

# **THE DIARY OF A FORTY-NINER**

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The diary of a forty-niner by Chauncey L. Canfield

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**CHAUNCEY L. CANFIELD**

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*Edited by*  
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TO MY WIFE, MY CHUM FOR  
A QUARTER OF A CENTURY,  
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY  
DEDICATED

CHAUNCEY L. CANFIELD





## PREFACE

Now and again there comes out of the dim past something which opens up an hitherto unknown or forgotten page in history. A copper implement from a lake midden, a chipped arrow head from a cave, a deciphered hieroglyphic from the face of a granite rock, a ruined temple in an overgrown jungle by means of which we rescue a chapter that tells of men's works and men's lives, former generations, who cumbered the earth for a brief time and passed away and of whose existence even tradition is silent. There are fascinating revealments that excite a momentary interest only, for, barring the scientist, we live in the present, and how our remote ancestors throve or what they did gives us but little concern. The long ago is vague, the cave dwellers and the temple builders existed in fable land, and, while we concede the importance of the discoveries, we leave the study to the specialists and magazine writers and do not burden our mind with ancient history. This indifference not only obtains with reference to the tribes and peoples who have disappeared off of the earth; it is equally true of comparatively recent events.

Probably no one thing has had a greater influence upon the progress and expansion of our own country than the discovery of gold in California in 1849, following the material wealth that it added to the world's store. Figures of billion gold production have been recorded and preserved, but beyond

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that there is no authentic or truthful record. That unique period is without its historian, and in only a vague way is it comprehended. The present generation is content to adopt Bret Harte's tales as veracious chronicles of life in the foothills and mining camps of the "Fifties," yet every old pioneer knows that his types were exaggerated, the miners' dialect impossible and unknown; but he illumined his pages with genius, he caught the atmosphere, and neither protest nor denial are sufficient to remove the belief that he was writing real history. As for the latter day romancers, who attempt to reproduce pioneer times, they are usually mushy imitators of Harte who romance without knowledge or understanding. Those old, free, careless days were and are without parallel. The conditions that created them vanished with the exhaustion of the shallow "diggings," and when in creek, gulch and ravine the golden harvest had been gathered life became prosaic and dull, with the dullness propriety asserted itself, the conventions of a more exacting social order crept in and the amazing foothill days of the "Fifties" existed only as legend and tradition.

Perhaps it was best. Men were getting dangerously close to Paganism, yielding to the beckoning of "the wild," the insidious climatic influence of the pine-clothed hills, and it was well that the shackles of civilization should again fetter them. A great empire demanded development, fertile valleys invited cultivation, and the "cow counties" (as the plains were contemptuously termed by the miners), with the decay of mining, began to assert their importance and supremacy. In the "Sixties"

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new conditions sprang into existence and this was written to the characteristics of the days of "49."

To write understandingly of that period one must have lived in it; to catch the spirit one must have been a part of it. In these prosy days of railroads and trusts it is a fable, resting on no better authority than the romancers' creations or senile maunderings of the belated pioneer. And yet the half has not been told. Then fact was romance and romance fact. To be rich was not to be envied, to be poor brought no reproach. Brawn and muscle counted for more than brains; health and strength was a more available capital than a college education.

There lately came into possession of the editor of the text that follows this preface a stout, leather-bound book of some three hundred pages, containing a jumble of accounts and records of happenings and incidents ranging from the cost of provisions and supplies to notes of the doings of mining chums and neighbors. Bearing every evidence of genuineness, it purported to be the experiences of one Alfred T. Jackson, a pioneer miner who cabined and worked on Rock Creek, Nevada County, California. In the lapse of the fifty odd years since it had been written, the ink had faded and turned yellow, many of the lines were barely legible, and a dozen of the first leaves of the book had been torn away. Fortunately, the remainder was intact and the subject matter proved to be of vital historical interest. Here at last was a truthful, unadorned, veracious chronicle of the placer mining days of the foothills, a narrative of events as they occurred; told in simple and, at times, ungram-