. Though not rich, she has refused many liberal offers for it, being unwilling to part with it unless assured that it would be retained among the pioneers of California, or at least be kept in the state. Some years ago the Society of California Pioneers attempted to treat with Mrs. Wimmer for this interesting relic, which, owing to a failure of negotiations, still remains in the hands of its long-time owner.

#### Their Fortunes and their Fate.

And where are they, and how have they fared, these pioneers of the pioneers—what is to be said of them, these eye-witnesses of the great gold find—these men who were present at this new birth of California? Rich—millionaires, every one of them, we are ready to exclaim—very sybarites, living in palatial mansions, the recipients of that adulation and homage that large wealth never fails to inspire. In view of the great opportunities enjoyed by this first crop of the Argonauts, it would naturally be supposed that they had amassed riches beyond measure. But what are the facts? Unfortunately, quite the reverse of what the majority of mankind would expect, and very unlike what all could wish them to have been. Not one of these men who were so permitted to skim the cream from the new El Dorado ever became rich; hardly any of them ever acquired, or at least retained, so much as a competence, while some remain, as others have died, miserably poor! Take for example the cases of Sutter, Marshall, Wimmer and Bennett, who figured so conspicuously in connection with the gold discovery: These men, though first on the ground, profited little in the end by that event—would have been better off, indeed, had it never occurred. It proved fatal to all, and especially so to Sutter, who, up till that time, had been successful in all his multifarious undertakings—



STREET IN A MINING TOWN.

was, in fact, on the road to position and fortune, with the prospect of becoming in a few years the richest, as he was already the most active and enterprising, man in all California.

#### What Worked the Pioneers' Downfall

Was this very discovery of gold, or rather the large and promiscuous immigration that it led to. That General Sutter was unable to cope with the sharpers brought hither by the inflowing tide, and who afterwards sought to circumvent him in every possible manner, or that he failed to protect his property against the rabble that tried to wrest it from him, proves nothing against his capacity as a financier or his efficiency as a business man. These new comers, with hardly more appreciation of the rights of the early settler than the Bedouins of the desert, squatted on his lands, dispersed his domesticated Indians, stole his cattle, and appropriated without compunction or stint whatever else of a useful kind they could conveniently lay hands upon. To contend with these hordes, armed with rifles and revolvers, and the still more dangerous instrumentalities of the law, would be like battling with a pack of ravenous wolves. That the hardy pioneer was despoiled of his property and finally vanquished in this unequal fight implies neither incompetence nor neglect on his part. Few men would, under the circumstances, have managed their affairs better, or resisted this system of wholesale depredation more efficiently than did he.

General Sutter was in many respects a very superior man. His intellectual endowments were of the highest order. Physically he was equally well favored, being well proportioned and otherwise of great bodily perfection. He was highly educated, first in the schools and afterwards to the profession of arms, the versatility of his talents being manifested by the creditable manner in which he acquitted himself in both these callings. His aptitude for the acquirement of knowledge is evinced by the facility with which he read and spoke four different languages. He naturally possessed the instincts, and always, even in the midst of his rude surroundings, managed to preserve the manners and bearing of the gentleman, soldier and scholar. And yet, with so much to lift him above the common level, he was utterly without ostentation or vanity. Though learned and well acquainted with books, he was thoroughly practical, showing on all occasions the sagacious, enterprising man of affairs. He was the first to introduce any thing like new ideas and modern improvements into California. Though he did not put up the first flouring or the first saw mill in the country, he was the first to erect establishments of this kind with a view to manufacturing flour and lumber for the general market. He was also the first to engage in the growing of wheat and the cultivation of the land on an extended and systematic scale.

#### The Testimony of General Bidwell.

Gen. John Bidwell, himself one of the earliest, as he is also one of the noblest of the pio-

neers, bears efficient and kindly testimony to the high qualifications, personal merits and rich deservings of Gen. John A. Sutter. In a letter written not long since to Capt. Wm. F. Swasey, and now in the possession of the Society of California Pioneers, Gen. Bidwell, among other things, remarks as follows, his statements being here somewhat abbreviated: "General Sutter, when I first saw him in 1841, seemed to me the grandest man I had ever met with. Of a fine presence and agreeable deportment, he spoke German, French, Spanish and English fluently and well. As a conversationalist he excelled, being at home in the most refined and intelligent company. Yet he was not the least egotistical, but listened respectfully to every one, the high and low alike, and by his courteous manner making all with whom he came in contact his friends. He was a man of the purest honor and the strictest integrity. The California officials had such confidence in all he said or promised that when he sought land for a colony they readily granted all he asked for, and immediately put him in possession of the same. All who knew were ready to trust him, the Russian Fur Company having sold to him, at the stipulated price of \$100,000, but wholly on credit, their entire property at Fort Ross and Bodega. Becoming jealous of his growing power and exasperated at the partiality he manifested towards the American settlers, the Mexican authorities in California began at last to threaten Gen. Sutter, going so far as to talk of expelling him from the country. When things had reached this pass Sutter advised these intermeddlers that they had better refrain from further threats of this kind, as he was in a position to successfully resist any interference with his rights, and that if these menaces were repeated he might himself be constrained to act on the offensive, his main reliance in case this became necessary being upon the small number of Americans, not over fifty or sixty, then living in the vicinity of the Fort or settled in the Upper Sacramento Valley. This defiant attitude of Sutter towards the departmental authorities having been reported at the national capital, Mitcheltorena was dispatched to California with 500 troops, for the purpose of crushing out this growing spirit of insubordination, and, if need be, driving every American, Sutter included, out of the country. So far from accomplishing such task, this doughty commander, who was also appointed Governor, found it expedient to make friends with Sutter and his adherents, affairs having ultimately taken such turn that he who had come to expel others was himself expelled from California."

Continuing, our worthy informant goes on to remark upon the boundless generosity of General Sutter as manifested towards all who, from sickness, misfortune or other cause, required assistance. No man, rich or poor, whatever his position in life or nationality, ever applied to Sutter for aid in vain. Whoever asked received, nor did he always wait for the suffering and needy to come and make their wants



MINING CAMP IN THE MOUNTAINS.

known. When he heard of an incoming immigrant train snowbound in the mountains, or suffering from want of food, he at once sent them provisions on pack animals, in charge of trusty men, these relief parties going sometimes far into and even quite across the Sierra on these errands of mercy. All who arrived at the fort destitute were supplied according to their necessities, and this without any charge being made or any thing said about future compensation. There being at that day no hotels or public houses in the country, all who came to Sutter's establishment desiring to stop were there entertained as free guests, however long they chose to remain. When General Bidwell and his companions entered the country, Sutter, hearing that there was a party coming in who were in need of provisions, forwarded them supplies while they were yet in the mountains more than a hundred miles away.

It was by noble and disinterested acts like these, running through a series of years, that General Sutter managed to so attach to his cause the entire foreign population, and even many of the native Californians, that when the final outbreak occurred the conquest of the country became an easy matter. That the subjugation of California did not cost us a long and bloody struggle is largely due to the course pursued by Sutter and his coadjutors prior to the commencement of active hostilities.

As a partial recognition of obligations for the service so rendered, the Legislature of this state some years ago voted General Sutter a monthly stipend of \$250, limiting the same to a certain number of years. On the expiration of this period this subsidy failed to be renewed, nor have the efforts since made by some to procure a re-enactment of that law ever met with success. As a consequence, this fast friend of American institutions and interests in the Far West, this planter of the new civilization on the Pacific Coast, the hardy explorer and typical pioneer, worn out with toil and weary with waiting, passed into the sere and yellow leaf of life, his last days pinched with want and clouded with sorrow. On the 18th day of June, 1880, the eventful career of the Switzer soldier was brought to a close in the city of Washington, whither he had gone several years before, in the hope of obtaining from Congress some slight compensation for the property of which he had been so unjustly deprived and the sacrifices he had made in behalf of republican institutions and the American people. Through neglect and delay the ingratitude of California was paralleled by the injustice of Congress, which body, always professing a willingness to do justice to General Sutter, temporized until it was too late. Several members of the House, however, attended his funeral, and there is even a talk of having a stone placed at the head of the old man's grave. It would not indeed be at all strange if, after so starving him to death, California should take measures to erect a grand monument over his remains. This is the way the world often treats its heroes! The body of

General Sutter, who was seventy-five years old at the time of his death, was taken to the little town of Letitz, in Pennsylvania, where his daughter resides, and there interred in the humble graveyard of the place. By his side his aged and estimable wife, since deceased, has also been buried.

#### As for Marshall,

Dating from the time of the gold discovery, the story of his life is briefly told. Having during the few months that followed that event collected considerable gold, some of it being a sort of tribute paid him and Sutter by the Indians, he concluded to leave the diggings, which he did. After a short absence he returned and again went to mining, at which he afterwards met with only moderate success. Tiring of this business, he betook himself to fruit and vine growing, on a patch of land that he had always occupied near the mill, or Coloma, as the town that had here grown up had come to be called. Planting only trees and vines of choice varieties, Marshall had here in the course of a few years the best nursery and vineyard in that section of country. Having lived here for some time in a comfortable sort of way he parted with this place, and afterwards does not seem to have had any permanent home or to have remained long in one place. For a time, and up till a year or two ago, he was living in a cabin at Kelsey's Diggings, an ancient mining camp on the opposite side of the river a few miles above Coloma. Latterly he has been sojourning elsewhere in the central mining counties, visiting occasionally San Francisco, Sacramento and other of the larger towns. He is now quite poor, but does not appear to worry over his present condition nor the outlook for the future. By reason of his former history and many good personal qualities, he is generally well liked, and receives everywhere a cordial welcome. Though an unlettered man, Marshall is intelligent and thoughtful, and, between his reminiscences and a large fund of general information, is capable of not only entertaining a promiscuous crowd but also of interesting persons of mental culture. He is odd in many of his ways—in some peculiar to the verge of eccentricity—being little governed by the opinions of others, and quite indifferent to the etiquette of conventional life. Taken altogether, he is an agreeable sort of fellow, and not unsociable, once his confidence is gained—the which is not an easy matter, the scurvy manner in which he fancies he has been treated by the State of California in refusing to properly reward his services, having rendered him somewhat misanthropic and suspicious of strangers. It would really seem as if the state might make some little provision for the old man in his declining years, seeing he is so very needy, and was the actual discoverer of gold, an event generally conceded to have been a great public blessing. To Hargrave, the discoverer of gold in Australia, there was given a donation of \$75,000, and simple justice requires that something should be done



for Marshall. For a time he did receive from the state of California a subsidy of \$100 per month. But the period for which this was to be continued having expired, the Legislature refused to renew it, fearing its further payment would be too great a strain on the financial resources of the state.

#### Why the Early Pioneers Failed to Make Money.

Peter Wimmer, who was with Marshall in the mill-race when he picked up the first piece of gold, though a man of good habits, industrious, temperate and possessed of fair business capacities, never succeeded in acquiring much property, the extent of his worldly wealth consisting of a small piece of land in San Luis Obispo County, on which he and his pioneer wife are, or at least were, living not long ago. Bennett, who brought the first samples of gold to San Francisco, though far from being rich, is in comfortable circumstances, owning and living on a piece of good land in the vicinity of Santa Cruz. He left the mines in the summer of 1849, and never returned to them. Of the considerable number of white men who were at Sutter's mill when gold was discovered, none ever became rich, nor did any of them ever acquire more than a very moderate competence. Several are known to have died, if not in indigence, at least quite poor. Of the residents of the country at that time only a few afterwards became millionaires, and these were made such through the increased value of their landed possessions, or by their engaging in other than mining pursuits. The causes that brought men to California at that early day were such as little qualified them for rapidly accumulating property. The most of them came here in search of health or adventure, or in the hope of being able to live in an independent and easy-going way. Some were hunters and trappers, who, in pursuit of their vocation, having drifted into the country, remained here. Some were border men, who had sought on this far-off coast a refuge from a too rapidly advancing civilization. A few were run-away sailors or mariners, who, attracted by the beauty of the country, the excellence of the climate and the hospitality of the inhabitants, had been enticed into a long sojourn on these pleasant shores. Whatever the causes that brought or kept them here, hardly any of these pioneers had in view the acquisition of wealth; wherefore, none of them can be properly called Argonauts, using that term in its primary sense. They were for the most part a hardy, brave and generous set of men, whose habits being simple and their wants few, neither craved nor had any need for much money. The most of them left the mines early and retiring to their homes in the lower country, never troubled themselves much with gold digging thereafter.

Concerning a few of the more noted of this class something will be written a little further on; though, truth to say, it hardly needs that

their names be even so much as mentioned in these fugitive papers, seeing so much that is noble and good has been recorded of them in the great work of Hubert Howe Bancroft on the Pacific States and Territories. Embalmed in the pages of the illustrious historian, their memoirs will be handed over to an honorable and an enduring fame. The Natural Wealth of California, by Titus Fey Cronise, contains also much that is interesting in regard to the lives and characters of these men, who, journeying far by land or water, came early to make for themselves homes in this border-land of the Great Pacific Sea.

#### The New Era.

Arriving at San Francisco in the month of February, 1849, the writer found the place crowded with miners, who, leaving the diggings at the commencement of the rainy season, had come to the city to pass the winter. A more motley crowd, or one composed of such divers nationalities was, perhaps, never before collected in one place. Almost every civilized people on the face of the earth was already represented here. The Mongolian only, of all the races now in the country, had not yet put in an appearance, the worst coming last. San Francisco, although a very Babel of languages, and the scene of indescribable activity, had up till this time remained peaceful and orderly, crimes and even misdemeanors of a grave kind having been of rare occurrence. While the merchants were busy, and the public places were thronged with frequenters and patrons, the miners, unconscious of impending events, were taking things easy. Though current wages were an ounce per day, not until they got dead broke did these old timers seem disposed to seek or accept employment. By the time spring came around the most of them had got rid of their earnings, a good share of which had passed over the gambling tables. Early in March and before more than a few of them had begun to think of returning to the mines, the advance of the new immigration had begun to arrive—an excited, eager, rushing crowd—who going for everything within reach, soon relegated to the background their predecessors in the field. To such an extent, in fact, has the year commemorated by the discovery of gold come to be overshadowed by the stirring event that followed in its wake, that the year 1849 is generally accepted as marking the advent of the new epoch in our history. Being so little in accord with the spirit of the new comers, and not over anxious to enrich themselves by gold digging, many of the forty-eighters, as already stated, left the mountains before the summer of '49 was over and returning to their homes, engaged in pursuits more congenial to their tastes and previous habits of life.

With the year 1848 all that was staid and primitive in or about the mines of California vanished. With it ended the old civilization and the old scenes, new men with new ideas and different methods of doing business having

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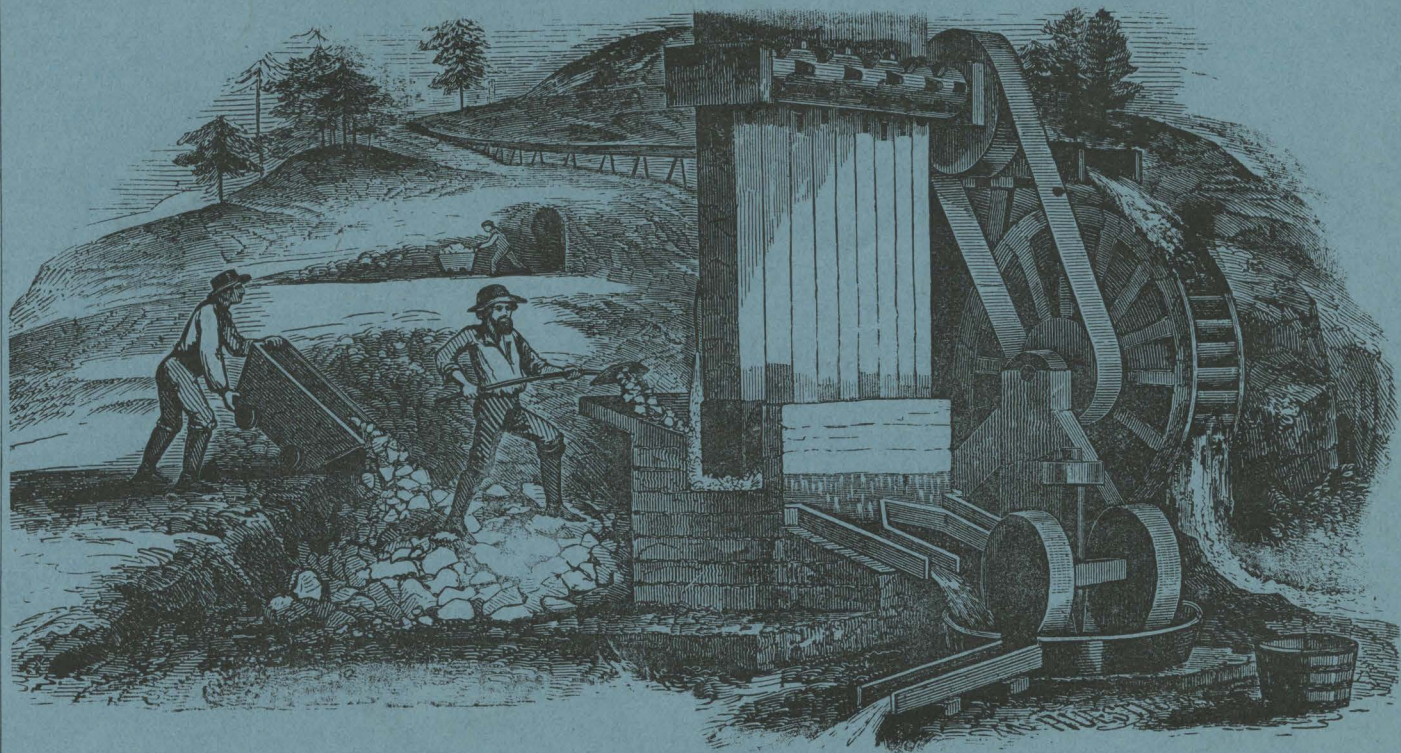
come to take the place and accelerate the work of the first stock of pioneers.

Sutter's Mill.

The view given of Sutter's mill is taken from a painting by Nahl, and shows this famous landmark as it stood in the summer of '49 and for several years thereafter. The buildings seen in the background represent a hamlet that sprung up that summer on the opposite side of the river, the town of Coloma, farther to the right, not being shown in the cut. Having already made mention of the more interesting incidents connected with the history of this mill, it only remains to be said that it, like the baronial establishment at New Helvetia, has become one of the things of the past. But if the fort is so nearly gone, the very site of the mill has been razed. The rude structure itself has not only disappeared, but the ground on which it stood

has been literally swept away. The dam, the race in which Marshall picked up the first piece of gold, the big pines standing fast by, as shown in the picture, are all gone, and in their place only piles of white bowlders glisten in the sun! So changed everything, that but for the river, flowing as it flowed before, it would be difficult now to identify the exact spot formerly occupied by Sutter's mill. Nor let the relic hunter come here seeking mementoes or reminders of the past! The iconoclastic pick of the miner has spared none of these—not a stick or foundation stone or slab or splinter has been left. All is extinguished. Even the old town of Coloma has been nearly all washed away, the ground it covered having been sent down the South Fork to swell the tide of slums that vex the farmers below, and which, beginning when Marshall here washed his first pan of dirt, has gone on increasing ever since.





EARLY CALIFORNIA QUARTZ MILL.