

decrees inexorable and summary. It occasionally happened, however, that the wrong man dangled from a pine limb, or climbed the steep side of the gulch with blood flowing from his lacerated back, an exile from an outraged camp; yet these incidents were by no means as frequent as is generally supposed, and there were hundreds of mining camps, long since abandoned and, perhaps, forgotten, which never witnessed such an exposition of popular justice.

When thievery thus became common and gold dust could no longer be left exposed to view with a certainty of its remaining undisturbed, many were the devices resorted to by the miners for its safe keeping. It became the general custom to bury it in the ground or secret it in some secure hiding place, known only to the owner of the gold and his partner, if he had one; and this gave rise to many complications, both serious and comic. Frequently the place of secretion was forgotten, or so imperfectly remembered as to throw the unfortunate owner into a state of excitement and perturbation bordering upon insanity, while yards of earth were overturned with feverish haste until the hidden dust was found. That, however, was not the only result of many such cases of forgetfulness. More than one man forfeited his life, the innocent victim of erring circumstantial evidence, and many a stripe was laid upon the bare and bleeding back of the guiltless, charged with the theft of that which never was stolen, and which, perhaps, still rests snugly in its forgotten hiding place. A miner often died suddenly, or was killed in his claim or in some causeless quarrel, and diligent search failed to reveal the dust he was supposed to have accumulated. Occasionally, as the years rolled on, these "plants" were accidentally discovered; but the great majority of them—and who can say how many?—still nestle in their earthy nests, and may, perhaps, till Gabriel's blast shall make them valueless in mortal eyes.

An instance of this kind occurred at Drews' Flat in the summer of 1852. This was then a typical mining camp, situated on Salmon River, four miles above Sawyer's Bar. It was a lively camp, in the fullest acceptance of the term, and howled even as Rome was made to howl in pagan days of old. One of the miners working on the flat, Frank Ring by name, buried thirteen ounces of dust in a leather purse, near the trunk of a fallen tree. He, alone, knew of its hiding place, and was one day overcome with astonishment to discover the ground dug up and the treasure gone. That he had been robbed by some one who had discovered his place of deposit he had no doubt, and his mind at once rested upon Charles Clark, a man whom he had observed loitering in the vicinity of his earthly savings bank. The eye of suspicion once fixed upon an individual, the strong arm of hasty and inconsiderate action immediately followed. The news spread through the camp, and a crowd quickly gathered, bent upon administering swift justice, as they understood it—that justice which is often the very essence of iniquity.

The intended victim was an Englishman, an old man-

o'-war's man, as simple, harmless and innocent as a child, the last man in the camp who should have been suspected of such a crime; yet he had been seen in the vicinity of the fallen tree, and that was evidence enough. His age, however, was in his favor, and it was decided not to hang him, but to go through the form of doing so, choking him enough to make him confess the robbery and surrender the stolen purse. As he was led out, with the harsh rope encircling his neck, he cried like a child with grief and shame. This was more than some of his judges could endure; craven appeals for mercy or ruffianly bravado would have fallen like rain drops upon a rock, but tears like those, welling up to the eyes from an agonized heart, broke down the barrier of prejudice, and he found many champions among those who had been so quick to condemn him. He was released, and wandered away, no one knew whither, while his accuser went to Australia, and the incident was forgotten, fading quickly from the screen of memory before the many that followed.

A few months later another miner, James Lee, took it upon himself to build a shake house, a somewhat pretentious structure for such a community. In furtherance of this purpose he was one day coming into camp with a load of shakes upon his back, his head bowed forward and his eyes fixed upon the ground. Upon a log which lay in his pathway his practiced eye detected a faint streak of gold dust, and the load of shakes was thrown hastily down, while he investigated these strange "colors." He followed the "lead" until it disappeared in the end of the log, and still pursuing his investigation he came upon a squirrel's nest, in which were the lost leather purse, gnawed in two by the sharp teeth of the bushy-tailed robber, and a liberal sprinkling of its yellow contents. The mystery of the lost purse was solved. Poetic justice, so beautiful in the conventional tales of story writers, has but few exhibitions in the cold reality of life, and had far less in those early mining days, when men came and went so quickly and so quietly that few noticed either their coming or their going. There certainly was none in this case; for the innocent old man and his hasty accuser, as well as many of those who placed that cruel rope around his neck, died, or still live, in ignorance of the fact that a tragedy nearly resulted from the providential instinct of an industrious squirrel.

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It is now believed that the denudations of the land do not cover the sea floor further than 300 miles seaward. These deposits are four miles deep in places. Far at sea its surface is covered with very small "shell animals." There is a patch of them in the North Atlantic 1,300 miles long and several hundred miles wide. Their shells finally sink to the bottom and form chalk. In the great abysses of the ocean, however, these shells dissolve before they reach the bottom. Here the only addition to the sea floor is made of wrecks, iceberg washings, dust carried by the wind, pumice from volcanoes and meteoric stones. The accretion is infinitely slow.