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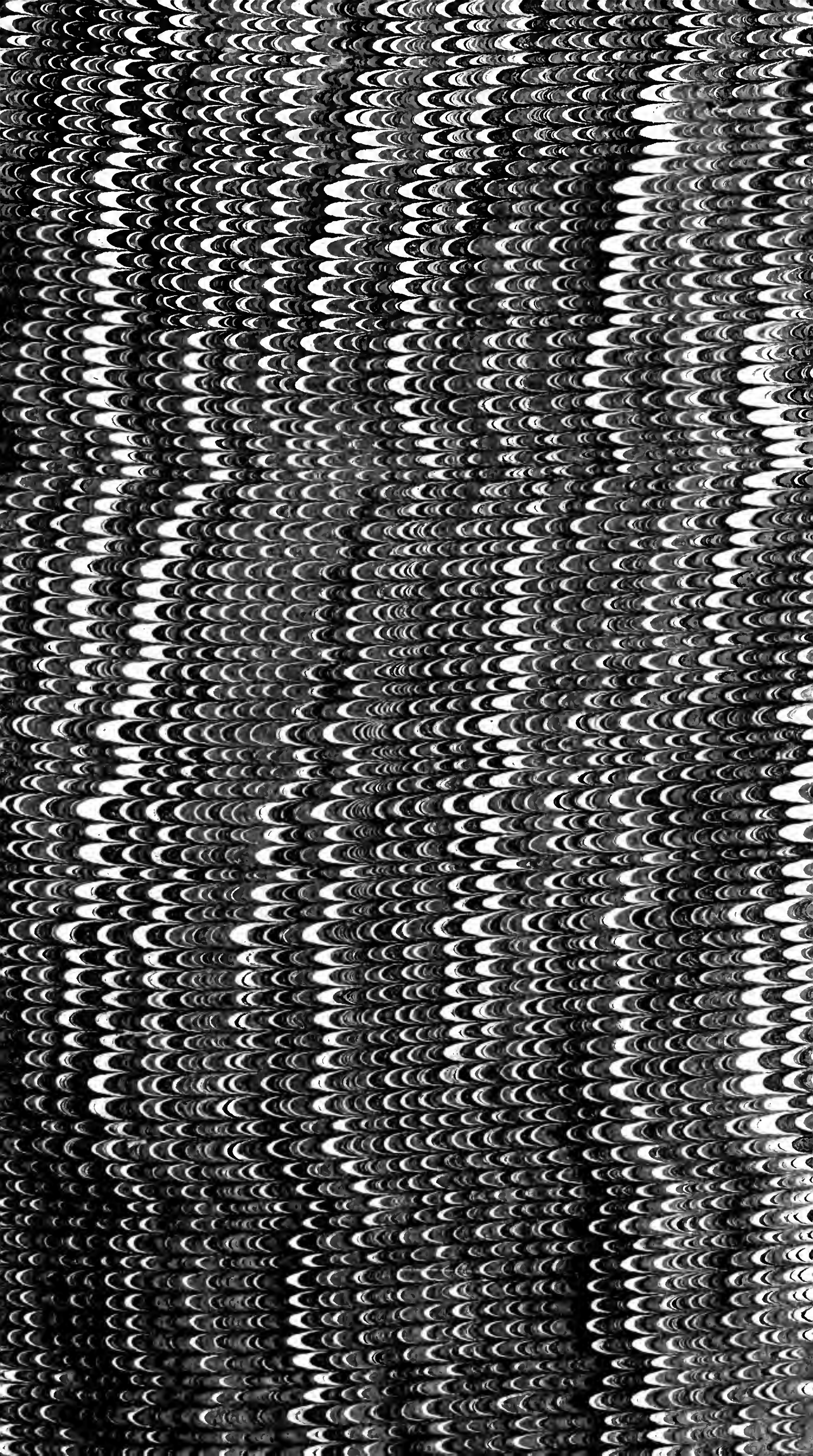

THE YO-SEMITE;

ITS HISTORY, ITS SCENERY, ITS DEVELOPMENT.

By JOHN ERASTUS LESTER.

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NOTE.

The following paper was prepared for, and read before the Rhode Island Historical Society, at their Cabinet, December 17th, 1872.

Many references and notes have been added to the original text.

Since these pages were in type, the Supreme Court of the United States has rendered their decision confirming the grant of the Yo-Semite to the State of California as a national park, and thus it would seem all claims of private individuals are forever quieted.

The paper is published at the request of many friends, and into their hands it is committed.

J. E. L.

February 1*st*, 1873.

THE YO-SEMITE.

I am aware that my subject seems better fitted for a scientific society, than one, which, like ours, seeks to preserve the recorded facts of the past. But we all love Nature and she addresses us in so varied moods that there is no one, who does not at some time find great pleasure in contemplating her developments. Nowhere probably upon the whole globe, has she given a more sublime and grand development, than in the valley, the surrounding hills and those magnificent waterfalls, which have taken the general name of YO-SEMITE. My task then shall be to tell you, what I can, in the brief time allotted me, of the Yo-Semite, the history of its discovery and exploration, its scenery and its future development.

I am also aware, how very far short of satisfaction to myself, as well as to you, I shall come in any attempt to describe the sublimity and grandeur of this scenery; I can only indicate, leaving your imagination to paint a more perfect picture, and trusting that you all may yet behold, as I have, those scenes with your own eyes, and drink in the *inspiration*—the voice of God speaking to us through Nature.

The history of the Yo-Semite is, to a certain extent, the history of California, for in this, culminates all the glories of her magnificent scenery, and to preserve this place, where man is forbidden to build his cities or in great numbers to congregate, as a *sacred* park, she has always labored, aided as far as possible by the Nation in her Legislative Councils. The discovery of gold, gave to California a sudden and almost unprecedented popularity and hither flocked people by the thousands to seek that ever luring, but ever vanishing phantom—a fortune. The facts connected with the early settlements upon the Pacific coast of North America, the various expeditions, the development under Spanish rule, and the wresting of that section now comprising California from the Spaniards are familiar to you all.*

The great extent of the State, its varied climates, the paucity of settlements, and the vast regions even now comparatively unexplored are not comprehended by us in the East, and are facts rarely known to others than those who have visited the "Golden State."

In examining that much vexed question as to the origin of the name of the State, I chanced upon an earlier mention of the existence of gold in that section of country than I have ever before seen in print. So curious is the old narrative that I deem it worthy of a few words here.

John A. Sutter will probably always be popularly considered as the first discoverer of gold in California. True, he owned the rancho where it was found, but James W. Marshall, who was in his employ, was really the person. He picked up the first gold, satisfied himself of its purity, and then made it known to Sutter. The story of its first discovery, the spread of the news, the armies of men who flocked to the spot, and the vast wealth which has thus flowed to the Nation, all furnish material for an extended essay, but we must hasten.

In June last I was in the pretty town of Golden, seventeen miles west of Denver, the capital of the territory of Colorado. The *hotel*-car, in which we had been living for a week past, was drawn up upon a siding. This was our home, and from here we set out upon our various excursions among the Rocky Mountains. We were brought officially into relations with Capt. Edward Berthoud, the Chief Engineer of the Colorado

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* See History of California. Robert Greenhow, Translator and Librarian to the Department of State, Washington; also Memoirs Historical, &c., by same. 1840.

Central Railroad. A friendship sprang up between us and I soon found that Capt. Berthoud was a man learned in many things—as botany, geology and history, as well as engineering. One day I happened to say to him that I was going over that often considered question of the derivation of the word California,* and then it was that he told me, that he had in his possession an old book which contained an early mention of the existence of gold in California and proposed to show it to me on the morrow. Capt. Berthoud† is a Frenchman, and brought the book with him, many years ago, to this country. It belonged to his father before him, and is a rare volume. It is not contained in any library in this city, and up to this writing I have been unable to find anywhere another copy.

I give you first the title of the book and then the extract *verbatim*, which contains the curious record.

> "A voyage round the world by the way of the Great South Sea. Performed in the years 1719–20–21–22 in the Speedwell of London, of 24 guns and 100 men (under His Majeſty's Commiſſion to cruiſe on the Spaniards in the late war with the Spaniſh Crown) till ſhe was caſt away on the Iſland of Juan Fernandez in May 1720; and afterwards continu'd in the Recovery, the Jeſus Maria, and Sacra Familia, &c. By Capt. George Shelvocke, Commander of the Speedwell, Recovery &c. in this expedition. MDCCXXVI.

No complaint can be found with this title on the score of wanting explicitness. Nowadays we always try to have our book titles tell as little as possible of what is within—a sort of mania for mystification, but in former times, when printing was far more tedious, and reading by far less generally practised, they used to print titles so that one knew what the book treated upon and need not be put to so unpleasant a task as reading several chapters to learn what the title should have been.

But to the words of the old book:

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* See "Annals of San Francisco," &c. Soule, N. Y., 1855, page 23.

† Berthoud Pass, in the Rocky Mountains, was named after him.

> "As to the bounds and extent of California our Geographers have never yet been able to determine either by their own obſervations or information from others, whether it is an iſland, or a part of the Continent of North America."

The record then goes on to state that they would not try to determine the fact, but if they did, it

> "would be perhaps more a ſatisfaction to the curious, than any real advantage to us; ſince it would be much the ſame to us whether it be an Iſland, or a part of the Continent, if we had any advantageous views of making any ſettlements there."

The record then continues:

> "The Eaſtern coaſt of that part of California, which I had a ſight of, appears to be mountaineous, barren, and ſandy and very like ſome parts of Peru; but nevertheleſs the ſoil about Puerto Seguro, and (very likely in moſt of the vallies) is a rich black mould, which as you turn it freſh up to the ſun appears as if intermingled with gold-duſt, ſome of which we endeavor'd to waſh and purify from the dirt; but tho' we were a little prejudic'd againſt the thoughts that it would be poſſible that this metal ſhould be so promiſcuouſly and univerſally mingled with common earth, yet we endeavor'd to cleanſe and waſh the earth from ſome of it, and the more we did, the more it appear'd like gold; but in order to be further ſatisfied, I brought away ſome of it which we loſt in our confuſions in China But be that as it will, it is very probable that this country abounds in metals of all ſorts, though the inhabitants had no utensils or ornaments of any metal whatſoever, which is no wonder, ſince they are ſo perfectly ignorant in all arts."

Those "confusions in China" of which our author speaks, may have saved for us the State, for had the "gold-dust" reached England, her people would have found their way over the oceans to this far-off land, driven out the Spaniards and natives and made a history for our consideration—the life of a State for our contemplation. But it was for Americans in later days to found a State, and advance it to prosperity and stability. It was for Americans to explore the mountain fastnesses and acquaint us with their grand and awful scenery, and it was to be the crowning glory of Americans to lay down a track over the rugged Sierras and drive over it the iron-horse, dragging precious freights—a track which should be a link in the iron bands which now hold the two oceans together.

In the development of this State, and the exploration of the mountain-wilds, that famous valley was discovered, of which I shall speak. Let us first describe in general terms the immediate country, and then trace the history of its discovery.

That range of mountains known as "Sierra Nevada" is limited to California, and extends from Mt. Shasta in the north to Tejon pass in the south, a length as estimated of 550 miles. Beyond Mt. Shasta this range with greatly diminished elevations stretches away through Oregon and Washington Territory under the name of the "Cascade Range," while from Tejon pass they become assimilated with the Coast Range geographically, but still to the geologist the two ranges retain their respective characteristics.

Eighty miles is given as the average width of this mountain range, whose western slope by a gradual descent finds its level on the shores of the Pacific, while the eastern is more abrupt, rising from the great basin up to the lofty peaks, within a space of a few miles. Deep gorges have been ploughed through this range, which are denominated "passes."

I will give you the elevation of some of the principal of these passes:

Mono,	10,765	feet above the sea.
Sonora,	10,115	" "
Carson,	8,759	" "
Yuba Gap,	6,642	" "
Donner,	7,056	" "

Through this last named the "Central Pacific" finds its way over the ever snow-clad hills.

The peaks just around these passes are very lofty, as for instance—

Mt. Whitney,	15,000	feet above	the sea.
Red Slate Rock,	13,400	"	"
Dana,	13,227	"	"
Castle Peak,	12 500	"	"
Wood's Peak,	10.552	"	"
Pyramid Peak,	10,120	"	"

I state these elevations that you may compare them with our highest New England mountain—Washington—which is 6,428 feet above the ocean. From this comparison you perceive how much grander must be these granite hills.

The Sierras are so high that they have up their sides well marked belts of vegetation. Around the foot hills we find the oak and pines (*Pinus sabiniana*, *Quercus Sonomensis*) as those most characteristic.

The next the pitch and sugar pines, the spruce and cedar, (*Pinus ponderosa*, *Pinus Lambertiana*, *Libocedrus decurrens*, *Abies Douglasii*), &c., &c. Next the firs—*Picea grandis* and *P. amabilis*, and also the *Pinus contorta*. In the highest belt, the end of all vegetation, we have the *Pinus flexilis* and the *Pinas aristata*. All these trees are by far larger and taller than those which compose our forests, and besides these we have those several groups of the "big trees" as they are called, which rival the world for size. Their botanical name is *Sequoia gigantea*, a twin-sister of the redwood *Sequoia sempervirens*, which abounds in the Truckee region of the Sierras.

In vegetation, then, this region is not wanting, but really surpasses the world.*

Besides the passes which I have mentioned, there are great depressions and fissures in these mountains, some of which are no doubt the result of glacial action, while others show great volcanic upheavals.

Within this mountain range is located the Yo-Semite Valley.

After the first excitement of gold-hunting was over, those who had settled in the State turned their attention to the pur-

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Note.—See elevations as given by Prof. J. D. Whitney, "The Government Surveys, &c., &c.

* The Eucalyptus of Australia is taller.

suit of farming, always called ranching in California. A farmer is a *rancher*—his farm is a *ranch*, or properly a *rancho*. They took up their lands in the great valleys called San Joaquin and Sacramento, along the banks of the Merced, the Tuolumne and the Frezno. Above the foot hills are many mountain meadows—little dish like valleys, with snow-capped mountains all around them. In these little sheltered spots the grass grows rank and green, offering grateful feed for the flocks and herds which are driven up from the valleys during the summer months. As early as 1850 many sturdy pioneers had taken up their ranchos, and were driving their cattle and sheep up the mountain-sides to pasture. Their great trouble was from the Indians, who, scattered about among the mountains, committed great depredations upon the stock. The people were so much annoyed that at last they formed themselves into a sort of military company—a guard for common safety.

A common danger always raises in us a feeling for mutual defence, and its development is that in us which we call military spirit. These are the conditions of revolution. Thus has often began a revolt—the result of which has been a people's freedom—a tyrant's dethronement.

Here were wrongs to be righted. True the Indians had long held the lands, true the whites were pressing hard upon them, but this does not give any plea of right for the Indians to steal and murder. I believe the whites had the right—a sacred right—to rise up against this oppression, and the question of success and power is not a concomitant of the right. According to the doctrine laid down by Froude in his recent brilliant lectures, if the Indians had proven themselves the more powerful, then it would have been *right* for the Indians to continue their oppression, to steal the flocks and herds, for they knew not money, and to force the whites into paying tribute to their uncivilized customs. Does not the mere statement of a case serve sufficiently to disapprove such a doctrine? But to our narrative.

As a natural result, then, of this common danger, there was formed a military company. It was composed of the hardy ranchers and sturdy miners from the near-by diggings, who avowed their purpose to be either to drive the Indians from the country or themselves die in the attempt. In the country round were many tribes—the Monos, the Mereeds, the Yo-Semites, and others,* the latter probably not a distinct tribe, but composed of defeated parties from several tribes who had taken refuge in the great valley. These gave the settlers the most trouble and against them their power was chiefly used.

Skirmishing and fighting became general along this part of the Sierras. The whites would drive the Indians far up into the mountains, but they would always lose track of them, the Indians taking refuge in some fastness the entrance to which they could not discover. Thus for some time went on these skirmishes between the parties contending for the mastery. The whites became more emboldened and pushing further into the mountains discovered that the retreat into which the Indians took themselves, was a vast gorge, a sight of which they obtained from a near-by peak. Those who had seen this place of retreat told wonderful stories about it, upon their return to the plains. Undoubtedly this was the first time white men had ever obtained even a glimpse of this wonderful scenery, and it is not surprising that those who composed the company, should have given such a description of the gorge as should have led others to desire to see it. This was late in the summer of 1850. During the rainy or winter season the ranchers talked over the discovery, and talking only magnified the stories, which spread into the mining camps, and at night around the camp-fires many were the wonderful tales related and many were the plans formed for exploring that "mountain retreat" the next season. A great excitement was raised in the settlements around, so that when spring came, it was no difficult task for Capt. Boling to organize his company of picked men, to make an expedition into the mountains both for the purpose of exploring the "valley or gorge," and to exterminate the Indians, that they would not trouble them during the coming planting time. March, 1851, saw the company fully organized and equipped and ready to start. They called to their aid Te-nei-ya, an old chief, who had always been friendly to the whites. Even among Indians there are always some, of such good parts, that they make for themselves friends.

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* Chook-chan-cie, Po-to-en-cie, Noot-cho, Po-ho-ne-chee, Ho-na-chee, Chow-chilla.

Te-nei-ya led the band of explorers, and knowing the trail, a few days' march brought them into that valley, which we now know as "Yo-Semite." Imagination can only paint the scene, as those hardy ranchers, led by the old and friendly Te-nei-ya, stood upon the edge of the mountains which form the sides of this wonderful valley. They must have stood awe-stricken and mute. The romantic wildness and sublime grandeur of the scene spread out before them must have overpowered them, even though made of "stern stuff."

It is related that at one time Te-nei-ya failed the whites, and they called to their aid another friendly Indian, Cow-chit-ty by name, who led them on and has to this day remained true to the whites. This last named Indian I had the pleasure of seeing.

On our way to the valley we had proceeded as far as Clark and Moore's where we were to stay over Sunday. It was a pleasant June day, and after lunch we were all sitting upon the piazza listening to Mr. Clark, as he told us of the incidents of his early life in these mountains. The sound of a rider was heard, and looking up, we saw galloping into the yard an old Indian, with a white silk handkerchief about his head, pantaloons of great size and white as snow, in a striped shirt, a flannel blouse, and without shoes. The horse which he rode was a real mustang and his saddle was of Mexican make. Dismounting, he walked with uncertain step directly towards us, and greeted Mr. Clark, who addressed him as Capt. John, with grave yet hearty look and speech.

This was the once powerful chief of the powerful Freznos, and he to whom the whites once looked for a safe conduct amongst the dangerous fastnesses of those great mountains which towered around us, with their snow-capped peaks.

Mr. Clark with some difficulty and by using some Spanish, some Indian, and a little English, made the old chief understand that I lived "six moons" away, or a distance equal to about three thousand miles, and near that "other ocean." The old man with a face full of animation raised himself up, and exclaimed in his broken English, "Whew! too muchy far, old Injun!"

No indeed! he nor any of his tribe will ever see that "other ocean" of which the soothsayers have often told them around the council fires. These tribes are fast passing away and they will be soon numbered with their brothers of the Atlantic, while the tribes in the great middle ground will survive but a few years longer, the calamities which have overtaken the red men, dwellers by either ocean.

It is related that the Indians were terribly disheartened by this to them "unceremonious invasion," and after a little skirmishing made peace with the men who had found the way into this retreat which had for so long been their secure hiding-place.

The story of the visit of the Indian chief, Josè Jerez, a name more Spanish than Indian, under charge of James D. Savage, to San Francisco, the offense given the chief, and the manner in which he and his people avenged it, is told quite graphically by Mr. Hutchings.* To the incidents connected with this affair, he gives, I apprehend, too much prominence in the train of circumstances which led to the discovery of the valley.

As the Indians kept their peace, there was no occasion for the whites to push so far into the mountains, and for some year or more, little was done towards exploring further this valley. But little seems to have been said about the place outside of the country immediately around. To the renewed excitement in the finding of gold all seem to have turned their attention, and for a time to have forgotten the wonderful scenery.

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* See "Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California," &c. J. M. Hutchings, of Yo-Semite, 1870. N. Y.

The killing of two miners in or near the valley in the summer of 1852, led to the fitting out of a second expedition. This time the miners from the Mariposa country furnished the men, and they styled themselves the "Mariposa Battalion." They pushed into the valley, attacked the Indians without mercy, killed many, and the rest drove out. These took refuge with the Monos, who dwelt by the lake of the same name upon the Eastern side of the Sierras. We are told the tribes afterwards fought among themselves, and that the Monos almost entirely exterminated the tribe called "Yo-Semites."

Upon the return of the soldiers, each had his story to tell, some of which obtained quite a circulation through the State, but were, I am told, generally discredited, being looked upon as the "yarns of a traveller." They were not given to exaggeration if they were as moderate in all their estimates, as in giving the height of the Yo-Semite Fall which they reported as being "more than a thousand feet high," and of the mountain peaks they gave their height at about half their real altitude.

To find a good reason for the tardiness with which the stories of the towering cliffs, the magnificent waterfalls, the great trees and the wonderful scenery of this valley, spread through the State and found their way into the eastern press is difficult. I can only explain it in the extraordinary excitement which existed about gold, the restlessness of the people who rushed from place to place as the news of newly-found "diggings" reached them, and the general distrust with which all the more sober part of the people there, and all Eastern men, accepted the stories which were told "of California." At all events several years passed away before much was known of the Yo-Semite.

What little had become known with any accuracy was communicated by Dr. L. H. Bunnell, who had been a member of that celebrated "Mariposa Battalion." He had looked upon the scenery with artist-eye, and was a true lover of Nature. He was a gentleman of extended knowledge and agreeable parts, and winning the confidence of the Indians who accompanied them, and whom they met, he obtained from them, all the information which he could, respecting names of the waterfalls, the mountains and the valley itself. To him, probably, is due the name given to the valley. His accounts of what he had seen gradually attracted attention, and few names are so closely connected with the history of this "wonderful valley" as that of Bunnell's.

In 1855 Mr. J. M. Hutchings, with a small party, made the first excursion into the valley. He was led to the place by the stories of the wonderful scenery which had reached him, and to obtain material for his series of papers illustrating the scenery of California. A second party of sixteen persons from the town of Mariposa made a visit the same year to the valley. The reports made by these tourists and the descriptions which now found their way into the press, made the year 1856 memorable in opening the travel to the Yo-Semite. A trail was cut on the Mariposa side and it may be said that by the next year pleasure travel was fairly began.

Of course these early visitors were forced to carry with them a full set of camp equipage, and the condition of the roads and the trails up the mountains made the journey one of hardship and in many places very dangerous. As tourists began to turn their steps towards the valley, persons, whose aim was "to turn a penny" into their pockets, began to try to meet the wants of these travellers. In the autumn of 1856 the first house was built, and was for many years known as the "Lower Hotel." The building is still standing and forms a part of the hotel now known as the "New Sentinel," and kept by Mr. Black. In the spring of 1857 one Hite erected a canvas house some half a mile further up the valley than the first mentioned. In the spring of 1858 was erected the building which now forms "Hutchings' Hotel." Messrs. Hite and Beardsley were the owners, and for a season they kept it as a hotel. It was continued by different parties, Peck, Longhurst and others till 1864, when Mr. Hutchings assumed the business which has since been continued by him with a sharp eye to the "financial gains." The Lower Hotel was kept successively by John Reed in 1857, by one Cunningham from 1858 to 1861. In 1863 G. F. Leidig took it and kept it till 1870. In 1871 Leidig erected a new hotel an eighth of a mile further down than his old house, which he is now keeping.

In 1857 there was erected a small building to be used as a store-house above the site of the present Hutchings Hotel. All these save the Leidig's new hotel, which I have mentioned, were rude structures made from rough boards, without plastering and with partitions made of cloth. Everything at this time had to be brought upon the backs of mules or horses from fifty to sixty miles and over the roughest of rough mountain trails.

In 1871 Mr. John Smith erected a building in which he opened a saloon, bath rooms, a barber's shop, &c., for the accommodation of guests. This year Mr. Hutchings added a new building to his hotel which is used as a dormitory. Several small unfinished buildings are scattered through the valley, used for various purposes, as photographic galleries, telegraph office, a store, &c. The houses and buildings of J. C. Lamon are situated at the upper end of the valley. These comprise the buildings so far erected in the valley, and all of them are rude structures, serving only for a poor protection against storms.

The first white man who took up his residence in the valley was Mr. J. C. Lamon. From his own lips I learned the following facts of his life. He was led to the valley from hearing the wonderful stories about it. He was at work in the mines in the Mariposa country at the time, and after thinking the matter over he resolved to make a visit into the valley. In 1859 he made his first journey into the Yo-Semite. He says he was perfectly enraptured by the place and his first impulses were to make his home here. He staid during the summer and made some considerable progress in exploring different parts of the valley and the country immediately around it. He fixes the day that he reached the valley as either the 18th or 20th of April, 1859. The next year he returned to the valley with the full determination to make it his home and began to clear up a piece of land, erect a log cabin, set out trees, &c. In the winter he lived among the various towns down among the foot-hills, as Mariposa, Coulterville, and various mining camps. He returned the next season and having got his house into complete order, he has since resided in the valley, winter as well as summer. For several years he spent the long winter alone in this vast solitude, with little of animate life around him. Even the Indians seek other places to pass the winter — the birds fly away to the lower valleys — the deer go down nearer the dwelling places of man. What thoughts must arise in one thus dwelling alone with nature! He told me that the scenery was so grand, so ever-changing that he could not feel lonesome. Occasionally as he would think of himself alone in this valley, with impassable barriers of snow between him and the settlements, he would offer up a prayer that he might be protected against sickness and suffering, for with health he found ample resources of happiness. For two years he had an occasional companion in the person of Henry Wilmer.

As you come down the Mariposa trail, just as you reach the level of the valley, you pass a large tree, around the trunk of which you see some rough boards standing with inclined sides. You examine the rude structure and find that the boards cover a great opening in the tree which fire had made and that the space within scarcely allows a man to lie with extended limbs. Your guide tells you that the *hermit* lived here and that he died in the valley and is buried near the banks of the swift flowing Merced. This is all he can tell you; of his name, his history, his motives, he can tell you nothing. Mr. Lamon furnished me with the facts.

Poor Wilmer, as he affectionately called him, was from New York. There terrible and unrelenting adversities and domestic troubles coming upon him, he sought in the great mountain solitude escape from his cares. He lived in this rudely constructed shelter and spent his time in fishing and hunting. All the solicitations of Mr. Lamon that he come and share his cabin with him were politely refused, for, said Mr. Lamon, "Wilmer shew his good bringing up, and I think he was born a gentleman." At long intervals he would come over and spend a day at the cabin and then tell Lamon of his past life. Letters would reach him from his friends and then he would become very low-spirited, "and act like a madman." He grew more and more dejected and sad, ceased to find any oblivion in his fishing-rod and rifle, and often told Lamon that he had fully resolved to take his own life. Lamon had not seen him for a longer time than usual; the Indians as they came to the cabin said, "White man gone, we no see him;" and so Lamon started for the rude shelter with a sad heart. Sure enough, there was no one there and nothing to tell where Wilmer had gone. Next day while searching the river, he found the body thrown upon its rocky bank. Thus ended the life of James Wilmer, whose grave made that day was the first for a white man in that weird solitude. There is, however, a tradition that the two miners killed in 1852 were buried at the foot of the Bridal Veil Fall, but I could not learn that this was well authenticated. All that is now left to tell of Wilmer is the rude hut which he adapted after the fire had almost formed it. Mr. Lamon is the only person who knew Wilmer, and the sturdy mountaineer tells you the simple story with such feeling, as comes from a sympathetic heart.

There is another man to whom justice must be done, for in speaking of those who have labored to open the Yo-Semite to the world, Galen Clark must never be omitted. Mr. Clark formerly lived in New York city; the gold excitement took him to California in 1853, and varied circumstances led him to the Mariposa country. He was engaged in building a race to carry water to the "diggings" when the company for which he was at work failed. Finding himself thus situated in 1855, he *located* in the mountains on the banks of the south fork of the Merced, and upon the trail to the Yo-Semite. He opened a *hotel* which was a canvas tent, afterwards built a log-cabin, then a frame house, and now has several buildings and one of the most hospitable homes which I found in all the country. Mr. Clark has done great service in exploring the mountains and locating and enumerating the groves of *big* trees. At present the wagon road ends and the trail begins at his rancho, on the journey to the valley, and from here also the trip to the Mariposa grove of *big* trees is made. Mr. Clark is a man of great intelligence, a true lover of nature, very plain and simple in his habits, and to this day preserves the custom of nightly lighting a camp-fire before his door. Although well advanced in years he is still "hale and hearty" and carries as true a shot as in his younger days. In the country round he has a good name, and the Indians speak of him as "Father Clark."

Thus is told the story of the discovery and exploration of the Yo-Semite, and the settlements made therein. But little so far has been done to mar the valley, the few buildings which have been erected are so slight in their structure that they seem built only for the day.

I come now to speak of the scenery in and around the Yo-Semite. It is with caution that I shall do it, ever mindful of the exaggerated stories which have found their way into the press. I shall give you nothing from hearsay, and shall only describe what I myself have seen. Where I give you measurements of altitudes I shall take the last report of the surveys under charge of Prof. J. D. Whitney, State Geologist.

I am aware also that even the best authenticated measurements of the mountains, the water-falls, and the "Big Trees" will be received by the popular mind reluctantly, for all their preconceived notions are associated with the hills just about them.

Again, what we know of such objects is by comparison; we associate a tall tree always with a low one, a high mountain with a hill. So it is, when you are set down in one of these great forests of the Sierras, where all the trees are larger by far than in New England, we lose sight for the moment of their greater size. Bring to your aid a cord, which you can stretch around the tree and then lay down by the outstretched line a foot-rule, and you will perceive the size by comparison. Again, standing upon one side of the valley and looking across to a granite mountain face, sharply and smoothly cut, and it seems not very high, but go to the foot of that rock and look up its face and its thousands of feet are perceived.

Be assured then that I shall not over-state anything, and if it should seem quite impossible to imagine even, such grand developments of Nature, when compared with our New England scenery, believe that although she has been lavish to us, she chose another spot as the arena of her grandest displays.

A little to the south of east is the direction in which the Yo-Semite lies from San Francisco, and at a distance in an air line of one hundred and fifty-five miles, but more than two hundred and fifty miles must be travelled to reach the valley. There are many routes advertised, but really they reduce themselves to two, for you must enter the valley either upon the side towards Mariposa, or on the side towards Coulterville. From the first named place the wagon road terminates at Clark's rancho and thence by saddle train into the valley. On the other side the wagon road extends to the top of the mountain, to a place called Gentry's, and thence by a steep trail down its side. But the best and most simple direction to be given to the tourist is to go into the valley on one side and out upon the other, for at every step new scenery is brought into view.

We will follow the trail from Clark's, whose rancho lies upon the South Fork of the Merced, and which is crossed at this point by a bridge. The trail follows along a ridge rising higher and higher at every advance, now ascending rapidly and now winding through a mountain meadow. A few miles on we reach a great meadow, famed in the country round and which lies at an elevation of 7,100 feet, and a little further on we pass the highest point on the trail, 7,400 feet above the sea. The great banks of snow over which I rode in June, and the structure of the trees and plants all told of the great altitude. The *Pinus contorta* struggled against the ice and snows, and the firs scattered about with their green, although scanty, foliage, contrasted pleasingly with the barren soil and snow drifts. Some twenty miles of horse-back ride from Clark's brings us to that famous spot called Inspiration Point, and where is obtained the first view of the valley. Let me try to give you some idea of the view from this point. We are at the edge of the valley on a huge rock which juts out into it. To the west the valley seems to close up just beyond where we stand, to the east we have a view which is unsurpassed for beauty and grandeur. The rarity of the air and its dryness extends our range of vision over a great space.

We arrived there just as the sun was sinking behind the great mountains, casting lingering rays through the valley, reflecting itself in the river and gilding the far-off peaks. Just in front of us over a mountain, lower than where we stood, tumbled a stream, and, falling, broke into white foam, which floated away in mist. This fall the Indians called Po-ho-no, or the "Night Wind," but which has received the popular name of "Bridal Veil." Its height from the valley level to the edge of the mountain is 900 feet. It is fed from the melting snows, forming a river which flows through a depression or cañon, tumbling over the sharp wall into the valley, and by some half a dozen brooks finds its way into the Merced. From our situation it has a pretty rather than sublime effect, the very opposite of Niagara. After we entered the valley a few of us made our way up near the foot of this fall, and then the noise from the foaming water and the swaying of the tall trees gave us that effect which led the Indians to see in this place the spirit of the night wind, or Po-ho-no.

Far below us the level of the valley is seen, but so far that the great trees seem like shrubs and the river which winds along looks like a brook. To our left across the valley rises the form of that great mountain called El Capitan, by the Indians Tu-tock-a-mu-la, or the great chief. The popular name is an attempt at affectation and is neither English nor Spanish. This is a great granite mountain which seems to jut out into the valley, rising from its level almost perpendicularly 3,300 feet. It is an imposing sight and its size is only fully appreciated by riding around its face, and climbing upon the *talus* at its foot and then looking up its smoothly cut side. At some distance up the valley the walls seem to close together. On the right we have those three great rocks which lie one upon the other, and which the Indians called Pom-pom-pa-sus, or mountains playing at leap-frog. They are called the "Three Brothers" by us. Beyond these we have that great and perfect dome like mountain which has received the name of North Dome, and which rises 3,568 feet above the valley. This is one of those dome shaped masses of rock which Prof. Whitney tells us is not uncommon in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, where they are developed on a grander scale than in any other granite region with which geologists are familiar. On our left we have South or Half Dome, which is the loftiest and most imposing mass of rock which belongs to the Yo-Semite. It rises to a height of 4,737 feet above the valley and stands out a great sentinel overlooking all. Beyond these we have the snowy mountains rising up grandly against the sky, Cloud's Rest, Mt. Starr King, and the peaks of the Obelisk group of granite hills. These last named mountains are from thirty to sixty-five miles from where we are standing. With all that I have thus hastily described in view, with the earth around us, clothed in magnificent mountain flowers, with the trees tall and grand, and the atmosphere so clear that you have a range of vision of sixty miles and more, and you can imagine the beauty, the grandeur and the sublimity of the scene which is spread out before us as we stand at Inspiration Point.

This is a spot where one loves to linger and drink in the *inspiration.* The feelings which seem uppermost in all are those of reverence and humility, and the great mountains which rise one above the other, seem like succeeding steps by which we can climb up above and beyond the clouds, which rest upon the far-off peaks, to still greater beauty.

To reach the valley level we must descend 2,973 feet, and within such a distance as makes the trail in some places very steep. New views open at every step, the mountains take on new forms, the water-falls come nearer, the walls of the valley seem closing around us. We could easily find the places from which Bierstadt and Hill each painted his picture, which give so truthful representations of the valley and its scenery.

Having now reached the level of the valley, which lies 4,000 feet above the sea, let us take a general view of this great gorge or depression. The valley is situated nearly in the centre of California, from north to south, and midway between the bases of that range of mountains known as the Sierras. At this point of the range its width is given at seventy miles. The length of the valley is six miles, its width varies from one-nalf to a mile and a half in width, its surface is nearly level, its walls are of granite almost perpendicular. Take the general level of the surrounding region, and the valley level is nearly a mile below it. Prof. Whitney calls it a "gigantic trough." The general direction of the valley is north-east by east, until near its upper end where it makes a sharp turn and divides into three cañons, the northerly Te-na-ya or Te-nei-ya, the middle one Nevada, and the southerly, Il-lil-lon-ette. Through each of these cañons flows a branch of the Merced—the Tenaya in the first, the Nevada or main river in the second and the Illilouette or South Fork in the third, all of which unite in the valley and form the Merced river, which flows through the Yo-Semite and finds its way out between almost perpendicular granite walls, and flowing across the plain empties into the San Joaquin river. At the lower part of the valley it narrows in a V shaped cañon, giving only space between the walls for the river.

Prof. J. D. Whitney thus sums up the distinguishing features of the Yo-Semite Valley, and his words are so truthful that I quote them *verbatim:*

> "The principal features of the Yo-Semite, and those by which it is distinguished from all other known valleys, are: first, the near approach to verticality of its walls; second, their great height, not only absolutely, but as compared with the width of the Valley itself; and, finally, the very small amount of *talus* or *debris* at the base of these gigantic cliffs. These are the great characteristics of the Yo-Semite throughout its whole length; but besides these, there are many other striking peculiarities and features both of sublimity and beauty which can hardly be surpassed if equalled, by those of any mountain valleys in the world. Either the domes or the water-falls of the Yo-Semite or any single one of them even, would be sufficient in any European country to attract travellers from far and wide in all directions. Water-falls in the vicinity of the Yo-Semite, surpassing in beauty many of those best known and most visited in Europe are actually left entirely unnoticed by travellers, because there are so many other objects of interest to be visited that it is impossible to find time for them all."

My plan now will be to take you on an excursion through the valley, observing the points of interest on the right hand side and then on the left, from Inspiration Point towards the head of the valley. For this purpose we must remount our mules, arrange our clothing for rough trails and the fording of streams.

The first object which rivets our attention is the Bridal Veil or Po-ho-no, and seen from the valley level is even more

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See Yo-Semite Guide Book, published by order of the Legislature of California, by Prof. J. D. Whitney, State Geologist, pp. 53-54.

beautiful than when we looked down upon it from Inspiration Point. This fall in the late summer dries up to a mere trickling of water over the side of the mountain. It is formed by a creek which has received the same name, rises near Empire Camp and flowing through the great mountain meadow, which we cross in our journey from Clark's to Inspiration Point, is at last precipitated into the valley. The sheet of water falls 630 feet perpendicularly upon a pile of *debris* and over this it rushes in innumerable cascades, into the various brooks which flow into the Merced. The height of this *talus* is about 300 feet, making the height of the cliff 900 feet. The water spreads out into a fleecy veil which sways to and fro in the currents of air which itself creates. The effect whether near or at some distance is, as you can imagine, quite pleasing. We next come to a prominent granite mountain which has received the name of Cathedral Rock, but which the Indians called Poo-see-nah Chuck-ka, which means the big-acorn cache. It is 2,660 feet high. Near by are the Cathedral spires, which when brought into relief by proper lights and shadows, look like two gothic spires of some old cathedral hidden behind the great rock which has received that name. Just along this side of the valley its walls are formed into shapes more fantastic than beautiful, but which all give the beholder much pleasure.

One of the grandest masses of rock in the whole valley is the Sentinel, which stands like a huge watch tower of slender form a thousand feet above the valley wall. This the Indians called this Lo-ya, a place to give a signal. It is 3,043 feet above the river. From here the wall of the valley extends quite evenly to Glacier Point, which has an altitude of 3,200 feet, and where the valley turns into Illillouette cañon.

Crossing the Merced we will make a tour of inspection on the left hand side. Opposite Inspiration Point stands old Tu-tock-a-nu-la, which when looked at from a near point, gives a striking idea of solid grandeur. It rises 3,300 feet, is distinctly seen from the San Joaquin valley, more than sixty miles distant. The *debris* at the foot of this rock is very little, its sides are smoothly cut, entirely free from any kind of vegetation. It is said of this mountain "El Capitan imposes on us by its stupendous bulk, which seems as if hewed from the mountains to stand as the type of eternal massiveness. It is doubtful if anywhere in the world there is presented so squarely cut, so lofty and so imposing a face of rock."

Proceeding on we next come to the fall, which is called the Virgin's Tear, and while it lasts is a beautiful sight as the water trickles over the side of the mountain for more than a thousand feet. It lasts but a few weeks of each recurring season. Next we have those three hills called the Three Brothers, which are huge rocks, looking somewhat like three frogs, one above the other, the highest being 3,830 feet high, and which gave the Indian name Pom-pom-pa-sus.

The next object of interest is that which receives more attention than all others, the Yo-Semite Fall. A stream heads in Mt. Hoffman, ten miles away, flows over a smooth granite bed, receiving the waters of the melted snows, and finding its way to the edge of the mountain, tumbles over it in its course to the Merced. At the point of breaking over the edge of the mountain, Prof. Whitney measured the river at a medium stage of water and places its width at twenty feet and its average depth two feet, which would be two hundred and twenty cubic feet of water per second falling over the precipice, taking the velocity of the flow at one mile per hour. On the 17th day of June, 1865, Mr. J. F. Houghton measured the creek below the fall and found it, in width thirty-seven feet, in depth twenty-five inches, and in velocity to be one mile per hour, which would give rising five hundred thousand cubic feet of water passing over the falls in one hour. At times of floods there is probably three or four times that amount of water. Looking at this fall directly in front it seems to be blended into one harmonious whole, a a great leap, a succession of cascades, and then a shorter leap when it is lost amid the tall trees which grow around the foot of the mountain. Its vertical height is given as 2,634 feet, the measurements varying from 2,537 to 2,641, according to the level assumed as the starting point. The first vertical descent is 1,500 feet, to where the water strikes upon a shelf, about one-third of a mile in depth back from the outermost cliff over which the water falls at last. From this shelf the water rushes in a series of cascades down an inclination equivalent in vertical or perpendicular measurement of 626 feet, and then over the outer cliff upon the *talus* at the foot, from the top of which to the lip of the cliff is 400 feet. It would seem that all the elements of grand beauty and attractiveness are gathered in this fall and its surroundings, and in vertical height it surpasses any other yet found with anything like the same body of water. Niagara is 164 feet high on the American and 150 on the Canadian side, but its extreme width is 4,750 feet.

One of the most attractive features of this fall is its vibratory motion. The mass of water is so great that it does not break up into spray, but from less than forty feet where it pours over the rock it widens out to more than three hundred, where it falls upon the shelf, and this great mass swings in a space little less than a thousand feet from east to west. As the water falls over, rocket-like masses are formed which seem to whirl around with great rapidity as they descend. This is said to be due to the action of the strong currents of air which are formed. As the air is collected within the falling mass of water by this swinging and whirling motion and strikes upon the shelf of rock a noise like the report of a cannon is heard.

I must leave you to imagine the grandeur of the Yo-Semite Fall. It is indescribable in its varied aspects under a full noon-day sun, at eventide when sombre shadows creep through the valley, or in the light of the full moon. To the Indian there was something awful, for he called it Yo-Semite—better Yo-ham-e-ta—or the great grizzly bear, which to him is of all things most awful, for after death if he has been a bad Indian he becomes a grizzly bear and is doomed to live among the great snow mountains.

Some two miles on along the walls of the valley we come to the point where the three cañons begin, and keeping still to the left we have in view a rounded mass of granite which has received the name of Washington Column, 1,875 feet high. This the Indians called Hun-to, or the watching eye.

Just beyond we have those peculiarly formed cavities in the side of the mountains made no doubt by the falling away of a part of some of the concentric plates of which the mass is made up. The Indian gave these the poetical name of To-coy-ae, or shade to a baby-basket. Above the Arches, rises the North Dome to the height of 3,568 feet. From the valley it looks like a perfect dome, its sides perfectly inaccessible, but on the back side by a long ridge one can reach the summit. Geologists tell us that such dome shaped masses composed of concentric plates are common in all granitic regions. Up Tenaya cañon, we come to Cloud's Rest, which can be visited late in the season, and when at the top one is quite 10,000 feet above the sea.

Before leaving this cañon let us add a few more words about South Dome, which is situated on the right hand side. The Indians call it Tis-pa-ack—the goddess of the valley. It is perfectly inaccessible to man, and one side is a perfect dome, while upon the other it is cut crosswise of the mass, smoothly, and is absolutely vertical for some 2,000 feet down from the summit, and then shoots off at a sharp angle, with very little *talus* or *debris* at its foot. If you have ever seen one of Watkins' photographs of this mountain taken from the meadow in the valley, you will recall the peculiar shape of the rock, and gain some idea of the imposing grandeur of this huge granite hill. This rock is more unique in its appearance than any other, for we are told no similar formation has been found in the Sierras, and where upon our globe shall we find a mountain to compare with it?

The Illilouette cañon has no trail yet made up the gorge, but is accessible on foot. Fine views are had of the rocks and falls which bound the Nevada cañon. At the head of the gorge is a waterfall, where the South Fork of the Merced enters the valley called Il-lil-lou-ette by the Indian—the beautiful—a name which, for a wonder, has been preserved. It is a matter of regret that so few of the really appropriate Indian names have been retained.

Now let us take fresh animals for a long and steep climb up Nevada Cañon, the middle one of the three, and through which the main Merced flows.

The river in coming from the high mountains beyond, down to the valley level, makes in two miles a descent of more than two thousand feet in perpendicular measurement. We follow along the right bank of the river, and some two miles from Hutchings' cross the South Fork or Illilouette near where it unites with the main river. Just beyond we go over an immense deposit of huge angular blocks of granite piled up like a *terminal moraine*, and which seem to have been torn from the walls by a great ice-flow. The trail now rises very rapidly to follow the river bank. For some distance the river is a wild torrent, and really more fearful to behold than the rapids of Niagara. By considering the inclination of the rocky bed over which it flows, you can form some idea of this surging stream, which plunges down the cañon at a fearful rate. The rocks, the trees, the shrubs even, all seem to be wild and grotesque in shape, in this narrow, but steep gorge. It is a weird spot—the home of nymphs and genii. We soon arrive at the first fall, called the Vernal, but which the Indians called Pi-wy-ack, the sparkling river. Here the rainbow is seen in glory, for the rising mist finds every sunbeam which creeps into the cañon and refracts its rays. The fall is 400 feet, with spray and foam rising half this height. There is a great body of water flowing over this great granite step, as it were, which stretches across the cañon. The sight of this fall is lovely, and to climb over the rocks amid the spray and catch the fleeting bows, repays one for a little exertion, and perhaps more danger.

To get over "this step," our trail becomes very steep and winds along a precipitous ridge. The river between the two falls descends 300 feet of perpendicular height, and this together with the height of the Vernal Fall must be surmounted by a steep climb, which we found far more difficult to *climb down* than to *climb up*. Reaching the foot of Nevada Falls we had a grand sight—a great river precipitated over a granite rock 600 feet high. A projection of the rocky edge about the centre of the river gives a twirl to the water, and foam and mist are thrown in all directions over and among the great trees which grow about the foot of the fall.

To our left rises a peculiarly rounded mass of granite about 2,000 feet higher than where we stand at the foot of Nevada Falls. From this side it is inaccessible, but by going around and by a long trail the top can be reached. There is growing a tree of considerable size just upon the summit, but its gnarled form and shortened branches tell of its hard fight with the winter's winds and snows. This mountain is now usually called "Cap of Liberty," although it has been designated by several other names. For picturesque beauty, for weird spots, for grand waterfalls, the Nevada cañon surpasses all the others, and is really the most interesting of the excursions made by tourists.

Having now spoken of the water-falls which add so much to the pleasing effect of the Yo-Semite scenery, if they do not, as some have said, add anything to the grandeur, allow me to call your attention to some of the more noted waterfalls with which geographers have made us acquainted. In this way a better idea is had of those which belong to the Yo-Semite. Niagara, with its great volume of water, and sublime effect, will always challenge comparison. The Zambezè, or rather the falls of this river, are described by Dr. Livingstone as very grand. He gave the name of Victoria to these falls, but which has not become popular. The river about one-half mile in width rushes over a precipice one hundred feet high, and turning almost at right angles is held by two high walls not more than twenty yards apart for some thirty miles of its course. Europe has many water-falls which tourists seek out with eagerness, especially those of Switzerland and Norway. The Staubbach in the Alps is about the height of the Bridal Veil—900 feet—but we are told that the volume of water is very insignificant when compared with Po-ho-no in its glory. The Aar, at Handeck, is a pretty fall, but cannot compare even with those least noted in the Yo-Semite. The Gavarnie in the Pyrenees is the highest in Europe, being 1,266 feet, but the volume of water is lacking to this fall to give a grand effect, nevertheless it is a very pleasing sight. The finest fall in Europe as admitted on all sides is the Vöring Foss in Norway, estimated in height 850 feet, of good volume, but falls into an inaccessible chasm, so that it can be viewed only from above, by which much of its beauty is lost. The Kaieteur Falls in British Guiana is spoken of by travellers as the finest water-fall in South America. Some of the numerous falls which have been found in the Yellowstone country are very pleasing in their appearance, but none of them have such elements of grandeur in them as those of the Yo-Semite.

There are, of course, some others which might be named, but these are sufficient to show you that the Falls which we have described as giving so much beauty to the Yo-Semite Valley are superior at least in some of the elements of grandeur and sublimity to any yet examined and described by travellers and geographers.

Even from this imperfect description of the scenery of the Yo-Semite, I cannot omit to say a few words upon the trees, the plants and flowers which adorn and beautify the valley. I shall not attempt to give a complete *flora*, but only mention a few of the more striking plants.

The surface of the valley is nearly level, contains 1,141 acres, of which 745 are meadow, and lies at an elevation of

4,000 feet above the level of the ocean. The mean of the various observations made by Prof. Whitney was 4,046 feet, and as this has been the result of several other series of observations, the elevation as given may be taken as correct. Around the valley just at the foot of the mountains we have the piles of *talus* or *debris*, extending irregularly towards the river. Next we have a belt of sand—the washings and scourings of the granite *debris.* At each end of the valley we have meadows of a deep, peaty soil, and along the river little strips of this black mould. The meadow just before we reach the three cañons is by far the larger. The river is in width say seventy feet, but in places at high stages of the water it spreads itself out in great lakes. Over these low meadow lands grows quite luxuriantly a tree, which is often mistaken for the cotton-wood, and which is the best established of any found in the valley. It is what is known as the Balm of Gilead Poplar—*Populus balsamifera.* We also see the willow and the spruce, and large masses of the *azalea occidentalis*, which gives a charm to the valley with its bright and shining white clusters of fragrant flowers. Along the river banks we have the yellow flowering plant called *Hellenium grandiflorum.* In the narrower portions of the valley where the *debris* and the sand washed therefrom cover the whole space we have a dense growth of the Alder (*Alnus viridis*) and also small trees of the *Rhamnus Menziesii.* The foliage of both of these trees are peculiar in color and seem to take on the sombre hues of the gray mountains around them. We find also the Douglas spruce, the willow, and occasionally a large and lofty sugar-pine. In the drier portions of the sandy soil we have trees of the yellow pine (*P. ponderosa*,) from 125 to 150 feet in height, and cedar trees of noble proportions. There are also groves of black oak trees (*Quercus sonomensis*) scattered about in different parts of the valley. The meadows are filled with coarse grasses and sedges* of rampant growth.

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* Calamagrostis canadensis; Pragmites communis; Glyceria nervata, &c., &c.

Around the Vernal Falls there are many fine specimens of cryptogamous plants, and upon the shelving rocks grow ferns which have all the grace of those found in the tropics.* Beautiful leaved, and gaudily colored shrubs and flowers are found in patches throughout the valley. Among the shrubs the manzanita (*Arctostaphylus glauca*) and among the flowers the pentstemons are the most conspicuous.†

The piles of *debris* or *talus* have collected in many places considerable soil, in which are clusters of trees standing against the very rocks. The oaks, a few maples and some shrubs and flowers which are not found in the meadows and sandy places, abound on these piles of *debris*.‡ The most conspicuous shrub is the *ceonothus*, which is one of the most beautiful of this class of plants I have ever seen. With variously colored flowers it is found in at least two belts of vegetation in California, and on the mountains bounding Napa valley, it covers the hill-sides with its feathery foliage and delicate flowers.

In June the trees are in full leaf, the shrubs are in flower, and the plants are either in bud, or covered with fragrant blooms. The glories of the vegetable world at this time are added, to make the Yo-Semite the famed spot that it is—a spot without a parallel—unique in its sublime isolation of granite peaks, grand in its water-falls and glorious in its drapery of many colored blossoms.

It would be perhaps profitable, at least it would be very interesting, to examine the geological theories of the formation of this valley. In the discussion the usual division is made between the advocates of glacial action and those who discard this theory for the formation of gorges and valleys similar to, if not upon so grand a scale as, the Yo-Semite. Prof. Whitney, who holds the position of State Geologist, and therefore speaks with some authority, after reviewing the various theories, sums them all up in his own which may be put into one word—*subsidance.** He thinks that the area of the valley sank about a mile below the general level of the surrounding country. To refute this, many facts can be adduced which seem convincing.

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* Adiantum pedatum; Pelloea densa; P. Bridgesii; P. mucronata; Cheilanthes gracillima; Polypodium Californicum; Aspidium argutum; Cystopteris fragilis, &c.

† Cornus Nuttallii; Rubus Nutkanus; Rosa blanda; Pentstemon laetus; Hosackia grandiflora; Frangula Californica; Spraquea umbellata; Comandra umbellata; Silene compacta; Chaenactis achilleæfolia.

‡ Quercus chrysolepis; Q. vaccinifolia: Acer macrophyllum; A. glabrum; Tetranthera Californica; Bahia confertiflora; Ceonothus integerrimus; C. divaricatus; Philadelphus Californicus; Rhus diversiloba; Lilii, &c., &c.

It seems to me strange that so few eminent geologists have ever even visited the Yo-Semite, and no one has ever made a complete survey. Prof. Agassiz has promised a visit to this region, and from him we should have a candid and plain statement of the results of his examination in the light of his extended knowledge. We know the Alps, may we not, the Sierras?

There is and has been for two years past, living in the valley a gentleman of Scottish parentage, by name John Muir, who, Hugh Miller like, is studying the rocks in and around the valley. He told me that he was "trying to read the great book spread out before him." He is by himself pursuing a course of geological studies, and is making careful drawings of the different parts of the gorge. No doubt he is more thoroughly acquainted with this valley than any one else. He has been far up the Sierras where glaciers are now in action, ploughing deep depressions in the mountains. He has made a critical examination of the superincumbent rocks, and already has much material upon which to form a correct theory.

This valley or gorge is upon so much grander scale than any other yet found, that geologists have shrunk from advancing a theory grand enough to explain it. Until we can describe an ice-flow broader and deeper by a thousand times than any now known, and shall find its *terminal moraine* in the great valleys of Sacramento and San Joaquin, we shall fail in properly contemplating the Yo-Semite and one of Nature's grandest geological displays.

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* See Reports, &c., &c., State Geological office, San Francisco.

There has been much discussion as to the origin of the name of the valley. The Indians know the place as Ah-wah-nee and it seems strange that this was not adopted. The orthography of the word Yo-Semite is still more strange. The Indian word spelled as nearly after their pronunciation as possible would be Yo-ham-ē-tā or Yo-hem-ē-tā. The present name seems to have gained currency during the summer of 1851 and is retained, although several attempts were early made to change it. Dr. L. H. Bunnell is probably the first man who recorded the name of the valley, and his orthography is that now in use. In vain I have searched among the books upon California and the valley, for some solution of this problem, but all leave it by saying it is impossible to tell how the name came into use.

All inquiries into the adoption of names of places bring to light certain historical facts, and to the student it is of much interest as well as profit to pursue such investigations. Let me give you what seems to me a solution of this seemingly vexed question. The origin of the name, California, is by far more obscure.

It has been suggested that this name was that of the most powerful tribe of Indians, who had given to the country round their name, but this has been disapproved by historians of the early wars with the natives, and in fact the Yo-Semites were not a distinct tribe,* but the Indians who dwelt in the valley were composed of defeated parties from the several tribes, and this name has rather been in later days given this band of outcast warriors than theirs to the valley.

It is well known that the Indian sees in every mountain, and tree, in the water-fall, and in every weird spot a *spirit* or *nymph*, whose life is enwrapped in this outward form. In the water-fall at the entrance to the valley, he saw the spirit of the night wind; in the mountain called South Dome he saw the goddess of the valley; in the trees he found nymphs who exercised a certain power over him. The whole race is very imaginative, and given to the contemplation of things supernatural. Those who have lived among them till they have learned their traditions, their customs and habits of thought, tell us that certain of them travel from tribe to tribe and around a council fire tell the most wonderful stories of their origin, the visits of the great-spirit to earth, the great battles of their tribe in which the *genii* which preside over their fortune took part. They point you to Mt. Shasta as the wigwam where the great spirit dwells, to little Mt. Shasta where lives the grizzly bear, the father of all Indians, with his *god*-wife. He imagines smoke rising from the wigwam fires within these mountains, and on their side he sees plainly the prints of the feet of the great-spirit, made when he came down the mountain.

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* See Dr. Bunnell's Indian Wars, Hutchings' Magazine, &c.

It seems perfectly natural then that the Indian should find a pervading *spirit* in the valley. That which struck him as the development as it were of this spirit was the great fall which seemed grand and awful to his untutored mind, and this he called Yo-ham-ē-tā, and as this spirit of the grand and awful pervaded all the valley, he found Yo-ham-ē-tā at every step, for mountains and water-falls, all were grand and imposing.

It was also in perfect accord with his nature that this spirit should be that which to him is the most awful thing known —a great and full-grown grizzly bear. He has implicit belief that every Indian who leads a wicked life, is to become a grizzly bear doomed to live among the snowy mountains where there is no deer for his food. His heaven is a place where he can lie all day in his wigwam and deer shall come to his door to be made into venison. It was then, I repeat, in accord with his nature to find the spirit of the great grizzly bear in the valley—to him Yo-ham-ē-tā.

The name of the *locus* or the place then was Ah-wah-nee, and the spirit of Ah-wah-nee was Yo-ham-ē-tā.

For the orthography it is more difficult to account. We know that the Spaniards as they gradually spread themselves over the country mingled with the native tribes and that there grew up a race, in California called Mexicans, which show the characteristics of their progenitors. Their language is mostly Spanish, but somewhat modified by the Indian. Long intercourse with the Spaniards also had taught the Indians many new words. The children of the mingling of these races speak to-day peculiar dialects. Since settlements were made by Americans this race has died out or been driven out of most of the towns. You can see that all these circumstances had much influence upon the language of the several peoples. The s and z sounds are quite wanting in the Indian dialects, and in the words now used by the Indians which have these sounds they have been modified by or taken entire from the Spanish. It is one of the most difficult tasks to put into English letters the words and names of the Indians, for among the members of a single tribe, each individual has a pronunciation different from the other. This influence of the Spanish upon the speech of the natives is very apparent, and the difficulty in spelling Indian words is forcibly proven by a single trial.

It is said that when the Americans made their way over into the valley, the Indians in their despair cried out what seemed like Yo-sem-i-te. Dr. Bunnell first gave this orthography, and he supposed it to be the Indian name of the valley. Later investigations showed it to be not the name of the valley, but of the water-fall, which is the highest, or rather a corruption of that name.

All through the State we see the labored attempts on the part of the whites to entirely ignore all the Indian names. They early began to hate the natives and this hatred became so fierce that they would not even allow a name to remain to remind them of the Indian or any of his race. All that was Spanish they retained and cherished and even if any Indian name became early attached to any place, later years would see the word so changed that little of the original would be left. The Indian name Yo-ham-ē-tā may have been thus treated, although the early date at which we find the present orthography given, seems to point to its origin in an attempt to put into English letters the spoken word of the Indians.

It was, it seems to me, the very thing that those natives of the forests, who for so long had found a secure retreat in this, to them Ah-wah-nee where the *spirit*, Yo ham-ē-tā, found its home, would do when, with ruthless march, the invaders came upon them, to cry to that *spirit* to protect them and the place where they dwelt. The white men caught the word and put it as nearly as they could into English letters, so that upon their return to the settlements they gave the name, each pronouncing it, as nearly as he could, as they had heard it. All have now acquiesced in this orthography, and there would be little use to try to make current another name, if indeed any other would be better. Let it remain forever! In it perpetuate the traditions of the poor Indian who saw in this awful and sublime scenery, that mighty spirit which was ever before him—the dread grizzly bear!

I now come to speak briefly of the development of this famed valley. It will serve us to first see what has been done by Congress and the State of California towards this object. In 1864 Congress enacted that the "Cleft or Gorge" in the Granite Peak of the Sierras, estimated in length fifteen miles, with its various spurs and cañons and one mile back from the edge of the precipice on all sides be granted to the State of California "that the said State shall accept this grant upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort and recreation; shall be inalienable for all time, but leases not exceeding ten years may be granted for portions of said premises."* The signature of the President of the United States, approving the act was given June 30, 1864, and in accordance with this act Governor Low issued his proclamation taking possession of said territory for the purposes specified. The following named gentlemen were appointed Commissioners: F. Law Olmstead, J. D. Whitney, William Ashburner, I. W. Raymond, Alexander Deering, George W. Coulter and Galen Clark. Henry W. Cleveland has since been appointed in place of Mr. Olmstead, who resigned. These are the Commissioners at present. The necessary surveys to establish "the locus, extent and limits of the said Cleft or Gorge" were at once began and now have been completed and filed at Washington. To complete the dedication of this portion of the Sierras as a place of "resort and recreation" the State Legislature by public act accepted the trust, confirmed the Commissioners and gave them certain powers to enable them to properly protect the valley. A guardian of the valley, as he is called, was appointed, further surveys made, the roads and trails improved, a map of the valley level completed, and in 1867 a report was made to the Legislature, and further appropriations were asked for, to carry out their plans.

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* See Statutes at Large, 1864, and Congressional Globe same year.

At the time the Commissioners took possession of the valley there were several persons already settled in the valley and many claimants, all of whom the Commissioners proposed to treat liberally. Messrs. Hutchings and Lamon were foremost in their opposition to the Commissioners and persisted in their claims to a fee-simple of 160 acres each. They sought redress in the courts and before the Legislature. Mr. Lamon it is said, would have yielded his claim to the fee in the land, upon payment of a sum to be agreed upon for the improvements which he had made, for all of which it seems he should have received a fair compensation. He was an actual settler, the first in the valley, and had really ploughed and tilled the soil. Not so with Mr. Hutchings; he came to the valley, bought a house and opened a *hotel*, which means in such a place, a medium of making large charges for the least that can be given. At the Legislature of 1867–8 they appeared and pressed their claims with so much tact and energy that a bill was proposed giving them 160 acres each, and so far as votes of the members were needed it became a law. At the Fortieth Congress this bill was presented for ratification, and an act of approval was passed by the House. but failed in the Senate. At the second session of the Forty-first Congress a bill was again introduced but failed. Thus matters have rested.

It is no wonder that the press, with almost universal voice, opposed any action of Congress whereby any portion of the valley should be given in fee to any person. Every citizen in the United States has acquired a kind of right in and to this national play ground. It was a shame, yea almost a fraud upon the rights of the people, to thus attempt to set aside a solemn compact entered into by the nation and the State of California. Those discussions are still fresh in your memories and although they resulted in a defeat of the bills proposed in Congress, the partial success of the claimants paralyzed the efforts of the Commissioners, and the natural consequences have flown from this inaction. There might have been long ago a carriage-road built into the valley on the Mariposa side, suitable hotel accommodations might have been provided, trails to the various points of interest could have been made, and all done under the direction of the Commissioners and used by the people under proper restrictions. Now the valley is a haunt for people who are unprincipled in their treatment of tourists. I know of many persons abandoning the trip to the Yo-Semite after reaching San Francisco, upon hearing the story of returned tourists. Cliques and interests combine to make the most money that they can, and these too strong to be opposed, luxuriate in their gains. I would not include all in my indictment, for there are on the road and in the valley gentlemen of high-toned principles, and moral rectitude, but the few are only brought out in fuller relief by the many against whom so many complaints are made.

There are now pending suits involving the collateral questions in the proceedings to procure decisions upon the claims of Mr. Hutchings, but if the Court holds, as it undoubtedly will, to its former rulings, then there need be no fear that any private individual will have in fee any part of that domain, which God himself set apart, and forbade man to build his cities and habitations upon.

The people of California having accepted the trust, ought to carry it out in good faith, and to them to-day the nation is looking for such action as shall make this, as the Act of Congress intended, a place "for public use, resort, and recreation."

The Central Pacific Rrilroad Company, which is the great power at present in California, has not by any means done what they could and ought in making the travel to the Yo-Semite easy and expeditious. True they have laid their track down the San Joaquin valley and tourists are landed at their new hotel—El Capitan—in their new city of Merced, but towards putting the stage-roads in order, or making a carriage-road into the valley, they have done nothing. You may ask, why should they. I can only reply because at the end of the great roads across the continent lies this famed valley—the place to which every tourist looks with longing eye, and this company owns the complete monopoly of laying a track nearest to the mountains in which lies the Yo-Semite.

Like all other wrongs suffered by a people, this will in time be righted. A new era in the history of the Yo-Semite will begin, the course of which an abler pen shall trace. The grand scenery, the everlasting mountains, the magnificent water-falls will remain, and each recurring season the trees, the plants and flowers shall have their time of bud and bloom, for do what he will, man can but slightly mar the grandeur and beauty of the valley, while the sublime isolation of those granite hills, he can never change.

THE

YO-SEMITE,

Its History, its Scenery, its Development.

By John Erastus Lester.

1873.

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