

PIONEER DAYS IN SAN FRANCISCO.



BUILDING OF THE "ALTA CALIFORNIA."



WHEN Captain Montgomery first gave the American flag to the breeze on the Plaza of Yerba Buena on the 8th of July, 1846, let us hope that a certain person was there to see—that native woman who, in Los Angeles in 1842, sang in the hearing of Dufлот de Mofras her song of prophecy: "When the Frenchmen come, the women will surrender; when the Americans come, good-by to California!"

On the day of that flag-raising Yerba Buena was an amiable as well as a picturesque village, and its tenscore of inhabitants,—native Californians, English, Scotch, and Irish, with a sprinkling of Swiss, Swedes, Danes, Kanakas, and Indians,—unvexed by prophetic dreams of the feverish days of gold, were content to hail that gaudy bunting, and the promise of all that it stood for; were content to wait till the commerce of all the seas should find its way to the noblest anchorage the world could offer it.

The ever-expectant citizen of Yerba Buena who, spy-glass in hand, on the last day of that same July, mounted the hill above the cove ("Telegraph Hill" it was to be called) was greeted with a prospect that justified his highest hopes, and inspired him with the raptures to which Benjamin Morell had given expression fifteen years before—"a bay that might float the whole British navy without crowding; a circling grassy shore indented with convenient coves; a verdant, blooming country round about." Here were waving woodlands, and

pastures flecked with grazing herds; hill and dale, mountain and valley, rolling rivers and gurgling brooks. And, looking seaward to where the Pacific pounded at the rocky headlands of the Golden Gate, he descried a ship under all sail, heading for the straits and the bay; a ship carrying the American ensign at her peak, but not a man-of-war, for her decks, and even her lower rigging, were black with passengers—men, women, and children! Again and again, with leveled glass, he peered, confirming the witness of his eyes; then he turned and ran down the hill and around the curving beach of the cove that rested sleepily between the arms of Clark's Point and the Rincon; and presently all the motley multitude of his fellow citizens were swarming from their adobes and their shanties, stirred with the news as the leafy ridges of the Contra Costa were stirred with the sea-breeze.

The ship that let go her anchor that day, off the little island of the "good herb," was the *Brooklyn* from New York, bringing "Bishop" Brannan (the redoubtable "Sam" of a later day) and his colony of Latter-day Saints; and these brought stout hearts, strong arms, and cunning hands; money, tools, pluck, keen wits, and a printing-press. And so, although they quarreled with their very mundane bishop, and went to law with him, and abandoned their scheme of Mormon colonization, and presently made game of Brigham Young in their tents among the sand-hills, nevertheless they gave to San Francisco her first prayer-meeting, her first jury trial, her first local advertising, her first newspaper; for with the same types and press that had once done duty for "The Prophet" in New York, they printed blank deeds, alcaldes' grants, and pronunciamientos, and early in the following January issued the first number of the "California Star," pledged "to eschew with the greatest caution everything that tends to the propagation of sectarian dogmas." A progressive folk, those Mormons of Yerba Buena!

Toward the close of January, 1847, Yerba Buena underwent a change of name, and by summary process and proclamation of the alcalde became San Francisco; for the chief magistrates of those days were a very summary folk, doing a mildly autocratic business each in his little bailiwick, and having small reverence for precedents or principles, but just setting up or casting down according to certain loose notions of their own regarding Mexican

judicature or Californian traditions. And so the first alcalde of Yerba Buena under the American flag, being a naval lieutenant (Mr. Washington A. Bartlett) appointed by Captain Montgomery, and invested with ample powers, military as well as civil, to administer the affairs of the embryo metropolis according to Mexican practice conformed to American ideas, proceeded to the making of history in a small way, building better than he knew. He first changed the name of the place to San Francisco, and then vouchsafed to explain that Yerba Buena was but a paltry cognomen taken from a lot of vulgar mint overrunning an insignificant island; that it was a merely local name, "unknown beyond the district," while San Francisco had long had the freedom of the maps; and finally that it was an outlandish name, which Americans would mangle in pronouncing. "Therefore, to prevent confusion and mistakes in public documents, and that the town may have the advantage of the name given on the public map, it is hereby ordained," etc.

And the alcalde was right: for in 1836 Alexander Forbes had written "the port of San Francisco is hardly surpassed by any in the world"; and ten years later (eighteen months in advance of the Bartlett coup) George Bancroft, then Secretary of the Navy, had instructed Commodore Sloat in relation to the blockade or occupation of "the port of San Francisco," in the event of his (Sloat's) ascertaining with certainty that Mexico had declared war against the United States.

The 5th of March, 1847, brought the ship *Thomas H. Perkins*, with a detachment of the New York regiment commanded by Colonel Stevenson. These men were pledged by the terms of their enlistment to make permanent settlement in California at the close of the war, and they had been chosen for the most part with an eye to their prospective usefulness as skilled artisans or shrewd traders. Thus they constituted an important accession to the population, and, joined with their Mormon predecessors, showed a bold front of energy and confident resources. The air began to be stirred with the bustle of business, and all the talk was of town lots. General Kearney had ceded to the town all the beach- and water-lots on the east front, between Fort Montgomery and Rincon Point; and on the 20th of July two hundred of these lots, lying between the limits of high- and low-water marks, were sold at public auction for from \$50 to \$100 each. These lots measured 45 × 137 feet, and were for the most part uncovered at low tide. In December, 1853, the water-lots between Clay and Sacra-

mento streets fetched from \$8000 to \$16,000 each, although they were but 25 × 60 feet, and at all times under water. In 1847 a fifty-vara lot north of Market street could be bought for \$16. A vara, the Spanish yard, is about 33½ inches, and six of these lots made a building block bounded by four streets. Hittell¹ records that, in the seventeen months ending on the 1st of August, "157 houses had been built in a place which had only 30 houses before"; and already it was a city of two newspapers, for in May the "Californian" had come from Monterey and cast in its fortunes with the "smart little settlement on the cove," which, having secured two notable importations of unterrified hustlers, had begun to set competition at defiance, with a total population of nearly five hundred, composed of all nationalities under the sun. Of this number fully one half were citizens of the United States; and these, being stirred by municipal aspirations, bethought them that it was time to give the place a town council and call it a city. So a public meeting was held under a call from the governor, and six gentlemen were elected to constitute an *ayuntamiento*, or council. These were Messrs. Glover, Jones, Howard, Parker, Leidesdorff, and Clark, and their functions were the laying out of streets, the award of building privileges, the regulation of business, the granting of licenses, the appointment of town officers and constables, etc. The enforcement of ordinances and general execution of the laws devolved upon the first alcalde, who was Mr. George Hyde. He was assisted by Dr. T. M. Leavenworth as second alcalde, and by Mr. Leidesdorff as treasurer. Messrs. Glover, Leidesdorff, and Clark were appointed a committee to take measures for the establishment of a public school for the youth of both sexes; but it was not until April 3, 1848, that the school was formally opened. By that time the population had increased to about 850, all told, and the buildings of all kinds numbered two hundred, including two considerable hotels, besides public houses and saloons, stores, warehouses, and two wharves in course of construction. Already the characteristic enterprise of San Francisco had begun to express itself in a brisk development of its peculiar industry: gambling-houses were springing up on every corner, and an ordinance of the *ayuntamiento* provided for the seizure, for the benefit of the town, of all moneys found on any table used for gambling with cards. "Such an ordinance, if enforced a year later, would have enriched the city in a single night; but the act was repealed at the next meeting."²

Early in the spring of 1848 there began to be rumors of gold to be found in the foothills

¹ J. S. Hittell, "A History of the City of San Francisco."

² Soulé, Gihon, and Nisbet, "The Annals of San Francisco": New York, 1855.

of the Sierra Nevada; and presently actual miners appeared in town, showing small parcels of dust and telling tales of wonder that turned the heads of gaping groups met at the landing on the cove and in every place convenient for assembling from Telegraph Hill to Happy Valley. Then the cry went up, and bedlam was let loose. Sailors deserted from the shipping and soldiers from the barracks; the laborer dropped his shovel and his pick, only to return and take them up again — shovels and picks would be useful in the diggings; the mechanic turned his back upon his job; the builder left his house unroofed; the blacksmith and the baker let their fires go out; and the merchant stripped his shelves, huddled his goods into boxes and bales, and shouted at the cove for a launch bound for the Sacramento Valley. The cry of "Gold!" was caught up and reëchoed on the docks and in the market-places of Atlantic seaports, until the world was turned upside down. Every day added to the number of those who were hurrying to the "placers," and the bay was alive with freighted launches crawling up the Sacramento. In May and June the "Californian" and the "California Star" stopped their presses with a farewell fly-sheet. In the middle of July the "Californian" revived with news of affairs in the mines. For two months the ayuntamiento had not met; the city fathers and officials had all gone to the diggings. The public school, which had been closed for two months, was reopened in December, and on Sundays public worship was held there by a Protestant chaplain imported from Honolulu, on a salary of \$2500, raised by subscription.

The first brick house in San Francisco was built by Mellus and Howard on the corner of Clay and Montgomery streets, in September, 1848. In December flour was \$20 a barrel, butter ninety cents a pound, brandy \$8 a gallon, and gold-dust dull at \$10.50 an ounce. Common laborers were getting \$10 a day, and ordinary mechanics \$20. Gold-dust at \$16 the ounce soon became the circulating medium for all purposes of trade. The bay was bustling with small craft, and the sand-hills were thickly flecked with canvas tents and such makeshifts as could be rigged with a pole and two blankets, while the Plaza, and Clay and Montgomery streets, rioted in music and drink and gambling. "Men," says Hittell, "who had lived on five dollars a month now spent hundreds; men who had been idlers formerly were now among the most industrious, and men who had never before wasted a day became loungers and gamblers." And, let us add, men who at home had been blithe, cheery, vital, became despondent, moody, inert, stunned by the mad scramble about them; and men refined, sensitive, keenly

susceptible to impressions of coarseness and depravity, became home-sick, heart-sick, desperate, ready to plunge into the unknown out of the ghastly brutality of such a training as this.

On the last day of February came the steamship *California*, bringing General Persifer Smith to the command of the Military Department, comprising California and Oregon; and on the last day of March the Pacific mail-steamer *Oregon* brought about three hundred and fifty passengers, including Colonel John W. Geary, who bore government despatches to the commanders of the military and naval forces on the Pacific, and brought the first regular mail that was opened in San Francisco. Colonel Geary had been appointed postmaster of the new city, with powers to create post-offices, appoint postmasters, and establish mail routes throughout the territory. Within the next three months more than three hundred square-rigged vessels were lying in the harbor stranded and disabled for want of sailors, the crews having deserted in a body almost as soon as the anchors were let go. Some of these vessels eventually rotted where they were moored; some were hauled up on the beach and in the mud to serve as store-houses, lodging-houses, and saloons; and, at a later period, more than one of them, flanked by buildings and wharves, and forming part of a street, appeared as an original and startling feature of that most surprising town. Thus, the brig *Euphemia* was purchased by the ayuntamiento and converted into the first jail, and the store-ship *Apollo* was used as a lodging-house and drinking-saloon; and as lots were piled or filled in on the flat covered by the bay, the Apollo saloon in course of time presented the extraordinary spectacle of the hull of a large ship looming up among the houses. The *Niantic*, stripped of her masts and rigging, and propped with piles on each side, lay at the corner of Sansome and Clay streets and served for the storing of merchandise, and when the May fire of 1851 consumed all but the deeper parts of her hull and some of her ribs, a hotel was built on the wreck and called the Niantic.

In the first six months of 1849 fifteen thousand souls were added to the population of San Francisco; in the latter half of that year about four thousand arrived every month by sea alone. At first the immigrants were from Mexico, Chile, Peru, and the South American ports generally; but soon our own Americans began to swarm in, coming by way of Cape Horn and Panama, or across the plains; and the number of these was swelled by the addition of thousands of deserters from the shipping, and by a straggling contingent from China, Australia, and the Hawaiian Islands. Probably two thirds of these newcomers proceeded at once to the mines,

but those that remained to try their fortunes in the city were enough to give to San Francisco at the end of the year a population of twenty-five thousand—mostly men, young or of middle age, very few women, fewer children, with here and there a bewildered matron or maiden of good repute. Here were British subjects, Frenchmen, Germans, and Dutch, Italians, Spaniards, Norwegians, Swedes, and Swiss, Jews, Turks, Chinese, Kanakas, New Zealanders, Malays, and Negroes, Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia and Cappadocia, in Boston and New Orleans, Chicago and Peoria, Hoboken and Hackensack.

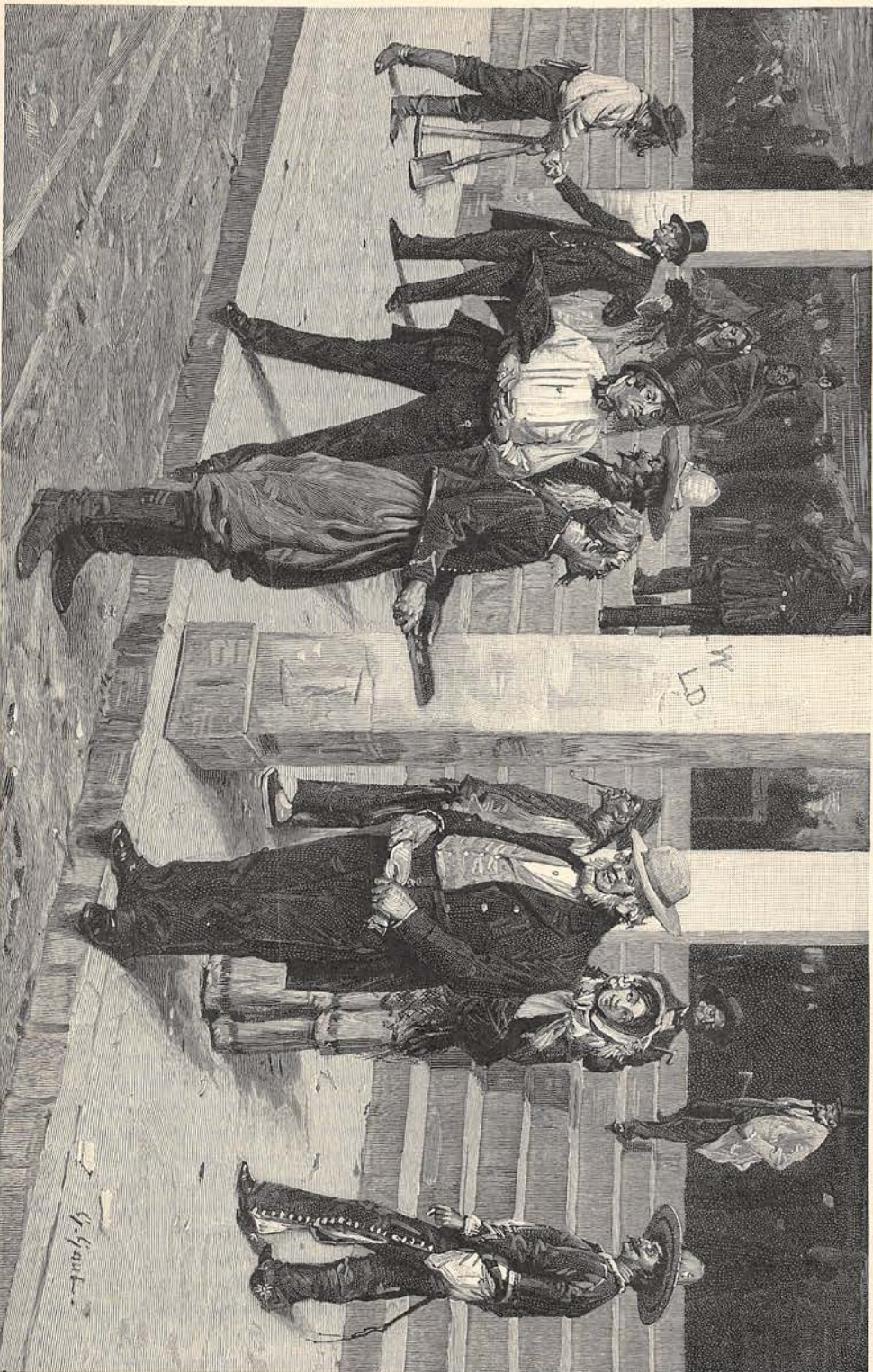
And how did they all live? In frame-houses of one story, more commonly in board shanties and canvas tents, pitched in the midst of sand or mud and various rubbish and strange filth and fleas; and they slept on rude cots, or on "soft planks" under horse-blankets, on tables, counters, floors, on trucks in the open air, in bunks braced against the weather-boarding, forty of them in one loft; and so they tossed and scratched, and swore and laughed, and sang and skylarked—those who were not tired or drunk enough to sleep. And in the working-hours they bustled, and jostled, and tugged, and sweated, and made money—always made money. They labored and they lugged: they worked on lighters, drove trucks, packed mules, rang bells, carried messages, "waited" in restaurants, "marked" for billiard-tables, served drinks in bar-rooms, "faked" on the Plaza, "cried" at auctions, toted lumber for houses, ran a game of faro or roulette in the El Dorado or the Bella Union, or manipulated three-card monte on the head of a barrel in front of the Parker House; they speculated in beach- and water-lots, in lumber, pork, flour, potatoes; in picks, shovels, pans, long boots, slouch-hats, knives, blankets, and Mexican saddles. There were doctors, lawyers, politicians, preachers, even gentlemen and scholars among them; but they all speculated, and as a rule they gambled. Clerks in stores and offices had munificent salaries; \$5 a day was about the smallest stipend even in the custom-house, and one Baptist preacher was paid \$10,000 a year. Laborers received a dollar an hour; a pick or a shovel was worth \$10; a tin pan or a wooden bowl, \$5; and a butchers' knife, \$30. At one time the carpenters who were getting \$12 a day struck for \$16. Lumber rose to \$500 per thousand feet, "and every brick in a house cost a dollar, one way or another."¹ Wheat-flour and salt pork sold at \$40 a barrel; a small loaf of bread was fifty cents, and a hard-boiled egg a dollar. You paid \$3 to get into the circus, and \$55 for a private box. Men talked dollars, and a copper

coin was an object of antiquarian interest. Forty dollars was the price for ordinary coarse boots; and a pair that came above the knees and would carry you gallantly through the quagmires brought a round hundred. When a shirt became very dirty, the wearer threw it away and bought a new one. Washing cost \$15 a dozen in 1849. Rents were simply monstrous: \$3000 a month in advance for a "store" hurriedly built of rough boards. Wright and Co. paid \$75,000 for the wretched little place on the corner of the Plaza that they called the Miners' Bank, and \$36,000 was asked for the use of the Old Adobe as a custom-house. The Parker House paid \$120,000 a year in rents, nearly one half of that amount being collected from the gamblers who held the second floor; and the canvas tent next door, used as a gambling-saloon, and called the El Dorado, was good for \$40,000 a year. From 10 to 15 per cent. a month was paid in advance for the use of money borrowed on substantial security. The prices of real estate went up among the stars: \$8000 for a fifty-vara lot that had been bought in 1848 for \$20. Yet, for all that, everybody made money, although a man might stare aghast at the squalor of his lodging, and wish that he might part with his appetite at any price to some other man. It was some such man as this who preserved the bill of fare of the Ward House for the dinner there on the 27th of October, 1849.

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| Oxtail soup | | \$1.00 |
| Baked trout, anchovy sauce | | 1.50 |
| Roast beef | | 1.00 |
| Roast lamb, stuffed | | 1.00 |
| Roast mutton, stuffed | ..... | 1.00 |
| Roast pork, with apple sauce | ..... | 1.25 |
| Baked mutton, caper sauce | ..... | 1.25 |
| Corned beef and cabbage | ..... | 1.25 |
| Ham | ..... | 1.00 |
| Curried sausages | ..... | 1.00 |
| Lamb and green peas | ..... | 1.25 |
| Venison, wine sauce | ..... | 1.50 |
| Stewed kidney, champagne sauce | ..... | 1.25 |
| Fresh eggs | ..... | 1.00 each |
| Sweet potatoes | ..... | .50 |
| Irish potatoes | ..... | .50 |
| Cabbage | ..... | .50 |
| Squash | ..... | .50 |
| Bread pudding | ..... | .75 |
| Mince pie | ..... | .75 |
| Brandy peaches | ..... | 2.00 |
| Rum omelette | ..... | 2.00 |
| Jelly omelette | ..... | 2.00 |
| Cheese | ..... | .50 |
| Prunes | ..... | .75 |

At the El Dorado Hotel at Hangtown (a mining-camp) the dainty menu offered "beef with one potato, fair size," \$1.25; "beef, up along," \$1; "baked beans, greased," \$1; "new potatoes, peeled," 75 cents; "hash, low grade," 75 cents; "hash, 18 karats," \$1; "roast grizzly," \$1; "jackass rabbit,

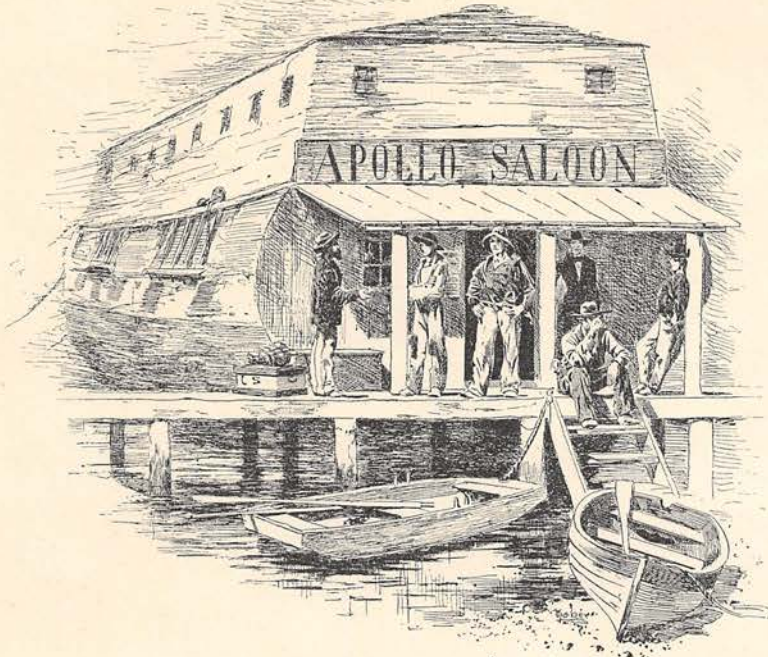
¹ "Annals of San Francisco."



DRAWN BY GILBERT GAUL.

IN FRONT OF THE EMPIRE SALOON.

ENGRAVED BY J. W. EVANS.



OLD STORE-SHIP "APOLLO," USED AS A SALOON.

whole," \$1.50; "rice with brandy peaches," \$2; and "a square meal" for \$3. "All payable in advance. Gold-scales on the end of bar." But the small, cheap gold-scales cost \$30, and the coarse knives and forks not less than \$25 the pair.

The aspect of the streets of San Francisco at this time was such as one may imagine of an unsightly waste of sand and mud churned by the continual grinding of heavy wagons and trucks, and the tugging and floundering of horses, mules, and oxen; thoroughfares irregular and uneven, ungraded, unpaved, unplanked, obstructed by lumber and goods; alternate humps and holes, the actual dumping-places of the town, handy receptacles for the general sweepings and rubbish and indescribable offal and filth, the refuse of an indiscriminate population "pigging" together in shanties and tents. And these conditions extended beyond the actual settlement into the chaparral and underbrush that covered the sand-hills on the north and west.

The flooding rains of winter transformed what should have been thoroughfares into treacherous quagmires set with holes and traps fit to smother horse and man. Loads of brushwood and branches of trees, cut from the hills, were thrown into these swamps; but they served no more than a temporary purpose, and the inmates of tents and houses made such bridges and crossings as they could with boards, boxes,

and barrels. Men waded through the slough, and thought themselves lucky when they sank no deeper than their waists. Lanterns were in request at night, and poles in the daytime. In view of the scarcity and great cost of proper materials and labor, such makeshifts were the only means at hand. A traveler who came by sea in 1849 describes with graphic interest "the peculiar construction of the sidewalk between the store of Simmons, Hutchinson & Co. and the Adams Express office." This place was bridged with cooking-stoves, sacks of

Chile flour, bags of coffee, and boxes of tobacco; and one yawning pit was stopped with a piano. Nevertheless, there were clumsy or drunken pedestrians who would have sunk out of sight but for timely rescue. Hittell tells of two horses that were left in the mud of Montgomery street to die of starvation, and of three drunken men who were suffocated between Washington and Jackson streets. And yet the rains that were productive of conditions so desperate and deadly in the city brought showers of gold to the miners in the diggings, and the monthly yield of dust and nuggets was three times greater after November than it had been in the summer.

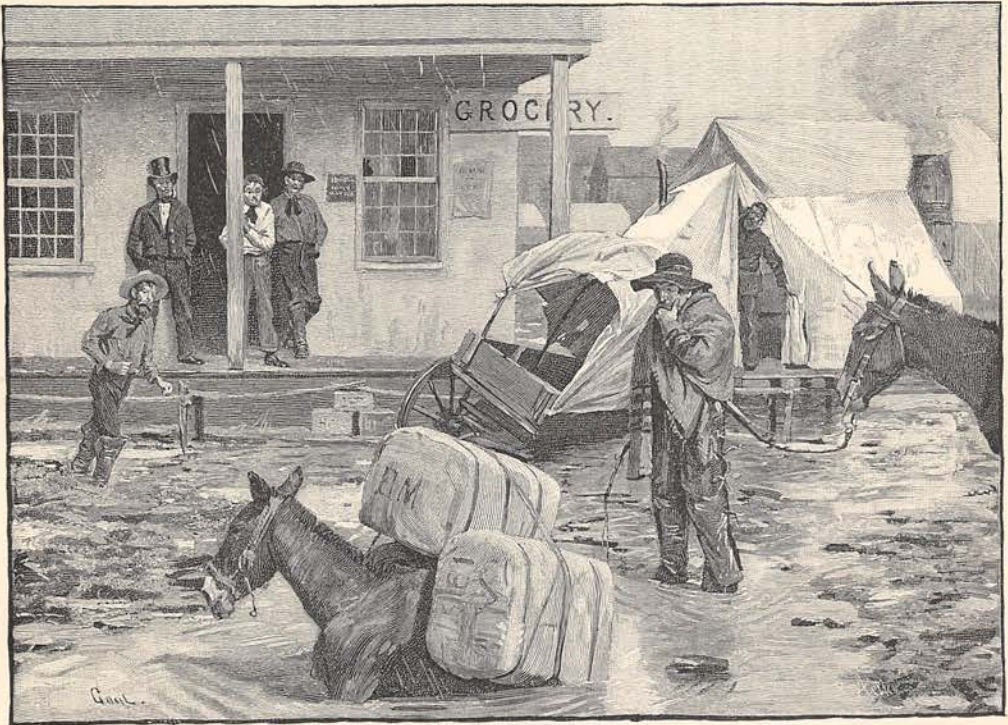
Standing on the piazza of the Old Adobe custom-house, on the upper side of the Plaza, or Portsmouth Square, and looking eastward across the open space, you had before you the Parker House and Dennison's Exchange, center and focus of all interest and all news to the San Franciscan of '49; and adjoining the Parker House, on the corner of the Plaza formed by the intersection of Kearney and Washington streets, was the El Dorado, most reckless of gambling-resorts and phenix of many fires. Amidships, on the north side of the square, was the original office of the "Alta California" newspaper, a journal which terminated its existence only a few months ago; and adjoining that, the Bella Union and Washington Hall—alike infamous, the former as a den of gam-

bling desperados and cutthroats, and the latter as a stew of polyglot debauchery.

Southward, on the Clay street side of the Plaza, and on the corner of Kearney street, was that historic adobe, the old City Hotel, the first important hostelry of Yerba Buena; and when the placers began to give out their treasures it was the headquarters of gambling miners, and overflowed with gold. "Scenes such as never before were and never again will be witnessed," said the "Alta California," "were common in the old City Hotel in 1848 and '49." In the spring of '49 the building was leased for \$16,000 per annum, cut up into small stores and offices, and subleased at an enormous advance; but the City Hotel was "gobbled up" in the great fire of June, 1851. Higher up, on the south side, was Sam Brannan's office, where that redoubtable Mormon arraigned the "Hounds" before a concourse

Leavenworth or a Geary; and midway between the Old Adobe and the Parker House stood the original flag-staff, boldly flaunting Uncle Sam's title-deed to the land of gold.

The Old Adobe was a conspicuous landmark in the San Francisco of those wild times, and most dear to the memory of every Forty-niner. In the early days of the American occupation it had been used as a military barrack and guard-house, and later it became the first custom-house of San Francisco. A sedate, drowsy-looking structure, with sturdy brown walls, a low-pitched roof, tiled in the true rancho fashion, a long, rickety porch with planking all adrift, and posts and railings elaborately whittled, the Old Adobe from its coign of vantage on the higher ground overlooked the Plaza and took note of the various devilment that marked its reckless doings; while, with that handy cross-beam at the south end of the porch, it seemed



A MUDDY STREET IN SAN FRANCISCO.

of exasperated citizens, and demanded their summary stamping out. Across the way, on the southwest corner of the Plaza, was the little frame school-house—the first school-house, which became, afterward, a concert-hall for Steve Massett's musical eccentricities, and then a police-station for a most inefficient constabulary. Between the school-house and the south end of the Old Adobe was the alcalde's office, where justice was informally dispensed by a

to wait with cynical patience until the coming vigilance committee should bring their first victim their short shrift and their long rope. The ever-open portal admitted you to a wide vestibule which divided the house into unequal wings, and showed you on one side the desks of the inspectors and deputies, and on the other the sanctum of the collector—an imperturbable and dapper little man whose supernatural equanimity was the admiration of the time and place,



DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

THE POST-OFFICE IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1849-50.

ENGRAVED BY J. H. E. WHITNEY.

imparting an air of repose and hospitality to all his surroundings, and making even his iron safe, which should have been the grim receptacle of the public treasure, seem but a pleasing and confiding joke, seeing that he usually kept it as open as his own countenance, and free to display its golden lining to the day.

On the 22d of June, 1851, the Old Adobe disappeared from the map of San Francisco, swallowed up in that last great fire which devoured the City Hotel and the City Hospital, the Jenny Lind Theater and the office of the "Alta California." Other adobe houses characteristic of the old California life were the Mowry dwelling and the residence of Señora Briones, both on the northwestern skirt of the town. These were all of one story, and roofed with tiles. The entrance was set fairly in the middle of the front, and there was usually a hall extending from the front to the back door and equally dividing the house, so as to give a large sitting-room, which was also used for a guest-room, on one side of the hall, and on the other a bed-chamber in front and a kitchen at the back. In several of these houses the guest-room and the bed-chamber were floored with tiles of marble in alternate black and white, and the cornices showed some fair attempts at carving; these apartments were always hospitably furnished, and on occasions of entertainment made pretensions to luxury.

The post-office of that time was a frame building of one story and an attic on the corner of Clay and Pike streets. There was but small accommodation here for clerks and "handlers," and still less for the impatient and peremptory crowd of home-hungry men who came daily, but most of all on mail-day, which was once a month, and took the small windows and loopholes by storm. To avoid confusion and dangerous conflict, long queues were formed, extending from the windows along Clay street to the Plaza, and along Pike street sometimes as far as Sacramento, and even to the chaparral beyond. Here traders, miners, merchants, gamblers, and adventurers of every complexion waited in their places, often from the afternoon of one day, all night long, to the morning of the next, in the mud and the soaking rain, with weary limbs and anxious hearts. Men whose strength was unequal to the strain were glad to employ others to hold their places for them through the long hours; and there were those who, while not seeking or expecting letters for themselves, secured good standings in the line before the coming of the crowd, only to sell their right of place to richer men whose time was money. From ten to twenty dollars was a common price for such service.

The gamblers of '49 constituted a controlling class with whom was all the physi-

cal, moral, and financial force. Abounding in ready resources of a mixed and mysterious kind, and unscrupulous in the application of them; themselves well stocked with the adventurer's courage, and their courage imposingly backed up with six-shooters; numbering in their society, whether as professionals or amateurs, many of the "first men" of the city; having the largest show of "smartness," if not of a finer intellectuality and higher wisdom; of sophisticated observation, reckless speculation, and, most important of all, cash; paying the highest rents, monopolizing the most desirable business sites; prompt in applying every new and admirable improvement, commanding every comfort that invention or expensive labor could supply, every luxury that fine raiment, and pictures, and shows, and music, and wine, and a motley "world of ladies" could stand for — no wonder that they swayed the city, and carried the day with a high hand. For they paid twelve per cent. a month for money, and were ready to take all they could get at that price, offering securities in the goodwill and fixtures of one "saloon" or another, a house, a lease, a water-lot, a bank.

Moreover, the gambler of '49 was no vulgar villain of the sordid stripe; he had his aspirations; it was proud game he hunted, and he put his own life into the chase. The law being to play fair or die, and the finest distinctions of the *meum* and *tuum* being defined by the pistol, it is easy to understand that there were honest gamblers in San Francisco in '49; in fact, I will go so far as to assert that, as a class, no others were so strict and punctual in all their dealings. No investment was safer or more profitable than a loan to a gambler; no rightful claim was more easy of collection. Nor were these men, though most dangerous on certain points of professional prerogative, by any means habitually quarrelsome. On the contrary, they were often the peacemakers of a fierce crowd whose explosive passions were stirred, constituting themselves an extemporaneous vigilance committee, in the name of the law and order they had themselves set up for the occasion; and then woe to the refractory!

As I have elsewhere said,

not uncommonly the professional faro-banker of '49 was a farmer-like and homespun man, with a kindly composition of features and expression, patriarchal in his manners, a man to go to for advice, abounding in instructive experiences of life, and full of benevolent leanings toward the world; a man to lounge about the porticos of hotels, reading his "Alta," or the latest home papers, projecting city improvements and public charities, discussing important enterprises, overhauling the business of the ayuntamiento, considering at large the state of the country, defining the duties of



OLD ADOBE, USED AS CUSTOM-HOUSE.

Congress toward California, portraying the future of the State; and then — starting out to make the round of the tables, and deliberately to set about “breaking the bank.” I have known such a man to take, in one day and night, five out of seven monte banks, besides a faro bank or two, seat his own dealers at them to keep the game going, and then subside into his pipe and newspaper, his political economy and projects of benevolence.

Of such was the fraternity that swayed the city in those days, and the secret of their paramount influence lay, partly, in their harmonious combination of the preëminently American traits—a faculty of taking accurately and at once the bearings of new and strange situations, fixity of purpose, persistence of endeavor, audacity of enterprise, ready hazard of life, ever fresh elasticity of sanguine temperament, but principally in the imposing figures of an omnipotent cash capital, wherewith they knew how to feed the enormous cravings of the people, and mitigate their privations and their pains.¹

The people eagerly accepted the treacherous comforts and solacements so seductively displayed on the green cloth; and gambling became the recreation of the honest toiler or trader, as well as the revel of the reckless buccaneer. While occupations were as various as the needs and makeshifts of those who had recourse to them, it may be said that in all that din and bustle and hurly-burly there was but one pursuit. Miners and boatmen, laborers, mechanics, and builders, merchants and clerks and peddlers, thimble-riggers and fakirs from the streets, lawyers, physicians, judges, clergymen—all alike found a rapture in faro or bluff, a distraction in roulette or rondo, an edifying experience in monte or rouge-et-noir. The bar and the green table went into partnership, and, with a joint stock of cards and chips, decanters, fiddles, and pictures, and reckless wo-

men, did a madly merry business. There were hundreds of such places where, in the evening and all night long, keen fellows, horribly quiet, shuffled the fateful cards with deadly deliberation, or where bedeviled women, horribly beautiful, greedy, and cruel, twirled roulette-wheels to the mockery of music.

The great “saloons” were on the Plaza: all of the east side and the greater part of the north and south sides were given up to them. In each of these from ten to a dozen tables waited for players—for the man whose “blood was up,” or the man who was bored, or the pleasant fellow who “might as well amuse himself.” The man whose blood was up usually began with a stake of a thousand dollars and ended with fifty cents, and lost it; and the pleasant fellow who would amuse himself usually began with fifty cents and ended with a thousand dollars, and lost it; while the bored man won and won, and “took no interest.” Piles of coin in gold and silver, bags of dust, and gold in nuggets, lay in the middle of the table; and the game went on in sweet repose and pensiveness, not even broken when the stakes were at their highest, and the spectators, standing three lines deep, waited for the luck of “that long-haired stranger who came to break the bank.”

“Everybody gambled”—that was the excuse for everybody else. The phenomenal exception was the man who, having lost his all at three-card monte on the head of a barrel in the Plaza, was thereupon seized with acute compunctions on moral grounds, and a luminous theory of the ratio of chances. “While profits and wages were so high, while there were no homes, no comfort or decency to be found in lofts and bunks, men thought to take refuge in riotous excess, seeking for rest and recreation

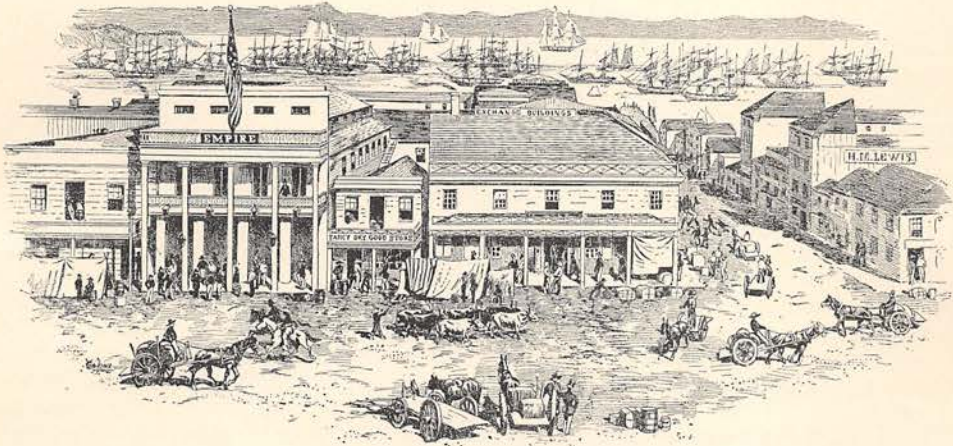
¹ J. W. Palmer, “The New and the Old.”

in gambling-hells, and bar-rooms, and dance-houses."¹ To find the few virtuous and worthy women of that time, you must have sought for them in tents and makeshift harbors, safely withdrawn from the public gaze, or else in the struggling beginnings of churches that feebly held their little forts against the banded forces of a multifarious godlessness.

From the upper corner on Washington street to the lower corner on Clay street, the people filed across the Plaza, between the Old Adobe and the Parker House, in an unending procession, or broke into motley groups of many colors and many tongues, and loitered by the flag-staff, among the trucks, and the oxen, and

that they had sown the wind to reap the whirlwind. The Chinese quarter in San Francisco became, it was charged, a hotbed of depravity and crime. The opium-habit spread among the white youth of both sexes, and fetid dens were open day and night."² The oath of a Chinaman became a joke in the courts, and it was proved that in the Chinese quarter rewards were covertly offered for the slaying of innocent witnesses. Thus anti-Chinese legislation, for the suppression of the Chinese high-binder, became a foregone conclusion.

But there are Chinese and Chinese; they are not all coolies and highbinders. In "Little China," as the district which includes Dupont



CORNER OF THE PLAZA, FEBRUARY, 1850.

the mules, the stalls of the small venders, and the handy boxes and barrels of the fakirs and thimblerriggers, and the dealers of three-card monte; while from time to time some jingling rancho, picturesque in serape, sombrero, and silver bell-buttons, and heeled with formidable spurs, would come caracoling across the square, making a circus of himself for the delectation of señora and madame. Always conspicuous among these was the ubiquitous Chinaman, "child-like and bland," but slyly twinkling with the conscious smartness of ways that are as hard to find out as the thimblerrigger's pea, which he so cunningly resembles.

There is record of two Chinese men and one woman who came to California on the bark *Eagle* from Hong-Kong in 1848. By February, 1850, these had been followed by 787 men and two women, and still they came. Beginning in the mines, they spread into the farms and gardens, and thence into workshops and factories, outbidding the Caucasian with longer hours of work and smaller pay. "Then the men who had given them employment, displacing the American and European workmen, soon found

street and the upper part of Sacramento street is called, were many respectable and wealthy Chinese merchants, men who trafficked in the goods and wares of their country, and were regarded by their Caucasian neighbors as shrewd, polite, and well informed, having consideration for their social caste, holding themselves aloof from the washermen and the porters, and, so far as the exigencies of their business permitted, living retired. In common fairness they were not to be reckoned with the keepers of gambling-dens, opium-joints, and brothels, but rather to be accepted as an honorable protest and appeal in the interest of that class of their people who are industrious, decent in their lives and manners, and of good report, who are contented, peaceable, and thrifty, and who hold it a point of honor that the Chinaman who cannot pay his debts must kill himself for the credit of the survivors.

Even in those days a sentiment of Sunday-ness might be found in the suburbs of San Francisco; and in an equestrian scamper to the Lagoon, the Presidio (the old Spanish cantonment), or the Mission San Dolores, one might

¹ *Annals of San Francisco.*

² *San Francisco "Chronicle,"* September 7, 1890.



MISSION SAN DOLORES — SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

give his heart an airing. The Mission, so intimately associated with the early history of Yerba Buena and the later San Francisco, though it had been projected ever since the discovery of the bay in 1769, was not founded till 1776. The site was a small, fertile plain, embosomed among green hills, about two miles from the center of the present city. Several rivulets of clear, sweet water mixed their streams to form the larger Mission Creek. Further north were the bleak and sterile sand-hills on which the site of the present city was pitched; but the Presidio was more happily placed, and the small cove on the east, within the narrow entrance to the bay, afforded shelter and good anchorage.

The old Mission Church of 1850 was a spacious building of adobe, very plain without and partly whitewashed, except the front, which was relieved by certain crude architectural decorations, and showed several handsome bells. The interior was somber, grim, and cold. On the walls were rude paintings of saints and sacred subjects, and tinsel ornaments decorated the altar. But mass was still celebrated in the gloomy pile for the spiritual comfort of a small company of worshippers, mostly women of the Spanish races.

But the Mission was the favorite resort of holiday-makers from the city, especially of the Sunday revelers. Here bull-fights were held, and bear-baitings, and prize-fights of pugilists, and horse-races, and duels, and all the other mild diversions of the Forty-niner; and bars and gambling-tables supplied abundantly the indispensable refreshment and risk. Over the plank road, constructed in 1850, came an endless cavalcade of dashing equestrians of both sexes, and the highways extending southward to San José invited to pleasant excursions among green fields and hills.

But, after all, it was but a ghastly jollity, for under and all around it were destitution and disease, crime and despair and death. For the sick, the friendless, and the utterly broken there

were, for many months, no infirmary, no hospital fund, no city physician.

"Your honor, and gentlemen," said the eccentric Mr. Krafft, addressing an imaginary ayuntamiento, "we are very sick, and hungry, and helpless, and wretched. If somebody does not do something for us we shall die; and that will be bad, considering how far we have come, and how hard it was to get here, and how short a time we have been here, and that we have not had a fair chance. All we ask is a fair chance; and we say again, upon our honor, gentlemen, if somebody does not do something for us, we shall die, or we shall be setting fire to the town first, and cutting all our throats."¹

For these were the times when scurvied men were landing from the ships, and men crippled with rheumatism, and wasted with dysentery, and delirious with pneumonia and typhoid fever, were taking refuge in the city, to find only the bare, wet earth for a bed, under a leaky tent, or a foul bunk in the loft of a shanty, where a man had never a chance to die like a man, because of the cruel, carousing crew in the den below; no doctor, no nurse, no balm, no wine or oil, no cup of cold water, no decent deathbed. And so we found their poor, cold, silent corpses in lonely tents apart, or in the bush, or under the lee of a pile of lumber in Sacramento or Montgomery street; and we dug a hole and buried them right there, and the city of San Francisco is their gravestone, and this story is their epitaph.

Here is a passage from the address of the alcalde, Colonel John W. Geary, to the ayuntamiento in August, 1849:

At this time we are without a dollar in the public treasury, and it is to be feared the city is greatly in debt. You have neither an office for your magistrate, nor any other public edifice. You are without a single police officer or watchman, and you have not the means of confining a prisoner for one hour; neither have you a place to shelter sick and unfortunate strangers who

¹ J. W. Palmer, "The New and the Old."

may be cast upon our shores, or to bury them when dead. Public improvements are unknown in San Francisco. In short, you are without a single requisite for the promotion of prosperity, for the protection of property, or for the maintenance of order.

Organized bands of ruffians, including thieves, burglars, and roughs, ever ready with knife and pistol, roamed unchallenged. Depredation and assault became familiar incidents

them fast bound with his "Thus saith the Lord your God!"

Most dangerous, and for a time most numerous, of the immigrant criminals who came to recruit the gangs of "Sydney-town" were the old convicts and ticket-of-leave men from Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales, who feared nothing but the gallows anywhere, and even that not at all in this land of devil-may-care, where prosecutors and witnesses were too

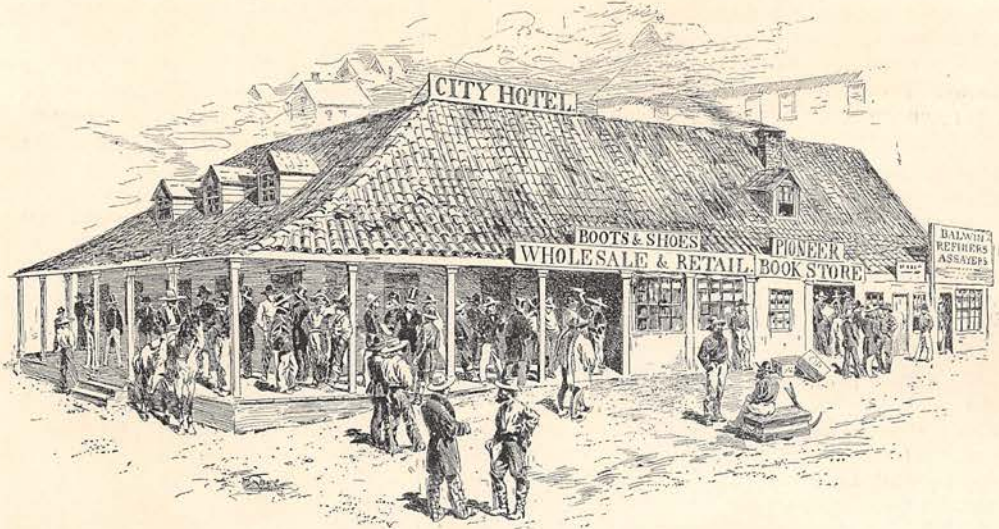


"HOUNDS" ATTACKING CHILIANS.

in the life of the town. The conflagrations which subsequently laid waste the most valuable districts were traced or ascribed to the handiwork of "Sydney coves" and "Hounds," who plundered under cover of the general confusion and dismay incident to a great fire. And everywhere was the reckless apathy of "every man for his own hand," every man a law to himself, and the six-shooter his only constable. Only on a Sunday afternoon, on the piazza of the Old Adobe, was the voice of the prophet heard in righteous rebuke and warning—the voice of brave old Father Taylor, lifted up in stentorian psalm and prayer, arresting the passing miner and gambler, the "Sydney cove" and the courtesan, and holding

busy to concern themselves with courts; where judges were ignorant, careless, or corrupt; where trials were too costly for a bankrupt city; and where a man might hide easily and utterly under an alias or an alibi, a pea-jacket or a serape, a smooth face or a ragged beard.

The quarter known as "Sydney-town," the "Five Points" and the "Seven Dials" of San Francisco, lay around Clark's Point, in Broadway and Pacific street. Here a policeman hardly dared to enter, night was made hideous with debauchery and assaults, and for a few ounces a fellow could be hired to kill a man or fire a house, and no questions asked. "Although hundreds of murders had been committed" by the desperate denizens of these and other



THE FIRST HOTEL AT SAN FRANCISCO.

quarters, "and many murderers had been arrested, not one had been hanged, either legally or at the hands of self-appointed executioners; and the very courts themselves had become a by-word."¹

But the very excesses and intolerable outrages of this state of things presently compelled their own stamping out by methods that were short and summary. On the 15th of July, 1849, a gang of young men who called themselves "Regulators," but were commonly known as "Hounds," and who were the "Mohawks" and "thugs" and "plug-uglies" of that time, proceeded to "take the town" after a fashion which they had made their own. This gang, which had been first heard of toward the close of 1848, began to make itself felt and feared in the spring of the following year. Under the pretense of mutual defense against the encroachments of foreigners, especially Chileans, Peruvians, and Mexicans, they had adopted a sort of military organization with a regular headquarters, which they called Tammany Hall, in a tent near the City Hotel. They paraded the town in broad daylight, with flag and fife and drum, armed with revolvers and bludgeons; and at night, when the streets were dark and unguarded, they often raided saloons and taverns, eating and drinking at the charge of the proprietors, and afterward making a wreck of stock and furniture in the very devilment of wantonness and fun.

Returning from a marauding excursion to the Contra Costa on the afternoon of Sunday, the 15th of July, they made the rounds of the town, equipped in fantastic toggery of ponchos

and Canton crapesaws, pillaged from Spanish-American and Chinese shops; and in the evening they marched upon the tents of the Chileños, cuffing and kicking the women and children, and clubbing and shooting the men, tearing down the tents, destroying their scanty furniture, and plundering them of clothing and valuables.

The limit of that criminal apathy which had so long passed for patience was reached at last. On the 16th the community of "all good citizens" met on the Plaza in response to a proclamation of Alcalde Leavenworth, who had been urged to vigorous action by a committee of merchants and others. The meeting was organized with Mr. W. D. M. Howard as chairman and Dr. Fourgeaud as secretary. Sam Brannan addressed the multitude, and denounced the "Hounds," and the whole foul herd of criminals and miscreants, in unmeasured terms. A subscription was opened for the relief of those who had suffered by the outrages of the 15th; a volunteer police force was organized, consisting of 230 special constables, armed with muskets and revolvers, and commanded by Captain W. E. Spofford; and that same afternoon twenty of the "Hounds," including Sam Roberts, their leader, were captured and lodged on board the United States ship *Warren*. On Tuesday a grand jury of twenty-four citizens found a true bill against the prisoners, who were brought to trial on Wednesday before a jury specially impaneled. Sam Roberts and his mate, Saunders, were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment with hard labor, and the others to shorter terms with fines. But these penalties were never enforced. Several of the leaders were sent out of the country, the rest were set at liberty; and although the "Hounds" were muz-

¹ San Francisco "Chronicle," September 7, 1890.

zled, other criminals and desperados, more daring and dangerous than they, were encouraged to show a bold front and strike deadlier blows. The famous Vigilance Committee of 1851, with its swift and tragic executions, was the inevitable response to the general cry for retribution and protection.¹

The hotels of San Francisco may be regarded as the consummate product of that primitive system of coarse feeding-places which began in 1848 in the makeshifts of a mining-camp, and was developed in the growth of "saloons" and restaurants of every imaginable description: dining-rooms, chop-houses, cabarets, and fondas. There were cooks for every people and tribe under the sun — American, English, German, French, Italian, Chilean, Mexican, Chinese, Kanaka, Negro. There were beef and mutton from the ranches, fish from the bay and rivers, bear, elk, antelope, hare, squirrel, quail, duck, snipe, and plover from the inland hills and valleys, vegetables from the Pacific islands, and fruits from more distant ports. A hungry man might make a tolerable meal on beef at fifty cents, pork or mutton at seventy-five cents, a dozen canned oysters for a dollar, and a baked potato for half a dollar; or if his appetite was dainty and his pouch full, he might indulge in roast duck at five dollars, broiled quail at two dollars, and "top off" with sardines and *pâté de foie gras* regardless of expense.

Mr. Winn, the proprietor of the Fountain Head and Branch, arrived in San Francisco in 1849 without a dollar. He started business by making candy with his own hands, and peddling it about the streets on a tray slung from his shoulders by a pair of old suspenders. The San Francisco "Commercial Advertiser" of the 6th of April, 1854, notes that Mr. Winn "paid for ice and eggs last season (five months), \$28,000; for one month's advertising, \$1600; receipts at his two houses average \$57,000 a month; has paid \$200 a month for water; to one man in his employ, \$1000 a month and his board; has paid \$3000 for potatoes, and \$5000 for eggs, for the same time; and fed poor and hungry people at a daily cost to him of \$20."

The first of the San Francisco hostelrys, in point of time, was the old City Hotel, which was built of adobes in 1846 at the corner of Clay and Kearney streets, and, until after the discovery of gold, was the only notable public house. Then followed, in 1849 and the succeeding years, the Parker House, the Graham

House (afterward the City Hall), the St. Francis, the Union (destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851), the Oriental, the Tehama, Wilson's Exchange, the Rasette House, and others.

The public amusements of San Francisco may be said to have begun at the old school-house on the Plaza on the evening of June 22, 1849, when Mr. Stephen C. Massett appeared in a sort of musical monologue, with recitations and imitations. The small room was filled, "front seats" being "reserved" for the four ladies who were present. The piano used on this occasion was loaned by Mr. Harrison, the collector of the port, and was said to be the only one in California; the charge for admission was \$3, and \$16 was the price paid for removing the piano from the custom-house to the school-house, half-way across the



THE FIRST SCHOOL-HOUSE, SAN FRANCISCO.

Plaza. In 1849 and 1850 there were equestrian and acrobatic performances in tents,—Rowe's and Foley's circuses,—and in January, 1850, the first dramatic performance was given in Washington Hall, "The Wife" and "Charles II." being indifferently played by a small company to a large audience. In April, 1850, a French vaudeville company appeared in a neat little house on Washington street near Montgomery, and, in September following, the original Jenny Lind Theater offered its attractions over the Parker House saloon on Kearney street. This house was destroyed in the fire of May, 1851. The large brick and stone building known as the New Jenny Lind, afterward the City Hall, was opened on the 4th of October, 1851, and the American Theater on Sansome street on the 20th.²

The school-house on the Plaza was appropriated as a place of public worship in October,

¹ See this magazine for November and December, 1891.

² "Annals of San Francisco."

1848, the services being conducted by the Rev. Dwight Hunt, a missionary from the Sandwich Islands, who is remembered as the first Protestant clergyman in California. The little house was filled at every meeting, and on the first Sunday in January, 1849, the first Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered to twelve communicants of different denominations. That congregation was composed of people who were not hampered by sectarian prejudices, or concerned to cavil about creeds and forms. The steamship *California*, which arrived in February, brought four missionaries from New York—Messrs. Wheeler, Baptist, and Woodbridge, Douglass, and Willey, Presbyterians. On the 1st of April the steamer *Oregon* brought the Rev. Albert Williams, who, after preaching for a while in the school-house, on the 20th of May organized the first Protestant society in the new city,—the “First Presbyterian Church,”—which was started with six members. In this small but notable group were Sarah B. Gillespie of the Presbyterian Missionary Church at Macao, China, and Mr. Frederick J. Billings, of the First Congregational Church at Woodstock, Vermont. This gentleman, by the early and earnest part he took in the moral sanitation of the city, won for himself an honorable name in her annals as a conspicuous pioneer in all good works; he was associated with General Halleck in the practice of law. The place of worship of this brave little congregation was on Dupont street in a tent that had been the marquee of a military company in Boston. This temporary accommodation was superseded in the fall of 1850 by a church edifice, complete with pulpit, pews, lamps, and bells, which was brought out from New York and set up in Stockton street near Broadway; but five months later it was burned, in the great fire of June 2, 1851. Although this represented the first religious society organized in San Francisco, it was preceded as a church edifice by the “First Baptist Church,” on Washington street between Dupont and Stockton streets, erected to accommodate the congregation gathered by the Rev. O. C. Wheeler, who had arrived in the *California* in February, 1849. Then followed the “First Congregational Church,” organized in July, 1849; “Trinity Church” (Episcopalian), and Grace Chapel, under the rectorship of that devoted missionary, Dr. Vermehr, who, in February, 1854, resigned the principal charge to Bishop Kip.

The early Roman Catholic “Church of St. Patrick,” in Happy Valley, with its school and orphan-asylum, and those at the Mission San Dolores and in Vallejo street, were largely attended, and services were held in English, French, and Spanish. Jewish synagogues and

Buddhist temples have their place in the religious history of the city, which, beginning with the Mormon elder, Sam Brannan, became in time worthy of the ministrations of Bishops Alemany and Kip; and no man did more to pilot her skittish flock to nobler heights than that brave, pertinacious, and magnetic Methodist, William Taylor, whose church was the open Plaza, and his pulpit the porch of the Old Adobe.

On the 4th of January, 1849, the “*Californian*,” which in November, 1848, had been consolidated with the “*Star*,” changed its name to the “*Alta California*.” At first it appeared as a weekly, then three times a week, and finally it became the first daily paper in California. Then came in quick succession the “*Journal of Commerce*,” the “*Pacific News*,” and the “*Daily Herald*.” On the 1st of August appeared the “*Picayune*,” the fifth daily, but the first evening paper. These were followed by the “*Courier*,” the “*Chronicle*,” the “*Bulletin*,” and others, including German, French, Italian, Spanish, and even Chinese newspapers, all of them marked in a greater or less degree by the ability, enterprise, pluck, and vim which are the characteristics of the country.

In describing the familiar features which should appear in a picture of the San Francisco of those golden years, the auction is not to be forgotten—that last resort of the consignee or supercargo who could find no storage for his shipment, no ready purchaser at any price. There were neither wharves nor warehouses to accommodate the overflowing freights brought by incoming fleets of merchantmen. Lighterage from ship to shore cost four dollars a ton, and the monthly rate for storage was ten dollars a ton. Perishable goods were often a total loss; cargoes were, in some cases, reshipped to the Atlantic States without breaking bulk. Excessive and indiscriminate shipments could but result in wholesale waste and recklessness, and the only relief was to be found in auctions of a slap-dash kind, conducted by any man who might see fit to put up a sign near the water-front.

At first the principal landing-place was at Clark's Point, where the water was deep at the rocky shore; but by October, 1850, there were wharves of considerable length at Market, California, Sacramento, Clay, Washington, Jackson, and Pacific streets. The aggregate length of all the wharves exceeded six thousand feet, and the cost to that date amounted to a round million.

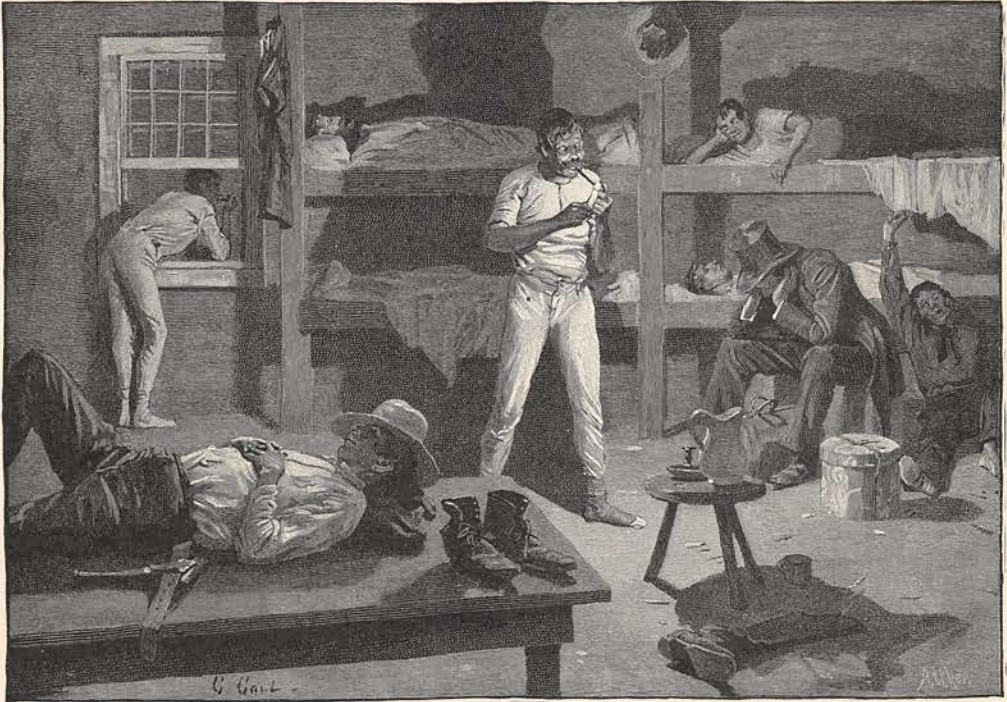
The famous clippers which had excited the admiration of the world of men who “go down to the sea in ships” by the beauty of their lines, their buoyant grace, and their capacity to carry great spreads of canvas, were racing against

time around Cape Horn to land on the wharves of San Francisco cargoes for which there might be no market, but at rates of freight that nearly paid the cost of the ship in a single run. Those were the days of the *Gray Eagle* and the *Grayhound*, the *White Squall* and the *Flying Cloud*, the *Typhoon* and the *Trade Wind*, and the *Sovereign of the Seas*—true couriers and wild riders of the main, that made the very storms their servants.

On Telegraph Hill—on the very spot where in 1847 our citizen of Yerba Buena had stood

was made in not less than seven or eight days, "fares, \$30 cabin, \$20 deck, and \$5 extra for berths; meals on board, \$2." In 1855 a good boat could make the distance in half a day.

It is usual to speak of the conflagrations which from time to time laid waste the most populous and bustling parts of San Francisco as the "great fires," because any one of them sufficed to fill the measure of a citizen's conception of ruthless devastation and dismay. There were six of them, beginning with that of Christmas Eve, 1849. Then thin boards



A LODGING-HOUSE INTERIOR.

watching the incoming of the *Brooklyn* with her dispensation of Mormons—Messrs. Sweeney and Baugh erected early in 1849 a lookout, or observatory, which commanded the approach and entrance to the Golden Gate, and by means of a code of signals kept their patrons of the city informed of the approach of vessels of every class, from coasting craft to man-of-war. At a later day a station was established nearer the ocean, which transmitted earlier intelligence by signaling the inner telegraph-house.

Until the fall of 1849 small schooners and launches had afforded the only means of navigation across the bay and up the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers; but in September a little iron steamer called the *Pioneer* began to ply the waters of the Sacramento, and was shortly followed by the *Mint*, the steam-propeller *McKim*, and the *Senator*. At first the run

and lath, and flimsy cotton cloth, and painted canvas, were licked up like tinder by the lapping tongues of flame. The fire began in Denison's Exchange, on the Plaza, in the early morning. That notable landmark of the Forty-niner, the Parker House, and all the buildings on Kearney street between Clay and Washington streets, were obliterated from the map of the city. It was the work of minutes, and the loss was a million. On May 4, 1850, the second great fire broke out on the site of the first, and swept away in its amazing rush and roar three entire blocks in the heart of the city. This time the loss was four millions. In the first conflagration it was the gamblers who had chiefly suffered; now it was the merchants. Six weeks later, on the 14th of June, when the wind was high, the entire district bounded by Clay and California streets, Kearney street and



FREDERICK J. BILLINGS.

the water's edge, was swept away, buildings and goods being almost totally consumed.

On the 4th of May, 1851, the anniversary of the second great fire, the city was desolated by a conflagration which is remembered as *the* great fire. It made a jest and mock of "fire-proof" buildings, and iron frames and doors and shutters curled up in the flames like cardboard. It began late on the night of the 3d, in a store on the south side of the Plaza. The wind rose with the flames, and whirled them south and north; the streets beneath the planking became great flues; the whole business part of the city was a roaring furnace; and the reflection is said to have been visible in the sky at Monterey, a hundred miles away. Ten hours sufficed for the destruction of nearly two thousand houses; eighteen whole squares, with portions of five others, in the most important part of the city, were almost totally obliterated, and the loss was estimated at \$12,000,000. On what had been the streets, men said, "Well, the bay is here, and the people are here, and the placers are left!" And they went straightway to work and built a new city, richer, stronger, handsomer than before. Hittell says of these fires that they exercised an important influence upon the politics and trade of the city. "The fire of May, 1851, was attributed to incendiarism. The amount of property exposed in the streets was so great that the

citizens banded themselves into a committee of vigilance, which soon extended its jurisdiction and hanged murderers as well as protected property. Merchants put their goods into store-ships, and the harbor was filled with old hulks until 1854, when brick stores, really fire-proof, began to furnish room and safety on shore. Unable to make bricks or cut stone except at terrific cost, orders were sent abroad for incombustible building materials. Granite was brought from China or from Quincy, lava from Honolulu, and bricks from Sydney, London, and New York." Out of the ruin and waste sprang new life, new forces, higher hopes, and nobler endeavors.

By 1852 the characteristics of a Spanish town had well-nigh disappeared from San Francisco. From Clark's Point to the Rincon, all had become American. The jingling *ranchero*, ostentatiously *sombrero'd* and *bespurred*, had been superseded by equipages familiar in the Eastern cities; omnibuses plied between the Plaza and the Mission; the "steam paddy" was busy in Happy Valley; and the sand-hills at the back of the town were being dumped into the water-lots in front. The city was moving bayward, and new streets were growing upon piles. "Where once floated ships of a thousand tons, now were great tenements of brick securely founded in the solid earth."

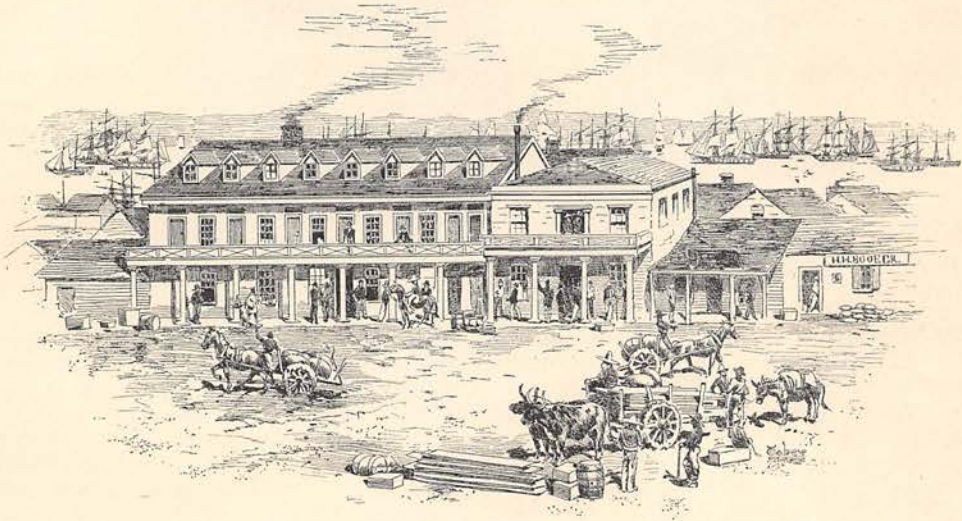
The sleepy little Yerba Buena of 1847 had become a metropolis of factories and great

stores, of schools and churches, of newspapers and theaters, of benevolent institutions and public works, of stage-coaches and mails, expresses and steamers; a city of brilliant bustle and magnificent dissipations. But a dollar was no longer paid for a pill, nor ten dollars for an ounce of carpet-tacks; for everybody was trying to sell, and everywhere was glut in spite of the ravenous extravagance and waste. Auctioneers tossed off ship-loads of merchandise for a song, and the enormous loss fell upon the foreign shippers; so "happy-go-lucky" was the temper of the hour, and a canter to the Presidio or the Mission, or a picnic excursion to the Contra Costa, was the usual diversion in the intervals of business.

In August, 1850, the Society of California Pioneers was called into being, mainly through the influence and efforts of Messrs. Howard, Brannan, Bryant, Wadsworth, Folsom, and others; and its first appearance as a civic organization, preceding all others in California, was in the public obsequies appointed to honor the memory of President Zachary Taylor, on the 29th of that month. The officers first

invested all his means in the sterile sand-lots of Yerba Buena, and waited for the coming of the great city he foresaw.

The records of that parent society were destroyed in the great fire of May, 1851, with the exception of one book containing the constitution and the signatures of a few members. The officers, who had been chosen to serve a twelve-month, were compelled by the exigencies of that memorable period of disaster, danger, and turmoil to hold their respective places for three years; but in the imposing demonstration by which the admission of California into the Union of States was celebrated on the 29th of October, 1850, the Society of Pioneers appeared in force, and made a conspicuous impression by their moral and intellectual prestige. On the 6th of July, 1853, the association, which owing to the local troubles had so long been unable to meet, was reorganized at the Oriental Hotel, when Mr. Brannan was elected president; Messrs. Larkin, Snyder, and Lippincott, vice-presidents; and William Tecumseh Sherman, treasurer. The society as at present constituted is a social and benevolent, as well as a historical, scientific, and

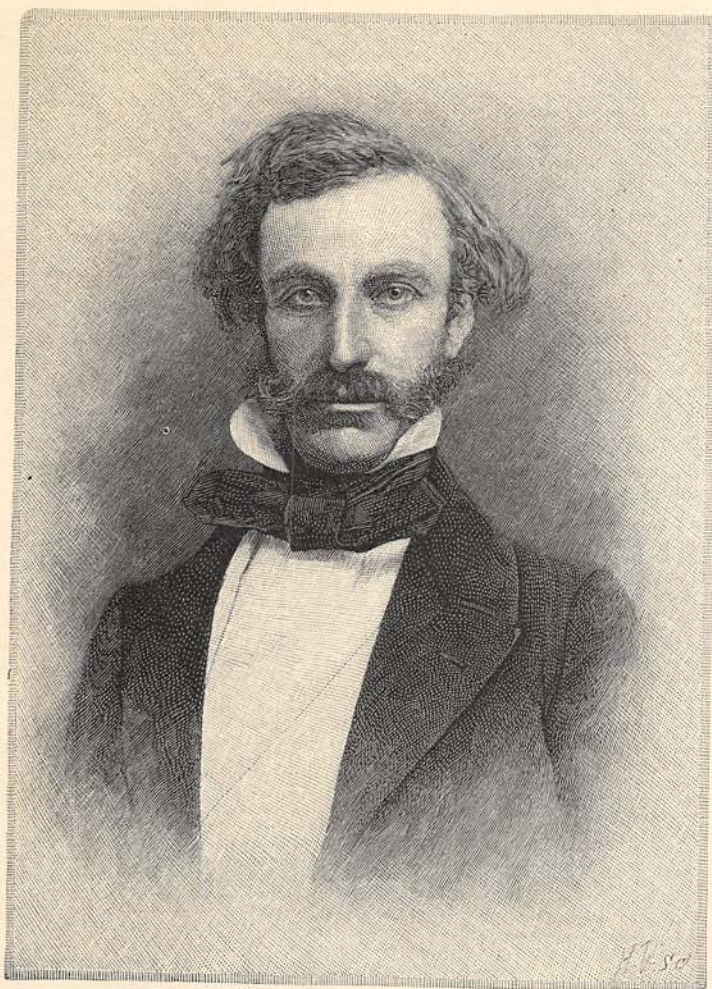


DENNISON'S EXCHANGE AND PARKER HOUSE, BEFORE THE FIRE OF DECEMBER, 1849.

elected were Messrs. Howard, president; Brannan and Snyder, vice-presidents; Bryant, Parker, Folsom, and Wadsworth, secretaries; and Talbot H. Green, treasurer. Among these associated pioneers Captain Folsom was a conspicuous figure. He came to California as a staff-officer in the quartermaster's department of Stevenson's regiment, and was eventually made chief of that department on the North Pacific coast. With notable foresight, long before the apparition of the golden wizard, he

literary association; and its objects are to collect and preserve information relating to the early settlement and subsequent history of the country, and "in all appropriate matters to advance the interests and perpetuate the memory of those whose sagacity and enterprise induced them to settle in the wilderness and become the founders of a new State."

In the impressive list of honorary members and distinguished guests who in the past have imparted distinction to the meetings of this



PHOTOGRAPHED BY TABER.

CAPTAIN J. L. FOLSOM.

most interesting association are to be found the names of Generals Sherman, Rosecrans, Wool, Frémont, Halleck, Schofield, Sutter, and Vallejo, and the Revs. Henry W. Bellows and Thomas Starr King.

Originally it was a condition of membership that the applicant should have arrived in California prior to the 1st of January, 1850; but the constitution has since been amended so as to admit the sons of pioneers.

John Williamson Palmer.

