

THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD

BY WINFIELD J. DAVIS



MARSHALL'S MILL

While it is absolutely true that there had been discoveries of gold in California many years before, the credit of its practical discovery is due to James W. Marshall, and that was by a mere accident. However, it should not be understood that there is disposition to detract from the credit that is justly due him. Marshall was a native of New Jersey, and was born October 8, 1810. On arriving at man's estate he removed to Indiana, afterwards Illinois and Missouri and arrived in California in 1844. He entered the employment of Captain Sutter at the Fort a year later, and in 1846 was an active participant in the California Revolution—the "Bear Flag War" as it may be called. Returning to Sutter's Fort he again entered the employment of the famous pioneer whose name is so intimately connected with the history of California, and it was in the course of that employment that the important discovery was made that, indeed, changed the geography of the world. Marshall, as about all who made important discoveries or inventions, passed his declining

years in poverty, and about 5 o'clock on the morning of August 10, 1885, he was found dead in his cabin within almost a stone's throw of the place where he had picked up the first gold nugget that gave to California the entitlement of the Golden State; that resulted in the building up of a giant commonwealth on the shores of the Pacific; that created a State whose development has been unparalleled, and the perfected realization is yet to come. The narrative of Marshall himself, of the discovery of gold is briefly as follows: It is carried to us from his dictation to his biographer, George Frederic Parsons, who for many years was the Town Editor of the "Record-Union" of this city. California had come into the possession of the United States; Marshall returned to Sutter's Fort from his campaign with the revolutionary party in the southern part of the State. He suggested to Sutter the advisability of establishing a saw mill, and with an Indian interpreter set out to examine the country around. His quest ultimated at Coloma. Here the American River flowed through a narrow valley and was hemmed in by precipitous hills. It afforded an ideal site for water power. It was in June, 1847, that Marshall began the construction of the saw mill at Coloma. We now approach the most important event, not only in the life of Marshall, but in the history of California and the world. In January, 1848, in the morning, Marshall went out to superintend the work of the men under his charge, and after closing the fore-bay gate and thus shutting off the water, he walked down the tail-race to see what sand and gravel had been removed during the night. On this particular morning he strolled to the lower end of the race and stood for a moment examining the mass of debris that had been washed down, and at this junction his eye caught the glimmer of something that laid lodged in a crevice, on a ripple of soft granite, some six inches under the clear water. He stooped and picked up the substance; it was heavy, of a peculiar color, and unlike anything he had seen in the stream before. For a few minutes he held it in his hand reflecting, and endeavoring to recall all that he had heard or read concerning the various minerals. After a close examination he became satisfied that what he held in his hand must be one of three substances—mica, sulphurets of copper, or gold. The weight assured him that it was not mica. Could it be sulphurets of copper? He remembered that that mineral is brittle, and that gold is malleable, and as this thought passed through his mind he placed the specimen upon a flat stone and tested it by striking it with another. The substance did not crack or flake off; it simply bent under the blows. This, then, was gold, and in this way was the first practical discovery of gold made in California.

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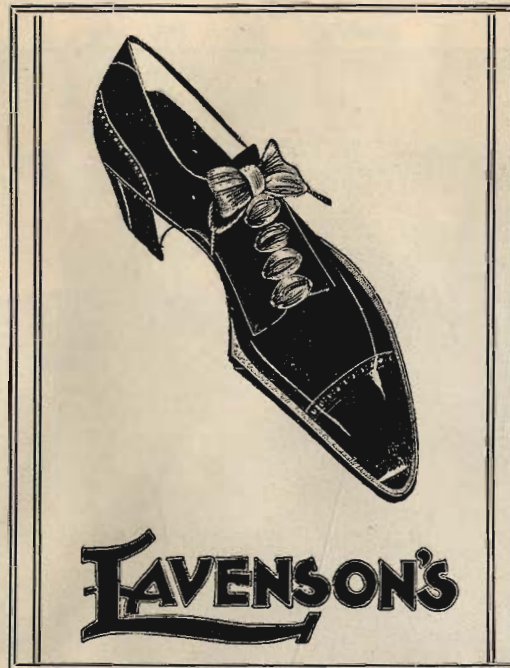
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