

WHY HAVE JAMES G. FAIR'S DAUGHTERS FORSAKEN SAN FRANCISCO?

With "Birdie" Fair Vanderbilt Closing Out All Her Vast Properties Here, and "Tessie" Fair Oelrichs Retaining Only the White Faimont, Built to Her Father's Memory, Few Ties Now Bind the "Fair Girls" to the City That Was the Senator's Lifelong Pride.

MRS. OELRICHS LOOKED BEFORE MARRIED

MRS. WM. K. VANDERBILT, JR. on her last visit to San Francisco

THE LATE HERMAN OELRICHS

MRS. THERESA FAIR OELRICHS

MRS. W.K. VANDERBILT, JR. AS AN EGYPTIAN

W.K. VANDERBILT, JR.

THE FAIRMONT HOTEL OWNED BY MRS. THERESA FAIR OELRICHS

MRS. W.K. VANDERBILT, JR.

By Billie Glynn

NOT long ago the daily newspapers contained an announcement of the sale, by Thomas Magee & Son, of the northwest corner of Davis and Commercial streets for \$50,000. This was part of the holdings of the late James G. Fair, and belonged to Virginia Fair Vanderbilt, better known to the old residents of the city as Birdie Fair. For 10 years and more San Francisco has seen less and less of the younger daughter of its chief pioneer. Neither does the elder sister, Mrs. Herman Oelrichs of New York, remember her old home, the scene of her father's wealth and power, except to pay it a very occasional visit. New York and Europe have claimed the two sisters almost wholly, and whatever ties still bind them to the west, it is their pleasure, it would seem, to sever and renounce with as much dispatch as possible.

With regard to the property mentioned above, I went to Mrs. Vanderbilt's agent. It was his instruction, he said, to sell all of Mrs. Vanderbilt's property in San Francisco. That of the Fairmont hotel, and one or two other minor holdings, had been disposed of years ago. Reasons? He knew none except that Mrs. Vanderbilt, like her sister, had taken up residence in the east and Europe. Besides, an agent had nothing to do with reasons. He simply followed instructions.

In the languorous California sunshine I came away thinking, and strangely enough, the spirit of the old pioneer, James G. Fair, seemed to walk with me. On every side of us rose San Francisco—San Francisco, the rebuilt, the beautiful, the most wonderful, the most vividly individual of all cities of the United States; and the hands of the spirit that walked with me swept out to it lovingly, yearningly, as something that he had helped found, that belonged to the blood of his heart and the dream of his brain. But his hands clasped themselves in agony. For soon he would be left to him the grave in which his body lay buried. And thus while the years tramped past would he lie a stranger in his own city. How different when he died. Half the city belonged to him then, and if he had lived his holdings would have still increased. This was home, the place that he loved of all the world, where he brought up his children, and he could not own too much of it. So when he died was it not with the happy feeling that his children would continue to hold away where he himself had lived and ruled? But the spirit beside me seemed to weep silently. That dream had not come true. In the home he had left them his daughters had gradually become strangers. Soon it would be wholly so. And of all that he had dreamed only he alone would remain—

silent and forgotten in the midst of a splendor and a city no longer his. It was the tragedy of a healthy, fragrant ambition that unfolded to me, of a brain that had labored and labored well.

In the midst of the noise of the streets I seemed to hear the birds calling with an eerie, pensive note in the heavens—just as they had called before San Francisco had been at all, as in the long ago when Indian lovers had listened to them in the evening and clung and kissed to the mating music. How time flies, effacing our struggles and hopes. The bones of the Indian warrior look exactly like the bones of the white man, however great he may be.

In the hand of the spirit that walked with me I noticed torn pages—the torn pages of yesterday. Forlornly, retrospectively, he looked at them. One by one the years slipped back to me in review. The old San Francisco I had not known, profoundly loving and warm of heart, smiled from its milled pages. Its blossoms laughed to life and sunshine again and its records trimmed and shaped themselves into human actors. These were the days of Theresa and Virginia Fair, when every one called the sisters Tessie and Birdie, respectively, and when they romped and spelled the old town ditty, not alone with their social gavottes but with their beauty and good will.

At Santa Barbara Tessie was noted for her feats in swimming. She could handle the ribbons behind a dashing team and loved to drive through the city streets, where she was always recognized and remarked upon. Also was she an equestrian of rare skill and grace. And besides all this a beautiful, breathing sample of womanhood.

Birdie Fair was different. Not so much the accomplished woman of society, she was possessed of downright, romping girlishness that made her the idol of the people. She was democratic from the point of her patriotic toe to the point of her patriotic finger tip. From the viewpoint of her social position she was an anomaly—a blithe, free, daring girl, who had just wanted to be a girl.

Even after she had gone to New York and become the first debutante of the Newport season this attribute still clung to her. When she came back to San Francisco she was the same Birdie Fair. But the New York press that devoted columns and columns to her, describing the color of her eyes, the manner in which her lashes dropped, the pinkness of her finger nails and the vividness of her smile—the New York press has glassed her and robbed of its freedom just such a wild rose often and often before.

In the west of her girlhood Birdie Fair had learned the joy of living and was ingeniously mistress of it. New York taught her the requirements of eastern society, the society of much moneyed prejudice and little class and in its shackles her girlhood relin-

quished itself with a sigh. New York did not accomplish all this in a moment, of course. It takes longer than a month or two or even a year to shake a free, rosebud product of the west. But in the end the east and Europe reduce the best to worshipping their gods. Their society of statuary on pedestals has the magnetism of fine lines and the jealous worship of the observer.

Theresa Fair the east transplanted through marriage to a New York clubman. With her real estate holdings in this city reduced to one or two properties, rarely do we now see anything of her. Birdie Fair it married off likewise, and though Birdie Fair is no longer bound by that tie, it seems to have won her wholly. Yet she was the favorite child of her father and perhaps inherited more of his loyal sterling qualities.

Pause for a moment and reflect. There is something almost uncanny in the situation. For almost every one else, foreigner or visiting easterner, and even westerner, San Francisco possesses an irresistible charm. Its attraction recalls them again and again. But for Birdie Fair, daughter of her father, the man who loved the city by the Golden Gate perhaps more than all other men and was one of its first and chief pioneers—for Birdie Fair, who was born, bred and grew up here, the playground of her youth—there is no longer attraction.

Real estate in San Francisco is undoubtedly of more prospective value than in any other city in the United States. In five years present holdings will have almost doubled in value. Yet all of Mrs. Vanderbilt's property in this vicinity is for sale. It would seem that Birdie Fair is severing her connections with her old home with a vengeance. Behind the black Italian eyes of the lady rests the secret. The people of San Francisco can not understand. We have many warm and lovely memories of Birdie Fair and it is like the uprooting of first foundations, a slam to old associations. Yet that severance has been well begun.

At the time of his death James G. Fair owned 50 odd blocks at the north end of the city; the Lick house, erected in 1858; the five story building at the corner of Pine and Sansome (speaking of San Francisco before the fire); the huge building at Front and Oregon at the corner of Drumm, Washington and Oregon streets. These are only a few. There was scarcely a commercial street in town where he was unable to point out holdings. On Bernal heights, one of the then coming residential sections of the city, he owned 140 acres. He was interested in the Fulton engineering and ship building works; in the Pacific rolling mills, covering 13 1-3 acres, and owner of seven large and profitable ranches in the country. His mining properties were the most valuable in California. In Nevada it was much the same. The list of his prop-

erties in San Francisco, California and the west, in fact, would fill a book. He died worth \$40,000,000, divided equally among his three children, his son Charles, however, getting only the income on his share as long as he lived. But not long after his father's death Charles was killed in an automobile accident in Europe. According to the terms of the will his interest reverted to his sisters.

Yet of this immense bequest Mrs. Herman Oelrichs (formerly Miss Tessie Fair) possesses, as stated before, but two or three properties in San Francisco. Mrs. Vanderbilt has still left to sell the northwest corner of Pacific and Front streets, 45 feet adjoining the Mills building in Montgomery street and 40 feet in Pine street adjoining the Fort Mason and east of the Presidio. This about completes the list. Not so the reflection.

Birdie Fair is still a young woman. She is too young, perhaps, in spite of the warm Celtic temperament she inherited from her father, to understand deeply or regret. Having eaten the dead fruit of eastern society so long, she may feel herself biased to everything. But the day will come when all her holdings will have been sold out in San Francisco, and the day will come when, returning here as a casual visitor, she will find herself practically a stranger in the city that bred her. Of course, she will be known as of yore, she will have her friends, many of them, but San Francisco—the San Francisco that belonged to her in its soil, in the very heart of it—will be no longer hers. Gone! And will not the spirit of the father walk then with the daughter as it walked with me?

Over in Montgomery street was his old office, poorly furnished and threadbare. But the engine of a great, stirring mind and personality wrought there. In Pine street was the old home. Strangers occupy the site now. But can any of us bury so the laughter and love, the merry moods, escapades and charming associations of the years? To Birdie Fair will they not come back as they come to the rest of us? And having cut off San Francisco, as it were, from her affections, will San Francisco not prove the stronger and at the last rule her heart? In a wild plunge of yearning will she not wish it all back again, all that she had owned and sold—associated as it was with the gladdest hours of her girlhood, the old home life with its thousand true friendships, and the father who loved her first of all?

The same thing applies to her sister, but in a lesser degree. Mrs. Oelrichs in New York has to bind her the interests of her family, another generation. Yet first things are nearly always the last. She, too, must sometimes remember and regret, though, perhaps, with the satisfaction of a sacrifice for love. But Birdie Fair belonged to us in all the glorious joy of her being. And it must be said San Francisco shall belong always to the deeper part of her. There is no individuality proof against memory or the impulse to revert. Life is dearer in its roses of yesterday than its cherry blossoms of tomorrow. There can be no regrets like those we have had. The falling star is greater than all that shine eternally in the sky. Some day will Birdie Fair come to us and, like a little lost child, cry again for the domain that was her heart. But never again can she have it, never again reclaim her heritage or her place among us. The mandate of the years has no recall.

Of the old days in San Francisco many stories could be recalled, particularly regarding the popularity of the two girls. About Tessie Fair it could be said in one sense that she was reared in the mining camps. A girl in her every quality, through and through western, the miners loved her. It is recorded that on one occasion when she was to her father's office, she was showered with gold down the length of a street. To such an extent did the men like her, and she returned their liking with the free abandon of her girlhood. At Santa Barbara shortly before the time of her marriage she had a pet kitten. In the happiness and excitement of the wedding, which took place in San Francisco and was the greatest social event of a decade, the kitten was forgotten. But Santa Barbara remembered.

Pussy has been left there. The night of the wedding one of the wits of the burg who had been a schoolmate of Tessie Fair caught the kitten and auctioned it off as belonging to "Santa Barbara's sweetheart," who was leaving to live in New York. A girl in brought a handsome figure and the amount was used to buy a wedding present for the young bride. Birdie Fair was fond of playing pranks, and particularly on her best friends. In a Market street window a masked woman demonstrated some new article or other for a couple of days. It was whispered about that it was Birdie Fair trying to win a wager she had made and evade being recognized by her friends. Not a word could be got out of the management of the store, the identity of the woman being most carefully guarded. In a few short hours the window became the interest of the town. Out-let society jostled itself to determine whether or not the masked woman were Birdie Fair. But they never did find out. James G. Fair had a fashion of calling the two girls "his boys." As a matter of fact Birdie did make one try. It is reported, at the masculine gender. Dressed like a young dandy she came down street one day. With an eyeglass she endeavored to play the role of an English aristocrat. This accent she knew very well. She was getting along famously, having suc-

ceeded in passing without recognition under the observation of some of her social intimates, when suddenly getting off a streetcar she jostled a young tough—who resented her eyeglass and aristocratic air. Flushed with anger and exasperating in a manner to attract attention, he poked his face up to hers to better vent his wrath. Then instantly he stood silent, gazing at her searchingly over from her eyes to her heels. He burst out laughing. "You're a woman!" he exclaimed. "Dog on you, you're a woman!"

The eyeglass of the young pseudo-aristocrat no longer saw clearly. It swam in a flush of blood. But Birdie Fair had a temper of her own. With a swift hand she slapped the young man in the face and with a smack that set the crowd which had gathered to gapeful tittering; then she took to her heels and ran man before she invited him block away and took her home. If Birdie Fair ever took up with men's clothing again it is not recorded. Perhaps that one experiment was sufficient. Does she or Tessie ever dwell on the fun of those days now? It was a common saying in San Francisco at that time that it was always fair weather when the Fair girls were around.

Many suitors, of course, aspired to their hands and property in marriage. On the Petaluma ranch Tessie owned a maverick, so the story goes. When ever a young man came particularly amorous and insistent she invited him over to the ranch. Then she would say to him, "If you will ride Humpy, maybe I will consider the proposition." Only one man has ever succeeded in staying on the back of that animal. It was a Spanish gentleman from Mexico. Tessie had not known that to his other accomplishments he added that of being a skilled vaquero. But, of course, she did not consent to marry him. She got over it by stamping her foot. He said it wasn't fair. She replied, "I am always fair."

In those days San Francisco had some notorious gambling dens. With a party of friends the two sisters went to one for themselves. The roulette wheel enticed Tessie. She lost a thousand dollars. It was all she had with her. She could not or did not care to write a check, so she handed over one of her valuable rings, getting an amount on it, which she likewise lost. Strangely enough, she was not recognized, being somewhat made up, and the party was with her keeping quiet as to her identity. But the ring she parted with had her initials cut on the inside. The manager of the gambling joint evidently examined it closely next day and thought hard. It dawned upon him who the was. He returned the ring with his compliments, stating that he appreciated the honor she had done him to visit his place. Such was the regard that San Francisco of the "nineties" had for the two Fair girls. The more they romped the better they were loved, and they romped and were loved a very great deal.

There is another little story of a fancy ball. This was Birdie's affair. It was suggested that the grotesque was permissible and that every one should come according to how he felt and what he would like to be instead of himself. Some came as mice, some as beasts of the jungle, etc. It was a medley in extravaganza. But the banquet served was the joke that jolted. Till then everything went swimmingly. The tiger embraced the bear and the colonial gentleman stroked the cat that was his sweetheart. The combinations were ludicrous beyond conception. At the end of the table, Oh, there were lots of good things for those who were dressed for them; but the others—well—So one could go on telling tales of those days without end. But what is the use now?