

The Lure of San Francisco eBook

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The Mission

A view from Twin Peaks—The city with its historic crosses. A visit to the old church—Its past, and the romance of Lueis Argueello.

The Mission and Its Romance

“Tickets to the city, Sir?” The conductor’s voice sounded above the rumble of the train. As my companion’s hand went to his pocket he glanced at me with a quizzical smile.

“I should think you Oaklanders would resent that. Hasn’t your town put on long skirts since the fire?” There was an unpleasant emphasis on the last phrase, but I passed it over unnoticed.

“Of course we have grown up,” I assured him. “We’re a big flourishing city, but we are not the city. San Francisco always has been, and always will be the city to all northern California; it was so called in the days of forty-nine and we still cling affectionately to the term.”

“I believe you Californians have but two dates on your calendar,” he exclaimed, “for everything I mention seems to have happened either ‘before the fire’ or ‘in the good old days of forty-nine!’ ‘Good old days of forty-nine,’” he repeated, amused. “In Boston we date back to the Revolution, and ‘in Colonial times’ is a common expression. We have buildings a hundred years old, but if you have a structure that has lasted a decade, it is a paragon and pointed out as built ‘before the fire.’ Do you remember the pilgrimage we made to the historic shrines of Boston, just a year ago?”

“Shall I ever forget it!” I exclaimed.

He smiled appreciatively. “Faneuil Hall and the old State House are interesting.”

“Oh, I wasn’t thinking about the buildings! I don’t even recall how they look. But I do remember the weather. I was so cold I couldn’t even speak.”

“Impossible!” he cried, “you not able to talk!”

“But it’s true! My cheeks were frozen stiff. I wore a thick dress, a sweater, a heavy coat and my furs, and, still I was cold while all the time I was thinking that the fruit trees and wild flowers were in blossom in California. If it hadn’t been for the symphony concerts and the opera, I never could have endured an Eastern winter.”

“A fine compliment to me when I spent days taking you to points of historic interest.”



I sent him an appreciative glance. “It was good of you,” I acknowledged, “and do you remember that I promised to take you on a similar pilgrimage when you came to San Francisco?”

He laughed. “And I was foolish enough to believe you, since I had never been to the Pacific Coast.”

The train came to a stop in the Ferry Building and we followed the other passengers onto the boat. “San Francisco is modern to the core,” he continued. “Boston dates back generations, but you have hardly acquired your three score years and ten.”

“If you don’t like fine progressive cities, why did you come to California?” His fault-finding with San Francisco hurt me as if it had been a personal criticism.

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"You know why I came," he said gently, with his eyes on my face.

I felt the blood creeping to my cheeks and turned quickly to look for an out-of-doors seat. In the crowd we were jostled by a little slant-eyed man of the Orient, resplendent in baggy blue silk trousers tied neatly at the ankles and a loose coat lined with lavender, whose flowing sleeves half concealed his slender brown hands.

"There's a man who has centuries at his back." My companion's eyes traveled from the soft padded shoes to the little red button on the top of the black skull cap. "Even his costume is the same as his forefathers'."

"If you are interested in the Chinese, I'll show you Oriental San Francisco. It lies in the heart of the city and its very atmosphere is saturated with Eastern customs. It is much more sanitary but not as picturesque as it was before the fire." I flushed as I saw his amusement, and quickly called his attention to the receding shores where the encircling green hills had thrown out long banners of yellow mustard and blue lupins. To the right was Mt. Tamalpais, a sturdy sentinel looking out to the ocean, its summit pressed against the sky's blue canopy and its base lost in a network of purple forests. In front of the Golden Gate was Alcatraz Island, like a huge dismantled warship, guarding the entrance to the bay, and before us, San Francisco rested upon undulating hills, its tall buildings piercing the sky at irregular intervals. We made our way to the forward deck in order to have the full sweep of the waterfront.

"You should see it at night!" I said, "it is a marvelous tiara. The red and green lights on these wharves close to the water's edge are the rubies and emeralds, while above, sweeping the hills, the lights of the residences sparkle like rows and rows of diamonds."

A crowd of passengers surged around us as the boat poked its nose into the slip. "There was nothing left of this part of the city but a fringe of wharves, after the fire." I bit the last word in two, for it was evident the expression was getting on his nerves. I was thankful that the clanging chains of the descending gang plank and the tramp of many feet made further conversation impossible.

"Hurry," he urged, "there's the Exposition car." We were in front of the Ferry Building and the crowd was jostling us in every direction.

"You surely are not going to the Exposition!" I exclaimed in mock surprise.

"Of course I am. Where else should we go?"

"But, my dear Antiquary, those buildings are only a few months old!"

He laughed good naturedly. "It ought to suit you Westerners, anyway," he retaliated. Then taking my arm, "Let us hurry! Look, the car is starting!"



“I am going to take the one behind,” I announced. “There must be something old in San Francisco and I am going to find it.”

“You’ll have a long hunt,” rejoined the skeptic, and with his eyes still on the tail of the disappearing Exposition car, he reluctantly followed me.

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“Lots of strangers in San Francisco for the Fair,” he remarked, as from the car window he watched the big turban of a Hindoo bobbing among the crowd on the sidewalk; then his eyes wandered to a Japanese arrayed in a new suit of American clothes and finally rested on a bright yellow lei wound about the hat of a swarthy Hawaiian. I smiled as I nodded to the Japanese who had worked in my kitchen for three years, and recognized in the dusky Hawaiian one of the regular singers in a popular cafe.

The train had now left commercial San Francisco behind and was climbing the hills to where the nature loving citizens had perched their houses in order to obtain a better view of the bay. We abandoned the car and following an upward path, finally stood on the lower shoulder of Twin Peaks. Tired from our exertions we sank upon the soft grass. The hills had put on their festival attire, catching up their emerald gowns with bunches of golden poppies and veiling their shoulders in filmy scarfs of blue lupins. The air was filled with Spring and the delicate blush of an apple-tree told of the approach of Summer. Below, the city, noisy and bustling a few moments ago, now lay hushed to quiet by the distance and beyond, the sun-flecked waters of the bay stretched to a girdle of verdant hills, up whose sides the houses of the towns were scrambling. To the left, resting on the top of Mt. Tamalpais, could be seen the “sleeping maiden” who for centuries had awaited the awakening kiss of her Indian lover.

“What a glorious play-ground for San Francisco.” His voice rang with enthusiasm. “Look at the ferryboats plowing up the bay in every direction. A man could escape from the factory grime on the water front and in an hour be asleep under a tree on a grassy hillside.”

“It is a splendid country to tramp through, but if a man wants to sleep, why not spend less time and money by selecting a nearer place? There are plenty of trees and grassy mounds in the Presidio and Golden Gate Park.”

His eyes followed mine to the green patch edging the entrance to the bay and then ran along the tree-lined avenue to the parked section extending almost from the center of the city to the Pacific Ocean. Suddenly he stood up and took his field glasses from his pocket.

“There’s a granite cross just visible above the trees in Golden Gate Park.” He focused his glasses for a better view. “It’s quite elaborate in design and seems to be raised on a hill.”

He offered me the glasses but I did not need them. “It’s the Prayer-Book Cross and commemorates the first Church of England service held on this Coast by Sir Francis Drake in 1579. I think it is a shame that we haven’t also a monument for Cabrillo, the real discoverer, who was here nearly forty years earlier. If Sir Francis hadn’t stolen a Spanish ship’s chart, he would never have found the Gulf of the Farallones. Cabrillo

sailed along the coast more than half a century before Massachusetts Bay was discovered," I added maliciously.



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“I had forgotten the old duffer,” he smiled back at me. Raising his glasses again, he scanned the sombre roofs to the right. “There’s another monument,” he volunteered, “rising out of the heart of the city.”

I followed the direction indicated to where the outstretched arms of a white wooden cross were silhouetted against the sky.

“If I were in Europe,” he continued, “I should call it a shrine, for the sides of the hill on which it stands are seamed with paths running from the net-work of houses to the foot of the cross.”

“It is a shrine at which all San Francisco worships. Wrapped in mystery it stands, for when it was placed there no one knows. It comes to us out of the past—a token left by the Spanish padres. Three times it has fallen into decay, but always loving hands have reached forward to restore it, and as long as San Francisco shall last, a cross will rise from the summit of Lone Mountain.”

“The Spanish padres!” The ring in his voice bespoke his interest. “Are there any other relics left?”

I pointed to the level section below. “Do you see that low red roof almost hidden by its towering neighbors? That is the old Mission San Francisco de Asis, colloquially called Dolores, from the little rivulet on whose bank it was built.”

Through his field glasses he scrutinized the expanse of substantial houses and paved streets. “I can’t find the rivulet,” he announced.

“Of course you can’t, you stupid man!” I laughed. “If you’ll use your imagination instead of your glasses you will see it easily. The stream arose, we are told, between the summits of Twin Peaks, and tumbling down the hill-side, made its way east, emptying into the Laguna.”

“I don’t see a laguna!” Again the skeptic surveyed the field of roofs.

“Put down your glasses and close your eyes,” I commanded. “When you open them the houses from here to the bay will have disappeared and the ground will be covered with a carpet of velvety green, dappled here and there by groves of oak trees and relieved by patches of bright poppies.”

“And fields of yellow mustard,” he supplemented.

“No, your imagination is too vivid. The padres brought the mustard seed later. A little south of the present mission,” I continued, “you will see a group of willows bending to drink the crystal waters of the Arroyo de los Dolores, so named because Anza and his



followers discovered it on the day of our Mother of Sorrows, and to the east is the shining laguna.”

“It’s clear as a San Francisco fog,” he laughed. “I’d like to take a look at the old building! Is there a car line?”

“Let’s follow in the footsteps of the padres,” I begged. “They used often to climb this hill and it isn’t very far.”

He looked dubiously down the rugged side and mentally measured the distance from the base to the low tiled roof.

“All right,” he said at last, “if you’ll let me take a ten minutes nap before we start.” He stretched himself at full length on the soft grass and pulled his hat low over his eyes.

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I was glad to be quiet for a time and let my imagination have full sweep. I seemed to see, toiling up the peninsula, a little band of foot-sore travelers, the leathern-clad soldiers on the alert for hostile Indians, the brown-robed friars encouraging the women and children, and the sturdy colonists bringing up the rear with their flocks and herds. At last the little company come to a sparkling rivulet and stoop to drink eagerly of the cool water. The commander examines his chart and nods to the tonsured priest who falls on his knees and raises his voice in thanksgiving. Stretching out his arms in blessing to his flock, he exclaims: "Rest now, my children. Our journey is at an end. Here on the Arroyo de Nuestra Senora de los Dolores, we will establish the mission to our Father San Francisco de Asis."

"If we want to see the old building before lunch time, we shall have to be moving," said a sleepy voice at my elbow.

"Come on, then, I'll be your pathfinder," and we raced down the hill-side until the paved streets reminded us that city manners were expected.

We followed the former course of the Arroyo de los Dolores down Eighteenth to Church street, then turned north. Two, blocks further on I laid a detaining hand on my companion's arm.

"Hold, skeptic," I whispered, "thou art on holy ground."

He looked up at the two-story dwelling house before us, let his eyes wander down the row of modest residences and linger on the pavements where a tattered newsboy was shying stones at a stray cat; then his glance came back to my face with a smile. "My belief in your veracity is unlimited. I uncover." He stood for an instant with bared head. "Just when did this sanctification take place, was it before the fire or—"

"It was on October 9th, 1776," I tried to speak impressively, "the year the Colonies made their Declaration of Independence. The procession began over there at the Presidio," I pointed to the north. "A brown-robed friar carrying an image of St. Francis led the little company of men, women and children over the shifting sand-dunes to this very spot where a rude church had been erected. Its sides were of mud plastered over a palisade wall of willow poles and its ceiling a leaky roof of tule rushes but it was the beginning of a great undertaking and Father Palou elevated the cross and blessed the site and all knelt to render thanks to the Lord for His goodness."

"But I thought you said the church still existed." His eyes again sought the row of dwelling houses.

"This was only for temporary use and later was pulled down. Six years after the fathers arrived, a larger and more substantial church was built one block farther east. But before you see that you must get into the spirit of the past by imagining a square of four



blocks lying between Fifteenth and Seventeenth streets and Church and Guerrero, swept clean of these modern structures and filled with mission buildings. At the time when you New Englanders were pushing the Indians farther and farther into the wilderness, killing and capturing them, we Californians were drawing them to our missions with gifts and friendship. While you were leaving them in ignorance we were teaching them—”

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He stooped to get a full look at my eyes. "I never knew a Spaniard to have eyes the color of violets. Look up your family tree, my dear enthusiast, and I think you will find that you are we."

"I'm not," I declared indignantly. "I'm a Californian. I was born here and even if I haven't Spanish blood in my veins, I have the spirit of the old padres."

"But the spirit has not left a lasting impression. Indeed civilization whether dealt out with friendly hands or thrust upon the natives at the point of the bayonet seems to have been equally poisonous on both sides of the continent."

"True, philosopher, but would you call the work of these padres impressionless, when it has permeated all California? The open-hearted hospitality of the Spaniards is a canonical law throughout the West, and their exuberant spirit of festivity still remains, impelling us to celebrate every possible event, present and commemorative."

We had reached Dolores Street, a broad parked avenue where automobiles rushed by one another, shrieking a warning to the pedestrian. Suddenly I found myself alone. My companion had darted across the crowded street to a little oasis of grass where a mission bell hung suspended on an iron standard.

"It marks 'El Camino Real,'" he reported as he rejoined me.

"The King's Highway," I translated. "It must have been wonderful at this season of the year, for as the padres traveled northward, they scattered seeds of yellow mustard and in the spring a golden chain connected the missions from San Francisco to San Diego. Over there nearer the bay," I nodded toward the east where a heavy cloud of black smoke proclaimed the manufacturing section of the city, "lay the Potrero—the pasture-land of the padres—and the name still clings to the district. Beyond was Mission Cove, now filled in and covered with store-houses, but formerly a convenient landing place for the goods of Yankee skippers who, contrary to Spanish law, surreptitiously traded with the padres."

We turned to the massive facade of the old church, where hung the three bells, of which Bret Harte wrote.

"Bells of the past, whose long forgotten music
Still fills the wide expanse;
Tingeing the sober twilight of the present,
With the color of romance."

As we entered the low arched doorway, we seemed to step from the hurry of the twentieth century into the peace of a by-gone era. Outside, the modern structures crowd upon the low adobe building, staring down upon it with unsympathetic eyes and



begrudging it the very land it stands on, while inside, hand-hewn rafters, massive grey walls, and a red tiled floor slightly depressed in places by years of service, point mutely to the past, to the days when padres and neophytes knelt at the sound of the Angelus. Within still stand the elaborate altars brought a century ago from Mexico, before which Junipero Serra held mass during his last visit to San Francisco. On the massive archway spanning the building, can be seen the dull red scroll pattern, a relic of Indian work.

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“Sing something,” my companion suggested. “It needs music to make the spell complete.”

“It does,” I assented, “but you must stay where you are,” and climbing to a balcony at the end of the building, I concealed myself in the shadow.

He glanced up at the first notes, then sat with bowed head. I filled the old church with an Ave Maria, then another. As I sang, the candles seemed to have been lighted on the gilded altars, and the brown friars and dusky Indians took form in the dim enclosure.

“More,” he urged, but I would not, for I feared that the spell might be broken. So he came up to see why I lingered, and found me mounted on a ladder peering up at the old mission bells and the hand-hewn rafters tied with ropes of plaited rawhide.

My song must have attracted a passer-by, for a voice greeted us as we descended.

“Did you see the bells?” he asked eagerly. “They’re a good deal like some of us old folks, out of commission because of age and disuse, but nevertheless they have their value. One has lost its tongue, another is cracked and the third sags against the side wall, so they’re useless as church bells, but still they seem to speak of the days of the padres and the Indians.”

“Were there many Indians here?” questioned the Bostonian.

“Often more than a thousand. I was born in the shadow of this building, in the year when the Mission was secularized, but my father knew it in its glory and used to tell me many stories about the good old padres.”

Seeing the interest in our faces, the dark eyes brightened and he patted the thick adobe wall affectionately. “This church was only a small part of the Mission in those days. The buildings formed an inner quadrangle and two sides of an outer one, all a beehive of industry. There were the work rooms of the Indians, where blankets and cloth were woven; great vats for trying out tallow and curing hides, and also huge storehouses for grain and other foodstuffs, all built and cared for by the Indians.”

“Quite a change from their lazy roving life,” suggested the Easterner.

“Still the padres were not hard taskmasters,” insisted the stranger. “The work lasted only from four to six hours a day and the evenings were devoted to games and dancing. All were required to attend religious services, however, and at the sound of the Angelus, they gathered within these walls. There was no sleeping through long prayers in those days,” he added with an amused smile, “for a swarthy disciple paced the aisles and with a long pointed stick aroused the nodding ones, or quieted the too hilarious spirits of the small boys.”



“A good example for some of our modern churches,” remarked my companion, as we followed our guide to the altar at the end of the chapel. The light streaming through the mullioned window fell full upon the carved figure of a tonsured monk clad in a loose robe girdled with a cord. “It is our father, St. Francis,” explained the old man. “It was in accordance with his direct wish that this Mission was founded.”

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“Yes?” questioned the skeptic.

“When Father Junipero Serra received orders from Galvez for the establishment of the missions in Alta California, and found that there was none for St. Francis, he exclaimed: ‘And is the founder of our order, St. Francis, to have no mission?’ Thereupon the Visitador replied: ‘If St. Francis desires a mission, let him show us his port,’ and the Saint did!” the old face with its fringe of soft white hair was transformed with religious enthusiasm. “He blinded the eyes of Portola and his men so that they did not recognize Monterey and led them on to his own undiscovered bay. And in spite of the fact that the Mission has been stripped of its lands, we know that it is still under the special protection of St. Francis, for it was not ten years ago that the second miracle was performed.”

“The second miracle!” we wonderingly repeated.

“Yes, it was at the time of the fire of 1906. The heart of San Francisco was a raging furnace. The fireproof buildings melted under the tremendous heat and collapsed as if they had been constructed of lead; the devouring flames swept over the Potrero; they fell upon the brick building next door and crept close to the walls of this old adobe, when suddenly, as if in the presence of a sacred relic, the fire crouched and died at its very doors.”

We passed the altar and the old man crossed himself, while in our hearts we, too, gave thanks for the preservation of this monument of the past.

“You must not go until you have seen the cemetery,” said our guide as we moved toward the entrance, and throwing open a door to the right he admitted us to the neglected graveyard. Here and there a rude cross marked the resting place of an early Indian convert and an almost obliterated inscription on a broken headstone revealed the name of a Spanish grandee. Shattered columns, loosened by the hand of time and overthrown in recent years, lay upon the ground, while great willow and pepper trees spread out protecting arms, as if to shield the silent company from the inroads of modern enterprise. We picked our way along vine-latticed paths, past graves over which myrtle and roses wandered in untrimmed beauty, to where a white shaft marked the resting place of Don Luis Argueello, comandante of the San Francisco Presidio for twenty-three years and the first Mexican governor of California.

“How splendidly strong he looms out of the past,” I said. “His keen insight into the needs of this western outpost and his determined efforts for the best interests of California will forever place him in the front rank of its rulers. I wonder if his young wife, Rafaela, is buried here also?” I drew aside the tangled vines from the near-by headstones. “She was always a little dearer to me than his second wife, the proud Dona Maria Ortega, perhaps because Rafaela belonged pre-eminently to San Francisco. Her father, Ensign Sal, was acting comandante of the Presidio when

Vancouver visited the Coast, and Rafaela and Luis Argueello grew up together in the little adobe settlement.”



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“Go on,” said the skeptic, leaning comfortably against a tree trunk. “This old Mexican governor seems to have had an interesting romance.”

“He wasn’t old,” I protested, “only forty-six when he died. He was a splendid type of a young Spanish grandee, tall and lithe of form, with the dark skin and hair of his race. He combined the freedom born of an out-of-door life with the courtly manners inherited from generations of Spanish ancestry. To Rafaela Sal, watching the soldiers file out of the mud-walled Presidio, it seemed that none sat his horse so straight nor so bravely as did Don Luis Argueello. And at night to the young soldier dozing before the campfire in the forest, the billowy smoke seemed to shape itself into the soft folds of a lace mantilla from which looked out the smiling face of a lovely grey-eyed girl, framed in an exquisite mist of copper-colored hair.

“There was no opposition on the part of the parents to the union of these young people. The elder Argueello loved the sweet Rafaela as if she were his own daughter, and Ensign Sal was proud to claim the splendid young soldier as a son-in-law. So the betrothal was solemnized, but since Don Luis was a Spanish officer, the marriage must await the consent of the king, and forthwith papers were dispatched to the court of Madrid. California was an isolated province in those days and the packet boat, touching on the shore but twice a year, frequently brought papers from Spain dated nine months previous, so the older people affirmed that permission could not be received for two years, while Luis and Rafaela declared that if the king answered at once—and surely he would recognize the importance of haste—word might be received in eighteen months.

“After a year and a half had passed the young people could talk of little besides the expected arrival of the boat with an order from the king. Frequently Luis would climb the hills back of the Presidio where the wide expanse of the ocean could be seen. At last a sail was discovered on the horizon and the little settlement was thrown into a turmoil of excitement. Luis was first at the beach and impatiently watched the ship make its way between the high bluffs that guarded the entrance to the bay, and nose along the shore until it came to anchor in the little cove in front of the Presidio. Had the king’s permission come? he eagerly asked his father, who was running through the papers handed him by the captain. But the elder man shook his head, and Luis turned with lagging steps to tell Rafaela that they must wait another six months. It seemed a long time to the impatient lovers and yet there was much to make the days pass quickly at the Presidio. The door of the commodious sala at the home of the comandante always stood wide open, and almost nightly the feet of the young people which had danced since their babyhood tripped over the floor of the old adobe building. Picnics were planned to the woods near the Mission and frequently longer excursions were undertaken; for El Camino Real was not only, the king’s highway to church and military outposts, but also the royal road to pleasure, and when a wedding or a fiesta was at the end of a journey, no distance was counted too great. Luis watched his betrothed blossom to fuller beauty, fearful lest someone else might steal her away before word from the king should arrive.



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“A year passed, then another. Packet boats came and went every six months, bringing orders to the comandante in regard to the administration of the military forces, concerning the treatment of foreign vessels, and of numerous other matters, but still the king remained silent on the one subject which, to the minds of the two young people, overshadowed all else. Luis rashly threatened to run away with his betrothed, while Rafaela, frightened, reminded him that there was not a priest in California or Mexico who would marry them without the king’s order. And so each time the packet boat entered the harbor their hearts beat with renewed hope and then, disappointed, they watched it disappear through the Gulf of the Farallones, knowing that months would pass before another would arrive.

“Thus six years had gone by since permission had been asked of the king; six interminable years, they seemed to the lovers. Again the packet boat was sighted on the distant horizon. Luis saw the full white sails sweep past the fort guarding the entrance; he heard the salute of the guns and watched the anchor lowered into the water before he made his way slowly down to the shore. It would be the same answer he had received so many times, he was, sure, and he dreaded to put the question again. Ten minutes later he was racing over the sand-dunes to the Presidio, his face radiant and his hand tightly clasping an official document. It had come at last—the order from the king! Where was Rafaela? He hurried to her house and, folding her close in his arms, he whispered that their long waiting was at an end; that she was his as long as life should last.

“But, oh, such a little span of happiness was theirs! Only two brief years, and then the cold hand of death was laid upon the sweet Rafaela.”

For a moment my companion did not move. A bird sang in the tree above us and the wind sent a shower of pink petals over the green mound. Then, stooping, he picked a white Castilian rose from a tangle of shrubbery and laid it at the base of the granite shaft. “In memory of the lovely Rafaela,” he said softly; I unpinned a bunch of fragrant violets from my jacket and placed, them beside his offering, then we silently followed the shaded path to the white picket gate and were once more on the noisy thoroughfare.

“A fitting resting place for the first Mexican governor of California,” he said, glancing back at the heavy facade of the church, “so simple and dignified. Yet if Luis Argueello had lived in New England, we should have considered his house of equal importance with his grave and have placed a bronze tablet on the front, but you Westerners have, so little regard for old—”

“If you would like to see the home of Luis Argueello, I will show it to you. It is at the Presidio.”

“A hopeless mass of neglected ruins, I suppose. But still I should like to see the old walls, if you can find them.”

“Shall we take the Camino Real on foot, just as the old padres used to?”



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“Not if I have my way. I’ll acknowledge that the Spanish friars have left you Californians one legacy that no Easterner can vie with, that is your love of tramping over these hills. I’ve seen streets in San Francisco so steep that teams seldom attempt them, as is evident from the grass between the cobblestones, and yet they are lined with dwellings.”

“Houses that are never vacant,” I assured him. “We like to get off the level, and value our residence real estate by the view it affords.”

Noticing that the sun was now high, my companion drew out his watch. “Luncheon time,” he announced. “Shall it be the Palace or St. Francis hotel?”

“Let’s keep in the spirit of the times and go to a Spanish restaurant,” I suggested, and soon we were on a car headed for the Latin quarter.

“May I replace the violets you left at the Mission?” he asked, as stepping from the car at Lotta’s fountain, we lingered before the gay flower stands edging the sidewalk.

Before I had a chance to reply a fragrant bunch was thrust into his hands by an urchin who announced: “Two for two-bits.”

“Two-bits is twenty-five cents,” I interpreted, seeing the Easterner’s mystified look.

“I’ll take three bunches.” His eyes rested admiringly on the big purple heads as he held out a dollar bill.

“Ain’t you got any real money?” asked the boy, not offering to touch the currency.

Again the man’s hand went to his pocket and drew out some small change, from which he selected a quarter, a dime and three one-cent pieces. The urchin turned the coppers over in his palm, then, diving below the heap of violets, he pulled out several California poppies. “We always give these to Easterners,” he announced as he tucked them in among the violets.

“I wonder how that boy knew I was an Easterner?” the Bostonian reflected as we turned away. Then gently touching the golden petals, he asked: “Where did you get the odd name ‘eschscholtzia’ for this lovely flower?”

“It was given by the French-born poet-naturalist, Chamisso, in honor of the German botanist, Dr. Eschscholz, who came together to San Francisco on a Russian ship in 1816. However, I like better the Spanish names, dormidera—the sleepy flower—or copa de oro—cup of gold,” I added as I pinned the flowers to my coat. The man’s glance wandered around Newspaper Corners, when suddenly his look of surprise told me that he had discovered on this crowded section of commercial San Francisco a duplicate of the old bell hung in front of the Mission San Francisco de Asis.

“We are following El Camino Real from the Mission to the Presidio,” I reminded him.

We turned toward the shopping district, but the lure of the place made our feet lag. We watched the people purchasing flowers at the corner, and the little newsboys drinking from Lotta’s fountain.

“A tablet,” he exclaimed delightedly, examining the bronze plate fastened to the fountain. “I didn’t know you Westerners ever indulged in such things. ‘Presented to San Francisco by Lotta, 1875,’” he read.

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“Little Lotta Crabtree,” I explained, “the sweet singer who bewitched the city at a time when gold was still more plentiful than flowers, and her song was greeted by a shower of the glittering metal flung to her feet by enthusiastic miners. But read the second tablet,” I suggested. “It was placed there with the permission of Lotta.”

“Tetrazzini!” his voice rang with surprise.

“Can you picture this place surging with people as it was on Christmas night five years ago, when Tetrazzini sang to San Francisco?” I asked. “The crowd began to gather long before the appointed time—the wealthy banker from his spacious home on Pacific Heights, the grimy laborer from the Potrero and the little newsboy with the badge of his profession slung over his shoulder. Flushed with excitement, the courted debutante drew back to give her place to a tired factory girl and close to the platform an old Italian, who had tramped all the way from Telegraph Hill, patiently waited to hear the sweet voice of his country woman. ‘Tetrazzini is here,’ they said to one another; Tetrazzini, who had been discovered and adored by the people of San Francisco when, as an unknown singer, she appeared in the old Tivoli opera house. At last she came, wrapped in a rose-colored opera coat, and was greeted with shouts of joy from a quarter of a million throats. She was radiant; smiling and dimpling she waved her handkerchief with the abandonment of a child. The storm of applause increased, rolling up the street to the very summit of Twin Peaks. Suddenly the soft liquid notes of a clear soprano fell upon the air, and instantly the great multitude was wrapped in silence. Out over the heads of the people the exquisite tones floated, mounting upward to the stars. It was the ‘Last Rose of Summer,’ and as she sang her opera coat slipped from her, leaving her bare shoulders and white filmy gown silhouetted against the sombre background. She sang again and again, while the vast throng seemed scarcely to breathe. Then she began the familiar strains of ‘Old Lang Syne,’ and at a sign, two hundred and fifty thousand people joined in the refrain.”

“There is not a city in all the world except San Francisco which could have done such a thing,” enthusiastically rejoined my companion, but the next instant the eccentricities of the place struck him afresh.

“Furs and apple blossoms!” he exclaimed, observing a woman opposite. “What a ridiculous combination!” Then, turning, he scrutinized me from the top of my flower-trimmed hat to the bottom of my full skirt until my cheeks burned with embarrassment. “Why, you have on a thin summer silk, while that woman is dressed for mid-winter!”

“Of course,” I assented. “She’s on the shady side of the street.”

But still his face did not lighten. “We’ve been in the sun all morning,” I continued to explain. “People talk about San Francisco being an expensive place to live in, but really it is the cheapest in the world. If a woman has a handsome set of furs, she wears them and keeps in the shadow, or if her new spring suit has just come home, she puts that on

and walks on the sunny side of the street, being comfortably and appropriately, dressed in either.”



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“Great heavens!” he cried, “what a city!”

We passed through the shopping district and lingered for a moment at the edge of Portsmouth Square. My eyes rested affectionately on the clean-cut lawns and blossoming shrubs. Then I turned to the skeptic, but before I could speak, he had dismissed it with a nod.

“Too modern,” he commented. “Looks as if it had been planted yesterday. Now the Boston Common—”

A rasping discordant sound burst from a near-by store and the Easterner sent me a questioning glance.

“A Chinese orchestra,” I replied. “We are in Oriental San Francisco.”

“That park was doubtless made as a breathing place for this congested Chinese quarter,” he glanced back at the green square. “A good civic improvement.”

“That park is a relic of old Spanish days and one of the most historic spots in San Francisco,” I said severely.

He stopped short. “You don’t mean—I didn’t suppose there was anything old in commercial San Francisco.”

“Portsmouth Square was once the Plaza of the little Spanish town of Yerba Buena, and the public meeting place of the community when there were not half a dozen houses in San Francisco.”

“Let’s go back.” He wheeled about abruptly and started in the direction of the square, but I protested.

“I am hungry and I want some luncheon!” “Then we’ll return this afternoon.” There was determination in his voice.

“We will hardly have time if we visit Luis Argueello’s home at the Presidio,” I objected.

“All right, we’ll take it in tomorrow, then.”

Hastening on, we were soon in the midst of the huddled houses of the Latin quarter. Tucked away between two larger buildings, we found a quaint Spanish restaurant. As we opened our tamales, my companion again referred to Portsmouth Square.

“Tell me about it,” he demanded. “Does it date with the Mission and Presidio?”



“No, it is of later birth, but still of equal interest in the history of San Francisco. The city grew up from three points—the Mission”—I pulled a poppy from my bouquet and placed it on the table to mark the old adobe—the Presidio—I moved a salt cellar to the right of the flower—and the town of Yerba Buena,” this I indicated by a pepper box below the other two. “Roads connected these points like the sides of a triangle and gradually the intervening spaces were filled with houses.”

“Go on.” He leaned back in his chair, but I had already risen. “It will be more interesting to hear the story on the spot tomorrow,” I assured him as I drew on my gloves.

The Presidio

The Spanish Fortifications and the Love Story of Concepcion and Rezanov

The Presidio Past and Present



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We hailed a car marked "Exposition" and were soon climbing the hills to the west. Between the houses, we had fleeting glances of the bay with its freight of vessels. Here waved the tri-color of France, while next to it the black, white and red flag of Germany was flung to the breeze, and within a stone's throw, Johnny Bull had cast out his insignia. At a little distance the ships of Austria and Russia rested side by side, and between the vessels the bustling little ferry-boats were churning up the blue water.

"It is difficult to picture this bay as it was in early Spanish days," I said, "destitute of boats and so full of otter that when the Russians and Alaskan Aleuts began plundering these waters, they had only to lean from the canoes and kill hundreds with their oars."

"But what right had the Russian here? Why didn't the Spaniards stop them? Otter must have brought a good price in those days." There was a ring of indignation in his voice, that told his interest had been aroused.

"San Francisco was helpless. There was not a boat on the bay, except the rude tule canoes of the Indians—'boats of straw'—Vancouver called them, and these were no match for the swift darting bidarkas of the Alaskan natives."

"And Luis Argueello in command!"

"I saw my idol falling, and hastened to assure him that the Comandante had built a boat a short time before, but the result was so disastrous that he never tried it again. The Presidio was in great need of repair and the government at Mexico had paid no heed to the constant requests for assistance, so Comandante Argueello had determined to take matters into his own hands. The peninsula was destitute of large timber, but ten miles across the bay were abundant forests, if he could but reach them. He, therefore, secured the services of an English carpenter to construct a boat, while his men traveled two hundred miles by land, down the peninsula to San Jose, along the contra costa, across the straits of Carquinez and touching at the present location of Petaluma and San Rafael, finally arrived at the spot selected. In the meantime the soldiers were taught to sail the craft, and the first ferryboat, at length started across the bay. But a squall was encountered, the land-loving men lost their heads, and it was only through Argueello's presence of mind that the boat finally reached its destination. For the return trip, the services of an Indian chief were secured, a native who had been seen so often on the bay in his raft of rushes, that the Spaniards called him 'El Marino,' the Sailor, and this name, corrupted into Marin, still clings to the land where he lived. Many trips were made in this ferry, but the comandante's subordinates were less successful than he, for one, being swept out to sea, drifted about for a day or two until a more favorable wind and tide brought him back to San Francisco. The Spaniards called the land where the trees were felled 'Corte Madera,' the place of hewn-wood, and a little town on the site still bears the name."



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“But what became of the boat? You said—”

“Governor Sola was furious that any one should dare to build a boat without his orders. He called it ‘insubordination.’ How did he know what was the real purpose of the craft? Might it not have been built to aid the Russians in securing otter or to help the ‘Boston Nation’ in their nefarious smuggling?”

My companion straightened with interest, “The Boston Nation?”

“Yes, even in those days the Yankee skippers, who occasionally did a little secret trading with the padres, told such marvelous stories of Boston that the Spaniards thought it must be a nation instead of a little town. In fact, the United States does not seem to have been considered of much importance by Spain, for when the American ship ‘Columbia’ was expected to touch on this coast it was referred to as ‘General Washington’s vessel.’”

“Go on with your boat story,” a smile played about the corners of his mouth. “What became of the craft?”

“The Governor ordered it sent to Monterey and commanded Argueello to appear before him. The Comandante was surprised to have his work thus suddenly interrupted but hastened to obey orders. On the way his horse stumbled and fell, injuring his rider’s leg so seriously that when Argueello reached Monterey, he was hardly able to stand. Without stopping to have his injury dressed, he limped into the Governor’s presence, supporting himself on his sword.

“How dared you build a launch and repair your Presidio without my permission?” exclaimed the exasperated Governor.

“‘Because I and my soldiers were living in hovels, and we were capable of bettering our condition,’ was the reply.

“Governor Sola, not noted for his genial temper, raised his cane with the evident intention of using it, when he noticed that the young Comandante had drawn himself erect and was handling the hilt of his naked sword.

“‘Why did you do that?’ the Governor demanded.

“‘Because I was tired of my former position, and also because I do not intend to be beaten without resistance,’ Argueello answered.

“For a moment the Governor was taken back, then he held out his hand. ‘This is the bearing of a soldier and worthy of a man of honor,’ he said. ‘Blows are only for cowards who deserve them.’”



“Argueello took the outstretched hand and from this time he and the Governor were close friends. But the boat proved so useful at Monterey, that it was never returned.”

The Jeweled Tower of the Exposition came into view. “So it is to be the three months’ old World’s Fair, after all, instead of the home of the first Mexican Governor of California?”

But I did not rise. “The Presidio is just beyond,” I explained. Then seeing him glancing admiringly at the green domes: “Perhaps you would rather—”

“No,” he answered me, “I’m an antiquary and I want to see the old adobe house.”



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Leaving the car at the Presidio entrance, we passed down the shaded driveway and along the winding path that led to the old parade ground. “This military reservation covers about the same ground as the old Spanish Presidio,” I explained. “At that time, however, it was a sweep of tawny sand-dunes, for the Spaniards had neither the ability nor the money to beautify the place. After it came into possession of the Americans, lupins were scattered broadcast as a first means of cultivation and for a time the undulating hills were veiled in blue. Later, groves of pine and eucalyptus trees together with grass and flowers were planted, until now it may be regarded as one of the parks of San Francisco. This was the original plaza of the old Spanish Presidio,” I continued, as we emerged onto the quadrangle, “and it was then lined with houses as it is today, only at that time they were crude adobe structures. Surrounding these was a wall fourteen feet high, made of huge upright and horizontal saplings plastered with mud, and as a further means of protection, a wide ditch was dug on the outside. Here Luis Argueello was Comandante for twenty-three years.”

Our eyes wandered over the substantial structures with their well-trimmed gardens and rested on a low rambling building opposite, protected from the gaze of the curious by an old palm and guarded by a quaint Spanish cannon. The building’s simple outlines, even at a distance, bespoke it as of a different generation from its more aggressive neighbors, even though its red-tiled roof had been replaced by sombre brown shingles, and its crumbling walls replastered. We crossed over the parade ground, and peering within, found that the building had been converted into an officers’ club house.

“Did you see the bronze tablet on the front?” I demanded.

“Yes,” he admitted rather sheepishly, turning to examine the deep window embrasure that showed the width of the walls.

“There’s an atmosphere of romance about the old place—”

“And well there may be,” I broke in, “for it was here that Rafaela Sal came as a bride, and that Rezanov met Luis Argueello’s beautiful sister, Concepcion, and a love story began which may well take place with that of Miles Standish and Priscilla.”

“Rezanov,” he repeated, searching his memory. “I recall that there was a romance connected with his visit to San Francisco but the details have escaped me. Please sit down on this bench and tell me the story just as if I had never heard it before.”

“More than a century ago there dwelt in this old adobe house a beautiful maiden,” I began. “Her father was Comandante of the Presidio, ‘el Santo,’ the people termed him, because of his goodness. Concepcion, or Concha, as she was affectionately called by her parents, was only fifteen years old when our story begins—a tall, slender girl with masses of fine black hair and the fair Castilian skin, inherited from her mother. So lovely was she that many a caballero had already sung at her grating, but she would

listen to none of them. Her lover would come from over the sea, she declared, someone who could tell her about the wide outside world.



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“Then you will die unmarried,” said her mother, kissing the soft cheek, ‘for travelers seldom come as far as San Francisco.’

“A ship! a ship!” sounded a cry from the plaza. A vessel had been sighted off Cantil Blanco, the first foreign ship seen since Vancouver’s visit fourteen years before.

“It is the Russian expedition which Spain has ordered us to treat courteously,” exclaimed Don Luis, bursting into the house, his face aglow with excitement. ‘Since father is in Monterey and I am acting Comandante, I must receive these strangers,’ he continued as he threw his serape over his shoulders, his eyes flashing with his first taste of command.

“Be careful,” cautioned his mother, ‘we have had no word from Europe for nine months and the last packet boat from Mexico brought a rumor of war with Russia.’

“But the foreign vessel had come only with friendly intentions. The Russian Chamberlain Rezanov, in charge of the Czar’s northwestern possessions, had found a starving colony at Sitka and had brought a cargo of goods to the more productive southland with the hope of exchanging it for foodstuffs. To be sure, he knew the Spanish law strictly forbidding trade with foreign vessels, but it seemed the only means of saving his famishing people and he trusted much to his skill in diplomacy.

“A few hours later, Concha, on the qui vive with excitement, saw her brother approaching with a little company of men, among whom was a tall well-built Russian officer, whose keen eyes seemed to take in every detail of the little settlement.

“Don Luis conducted his guests to the old adobe building, draped in pink Castilian roses, and into the cool sala, which, although provided with slippery horse-hair chairs and plain whitewashed walls ornamented with pictures of the Virgin and saints, was a pleasing contrast to the ship’s cabin. Here he presented his guests to his mother, a woman whose face still reflected much of the beauty of her youth in spite of her cares which had come in the rearing of her thirteen children. Beside her stood Concepcion. Her long drooping lashes swept her cheeks, but when she raised her eyes in greeting Rezanov saw that they were dark and joyous. He was a widower of many years, a man of forty-two, who had given little thought to women during his wandering life, but now he found himself keenly alive to the charms of this radiant girl. Simple and artless in her manners, yet possessing the early maturity of her race, she set her guests at ease and entertained them with stories of life on the great ranchos, while her mother was busy with household duties.



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“It was ten days before Don Jose Argueello returned from Monterey and in the meantime no business could be transacted. During these days Rezanov saw much of Concepcion, for there was dancing every afternoon at the home of the Comandante and frequent picnics into the neighboring woods. It was not long before the Russian learned that Concepcion was not only La Favorita of the Presidio, but also of all California, for although born at San Francisco, she had spent much time in her childhood at Santa Barbara, where her father had been Comandante. With a chain of missions and ranchos extending from San Diego to San Francisco, there was much interchange of hospitality, and Concha was a favorite guest at all fiestas. So the dark eyed Spanish girl had danced her way into the heart of many a youth as she was now doing into that of this powerful Russian.

“Often he would stand in the shadow of the deep window casement and watch her lithe young figure bend in the graceful borego, occasionally catching a glance from beneath the sweeping lashes that would send his blood surging through his veins and make him almost forget the purpose of his voyage. Sometimes he would draw her aside to talk of his hope that the Spaniards would furnish him bread-stuffs for his starving colony and he marveled at her keen insight into the affairs of state, while his heart beat the quicker for her warm sympathy. Often their talk would wander to other things and as she occasionally flashed a smile in his direction, showing a row of pearly teeth, his blood tingled and he thought that the flush on her cheek was not unlike the pink Castilian rose that was nightly tucked in the soft coils of her shadowy hair. At times he imagined her clad in rich satin, with a rope of pearls about her delicate throat, and as he drew the picture he saw her as a star among the ladies of the Russian court.

“When Don Jose Argueello returned, Rezanov asked him for the hand of his daughter in marriage, but the Comandante indignantly refused. Although liking the distinguished Russian for himself, he would not listen to such—a proposal. Give his daughter to a foreigner and a heretic! Never! It was not to be thought of for an instant. Concha must be sent away. She must not see this Russian again! He would have her taken to the home of his brother, who lived near the Mission, until the foreign ship was out of the bay. While the father talked, the mother hurried to the padres to beg the good priests to forbid such a union.

“But Concha was no longer the docile girl of a month ago. She was a woman and her heart was in the keeping of this sturdy Russian. She would have him or none, and nothing the padres or her parents could say would change her. Don Jose had never crossed his daughter before, and now as she flung her arms about his neck and begged for her happiness he weakened. After all, this Russian was a splendid fellow, and perhaps it might be an advantage to Spain,



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rather than a detriment to have an ally at Petrograd. In the end the pleading of Concha and the arguments of Rezanov won. Comandante Argueello yielded and the betrothal was solemnized, but there were many obstacles before the marriage could be consummated. The permission of the Czar of Russia and the King of Spain must be obtained, and this would take time, as well as involve a long and dangerous trip. But nothing could daunt the spirits of the lovers. Concepcion's brother, Luis, had already waited six years for permission to marry Rafaela Sal and if Rezanov traveled with haste he could return in two. He must go first to Petrograd to ask the consent of the Czar and then to the Court of Madrid to promote more friendly relations between the two countries, finally returning to claim his bride, by way of Mexico. But before he could start on his journey, his starving Alaskan colony must be provided for, and after considerable discussion, arrangements were made for an interchange of commodities, and the hold of the Russian ship, 'Juno' was packed with foodstuffs for the Sitkans, while the ladies at the Presidio were resplendent in soft Russian fabrics and the padres were rejoicing in new cooking utensils for their large Indian family.

"At length the 'Juno' weighed anchor and the white sails filled with the afternoon breeze. As the Russians came opposite Cantil Blanco, the fort which had scowled so menacingly upon them on their entrance forty-four days before, now smiled with friendly faces. There was much waving of hats and many shouts of farewell from the little group on the shore, but Rezanov saw only the figure of a tall graceful girl with the soft folds of a mantilla billowing about her head and shoulders and heard only the murmur of love from the rosy lips. 'Two years,' he whispered back to her, as the ship passed out through the Gulf of the Farallones and became but a speck on the sunset sky.

"The two years passed and still there was no sign of the returning vessel. Luis Argueello had been married to the lovely Rafaela and a little son had come to bless their household, and yet Concepcion looked out over the ocean watching for the white sail of a foreign ship. The sweet grey eyes of Luis' young wife were closed in death and Concha's heart and hands went out in sympathetic love and deeds to the stricken family, all the while trying to still in her own breast the fear that a like fate had overtaken her loved one. The verdant hills were again streaked with golden poppies and once more turned to tawny brown and still no ship nor word came from over the sea.

"It was eight or ten years before even a rumor of the fate of her lover reached Concepcion, and not until she met the Englishman, Sir George Simpson, twenty-five years after Rezanov sailed out of San Francisco bay, did she learn the details of his death. It was almost winter when, leaving Alaska, he crossed the ocean and began his perilous trip through Siberia. Frequently drenched to the skin and undergoing terrible privations, he traveled for thousands of miles on horseback, now lying at some wayside inn burning with fever and again pushing on until he dropped prostrate at the next village. A fall from his horse added to his already serious condition, which resulted in

his death in the little village of Krasnoiark, and he lies now buried beneath the snows of Siberia.



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“Although many sought her hand in marriage, Concepcion remained faithful to her Russian lover. There being no convent for women in the country at that time, she donned the grey habit of the ‘Third Order of St. Francis in the world,’ devoting her life to the care of the sick and the teaching of the poor. Later when a Dominican convent was established,” I added, rising, “she became not only its first nun, but also its Mother Superior.”

“A romance that may well take a place with such world-famed love stories as those of Abelard and Heloise; and Alexandre and Thaeis. I should like to make a pilgrimage to her grave,” he added as we left the old adobe house.

“You can,” I replied. “It’s tucked away in a corner of the Benicia Cemetery, marked by a marble slab carved with her name and a simple cross.”

We entered a grove of eucalyptus trees, which now and again divided, giving marvelous views of the bay and the Marin shore.

But my companion’s mind still dwelt on the story he had heard. “So Concepcion suffered in the uncertainty of hope and despair for ten years,” he said, “but ten months of it brought me to the limit of endurance. Do you think if Rezanov had returned and Concepcion had married him and gone to Petrograd she would have been happy?”

“Of course she would.”

“Still Petrograd is a cold, dreary place compared to California.”

“But what difference would that make? A woman would give up everything and count it no sacrifice for the man she loved.”

“And you said only yesterday—”

“Oh, but that was different,” I assured him, my cheeks burning under his gaze.

“Rezanov loved California. He thought it so wonderful that he wanted it for a Russian province, and he would have brought Concepcion back to visit—”

“Boston is nearer than Petrograd and not so cold. Don’t you think you could teach me to love California, too?”

“Perhaps,” I acknowledged. Then anxious to turn the conversation, I asked: “Would you like to see the location of the old Spanish fort?” He nodded and we took the road leading to the present Fort Point. “I can’t show you the exact location,” I confessed, “because the United States cut down the bold promontory, Cantil Blanco, in order to place the present fortification close to the water’s edge, but if you will use your imagination and picture a white cliff towering a hundred feet above the water at the point where Fort Winfield Scott now stands, you will see the entrance to the bay as it was in



Spanish days. Here was located the old fort, called Castilla San Joaquin, which guarded the harbor for many years. Made of adobe in the shape of a horseshoe, so perishable that the walls crumbled every time a shot was fired, still it answered its purpose, as it was never needed for anything but friendly salutes, and even these were at times, perforce, omitted. The Russian, Kotzebue, states that when he entered the harbor he



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was impressed by the old fort and the soldiers drawn up in military array, but wondered that no return was made to his salute. A little later, however, the omission of the courtesy was explained when a Spanish officer boarded the vessel and asked to borrow sufficient powder for this purpose. Moreover, Robinson tells us that frequently during the afternoon's siesta a foreign ship would pass the fort, drop anchor in Yerba Buena Cove, and spend several days in the bay before the Presidio officers would know of its presence. But this was after the time of Luis Argueello."

One by one the palaces of light in the Exposition grounds below us burst into radiance. The Horticultural dome turned to a wonderful iridescent bubble and the Tower of Jewels caught and reflected the light that played upon it. Wide bands of color streaked the sombre sky, transforming the clouds to shades of violet, yellow and rose. "The rainbow colors of promise," he said gently as he drew closer. "I shall take them as a message of hope that I shall win the love of the woman who is dearer to me than all else in life!"

The Plaza

A Chinese Restaurant. Yerba Buena and the Reminiscences of a Forty-Niner

The Plaza and its Echoes

"Be careful," I warned, "you'll get your feet wet."

We stood on the corner of Montgomery and Commercial Streets, having carried out our resolution of the day previous to continue our search for old landmarks. The Bostonian moved uncomfortably under the warmth of the noonday sun, and glanced down at the dry, glaring pavement; then he stooped to turn up his trousers.

"All right," he announced, "is it an arroyo or has the hose used in putting out 'the fire' suddenly burst?"

"Neither. The arroyo was a block further south. It ran down what is now Sacramento Street, and you ought to know enough about the fire to realize that we couldn't use our fire hose, because the earthquake broke the water mains."

"Then there was an earthquake!" He shot an amused glance at me. "You're the first Californian I've heard acknowledge it."

"Oh yes, there was an earthquake—but it didn't do much damage," I hastened to add. "Just 'knocked down a few chimneys and rickety buildings that the city was going to pull down anyway. It was the fire that destroyed the city."



“So Mother Nature was just favoring ’Frisco by lending a helping hand to the city officials,” he laughed. “Well, you see I’m prepared for the deluge.” He indicated his upturned trousers. “But if it isn’t an arroyo—”

“It’s the bay,” I explained. “It used to touch the shore about where we are standing, forming a little inlet called Yerba Buena Cove.”

“But,” objected the man, mentally measuring the distance down the straight paved street to where the slender shaft-like tower of the Ferry Building broke the sky line, “it must be seven blocks from here to the present waterfront, two thousand feet at least.”

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“Yes, fully that,” I agreed. “A large part of the business section of San Francisco stands on made-land. The water along the shore, here at Montgomery street, was very shallow, and at the time of the gold rush, when seven or eight hundred vessels were waiting in the bay to discharge their freight and passengers, a corporation of energetic Americans built a long wharf from here to the deep water, where the ships were anchored. Look down Commercial Street to the Ferry Building and, instead of the houses on either side, imagine it open to the water. Then you will see Central Wharf as it was in ‘forty-nine.’”

“Central Wharf!” The name had caught his interest.

“Yes, it was called that from the one you have in Bost.”

“Bost?” he repeated, mystified. “Bost?”

“Yes, Bost!” I answered. “You called our, city ‘Frisco, not five minutes ago, so why shouldn’t I—”

“I beg your pardon,” he said humbly. “I will never offend in that way again.”

“But the building of the wharves and the filling in of the waterfront belong to a later time and we are back in Spanish days. When Vancouver landed he tells us that he cast anchor within a small inlet surrounded by green hills, on which herds and cattle were grazing. Historians say that his ship lay about where the Ferry Building now stands and that the crew put off for the shore in small boats. This place was a waste of sand-dunes and chaparral but the Englishmen were refreshed by the cool waters of the arroyo and spent a pleasant morning shooting quail and grouse.”

“Quail, grouse and chaparral,” he repeated, as his eyes traveled up and down the solidly built blocks and rested on the pedestrians hurrying in and out of the buildings. “Let’s take a look at the bed of the arroyo.”

We paused at the corner and for a moment watched the car laboriously climb the Sacramento Street hill and disappear over the crest; then we turned for another look at the mass of buildings now resting on the solid ground which had taken the place of the shining waters of Yerba Buena Cove.

“It was about here,” I announced, “that the arroyo opened out into the Laguna Dulce, a little fresh water pool where Richardson’s Indians delighted to take a cold plunge on leaving their steaming temescal.”

“Richardson? Hardly a Spanish name!”

“No, but a Spaniard by naturalization and marriage. He was an Englishman who had come to the coast in the whaler ‘Orion,’ and being fascinated by the country and the



carefree Spanish life, had married a lovely little senorita, the daughter of Lieutenant Martinez, later Comandante of the Presidio. Richardson settled on a ranch at Sausalito and in 1835, when Governor Figueroa decided to establish a commercial city on the shore of Yerba Buena Cove, he appointed as harbor master, this Englishman, who was already carrying on a small business with the Yankee skippers, and the future town was made a port of entry for all vessels trading up and down the coast. Richardson built the first house in the little settlement of Yerba Buena, afterwards San Francisco.”



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“Since this is an historic pilgrimage, we must take a look at the spot where the first house stood. Is it far?”

“Only a few blocks,” I assured him. “But we shall have to venture into the heart of Chinatown.”

We made our way up Sacramento Street, where the straight-lined grey business blocks gave way to fantastic pagoda-like buildings gaily decorated in green, red, and yellow. Bits of carved ivory, rich lacquer ware and choice pieces of satsuma and cloisonne appeared in the windows. In quiet, padded shoes, the sallow-faced, almond-eyed throng shuffled by, us; here a man with a delicate lavender lining showing below his blue coat, there a slant-eyed woman with her sleek black hair rolled over a brilliant jade ornament, leading by the hand a little boy who looked as if he had stepped out of a picture book with his yellow trousers and pink coat.

We turned to the right at Grant Avenue, passing a building conspicuous on account of its elaborately carved balconies hung with yellow lanterns and ornamented with plants growing in large blue and white china pots. The Bostonian looked curiously at the Orientals lounging about the door, then his face brightened as he read the words, “Chop Suey.”

“It’s a Chinese restaurant,” he exclaimed delightedly. “Let’s go in for a cup of tea, as soon as we have taken a look at your historic landmarks.”

On the northwest corner of Grant Avenue and Clay Street, we paused before a dingy four-story brick building on whose sides were pasted long strips of red paper ornamented with quaint Chinese characters. I secretly wished that the building had been designed as a gay pagoda with bright colored, turned-up eaves like many of those in Chinatown and that its windows had displayed the choice embroideries and carved ivories of some of its neighbors, but as we peered through the glass, we saw only utilitarian articles for the coolie Chinaman.

“Rather a sordid setting for my story,” I bemoaned. “The first house in commercial San Francisco stood here. It was only a sail stretched around four pine posts, but two years later was replaced by a picturesque, red-tiled adobe, so commodious that the Spaniards called it the Casa Grande. I am afraid the building now occupying the spot where the second house stood will be equally disappointing,” I said ruefully, as we recrossed the street to where a Chinese butcher and vegetable vender was displaying his wares. We gazed curiously at the dangling pieces of dried fish, strings of sausage-like meat, unfamiliar vegetables, lichee nuts and sticks of green sugar cane.

“Somewhat different from the silks, satins and laces displayed on this spot by Jacob Leese in Spanish days,” I reflected. “He was a Bostonian, who like Richardson had

become an adopted son of California and settled at Yerba Buena for the purpose of trading with the American vessels.”

“This must have been a lively business center.” The man raised his voice above the rumble of the wagons and cars. “Two little houses in the midst of a sea of sand-dunes and no settlement nearer than the Mission.”



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“Oh, it didn’t take the American long to make things hum,” I assured him. “He arrived here on July second. Two days later he had built a house and was entertaining all the Spaniards from miles around, at a grand Fourth of July celebration.”

“Quick work even for a Yankee,” laughed my companion. “But rather hard on his English neighbor, I should think. Did Richardson attend?”

“Of course he did! Delivered the invitations, too! Leese was busy building his house, so the Englishman, in his little launch, called at all the ranchos and settlements about the bay and invited the Spaniards to come to Yerba Buena for a Fourth of July fandango.”

We retraced our steps and a few doors beyond entered the gay, balconied restaurant, in quest of a cup of tea served in Oriental style. Climbing the steep stairs, we passed the first floor where laborers were being served with steaming bowls of rice; then mounted to the more aristocratic level where we were seated at elaborately carved teakwood tables, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. While waiting for our tea, we stepped onto the balcony which we had regarded with so much interest from the street. Above us hung the gorgeous lanterns, swaying like bright bubbles in the breeze, and below moved the silent blue-coated throng.

“So there was a Fourth of July celebration here even in Spanish times?” said the man. “Somewhat prophetic of the American days to come, wasn’t it?”

We caught a glint of color in the street and leaned far over the balcony to watch a violet-coated Chinese girl thread her way among the sombre crowd.

“It must have been just below us that the early festivities were held,” I suggested. “Leese’s house was not large enough to accommodate his guests, so a big marquee surmounted by Mexican and American flags, and gaily decorated with bunting, was spread about where the street now runs. Can’t you picture it all? The dainty little señoritas in their silk and satin gowns, with filmy mantillas thrown over their heads and shoulders, and the men not less gorgeous in lace-trimmed velvet suits and elaborate serapes. I can almost hear the applause and the booming of the cannon that followed General Vallejo’s glowing tribute to Washington, and see the graceful Spanish dancers as they assembled for the evening ball. It was doubtless at this time that Leese met General Vallejo’s fascinating sister, whom he married after a short and business-like courtship.”

“Short, and she a Californian?” He sent me an amused glance.

“Perhaps Leese thought delay dangerous,” I suggested, “for Señorita Maria Rosalia was one of the belles of the new military outpost at Sonoma and more than one gaily clad caballero was suing for her hand.”



“No wonder the American pushed the matter,” laughed my companion. “Did many Boston men marry Spanish Senoritas?”

“Nearly all who came to the Coast,” I answered. “The California women were among the most fascinating in the world and held a peculiar charm for these sturdy New Englanders.”



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“I can understand that,” he said, bending for a better look at my face. “But what could the dainty senioritas see in these crude; raw-boned Yankees?”

“Just what any woman would see,” I declared. “Men of sterling character, working against terrible odds, with that courage which does not know the word failure. They saw men of perseverance, energy and brains who were bringing into the country the indomitable spirit of New England.”

“I am glad you have a good word for the early Yankees,” he said, “and I wish your enthusiasm extended to a later generation.”

He turned toward me and I felt the telltale color sweep my cheeks as I became conscious that I was thinking less of Leese and his compatriots than of the Bostonian at my side.

“It wasn’t the New England spirit,” he declared, “that gave these early settlers the strength and determination to succeed. It was the women who had faith in them. A man can accomplish anything if the woman he loves—” My companion had moved close to my side, and his voice was low as he bent over me. “Little girl,” he began, “last year in Boston when you came into my life—”

The harsh jangle of a Chinese orchestra broke the dull murmur of the street and in an instant the little balcony was crowded with gazers eager to catch a glimpse of the musicians through the windows opposite.

My companion and I moved aside for the new corners and turned again toward the interior. Through the open door we could see the waiter placing steaming cups of tea upon the table we had deserted, and re-entering the room, we seated ourselves in the big carved arm-chairs. Sipping the delicious beverage, we glanced toward the other tables, where groups of Chinamen were talking in a curious jargon and dexterously handling the thin ebony chop-sticks. On the wide matting-covered couches extending along the sidewalls, lounged sallow-faced Orientals, while in and out among the diners noiselessly moved the waiters, balancing on their heads, large brown straw trays. Snowy rice cakes, shreds of candied cocoanut, preserved ginger and brown paper-shell nuts with the usual Chinese eating utensils were placed before us. We tried the slender chop-sticks with laughable failure and then, declaring that fingers were made first, we had no further trouble. We took a farewell look at the gilt carved screens and long banners, which in quaint Chinese characters wished us health and happiness. Then following our smiling attendant to the door, we were bowed down the stairway. A Chinaman leaned over the railing and called the amount of our bill to the attendant on the second floor, who like an echo took it up and sent it on to the main entrance, where we settled our account.



Again on the sidewalk, we mingled with the Oriental throng whose expressionless yellow faces gave no hint of joy or sorrow. At the corner we turned east and made our way toward Portsmouth Square. I paused and let my eyes run over my companion, from his immaculate linen collar to his well-polished shoes.



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“You’ll look sadly out of place here,” I warned. “No artist would ever take such a well-groomed person for a model, nor would you be suspected of belonging to the great army of the unemployed.”

“Are they the only classes allowed? Then I speak now for the purchasing right of your portrait.”

“Oh, I’ll pose very well as the ‘Amelican’ teacher of those little Chinese butterflies fluttering after that kite. Aren’t they attractive in their lavender, pink, and blue sahms?” I said, as we seated ourselves on the bench.

“To be honest, to be kind, to earn a little, to spend a little less,” he read from the face of the fountain standing against a clump of trees whose soft foliage drooped caressingly over it. “Why, that’s from Stevenson’s Christmas sermon. Look at that unappreciative brute! He drank without reading a word!” exclaimed the man indignantly.

“Yes, but he feels the better for coming here. He received the refreshment most needed and that is what Stevenson would have wished. Some other may need and will receive the spiritual help.”

“Why is it here?” he asked.

“Because Stevenson loved this place and came often to sit on the benches and study the wrecked and drifting lives of the men who lounged in the square.”

“And the gilded ship on top with its full blown sails—that must suggest his Treasure Island, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, and also the Manila Galleon, that splendid treasure-ship laden with silk, wax and spices from the Philippines and China, which once each year made its landfall near Cape Mendocino and followed the line of the coast down to Mexico.”

He leaned with arm outstretched along the back of the bench and surveyed the park.

“This, you said, was the old Spanish Plaza. What was here then?”

“At first just a sweep of tawny sand-dunes, surrounded by scrub oak and chaparral.” I dropped my eyes to the gravel walk, that I might shut out the emerald green lawns, and flowering shrubs. “Over the shifting hillocks wandered a little minty vine bearing a delicate white and lavender flower not unlike your trailing arbutus. It was from the medicinal qualities of this plant that the little settlement was named Yerba Buena, the good herb. Over there on the northwest corner where that dingy Chinese restaurant now floats the flag of Chop Suey stood the old adobe Custom House, the first building erected on the Plaza, and it was in front of this that the Stars and Stripes were run up



when General Montgomery, who had arrived in the sloop-of-war Portsmouth, took possession in the name of the United States.”

“So that is where the square got its name—from the ship ‘Portsmouth?’” His voice rang with the joy of discovery.

“Yes, but the new name never completely replaced the old. We love the terms which come to us from Spanish days, and so, to many of us, this is still the Plaza.”

“I presume there was a great outcry when Montgomery pulled down the Mexican flag and ran up the American. But I understand the country was helpless.”

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“Yes, it was poorly fortified, and the Californians had known for some time that Mexico was losing its hold, so the event was not unexpected. But there was no flag to pull down for the receiver of customs, realizing that resistance was useless, had packed the Mexican flag in a trunk with his official papers for safe keeping, so without opposition General Montgomery marched with seventy men accompanied by fife and drum from the waterfront to the Plaza, and raised the Stars and Stripes on the vacant flag pole. Thus the country came into the possession of the Americans and our historic pilgrimage is at an end,” I concluded, rising.

But my companion seemed loath to leave the place. We sauntered by dark-eyed Italian girls lolling on the benches, shaggy bearded old sailors, whose scarred faces told of fierce battles with the elements, and stopped to examine the plaster casts presented for our inspection by a weary-eyed street vender. At a distance, a laughing gypsy girl in a white waist and much beruffled red plaid skirt was enticing the crowd to cross her hand with silver that she might tell their fortunes.

“What need have we for gypsies?” he demanded pulling me down on a bench. “I’ll, read your palm.”

“Can you tell fortunes?” I questioned as I drew off my glove.

“I can tell yours,” he declared straightening out my fingers in his big strong hand, and examining the lines.

“He’s a tall dark man, wearing glasses—”

Instinctively I looked up into the uncovered brown eyes, then dropped mine in confusion as I met his laughing gaze.

“Only when he reads,” added the Bostonian, holding on to my fingers, as I tried to withdraw my hand.

An angry voice broke the silence and we sprang to our feet to see an old man shaking his fist in the face of a young Irish policeman.

“You let me alone!” he shouted. “You let me alone!”

For a moment the officer hesitated. Then he seized the old man by the collar. “Come along quietly! There ain’t no use making a howl. There’s a vagrancy law in this city and I’ll show you it ain’t to be sniffed at. I’ve been watching you ever since I’ve been on this beat and you ain’t done nothing but sit around this Plaza.”

“And ain’t I a right to sit ’round this Plaza?” The man pulled himself free and again defied the officer of the law with a clenched fist. “Didn’t I help make it? When you were playing with a rattle in your crib over in Dublin, I was a-stringing up a man to the eaves



of the old Custom House over there on the corner. And now you try to arrest me—me a Vigilante of '51—” His fury choked him, and with a quick turn of the hand, the officer again had him by the collar. But the old man wrenched himself loose.

“You keep your hands off me.” He raised his angry voice in warning. Then drawing a bundle of papers from his pocket he thrust them into the officer’s face. “Look at that—and that—and that—biggest business blocks in San Francisco. If I choose to wear a loose shirt and sit ’round the Plaza it isn’t any business of yours. In the good old days of forty-nine—”



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I touched the Bostonian on the arm. "Let's go to the Exposition," I suggested. "We've seen everything here."

"There's no need to hurry! We've all the afternoon before us." He edged a little closer to the old man, about whom a crowd was gathering.

"In the good old days of forty-nine," rang out again and I glanced nervously at my companion. "We didn't have any dipper-dapper policemen making mistakes." He snapped his fingers in the officer's face. "We had good red-shirted miners who knew their business."

The policeman moved uneasily and handed back the papers. "I guess they're all right," he acknowledged. "The law doesn't seem to touch you."

"Touch me! Well, I guess not!" The officer moved off and the old man returned to his bench. Before I realized my companion's intention, we were seated beside the miner. He was still muttering maledictions on the head of the Irish policeman.

"The scoundrel!" He dug his stick into the gravel path. "Had the nerve to arrest me! Me, who strung up Jenkins in the first Vigilante Committee, and Casey and Cora in the second."

"You must have come here in early days," remarked the Bostonian.

"Early days," echoed the miner, "well, I guess I did. I'm a forty-niner." He straightened himself proudly and looked to see the effect of his words.

"I think we had better go." Again I touched the Antiquary's arm but he gave no heed to my signal.

"There must have been some stirring times here in the days of the gold rush."

"You bet there were," agreed the forty-niner, "and the entire history of San Francisco was made around this Plaza. Here were built the first hotel, the first school-house, the first bank; within a stone's throw the first Protestant sermon was preached, the first newspaper was printed and the first post office was opened. It was through the Plaza that Sam Brannan ran with a bottle of yellow dust in one hand, waving his hat with the other and shouting, 'Gold! gold! from the American River!' It was here that the big gambling houses sprang up, where fortunes were made and lost in a night, and here the first Vigilance Committee met and executed justice." The old man paused for breath.

I was on the edge of the bench ready for flight. All my good work of the last two days was rapidly being undermined. I heard again the skeptic's contemptuous tone of yesterday. "It's either before the fire" or "in the good old days of forty-nine."

“We—we must go,” I stammered, “it’s getting very late.” The Bostonian looked at his watch. “Not three o’clock yet.” He leaned back comfortably. “You ought to be interested in this. Your grandfather was a forty-niner.”

I looked at him searchingly. I ought to be interested! I, who cherished every memory of pioneer days! I, who had bitten my lips a dozen times that afternoon, and was glorying in the tact and strength of mind which had avoided this period of our history!



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The miner, apparently aware of my presence for the first time, sent me a piercing glance from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "So your grandfather—"

"He wasn't exactly a forty-niner," I acknowledged. "He arrived outside the Heads the night of December thirty-first but there was a heavy fog and the vessel didn't get inside until the next morning."

"Hard luck," sympathized the old man, "coming near to being a forty-niner and missing it."

"But it's practically the same thing," persisted the Bostonian. "Only a few hours."

"The same thing!" scornfully repeated the miner. "There's as much difference as between Christmas and Fourth of July. A forty-niner's a forty-niner, and a man that came in fifty—well, he might as well have come in sixty or seventy, or even in the twentieth century. It's the forty-niner that counts in this community." He drew himself up proudly. Then plunging his hand deep into his pocket, drew out a nugget.

"Picked that up off my first claim," he explained, "but the dirt didn't pan out so well. I've carried it in my pocket all these years, just for the sentiment of the thing, I suppose. Many a time I was tempted to throw it on a table in the El Dorado, but I hung on to it."

"The El Dorado?" questioned the Easterner.

"Yes, one of the big gambling places here on the Plaza. Everybody took a chance in those days, even some of the preachers. You met all your friends there, and heard the best music and the latest news."

"Did they gamble with nuggets?" my companion led the old man on.

"Well, I guess they did! and gold dust in piles. The few children in town used to pan out the dirt of the Plaza in front of the Temples of Chance every morning after the places were swept out. The Californians put up parts of their ranchos, too, sometimes."

"How high did the stakes run?" Evidently this descendant of the Pilgrims had not lost all the sporting blood of his earlier English ancestors.

"Often as high as five hundred or a thousand dollars. The largest stake I ever saw change hands was forty-five thousand. Many a miner went back to the placers in the spring without a dollar in his pockets. But everybody was doing it and you could almost count the nationalities in the crowd around the table by the kinds of coins in the stacks. There were French francs, English crowns, East Indian rupees, Spanish pesos and United States dollars. The dress was as different as the money. We miners wore red and blue shirts, slouch hats and wide belts to carry our dust. The Californians were gorgeous in coats trimmed in gold lace, short pantaloons and high deer-skin boots, and



the Chinese ran a close second in their colored brocaded silks. You knew the professional gamblers by their long black coats and white linen—real gentlemen, many of 'em and the most honest in the country.

“Ever see a picture of the Plaza in forty-nine,” he asked abruptly.



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“Never.”

The miner drew a square on the gravel path with his stick. “The El Dorado was here, the Veranda here and the Bella Union here,” he said, punching holes on the three corners of Kearny and Washington. “They were the finest and they had the best locations in town. The El Dorado paid forty thousand dollars a year for a tent and twenty-five thousand a month for a building on the same site later.” The end of his stick deepened the hole on the southeast corner.

My eyes wandered from the plan to the real location. “Why, there is the name ‘Veranda’ over there now,” I exclaimed as the black letters on a white awning caught my eye.

“Yes, it is pretty near the old site, but it’s a poor substitute for its predecessor,” he added scornfully. “There was great style in those days —fine bars, lots of glass and mirrors and pictures worth thousands of dollars. The doors were always open from eleven in the morning ’til daylight the next morning, and a steady stream of people were pouring in and out all the time. Everybody was there. There weren’t no special inducement to stay home nights, when your residence was a bunk on the wall of a shanty and the fellers over you and under you and across the room weren’t even acquaintances. I got a pretty good room after awhile in the Parker House”—he drew a small oblong south of the El Dorado— “for a hundred dollars a week, but I didn’t stay long.”

“I should think not—at that price.”

“Oh, it wasn’t the price. One of my friends paid two hundred and fifty. But you see it got pretty warm at the Parker House, that Christmas eve, and so we all moved. They cleared away the hot ashes of the hotel and built the Jenny Lind Theatre on the spot. That was the first big fire. We had them right along after that, every few weeks. Six big ones in eighteen months, with lots’ of little ones in between.”

“Then the last fire wasn’t a new experience for you,” the Bostonian suggested.

“Lord, no! Rebuilding was a habit with us early San Franciscans. We didn’t begin to feel sorry for a man ’til he’d lost everything he owned three times. The Jenny Lind Theatre went down six times and the seventh building was sold for the City Hall. It stood right there”—he pointed to the handsome new Hall of Justice—“until it went up in the last fire.”

“You are sure it wasn’t the earthquake that finished it?” inquired the skeptic.

“Certainly not,” I flared. “The Relief Committee met there that morning to lay their plans while the fires were raging south of Market Street.”

He acknowledged defeat by changing the subject. “Was the old Spanish Custom House here?” he asked, pointing to the western side of the diagram.



“Yes,” assented the miner, and he traced an oblong on the northern end, “and just behind it, on Washington Street, was Sam Brannan’s house. He was the Mormon leader, you know, and brought a shi­pload of his followers to establish a settlement in forty-six. He published our first newspaper, the ‘California Star,’ in his house.”



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“Was it where that little green Chinese building with the bracketed columns and turned-up eaves is?” I interposed.

“The telephone exchange, you mean? Exact spot. They used to ring a hand bell in the Plaza on Sunday mornings to call the Mormons to hear Brannan preach in the Casa Grande.”

“Richardson’s house!” My companion sent me an appreciative glance.

“Sure, but that was before most of ’em, including Sam, went back on their faith. Next to the Custom House on the south,” he continued, “was the Public Institute. It wasn’t much to look at—just pine boards—but it was considerable useful. They held the Public School there and had preaching on Sundays ’til the teacher, the preacher and all the audience went off to the mines. They tried the Hounds there, too.”

“The Hounds?” my friend looked dazed.

“Yes, the Sidney Coves that lived in Sidneyville, along there on Kearny near Pacific.” Light had failed to dawn.

“Here on the corner of Kearny,” continued the Forty-niner, “was an old adobe building with a red-tiled roof and a veranda around it.”

“The City Hotel!” I exclaimed delightedly.

“How did you know?” He eyed me curiously.

“My grandfather was a near-forty-niner,” I reminded him.

“Oh yes. Too bad! Too bad!” he added sympathetically. “It was the house and store of a fellow named Leidesdorff,” he continued, “who did a lot of trading with the Yankee skippers in Mexican days, and it was turned into a hotel in the gold rush. It was always the swell place for blowouts. They had a big banquet and ball there for Governor Stockton, I’m told, after the procession and speeches in the Plaza, and another the next year for Governor Kearny; the first Relief Committee met here, called by Brannan, Howard and Vallejo, to send rescuers to the Sierras for the survivors of the Donner Party. There wasn’t much of any importance in the way of gathering that didn’t happen there.”

We instinctively looked across at the square, three-story, pressed-brick home of the Chinese Consulate and bank.

“Every big fire took at least one side of the Plaza, and the sixth, in June of fifty-one, wiped out the whole square. That adobe was the last link between the Spanish village of Yerba Buena and its American successor, San Francisco,” he regretted, “but it was a



good thing for the city, for they began to build with stone and brick after that. Did you see the Parrott Building, as you came along, on California and Montgomery?" he asked.

The Easterner turned to me. "You didn't show me that," he said, reprovingly.

"No, why should I? It wasn't built until fifty-two."

He ignored my insinuation and turned back to his informer. "What about the Parrott Building? It sounds like an aviary."

"Not exactly," he smiled. "It was made of granite blocks, cut and dressed and marked in China and then shipped over and set up by the 'China Boys,' as the Orientals here called themselves."



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"It's a curious coincidence," I ventured, "that the Hong Kong Bank now occupies the lower floor. What a freak of the winds it was that swept the big fire around that and the Montgomery block, and left them both for posterity!"

"Your fire seemed to have had a special veneration for historic structures," the Easterner commented. "It respected the Mission in like manner."

"Yes, somewhat," returned the miner, "but it might have had a little more respect and spared the Tehama House and the What Cheer House. I hated to see them go."

"And the Niantic Hotel and Fort Gunnybags," I added.

"Here! Here! I rise for a point of information," cried the alien. "Did the cheer inebriate and what is the technical difference between gunny-sacks and carpet bags?"

"Oh, that was our Vigilance Headquarters of fifty-six, where we hung Casey and Cora," elucidated the Forty-niner.

"Help," gasped the Bostonian, sinking upon the bench.

"Tell him," I nodded to the miner.

"The Tehama House, on the waterfront at California and Sansome, was the swell hotel for army and navy people and all the Spanish rancheros when they came to town. You couldn't keep even your thoughts to yourself in that house, for it had thin board sidings and cloth and paper partitions, but it had lots of style, and Rafael set a great table. They moved it over to Montgomery and Broadway to make room for the Bank of California, and the fire caught it there. The What Cheer House," the old man's eyes brightened, "was on Sacramento and Leidesdorff, and that's where we miners went, if we could get in. Woodward was a queer chap. Took you in whether you could pay or not. But it was only a man's hotel. There wasn't a woman allowed about the place. He had the only library in town and everybody was welcome to use it. I've often seen Mark Twain and Bret Harte reading at the table."

"And the sacks?" queried the Bostonian.

But the old man had leaned back on the bench and his eyes wandered over the green grass and trees of the square. "It's much prettier than it used to be," he admitted, "but nothing happens here now. The Chinese children fly kites and the unemployed loaf on the benches and the grass, and I'm one of them. I wish you could have seen it in the early days." His eyes kindled with excitement. "It was only a barren hillside, but there was always something doing then. All the town meetings were held here in the open air and all the parades ended here for the speeches. The biggest celebration was in 1850, when the October steamer, flying all her flags, brought the news that California was admitted to the Union. We went wild, for we had waited for that word for more than a



year. Every ship in the harbor displayed all her bunting and at night every house was as brilliant as candles and coal oil could make it. Bonfires blazed on all the hills and the islands and we had music and dancing all over the town 'til morning.”



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He paused in reminiscence. "But it wasn't so gay that moonlight night, the next February, when we hung Jenkins. He was a Sidney Cove and had just stole a safe, but that was the least of his crimes and of the whole gang. When we Vigilantes heard the taps on the firebell here in the Plaza, we gathered in front of the committee rooms. Nobody was excited; we just had to drive out the Sidney Coves and put an end to crime. We marched Jenkins here and hung him over there to the beam on the south end of the Custom House. Forty of us pulled on the rope, while a thousand more stood 'round as solemn as a prayer meeting to give us moral support and shoulder the responsibility. It wasn't no joke hanging a man, but it had to be done, if decent men was to live here."

He shook off his depression. "Everybody was in the Plaza sometime in the day, and once a month when Telegraph Hill signaled a steamer, everybody was here."

"Telegraph Hill? I never heard of it," he cast an accusing glance in my direction.

"It belongs to forty-nine," I retorted.

"All the shops closed immediately," continued the miner, "and Postmaster Geary was the most important man in town. The post-office was a block up the hill at Clay and Pike Streets, but the lines from the windows stretched down into the Plaza, and over among the tents and chaparral on California Street Hill. Men stood for hours, sometimes all night, in the pouring rain, and many a time I sold my place for ten dollars, and even twenty, to some fellow who had less patience or less time than I.

"But you should have been here on election day in fifty-one." The miner threw back his head and laughed aloud. "Colonel Jack Hays was running for sheriff," he resumed, "and his opponent hired a band to play in front of his store here on the Plaza as an advertisement. It worked fine! He was polling all the votes and the Colonel was about out of the running, 'til he got on his horse that he'd used on the Texas ranges and came cavorting into the square. He showed 'em some fancy turns they weren't used to and kept it up 'til the polls closed."

"Did he win?" I asked excitedly.

"Well, I guess he did! Hands down. But a sheriff ain't no use when the laws won't stick. That's why we had to have the Vigilance Committees."

I arose. That was a long story and the afternoon was fast going. My companion took the hint. He extended his hand and grasped the old miner's heartily.

"I thank you," he said, "you have opened up a new epoch to me and I shall not soon forget you. I shall come again and the place will have lost much of its interest if you are not here."



“Oh, I’ll be here,” laughed the old fellow. “It’s home to me.”

Telegraph Hill

The Latin Quarter. The signal station of '49 and a view of the city as it was. The Golden Gate.



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Telegraph Hill of Unique Fame

"Would you like to go up 'crazy owld, daisy owld Telegraft Hill'," I asked in a softened mood as we moved away. "There is just about time."

"Indeed I should," he answered. "Can we take in some of the other things you archaeologists were mentioning on the way? I don't want to miss anything."

"We must leave the Parrott and Niantic buildings until some other day, but you can see the Montgomery Block if you wish," and we turned down Washington Street. "It was built on piles, by General Halleck's law firm. William Tecumseh Sherman's bank was nearby, but I suppose most of Boston's business men were generals-in-chief of the United States Army."

My irony was ignored and as we reached the corner of Montgomery, I continued: "It was on this spot that James King of William, editor of the 'Bulletin,' was shot down by James P. Casey, the ballot-box stuffer. The newspaper office was at the other end of the block on Merchant Alley, and that evening's editorial accused Casey of electing himself supervisor and stated that he was an ex-convict from Sing Sing. Within an hour after the paper appeared, Mr. King was carried dying to his room in the same building. It was this murder that brought the second Vigilance Committee into existence. While the immense funeral cortege, the largest San Francisco has ever known, escorted the body of Mr. King up this street toward Lone Mountain Cemetery, Casey and Cora, another criminal, were hung in front of the Vigilance, Headquarters on Sacramento near Front."

"You called it Fort Gunnybags?" he queried.

"Yes, it was so named from the precautionary bulwark of sand-filled sacks piled up in a hollow square in front to protect the entrance. A bronze plate marked the old building before the fire."

We turned into Columbus Avenue. "Your beloved Stevenson used to live at No. 8, there on the gore where the Italian Bank is," I said. "We are coming to the Latin Quarter, a section that has always been given over to foreigners, for in early days 'Sidneyville,' peopled by ticket-of-leave men from the penal colony of Australia, and 'Little Chile' of the Peruvians and Chileans, clustered close around the base of Telegraph Hill."

"The very place Stevenson would choose, where life was flavored with history and the mystery of the foreign. But where are you going?" he exclaimed, stopping short as I began to ascend the steps by which Kearny Street climbs the hill.

"I thought you wished to see the site of the Marine Signal Station." I looked down at him from the fourth stair with feigned surprise.



“I do, indeed, but—can’t we go up by a funicular and come down this way?” he compromised. “My Boston calves protest.”

“Oh well, we can go by the level a little farther, but I thought you liked the ‘flavor of the foreign.’ Anyway, we ought to see Earl Cummings’ old man,” I remembered.

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“What is his fatherland and his business?” he asked as his eye traveled over the shop signs “Sanguinetti, Farmacia Italiana,” “Molinari & Cariani, Grocers;” “Oliva & Brizzolara, Real Estate.”

“His birthplace is the World Universal, and his profession-leading us back to nature,” I answered. Then, as we passed the spick and span concrete facade of the Patronal Church of St. Francis, with its rear of burned brick: “This is the direct descendent of the old Mission,” I told him, “the first Parish Church of San Francisco. It was gutted by the fire and is being very gradually restored. A notice within administers an implied rebuke: ‘The First Erected—the Last Restored.’”

We paused at the iron fence of the small green triangle cut off from Washington Square by the slant of Columbus Avenue, and peered at the fine bronze figure of a sinewy old man stooping to drink from his hand on the edge of the little pool.

“Mr. Cummings’ message to his universal brothers,” he commented. “None could fail to be refreshed by it. My strength is renewed. Let us ascend,” and he turned up Filbert Street.

Dark-eyed women lounged in the doorways of the houses that cling to the perpendicular sides of the hill. “The Italian pervades,” I volunteered, “but there are Greek, Sicilians, Spaniards and French.” The whole was reminiscent of the South of Europe, but the Neapolitan scene of cleated walks and steep steps lacked the enlivening color notes of the homeland.

“Not even a red shirt on a clothes line,” I regretted, but a flood of soft voweled Italian from a woman in a third story window, musically answered by a man in the street below, brought consolation.

“The opera’s own tongue,” the Bostonian commented.

“Well, you leave it to me,” finished the man in the street.

“Sure, Mike, I will,” responded the woman.

My companion halted in consternation.

“We make American citizens of them all,” I asserted.

“Les petits enfants aussi,” I added as a child ran past, shouting a response in irreproachable English to the Parisian command of her mother.

We turned through the rude stone wall into Pioneer Park and along the unkept paths shaded by eucalyptus, cypress and acacia trees and came upon the open height where



the mountain-hemmed bay lay in broad expanse before us, dotted with islands and with ferries streaking their way across its blue-gray surface.

“Wonderful,” he exclaimed under his breath.

“O, Telegraft Hill, she sits proud as a Queen,
And th’ docks lie below in th’ glare,”

I quoted from Wallace Irwin.

He lowered his gaze to the numerous wharves running out into the water, with teams appearing and disappearing at the entrances of the covered docks, like lines of busy ants.

“And th’ bay runs beyant her, all purple and green
Wid th’ gingerbread island out there,”



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I continued the quotation.

“What are those terraced buildings?” he queried.

“It has been the military prison for years. It is Alcatraz Island.”

He looked his inquiry.

“Spanish for Pelican,” I answered, seating myself on a rock. “Ayala, the captain of the ‘San Carlos,’ the first ship to enter the bay, named it from the large number of the birds he found on it, and the big island to the right that looks like a portion of the main land is Angel Island, abbreviated from Ayala’s Isla de Nuestra Senora de los Angeles.”

“And Goat Island?” he questioned as he threw himself down on the grass.

“Yerba Buena,” I corrected. “The other name was colloquially applied when Nathan Spear, being given some goats and kids by a Yankee skipper, put them over there. There were several thousand on the island in forty-nine, but the Americans killed them all off by night in spite of Spear’s protests.”

“Not all of them,” he denied as he shied a stick at a white head reaching from below for a grassy clump.

““And th’ goats and chicks and brickbats and sticks
Is joombled all over the face of it,
Av Telegraft Hill, Telegraft Hill,
Crazy owld, daisy owld Telegraft Hill,””

I laughed.

“I suppose the Spaniards must have had a name for this sightly hill,” said the Bostonian, his eye tracing the rugged skyline across the bay, along the Tamalpais Range on the north, and the San Antonio Hills on the east.

“Yes, Anza christened it in 1776 when he climbed up here for a view after selecting the sites for the Presidio and the Mission. He called it La Loma Alta, and the High Hill it remained until the Americans put it to commercial use in forty-nine. The little town on the edge of the cove in the hollow of the hills was unconscious of a ship entering the harbor until she rounded Clark’s Point, the southeast corner of this hill, and dropped anchor in full view—”

“Any relation to Champ?” he interrupted.



“No, Clark was a Mormon, although he afterward denied it, who had built a wharf in the deep water along the precipitous bluff, where ships could always disembark even when the ebb-tide uncovered mud-flats elsewhere along the shore of the cove.

“The American miners and merchants, eager for the earliest news of the approaching mails and merchandise, erected a signal station on the top of Loma Alta, about where that flag-pole is. When a vessel was seen entering the Golden Gate, the black arms of the semaphore on top of the building were raised in varying positions indicating to the watching town below, where every one knew the signals, whether it was a bark, a brig, a steamer or other kind of craft. This was the first wireless station on the coast.

“There comes a side-wheeler,” I exclaimed, raising my arms upward in a slanting position, as a big liner from Yokohama entered the channel. “Now fancy every office and bank closed, every law-court adjourned, every gaming table deserted; the shore black with people and long lines forming from the post-office windows to await the anchoring of the vessel, the landing of friends and freight, and the sorting of the mail by Postmaster Geary.”



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My companion made a telescope of his two hands and examined the Nippon Maru. "You are discharged for inefficiency," he said. "You are reporting a side-wheeler for a screw-propeller."

"There is no signal in the code for such modern inventions," I retorted. "I suppose the fog of your practical realism is too obscuring for you to see that clipper just coming in," I continued, as a full-rigged ship spread its filled sails against the glowing sky of the late afternoon.

"The lady is a bit sarcastic, Billy," he addressed the goat, "but we'll examine it." Then peering through his telescoped hands again, "It's the clipper ship Eclipse," he announced, "built especially for speed, in the exigencies of the San Francisco trade, with long, narrow hull, and carrying an extra amount of canvas. She has made the trip from New York in three-quarters of the time required by any other kind of craft, and demands, therefore, nearly double the price for freight." He looked at me for approval.

"What a whetstone for the imagination the business sense is!" I commented. "Perhaps if your grandfather owned shares in the Eclipse, you will be able to see the second signal station erected the next year on Point Lobos, just beyond the Fort. From there a vessel could be decried many miles outside the Heads and the signal repeated by the station here on Telegraph Hill, relieved the inhabitants of several more hours of anxiety."

"Anxiety is a mild term if one couldn't hear for a whole month from the girl who had his heart," he commented. "It's bad enough when she won't write, even with a telegraph and railroad between." He was tracing some characters in the ground at my feet, with a stick. "Thirty-four days," I made out.

"If you've sufficiently recovered from the climb, shall we see how the city looks from up here?" I asked.

For answer he sprang up and assisted me to my feet. We walked to the opposite side of the park, where the city lay extended before us.

"Imagine a forest of masts here in the bay, about seven or eight hundred; the water laying Montgomery Street beyond the Merchants' Exchange—that yellow brick building with the little arched cupola; and wharves running out from every street to reach the ships lying in deep water, every one swarming with teams and men hurrying to and fro. Connect them with piled walks over the water on the lines of Sansome and Battery Streets and you have a picture of Yerba Buena Cove in forty-nine. Heap up freight and baggage on the shore, erect thousands of tents on the sand dunes around the edges of a town of shanties and adobes climbing over the hills and you have our miner's metropolis," I sketched for him.



“I see it,” he said, shutting his eyes. “Now a wave of the magic wand and the scene is changed.” He opened them again.

“The magic wand is a steam-paddy, working day and night leveling off the sand-hills and shoveling them into the bay. The wharves are converted into streets and many good ships, whose crews having deserted for the mines, being pulled up and used as storage ships, are caught by the rising tide of sand and converted into foundations for buildings. Such was the ‘Niantic’ at Clay and Sansome.”



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“Oh yes, the 'Niantic!”

“The third building on the site still retains the name.”

“What was the case of assault that gave the belligerent name to Battery Street?”

“It was a precaution against assault,” I corrected. “Captain Montgomery erected a fortification of five confiscated Spanish guns on the side of this hill overlooking the harbor after he had taken possession of the Mexican town. It was known as Fort Montgomery, or the Battery. It was on the bluff just where Battery Street joins the Embarcadero down there, for the hill came out to that point.”

“Did the earthquake shake it down?” His question was tinged with triumph.

I crushed him with a look. “The ships that came loaded with freight and passengers took it away with them as ballast,” I explained, “and of recent years some contractors blasted it off and paved streets with it until it was rescued from further demolition by some appreciative landmark lovers of a women’s club.”

“What a fortunate interference! But the despoilers got a good slice of it, didn’t they? There wouldn’t have been much of it left in a few years.”

“No more than there is of Rincon Hill, over there at the southern corner of Yerba Buena Cove.” I was considerably mollified by his appreciation. “It was the best residence quarter of the fifties, but the ‘unkindest cut’ of Second Street, which brought no good to anyone, not even its commercial promoters, left it a place of the ‘butt ends of streets,’ as Stevenson says, and inaccessible, square-edged, perpendicular lots whose only value lies buried underneath them. I fear its scars can never be remedied.”

“You have several hills left,” he consoled me as his eye traveled along the broken western skyline. “What is their role in this historic drama?”

“The ridge running down the peninsula is the San Miguel Range, crowned by Twin Peaks, with the Mission at its foot. Nob Hill, next, acquired its name in the sixties, when the bonanza and railroad kings erected their residences there. Before the fire”—I felt my color rising, but there was no shade of change in my companion’s expression—“the mansions of the ‘Big Four’ of the Central Pacific—Huntington, Hopkins, Stanford and Crocker—and the Comstock millionaires—Flood, Fair and others—filled with magnificent works of craftsmen and artists, had more than local fame.”

“From this distance, with three of the largest buildings in the city, the hill hardly seems to have fallen from its high estate,” he observed.

“You are quite right. It still lives up to its name, for the Fairmont Hotel and the Stanford Apartments, christened for two of its former magnates, and the brown-stone Flood



mansion, remodeled for the Pacific-Union Club, are no whit less nobby than their predecessors.”

“The next hill?” He turned his gaze to the houses perched on the top and clinging part way down its steep sides.



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“A little graveyard where the Russian gold-seekers were laid to rest gave its name. It is now the home of the artists and the artistic.”

“A city built on the water and the hills, and rebuilt on the ashes of seven fires,” he commented. “It is almost incomprehensible.” After a moment’s pause: “How much of the city was burned by the last fire?”

I glanced sharply at him. There was no shade of irony in his tone and his face showed only sincerity.

“All that you can see, from the fringe of wharves at the waterfront to the top of the hills and down into the valley beyond, except these houses here at our feet, saved by the Italians with wine-soaked blankets, and a few on the heights of Russian Hill.”

“It was colossal!” he exclaimed. “Think of it! a whole city wiped out.” I lowered my eyes to the goat nibbling beside us. “The courage and energy that rebuilt it is herculean.” His enthusiasm was cumulative. “And rebuilt it in practically three years! No wonder you date all things from the fire.”

Billy flickered his tail and solemnly winked at me.

“It is getting late,” I said, “but the sun is just setting. Shall we watch it before we go?”

Without speaking, he followed me back to our first point of view. The crimson ball was sinking into the sea, with its Midas touch turning the water and sky to molten gold. The last rays gilded the cliffs on either side of the entrance to the bay, and burnished the heads of the nodding poppies at our feet. From the Presidio came the muffled boom of the sunset gun.

“Could Fremont have chosen a better name?” exclaimed the man at my side. “The Golden Gate it is, indeed!”

“It certainly is well named,” I agreed, “for everyone can interpret its meaning according to his mood and character. Some see only what Fremont saw, an open door to commerce; to others it is the entrance to hoards of gold, stowed away in hills and streams; to the poet it speaks of the golden poppies that streak the hillsides, but I like to think of it as did the Indians, who called it ‘Yulupa,’ the Sunset Strait.”

Silently we watched the lights of the city come out, one by one, until it seemed as if the heavens lay beneath us.

“I hoped when I left Boston that you would return with me,” he said gently, “but I can’t ask you to leave this. I didn’t understand then, but now—”

The lights became blurred and the night seemed suddenly to have grown cold.



“Of course, you couldn’t be happy—”

The voice did not sound like his. I had been in a dream for two days. I had thought he cared just as I did, but he couldn’t, or he would realize that nothing counted but—I bit my lips to keep from crying out.

“Boston is too cold for a girl with the warmth of California in her heart.”

Cold! Didn’t he know that life with him would make an iceberg paradise? Didn’t he realize—? But, of course, he didn’t care as I did! This was only a subterfuge. I straightened proudly.



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“I can’t ask you to go back with me,” he was saying, “but I can stay here with you.” His hand crept over mine. “Our business needs a manager on this coast. Will you help me make a home in San Francisco, dear?”

Below, the lights of the city danced with happiness and a glad new song rang in my heart.

Here ends 'The Lure of San Francisco. A Romance Amid Old Landmarks.' Written by Elizabeth Gray Potter and Mabel Thayer Gray and Illustrated from Sketches in Charcoal by Audley B. Wells. Done into a book by Paul Elder and Company at their Tomoye Press in San Francisco under the supervision and care of H. A. Funke, in July, Nineteen Hundred and Fifteen.