# THEN AND THERE

**History told as it would be written today**

**By IRVIN S. COBB**

## The Truth About the Forty-Niners

**Most of us see the Days of the Forty-Niners through the romantic mist in which the gifted pen of Bret Harte wreathed them. We see noble-hearted gamblers and adopted waifs and talented chivalric gun-fighters; we see red-shirted miners with the banjos on their knees singing quaint songs about their Susannas back East among the settlements.**

**What we are apt to forget is that the great transcontinental pilgrimage was marked more by endurance than by sporadic melodrama, more by sweat than by high heroics, more by human suffering than by theatric episodes. The average Forty-Niner was neither a swashbuckler nor a hero nor a desperado. He was not a character fit to go into a story-book or a scene in a play. Generally speaking, he was an orderly, hard-working, typical young American of his time who had been lifted out of the ordinary run of ordinary mankind only by his adventurous spirit and by his powers for facing and conquering hardships which to us of the present generation seem well--nigh incredible.**

**We are indebted to one Alonzo Delano for a graphic but truth picture of the great mid-century movement of the gold-seekers from the Mississippi to the Pacific. In a book which he wrote called, "Life on the Plain and Among the Diggings" it is real life in the raw that we see—not glorified fiction.**

**This book, now entirely out of print and only rarely encountered among the prized copies of some collector or the back shelves of some library, has furnished the material for this eye-witness article dealing with one of the greatest and most significant passages in our national history.**

THOSE who have read Emerson Hough's novel, "The Covered Wagon," may get a reminiscent thrill on reading the lines with which Alonzo Delano begins his main narrative. The principal distinction was this: Hough dealt with the first great stream of homeseekers over the Oregon trail, so that in his chapters women and broods of children played their parts; his pioneers, starting on a journey two-thirds the breath of this continent, took with them their families, their portable household equipment, their most valued possessions.

But Delano in his journal is telling us of a gold rush made up almost exclusively of full-grown men. The domestic side was altogether lacking. His companions were sturdy adventurers inspired by the oldest lure next only to love of warfare that set the feet of mankind on paths far and strange and perilous—the quest for treasure. But the country through which the expeditions passed, the dangers and discomforts they encountered, the sufferings they underwent—these largely were identical in both cases. Only the personnels and the goals were different.

For the emigrants there was the hope of new homesteads in the vast free fertile lands of the newly-opened Northwest; for the argonauts the chance to dig for those precious grains of yellow ore on craggy California hillsides sterile of every valued prospect save the metal hidden in them.

Delano's diary gives a graphic idea of the departure from what then was the farther fringe of the civilized settlements:

"Our general rendevouz (he says) was to be at St. Joseph, on the Missouri, from which we intended to take our departure. My wagon I shipped by water to St. Joseph and sent my cattle across the country about the middle of March (1849) to meet me at the place of rendevouz in April. Our desire to be upon the road induced us to be stirring early and we were moving as soon as our cattle had eaten their fill, when a drive of a mile placed us upon the great thoroughfare of the gold seekers.

"For miles, to the extent of vision, an animated mass of beings broke upon our view. Long trains of wagons with their white covers were moving slowly along, a multitude of horsemen were prancing on the road, companies of men were traveling on foot, and although the scene was not a gorgeous one, yet the display of banners from many wagons and the multitude of armed men looked as if a mighty army was on its march; and in a few moments we took our station in the line, a component part of the motley throng of gold-seekers who were leaving home and friends far behind to encounter the peril of mountain and plain."

### The Price of Westward Travel.

Within a month, though, this mighty caravan which he described had disintegrated. What made it fall apart into separate trickling units was that certain hardier spirits, growing impatient over the slow movement of the unwieldy mass, broke away with their trains, preferring to risk the danger of Indian attacks from which the main body might have been free, in order to reach the diggings the sooner. The face of the earth was streaked with toiling strings of wagons, teams and foot-travelers, each of these lines marking independent and helter-skelter route of a little group hurrying toward the Sierras and the diggings. Thus it befell that instead of chronicling the march of an army Delano, from this time on, told of the experiences of the individual outfit which he led.

"(August 11.) There were a great many men daily passing, who having worn down their cattle and mules had abandoned their wagons and were trying to get through as they might; but their woe-begone countenances and meager accoutrements for such a journey, with want and excessive labor staring them in the face, excited our pity, wretched as we felt ourselves. Our own cattle had been prudently driven and were still in good condition to perform the journey. Although our stock of provisions was getting low, we felt that under any circumstances we could get through, and notwithstanding we felt anxious, we were not discouraged. . . .

"(August 16.) . . . Beyond us, far as we could see, was a barren waste without a blade of grass or a drop of water for thirty miles at least. Instead of avoiding the desert, instead of the promised water, grass, and a better road, we were in fact upon a more dreary and wider waste without either grass or water and with a harder road before us.

"(August 17.) As I walked on slowly and with effort, I encountered a great many animals perishing for want of food and water on the desert plain. Some would be just gasping for breath, others unable to stand would issue low moans as I came up, in a most distressing manner, showing intense agony; and still others, unable to walk, seemed to brace themselves up on their legs to prevent falling, while here and there a poor ox or horse, just able to drag himself along, would stagger towards me with a low sound as if begging for a drop of water. My sympathies were excited at their sufferings, yet instead of affording them aid I was a subject for relief myself.

### Horrors of the Plains.

"High above the plain, in the direction of our road, a black, bare mountain reared its head at the distance of fifteen miles; and ten miles this side the plains were flat, composed of baked earth without a sign of vegetation and in many places covered with incrustations of salt. Pits had been sunk in moist places, but the water was salt as brine and utterly useless. . . .

"(August 20.) . . . Through the day there was a constant arrival of wagons and by night there were several hundred men together; yet we learned by a mule train that at least one hundred and fifty wagons had turned back to the first spring west of the Humboldt on learning the dangers of crossing the desert, taking wisely the old road (the more southerly route) again. This change of route, however, did not continue long, and the rear trains comprising a large portion of the emigration took our route and suffered even worse than we did. It was resolved that several trains should always travel within supporting distance of each other so that in case of an attack from the Indians a sufficient body of men should go together to protect themselves. Reports again reached us corroborating the great loss of cattle on the desert beyond the Sink. The road was filled with dead animals and the offensive effluvia had produced much sickness; but shortly afterwards our own portion of the desert presented the same catastrophe and the road was lined with the dead bodies of wornout and starved animals, and their debilitated masters in many cases were left to struggle on foot, combating hunger, thirst and fatigue in a desperate exertion to get through. . . .

"(September 17.) Ascending to the top of an inclined plain, the long-sought, the long-wished-for and welcome valley of the Sacramento lay before me five or six miles distant."

### A Lake of Dross.

Delano was one of the more fortunate Forty-niners. He had crossed the plains, weathered the desert, threaded through the Rockies and the empty waste spaces on their Pacific side, had dodged the Indians and now, on the sunset slope of the Sierras he was within sight of the promised land from which had filtered back to the East such fabulous stories of richness in every creek-bed and fortunes to be made overnight by the lucky or the shrewd.

He tells how disillusionment and defeat and despair awaited most of those who came as he had come. Here is the story of a typical case:

"In May, 1850, a report reached the settlements that a wonderful lake had been discovered a hundred miles back among the mountains toward the head of the Middle Fork of Feather river, the shores of which abounded with gold, and to such an extent that it lay like pebbles on the beach. An extraordinary ferment among the people ensued, and a grand rush was made from the towns, in search of this splendid El Dorado. Stores were left to take care of themselves, business of all kinds was dropped, mules were suddenly bought up at exorbitant prices, and crowds started off to search for the golden lake.

"Days passed away, when at length adventurers began to return with disappointed looks and their worn-out and dilapidated garments showed they had seen some service, and it proved that although several lakes had been discovered, the gold lake par excellence was not found. The mountains swarmed with men exhausted and worn out with toil and hunger; mules were starved or killed by falling from precipices. Still the search was continued over snow forty or fifty feet deep, till the highest ridge of the Sierra was passed, when the disappointed crowds began to return without getting a glimpse of the grand desideratum, having had their labor for their pains. Yet this sally was not without some practical and beneficial results.

### The Man They Left Behind.

"The country was more perfectly explored, some rich diggings were found and, as usual, a few among the many were benefitted. A new field for enterprise was opened and within a month roads were made and traversed by wagons, trading-posts were established and a new mining country was opened which really proved in the main to be rich, and had it not been for the gold-lake fever it might have remained many months undiscovered and unoccupied. . . .

"From the mouth of Nelson's creek to its source men were at work in digging. Sometimes the stream was turned from its bed and the channel worked; in other places wing dams were thrown out and the bed partially worked; while in some the banks only were dug. Some of these, as is the case everywhere in the mines, paid well, some fair wages, while many were failures. One evening while waiting for my second supply of goods I strolled by a deserted camp. I was attracted to the ruins of a shanty by observing the effigy of a man standing upright in an old torn shirt, a pair of ragged pantaloons, and boots which looked as if they had been clambering over rocks since they were made—in short, the image represented a lean, meager, worn-out and woe-begone miner such as might daily be seen at almost every point in the upper mines. On the shirt was inscribed in a good business hand, 'My claim failed—will you pay the taxes? (An allusion to the tax on foreigners.) Appended to the figure was a paper bearing the following words:

"'Californians — Oh, Californians, look at me! Once fat and saucy as a privateersman, but now—look ye—a miserable skeleton. In a word, I am a used-up man.'

"Ludicrous as it may appear, it was a truthful commentary on the efforts of hundreds of poor fellows in the 'golden land.' This company had penetrated the mountain snows with infinite labor in the early part of the season, enduring hardships of no ordinary character—had patiently toiled for weeks, living on the coarsest fare; had spent time and money in building a dam and digging a race through rocks to drain off the water; endured wet and cold in the chilling atmosphere of the country, and when the last stone was turned, at the very close of all this labor, they did not find a single cent to reward them for their toil and privations, and what was still more aggravating, a small wing dam on the very claim below them yielded several thousand dollars. Having paid out their money and lost their labor they were compelled to abandon the claim and search for other diggings where the result might be precisely the same."

### The Threshold of Vice.

Delano offers a realistic picture of the earlier months in the gold country when the majority of the workers were industrious and orderly, and then for contrast a picture of the time when the rascals, the professional bad men and the professional gamblers gathered in force to start their nefarious and corrupting operations, with the result that a condition sprang up which grew steadily worse until that grim day of the vigilantes—earnest honest men who framed their own primitive code of laws and themselves enforced these laws, being by turns criminal-chasers, jurors, judges and sometimes executioners.

After this fashion he sums up the period of transition from the first of these stages to the second and disreputable one:

"The population of Independence represented almost every state in the Union, while France, England, Ireland, Germany and even Bohemia had their delegates. As soon as breakfast was dispatched all hands were engaged in digging and washing gold in the banks or in the bed of the stream. When evening came, large fires were built, around which the miners congregated, some engrossed with thoughts of home and friends, some to talk of new discoveries and richer diggings somewhere else; or sometimes a subject of debate was started and the evening was whirled away in pleasant and often instructive discussion, while many for whom this kind of recreation had not excitement enough, resorted to dealing monte on a small scale, thus either exciting or keeping up a passion for play.

"Some weeks were passed in this way under the clear blue sky of the mountains, and many had made respectable piles. I highly enjoyed the wild scenery, and quite as well, the wild life we were leading, for there were many accomplished and intelligent men; and a subject for amusement or debate was rarely wanting. As for ceremony or dress, it gives us no trouble: we were all alike . . . At length a monte dealer arrived, with a respectable bank.

"A change had been gradually coming over many of our people, and for three or four days several industrious men had commenced drinking and after the monte bank was set up it seemed as if the long-smothered fire burst forth into a flame. Labor with few exceptions, seemed suspended and a great many miners spent their time in riot and debauchery. . . . The monte dealer, who in his way was a gentleman and honorable according to the notions of that class of men, won in two nights three thousand dollars! When he had collected his taxes on our bar he went to Onion valley, six miles distant, and lost in one night four thousand, exemplifying the fact that a gambler may be rich today and a beggar tomorrow."



# The Live-at-Home Program

By G. L. Nisbet

Necessity is the mother of many children other than mechanical inventions. Some philosopher years ago said that experience is a dear teacher; and Dame Experience has associated with her in most of her schools another teacher, Stern Necessity. In the hard school of adversity, under the tutelage of necessity, North Carolinians are learning to live at home. There is nothing new in Governor Gardner's live-at-home program; the same idea has been preached by agricultural college and extension forces, by far sighted bankers and editors for years. The difference reception of the idea is not due to any new thought but to a changed attitude on part of the people. The necessity of living at home, if we are to live at all, has prepared the citizenship of the state to receive the gosepel of self support.

There is nothing very new in the idea of an all-home banquet such as was served a few weeks ago by governor and Mrs. Gardner to state officials and members of the North Carolina press association. Ten years ago when the writer was secretary of the Monroe Chamber of commerce a supper was arranged where nothing was served except Union county products. The Made-in-Carolinas exposition promoted by industrial interests and held for several years at Charlotte was another expression of the same idea. None of these former efforts attracted the interest that the governor's program this year received. The reason is not that a man of as high rank as the governor of a state promulgated it; rather it lies in the fact that stern necessity has brought the average man to realization of his plight.

Some years ago I worked with county farm agents and others trying to organize the cotton co-operation. Cotton growers were apathetic. It was difficult to get their attention. It has been my privilege in recent weeks to attend meeting of farmers at Candor, at Hamlet, at Columbia and Pageland, and the most impressive thing about these meetings was the earnestness of the farmers in studying their problems. They evinced not only a willingness to listen, but they were eager to learn from experts the results of experiences elsewhere and to try to apply this information to solution of their problems. Necessity has exerted her influence, and the people of the state are going to come through because now they are in deadly earnest.

North Carolina is a tremendously rich state, potentially. Whether it is actually rich is another question. Folks are coming to appreciate the fundamental proposition that real wealth is represented in income rather than investment. The British have long had a more accurate conception of true wealth. Among them a man is not rated by his holding, but by his income. Instead of saying that So-and-So is worth a million pounds, they translate this into income and say that he is worth forty or fifty thousand pounds a year. One of the most absurd of the booster-bubbles blown by enthusiasts about North Carolina is that the state is rich because it pays into the federal treasury more than any other state save New York. That means nothing except that the revenue levied by the federal government upon tobacco users throughout the world is collected through an office located in North Carolina. The wealth of the state is not measured in terms of dollars produced somewhere else, collected from distant sources, and immediately paid out to the federal treasury; but it is measured by the state's ability to produce wealth. And the real sources of wealth in the State have hardly been tapped.

The old geographies rate North Carolina as one of the chief producers of naval stores. Sixty years ago this whole section was thickly covered with long leaf pines and the production of tar, pitch and turpentine was the main industry from here to the coast. A few years later the lumbermen came in and cut the trees that had already been bled by the turpentine men. Thus was killed one goose that laid golden eggs. And one of the important phrases of the live-at-home program has to do with reforestation of these desolated sandhills. With characteristic shortsighteness most of us are not interested in this project,—it takes too long. We have so dissipated our reserve wealth that we cannot afford to wait 30 or 40 years for a crop; we must live meantime, and we want a crop that will produce in 30 or 40 days. Again necessity is exerting its influence.

One of the most entrancing stories ever written is that compiled by the late Chief Justice Clark in his history of North Carolina in the Confederacy. It is a story of sublime courage and heroism; of insuperable obstacles overcome, of irresistable forces held at bay, of immovable barriers laid low. Then North Carolina lived at home. The marauding armies to the north stopped the flow of produce from that direction; the naval blockade cut us off on the east, the country south of us was more desolate than our own and no help could be had, and that time the mountains of the west were impassable. We had to live at home—and we did. It is a story of romance and adventure; how women went out into the fields and plowed and hoed; how they used okra for coffee and bark for tea; how they carded and spun and wove their own clothing, supporting not only themselves and their children, but by the exalted courage and determination of southern womanhood kept an army fighting in the field for three years after they should have been, by all the laws of economics, starved into submission. What North Carolina did in the sixties it can do again; but the appeal now is for a reasonable application of the rule so that the same distressing conditions shall not prevail.

Getting back to the unlimited sources of real wealth in our state. They are soil and climate. The ore that lies buried in our mines can be exhausted. There is a definite, though far distant limit, upon development of water power resources. But God in his infinite goodness has arranged that the soil, instead of being exhausted if properly cared for, will become more fertile the more it yields to man's needs The combination of soil and climate in North Carolina will produce almost anything. The eastern islands are laden with tropical fruits, while our mountain heights have plants found few other places outside the artic circle. It is a crime not to use these advantages; it is foolish to grow cotton and tobacco upon land that is yearning to produce potatoes and corn and other feedstuffs.

There could be given lots of figures showing the requirements of North Carolina in food and the pitifully small percentage of these things that we are producing; and along with this the amazing number of our ever diminishing cotton and tobacco dollers that go out of the state to pay for them, when we ought to grow them at home. One is reminded of what Clarence Poe said some years ago about the North Carolina farmer. He said he worked hard all summer killing grass to grow cotton to get money to buy hay. But figures don't mean anything when they get into million and billion columes; we can't grasp their significance. The necessity of getting the next meal from somewhere, we understand.

But so many folks are not farmers, and have no opportunity to raise their own foods. So the proposition perhaps should be presented in a somewhat different way. Since most of us are not going to grow our own food, let's buy food grown in North Carolina. Let's buy stuff produced as nearly as possible in our own community. Let's let the canned milk stay on the shelves and buy real cow milk. Let's encourage canning and preserving of sandhill peaches and let the Californians look somewhere else for a market. Let's develop a genuine North Carolina complex.

### WASTING MONEY AND TIME

Teacher (in mental arithmetic class): What is the interest on $1,000 for a year at 2% Herman Cohen, you pay attention!

Herman: For two per cent I couldn't pay attention.