

**DOWN THE
MOTHER LODE**

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Down the Mother Lode by Vivia Hemphill

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VIVIA HEMPHILL

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MOTHER LODE**

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

Down the Mother Lode

by

Viola Hemphill



SACRAMENTO
PURNELL'S

1922

THE MOTHER LODE

FOREWORD

So many inquiries have been made as to exactly where, and what, is the "Mother Lode"!

The geologist and the historian agree as to its location and composition, but the old miners and "sojourners" of the vanished golden era give strangely different versions of it. Some of these are here set down, if not all for your enlightenment at least, I hope, for your entertainment.

That is, after all, the principal aim of these tales of the old days in California, that are gone "for good." Mark Twain says in his preface to "Roughing It" that there is a great deal of information in his work, which he regrets very much but which really could not be helped, as "information seems to stew out of me naturally, like the precious otter of roses out of the otter"!

These stories make no such particular claim! They are merely historical fragments of their everyday life, gathered from a passing generation before they shall be finally lost. Each one is based upon truth. Somewhere, sometime, some place, certain characters lived the scenes and actions here described.

The title "Mother Lode" has been used in its broader sense, as exemplifying the source of all gold in California, and the life which arose from it.

The mining engineer said: "The Mother Lode runs south from El Dorado County to the lower boundary of Mariposa County. It stretches past the towns of Sutter Creek, Jackson, San Andreas, Angel's Camp and the road to Yosemite, far down below Coulterville. The lode begins suddenly and ends as suddenly, and though we have searched up and down the state we have never been able to pick it up again."

"Has it any relation to the Comstock Lode?" was asked.

"None whatever. Curiously enough, in Nevada City and vicinity it would appear that at one time in the earth's making, a great fissure opened in forming California and a wedge of Nevada mining country was pushed into it. North of there the California stratas begin again."

"But it was always my belief that these localities were on the Mother Lode, as well as the Georgetown and Auburn country."

"Many persons are apparently under that impression, but the geological surveys of the government place it in the exact location I have given you."

The "Old Miner, '49er," said: "We hunted most all o' our lives, lookin' for her! We called her the Mother Lode, because we thought that all the gold in the state must a' come from her an' washed down the rivers onto the bars where we found it. We thought she'd be pure gold, an' a hundred feet wide an' go on, world without end. We looked, an' looked, an' after quartz minin' come in, we dug an' dug, but we never found the old girl exceptin' here an' there.

"Joe Dance, that old prospector that died last year, he lost his mind lookin' for the big lode. Made some rich strikes in his day, Joe did, but he never could stop to work 'em. He was always waitin' for the mother of 'em all, he said, who'd put him on the road to the heart a' molten gold in the middle a' the earth.

"We old fellows tramped all the way through the hills with only a burro for company most a' the time, an' you'll ride down a broad paved way, soon, in your automobile. You'll go in days, where it took us months, an' some brainy young engineer will locate the old girl, most likely, in new-fangled ways that were unknown in our time.

"Well, the world whirls fast, now-a-days. Guess they'll need all the gold in the old girl's lap to keep on greasin' the machinery. I take off my hat to this generation. I hope they'll find it!"

Hittell says: "The Mother Lode is one of the most extraordinary metalliferous veins in the world. Gold-bearing lodes usually range only five or six miles, but this can be traced for more than sixty. The rock is a hard and white quartz, rich in very fine particles of gold, and the vein varies in width from a foot to thirty feet.

"There are in some portions of its course side branches or companion veins, as they are sometimes called, making the total width nearly one hundred feet. Nor is the direction of the lode always in a straight line. Though usually found within half a mile of what may be considered its normal course, it is sometimes found as far as two or three miles from it, and there are cases of other lodes (three, in all) entirely distinct, which in some instances approach so close as to be confounded with it."

There are numerous mines along the whole length of the lode, famous for having yielded their millions. One quartz ledge is said to have yielded for a long time, two-thirds gold. They say of the Morgan Mine, at Carson's Creek near Melones, "It appeared to be rich beyond parallel. On one occasion \$110,000.00 worth of gold was thrown down at a single blast."

Many expeditions were made in search of the fabled Great Lode but all attempts were vain.

The old spread-eagle Judge said: "Yes, sir; the Mother Lode dips up in a bit of a circle with no beginning and no end, in the western foothills of the Sierra Mountains. Down about

Melones, and Sonora, and Angel's Camp it goes, and through Table Mountain, and under Jackass Hill. It comes north, and north, past Coloma, and Auburn, to Nevada City and then it disappears."

I remembered the engineer's statement, but was silent.

"It was the haunt of Harte, and Twain, and Canfield in the north; it was the bank of such men as Hopkins, Crocker, Huntington and Stanford; the foundation of one of the greatest states in the Union, the Mother Lode, the Mother of Gold!

"Child, my old eyes have watched it spread for nearly ninety years—the power of gold, and of the men who came to seek it. The influence of gold controlled by the human intellect. I am old and tired and soon I shall sleep, but the old see clearly, too clearly, that which they are leaving, and that to which they pass."

"Thus, facing the stars, we go out amongst them into darkness," I quoted, softly.

"Not to darkness, but to eternal light, to rise again from the Mother Lode to mingle in the busy lives of men."

"Who maketh His messengers with two, and three, and four pairs of wings'."

"Exactly. To be born again, and yet again. The real mother-vein of gold was imbued in the men shaped by the life of the frontier. It was the cornerstone of great fortunes, of families, of enterprises, of achievements which are peculiarly California's own.

"It was the clearing house and open sesame of the vast trade of the Orient which is just coming into being; the foundation for the bridge of gold which shall reach across the seas; a fit monument to posterity which shall be erected with all the lightness and grace and stability of the present cultured generations, born with their feet in the flowers grown from the mother-gold of decent manhood and glorious womanhood—the precious metals of the spirit, unalloyed and unafraid.

"They are the true Mother Lode, the bourne of the seekers of gold, greater, far, than the crazed brains of the old prospectors had the power to conceive. A further-reaching, broader arc than the most wondrous rainbow of their imaginings born of dreams, and built of hunger and despair.

"So shall we find, at last, the Mother Lode, the virginity of the essence of creation, the beginning and the end. The curve of the circle which is unchanging, insoluble, omniscient; which shall return to that which created it; which is all; which is God!"

“'49”

“We have worked our claims,
We have spent our gold,
 Our barks are astrand on the bars;
We are battered and old,
Yet at night we behold
 Outcroppings of gold in the stars.

Where the rabbits play,
Where the quail all day
 Pipe on the chaparral hill;
A few more days,
And the last of us lays
 His pick aside and is still.

We are wreck and stray,
We are cast away,
 Poor battered old hulks and spars!
But we hope and pray,
On the Judgment Day,
 We shall strike it, up in the stars.

—Joaquin Miller.

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