

COULTERVILLE

Chronicle

THE ANNALS OF A MOTHER LODE

MINING TOWN

BY

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Chapter VI.

*Coulter
and Maxwell
Draw Lots*

New Year's Diggings to Hazel Green. Throughout this area miners' cabins were strung along singly and in groups under the pines.

The thirty-six thousand people who had arrived at the port of San Francisco in 1850 were evenly distributed between this section and the northern mines. Shrewd Westerners from the Mississippi Valley, brusque British from Cornwall, cool Scotsmen, witty Celts, artistic French, voluble Italians, austere Spaniards, and imperturbable Chinese, with a sprinkling of Hawaiians, made up the mining camps in the Coulterville area, already well established and easily designated.

The village itself was located atop the serpentine with an outcropping of quartz at Coulter's store. Near by, within a half mile, at the eastern contact of slate and greenstone, was the Louisa mine; at the western contact were the Tyro, Potosi, and Malvina mines. Two miles south of the town, where the serpentine outcrops again, was the Mary Harrison mine.

Three miles northwest, on the trail by which one entered Coulterville, was an immense gold-bearing quartz ledge standing boldly out against the sky. The camp at this point had been named Peñón Blanco, or white rocky cliff, by the Mexicans. Six Americans were mining there at the time. In the immediate neighborhood were Blue Gulch, Red Cloud, Fly Away Gulch, Dog Town, Buckhorn, and Horseshoe Bend.

Twenty-one miles southeast was the Mariposa region, a rugged, scantily timbered terrain, with abruptly formed uplands, steep gravelly hills, and bold outcroppings of quartz. Near by were Agua Fria, Quartzburg, and Hornitos. At Bear Valley near Mariposa were Princeton, Mt. Bullion, Mt. Ophir, and other settlements.

The rickety pioneer cabins of '48 had been greatly improved. Those in the Coulterville and Mariposa areas had been strongly built of logs, with doors and windows of planking, a well-constructed stone chimney, and a fireplace with a five-foot

Chapter VII.

*The
Formative Fifties*

on his own. In working for others, he was dependable and especially valuable as a sluice miner. One day at Horseshoe Bend, three miles from Coulterville, a new find other than gold had been made. Chinese workmen, mining the deep gravel channels in the river, had turned a powerful stream of water on a slope and uncovered the skeleton of a mastodon with nine-foot tusks in a perfect state of preservation. Beside the bones were human skulls with inch-thick frontal bones. These specimens were lying under eighty feet of gravel. In great excitement the miners and townspeople viewed these relics of a bygone era and then took them to the Odd Fellows lodge room in Coulterville, where they were kept on display.

Though the Chinese disputes were the only local squatter troubles, Coulterville and other mining settlements in the state followed the court litigation and the private squatter brawls on Colonel Frémont's famous Mariposa grant. These violent disputes were known to everyone, but especially to the ambitious younger sons of Red Cloud, Malvina, and Potosi miners who had struck out for themselves and were at the time working at Frémont's Josephine, Pine Tree, or Black Drift mines.

The whole Mother Lode knew that Frémont had put back into improvements a large proportion of the millions in gold taken from his mines since '48. His settlement at Bear Valley had everything for a miner's needs, and the colonel's generosity to his employees endeared him to young and old. They had all been for him in the squatter troubles which had harassed him constantly since '48. His first Mexican laborers had started with pick and pan on what resembled a rocky cattle range but upon which he had decided, without hope of success, to prospect for gold.

With Sutter's tragic picture before him, Colonel Frémont refused to delay or to be intimidated, and by the end of '56 the story of his expensive and bloody battle in the courts and on the ground was a mining classic. In recounting it, one recalls Ida

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you in politeness, and finally do not judge the people you meet by their clothes, or think you are going West to find fools. A millionaire may be in greasy buckskin and a college graduate in rags."

Chapter IX.

*The
Crowded Seventies*

By the time the Coulterville and Yo Semite Turnpike was completed in '74, the business of the towns had so increased through tourist travel that every boy over thirteen years old was becoming an efficient helper in merchandising from behind the counter, handling a pack train of from two to fourteen mules, delivering groceries, or bringing lumber from the mills in the Red Cloud district. Many experimented with all of these enterprises and then settled down to the business of their fathers, mining.

Demet Bruschi, with his father's instinct for trade and his own liking for folks, was among those who preferred work above ground. Fearless, though not foolhardy, he could be trusted with every commission from gold dust to private documents, keeping his own counsel at all times. The elder Bruschi called the boy his safety vault for information not entered in the daybook. Demet's ability to speak four languages made him the repository for private instructions from the miners to whom he delivered supplies and payrolls. These he carried regularly to the Red Cloud, Marble Spring, Bandereta, and Hasloe mines.

Francisco Bruschi, long aware of a smoldering jealousy between his sons, encouraged Demet in dangerous enterprise earlier than he would have otherwise. Virgil had acquired polish from two years at Santa Clara College. He had returned with a knowledge of literature and history, and he spoke better Spanish than his brother. In his annoyance at Demet's refusal to enter Santa Clara, he forgot his own desperate homesickness and his first letter to his mother, in which he had written: "I shall never fence in another colt. In fact I don't believe in breaking them in, even."

Demet's refusal had been characteristic, a declaration that

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*The
Crowded Seventies*

dollars in a tin among cans of tomatoes in a box. A butcher boy was just ahead of him with a pack train of meat for the same mine. At a turn in the trail two masked men stopped the butcher boy, thinking he might have the money. They threw the meat from the boxes but found only five dollars, which he had got from a sale on the road. When young Demet came along, they let him pass. On another occasion he carried the best piece of ore ever taken from Marble Spring mine. It held so much gold that old Paul was sent along as guard, with a rifle. This specimen won a medal at the New Orleans fair that year.

The largest payroll Demet ever carried was five thousand dollars to the Red Cloud mine, the money concealed in two hollow ax handles in a case of hardware. The boy had early learned not to trust his packing to an amateur. Returning from the Bandereta mine one day with two bricks of gold valued at seventeen hundred dollars each, he was very tired and allowed the mine superintendent to pack the mule which was to carry the gold. When Demet reached home, one brick was missing. He had met no one and was all for rushing back at once, but his mother insisted upon his having food and coffee first. Saddling his best horse, he went in search of the buckskin bag, and at a point five miles from home he found it lying in the middle of the trail. The relieved messenger delivered the brick to his father, whose only comment was, "You didn't pack that *aparejo*." Demet accepted the implied compliment along with the reproach.

This was the first of many such commissions. Next in local importance to mining and Yo Semite tourist travel was the growing local trade with the cattle kings, Miller and Lux. At certain seasons these men, who could ride from Bakersfield to San Francisco and camp each night on their own land, sent their cattle to graze in the small valleys and hillsides above Coulterville. Miller was a handsome man, tall and broad shouldered, a two-hundred-twenty-pound dynamo of strength. Coulter-