

**CAPTAIN JIM'S FRIEND
AND THE ARGONAUTS
OF NORTH LIBERTY**

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Captain Jim's friend and The Argonauts of North Liberty by Bret Harte

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BY

BRET HARTE,

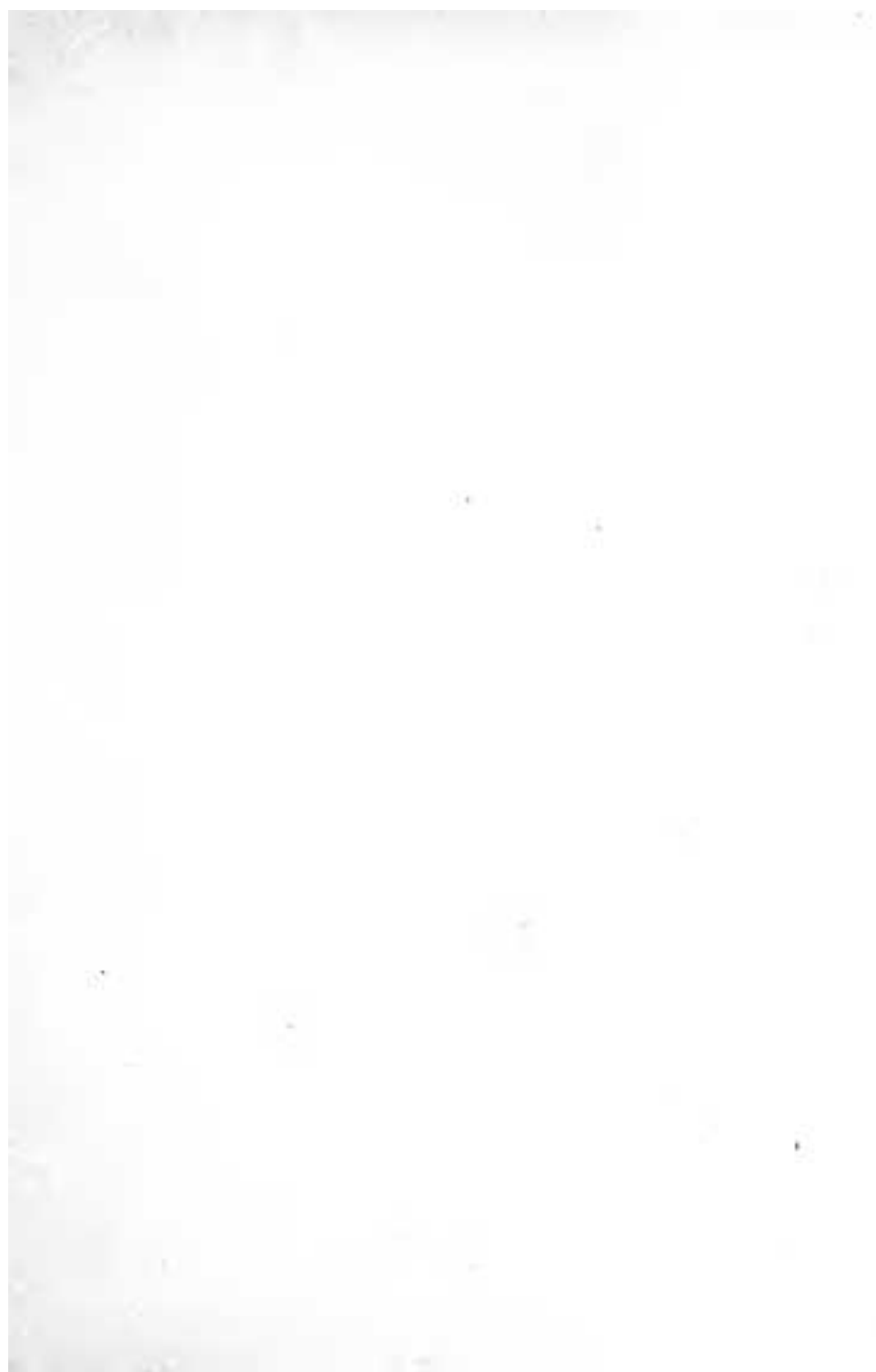
AUTHOR OF "THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP," ETC.

AUTHORIZED EDITION.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1889.



CAPTAIN JIM'S FRIEND.

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I.

HARDLY one of us, I think, really believed in the auriferous probabilities of Eureka Gulch. Following a little stream we had one day drifted into it—very much as we imagined the river Gold might have done in remoter ages—with the difference that *we* remained there, while the river Gold, to all appearances, had not. At first it was tacitly agreed to ignore this fact and we made the most of the charming locality, with its rare watercourse that lost itself in tangled depths of manzanita and alder, its laurel-choked pass, its flower-strewn hillside and its summit crested with rocking pines.

"You see," said the optimistic Rowley, "water's the main thing after all; if we happen to strike river gold, that's the stream for washing it, if we happen to drop into quartz—and that thar rock looks mighty likely, thar ain't a more natural born site for a mill than that right bank, with water enough to run fifty stamps. That hillside is an original dump for your tailings and a ready found inclined road for your trucks fresh from the hands of Providence, and that road we're kalkilatin' to build to the turnpike will run just easy along that ridge."

Later, when we were forced to accept the fact that finding gold was really the primary object of a gold mining company we still remained there, excusing our youthful laziness and incertitude by brilliant and effective sarcasms upon the unremunerative attractions of the Gulch. Nevertheless, when Captain Jim, returning one day from the nearest settlement and post-office, twenty miles away, burst upon us with, "Well, the hull thing'll be settled now, boys,—Lacy Bassett is coming down yer to look round," we felt considerably relieved.

And yet, perhaps, we had as little reason for it as we had for remaining there. There was no warrant for any belief in the special divining power of the unknown Lacy Bassett except Captain Jim's extravagant faith in his general superiority, and even that had always been a source of amused scepticism to the Camp. We were already impatiently familiar with the opinions of this unseen oracle; he was always impending in Captain Jim's speech as a fragrant memory or an unquestioned authority. When Captain Jim began, "Ez Lacy was one day tellin' mc," or, "Ez Lacy Bassett allows," or more formally when strangers were present, "Ez a partickler friend o' mine Lacy Bassett—may be ez you know him—scz," the youthful and lighter members of the Eureka Mining Company glanced at each other in furtive enjoyment. Nevertheless no one looked more eagerly forward to the arrival of this apocryphal sage than these indolent sceptics. It was at least an excitement; they were equally ready to accept his condemnation of the locality or his justification of their original selection.