

much enraged. He gave expression to his feelings by pouring out curses upon the heads of those who did the deed. As soon as I got a little the better of my bruises, he took me with him to Esquire Watson's, on Bond Street, to see what could be done about the matter. Mr. Watson inquired who saw the assault committed. Master Hugh told him it was done in Mr. Gardner's ship-yard, at midday, where there were a large company of men at work. "As to that," he said, "the deed was done, and there was no question as to who did it." His answer was, he could do nothing in the case, unless some white man would come forward and testify. He could issue no warrant on my word. If I had been killed in the presence of a thousand colored people, their testimony combined would have been insufficient to have arrested one of the murderers. Master Hugh, for once, was compelled to say this state of things was too bad. Of course, it was impossible to get any white man to volunteer his testimony in my behalf, and against the white young men. Even those who may have sympathized with me were not prepared to do this. It required a degree of courage unknown to them to do so; for just at that time, the slightest manifestation of humanity toward a colored person was denounced as abolitionism, and that name subjected its bearer to frightful liabilities. The watchwords of the bloody-minded in that region, and in those days, were, "Damn the abolitionists!" and "Damn the niggers!" There was nothing done, and probably nothing would have been done if I had been killed. Such was, and such remains, the state of things in the Christian city of Baltimore.

Master Hugh, finding he could get no redress, refused to let me go back again to Mr. Gardner. He kept me himself, and his wife dressed my wound till I was again restored to health. He then took me into the ship-yard of which he was foreman, in the employment of Mr. Walter Price. There I was immediately set to calking, and very soon learned the art of using my mallet and irons. In the course of one year from the time I left Mr. Gardner's, I was able to command the highest wages given to the most experienced calkers. I was now of some importance to my master. I was bringing him from six to seven dollars per week. I sometimes brought him nine dollars per week: my wages were a dollar and a half a day. After learning how to calk, I sought my own employment, made my own contracts, and collected the money which I earned. My pathway became much more smooth than before; my condition was now much more comfortable. When I could get no calking to do, I did nothing. During these leisure times, those old notions about freedom would steal over me again. When in Mr. Gardner's employment, I was kept in such a perpetual whirl of excitement, I could think of nothing, scarcely, but my life; and in thinking of my life, I almost forgot my liberty. I have observed this in my experience of slavery,—that whenever my condition was improved, instead of its increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man.

I was now getting, as I have said, one dollar and fifty cents per day. I contracted for it; I earned it; it was paid to me; it was rightfully my own; yet, upon each returning Saturday night, I was compelled to deliver every cent of that money to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it,—not

because he had any hand in earning it,—not because I owed it to him,—nor because he possessed the slightest shadow of a right to it; but solely because he had the power to compel me to give it up. The right of the grim-visaged pirate upon the high seas is exactly the same.

* * *

1845

LOUISE AMELIA SMITH CLAPPE
1819–1906

Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clapp (later, Clappe), a New Englander, wrote twenty-three letters to a sister in Massachusetts that constitute a vivid account of life in the mines of the Sierra Nevada in the early years of the California Gold Rush. Presumably the letters made the perilous trip east and back, because in 1855 Clappe published them as "California, in 1851 and 1852. Residence in the Mines" in a new short-lived San Francisco magazine, *The Pioneer*. When the letters began arriving in New England late in 1851, Clappe's sister could have sold them to a New York, Boston, or Philadelphia newspaper or magazine, for Easterners hungered for stories about gold mining in the new state, and both in subject matter and in style Clappe's accounts were remarkable. Even before going to San Francisco, she knew that others had succeeded with travel letters (conspicuously, Bayard Taylor, who left California just as she arrived there). Clappe lost her chance for national fame by not publishing the letters while excitement over the Gold Rush was high. By 1855, national focus had shifted to slavery, and the latest California news was about the fast, safer way to the Golden State—the new railroad across the isthmus of Panama.

Well before Clappe died, historians of the Gold Rush realized that her letters were an unparalleled resource, shrewd and ironical, for details about modes of travel (always hazardous), grotesque lodging and inventive attempts at establishing domestic comfort, methods of mining (often dangerous), vigilante justice, and the awe-striking splendors of nature. She drew memorable portraits of miners and the handful of white women who accompanied them, as well as a few California Indians she encountered, and she vividly described the arrival of immigrants who had survived the overland trek from Missouri. In the twentieth century, historians of California collected the letters in book form, and gradually their literary merits became known.

Clappe had a most unlikely background for her adventure in the Gold Rush. She was born in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, on July 28, 1819. Her father, a mathematician, moved the family to Amherst, Massachusetts, where he taught at the academy until he died in 1832. After her mother's death in 1837, her guardian, Osmyn Baker (a classmate of Emily Dickinson's father), kept her in schools, including the Amherst Academy, until she was nineteen or twenty. During the next few years she taught French and perhaps other subjects. In 1839 she met the diplomat Alexander Hill Everett, who corresponded with her on political and intellectual issues until his death in 1847; her letters to him, now lost, must have facilitated her composition of the letters on which her reputation rests. In September 1848 she married Fayette Clapp, a graduate of Brown University who was apprenticed to a doctor. She and her husband (by then Dr. Clapp) and members of their families sailed from New York in August 1849, rounded Cape Horn, and sailed through the Golden Gate into San Francisco

Bay in January 1850. They remained a year in San Francisco, Dr. Clapp suffering from illness, including what was called "brain fever." A miner could make a fortune in a day, and a doctor could charge Gold Rush prices for treating miners weakened from their working conditions (particularly susceptible, Clapp said, to erysipelas) and liable to incur broken bones in accidents (and suffer from peritonitis during recovery). Early in 1851 the Clapps took a steamboat to Marysville, at the confluence of the Feather and Yuba rivers. Hearing that a thousand miners at Rich Bar were without a doctor, Clapp went on to set up a rough "office" while Louise stayed behind a few weeks, contributing sketches and poems to the Marysville *Herald*. In the fall of 1851, from Rich Bar, she began writing her long letters to her sister Molly. Dr. Clapp found that two dozen doctors had preceded him to Rich Bar, and the Clapps left the mines for San Francisco late in 1852. Dr. Clapp soon sailed for Hawaii, then returned to Massachusetts, alone. What happened between them is unknown. She began teaching school in San Francisco in 1854. Effectively abandoned, she filed for divorce in 1856; after this time she spelled her last name Clappe. In 1878, on retiring after a quarter century of teaching in San Francisco, she moved to New York City, then to Morristown, New Jersey, where she died early in 1906.

As strong a "character" as any of the miners, Clappe knew she was "obstinate" and "wilful," determined from childhood to do what people said she couldn't. Past thirty, she rode almost twenty-four hours at a stretch without complaining, seeing herself as "a regular Nomad" in her passion for wandering. She did not endure unnecessary hardships (she had a cook when she could get one, and other women did her laundry), but she was tough, independent, and never too shocked to record the way miners swore, drank and gambled, and knifed each other, fought duels, lashed minor offenders, and hanged thieves. As she witnessed and portrayed a lengthening panorama of life in the mines, Clappe saw herself in relation to successful journalists: "Grace Greenwood," the pen name of Sarah Jane Lippincott (1823–1904), "Fanny Forester," the pen name of Emily C. Judson (1817–1854), and Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806–1867). But she also saw herself (she would have said self-mockingly) as a letter writer like the Marquise de Sévigné (1626–1696), famous for her correspondence with her daughter, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), author of *Turkish Letters*. Steeped in the Bible and thoroughly familiar with Spenser and Shakespeare, the English Romantics, Dickens, and many contemporary American writers, Clappe belonged in good literary company. With just a slight turn of her fortune, she might have had a career in journalism in her own time rather than a literary reputation a century and a half later.

California, in 1852¹

RESIDENCE IN THE MINES

Letter Twelfth.

FROM OUR LOG CABIN, Indian Bar,² January 27, 1852.

I wish that it were possible, dear M.,³ to give you an idea of the perfect Saturnalia,⁴ which has been held upon the river for the last three weeks,

1. The text is from the San Francisco *Pioneer* (February 1855). Perhaps identifying herself with the strong-willed heroine of Charlotte Brontë's 1849 book *Shirley*, Clappe signed the letters "Shirley," a pseudonym she had used for pieces in a Marysville, California, paper in 1851. In the text of "Residence in the Mines" Clappe referred to herself as "Dame Shirley"—possibly as a self-mocking way of saying "Schoolma'm Shirley," for she had taught in New England and in 1854 she

had become a schoolteacher in San Francisco.

2. On the East Branch of the North Fork of the Feather River, as was the nearby Rich Bar. (A *bar* is a bank of sand, gravel, and other matter built up in a river, creating a peninsula.)

3. Clappe's sister Molly.

4. In Roman religion, the festival of the god Saturn, beginning December 17; in Christian countries, any period of general license, particularly from Christmas through New Year's.

without at the same time causing you to think *too* severely of our good Mountains. In truth, it requires not only a large intellect, but a large heart, to judge with becoming charity of the peculiar temptations of riches. A more generous, hospitable, intelligent and industrious people, than the inhabitants of the half-dozen Bars—of which Rich Bar is the nucleus—never existed; for you know how proverbially wearing it is to the nerves of manhood, to be entirely without either occupation or amusement; and that has been pre-eminently the case during the present month.

Imagine a company of enterprising and excitable young men, settled upon a sandy level, about as large as a poor widow's potatoe patch, walled in by sky-kissing hills—absolutely *compelled* to remain, on account of the weather, which has vetoed indefinitely their Exodus—with no place to ride or drive, even if they had the necessary vehicles and quadrupeds,—with no newspapers nor politics to interest them,—deprived of all books but a few dog-eared novels of the poorest class,—churches, lectures, lyceums, theaters and (most unkindest cut of all!)⁵ pretty girls, having become to these unhappy men mere myths,—without *one* of the thousand ways of passing time peculiar to civilization,—most of them living in damp, gloomy cabins, where Heaven's dear light can enter only by the door,—and, when you add to all these disagreeables the fact that, during the never-to-be-forgotten month, the most remorseless, persevering rain which ever set itself to work to drive humanity mad, has been pouring doggedly down, sweeping away bridges, lying in uncomfortable puddles about nearly all the habitations, wickedly insinuating itself beneath un-umbrella-protected shirtcollars, generously treating to a shower-bath *and* the rheumatism sleeping bipeds, who did not happen to have an India-rubber⁶ blanket,—and, to crown all, rendering mining utterly impossible,—you cannot wonder that even the most moral should have become somewhat reckless.

The Saturnalia commenced on Christmas evening, at the Humboldt,⁷ which on that very day, had passed into the hands of new proprietors. The most gorgeous preparations were made for celebrating the *two* events. The bar was re-trimmed with red calico, the bowling alley had a new lining of the coarsest and whitest cotton cloth, and the broken lampshades were replaced by whole ones. All day long, patient mules could be seen descending the hill, bending beneath casks of brandy and baskets of champagne, and, for the first time in the history of that celebrated building, the floor (wonderful to relate, it *has* a floor,) was *washed*, at a lavish expenditure of some fifty pails of water, the using up of one entire broom, and the melting away of sundry bars of the best yellow soap; after which, I am told that the enterprising and benevolent individuals, who had undertaken the Herculean⁸ task, succeeded in washing the boards through the hopeless load of dirt, which had accumulated upon them during the summer and autumn. All these inter-

5. Fatally stabbed, Caesar, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 3.2.183, calls the blow from his friend Brutus "the most unkindest cut of all," a famous phrase much mocked for redundancy.

6. Rubber, caoutchouc, from the time when most rubber came from southeast Asia. The California rainy season is variable, roughly November through March.

7. The Humboldt Hotel, like the county and bay in northern California, honors the great Prussian scientist Alexander, Baron von Humboldt (1769–1859), revered in the mid-19th century as the first

great explorer for scientific rather than religious, political, or commercial reasons, and as the seemingly all-knowing author of *The American Journey*, a multivolume account of his scientific expedition into South and Central America. He visited Washington, D.C., as President Jefferson's guest in 1804 but never saw California.

8. In Greek myth Hercules is a mighty hero, son of Jupiter and Alcmena; he performs twelve seemingly impossible labors, the fifth of which is the cleansing of the stables of Augeas, who had penned 3,000 head of cattle there for thirty years.

esting particulars were communicated to me by "Ned," when he brought up dinner.⁹ That distinguished individual himself was in his element, and in a most intense state of perspiration and excitement at the same time.

About dark, we were startled by the loudest hurras, which arose at the sight of an army of India-rubber coats, (the rain was falling in riversfull,) each one enshrouding a Rich Barian,¹ which was rapidly descending the hill. This troop was headed by the "General," who—lucky man that he is—waved on high, instead of a banner, a *live* lantern, actually composed of tin and window-glass, and evidently intended by its maker to act in no capacity but that of a lantern! The "General" is the largest and tallest and—with one exception, I think—the oldest man upon the river. He is about fifty, I should fancy, and wears a snow-white beard of such immense dimensions, in both length and thickness, that any elderly Turk would expire with envy, at the mere sight of it. Don't imagine that *he* is a reveler; by no means; the gay crowd followed *him*, for the same reason that the king followed Madame Blaize, "because he went before."²

At nine o'clock in the evening, they had an oyster and champagne³ supper in the Humboldt, which was very gay with toasts, songs, speeches, etc. I believe that the company danced all night; at any rate, they were dancing when I went to sleep, and they were dancing when I woke the next morning. The revel was kept up in this mad way for three days, growing wilder every hour. Some never slept at all during that time. On the fourth day, they got past dancing, and, lying in drunken heaps about the bar-room, commenced a most unearthly howling;—some barked like dogs, some roared like bulls, and others hissed like serpents and geese. Many were too far gone to imitate anything but their own animalized selves. The scene, from the description I have had of it, must have been a complete illustration of the fable of Circe⁴ and her fearful transformations. Some of these bacchanals⁵ were among the most respectable and respected men upon the river. Many of them had resided here for more than a year, and had never been seen intoxicated before. It seemed as if they were seized with a reckless mania for pouring down liquor, which, as I said above, everything conspired to foster and increase.

Of course, there were some who kept themselves aloof from these excesses; but they were few, and were not allowed to enjoy their sobriety in peace. The revelers formed themselves into a mock vigilance committee, and when one of these unfortunates appeared outside, a constable, followed by those who were able to keep their legs, brought him before the Court, where he was tried on some amusing charge, and *invariably* sentenced to "treat the crowd." The prisoners had generally the good sense to submit cheerfully to their fate.

Towards the latter part of the week, people were compelled to be a little more quiet from sheer exhaustion; but on New Year's day, when there was a

9. Clappe's "light mulatto" cook and waiter, Ned, a fine fiddler, had been the cook on the brig *Somers* in 1842, when the captain hanged three men for mutiny.

1. A resident of Rich Bar; but "Barian" has an ironic echo of "barbarian."

2. Oliver Goldsmith (1730–1774), Irish writer then immensely popular in the United States, wrote a facetious spoof, "Elegy on Mrs. Mary Blaize," in imitation of a French poem by Bernard de la Monnoye. In the elegy the king himself is said to have

"followed her / When she has walked before."

3. Oysters arrived in the gold mining camps in tin cans, champagne in bottles.

4. Daughter of the sun and a sea nymph, Circe lived on the island of Aetna surrounded by people she had turned into animals. In Homer's *Odyssey* she transforms twenty-two of Odysseus's companions into swine.

5. Drunken celebrants, like ancient worshipers of the Greek god of wine, Bacchus.

grand dinner at Rich Bar, the excitement broke out, if possible, worse than ever. The same scenes in a more or less aggravated form, in proportion as the strength of the actors held out, were repeated at Smith's Bar and "The Junction."

Nearly every day, I was dreadfully frightened, by seeing a boat-load of intoxicated men fall into the river, where nothing but the fact of their *being* intoxicated, saved many of them from drowning. One morning, about thirty dollars worth of bread, (it must have been "tipsy cake,")⁶ which the baker was conveying to Smith's Bar, fell overboard, and sailed merrily away towards Marysville.⁷ People passed⁸ the river in a boat, which was managed by a pulley and a rope, that was strained across it from Indian Bar to the opposite shore.

Of the many acquaintances, who had been in the habit of calling nearly every evening three, only, appeared in the cabin during as many weeks. Now, however, the Saturnalia is about over. "Ned" and "Choch,"⁹ have nearly fiddled themselves into their respective graves,—the claret (a favorite wine with miners,) and oysters are exhausted,—brandied fruits are rarely seen, and even port wine is beginning to look scarce. Old callers occasionally drop in, looking dreadfully sheepish and subdued, and so sorry,—and people are evidently arousing themselves from the bacchanal madness, into which they were so suddenly and so strangely drawn.

With the exception of my last,¹ this is the most unpleasant letter which I have ever felt it my duty to write to you. Perhaps you will wonder that I should touch upon such a disagreeable subject at all. But I am bound, Molly, by my promise, to give you a *true* picture (as much as in me lies,) of mining life and its peculiar temptations, "nothing extenuating nor setting down aught in malice." But with all their failings, believe me, the miners, as a class, possess many truly admirable characteristics.

I have had rather a stupid time during the storm. We had been in the habit of taking frequent rows upon the river in a funny little toppling canoe, carved out of a log. The bridge at one end of our boating ground and the rapids at the other, made quite a pretty lake. To be sure it was so small that we generally passed and repassed its beautiful surface at least thirty times in an hour. But we did not mind *that*, I can assure you. We were only *too* glad to be able to go onto the water at all. I used to return, loaded down with the magnificent large leaves of some aquatic plant, which the gentle frosts had painted with the most gorgeous colors, lots of fragrant mint, and a few wan, white flowers, which had lingered past their autumnal glory. The richest hot-house bouquet could never give me half the pleasure, which I took in arranging in a pretty vase of purple and white, those gorgeous leaves. They made me think of Moorish Arabesques;² so quaint and *bizarre*, and at the same

6. Cake made of pastry and almonds—or any dry cake—saturated with wine or brandy and served with custard sauce.

7. Marysville, the Yuba County seat, is at the confluence of the Feather River and the Yuba River.

8. Crossed.

9. A "white man by the name of 'Chock,'" an assistant violinist to Ned, is introduced in Letter 8, where Clappe relishes the California convention that allows him to pass under a single name, as if he were Homer or Hannibal.

1. Letter 11 tells two grim stories. A Swede who stole money was caught, tried, and most ineptly

hanged: his writhing body, which was hauled up and down several times before the noose tightened enough to choke him to death, was left hanging for several hours. The second story involves two men who abandoned their companion in the snow and, as it turned out, very probably robbed and killed him; they were allowed to leave the Bar alive for want of conclusive evidence against them. Below: "nothing . . . in malice": the Moor's last speech, *Othello* 5.2.

2. A design marked by intricate patterns of interlaced lines.

time dazzlingly brilliant were the varied tints. They were in their glory at evening; for like an oriental beauty, they *lighted up* splendidly. Alas! where one little month ago, my pretty lake lay laughing up at the stars, a turbid torrent rushes noisily by;—the poor little canoe was swept away with the bridge, and splendid leaves hide their bright heads forever beneath the dark waters.

But I am not entirely bereft of the beautiful. From my last walk, I brought home a tiny bit of *out-doors*, which through all the long, rainy months that are to come, will sing to me silently, yet eloquently, of the blue and gold of the vanished summer, and the crimson and purple of its autumn. It is a branch, gathered from that prettiest feature of mountain scenery, a moss-grown fir-tree. You will see them at every step, standing all lovely in this graceful robe. It is in color, a vivid pea-green, with little hard flowers, which look more like dots than anything else, and contrast beautifully with the deeper verdure of the fir. The branch, which I brought home, I have placed above my window. It is three feet in length and as large round as a person's arm; and there it remains, a cornice wreathed with purple-starred tapestry, whose wondrous beauty no upholsterer can ever match.

I have got the prettiest New Year's present. You will never guess what it is, so I shall have to tell you. On the eve of the year, as the "General" was lifting a glass of water, which had just been brought from the river, to his lips, he was startled at the sight of a tiny fish. He immediately put it into a glass jar and gave it to me. It is that most lovely of all the creatures of Thetis,³ a spotted trout, a little more than two inches in length. Its back of mingled green and gold, is splashed with dots of the richest sable. A mark of a dark ruby color, in shape like an anchor, crowns its elegant little head. Nothing can be prettier than the delicate wings of pale purple, with which its snowy belly is faintly penciled. Its jet black eyes, rimmed with silver, within a circlet of rare sea-blue, gleam like diamonds, and its whole graceful shape is gilded with a shimmering sheen, infinitely lovely. When I watch it from across the room, as it glides slowly round its crystal palace, it reminds me of a beam of many-colored light; but when it glides up and down in its gay playfulness, it gleams through the liquid atmosphere like a box of shining silver. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever;"⁴ and, truly, I never weary watching the perfected loveliness of my graceful little captive.

In the list of my deprivations, above written, I forgot to mention a fact, which I know will gain me the sympathy of all carnivorously disposed people. It is, that we have had no *fresh meat* for nearly a month! Dark and ominous rumors are also floating through the moist air, to the effect that the potatoes and onions are about to give out! But don't be alarmed, dear Molly. There is no danger of a famine. For have we not got wagon loads of hard, dark hams, whose indurated hearts nothing but the sharpest knife and the stoutest arm can penetrate? Have we not got quintals⁵ of dreadful mackerel, fearfully crystalized in black salt? Have we not barrels upon barrels of rusty pork; and flour enough to victual a large army for the next two

3. In Greek myth, a sea nymph, mother of Achilles.

4. The beginning of Book I of John Keats's *Endymion* (1818): "A thing of beauty is a joy forever /

Its loveliness increases; it will never / Pass into nothingness."

5. Hundredweights.

years? Yea, verily, have we; and more also. For we have oysters in cans, preserved meats and sardines, (*appropo*, I *detest* them) by the hundred box full.

So hush the trembling of that tender little heart and shut those tearful and alarmed eyes, while I press a good-night kiss on their drooping lids.

LETTER TWENTY-SECOND.⁶

FROM OUR LOG CABIN, Indian Bar, Oct. 27, 1852.⁷

In my last epistle, my dear M., I left myself safely ensconced at Greenwood's Rancho, in about as uncomfortable a position as a person could well be, where board was fourteen dollars a week. Now you must not think that the proprietors were at all to blame for our miserable condition. They were, I assure you, very gentlemanly and intelligent men; and I owe them a thousand thanks, for the many acts of kindness, and the friendly efforts which they made to amuse and interest me while I was in their house. They said from the first that they were utterly unprepared to receive ladies, and it was only after some persuasion, and as a favor to me, that they consented to let me come. They intend soon to build a handsome house; for it is thought that this valley will be a favorite summer resort for people from the cities below.

The American Valley⁸ is one of the most beautiful in all California. It is seven miles long and three or four wide, with the Feather River⁹ wending its quiet way through it, unmolested by flumes, and undisturbed by wing dams.¹ It is a superb farming country, everything growing in the greatest luxuriance. I saw turnips there which measured larger round than my waist, and all other vegetables in the same proportion. There are beautiful rides in every direction; though I was too unwell during my stay there to explore them as I wished. There is one drawback upon the beauty of these valleys, and it is one peculiar to all the scenery in this part of California—and that is, the monotonous tone of the foliage, nearly all the trees being firs. One misses that infinite variety of waving forms, and those endless shades of verdure, which make New England forest scenery so exquisitely lovely. And then that gorgeous autumnal phenomenon, witnessed, I believe, nowhere but in the Northern States of the Union, one never sees here. How often, in my far-away Yankee home, have I laid me down at eve, with the whole earth looking so freshly green, to rise in the morning and behold the wilderness blossoming, not only like the rose, but like all other flowers beside, and glittering as if a shower of butterflies had fallen upon it during the silent watches of the night. I have a vague idea that I "hooked"² that butterfly comparison from

6. The text is from the *San Francisco Pioneer* (November 1855).

7. This is one week before the Democrat Franklin Pierce won the presidential election.

8. In Letter 21 Clappe describes her trip to the American Valley (east of Quincy), where men were meeting to nominate presidential electors. The Greenwood Rancho was the headquarters of the Democratic Party. Clappe stayed at a better place, the American Rancho, which was the Whig headquarters. She states emphatically that she was not a Whig, but a Democrat (holding strong convictions although not allowed to vote).

9. Not a valley created by the American River near Sacramento, but a valley created by the Feather

River, near Quincy, California.

1. Piers built out from the shore to deepen a channel or to divert logs and debris; in Letter 20 Clappe specifies that a wing dam "differs from a common dam, in dividing the river lengthways instead of across." Flumes are narrow channels (usually wooden) which carry water to pour onto water wheels or into troughs; as water pours over dirt tossed onto troughs, gold particles, being heavy, settle at the bottom. Perhaps a letter was lost, for in Letter 15 Clappe says she had mentioned flumes earlier. In Letter 20 she describes daringly walking "high above the bed of the river, from flume to flume, across a board connecting the two."

2. Lifted, stole.

somebody. If so I beg the injured person's pardon, and he or she may have a hundred of *mine* to pay for it.

It was at Greenwood's Rancho, that the famous quartz hoax³ originated last winter, which so completely gulled our good miners on the river. I visited the spot which has been excavated to some extent. The stone is very beautiful being lined and streaked and splashed with crimson, purple, green, orange, and black. There was one large white block, veined with stripes of a magnificent blood-red color, and partly covered with a dark mass, which was the handsomest thing of the kind I ever saw. Some of the crystalizations were wonderfully perfect. I had a piece of the bed rock given me, completely covered with natural prisms, varying in size from an inch down to those not larger than the head of a pin.

Much of the immigration from across the plains, on its way to the cities below, stops here for awhile to recruit.⁴ I always had a strange fancy for that Nomadic way of coming to California. To lie down under starry skies, hundreds of miles from any human habitation, and to rise up on dewy mornings, to pursue our way through a strange country, so wildly beautiful, seeing each day something new and wonderful, seemed to me truly enchanting. But cruel reality strips *everything* of its rose tints. The poor women arrive, looking as haggard as so many Endorean witches;⁵ burnt to the color of a hazelnut, with their hair cut short, and its gloss entirely destroyed by the alkali, whole plains of which they are compelled to cross on the way. You will hardly find a family that has not left some beloved one buried upon the plains. And they are fearful funerals, those. A person dies, and they stop just long enough to dig his grave and lay him in it, as decently as circumstances will permit, and the long train hurries onward, leaving its healthy companion of yesterday, perhaps, in this boundless city of the dead. On this hazardous journey, they dare not linger.

I was acquainted with a young widow of twenty, whose husband died of cholera when they were but five weeks on their journey. He was a Judge in one of the Western States,⁶ and a man of some eminence in his profession. She is a pretty little creature, and all the aspirants to matrimony are candidates for her hand.

One day a party of immigrant women came into my room, which was also the parlor of the establishment. Some observation was made which led me to enquire of one of them if her husband was with her.

"She hain't got no husband," fairly *chuckled* one of her companions; "She came with *me*, and her feller died of cholera on the plains!"

At this startling and brutal announcement, the poor girl herself gave a hysteric giggle, which I at first thought proceeded from heartlessness; but I was told afterwards, by the person under whose immediate protection she came out, and who was a sister of her betrothed, that the tender woman's

3. In Letter 13 Clappe tells the story of the "salting" of a mine so it could be sold as bearing abundant and valuable quartz.

4. *Recruit*: recover.

5. In 1 Samuel 28, King Saul, having already disobeyed God, further sins by disguising himself and consulting a witch in the village of Endor, whom he compels to violate his own law by summoning up the dead prophet Samuel. The biblical account

says nothing about the personal beauty or ugliness of the witch, but well before the 19th century she was visualized as a hag, like the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

6. A New Englander, Clappe is still thinking of states like Illinois as western, although California had been a far more western state since September 1850, several months after she arrived there.

heart received such a fearful shock at the sudden death of her lover, that for several weeks her life was despaired of.

I spent a great deal of time calling at the different encampments; for nothing enchanted me half so much as to hear about this strange exodus from the States. I never weary of listening to stories of adventures on the plains, and some of the family histories are deeply interesting.

I was acquainted with four women, all sisters or sisters-in-law, who had among them thirty-six children, the entire number of which had arrived thus far in perfect health. They could of themselves form quite a respectable village.

The immigration this year, contained many intelligent and truly elegant persons, who, having caught the fashionable epidemic, had left luxurious homes in the States, to come to California. Among others, there was a young gentleman of nineteen, the son of a United States Senator, who having just graduated, felt adventurous, and determined to cross the plains. Like the rest, he arrived in a somewhat dilapidated condition, with elbows out, and a hat the very counterpart of Sam Weller's "gossamer ventilation,"⁷ which, if you remember, "though *not* a very handsome 'un to look at, was an astonishin' good 'un to wear!" I must confess that he became ragged clothes the best of any one I ever saw, and made me think of the picturesque beggar boys, in Murillo's⁸ paintings of Spanish life.

Then there was a person, who used to sing in public with Ossian Dodge.⁹ He had a voice of remarkable purity and sweetness, which he was kind enough to permit us to hear now and then. I hardly know of what nation he claimed to be. His father was an Englishman, his mother an Italian; he was born in Poland, and had lived nearly all his life in the United States. He was not the only musical genius that we had among us. There was a little girl at one of the tents, who had taught herself to play on the accordeon on the way out. She was really quite a prodigy, singing very sweetly, and accompanying herself with much skill upon the instrument.

There was another child, whom I used to go to look at, as I would go to examine a picture. She had, without exception, the most beautiful face I ever saw. Even the alkali had not been able to mar the golden glory of the curls which clustered around that splendid little head. She had soft brown eyes, which shone from beneath their silken lashes, like "a tremulous evening star;"¹ a mouth which made you think of a string of pearls threaded on scarlet; and a complexion of the waxen purity of the japonica,² with the exception of a band of brownest freckles, which, extending from the tip of each cheek straight across the prettiest possible nose, added, I used to fancy, a new beauty to her enchanting face. She was very fond of me, and used to bring

7. The epitome of London lowlife, Weller was Samuel Pickwick's servant in Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37).

8. Bartolomé Murillo (1617-1682), Spanish painter famous in his own time for exalted biblical scenes and in the mid-19th century for subjects such as Clappe is thinking of—moodily romanticized street urchins begging, eating, playing with dogs.

9. Singer and songwriter active in New York when these letters were written, author of the timely "Ho! Westward Ho!" (1850) and "Ossian's Serenade" (1850), the latter song being an allusion to

Fingal (1762) by the Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736-1796). (*Fingal* purports to be a translation of a Celtic epic by Ossian, the son of Finn, or Fingal.)

1. *Tremulous* is a common word in English Romantic poetry, but the source may be Dante's *Purgatory*, Canto 12, where the visage of an angel casts forth streams of "tremulous luster like the matin star," according to the Henry Francis Cary translation standard in Clappe's time. (Venus is both the morning and the evening star.)

2. White camellia (an import from Japan and other regions of the Orient).

me wild cherries which her brothers had gathered for her. Many a morning I have raised my eyes from my book, startled by that vision of infant loveliness—for her step had the still grace of a snow-flake—standing in beautiful silence by my side.

But the most interesting of all my pets was a widow, whom we used to call the "long woman." When but a few weeks on the journey, she had buried her husband, who died of cholera after about six hours illness. She had come on; for what else could she do? No one was willing to guide her back to her old home in the States; and when I knew her, she was living under a large tree a few rods from the rancho, and sleeping at night, with all her family, in her one covered wagon. God only knows where they all stowed themselves away, for she was a modern Mrs. Rogers, with "nine small children and one at the breast," indeed, of this catechismal number,³ the oldest was but fifteen years of age, and the youngest a nursing babe of six months. She had eight sons and one daughter. Just fancy how dreadful, only one girl to all that boy! People used to wonder what took me so often to her encampment and at the interest with which I listened to what they called her "stupid talk." Certainly, there was nothing poetical about the woman. Leigh Hunt's friend⁴ could not have elevated her common-place into the sublime. She was immensely tall, and had a hard, weather-beaten face, surmounted by a dreadful horn comb and a heavy twist of hay-colored hair, which, before it was cut and its gloss all destroyed by the alkali, must, from its luxuriance, have been very handsome. But what interested me so much in her, was the dogged and determined way in which she had set that stern, wrinkled face of hers against poverty. She owned nothing in the world but her team, and yet she planned all sorts of successful ways, to get food for her small, or rather large family. She used to wash shirts, and iron them on a chair—in the open air, of course; and you can fancy with what success. But the gentlemen were too generous to be critical and as they paid her three or four times as much as she asked, she accumulated quite a handsome sum in a few days. She made me think of a long-legged, very thin hen, scratching for dear life, to feed her never-to-be-satisfied brood. Poor woman! she told me that she was compelled to allowance⁵ her young ones, and that she seldom gave them as much as they could eat, at any one meal. She was worse off than the

—"old woman who lived in a shoe,
And had so many children she didn't know what to do;
To some she gave butter, and some she gave bread,
And to some she gave whippings, and sent them to bed."⁶

Now *my* old woman had no butter and very little bread; and she was so naturally economical, that even whippings were sparingly administered. But after all their privations, they were—with the exception of the eldest hope⁷—

3. By "catechismal number" Clappe means merely a group of children of an age to be taught church catechism. "Mrs. Rogers, with 'nine small children and one at the breast'; his wife, with nine small children and one at the breast, followed the Protestant martyr John Rogers to Smithfield on February 14, 1554, when Queen Mary had him burned alive at the stake.

4. Clappe uses this allusion in Letter 5 also: "I looked at this person with somewhat the same kind of *inverted* admiration, wherewith Leigh Hunt was

went to gaze upon that friend of his, 'who used to elevate the common-place to a pitch of the sublime.'" Most likely, the friend was John Keats, like Hunt one of the so-called Cockney School of poets.

5. A verb: ration, limit.

6. One of the children's rhymes in *Songs for the Nursery; or, Mother Goose's Melodies for Children* (London, 1719), frequently reprinted.

7. A common phrase for oldest child, but specifically an echo of Robert Burns's "The Cotter's Sat-

as healthy looking a set of ragged little wretches as ever I saw. The aforesaid "hope" was the longest, the leanest, and the bob-sidedest specimen of a Yankee that it is possible to imagine. He wore a white face, whiter eyes, and whitest hair; and walked about, looking as if existence was the merest burden, and he wished somebody would have the goodness to take it off his hands. He seemed always to be in the act of yoking up a pair of oxen, and ringing every change of which the English alphabet is capable, upon the one single Yankee execration, "*darnation!*" which he scattered, in all its comical varieties, upon the tow head of his young brother, a piece of chubby giggle, who was forever trying to hold up a dreadful yoke, which *wouldn't* "stay put," in spite of all the efforts of those fat, dirty little hands of his. The "long woman," mother like, excused him by saying that he had been sick; though once when the "darned fools" flew thicker than usual, she gently observed that "he had forgotten that he was a child himself once." He certainly retained no trace of having enjoyed that delightful state of existence; and though one would not be so rude as to call him an "old boy," yet being always clad in a middle-aged habit, an elderly coat and adult pantaloons, one would as little fancy him a *young* man. Perhaps the fact of his wearing his father's wardrobe, in all its unaltered amplitude, might help to confuse one's ideas on the subject.

There was another dear old lady, to whom I took the largest kind of a liking, she was so exquisitely neat. Although she too had no floor, her babe always had on a clean white dress and face to match. She was about four feet high, and had a perfect passion for wearing those frightful frontpieces of false hair, with which the young women of L.⁸ were once in the habit of covering their abundant tresses. She used to send me little pots of fresh butter,—the first that I had tasted since I left the States,—beautifully stamped,⁹ and looking like ingots of virgin gold. I, of course, made a dead set at the frontpiece; though I do believe, that to this distorted taste, and its accompanying horror of a cap, she owed the preservation of her own beautiful hair.¹ To please me she laid it aside; but I am convinced that it was restored to its proud eminence as soon as I left the valley, for she evidently had a "sneaking kindness"² for it that nothing could destroy. I have sometimes thought that she wore it from religious principle, thinking it her duty to look as old as possible, for she appeared fifteen years younger when she took it off. She told me that in crossing the plains, she used to stop on Saturdays, and taking everything out of the wagons, wash them in strong lye; to which precaution she attributed the perfect health which they all enjoyed (the *family*, not the wagons) during the whole journey.

There is one thing for which the immigrants deserve high praise, and that is, for having adopted the Bloomer dress,³ (frightful as it is on all other occasions) in crossing the plains. For such an excursion it is just the thing.

urday Night" (very popular in the United States), where the "eldest hope" of the cotter and his wife is "their Jenny, woman-grown."

8. Unidentified; perhaps an allusion to a village in New England the sisters knew.

9. After the hard work of churning, soft fresh butter was put into wooden molds, the lid of which often was carved so that a pleasing design could be imprinted on the top.

1. A setter freezes into a "dead set" when it spots

a game bird or animal; here, Clappe makes a determined effort to persuade the woman to remove the hairpiece.

2. A common phrase meaning half-concealed fondness (not "kindness" in our sense).

3. Garb consisting of a short skirt over loose trousers gathered tight at the ankles, then recommended by the crusader for women's suffrage Amelia Bloomer (1818–1894) in her magazine *The Lily* (1848–54).

I ought to say a word about the dances which we used to have in the bar room, a place so low that a *very* tall man could not have stood upright in it. One side was fitted up as a store, and another side with bunks for lodgers. These bunks were elegantly draped with red calico, through which we caught dim glimpses of blue blankets. If they could only have had sheets, they would have fairly been enveloped to the American colors. By the way, I wonder if there is anything *national* in this eternal passion for blue blankets and red calico? On ball nights the bar was closed, and everything was very quiet and respectable. To be sure, there was some danger of being swept away in a flood of tobacco juice; but luckily the floor was uneven, and it lay around in puddles, which with care one could avoid, merely running the minor risk of falling prostrate upon the wet boards, in the midst of a galopade.⁴

Of course the company was made up principally of the immigrants. Such dancing, such dressing, and such conversation surely was never heard or seen before. The gentlemen, generally, were compelled to have a regular fight with their fair partners, before they could drag them on to the floor. I am happy to say, that almost always the stronger vessel won the day, or rather night, except in the case of certain timid youths, who after one or two attacks, gave up the battle in despair.

I thought that I had had some experience in bad grammar, since I came to California, but the good people were the first that I had ever heard use right royal *we*, instead of *us*.⁵ Do not imagine that all, or even the larger part of the company, were of this description. There were many intelligent and well-bred women, whose acquaintance I made with extreme pleasure.

After reading the description of the inconveniences and discomforts which we suffered in the American Valley,—and I can assure you that I have not at all exaggerated them,—you may imagine my joy when two of our friends arrived from Indian Bar, for the purpose of accompanying us home. We took two days for our return, and thus I was not at all fatigued. The weather was beautiful, our friends amusing, and F. well and happy. We stopped at night at a rancho, where they had a tame frog. You cannot think how comically it looked, hopping about the bar, quite as much at home as a tame squirrel would have been. I had a bed made up for me at this place, on one end of a long dining table. It was very comfortable, with the trifling drawback that I had to rise earlier than I wished, in order that what had been a bed at night, might become a table by day.

We stopped at the top of the hill, and set fire to some fir trees.⁶ Oh, how splendidly they looked, with the flames leaping and curling amid the dark green foliage, like a golden snake, fiercely beautiful. The shriek which the fire gave as it sprang upon its verdant prey, made me think of the hiss of some furious reptile, about to wrap in its burning folds its helpless victim.

With what perfect delight did I re-enter my beloved log cabin. One of our good neighbors had swept and put it in order before my arrival and everything was clean and neat as possible. How gratefully to my feet felt the thick warm

4. A sidelong or curvetting kind of gallop (and also a lively dance).

5. Clappe puns on the royal "we" (one person), as in the phrase attributed to Queen Victoria "We are not amused"; she had heard some of the immi-

grants say something like, "He came with we."

6. Apparently they lighted the fire to see the spectacle, not being concerned with shortage of resources or danger to the forest.

carpet; how perfect appeared the floor, which I had once reviled (I begged its pardon on the spot) because it was not exactly even; how cosy the old faded calico couch; how thoroughly comfortable the four chairs, (two of them had been thoroughly rebottomed with brown sail cloth, tastefully put on with a border of carpet tacks); how truly elegant the closet-case toilet table, with the doll's looking glass hanging above, which shewed my face—the first time that I had seen it since I left home—some six shades darker than usual; how convenient the trunk which did duty as a wash-stand with its vegetable dish instead of a bowl, (at the rancho I had a pint tin pan, when it was not in use in the kitchen); but above and beyond all, how superbly luxurious the magnificent bedstead, with its splendid hair mattress, its clean wide linen sheets, its nice square pillows, and its large generous blankets and quilts. And then the cosy little supper, arrayed on a table-cloth; and the long, delightful evening afterwards, by a fragrant fire of beach and pine, when we talked over our past sufferings! Oh, it was delicious as a dream, and almost made amends for the three dreadful weeks of pleasuring in the American Valley.

1855

WALT WHITMAN

1819–1892

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, son of a Long Island farmer turned carpenter who moved the family into Brooklyn in 1823 during a building boom. The ancestors were undistinguished, but stories survived of some forceful characters among them, and Whitman's father was acquainted with powerful personalities like the aged Thomas Paine. Whitman left school at eleven to become an office boy in a law firm, then worked for a doctor; already he was enthralled with the novels of Sir Walter Scott. By twelve he was working in the printing office of a newspaper and contributing sentimental items. By fifteen, when his family moved back into the interior of Long Island, Whitman was on his own. Very early he reached full physical maturity and in his midteens was contributing "pieces"—probably correct, conventional poems—to one of the best Manhattan papers, the *Mirror*, and often crossing the ferry from Brooklyn to attend debating societies and to use his journalist's passes at theaters in Manhattan. His rich fantasy life was fueled by numberless romantic novels. By sixteen he was a compositor in Manhattan, a journeyman printer. But two great fires in 1835 disrupted the printing industry, and as he turned seventeen he rejoined his family. For five years he taught intermittently at country and small-town schools, interrupting teaching to start a newspaper of his own in 1838 and to work briefly on another Long Island paper. Although forced into the exile of Long Island, he refused to compromise further with the sort of life he wanted. During his visits home he outraged his father by refusing to do farm work. Although he was innovative in the classroom, he struck some of the farm families he boarded with as unwilling to fulfill his role of teacher outside school hours; the main charge against him was laziness. He was active in debating societies, however, and already thought of himself as a writer. By early 1840 he had started the series "Sun-Down Papers from the Desk of a School-Master" for the Long Island *Democrat* and was writing poems. One of