Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clapp (later, Clappe), a New Englander, wrote twenty-three letters to a sister in Massachusetts that constitute a vivid account of life in the mines of the Sierra Nevada in the early years of the California Gold Rush. Predominantly letters the letters made the perilous trip east and back, because in 1855 Clappe and her family went to California, in 1851 and 1852. Residence in the Mines in a new short-lived San Francisco magazine, The Pioneer, when the letters began arriving in New England late in 1851, Clappe’s sister could have sold them to a New York, Boston, for Easterners haggled for stories about gold mining in the new state, and both in subject matter and in style Clappe’s accounts were remarkable. Even before going to San Francisco, she knew that others had succeeded with travel letters (conspicuously, Bayard Taylor, who left California just as she arrived there). Clappe lost her chance for national fame by not publishing the letters while excitement over the Gold Rush was high. By 1855, national focus had shifted to slavery, and the latest California news was about the fast, safer way to the Golden State—the new railroad across the isthmus of Panama. Well before Clappe died, historians of the Gold Rush realized that her letters were an unparalleled resource, shovel and trommel, for details about modes of travel (always hazardous), grotesque lodging and inventive attempts at establishing domestic comfort, methods of mining (often dangerous), vigilant justice, and the awe-striking splendors of nature. She drew memorable portraits of miners and the handful of white women who accompanied them, as well as a few California Indians she encountered, and she vividly described the arrival of immigrants who had survived the overland trek from Missouri. In the twentieth century, historians of California collected the letters in book form, and gradually their literary merits became known.

Clappe had a most unlikely background for her adventure in the Gold Rush. She was born in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, on July 28, 1819. Her father, a mathematician, moved the family to Amherst, Massachusetts, where he taught at the academy until he died in 1832. After her mother’s death in 1837, her guardian, Orson Baker (a classmate of Emily Dickinson’s father), kept her in schools, including the Amherst Academy, until she was nineteen or twenty. During the next few years she taught English and mental vision, and as far as possible, to attune the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; be must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man.

I was now getting, as I have said, one dollar and fifty cents per day. I contracted for it; I earned it; it was paid to me; it was rightfully my own; yet, upon each returning Saturday night, I was compelled to deliver every cent of that money to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it—not because he owed it to him,—nor because he possessed the slightest shadow of a right to it; but solely because he had the power to compel me to give it up. The right of the grim-visaged pirate upon the high seas is exactly the same.
Bay in January 1850. They remained a year in San Francisco. Dr. Clapp suffering from illness, including what was called "bein fever." A miner could make a fortune in a day, and a doctor could charge Gold Rush prices for treating miners weakened from their work. The trip was particularly susceptible, Clapp said, to typhoid and liable to incur broken bones in accidents and suffer from peritonitis during recovery. Early in 1853 the Clapps took a steamboat to Marysville, at the confluence of the Feather and Yuba rivers. Hearing that a thousand miners at Rich Bar were without a doctor, Clapp went on to set up a rough "office" while Louise stayed behind a few weeks, contributing sketches and poems to the Marysville Herald. In the fall of 1851, at Rich Bar, she began writing her long letters to her sister Molly. Dr. Clapp found that two dozen doctors had preceded him to Rich Bar, and the Clapps left the miners for San Francisco late in 1852. Dr. Clapp soon sailed for Hawaii, then returned to Massachusetts alone. What happened between them is unknown. She began teaching school in San Francisco in 1854. Effectively abandoned, she filed for divorce in 1856, after this time she sold her last name Clappe. In 1878, on retiring after a quarter century of teaching in San Francisco, she moved to New York City, then to Morristown, New Jersey, where she died early in 1906.

As a strong "character" as any of the miners, Clappe knew she was "absolutely and "wifful," determined from childhood to do what people said she couldn't. Past thirty, she rode almost twenty-four hours at a stretch without complaining, seeing herself as "a regular Nomad" in her passion for wandering. She did not endure unnecessary hardships (she had a cook when she could get one, and other duties did her brother), but she was tough, independent, and never too tedious to record the way miners swore, drank and gambled, and loved each other, fought duels, lashed minor offenders, and hung thieves. As she witnessed and portrayed a lengthening panorama of life in the mines, Clappe saw herself in relation to successful journalists: "Grace Greenwood," the pen name of Sarah Jane Lippincott (1823-1906), "Fanny Forester," the pen name of Emily C. Judson (1817-1874), and Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-1867). But she also saw herself (she would have said self-mockingly) as a letter writer like the Marquis de Sade (1740-1800), famous for her correspondence with her daughter, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), author of Turkish Letters. Stumped in the Bible and thoroughly familiar with Spencer and Shakespeare, the English Romantics, Dickens, and many contemporary American writers, she was not beholden to any literary company. With just a slight turn of her fortune, she might have had a career in journalism in her own time rather than a literary reputation a century and a half later.

California, in 1852

RESIDENCE IN THE MINES

Letter Twelfth

From our Log Cabin, Indian Bar, January 27, 1852.

I wish that it was possible, dear M., to give you an idea of the perfect Saturnalia, which has been held upon the river for the last three weeks, 1. The text is from the San Francisco Pioneer (February 1853). Perhaps identifying herself with the strong-minded Woman of 1849 book Shakers, Clappe signed the letters "Shaker Sister," as Mary 1851. In the rest of "Residence in the Mines," she refers to herself as "Shake Sister," possibly as a self-conscious way of saying "Shaker Sister," for she had taught in New England and in 1854 she had become a schoolteacher in San Francisco. 2. On the East Branch of the North Fork of the Yuba is a small town called Rich Bar. In her is a large hall, several, and other names she often to 3. Clapp's sister Mally. 4. The Humboldt ideal, or perhaps this is a possible way of saying "Shaker Sister." 5. Family in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" (1643). What a brother from the Maria there is a town called Marysville, California, paper. 1851. In the rest of "Residence in the Mines," she refers to herself as "Shake Sister," possibly as a self-conscious way of saying "Shaker Sister," for she had taught in New England and in 1854 she 1852. It is the custom of the festival of the god Xanadu, beginning December 17, in Christian ex 1860, in her own time rather than a literary reputation a century and a half later.

great exploit for scientific and other religious, political, or commercial reasons, and as the seem- ineffectstally all-seeing author of The American Journey, a re- monstration against his scientific exploits, into sacred and secret formulas. He married Washing- tions, D.C., in President Jefferson's court in 1804 but never used them. 4. Flaga and other names she often to 5. Family in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" (1643). What a brother from the Maria there is a town called Marysville, California, paper. 1851. In the rest of "Residence in the Mines," she refers to herself as "Shake Sister," possibly as a self-conscious way of saying "Shaker Sister." 4. The Humboldt ideal, or perhaps this is a possible way of saying "Shaker Sister."
eating particulars were communicated to me by "Ned," when he brought up dinner." That distinguished individual himself was in his element, and in a most intense state of inspiration and excitement at the same hill. About dark, we were startled by the loudest burro, which arose at the sight of an army of India-rubber coats, (the rain was falling in rivers full) each one enshrining a Rich Burro, which was rapidly descending the hill. This troop was headed by the "General," who—lucky man that he is—rode on high, instead of a hanner, a live lantern, actually composed of tin and window-glass, and evidently intended by its maker to act in no capacity but that of a lantern! The "General" is the largest and tallest and—with one exception, I think—the oldest man upon the river. He is about fifty, I should fancy, and wears a snow-white beard of such immense dimensions, in both length and thickness, that any elderly Turk would expire with envy, at the mere sight of it. Don't imagine that he is a reveiler; by no means; the gay crowd followed him, for the same reason that the king followed Madame Blaize, "because he went before." 9

At nine o'clock in the evening, they had an oyster and champagne1 supper in the Humboldt, which was very gay with toasts, songs, speeches, etc. I believe that the company danced all night; at any rate, they were dancing when I went to sleep, and they were dancing when I woke the next morning. The revel was kept up in this mad way for three days, growing wilder every hour. Some never slept at all during that time. On the fourth day, they got past dancing, and, lying in drunken heaps about the bar-room, commenced a most unearthly howling—some barked like dogs, some roared like bulls, and others hissed like snakes or frogs. Many were too far gone to imitate anything but their own animalized selves. The scene, from the description I have had of it, must have been a complete illustration of the fable of Circe2 and her fearful transformations. Some of these bacchanals3 were among the most respectable and respected men upon the river. Many of them had resided here for more than a year, and had never been seen intoxicated before. It seemed as if they were seized with a reckless mania for pouring down liquor, which, as I said above, everything conspired to foster and increase.

Of course, there were some who kept themselves aloof from these excesses; but they were few, and were not allowed to enjoy their sobriety in peace. The revelers formed themselves into a mock vigilance committee, and when one of these unfortunate appeared outside, a constable, followed by those who were able to keep their legs, brought him before the Court, where he was tried on some ammunitious charge, and summarily sentenced to "treat the crowd." The prisoners had generally the good sense to submit cheerfully to their fate.

Towards the latter part of the week, people were compelled to be a little more quiet from sheer exhaustion; but on New Year's day, when there was a grand dinner at Rich Bar, the excitement broke out, if possible, worse than ever. The scenes in a more or less aggravated form, in proportion as the strength of the actors held out, were repeated at Smith's Bar and "The Junction."

Nearly every day, I was dreadfully frightened, by seeing a boat-load of intoxicated men fall into the river, where nothing but the fact of their being intoxicated, saved many of them from drowning. One morning, about thirty dollars worth of bread, (it must have been "tippy cake,"6) which the baker was conveying to Smith's Bar, fell overboard, and sailed merely away towards Marysville.7 People passed8 on the river in a boat, which was managed by a pulley and a rope, that was strained across it from Indian Bar to the opposite shore.

Of the many acquaintances, who had been in the habit of calling nearly every evening three, only, appeared in the cabin during as many weeks. Now, however, the Saturnalia is about over. "Ned" and "Chock,9" have nearly filled themselves into their respective graves,—the claret (a favorite wine with miners), and oysters are exhausted,—brandied fruits are rarely seen, and even port wine is beginning to look scarce. Old callers occasionally drop in, looking dreadfully sheepish and subdued, and so sorry,—and people are evidently aroving themselves from the bacchanal madness, into which they were so suddenly and so strangely drawn.

With the exception of my last, this is the most unpleasant letter which I have ever felt it my duty to write to you. Perhaps you will wonder that I should touch upon such a disagreeable subject at all. But I am bound, Molly, by my promise, to give you a true picture (as far as in me lies,) of mining life and its peculiar temptations, "nothing extenuating nor setting down aught in malice." But with all their failings, believe me, the miners, as a class, possess many truly admirable characteristics.

I have had rather a stupid time during the storm. We had been in the habit of taking frequent rows upon the river in a funny little toppling canoe, carved out of a log. The bridge at one end of our bowling ground and the rapids at the other, made quite a pretty lake. To be sure it was so small that we generally passed and repassed its beautiful surface at least thirty times in an hour. But we did not mind that, I can assure you. We were only too glad to be able to go out onto the water at all. I used to return, loaded down with the magnificently large leaves of some aquatic plant, which the gentle frosts had painted with the most gorgeous colors, lots of fragrant mist, and a few wane, white flowers, which had lingered past their autumnal glory. The richest bus- house bouquet could never give me half the pleasure, which I took in arrang- ing in a pretty vase of purple and white, those gorgeous leaves. They made me think of Moorish arabesques,10 so quaint and bizarre, and at the same

9. Clapp's "light relish" rock and oakard. Ned, a few slider, had been the cook on the brig Bowser in 1853, where the captain engaged him for the sake of customary.

10. Mysterious, the Yuba County seat, is as the centron of the Yuba River and the Yuba River. 4. Crooked. 5. "White man by the name of Chock," an absolute villain to Ned, is introduced in Letter 8, where Clapp relieves the California caudillo of that allows him to pass under a single tree, as he be some Hunter or Humboldt.

11. Letter 11 tells two great stories. A Swede who stole money was caught, tried, and most impris- 6. Cake made of powder and almonds—or any dry cake—intempered with wine or brandy and served with customary.

12. Clapp's "light relish" rock and oakard. Ned, a few slider, had been the cook on the brig Bowser in 1853, where the captain engaged him for the sake of customary.

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14. Letter 11 tells two great stories. A Swede who stole money was caught, tried, and most impris-
time dazzlingly brilliant were the varied tints. They were in their glory at evening; for like an oriental beauty, they flashed up splendidly. Alas! where one little month ago, my pretty lake lay laughing up at the stars, a sudden torrent rushes noisily by—the poor little canoe was swept away with the bridge, and splendid leaves hide their bright heads forever beneath the dark waters.

But I am not entirely bereft of the beautiful. From my last walk, I brought home a tiny bit of out-door, which through all the long, rainy months that are to come, will sing to me silently, yet eloquently, of the blue and gold of the vanished summer, and the crimson and purple of its autumn. It is a branch, gathered from that prettiest feature of mountain scenery, a moss-grown fir-tree. You will see them at every step, standing all lovely in this graceful robe. It is in color, a vivid sea-green, with little hard flowers, which look more like dots than anything else, and contrast beautifully with the deeper verdure of the fir. The branch, which I brought home, I have placed above my window. It is three feet in length and as large round as a person’s arm; and there it remains, a cormice wreathed with purple-starred tapestry, whose wondrous beauty no upholsterer can ever match. I have got the prettiest New Year’s present. You will never guess what it is, so I shall have to tell you. On the eve of the year, as the “General” was lifting a glass of water, which had just been brought from the spring to his lips, he was startled at the sight of a tiny fish. He immediately put it into a glass jar and gave it to me. It is that most lovely of all the creatures of Theta, a spotted trout, a little more than two inches in length. Its back is of mingled green and gold, and is splashed with dots of the richest sable. A mark of a dark ruby color, in shape like an anchor, crowns its elegant little head. Nothing can be prettier than the delicate wings of pale purple, with which its snowy belly is faintly peckled. Its jet black eyes, rimmed with silver, within a circle of rare sea-blue, gleam like diamonds, and its whole graceful shape is gilded with a shimmering sheen, infinitely lovely. Where I watch it from across the room, as it glides slowly round its crystal palace, it reminds me of a beam of many-colored light; but when it glides up and down in its gay playfulness, it gleams through the liquid atmosphere like a box of shining silver. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever;” and, truly, I never weary watching the perfected loveliness of my graceful little captive.

In the list of my depredations, above written, I forgot to mention a fact, which I know will gain me the sympathy of all cleverly disposed people. It is, that we have had no fresh meat for nearly a month! Dark and ominous rumors are also floating through the moist air, to the effect that the potatoes and onions are about to give out! But don’t be alarmed, dear Molly. There is no danger of a famine. For have we not wagon loads of dark, dark hams, whose indurated bones nothing but the sharpest knife and the stoutest can penetrate? Have we not got quintals of delicious mackerel, fearfully crystallized in black salt? Have we not barrels upon barrels of rusty pork, and flour enough to victual a large army for the next two years? Yes, verily, have we; and more also. For we have oysters in casks, preserved meats and sardines, (appropos, I detect them) by the hundred box full. So hush the trembling of that tender little heart and shut those tearful and alarmed eyes, while I press a good-night kiss on their drooping lips.

LETTER TWENTY-SECOND. 6

From Our Log Cabin, Indian Bar, Oct. 27, 1852.

In my last epistle, my dear Mr., I left myself safely ensconced at Green-wood’s Rancho, in about as uncomfortable a position as a person could well be, where board was fourteen dollars a week. Now you must not think that the proprietors were at all to blame for our miserable condition. They were, I assure you, very gentlemanly and intelligent men; and I owe them a thou-sand thanks, for the many acts of kindness, and the friendly efforts which they made to amuse and interest me while I was in their house. They said from the first that they were utterly unprepared to receive ladies, and it was only after some persuasion, and as a favor to me, that they consented to let me come. They intend soon to build a handsome house; for it is thought that this valley will be a favorite summer resort for people from the cities below.

The American Valley is one of the most beautiful in all California. It is seven miles long and three or four wide, with the Feather River winding its way from the north to the south, surrounded on three sides by lofty mountains. And there is better reason to believe that this valley will be an American park than any other valley in California. It is cloistered by solid mountains; it is a gem, like a very precious jewel, set in a framework of blue and green. It is a wonderland where beauty reigns and pure and sweet mountain air rules. It is a fairy land, where the gossamer of misty morning hangs over the mountains and mountain lakes. It is a land of nooks and corners, where one may wander with only the braying of the feathered throng, and the chirping of the busy insect to break the silvery silence of the morning air. It is a land where one may wander with only the braying of the feathered throng, and the chirping of the busy insect to break the silvery silence of the morning air.

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1. In Greek myth, a sea nymph, mother of Achil-les.
2. The beginning of John Scott’s Eady-son (1849) “A thing of beauty is a joy forever / In离去 increases; it will never / Pass into nothingness.”
3. Houndsbreaths.
4. The river is from the San Francisco Ocean (November 1855).
5. This is in one week before the Democrat Franklin Pierce was the presidential electors.
6. In Letter 22 Chippe describes her trip to the American Valley (1st of Quaker), in which case we refer to her letter. In Letter 15 Chippe says the Great Round Ranch was the headquarters of the American Valley, which was the Whig head quarters. She states emphatically that she was not a Whig, but a Democrat (holding strong convic-tions although not allowed to vote).
somebody. If so I beg the injured person’s pardon, and he or she may have a hundred of mine to pay for it.

It was at Greenwood’s Bianco, that the famous quartz boux’ originated last winter, which so completely gullied our good miners on the river. I visited the spot which has been excavated to some extent. The stone is very beautiful being lined and streaked and splashed with crimson, purple, green, orange, and black. There was one large white block, veined with stripes of a magnificient blood-red color, and partly covered with a dark mass, which was the handsomest thing of the kind I ever saw. Some of the crystallizations were wonderfully perfect. I had a piece of the bed rock given me, completely covered with natural prisms, varying in size from an inch down to those not larger than the head of a pin.

Much of the immigration from across the plains, on its way to the cities below, stops here for awhile to recruit. I always had a strange fancy for that Namadic way of coming to California. To lie down under starry skies, hundreds of miles from any human habitation, and to rise up on dewy mornings, to pursue our way though a strange country, so wildly beautiful, seeing each day something new and wonderful, seemed to me truly enchanting. But cruel reality strips everything of its rose tints. The poor women arrive, looking as haggard as so many Endorean witches; burnt to the color of a hazelnut, with their hair cut short, and its gloss entirely destroyed by the alkali, whiteords of which they are compelled to cross on the way. You will barely find a family that has not left some beloved one buried upon the plains. And they are fearful funerals, those. A person dies, and they stop just long enough to dig his grave and lay him to rest, under circumstances will permit, and the long train hurries onward, leaving its healthy companion of yesterday, perhaps, in this boundless city of the dead. On this hazardous journey, they dare not linger.

I was acquainted with a young widow of twenty, whose husband died of cholera when they were but five weeks on their journey. He was a Judge in one of the Western States, and a man of some eminence in his profession. She is a pretty little creature, and all the aspirants to marriage are candidates for her hand. One day a party of immigrant women came into my room, which was also the parlor of the establishment. Some observation was made which led me to enquire of one of them if her husband was with her. “She hasn’t got no husband,” fairly chuckled one of her companions, “She came with me, and her feller died of cholera on the plains!”

At this startled and brutal announcement, the poor girl herself gave a hysteric giggle, which I at first thought proceeded from heartlessness; but I was told afterwards, by the persons under whose immediate protection she came out, and who was a sister of her betrothed, that the tender woman’s

heart received such a fearful shock at the sudden death of her lover, that for several weeks her life was despaired of.

I spent a great deal of time calling at the different encampments; for nothing enchanted me half so much as to hear about this strange exodus from the States. I never weary of listening to stories of adventures on the plains, and some of the family histories are deeply interesting.

I was acquainted with four women, all sisters or sisters-in-law, who had among them thirty-six children, the entire number of which had arrived thus far in perfect health. They could of themselves form quite a respectable village.

The immigration this year, contained many intelligent and truly elegant persons, who, having caught the fashionable epidemic, had left luxurious homes in the States, to come to California. Among others, there was a young gentleman of nineteen, the son of a United States Senator, who having just graduated, felt adventurous, and determined to cross the plains. Like the rest, he arrived in a somewhat dilapidated condition, with elbows out, and a hat the very counterpart of Sam Weller’s “gossamer ventilation,”7 which, if you remember, “though not a very handsome ‘un to look at, was an astonishin’ good ‘un to wear!” I must confess that he became ragged clothes the best of any one I ever saw, and made me think of the picturesque beggar boys, in Murillo’s paintings of Spanish life.

Then there was a person, who used to sing in public with Ossian Dodge, who had a voice of remarkable purity and sweetness, which he was kind enough to permit us to hear now and then. I hardly know of what nation he claimed to be. His father was an Englishman, his mother an Italian; he was born in Poland, and had lived nearly all his life in the United States. He was not the only musical genius that we had amongst us. There was a little girl at one of the tents, who had taught herself to play on the accordion on the way out. She was really quite a prodigy, singing very sweetly, and accompanying herself with much skill upon the instrument.

There was another child, whom I used to go to look at, as I would go to examine a picture. She had, without exception, the most beautiful face I ever saw. Even the alkali had not been able to mar the golden glory of the curls which clustered around that splendid little head. She had soft brown eyes, which shone from beneath their silken lashes, like “a monstrous evening star,” a mouth which made you think of a string of pearls threaded on scarlet; and a complexion of the suavest purity of the joponica, with the exception of a band of brownest freckles, which, extending from the tip of each cheek straight across the prettiest possible nose, added, I used to fancy, a new beauty to her enchanting face. She was very fond of me, and used to bring

7. The epitaph of London Swivel, Weller was Samuel Pickwick’s servant in Charles Dickens’s „The Pickwick Papers“ (1836–37).
8. Bartolomeo Spachia (1647–1682), Spanish painter famous in his own time for vivid biblical scenes in and the mid-18th century for subjects such as Chappel is thinking of is probably a reference to the roman-style painting of the same name in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The painting is called "The Vision of St. John the Baptist" and was created in 1680. It was painted by Bartolomeo Spachia.
9. Singer and songwriters active in New York when the story was written. These musicians were quite popular at the time and included the composer of the song "Hush, Little Whirligig" (1850) and "Ossian’s Sona- mada" (1850), the latter song being a reflection of Pope’s (1762) by the Scottish poet James Mac- pherson (1736–1796). (Tongue juvenile to be a translation of a Celtic epic by Ossian, the son of Fionn, or Finneg.)
me wild cherries which her brothers had gathered for her. Many a morning I have raised my eyes from my book, startled by that vision of infant loveliness—for her step had the still grace of a snow-flake—standing in beautiful silence by my side.

But the most interesting of all my pets was a widow, whom we used to call the “long woman.” When but a few weeks on the journey, she had buried her husband, who died of cholera after about six hours’ illness. She had come on; for what else could she do? No one was willing to guide her back to her old home in the States; and when I knew her, she was living under a large tree a few rods from the rancho, and sleeping at night, with all her family, in her one covered wagon. God only knows where they all stowed themselves away, for she was a modern Mrs. Rogers, with “nine small children and one at the breast,” indeed, of this catachrestical number, the oldest was but fifteen years of age, and the youngest a nursing baby of six months. She had eight sons and one daughter. Just fancy how dreadful, only one girl to all that boy! People used to wonder what took me so often to her encampment and at the interest with which I listened to what they called her “stupid talk.”

Certainly, there was nothing poetical about the woman. Leigh Hunt’s friend could not have elevated her common-place into the sublime. She was immensely tall, and had a hard, weather-beaten face, surmounted by a dreadful horn comb and a heavy twist of hay-colored hair, which, before it was cut and its gloss all destroyed by the alkali, must, from its luxuriance, have been very handsome. But what interested me so much in her, was the dogged and determined way in which she had set that stern, wrinkled face of hers against poverty. She would buy her girl and her team, and yet she planned all sorts of successful ways, to get food for her small, or rather large family. She used to wash shirts, and iron them on a chair—in the open air, of course; and you can fancy with what success. But the gentlemen were too generous to be critical and as they paid her three or four times as much as she asked, she accumulated quite a handsome sum in a few days. She made me think of a long-legged, very thin hen, scratching for dear life, to feed her never-to-be-satisfied brood. Poor woman! she told me that she was compelled to allowance her young ones, and that she seldom gave them as much as they could eat, at any meal. She was worse off than the "old woman who lived in a shoe."

And had so many children she didn’t know what to do; To some she gave butter, and some she gave bread. And to some she gave shippings, and sent them to bed."

Now my old woman had no butter and very little bread; and she was so naturally economical, that even shippings were sparingly administered. But after all their privations, they were—with the exception of the eldest hope—3.

3. In "catachrestical number" Clappe means merely a group of children of an age to be taught church catechisms. "Mrs. Rogers, with nine small children and one at the breast."—In the note to this passage, we are informed that on February 14, 1854, when Queen Mary had given birth to the "alight boy," the two infants, with nine small children and one at the breast, followed the Pentecostary muster. John (poor old John) was the eldest of the "nine juniors, nine seniors." 4. "An old woman’s grief: she’s always better when she’s alone."—This is a transcribed line from "The Poet’s Corner," a book by one of the Leigh Hunt circle. 5. "An old woman’s grief: she’s always better when she’s alone."—This is a transcribed line from "The Poet’s Corner," a book by one of the Leigh Hunt circle. 6. One of the children’s rhymes in Songs for the Nursery, by Martha Catherine Libhart, one of the Leigh Hunt circle. 7. A common phrase for "old age," but specifically of the sort used in "The Corn’s Ta-nder Night." 8. "The eldest hope of the father and his wife."—In "Mr. Jones, woman-grace." 9. Uncollected, perhaps an allusion to a village in New England for villagers. 10. "I know of no such thing."

as healthy looking a set of ragged little wretches as ever I saw. The aforesaid "hope" was the longest, the meanest, and the hobo-sidesed specimen of a Yankee that it is possible to imagine. He wore a white face, white eyes, and whitest hair; and walked about, looking, as if existence was the merest burden, and he wished somebody would have the goodness to take it off his hands. He seemed always to be in the act of yoking up a pair of oxen, and ringing every change of which the English alphabet is capable, upon the one single Yankee exclamation, "darumon!" which he scattered, in all its comical varieties, upon the tow head of his young brother, a piece of chubby giggle, who was forever trying to hold up a dreadful yoke, which wouldn’t "stay put," in spite of all the efforts of those fat, dirty little hands of his. The "long woman," mother like, exhume him by saying that he had been sick; though once when the "darned fools" flew thicker than usual, she gently observed that "he had forgotten that he was a child himself once." He certainly retained no trace of having enjoyed that delightful state of existence; and though one would not be so rude as to call him an "old boy," yet being always clad in a middle-aged habit, an elderly coat and adult pantaloons, one would as little fancy him a young man. Perhaps the fact of his wearing his father’s wardrobe, in all its unlathered amplitude, might help to confuse one’s ideas on the subject.

There was another dear old lady, to whom I took the largest kind of a liking, she was so exquisitely neat. Although she too had no floor, her bobe always had on a clean white dress and face to match. She was about four feet high, and had a perfect passion for wearing those frightful frontpieces of false hair, with which the young women of L. 5 were once in the habit of covering their abundant tresses. She used to send me little pots of fresh butter,—the first that I had tasted since I left the States,—beautifully stamped, 6 and looking like ingots of virgin gold. I, of course, made a deal set at the frontpiece; though I do believe, that to this distorted taste, and its accompanying horror of a cap, she owed the preservation of her own beautiful hair. 7 To please me she laid it aside; but I am convinced that it was restored to its proud eminence as soon as I left the valley, for she evidently had a "sneaking kindness" for it that nothing could destroy. I have sometimes thought that she wore it from religious principle, thinking it her duty to which precaution she attributed the perfect health which they all enjoyed (the family, not the wagons) during the whole journey.

There is one thing for which the immigrants deserve high praise, and that is, for having adopted the Bloomer dress, 8 (frightful as it is on all other occasions) in crossing the plains. For such an excursion it is just the thing.
I ought to say a word about the dances which we used to have in the bar room, a place so low that a very tall man could not have stood upright in it. One side was fitted up as a store, and another. These bunks were elegantly draped with red calico, through which we caught dim glimpses of blue blankets. If they could only have had sheets, they would have fairly been enveloped to the American colors. By the way, I wonder if there is anything national in this eternal passion for blue blankets and red calico? On ball nights the bar was closed, and everything was very quiet and respectable. To be sure, there was some danger of being swept away in a flood of tobacco juice; but luckily the floor was uneven, and it lay around in puddles, which with care one could avoid, merely running the minor risk of falling prostate upon the wet boards, in the midst of a galopade.  

Of course the company was made up principally of the immigrants. Such dancing, such dressing, and such conversation surely was never heard or seen before. The gentlemen, generally, were compelled to have a regular fight with their fair partners, before they could drag them on to the floor. I am happy to say, that almost always the stronger vessel won the day, or rather night, except in the case of certain timid youths, who after one or two attacks, gave up the battle in despair.

I thought that I had had some experience in bad grammar, since I came to California, but the good people were the first that I had ever heard use right royal we, instead of us.  

Do not imagine that all, or even the larger part of the company, were of this description. There were many intelligent and well-beled women, whose acquaintance I made with extreme pleasure.

After reading the description of the inconveniences and discomforts which we suffered in the American Valley,—and I can assure you that I have not at all exaggerated them,—you may imagine my joy when two of our friends arrived from Indian Bar, for the purpose of accompanying us home. We took two days for our return, and thus I was not at all fatigued. The weather was beautiful, our friends amusing, and E. well and happy. We stopped at night at a rancho, where they had a tame frog. You cannot think how comically it looked, hopping about the bar, quite as much at home as a tame squirrel would have been. I had a bed made up for me at this place, on one end of a long dining table. It was very comfortable, with the trilling drawbacks that I had to rise earlier than I wished, in order that what had been a bed at night, might become a table by day. We stopped at the top of the hill, and set fire to some fir trees. Oh, how splendidly they looked, with the flames leaping and curling amid the dark green foliage, like a golden snake, fiercely beautiful. The shriek which the fire gave as it sprang upon its verdant prey, made me think of the hiss of some furious reptile, about to wrap in its burning folds its helpless victim. With what perfect delight did 1 re-enter my beloved log cabin. One of our good neighbors had swept and put it in order before my arrival and everything was clean and neat as possible. How gratefully to my feet felt the thick warm carpet; how perfect appeared the floor, which I had once reviled (I legged it on the spot) because it was not exactly even; how cozy the old faded calico couch; how thoroughly comfortable the four chairs, (two of them had been thoroughly rebottomed with brown sail cloth, tastefully put on with a border of carpet tacks); how truly elegant the chintz-case-toilet table, with the doll's looking glass hanging above, which showed my face—the first time that I had seen it since I left home—some six shades darker than usual; how convenient the trunk which did duty as a wash-stand instead of a bowl, (at the rancho I had a pint tin pan, when it was not in use in the kitchen); but above and beyond all, how superbly luxurious the magnificent bedstead, with its splendid hair mattress, its clean wide linen sheets, its nice square pillow, and its large generous blankets and quilts. And then the cozy little supper, arrayed on a table-cloth; and the long, delightful evening afterwards, by a fragrant fire of beach and pine, when we talked over our past sufferings! Oh, it was delicious as a dream, and almost made amends for the three dreadful weeks of pleasing in the American Valley.

WALT WHITMAN
1819—1892

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, son of a Long Island farmer turned carpenter who moved the family into Brooklyn in 1823 during a building boom. The ancestors were unadmonished, but stories survived of some forlorn characters among them, and Whitman's father was acquainted with powerful personalities like the aged Thomas Paine. Whitman left school at eleven to become an office boy in a law firm, then worked for a doctor; already he was embroiled with the novels of Sir Walter Scott. By twelve he was working in the printing office of a newspaper and contributing sentimental items. By fifteen, when his family moved back into the interior of Long Island, Whitman was on his own. Very early he reached full physical maturity and in his midteens was contributing "pieces"—probably correct, conventional poems—to one of the best Manhattan papers, the Mirror, and often crossing the ferry from Brooklyn to attend debating societies and to use his journalist's passes at theaters in Manhattan. His rich fantasy life was fueled by numbersless romantic novels. By sixteen he was a compositor in Manhattan, a journeyman printer. But two great fires in 1835 disrupted the printing industry, and as he turned seventeen he rejoined his family. For five years he taught intermittently at country and small-town schools, interrupting teaching to start a newspaper of his own in 1838 and to work briefly on another Long Island paper. Although forced into the exile of Long Island, he refused to compromise further with the sort of life he wanted. During his visits home he outraged his father by refusing to do farm work. Although he was innovative in the classroom, he struck some of the farm families he boarded with as unwilling to fulfill his role of teacher outside school hours; the main charge against him was laziness. He was active in debating societies, however, and already thought of himself as a writer. By early 1840 he had started the series "Sun-Down Papers from the Desk of a School-Master" for the Long Island Democrat and was writing poems. One of