

AN UNLUCKY NUGGET

HISTORY OF THE LONG POTATO NUGGET IN CALIFORNIA.

Two Murders Followed Its Discovery—It Had Many Owners and Brought Little Profit to Any—A Miner's Experience With It—Last Appearance of the Nugget.

The current stories of gold nuggets recalled to a forty-miner this strange history of an early California lump of gold.

'This nugget,' he said: 'was found in the summer of 1853 by a Mexican miner who was washing cut dirt in a gulch leading down towards Dry Creek, in Amador county. At the head of the gulch a party of Digger Indians were in camp. One day one of the Indians came slouching along where the Mexican was at work in his crude and careless way and stopped to watch him. The Mexican kept a suspicious watch on the Indian out of the corner of his eye as he manipulated the cradle, for the Diggers were inveterate thieves, and did not hesitate to kill if it aided them in a robbery. The Indian eyed eagerly every pile of tailings the miner threw out, and after awhile the Mexican saw him stoop down quickly, dart his hand like a flash into the tailings and make a rapid motion with it to the breast of his buckskin shirt—a garment which he had undoubtedly looted from some miner. Then the Indian rose to his feet and watched the Mexican as before. The suspicious miner asked the Indian what he had found in the trailings. The Indian, without replying, ran up the gulch as fast as he could. That was enough for the Mexican. He knew that the Indian had found gold, and he started in pursuit of the fleeing savage, drawing a keen, long-bladed knife from his belt as he ran.

'The Indian led the Mexican a long chase. The digger camp was about three miles from the Mexican's claim, and the Indian was almost within sight of it before his pursuer overtook him. Then the Mexican plunged his knife to the hilt between the Indian's shoulders. With a yell the Indian fell to the ground. The miner tore open the Indian's shirt and found a gnarled and knotted lump of pure gold. Seizing the treasure, he thrust his knife once more into the body of the Indian, and hastened back to his camp. Two days later he was found dead in his tent, his body covered with spear wounds and his scalp gone. It was then that the finding of the nugget, its theft by the Indian, and its tragic recovery by the miner first became known in the mining camps. A Mexican woman who lived with the miner had been sent by him to a camp at Dry Creek, the day after the nugget was found, to carry the news to his brother, who was working there, and tell him to come to the gulch diggings. It was she and the brother who found the miner dead and mutilated in his tent when they got there from Dry Creek.

'The manner of the Mexican's murder was so unmistakably that of the Digger Indians that there could be no doubt who the assassins were. It was supposed that the yell of the Indian, when the Mexican's knife sank into his back, was heard at the digger camp, and members of the party went to see what it meant. There being life enough left in their dying companion, he had been able to tell them what had befallen him and who was responsible for his fate. The Indian's companions had simply avenged his death and at the same time recovered the nugget. The dead miner's brother and a party of other Mexicans started in pursuit of the Indians, but they found the camp deserted, and the trail the Diggers had taken could not be located.

The news of the finding of this nugget and the tragic incidents that followed it spread through the mining camps. The lump of gold was described as resembling in form a long potato, covered with smaller potatoes in bunches, its dimensions being about four inches long and two inches in mean width. From its peculiar shape it got the name of the Long Potato Nugget, and its fame was wide. Nothing was heard of the nugget for months, and its reappearance was only momentary, so to speak, and came about in a queer way.

'One of the most reckless and dissipated miners of those reckless days was Sam Lovell. He had dumped more dust on gambling tables than any other miner on Cosumnes River, where he had worked and fooled away various claims. One day in the fall, after the nugget was found, Sam was riding home on his mule to his camp from a mining town. Sam was drunk. On his way he met three Digger Indians. They stopped him and wanted to buy his mule. He didn't want to sell it, but at last one of the Indians stealthily drew something from beneath his blanket and told Sam they would give him that for the mule. When Sam's eyes fell on what the Indian had in his hand it almost knocked him sober. It was the long lost potato nugget, which had already cost two lives, and for which every miner in the moun-

tains was looking. The Indians were evidently anxious to get rid of the gold, for of course its possession was a constant menace to their safety. Sam dismounted from his mule, handed it over to the Indian and received the nugget. Drunk as he was, he knew the importance of keeping his possession of the murdered Mexican's lost treasure a secret. When he reached his tent he hid the nugget and tumbled in to sleep off his drunk. When he woke next morning he remembered trading the mule for the nugget, but he could not recall the place where he had hidden the lump of gold.

'According to the tale Sam told afterward, he hunted in every nook and corner of his claim, dug up ground on all sides of it, split no end of hollow logs, turned over stones of all sorts and sizes, working for days in the search, but no nugget, could he find. He at last made up his mind that the Indians had regretted their trade, sneaked back, found the gold, and carried it off again. Sam was terribly disappointed, for he had made up his mind to quietly work his way to Frisco with his treasure and break every bank in town with it. When he gave up the search for the nugget in disgust, he went back to the mining camp and filled up again. The minute he had reached the stage of intoxication he was in the night he traded his mule for the lump of gold, it all came back to him where he had hidden it. He started for his claim at once, without saying a word to any one; but for fear that he might get sober on the way and forget where the nugget was he carried a jug of camp whiskey along with him to keep his head level. Arriving at his tent all right, he walked over to an old pair of boots at one side of the tent, shoved his hand down into the leg of one boot, and found his nugget, just where he had hidden it.

'But poor Sam didn't have the satisfaction of even trying to break the Frisco bank with the dead Mexican's treasure, after all. For fear that he might bide it again and forget where it was for good and all, he took to carrying the lump secreted on his person, and within half a day he discovered that he had lost it. How he lost it or where was more than he could remember. He was sober at the time, and he laid it to that. So he went to drinking harder than ever. Being unable to find the nugget, he told his story about it in camp for the first time, and the search for it became general. Shortly after losing the nugget Sam died with delirium tremens. I was in there then, and when Sam died it was agreed that if any one in camp found the nugget it should be his individual property.

'Just about that time a stranger came into camp and looked around two or three days. Being a stranger, no one said anything to him, of course, about the lost Long Potato Nugget. He went away, and the search for the nugget went on. I remained there a month or so.

'After a time I went down to Frisco, and the very day I got there there was quite a stir over the robbery of the safe at the hotel where I stopped, the excitement being chiefly owing to the fact that a big nugget of pure gold, belonging to a man named Peters was among the property taken by the robbers. The nugget was described, and I was certain that it must be the missing Long Potato Nugget that was last in possession of poor Sam Lovell away up on the Cosumnes River. If there had been any doubt in my mind about the matter it would have disappeared when I met the man Peters. He was none other than the stranger who had spent the three days in camp where Sam had lost the nugget. I immediately asked Peters for an explanation. He was unmistakably astounded when I told him the story of the nugget. As said he had only been in California a few weeks, being from Illinois. While at the camp on Cosumnes River, in one of his strolls, he had stumbled on something, and looking down, saw that it was an old boot, lying half way in the leg of which was the nugget. He quickly picked it up, and, believing the find his, said nothing about it for fear the miners would object to his keeping it—which was a wise precaution—and quietly left the camp with it.

'Plainly, then, Sam Lovell had hidden his lump of gold again, this time while sober, and getting drunk had forgotten it, as he feared he would. If he had only become sober once more the chances are that he would have remembered where he had placed the nugget and got possession of it again.

'No trace of the robbers could be found and Peters must have left the place, for I saw him no more. Two months later I was walking down Montgomery street and seeing a crowd of people gazing in a jeweller's window, stopped to see what the attraction was. When I saw what it was I almost jumped out of my boots. It was the Long Potato Nugget. I passed into the store to see if I could learn how it came to be there. The proprietor frankly told me that it had been played in by a stranger at a faro bank in the city a month before and the jeweller had purchased it of the owner

of the bank. The jeweller was as much surprised to hear the history of the lump as I was that he hadn't heard it before. He said that if any person could establish a valid claim to the nugget he could have it. That was a safe enough offer. I thought, for it wasn't likely anyone could do that. At any rate, no one ever had the opportunity to try, for this nugget of many vicissitudes disappeared from the jeweller's window the next day, having been stolen so the jeweller said, by a very clever thief. Whoever the thief might have been, he was no more clever in getting the nugget than in keeping it, for from that day to this, so far as I know, nothing has ever been seen or heard of the Long Potato Nugget.'



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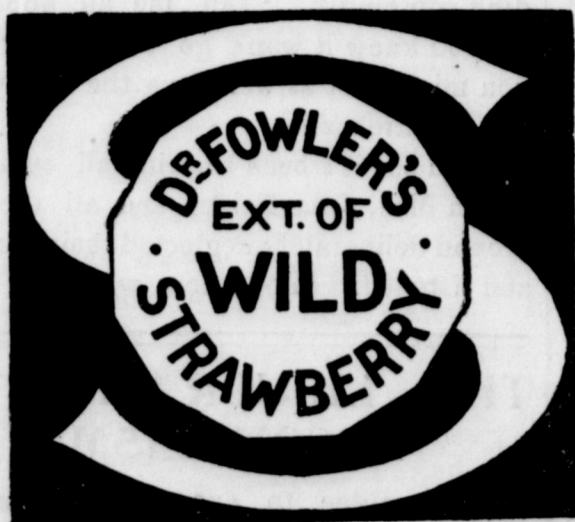
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THE FUTURE TELEGRAPHY.

Every Man Will Prepare his Own Message Slip.

An increasing amount of attention is being given nowadays to the possibilities of rapid telegraphy. By the Wheatstone system in which a previously punched strip of paper is fed into the transmitter, from 100 to 150 words a minute, are now easily sent over a single wire, a speed which is three or four times that of the operator who manipulates a Morse key. By the Rogers system, not yet in general use, it is claimed that 200 words a minute can be handled and printed on a typewriter automatically. What is called the DeLany system is still more rapid. But all these achievements and projects are surpassed by a plan described by Lieut. Geo. Owen Squier of the Third United States artillery and assistant professor of physics at Dartmouth. In some experiments conducted by Lieutenant Squier in co-operation with Prof. A. C. Crehore at Fort Monroe, a speed of 1,200 words per minute was actually attained and the assertion is made that from 3,000 to 6,000 words a minute may be sent by the same system between points as far apart as New York and Chicago.

One great novelty about the new plan is that it utilizes an alternating current instead of a constant one. Now, if an alternating current be interrupted, and if the interruption occurs at just the stage of an alteration, which is midway between a positive and a negative wave, there will be no spark, because the force which was flowing in one direction subsides to zero before it begins to flow in the other. What Messrs. Squier and Crehore propose, then, is to interrupt their current and restore it at just such 'zero points' in the oscillation as this. But the sparks will not disappear unless the 'make' and 'break' occur at precisely the right instant; and thus a simple and valuable guide is afforded the operator in adjusting his apparatus. When he finds that sparking has ceased, he knows that his transmitter interrupts and restores the flow at the zero stage, and is working in perfect harmony with the particular frequency of alternation employed.

Now, let us suppose that the Morse alphabet, which is composed of dots and dashes, is to be tried with this system. In that case a break lasting from the beginning of a positive wave, but continuing past its subsidence through the rise and fall of the negative wave also, would make a dash.

The machine by which messages are sent with an alternating current, is very simple. A narrow wheel with a flat narrow periphery is kept in rotation at a rate which is rapid and is equal to an integer number of cycles. Let us imagine, now, that the wire carrying the messages is cut in two, and the adjacent ends are provided with flexible metallic tips or 'brushes' and that these two brushes rest, side by side on the periphery of the wheel. Obviously the current will flow from one brush into the metal of the wheel, and thence into the other brush, so long as the wheel remains clean. If, however, a little patch of paper or other insulating material be attached to the periphery at a certain point, every time it comes round it will break the contact between one brush and the wheel, and thus open the circuit. As soon as the patch is past the connection will be restored.

This, however, was not the exact plan really pursued. In practice a long, narrow strip of paper was kept in motion by the wheel, just as a belt is by a pulley. This strip has been previously perforated with holes of different lengths, long or short, and carefully spaced. One brush rested on top of it, and the other pressed upward against it from below, the two being removed a short distance from the wheel, and situated one directly above the other. So long as the brushes were separated by the paper strip no current would flow, but when a hole permitted one to reach through and touch the other the current would be restored. The interruption and restorations of the current always occurred at the zero stage, between positive and negative waves, so that no sparking resulted after the brushes were once adjusted. The wheel was geared to the dynamo so as to make one revolution to every 184 half-cycles. An actual speed of 1,200 words a minute was secured, and three or four times that rate issued to be entirely feasible.

It is thought that a telegraph company of the future will fulfill a somewhat different function from the present ones. The company will own its own wires and rights of way as now, but the tendency of the offices proper will be to transmit and receive letters already prepared, rather than to undertake the preparation of the letters as well. When the system comes into general use, business offices will have their own perforators, and it will become necessary for the operator to learn the telegraph alphabet as a part of his preparation as a stenographer and typewriter. The three-key perforating machine is comparatively inexpensive, but undoubtedly a machine could be devised at an early date, as an attachment to the present typewriter, for the purpose of perforating letters at the

same time that they are being written by the typewriter in the usual way. These perforated strips of paper will be carried to the telegraph office, as letters are now delivered at the post-office, and the telegraph operator will slip the strip on the machine, and off will go the message.

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IN TOO MUCH OF A HURRY.

The Gas was not Turned on but the Student had his way.

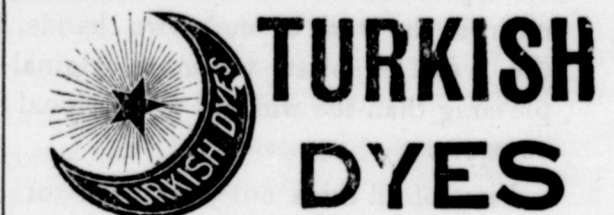
It is almost as dangerous to be too clever as to be stupid. According to Short Stories that is what a student of Yale College found out one day. He belonged to a chemistry class, before the members of which Professor Silliman was going to experiment with laughing-gas.

This student knew a little about the effects of laughing-gas, and he explained to his companions that since under its influence no one was responsible for his words, he was going to take the opportunity to tell Professor Silliman what he thought of him. The scheme might have worked well but for one unforeseen circumstance. Professor Silliman overheard the conversation.

When the professor remarked that for the purposes of illustration he should like to administer the gas to some member of the class, the plotter of mischief at once volunteered.

The leather bag was connected with his mouth and he soon appeared much excited. He began to abuse his professor, and to say many things which he would not have dared to say except under cover of the peculiar circumstances.

Professor Silliman allowed him to go on for a time, and then casually remarked that his young friend had become prematurely irresponsible, for the gas had not yet been turned on. Only those who have been to college and who know how a chemistry class can applaud, can imagine the uproar that followed.



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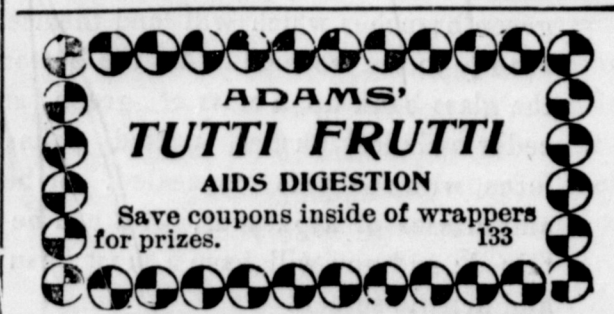
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