GOLD

By
STEWART EDWARD WHITE

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SYNOPSIS

Talbot Ward's challenge to Frank Munroe to a personal encounter to determine whether Munroe is fit to make a trip to California in search of gold is accepted. Munroe gets a hammerlock on Ward and wins the bout.

They choose the Panama route. Ward, it develops, is an old campaigner. On board ship they meet Johnny Fairfax and Yank Rogers. The four become partners.

Arriving at Chagres, Talbot Ward's knowledge of Spanish and his firm treatment of the native boatmen help wonderfully. The party enters a tropical forest.

They reach Gatun, and, after passing through several villages where Ward always diplomatically handles the natives, they arrive in Panama.

Ward forces steamship agent to refund passage money because ship isn't available.

Yank has provided accommodations for all on board a sailing ship. They arrive in San Francisco.

Ward puts it up to each man to get $20 in one day. Munroe makes $25 as a laborer. Johnny gambles and gets $220.

Ward astounds the party by telling how, by shrewd business deals in one day in the Golden City, he accumulated several thousand dollars.

Ward decides that he will not go with the party to the mines, but will stay in San Francisco, where he thinks more gold is to be found.

The party dig their first gold. They are not much encouraged when told that the value of their first pan is 13 cents.

CHAPTER XI.

Off For Sutter's Fort.

TWO days later Yank, Johnny and I embarked aboard a small bluff bowed sailboat, waved our farewells to Talbot, standing on the shore, and laid our course to cross the blue bay behind an island called Alcatraz. Our boatman was a short, swarthy man with curly hair and gold rings in his ears. He handled his boat well, but spoke not at all. After a dozen attempts to get something more than monosyllables out of him we gave it up and settled ourselves to the solid enjoyment of a new adventure.

The breeze was strong and drove even our rather clumsy craft at considerable speed. The blue waters of the bay flashed in the sun and riffled under the squalls. Spray dashed away from our bows. A chill racer in from the open Pacific, diluting the sunlight.

After a journey of several days we came into a wide bottom land country with oaks. The distant blue hills had grown and had become slate gray. At noon we discerned ahead of us a low bluff, and a fork in the river, and among the oak trees the gleam of tents, and before them a tracery of masts where the boats and small ships lay moored to the trees. This was the embarcadero of Sutter's Fort beyond, or the new city of Sacramento, whichever you pleased. Here our boat journey ended, and we set out to cover the three or four miles to Sutter's Fort.

Sutter's Fort was situated at the edge of the live oak park. We found it to resemble a real fort, with high walls, bastions and a single gate at each end through which one entered to a large inclosed square, perhaps a hundred and fifty yards long by fifty wide. The walls were not pierced for guns, and the defense seemed to depend entirely on the jutting bastions. The walls were double and about twenty-five feet apart. Thus by roofing over this space and dividing it with partitions Sutter had made up his barracks, blacksmith shop, bakery, and the like. Later in our investigations we even ran across a woolen factory, a distillery, a billiard room and a bowling alley! At the southern end of this long space stood a two story house. Directly opposite the two story house and at the other end of the inclosure was an adobe corral.

The place was crowded with people. A hundred or so miners rushed here and there on apparently very important business or loafed contentedly against the posts or the sun warmth of adobe walls. In this latter occupation they were aided and abetted by a number of the native Californians. Perhaps a hundred Indians were leading horses, carrying burdens or engaged in some other heavy toil. They were the first we had seen, and we examined them with considerable curiosity. A good many of them were nearly naked, but some had on portions of battered civilized apparel. Very few could make up a full suit of clothes, but contented themselves with either a coat, or a shirt, or a pair of pantaloons, or even with only a hat, as the case might be. They were very swarthy, squat, villainous looking savages, with big heads, low foreheads, coarse hair and beady little eyes.

We stopped for some time near the sentry box at the entrance, accustoming ourselves to the whirl and movement. Then we set out to find McClellan. He was almost immediately pointed out to us, a short, square, businesslike man, with a hard gray face, dealing competently with the pressure. A score of men surrounded him, each eager for his attention. While we hovered, awaiting our chance, two men walked in through the gate. They were accorded the compliment of almost a complete silence on the part of those who caught sight of them.

The first was a Californian about thirty-five or forty years of age, a man of lofty, stern bearing, swarthy skin, glossy side whiskers and bright supercilious eyes. He wore a light blue short jacket trimmed with scarlet and with silver buttons, a striped silk sash, breeches of crimson velvet, met below by long embroidered deerskin boots. A black kerchief was bound crosswise on his head, entirely concealing the hair, and a flat crowned, wide, gray hat heavily ornamented with silver completed this gorgeous costume. He moved with the assured air of the aristocrat. The splendor of his apparel, the beauty of his face and figure and the grace of his movements attracted the first glance from all eyes. Then immediately he was passed over in favor of his companion.

The latter was a shorter, heavier man, of more mature years. In fact, his side whiskers were beginning to turn gray. His costume was plain, but exquisitely neat, and a strange blend of the civil and the military. The jacket, for example, had been cut in the trim military fashion, but was worn open to exhibit the snowy cascade of the linen beneath. But nobody paid much attention to the man's dress. The dignity and assured calm of his face and eye at once impressed one with conviction of unusual quality.

Johnny stared for a moment, his brows knit; then, with an exclamation, he sprang forward.

"Captain Sutter!" he cried.

Sutter turned slowly to look Johnny squarely in the face, his attitude one of cold but courteous inquiry. Johnny was approaching hat in hand. I confess he astonished me. We had known him intimately for some months and always as the harum-scarum, impulsive, hail fellow, bubbling, irresponsible. Now a new Johnny stepped forward, quiet, highbred, courteous, self

With an Exclamation He Sprang Forward.

contained. Before he had spoken a word Captain Sutter's aloof expression had relaxed.

"I beg your pardon for addressing you so abruptly," Johnny was saying. "The surprise of the moment must excuse me. Ten years ago, sir, I had the pleasure of meeting you at the time you visited my father in Virginia."

"My dear boy!" cried Sutter. "You are of course the son of Colonel Fairfax. But ten years ago you were a very young man."

"A small boy, rather," laughed Johnny.

They chatted for a few moments, exchanging news, I suppose, though they had drawn beyond our earshot. In a few moments we were summoned and presented, first to Colonel Sutter, then to Don Gaspar Martinez. The latter talked English well. Yank and I, both somewhat silent and embarrassed before all this splendor of manner, trailed the triumphal progress like two small boys. We were glad to trail, however. Captain Sutter took us about, showing us in turn all the many industries of the place.

Don Gaspar here excused himself on the ground of business, promising to rejoin us later.

We walked back through the inclosure. Our companion was greeted on all sides with the greatest respect and affection. To all he responded with benign but unapproachable dignity. From the vociferating group he called the trader McClellan, to whom he introduced us, all three, with urbane formality.

"These young men," he told McClellan, who listened to him intently, his brows knit, "are more than acquaintances; they are very especial friends of mine. I wish to bespeak your good offices for what they may require. They are on their way to the mines. And now, gentlemen, I repeat, I am delighted to have had this opportunity. I wish you the best of luck, and I sincerely hope you may be able to visit me at Feather River, where you are always sure of a hearty welcome. Treat them well, McClellan."

"You know, cap'n, friends of your'n are friends of mine," said McClellan briefly.

At the end of half an hour we found ourselves in possession of two pack horses and saddles and a load of provisions.

"Look out for hoss thieves," advised McClellan. "These yere Greasers will follow you for days, waitin' for a chance to git your stock. Don't picket with rawhide rope, or the coyotes are likely to gnaw yore animiles loose. Better buy a couple of ha'r ropes from the nearest Mex. Take care of yoreselves. Goodby." He was immediately immersed in his flood of business.

We loaded our pack horses and set off next morning early on the trail up the American river. At last, it seemed to us, we were really under way; as though our long journeyings and many experiences had been but a preparation for this start. Our spirits were high, and we laughed and joked and sang extravagantly. Even Yank woke up and acted like a frisky colt. Such early wayfarers as we met we hailed with shouts and chaffing; nor were we in the least abashed by an occasional surly response, or the not infrequent attempts to discourage our hopes. For when one man said there was no gold another was confident that the diggings were not even scratched.

Yank turned the two horses out into a grass meadow and sat, his back against an oak tree, smoking his pipe and watching them. Johnny and I unrolled the beds, sorted out the simple cooking utensils, and started to cook. Occasional travelers on the road just above us shouted out friendly greetings. They were a miscellaneous lot. Most were headed toward the mountains. These journeyed in various ways. Some walked afoot and unencumbered, some carried apparently all their belongings on their backs; one outfit comprising three men had three saddle horses and four packs—a princely caravan.

Near sundown two horsemen turned off the trail and rode down to our little trickle of water. When they drew near we recognised in one of them Don Gaspar Martinez. He wore still his gorgeous apparel of the day before, with only the addition of a pair of heavy silver ornamented spurs on his heels and a brace of pistols in his sash. His horse, a magnificent chestnut, was harnessed in equal gorgeousness, with silvered broad bit, silver chains jangling therefrom, a plaited rawhide bridle and reins, a carved leather, high pommelled saddle, also silver ornamented, and a bright colored, woven saddle blanket beneath. The animal stepped daintily and proudly, lifting his little feet and planting them among the stones as though fastidiously. The man who rode with Don Gaspar was evidently of a lower class. He was, however, a straight, handsome young fellow enough, with a dark clear complexion, a small mustache and a pleasant smile. His dress and accoutrements were on the same general order as those of Don Gaspar, but of quieter color and more serviceable material. His horse, however, was of the same high bred type. A third animal followed, unled, packed with two cowhide boxes.

The Spaniard rode up to us and saluted courteously; then his eye lit with recognition.

"Ah," said he, "the good friends of our Captain Sutter! This is to be well met. If it is not too much I would beg the favor of to camp."

"By all means, Don Gaspar," said Johnny, rising. "The pleasure is, of course, our own."

Again saluting us, Don Gaspar and his companion withdrew a short distance up the little meadow. There the Spaniard sat down beneath a bush and proceeded to smoke a cigaretto, while his companion unsaddled the horses, turned them loose to graze, stacked up their saddles and made simple camping arrangements.

"Old Plush Pants doesn't intend to do any work if he catches sight of it first," observed Johnny.

"Probably the other man is a servant?" I suggested.

"More likely a sort of dependent," amended Johnny. "They run a kind of patriarchal establishment, I've been told."

"Don't use them big words, Johnny," complained Yank, coming up with the horses.

"I meant they make the poor relations and kid brothers do the hustling," said Johnny.

"Now I understand you," said Yank. "I wish I could see what they do with their hosses nights. I bet they know how. And if I was a hoss thief I'd surely take a long chance for that chestnut gelding."

"You might wander over later and find out," I suggested.

"And get my system full of lead—sure," said Yank.

The two camps did not exchange visits. We caught the flicker of their little fire, but we were really too tired to be curious, and we turned in early, our two animals tied fast to small trees at our feet.

The next day lifted us into the mountains. Big green peaks, across which hung a bluish haze, showed themselves between the hills. The latter were more precipitous, and the brush had now given way to pines of better size and quality than those seen lower down.

CHAPTER XII.

The Gold Trail.

WE came upon the diggings quite suddenly. The trail ran around the corner of a hill, and there they were below us! In the wide, dry stream bottom perhaps fifty men were working busily, like a lot of ants. Some were picking away at the surface of the ground; others had dug themselves down waist deep and stooped and rose like legless bodies. Others had disappeared below ground and showed occasionally only as shovel blades. From so far above the scene was very lively and animated, for each was working like a beaver, and the red shirts made gay little spots of color. On the hillside clung a few white tents and log cabins, but the main town itself we later discovered, as well as the larger diggings, lay around the bend and upstream.

We looked all about us for some path leading down to the river, but could find none. So perforce we had to continue on along the trail. Thus we entered the camp of Hangman's Gulch, for if it had been otherwise I am sure we would have located promptly where we had seen those red shirted men.

We wandered about here and there, looking with all our eyes. The miners were very busy and silent, but quite friendly, and allowed us to examine as much as we pleased the results of their operations. In the pots and cradles the yellow flake gold glittered

"Where can we dig a little of this gold ourselves?"

plainly, contrasting with the black sand. In the pans, however, the residue spread out fan shaped along the angle between the bottom and the side, and at the apex the gold lay heavy and beautiful all by itself. The men were generally bearded, tanned with working in this blinding sun and plastered liberally with the red earth. We saw some queer sights, however, as when we came across a jolly pair dressed in what were the remains of ultra fashionable garments up to and including plug hats! At one side, working some distance from the stream, were small groups of native Californians or Mexicans. They did not trouble to carry the earth all the way to the river, but, after screening it roughly, tossed it into the air above a canvas, thus winnowing out the heavier pay dirt. I thought this must be very disagreeable.

As we wandered about here and there among all these men so busily engaged and with our own eyes saw pan after pan show gold, actual metallic guaranteed gold, such as rings and watches and money are made of, a growing excitement possessed us—the excitement of a small boy with a new and untried gun. We wanted to get at it ourselves. Only we did not know how.

Finally Yank approached one of the busy miners.

"Stranger," said he, "we're new to this. Maybe you can tell us where we can dig a little of this gold ourselves."

The man straightened his back to exhibit a roving humorous blue eye, with which he examined Yank from top to toe.

"If," said he, "it wasn't for that eighteen foot cannon you carry over your left arm and a cold gray pair of eyes you carry in your head I'd direct you up the sidehill yonder and watch you sweat. As it is, you can work anywhere anybody else isn't working. Start in!"

"Can we dig right next to you, then?" asked Yank, nodding at an unbroken piece of ground just upstream.

The miner clambered carefully out of his waist deep trench, searched his pockets, produced a pipe and tobacco. After lighting this he made Yank a low bow.

"Thanks for the compliment; but, I warn you, this claim of mine is not very rich. I'm thinking of trying somewhere else."

"Don't you get any gold?"

"Oh, a few ounces a day."

"That suits me for a beginning," said Yank decidedly. "Come on, boys!"

The miner hopped back into his hole, only to stick his head out again for the purpose of telling us:

"Mind you keep fifteen feet away!"

With eager hands we slipped a pick and shovels from beneath the pack ropes, undid our iron bucket and without further delay commenced feverishly to dig.

Johnny held the pail, while Yank and I vied with each other in being the first to get our shovelfuls into that receptacle. As a consequence we nearly swamped the pail first off and had to pour some of the earth out again. Then we all three ran down to the river and took turns stirring that mud pie beneath the gently flowing waters in the manner of the "pot panners" we had first watched. After a good deal of trouble we found ourselves possessed of a thick layer of rocks and coarse pebbles.

"We forgot to screen it," I pointed out.

"We haven't any screen," said Johnny.

"Let's pick 'em out by hand," suggested Yank.

We did so. The process emptied the pail. Each of us insisted on examining closely, but none of us succeeded in creating out of our desires any of that alluring black sand.

"I suppose we can't expect to get color every time," observed Johnny disappointedly. "Let's try her again."

We tried her again, and yet again and then some more, but always with the same result. Our hands became puffed and wrinkled with constant immersion in the water and began to feel sore from the continual stirring of the rubble.

"Something wrong," grunted Johnny into the abysmal silence in which we had been carrying on our work.

"We can't expect it every time," I reminded hm.

"All the others seem to."

"Well, maybe we've struck a blank place. Let's try somewhere else," suggested Yank.

Johnny went over to speak to our neighbor, who was engaged in tossing out shovelfuls of earth from an excavation into which he had nearly disappeared. At Johnny's hail he straightened his back, so that his head bobbed out of the hole like a prairie dog.

"No, it doesn't matter where you dig," he answered Johnny's question. "The pay dirt is everywhere."

So we moved on a few hundred feet, picked another unoccupied patch and resumed our efforts. No greater success rewarded us here.

"I believe maybe we ought to go deeper," surmised Yank.

"Some of these fellows are taking their dirt right off top of the ground," objected Johnny.

However, we unlimbered the pickax and went deeper, to the extent of two feet or more. It was good hard work, especially as we were all soft for it. The sun poured down on our backs with burning intensity, our hands blistered, and the round rocks and half cemented rubble that made the bar were not the easiest things in the world to remove. However, we kept at it. Yank and I, having in times past been more or less accustomed to this sort of thing, got off much easier than did poor Johnny. About two feet down we came to a mixed coarse sand and stones, a little finer than the top dirt. This seemed to us promising, so we resumed our washing operations. They bore the same results as had the first, which was just the whole of nothing.

"We've got to hit it somewhere," said Johnny between his teeth. "Let's try another place."

We scrambled rather wearily, but with a dogged determination, out of our shallow hole. Our blue eyed, long bearded friend was sitting on a convenient bowlder near at hand, his pipe between his teeth, watching our operations.

"Got any tobacco, boys?" he inquired genially. "Smoked my last until tonight unless you'll lend."

Yank produced a plug, from which the stranger shaved some parings.

"Struck the dirt?" he inquired. "No; I see you haven't." He stretched himself and arose. "You aren't washing this stuff!" he cried in amazement as his eye took in fully what we were about.

Then we learned what we might have known before—but how should we?—that the gold was not to be found in any and every sort of loose earth that might happen to be lying about, but only in either a sort of blue clay or a pulverized granite. Sometimes this "pay dirt" would be found atop the ground. Again, the miner had to dig for it.

"All the surface diggings are taken up," our friend told us, "so now you have to dig deep. It's about four feet down where I'm working. It'll probably be deeper up here. You'd better move back where you were."

Yank stretched himself upright.

"Look here," he said decidedly, "let's get a little sense into ourselves. Here's our pore old hosses standing with their packs on and we no place to stay and no dinner, and we're scratchin' away at this bar like a lot of fool hens. There's other days comin'."

Johnny and I agreed with the common sense of the thing, but reluctant-

We Actually Panned Our First Gold!

ly. Now that we knew how, our enthusiasm surged up again. We wanted to get at it. The stranger's eyes twinkled sympathetically.

"Here, boys," said he, "I know just how you feel. Come with me."

He snatched up our bucket and strode back to his own claim, where he filled the receptacle with some of the earth he had thrown out.

"Go pan that," he advised us kindly.

We raced to the water and once more stirred about the heavy contents of the pail until they had floated off with the water. In the bottom lay a fine black residue, and in that residue glittered the tiny yellow particles. We had actually panned our first gold!

Our friend examined it critically.

"That's about a twelve cent pan," he adjudged it.

Somehow in a vague way we had unreasonably expected millions at a twist of the wrist, and the words, "12 cents," had a rankly penurious sound to us. However, the miner patiently explained that a twelve cent pan was a very good one, and indubitably it was real gold.

Yank, being older and less excitable, had not accompanied us to the waterside.

"Well, boys," he drawled, "that 12 cents is highly satisfactory, of course, but in the meantime we've lost about $600 worth of hoss and grub."

Surely enough, our animals had tired of waiting for us and had moved out packs and all. We hastily shouldered our implements.

"Don't you want to keep this claim next me?" inquired our acquaintance.

We stopped.

"Surely!" I replied. "But how do we do it?"

"Just leave your pick and shovel in the hole."

"Won't some one steal them?"

"No."

"What's to prevent?" I asked a little skeptically.

"Miner's law," he replied.

We almost immediately got trace of our strayed animals, as a number of men had seen them going upstream. In fact, we had no difficulty whatever in finding them, for they had simply followed up the rough stream bed between the canyon walls until it had opened up to a gentler slope and a hanging garden of grass and flowers. Here they had turned aside and were feeding. We caught them and were just heading them back when Yank stopped short.

"What's the matter with this here?" he inquired. "Here's feed and water near, and it ain't so very far back to the diggings."

We looked about us for the first time with seeing eyes. The little up sloping meadow was blue and dull red with flowers, below us the stream brawled foam flecked among black rocks, the high hills rose up to meet the sky, and at our backs across the way the pines stood thick serried. Far up in the blue heavens some birds were circling slowly. Somehow the leisurely swing of these unhasting birds struck from us the feverish hurry that had lately filled our souls. We drew deep breaths, and for the first time the great peace and majesty of these California mountains cooled our spirits.

"I think it's a bully place, Yank," said Johnny soberly, "and that little bench up above us looks flat."

We clambered across the slant of the flower spangled meadow to the bench, just within the fringe of the pines. It proved to be flat, and from the edge of it down the hill seeped a little spring marked by the feathery bracken. We entered a cool green place, peopled with shadows and the rare, considered notes of soft voiced birds. Just over our threshold, as it were, was the sunlit, chirpy, buzzing, bright colored busy world. Overhead a wind of many voices hummed through the pine tops. The golden sunlight flooded the mountains opposite, flashed from the stream, lay languorous on the meadow. Long bars of it slanted through an unguessed gap in the hills behind us to touch with magic the very tops of the trees over our heads. The sheen of the precious metal was over the land.

(To be Continued.)

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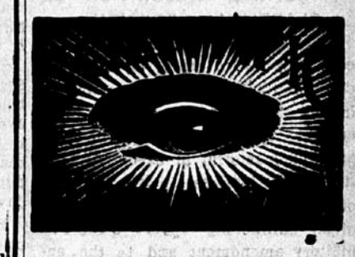

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MARY JORDISON

Dated July 1, 1916.