

**SIXTEEN MONTHS  
AT THE GOLD  
DIGGINGS**

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Sixteen months at the gold diggings by Daniel B. Woods

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## P R E F A C E.

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It is almost inconceivable what an excitement was produced upon nations and individuals by the discovery, less than four years since, of gold among the mountains of Upper California. Tides of human life soon set in toward this one point ; currents here met, whirling and contending with increasing force ; and, where all was silent and calm before, was heard the roar, and seen the violence and agitation of the maelstrom.

The writer was for sixteen months employed in the gold mines, chiefly upon the American and Tuolumne Rivers and their tributaries. His reasons for compiling his notes and presenting them to the public may be briefly stated. It was the request of several friends that he would keep a journal of his mining life, exhibiting its lights and shades, its fortunes and misfortunes. This he did, jotting down from day to day the incidents as they occurred. Many mining companions, aware of this fact, requested him to prepare his journal for the press, that their friends might thus have a view of their circumstances and employments.

Having so long been a miner, and acquainted with all his privations and sufferings ; having experienced

his elation at success and his depression at failure ; having passed through the trying season of acclimation, and lain once beneath a lone oak, expecting, as he looked up to the stars shining clear above him, there to end his days ; having rocked the gold-digger's cradle, wielded his pick and spade, messed and slept with miners, he is prepared to present a correct view of his subject for those who have friends at the mines.

He considers that it will be proper to present incidents of travel on his journey to California, in connection with the more important object, both to afford a view of the dangers and difficulties of the earlier emigrants to this country, and also to maintain the unity of his plan.

He hopes to make this little volume useful to those who are, or who expect to be, engaged in the arduous employments of mining. If any shall be encouraged to perseverance—especially if any young men who shall be thus thrown into circumstances where immorality and vice are so prevalent, and to which many give themselves up too easy victims, shall be put upon their guard, his best wishes will have been accomplished. He recalls, with sadness, the case of a merchant of education and refinement, who left a large circle of friends and a young family. With bright hopes he started for the gold placers. Disheartened by several failures, depressed at his separation from his family, he sought in the social cup to forget his sorrows and disappointments. Within three months from the time he arrived in the country he became a subject of *mania a potu*, and died



in the streets of San Francisco. The path of vice in California lies not through the ordinary influences of life; it leads not, as elsewhere, through a long course. It lies rather on an inclined plane, and speedily runs down into despair and ruin.

I intend to make this volume a miner's manual, in which he may find important directions relating to the various mining operations.

Another motive with the writer is the desire to induce all who are doing *well enough*, who are living within their means and laying by a little, to remain satisfied at home. The question is often asked, *Who should go to the mines?* It is very sure that a man with a family depending upon his daily efforts should not go. He should not exhaust his slender means, and run himself in debt, with the hope of making himself independent in one or two years. Let such a one, who is inclined to do this, picture to himself his wife struggling alone with poverty or sickness, his children left without a father's presence and love to guide and protect, and himself a homeless wanderer, subjected to the privations, hardships, and sickness incident to such a vagrant life.

Let the young man go, if he will, who has no family depending upon him—who has a strong constitution, and stronger moral courage; who is sober and persevering; who has little prospect of making a comfortable living at home, and who can make up his mind to spend five years from it, and to enjoy as few comforts as did Diogenes. To such a one there may be some comfort in even a miner's life. He has not, like the man of family in a similar condition, to

experience how much the heart can bear and not break—to live only in the future, while he

“ Drags at each remove a lengthening chain.”

His is not the history of an *exile heart*. He may enjoy the rest of the laboring man beneath God's own glorious canopy. The hardships which he endures in this, the *gold-age* of his life, may make him more satisfied with his situation when he returns home, while the troubles which once annoyed him will not there be experienced.

DANIEL B. WOODS.

*Philadelphia, July 1, 1851.*

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CHAPTER I.

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY.

CALIFORNIA extends from Oregon to Sonoma and Lower California, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. It shows a coast-front extending ten degrees of latitude, from the thirty-second to the forty-second parallel. To the voyager it presents only high and forbidding headlands — mountain ranges which step down from the broad table-lands in the interior, and push a bold foot far out into the waters of the ocean.

This country possesses 420,000 square miles, and is remarkable for its lofty ranges of mountains, among which lie interspersed limited but beautiful valleys and more extensive plains. Its diversity of climate and soil is as great as the varieties of its surface.

The channel which forms the entrance into this singular country from the Pacific is two miles in width and three in length, and is opposite, under the same parallel of latitude, to the Straits of Gibraltar.