

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

This sketch is meant to show how slowly the development of the west went on in the first half of the century that is just closed; how more than fifty years were suffered to elapse, after it was known with sufficient certainty that the Rocky Mountains contained deposits of the precious metals, before the task of finding them was gone about in earnest. One of the grievances of Pope's Poor Indian was the Christian's thirst for gold; but it would appear to have been a very moderate degree of thirst with which our fathers were afflicted, to have been restrained for half a century. Is it after all certain, despite all that we read of the Anglo-Saxon's greed for gold, that the men of our race are more eager for that substance than they are for beaver-skins, good crops of corn, or other means of providing well for themselves and their families? Pope had in mind the performances of the Spanish in Mexico and Peru. The English-speaking settlers of North America were never led off on any wild-goose chases after such transparent potentates as el Dorado. Neither does there appear anywhere in the American annals such a transaction as that of Mathieu Sâgean, who early in the 18th century came to France with a tale of travels up the Missouri, and of a King Hagaren, with a palace of solid gold; and who actually interested the minister Ponchartrain in his story, insomuch that he returned to America duly accredited by the French government for another journey to King Hagaren's realm.

The Americans knew very well that gold-mines were discovered in mountains, and from the time the Rockies were first heard of, they were naturally objects of suspicion. That vast chain suggests to this day all kinds of pleasing mysteries and possibilities to the beholder. Captain Jonathan Carver wrote thus of the "Shining Mountains," from hearsay, about the beginning of the Revolution: "this extraordinary range of mountains" may "probably in future ages be found to contain more riches in their bowels, than those of Indostan and Malabar; nor will I except even the Peruvian mines." At this time, I do not know that any white man had ever looked upon the Rocky Mountains, north of the Spanish possessions. The French were beginning to work back from their new settlement of St. Louis, in pursuit of furs, but very little of their doings can have been known on the Atlantic coast.

Twenty years later the United States owned a great part of the range, and Captains Lewis and Clark were sent out to explore it. So far as I have observed, their journals contain no mention of any possibility of precious metals. Neither do those of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Major Long, nor Fremont

on his earlier excursions. This begins to look like deliberate reticence, for the subject had already been brought before the public.

When Lieutenant Pike reached Santa Fe, he found in captivity there a Kentuckian named James Pursley, or Pursell, who had spent some time in Colorado between 1802 and 1805. "He assured me," says Pike, "that he had found gold on the head of La Platte, and had carried some of the virgin mineral in his shot-pouch for months; but that, being in doubt whether he should ever again behold the civilized world, he threw the sample away. He had imprudently mentioned it to the Spaniards, who had frequently solicited him to go and show a detachment of cavalry the place; but, conceiving it to be in our territory, he had refused, and was fearful that the circumstance might create a great obstacle to his leaving the country." The steadfastness of this wandering carpenter may, in fact, have had a good deal to do with determining the present map of the United States.

The next mention of gold that I have noticed, comes twenty years later, and is a rather obscure tradition of the Arapaho Indians, told long after. They were understood to locate it on the headwaters of the Kansas river—on the plains of eastern Colorado, therefore, where gold has never been found yet. Their story, as it has come down, was that somewhere about 1822 a party of them went on the war-path against the Pawnees. They had only three guns, and they were not very good ones, and everything went wrong. Presently all their bullets were gone, and they had no Pawnee scalps, nor even anything to eat; and they thought they had better go back. Their leader, however, on whom the odium of an unsuccessful expedition would fall, encouraged them to go a little further; his name is said to have been Whirlwind. As they sat debating the question, they espied some yellow stuff on the surface of the ground, which they found they could work almost as easily as lead. This discovery put them in better spirits; they made up a stock of bullets for their three guns of the new material and proceeded. Soon they met the Pawnees, and gained a wonderful victory. Every one of the yellow bullets laid out one of the enemy, who speedily fled appalled at the great medicine of the Arapahos. They, returning, rejoicing, gave all the credit to their new bullets; they kept some of them, and a few of them were buried with Whirlwind when he finally died. A white man saw them on this occasion, and his judgment was that they were gold.

About 1823, James Cockrell, a Missourian, and an uncle of Senator Cockrell's, while trapping in the region below Pike's Peak, apparently, found

what he believed to be silver. The idea haunted him, and in the summer of 1827 he formed a party of twenty-five men to follow up his discovery. They set out from the neighborhood of Independence, crossed the plains by the Arkansas route, and did, in fact, find a deposit of silver ore. But having found it, they found also that they did not know what to do with it when they had it; so they trudged back to Missouri, very hungry, lame and uncomfortable, and, it is said, very much out of humor with Senator Cockrell's uncle; and never went there again.

The next story comes from southeastern Wyoming, in the early 30's. It is said that an old Frenchman, named Du Shay, or Duchet, picked up somewhere on Horse Creek, a rock that he thought was curious; it was quite heavy, with bright yellow specks in it, and he put it in his bullet-pouch and carried it about with him until he got tired, when he threw it away. Some time after he emptied his old bullet pouch in the presence of some wise Mexicans, who, idly examining its contents, amazed the old trapper by asking where he got some nuggets of virgin gold that they found. He easily traced them back to his curious piece of rock; but he could never remember where it was that he found it.

In 1841, Rufus B. Sage heard that gold had been found in the sands of the Chugwater, quite near the scene of the last-mentioned episode; he also speaks of the New Mexican deposits, in the Taos region. "At present these valuable mines are almost entirely neglected—the common people being too ignorant and poor to work them, and the rich too indolent and fond of ease." Josiah Gregg, also, in 1844, had heard reports. "It is asserted that several specimens of silver ores have been met with on our frontier, as well as about the Wichita and the Rocky Mountains. Gold has also been found, no doubt, in different places; yet it is questionable whether it has anywhere been discovered in sufficient abundance to render it worth the seeking. Some trappers have reported an extensive gold region about the sources of the Platte river; yet, although recent search has been made, it has not been discovered."

The army kept its eyes and ears open in 1846. Lieutenant Emory heard two gold stories—one of the Mimbres river in New Mexico, the other of the Prieto in Arizona. "We learned that those who worked them" (the former) "made their fortunes; but the Apaches did not like their proximity, and one day turned out and destroyed the mining town, driving off the inhabitants." The case of the Prieto was much the same. "Its sands are said to be full of the precious metal. A few adventurers, who ascended this river hunting beaver, washed the sands at night when they