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CALIFORNIA

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California

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Содержание

California The Land of the Sun

I
THE SPARROW-HAWK'S OWN

For a graphic and memorable report of the contours of any country, see always the aboriginal account of its making. That will give you the lie of the land as no geographer could sketch it forth for you. California was made by Padahoon the Sparrow-Hawk and the Little Duck, who brooded on the face of the waters in the Beginning of Things.

There is no knowing where the tale comes from, for Winnenap the Medicine-Man who told it to me, was eclectic in his faiths as in his practice. Winnenap was a Shoshone, one of the group who had been forced southward into Death Valley when the great Pah Ute nation had split their tribes like a wedge. In the last of their wars he had been taken as a hostage by the Paiutes and brought up by them. He might have remembered the story, or his wife might have told him. She was a tall brown woman out of Tejon, and *her* mother was of that band of captives taken from San Gabriel by the Mojaves, Mission-bred. Wherever it came from, the tale has its roots deep in the land it explains.

Padahoon, being wearied of going to and fro under the heavens, said to the Little Duck that it was time there should be mountains; so the Little Duck dived and brought up the primordial mud of which even the geographers are agreed mountains are made.

As he brought it the Sparrow-Hawk built a round beautiful ring of mountains enclosing a quiet space of sea. Said the Little Duck, "I choose this side," coming up with his bill full of mud toward the west. Whereupon the Sparrow-Hawk built the other side higher. When it was all done and the Little Duck surveyed it, he observed, as people will to this day, the discrepancy between the low western hills and the high Sierras, and he thought the builder had not played him fair. "Very well, then," said the Sparrow-Hawk, "since you are resolved to be so greedy," and he bit out pieces of the Sierras with his bill, and threw them over his shoulder.

You can see the bites still deep and sharp about Mt. Whitney.

But the Little Duck would not be satisfied; he took hold by the great bulk of Shasta and began to pull, and Padahoon pulled on his side until the beautiful ring was pulled out in a long oval and began to break on the west where the bay of San Francisco comes in. So they were forced to divide the mountain range north and south and make what they could of it. But the Sparrow-Hawk, remembering the pieces he had thrown over his shoulder, chose the south, where you can still see him sailing any clear day about four in the afternoon, over all his stolen territory.

There you have the bones of the land as neatly laid out for you as they could do it in Kensington Museum: the long oval, breaking seaward, the high, bitten, westward peaks, and the Sparrow-Hawk's Own, tailing south like the quirk of an attenuated Q.

They serve, these fragmentary ranges, for the outposts of habitableness between the sea wind and the forces of pure desertness. Always there is skirmish and assault going on about them. Showers rush up the slope of San Jacinto, all their shining spears a-tilt. Great gusts of wind roar through the Pass of San Gorgiono, the old Puerto de San Carlos. Seasonally they are beleaguered by stealthy rushes of the fogs that from the Gulf hear the peaks about Whitney calling, or by the yellow murk of sand-storms on which the whole face of the desert is lifted up as it travels toward its destiny in orchard row and vineyard. Always the edge of the wind is against the stone. They shine, the frontlets of the sentinel saints, in that keen polish, as the faces of saints must with benignity.

Just beyond the pilæ of the broken mountains – the Pillars of Hercules of the West – the desert winds about the eastern bases of the range in deep indented bays, white-rimmed with the wave marks of its ancient sea. Out a very little way, where the shuddering heat-waves trick the imagination, it seems about to be retaken by the ghost of tumbling billows. Nothing else moves in it; nothing sounds. Plantations of growing things near the Pass lean all a little toward it, edging, peering – the wild, spiny, thorny things of the desert to enter the rain-fed paradise, the full-leafed offspring of the sea wind plotting to take the unfriended sandy spaces. They creep a little forward or back as the years run wet or dry. The green things stand up, they march along the cliffs, they balance on the edge of precipices, but desperation is in every contorted stem of *mesquite* and *palo verde*. And with all this struggle, so still! East on the desert rim the Colorado ramps like a stallion between its walls, westward the Pacific rings the low foreshore with thunder; but the land never cries out, quartz mountains disintegrate but they do not murmur.

It is odd here in a land rife with the naked struggle of great pagan forces, to find the promontories so lend themselves to the gentle names of saints. Perhaps the Padres were not so far from nature as one thinks; in the southerly range which, with San Bernardino on the north, sentinels the Pass by which the iron-rimmed Emigrant trail enters the coast valleys, they rendered for once the pagan touch. San Jacinto – St. Hyacinth – was he ever anything but a Christianised memory of a Grecian myth, or does it matter at all so long as there are men to see, in the deep purple light that dies along the heights, the colour of blood that is shed for love? Perhaps the best thing beauty can say to Greek or Christian is that there are still things worth dying for. No doubt the veins of Padre Jayme Bravo were as rich in martyr passion as the stained air of the mountain is in purples, paling to rose at morning, thinning at noon to pure aerial blues.

Seen from the coast the range has a finny contour as of some huge creature risen from the sea, with low hills about it like dolphins playing; but the prevailing note of the landscape is always blue, repeating the tints of the wild brodiæa that may be found on the lomas early in April, sending up its clustered heads between two slender curving spears.

Near at hand the masking growth is seen to be green, the dark olivaceous green of the chamisal. Nowhere does one get the force of the Spanish termination *al*– the place where – as in that word. The chamisal is the place of the chamise: miles and miles of it, with scarcely another shrub allowed, spread over the mesa and well up into laps and bays of the hills. It grows breast high, man high in the favoured regions; but even where under the influence of drouth and altitude it creeps to the knees, it abates nothing of its social character. Its ever-green foliage has a dull shining from the resinous coating which protects it from evaporation, and a slight sticky feel, characteristics that no doubt won it the name of "greasewood" from the emigrants who valued it chiefly because it could be burned green. The spring winds blowing up from the bay whip all its fretted surface to a froth of panicled white bloom, that, stirring a little as the wind shifts, full of bee-murmur, touches the imagination with the continual reminder of the sea. Higher up the thick lacy chaparral flecks and ripples, showing the light underside of leaves, and tosses up great fountain sprays of ceanothus, sea-blue and lilac-scented.

All the human interest of this region centres about the city on the bay of San Diego, a low locked harbour with a long spit of sand breaking the mild Pacific swell, as it bides its time for the shipping of the south-western world. It has already waited longer than most people suppose. Just fifty years after the landing of Columbus on the Bahamas, Cabrillo discovered it; Sir Francis Drake, romping up that coast with his buccaneers, must have seen it though he left no note of any visit, and in 1602 Sebastian Viscaino anchored there and gave it its present name. Just about the time the mixed Dutch and English on the Atlantic coast were beginning to think of themselves as Americans and to act accordingly, the Franciscan *Frailes* settled on San Diego bay. Nobody will know why it was reserved for the brown-skirted brothers of St. Francis to undertake the subjugation of Alta California, until it is known why the King of Spain quarrelled with the Jesuits. They were accused of plotting against His Majesty, but in those days it was possible to accuse the Jesuits of almost anything without

going very far wrong in the popular estimate. I have my own opinion about it, which is that a great land, like a great lady, has her way with men. And no land has called its own as has California: – poet or painter or pioneer, the world's rim under. No better patron could be found for this blossoming West than Francis of Assisi, who preached to his little brothers of the air and would have made a convert of the coyote. Perhaps the first settlers of a country leave their stripe on all the land's later offspring: if it was a way the West took to breed fervour and faith and the spirit of prophecy in the young generation, who shall say she has not succeeded?

In January of 1769 two expeditions by land and sea set forth in the name of God and the King of Spain, under the patronage of Señor San Jose, indubitable patron of all journeys since the flight into Egypt. In April the ship *San Antonio* anchored in the placid bay, there to await the live stock driven up from Velicatá. So the old world came to the new with a whole collocation of sainted personages flocking like doves to her banners.

But it was not saints that the land wanted so much as the stuff that goes to make them. The expedition starved, sickened; their eyes were holden. Governor Portola, with the greater part of the expedition, made a long *pasear* on foot to find the lost port of Monterey, and came back, with armour rust on his doublet sleeves and nothing much gained beside, to declare the expedition a failure. But Padre Serra – Junipero Serra, father president of Missions, juniper of God's own planting, sapling of that stock of which the founder of the order had wished for a whole forest full – Padre Serra claimed a churchman's privilege. He demanded time for a *novena*, a nine days' cycle of prayer to the patron who was so unaccountably hiding the relief ship in the fogs and indecisions of the uncharted coast. It is my belief that the Padre chose the *novena* simply because it was the longest possible time he could hope to delay the return of the expedition. Nine days they drew in their belts and told their beads, and on the last hour of the last day, far on the sea rim, behold the white wings of succour!

The Patron, who could never be at a loss for an expedient, contrived that the ship should lose an anchor which compelled it to put in at San Diego, where they had no expectation of finding any of the party. It was so that the land tried them out and approved, for from that day the founding went forward steadily.

There is a fine growing city now on the site of the early landing, regularly stratified through all the architectural periods of California, from the low thick-walled adobe of the Spanish occupation to the newest shingle-stained bungalow of the latest one-lunged millionaire; but the land has not lost, in a century and a half, one mark by which the brown-skirted *Frailes* found their way about in it. It has its distinctive mark, the Sparrow-Hawk's land, the seal of a private and peculiar affection. Here about the mouth of one of its swift seasonal rivers, and touching as with a finger-tip the opposing shore of the island of Santa Rosa, is the habitat of the Torrey pine. Japanesque, unrelated, drinking the sea air, never spreading inland, it hugs the sea-worn edges of La Jolla, as though, as some botanists believe, the species came to life there out of the jewel-tinted water and the spirit of the desert dust.

It is also possible to think of it as a relict of the land of which the broken Channel Islands were made, but in any case it is a pity that science could not have retained for this lonely, restricted species the name the *Frailes* gave to its fostering waters, Soledad – the solitary. Behind the town the mesa rises abruptly, knife-cut by the gullies of intermittent streams; and far back where the mountains break down into foothills, and these into the lomas – little low mounds of detritus – the sea air collects all the blue rays of the diffused light and holds them there all day in the hollows, in memory of the sea from which they rose.

In April of the year of the Occupation the white panicles of the chamise would be tossing here and there, and the yellow violets run thin lines as of fire among the grasses. You would not believe there were so many yellow violets in the world as a day's riding will still show you. At this season, *islay*, the wild cherry, will be shaking out its fine white spray of bloom, the button willow begins, the sycamore, the buckthorn, *cascara sagrada*; the great berried manzanita, which shed its waxen bells as early as December, will be reddening its apples. Here also the chia, the true sage, the honey-maker,

bread of the wild tribes, makes itself known by the penetrating pungent odour of its unfolding foliage. Binding all the leafy thickets, runs the succulent starry bloom of the megarrhiza that, from its hidden root, as large as a man's body, sends up smothering tendrils so sensitive to their opportunity that you have only to sit down beside them on one of these long growing afternoons, to find all their tips curling in your direction and the stems moving sensibly across the grass in the direction of support. As early as February the foot-long vines can be seen locating the nearest shrub or the cañon wall, farther away than you could detect it by any tactile sense. And how quickly, once the objective is sensed, the questing Force is withdrawn from the unsuccessful members! Perhaps this one to the right may keep on in the direction in which it has caught the invisible communicating thread from the nearest buckthorn, but the other three or four green tentacles, finding no invitation from any quarter, not only stop growing but seem to shrink and dwindle in the interests of the climbing brother. Sometimes in a particularly lusty growth, all the young vines will be drawn toward some conspicuous support, so that by the third day those that lay out starlike, with inquiring tips raised a little, delicately feeling, will swing through all their points to the one hopeful direction. These warm sensuous days toward the end of April, just after rain, when the very earth is full of a subtle intoxication, one has but to thrust a finger among the bourgeoning tips and tendrils of the megarrhiza to see them stir with live response. One must suppose, since the megarrhiza is of no discoverable use to anybody, that the Force uses it to its own ends, an ascending, uprearing Force, rehearsing itself for a more serviceable instrument. – This, however, is a digression; probably the Padres found no time for philosophising about anything, much less so useless a specimen as the wild cucumber.

What the Franciscans saw first in Alta California was what all pioneers look for in new lands – the witness of their faith. They saw the waxberry bush from which they were to gather the thin coating of the berries into candles for their improvised altars, saw the crepitant, aromatic *yerba buena*, and the shrubby, glutinous-leaved herb of the Saints, given to them for healing.

More than all else they must have seen in the month of the Virgin Mother, high on the altar slopes of San Jacinto and San Bernardino, the white thyrses of the yucca, called The Candles of Our Lord. Back where the green exclusiveness of the chamise gives place to the chaparral, the tall shafts arise. They grow in blossoming, the bells climbing with the aspiring stalk until as many as six thousand of them may hang pure and stiff along the lance-like stem between the bayonet-bristling leaves. Long after the white flame has burnt out, the stalks remain, rank on rank, as though battalions of Spanish spearmen had fallen there, holding each his spear aloft in his dead hand.

It is only back there where the yuccas begin, that the small, swift life of the mesa goes on, very much as it did in the days of the Spanish *Frailes*. The doves begin it, voicing the mesa dawn in notes of a cool blueness; then the sleek and stately quail, moving down in twittering droves to the infrequent water-holes. The rhythm of a flock in motion is like the ripple of muscles in the sides of a great snake. After them the road runner, *corredor del camino*, the cock of the chaparral, crest down, rudder aslant, swifter than a horse, incarnate spirit of the hopeful dust through which he flirts and flits. Then the blueness is folded up, it lies packed in the cañons, the mountains flatten; high in his airy haunts the Sparrow-Hawk sails, and the furry, frisk-tailed folk begin the day's affairs.

The secret of learning the mesa life is to sit still, to sit still and to keep on sitting still. The only other secret is to be learned in the wattled huts stuck like the heaps of the house-building rats in the dry washes, inwoven with the boughs of buckthorn and *islay*, except for size scarcely distinguishable from them. For the Indian has gone through all that green woof with the thread of kinship and found it an ordered world. He is choke-full as is the chamisal of wild life, of the tag ends of instincts and understandings left over from the days when he was brother to the beast – those sleek-bellied rats, stealing to lay another foot-long, dried stick to the characterless heap of their dwelling, – bad Indians to him, trying to remember their ways when they were men; that brown feathered bunch, in and out of the chia bush, – she was present at the making of man. Your aboriginal has the true sense of

proportion: not size but vitality. You can cover the sage wren with the hollow of your hand, but you cannot hop so far for your size nor be so brave about it.

Very different from the spring flutter and fullness, must have been the look of the land in the year of the martyrdom of Padre Jayme Bravo, which was the year of Bunker Hill and the Republic. The green of the chamisal was overlaid then by the brown tones of its seeding. *Islay* had shed its crimson drupes; the cactus fires had died down to the dull purples of the fruiting prickly pear; the sycamores by the dwindling waters of the arroya had scarcely a palsied leaf to wag. The Mission had been moved, for what reasons must be guessed by whoever has had occasion to observe the effect of a standing army on the subjugated peoples, back from the sea marsh to a little valley of what is known now as Mission River. Sixty converts had come down out of the hills to receive the Medicine of the Soft-Hearted God. That is the way they must have looked at it – rood and cup and sprinkling water, and the bells louder than the medicine drums. Back in the dry gullies the drums would have been going night and day where the *tingaivashes*, the Medicine-Men, lashed themselves into a fury over this apostasy. Certain of the renegades heard them between their orisons; they fled back to the muttering roll and the pound of the dancing feet. In the night after that, eight hundred of the Dieguenos, clothed in frantic fervour and very little else, came down to make an end of the "long gowns." How the soul of Padre Jayme must have leaped up as he heard them yelling outside his unguarded hut: the appetite for martyrdom is deeper than all our dreaming. He ran toward them with arms extended. "Love God, my children!" he cried, and received their arrows. When it was reported to the Padre President at Monterey, "Thank God," he said; "now the soil is watered." It did indeed repay them such a crop of souls as any watering produces in that soil; but at San Juan Capistrano, where a new foundation was in progress, they buried the bells and returned to the presidio.

Few people understand why Californians so love their Missions, the meagre ruins of them, scant as a last year's nest. But two priests, a corporal, and three men in the unmapped land with eight hundred angry savages – it is the mark of the Western breed to love odds such as that! It is not to the campanile at Pala nor the ruined arches of San Luis Rey that men made pilgrimages but to the spirit of enterprise that built the West.

All about the upper mesa there are traces, scarcely more evident to the eye than the Missions, that the inhabitants of it have been dreamers, dreaming greatly. I do not now refer to the court of San Luis Rey, from the roofs of which a joyous populace once cheered a governor of California in the part of toreador, in a neighbourhood where Raphael-eyed muchachitos who have never heard of the Five Little Pigs that Went to Market can still repeat you the rhyme that begins

> Up in Heaven there is a bull fight,
> The bull has horns of silver and a tail of gold.

Heaven enough under those conditions to the children of the Occupation! Nor am I thinking of a road on which, when there is a light wind moving from the sea, you can still hear at midnight the pounding feet of the Indian riders galloping down to the bay, only to see their beloved Padre blessing them from the ship's side in departing. I do not think even – because I make a practice of thinking as little as possible of a matter so discreditable to us as our Indian policy – of the procession of the evicted *Palatingwas*, even though the whole region of Warner's ranch is still full of the shame of it and the rending cry. The struggle of men with men is at best a sick and squalid affair for one of the parties; but men contriving against the gods for possession of the earth is your true epic. The brave little towns which start up there with their too early florescence of avenue and public square, the courageous acres which the vineyardist clears in the chamisal and the chamise takes again! All along the upper mesa, Pan and the homesteader keep up the ancient fight. And with what unequal weapons! The wild gourd, the bindweed, the megarrhiza, at the mere rumour of a cleared space, come beckoning and joining hands. Though he goes gunning all day without finding one young rabbit for his pot, the bark

of the homesteader's orchard trees will be gnawed by them at the precise sappy moment. At dawn the quail may be heard with soft contented noises between the rows of bearing vines, plunging their beaks in the ripest berries. Then the mule-deer will spend the night in the carefully fenced enclosure, ruining the largest bunches with selective bites; after which the homesteader, if he is wise, will know that he is beaten. The mule-deer can go over any fence, though usually he prefers to go between the wires, which he can do without altering his stride. Detected, even at its most leafless, the antlered chaparral makes cover for him until, after hours of following, he is glimpsed at last, scaling at his stiff bounding gait some inaccessible rocky stair from which nothing comes back but the bullet's deflected whine. Now and then some pot-hunter who remembers when the mule-deer could be heard barking to the does in any deep gully, when the moon rose hot on the flushed trail of the October day, will tell you that there are no more of his kind on San Jacinto. But so long as there are homesteaders to be fended from the hill borders, the mule-deer will come back. And when the mule-deer is gone there will still be drouth. Let the coast currents swing out a few degrees, or the Gulf winds blow contrarily for consecutive seasons, and the stoutest homesteader fails. After a few years you can guess where he has been by finding the chamise growing taller in the ploughed places.

Incurable wild hills and wild sufficing sea, and the little strip between which they give to one another – Indian giving! – conceded by the years of rain and demanded back by drouth; shoals that the tide piles and the sea eats again! It lies like a many-coloured dancer's scarf, and hearts are still caught in its folds as in the days of the Spanish Occupation.

There's a stripe of aquamarine turning to chrysoprase, that's for the sea; amber then for the hollow cliffs of La Jolla and San Juan, smugglers' cliffs eaten well under the shore; a stripe of scarlet, spangled with viscid diamond dew, that's for the mesembryanthemums crowding the foreshore; pale green of the lupins with a white thread through it of the highway, green again for the chamisal, and blue of the mountains' unassailable sea thought.

Nature is a great symbolist; what she makes out of her own materials is but the shadow of what man in any country will make finally of his. San Diego by the sea dreams of a great sea empery. What by all the signs she is bound to produce, is a poet. There in the scarf-coloured, low shore is the vocal forecast of him in the night-singing mocking-bird. Especially in the fringing island of Coronado out of the waxberry bush he can be heard gurgling like a full fountain with jets and rushes of pure crystal sound. From moonrise on until dawn he scatters from a tireless throat, music like light and laughter. It is as impossible to close the eyes under it as in the glare of the sun. And if the moon, the measurer, be gone on a journey to the other side of the world, still he sings, all his notes muffled by the dark; he sways and sings, dozes and sings, dreaming and wakes to sing. So it should be with poets whether anybody wishes them to or not. "The lands of the sun expand the soul," says the proverb.

II
MOTHERING MOUNTAINS

It is all part of that subtle relation between the observer and the landscape of the west, which goes by the name of "atmosphere," that one returns again and again to the reality of Christian feeling in the Franciscan Pioneers, as witnessed by the names they left us – one of the most charming proofs, if proof were wanted, of the power of religion to illuminate the mind to a degree often denied to generations of art and culture. How many book-fed tourists rounding the blue ranks of San Jacinto to face the noble front of the Coast Range as it swings back from the San Gabriel valley, would have found for it a name at once so absolute, so understanding as Sierra Madre, Mother Mountain?

There you have it all in one comprehensive sweep: the brooding, snow-touched, virginal peaks, visited and encompassed by the sacred spirit of the sea, and below it the fertile valley, the little huddling, skirting hills fed from her breast. The very lights that die along the heights, the airs that play there, the swelling fecund slopes, have in them something so richly maternal; the virtue of the land is the virtue that we love most in the mothers of men. And if you want facts under the poetry, see how the Sierra receives the rain and sends it down laden with the rich substance of her granite bosses, making herself lean to fatten the valleys. The great gorges and swift angles of the hills which fade and show in the evening glow, are wrought there by the ceaseless contribution of the mountain to the tillable land. And what a land it has become! There have been notable kingdoms of the past of fewer and less productive acres. Yet even in the great avenues of palms that flick the light a thousand ways from their wind-stirred, serrate edges, is a reminder of the host of bristling, spiny growth the land once entertained. It is as if the sinister forces of the desert lurked somewhere not far under the surface, ready at any moment to retake all this wonder of fertility, should the beneficence of the Mother Mountain fail. The Padre pioneers must have felt these two contending forces many a time when they lay down at night under the majestic Sierra, for they named the first spot where they made an abiding place, in honour of the protecting influence, *Nuestro Señora, Reina de Los Angeles*, Our Lady the Queen of the Angels. There she hovered, snow-whitened amid tall candles of the stars, while south and west the coyote barked the menace of the unwatered lands. Now this is remarkable, and one of the things that go to show we are vastly more susceptible to influences of nature than some hard-headed members of society suppose, that in this group of low hills and shallow valleys between the Sierra Madre and the sea, the most conspicuous human achievement has been a new form of domestic architecture.

This is the thing that most strikes the attention of the traveller: not the orchards and the gardens, which are not appreciably different in kind from those of the Riviera and some favoured parts of Italy, but the homes, the number of them, their extraordinary adaptability to the purposes of gracious living. The Angelenos call them bungalows, in respect to the type from which the later form developed, but they deserve a name as distinctive as they have in character become. These little thin-walled dwellings, all of desert-tinted native woods and stones, are as indigenous to the soil as if they had grown up out of it, as charming in line and the perfection of utility as some of those wild growths which show a delicate airy florescence above ground, but under it have deep, man-shaped, resistant roots. With their low and flat-pitched roofs they present a certain likeness to the aboriginal dwellings which the Franciscans found scattered like wasps' nests among the chaparral along the river, – which is only another way of saying that the spirit of the land shapes the art that is produced there.

One must pause a little by the dry wash of this river, so long ago turned into an irrigating ditch that it is only in seasons of unusual flood it remembers its ancient banks, and finds them, in spite of all that real estate agencies have done to obliterate such natural boundaries. This river of Los Angeles betrays the streak of original desertness in the country by flowing bottom-side up, for which

it receives the name of *arroya*, and even *arroya seca* as against the *rio* of the full-flowing Sacramento and San Juan. A *rio* is chiefly water, but an *arroya*, and especially that one which travels farthest from the Mothering Mountains toward the sea, is at most seasons of the year a small trickle of water among stones in a wide, deep wash, overgrown with button willow and sycamores that click their gossiping leaves in every breath of wind or in no wind at all. Tiny gold and silver backed ferns climb down the banks to drink, and as soon as the spring freshet has gone by, brodiæas and blazing stars come up between the boulders worn as smooth as if by hand.

Farther up, where the stream narrows, it is overgrown by willows, alders, and rock maples, and leaps white-footed into brown pools for trout. Deer drink at the shallows, and it is not so long ago that cinnamon bear and grizzlies tracked the wet clay of its borders. This is the guarantee that this woman-country is in no danger of too much mothering. No climate which is acceptable to trout and grizzlies is in the least likely to prove enervating; men and beasts, they run pretty much to the same vital, sporting qualities.

All that country which extends from the foot of the Sierra Madre to the sea, is so cunningly patterned off with ranks of low hills and lomas that its vastness is disguised, or rather revealed by subtle change and swift surprises as a discreet woman reveals her charms. This renders it one of the most delightful of motoring countries. The car swings over a perfect road into snug little orchard nooks as safe and secret seeming as a nest, climbs a round-breasted hill to greet the wide horizon of the sea, or a mesa stretching away into blue and amber desertness, which when adventured upon, discloses in unsuspected hollows white, peaceful towns girt by great acres of orange groves, or the orderly array of vines trimmed low and balancing like small, wide-skirted figures in a minuet. And then the ground opens suddenly to deep, dry gullies where little handfuls of the grey soil gather themselves up and scuttle mysteriously under the cactus bushes, and dried seeds of the megarrhiza rattle with a muffled sound as the pods blow about. Here one meets occasionally the last survivors of the old way of life before men found it: *neotoma*, the house-building rat, with his conical heap of rubbish; or a road runner, tilting his tail and practising his short, sharp runs in the powdery sand under the rabbit brush; here, too, the lurking desert shows its spiny tips like a creature half-buried in the sand, not dead, but drowsing.

As artists know colour, and poets know it, this is the most colourful corner of the world. The blue and silver tones of the Sparrow-Hawk's land give place to airy violets, fawns, and rich ambers. It is curious, that obstinate preference which a locality has for colour schemes of its own adoption; man can break up and re-form them, but he can never quite overcome the original key. Here the bright, instant note of the geraniums that shore up the bungalows, even the insult of the magenta-coloured Bougainvillea is subdued by the aerial softness that lies along the hills like the bloom on fruit. The sheets of Eschscholtzia gold that once spread over miles of the San Gabriel valley, and still linger in torn fragments about Altadena, have been sheared by the plough, to vanish and reappear again in the solid globes of orange, distilled from the saps and juices of the soil.

One of the most interesting of the instruments by which the cultivated landscape has gathered up and fixed the evanescent greens that spread thinly yet over the uncropped hills in spring, is the eucalyptus. All the tints are there, from the olive greens of the chaparral to the sombre darkness of the evergreen oak; young shoots of it have the silvery finish of the artemisia which once gave the note of the mesas about Riverside and San Bernardino. No other imported tree has quite to such a degree the air of the *habitué*; one wonders indeed if it could have been half so much at home in Australia, from whence it has returned like some wandering heir to the ancestral acre.

It proves its blood royal by its facile adaptiveness to the prevailing lines of the landscape, taking the rounded, leaning outline of the live oaks on the wind-driven hills, or in sheltered ravines springing upward straight as the silver firs. Perhaps its most charming possibilities are revealed in the middle distance where, lifted high on columnar stems, its leaf crowns take on the blunt, flowing contours of the hills. At all times it has a beautiful resilience to the wind, bowing with a certain courtliness without

compulsion, and recovering as if by conscious harmonious movement. The pepper tree, however, most magnificent specimens of which may be found lining the avenues of Pasadena, or in some unexpected corner of the hills marking the site of some old Spanish hacienda, is always an alien. It is like the Spaniards who brought it, perhaps, in its drooping grace, in the careless prodigality with which it sheds its fragile crimson fruits. Something of old-worldliness persists in its spicy odours, and in the stir of its lacy shadows; when the moon comes over the mountain wall and the wind is moving, there is the touch of mystery one associates with lovely señoritas leaning out of balconies. One fancies that the pepper tree will last so long as the dying race of Dons and Doñas, and with them will cease to be a feature of local interest.

There is hardly more than a trace in the modern city of Los Angeles of *Nuestra Señora, Reina de los Angeles*. The last time I passed through the old plaza, the streets of offence encroached upon it from the east, and a corner of the sacred precinct had been sacrificed to the trolley. The Church of Our Lady, over whose door may still be traced the fading inscription from which the city takes its name, was never a mission, but one of the six chapels or *asistencias* centred about the Mission San Gabriel. It was here the first expedition passed northward looking for the port of Monterey, on the day of the feast of Our Lady in the year when the Atlantic Colonies were making up their minds to fight the English. It was close to this spot and along Downey Street were enacted the most pitiful of all the tragic incidents which marked the recession of the aboriginal races. Bereft of their lands and the protection of their Church, they became a prey to the greed of the dominant peoples, and used regularly to be incited to drunkenness upon their wages on Sunday, arrested while in that condition, and sold each Monday morning for the amount of their fines to the neighbouring ranchers. Things like this lurking under the surface of commercial enterprise, as the desert lies in wait in sandy stretches, advise us that much of our insistence on democracy grows out of our inability to trust ourselves to deal equitably with our fellows under any other conditions. We can keep to the rules of the game we have set up more easily than to the unfenced humanities. Here in the old plaza full of sleepy light, which still retains the indefinable stamp of the people to whom to-morrow was always a better day for doing things, one sighs for the short-sighted self-interest which so wasted the native children of the soil.

But after all the land couldn't have loved them as it does the race for which it brings forth its miraculous harvests. Not that there weren't miracles in those days; in fact they began here, or rather at San Gabriel, six miles or so beyond the river which in those days was called Porcincula, a name that linked the old world with the new by way of the little chapel in Italy in which the beloved Francis received such heavenly favours. The miracle of San Gabriel relates to a display of a canvas presentiment of Our Lady, at the mere sight of which the wild tribes experienced exceeding grace. Looking up suddenly at the Mother Mountain brooding above the plain, it is easy to understand how the symbol of aloof but solicitous care came home to the primitive mind, always peculiarly open to suggestions of humaneness in nature.

The heads of the Sierra Madre are rounded, the contours of great dignity. The appeal it makes to the eye is of mass and line. Its charms, and it has many, of forested slope, leaping waters, and lilied meadows, do not offer themselves to the casual glance, but must be sought after with great pains. The bulk of the range is of warm, grey granite, clothed with atmospheric colour as with a garment. It borrows more from the sky than the sea, taking on at times an aerial transparency, the soul of the mountain about to pass trembling into light. Pinkish tones are discoverable in even the bluest shadows, and at times the peaks are touched with the rich, roseate orange of the Alpine-glow. But the variations of temperature and atmospheric conditions are not sufficiently pronounced to present themselves to the sense as the source of its aspects of tenderness, of majesty, of virginal aloofness. Rather such changes seem to be occasioned by palpitations of the Mountain Spirit, remote in sacred meditation, glowing, dimming, defining itself from within.

It may be that the immense vitality of the land, its abundance, the bursting orchards, the rich variety of native growth, somehow dwarfs the earliest impression of the Sierra Madre, since few,

if any, gather at first an adequate idea of the actual mass and height it represents. It is only after appreciation of the really amazing activities of the Angelenos is a little dulled by familiarity, at early morning when the groves are sleeping and the bright plantations of the gardens lack the sun to flash their brilliance on the sight, or at evening when a sea mist covers the teeming land, one is prepared to hear that many of these peaks are higher than the Simplon, and that it would be possible to wander for months in the intricacies of its cañons without having time to grow familiar with a single one of them.

Sometimes the mere mechanics of the land, the pull of the wind up the narrow gorges as you pass, advises the open mind of power and immensity residing in the thinly forested bulks. Passing what appears a mere shadowy gulf in the mountain wall, you are aware of a murmurous sound as of the sea in a shell, and feel suddenly the push of the draught on your windshield like a great steady hand. In places above San Bernardino, the steady pouring of invisible wind rivers has swept the soil for miles and defied three generations of artificial plantations. And sometimes the mountain speaks directly to the soul. I recall such an occasion one late spring. We had been skirting the range toward Riverside all afternoon, having the fall of the land seaward always in view, noting how, in spite of the absurd predilection of men for square fields and gridiron arrangements, the main lines of cultivation were being pulled into beauty by the sheer necessity of humouring the harvest. It was that lagging hour between the noon splendour and the gathering of the light for its dramatic passage into night. The orange orchards lay dead green in the hollows, unplanted ridges showed scarcely a trace of atmospheric blueness; unlaced, unbuskined, the land rested. And all in the falling of a leaf, in the scuttle of a horned toad in the dust of the roadway, it lifted into eerie life. It bared its teeth; the veil of the mountain was rent. Nothing changed, nothing stirred or glimmered, but the land had spoken. As if it had taken a step forward, as if a hand were raised, the mountain stood over us. And then it sank again. While the chill was still on us, the grip of terror, there lay the easy land, the comfortable crops, the red geraniums about the bungalows. But never again for me would the Sierra Madre be a mere geographical item, a feature of the landscape; it was Power, immanent and inescapable. Shall not the mother of the land do what she will with it?

Entering the cañons of the San Gabriel, one is struck with the endearing quality of their charm. In a country which disdains every sort of prettiness, and dares even to use monotony as an element of beauty, as California does, it is surprising to find, cut in the solid granite wall, little dells all laced with fern and saxifrage, and wind swung, frail, flowery bells. Little streams come dashing down the runways with an elfin movement, with here and there a miniature fall "singing like a bird," as Muir described it, between moss-encrusted banks.

Into the open mouths of such cañons have retreated the hosts of wildflowers that once in the wet seasons overran all that country from San Bernardino to the sea, – the white sage, most honeyful of all the sages, the poppies, gilias, cream cups, nemophilias which twenty-five years ago were as common as meadow grass, as thick as the planted fields of alfalfa which have usurped them. Settlers who came into this country when the trail over the San Gorgiono had not yet hardened between iron rails, tell of riding belly deep for miles in wild oats and waving bloom, and where the trail goes out over the San Fernando, toward Camulas, the yellow mustard reached its scriptural height, and the birds of the air built their nests in it. Now and then in very wet years a faint yellow tinge, high up under the bases of the hills, is all that is left of the seed which, by report, the Padres sowed along the coastwise trails, to mark where they trod the circuit of the Missions.

Everywhere within the cañons, honeyful flowers abound, and up from the rocky floors the slopes are stiff with chaparral. This characteristic growth, which, seen from the open valley flooded by dry sun, appears as a mere scurf, a roughened lichen on the mountain wall, is in reality a riot of manzanita, mahogany, ceanothus, cherry and black sage, from ten to fifteen feet high, all but impassable. Elsewhere in the ranges to the north, the chaparral is loose enough to admit fern and herbaceous plants, carpeting the earth, but here the rigid, spiny stems contend for three or four feet, thick as the carving in old cathedral choirs, before they attain light and air enough to put forth leaf or

twig. On the seaward side of the mountains, miles and miles of this dense growth flow over the ranges, parted here and there by knife-edge ridges, or by huge bosses of country rock, affording a great sweep to the eye, reaching far to seaward. From here the lower country shrinks to its proper proportion – a toy landscape planted with Noah's Ark trees – and the noise of men is overlaid by the great swells of the Pacific which come thundering in, lifting far and faint reverberations along the ranges.

On either side of these vast conning towers it is still possible to trace the indefinite tracks which wild creatures make, running clear and well defined for short distances and then melting unaccountably into the scrub again. Occasionally still they discover traces of the wild life in which the Sierra Madre once abounded. Deer are known to take advantage of such natural outlooks in protecting themselves from their natural enemies, and from the evidence of frequent visits here, bears and foxes and bobcats must have made much the same use of them. From such high escarpments the Indians would have seen Cabrillo's winged boats go by, and from them, all up the coast, ascended the pillars of smoke that attended the galleon of Francis Drake.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.