

"Sutter's Gold!" The Fatal Cry of '49

"It was the middle of the month of January, 1848. Mr. Marshall of New Jersey, my carpenter, was at work for me on my mills. He was working on a new saw-pit at Coloma, in the mountains, about eighteen hours' journey from the fort. When the framework was finished, I sent up Mr. Wimmer and his family, with some workmen. Mr. Bennet, of Oregon, went with them to superintend the haulage and to see to the installation of the machinery. Madame Wimmer was to cook for the outfit. I needed a saw-mill, as I was short of lumber for my big steam-mill, which was still under construction at Brighton. The boiler and machinery had just arrived after eighteen months' journey. God be thanked, never would I have believed such an enterprise possible, and the oxen all in good condition, praise be! I also needed lumber to finish the palisade at the village of Yerba Buena, at the bottom of the bay, for there were a great many ships there now, and the crews were turbulent and thieving, and beasts and merchandise had a way of disappearing, no one knows how.

"It was a rainy afternoon. I was sitting in my room at the fort writing a long letter to an old friend of mine at Lucerne. Suddenly Mr. Marshall burst into the room. He was soaking wet. I was very much surprised to see him, for I had just sent a wagon to Coloma loaded with provisions and iron work. He told me that he had something of the utmost importance to tell me, that he wanted to speak to me in private, and begged me to take him to some isolated place where no one could possibly overhear us. We went up to the next floor, and, although there was no one else in the house except the bookkeeper, he insisted so strongly that we locked ourselves into a room. I came down again to get Marshall something he wanted (I believe it was a glass of water). When I came back I forgot to turn the key in the lock. Marshall had just pulled a piece of cotton from his pocket and was showing me a lump of yellowish metal that had been wrapped up in it when my bookkeeper came into the room to ask me some question or other. Marshall slipped the metal into his pocket at once. The bookkeeper excused himself for interrupting us and left the room. 'My God! didn't I tell you to lock the door?' cried Marshall. He was in a terrible state of excitement, and I had all the trouble in the world to quiet him and to convince him that the bookkeeper had come in on his own business and not to spy on us. This time we bolted the door and even pushed a wardrobe against it. Marshall again took out the metal. There were several small grains of about four ounces weight. He told me that he had told the workmen that this was gold, but that they had all laughed at him and treated him like an idiot. I tested the metal with nitromuriatic acid. Then I read a long article on gold in the 'Encyclopedia Americana.' I told Marshall then that his mental was pure gold in the virgin state.

"At these words the poor fellow began to act like a madman. He wanted to leave at once for Coloma on horseback. He pleaded with me to accompany him there forthwith. I begged him to observe that evening was already closing in and that it would be far safer for him to pass the night at the fort. I promised to go with him the next morning. But he refused to listen and rode off at full gallop, crying: 'Come to-morrow—to-morrow early.' It was raining in torrents and he had not tasted a bite.

"Night fell quickly and I re-entered my room. This discovery of gold in the torrent did not leave me indifferent. But I took it quietly, as I have taken all the good and bad luck that has happened to me in my life. Nevertheless, I was unable to sleep all night. My imagination showed me all the terrible consequences and fatal results the discovery might have for me. Yet I was far from dreaming that it would mean the ruin of my beloved New Helvetia! Next morning I left full orders for the day's work with my numerous gangs of

workers and at seven o'clock left for the mill site accompanied by a few soldiers and a cowboy.

"We were midway up the zigzag path that leads to Coloma when we came across a riderless horse. A little higher up Marshall came out of the trees. He had been stopped by the storm and could not continue his way. He was half distraught and nearly dead of hunger. His excitement of yesterday was still upon him.

"We rode on and arrived at last at the new El Dorado. The clouds had cleared somewhat. In the evening we made a little trip along the banks of the canal, which was swollen to its brim from the heavy rains. I closed the sluiceways. Immediately the bed emptied and we set ourselves to look for gold in its bottom. We found several traces, while Mr. Marshall and the workmen handed me some small nuggets. I told them that I would have a ring made from these in California as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, I did, later, have a signet ring made from them. Not having any armorial bearings, I had my father's trade-mark, a phoenix in flames, engraved on the face, and upon the inside this inscription:

"First gold—Discovered in January 1848,—Three bishop's croziers followed, the cross of Basle and my name: SUTTER.

"The next day I surveyed Coloma thoroughly, taking good note of its situation and configuration. Then I called together all my workers. I told the men that it would be necessary to keep the matter secret for five or six weeks, the time necessary to finish the construction of my saw-mill, on which I had already spent \$24,000. When they had given me their word of honor, I returned home. I was depressed and could see no way out of the trouble which this accursed discovery was sure to make for me. Such a thing could not remain a secret long. Of that I felt certain.

"And so it happened. Barely two weeks later I sent one of the white workmen to Coloma, with a load of provisions and tools. A few Indian boys accompanied him. Mme. Wimmer told him the entire story and her children gave him some nuggets. Immediately after his return this man betook himself to one of the shops outside the limits of the fort. He ordered a bottle of whisky and tendered the gold which he had brought back from Coloma as payment. The proprietor (his name was Smith) asked if he took him for a Dingo Indian. The teamster referred him to me for corroboration. What could I say? I told Smith the story. His partner, Mr. Brannan, came to me at once and overwhelmed me with questions which I answered truthfully. He dashed out of the building without even taking time to close the door. That night Smith and he loaded all their goods on to two wagons, lifted a team from my corral, and left for Coloma.

"Then my workers began to desert.

"Soon I was alone at the fort with a few faithful mechanics and eight invalids.

"My Mormons were the last to leave me, but, once the fever had got hold of them, they were just as bad as the rest.

"An uninterrupted procession now went past my windows. Everyone who could walk climbed the hills from San Francisco and the coastwise hamlets. Shops, farm-houses, huts were closed and their tenants turned their faces toward Fort Sutter and Coloma. At Monterey and other towns of the south the rumor got about for a while that the whole thing was 'a ruse of Sutter's to get new colonists.' The procession dwindled for a few days, only to begin again still thicker than before. As the fever swept the southern towns, they too emptied rapidly. My poor domain was overrun.

"Misery now began for me.

"The mills ceased to work. They were plundered to the very mill stones. The tanneries were deserted. Sheets of leather went to green mold in the tanks and the untanned hides rotted away on the walls. My Indians and Kanakas disappeared with their wives and children. All were washing for gold, which they exchanged for

liquor. My shepherds left their flocks on the hills, my field workers threw down their spades, there was no one to cut a head of cabbage in the truck-gardens. In the byre prize cows, their udders full of milk, lowed piteously until they died. My very soldiers deserted. What was I to do? My men came to me. They implored me to go to Coloma, to become a gold-seeker with them. My God! how I loathed it! But I consented at last. There was nothing else left for me to do.

"I loaded up several wagons with merchandise and provisions. Accompanied by a hundred Indians and about fifty Kanakas, I settled down to wash gold in a mountain camp on the banks of the torrent which is called Sutter's creek to this day.

"Things went pretty well at the start. But soon a horde of worthless adventurers descended on us. They set up distilleries; they made friends with my men. I struck camp and went still higher up the mountain. Useless precaution! That accursed swarm of distillers followed us everywhere. For my poor Indians and Kanakas the taste of this new joy was irresistible. Soon all were incapable of the slightest work. For three days out of the four they sprawled on the ground, dead drunk.

"From the mountain top I could see the immense territory which I had cleared and fertilized given over to fire and pillage. At night the low roar of men on the march came up to us from the west, punctuated with rifle shots. At the end of the bay I watched a vast unknown city arising as though from the ground and spreading visibly each day. The bay was black with vessels.

"I gave in.

"I went down to the fort. I discharged a handful of men who had not been willing to come with me. I voided all the contracts and paid every bill."

The above is taken from "Sutter's Gold," by Blaise Cendrars, and is an exact reproduction of Johann August Sutter's own account of the discovery of gold at —what shall we say?—his imperial domain in California, New Helvetia, in January, 1848, when San Francisco was his private port through which came consignments of Kanakas from Hawaii to work his immense ranches. He was America's first multimillionaire, his biographer says, and the chance discovery of gold ruined him, of course. The discoverer was James W. Marshall, of New Jersey, employed by Sutter as a carpenter. Sutter planted cotton and introduced many fruits into California, including grapes, and these, in spite of all the gold, have proved the sources of far greater wealth and more general prosperity than all the mines together.—Ed.

ONLY 26% VOTE IN JAPAN

Japan's recent prefectural election, which indicates no wide changes in the political lineup of the major parties, is receiving deep study for the causes underlying the lack of interest disclosed by participation by not more than 26 per cent of the registered voters. Great enthusiasm had been expected on the part of the 9,000,000 newly enfranchised people.

Undoubtedly the fact that this was a bye-election offers part of the explanation. But a more powerful consideration in the voters' mental attitude lies in the truth that the Japanese people are not yet accustomed to governing themselves.

Neither political activities nor labor-union progress shows that they have entirely caught the spirit of western participation with leadership from their own ranks. Lack of leadership is one phenomenon of Japanese democracy today.

Probably Japan is still too close to feudalism, which was abolished in 1870, when the vast majority of the people were still serfs, accustomed to look to overlords for rulership. Moreover, despite the unrest which exists in Japan today, there are now and always have been two classes whose inactivity makes for quietness—those satisfied with existing conditions and those who trust that help for their wrongs will be given in due time by the authorities.

Few lawyers won in the recent election. Farmers headed the list of victors with 480, merchants and manufacturers next with 260, clerks 120, brewers 106, physicians and druggists 94, lawyers 77 and journalists 41. All twenty-eight of the proletarians elected are graduates of colleges or universities.

—Paul R. Wright in the "Chicago Daily News."