



El Dorado Up to Date

THE FIRST to come were explorers by sea, venturing uneasily northward along the shores in pygmy galleons on the lookout for fabled El Dorado, a vaguely imagined treasure trove of gold and spices somewhere near the Indies. Finding no riches, they returned disappointed. But the legend of El Dorado lingered, even when men driving their cattle in the dusty march from the south searched in vain for hidden wealth. At least the new country was a land of rich soil and gentle climate, and the newcomers stayed to grow rich from the herds they pastured, the fields and orchards they planted. Who could foresee that the legend would prove to be true almost as soon as the province had passed into the hands of the next comers from the East? Once more the old fable illumined California, more refulgent than before, as gold-seekers thronged westward by land and sea, risking hardship in the hope of ease. After a few years it faded. And yet people still came, tempted by the picture of rich acres, unbelievably fertile. California became that legendary land of perpetual summer, of orange groves in sight of snowy peaks, of oil wells spouting wealth, of real estate promising fortunes, of cinema stars and bathing beauties. It seemed to promise a new start, a kinder providence, a rebirth of soul and body. The aura faded again, slowly. And yet people came—in rickety automobiles piled high with all their belongings, people asking nothing but a chance to work in a country where the weather might be gentle enough to let them live.

“All the passengers . . . thronged with shining eyes upon the platform,” exulted Robert Louis Stevenson as the train that had carried

him across the continent headed down the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. "At every turn we could look further into the land of our happy future. At every turn the cocks were tossing their clear notes into the golden air and crowing for the new day and the new country. For this indeed was our destination—this was 'the good country' we have been going to so long."

It required little literary artifice to spin legends of an earthly Utopia so real that men would risk toil, hunger, and even death to seek it in the West. The diarists of the early expeditions, the newly settled immigrants who wrote back home, the enthusiastic globe-trotters who recorded their travels—all extolled the virtues of El Dorado, and after them a growing throng of professional boosters—newspaper lyricists, real-estate promoters, chamber-of-commerce press agents—swelled the chorus.

"I love you, California, you're the greatest State of all," begins the semiofficial State song; it closes with the solemn declaration:

"And I know when I die I shall breathe my last sigh
For my sunny California."

When the first white men came by foot into California in 1769, they failed to recognize the Bay of Monterey, so overenthusiastically described by the chronicler of Sebastian Vizcaino's expedition, and passed by. Since their time, similar panegyrics have misled others, for California is both more and less than its eulogists have claimed it to be. There is something more to it than sunshine and vineyards and orange orchards, bathing beaches and redwood trees and movie studios—more than the hurried visitor to a few chosen showplaces may glimpse. For California, in more than one sense, is all things to all men. The ballyhoosers have called it a sun-kissed garden spot cooled by gentle zephyrs from the sea. The description is appropriate enough for the sloping valley plains along the coast. They might also call it a sun-scorched waste of boulder-scarred mountains and desert plains, or a rain-drenched highland of timbered gorges and snow-capped granite peaks. Or they might describe the vast spreading plains of its Central Valley, or the smooth-worn brown slopes of its undulating oak-dotted foothills, or the lava crags and juniper forests of its volcanic plateaus. Its seashore has stretches of smoothly curving sandy beach and of saw-toothed, rock-strewn coast; its plains are checkered with fertile fields and pastures, and desolate with crags and alkali; its rivers brim with water between fringes of greenery and lose their flow underground in sandy washes. California's contrasts are extreme. It has fierce heat and bitter cold, some of the country's wettest regions and some of its driest, the continent's lowest point and the country's second highest. Its landscape is so variegated that when the Californian goes traveling,

he is apt to say to himself as he looks at parts of the rest of the country: "I have seen all this before."

The people are as diverse as their environment. The tide of newcomers who arrived on foot, in prairie schooners, on clipper ships when California became American territory were from every corner of the land: New England farm boys, Irish-Americans from the streets of New York, younger sons of southern slave-owning families, and mid-westerners imitating their fathers' trek from still farther east. Before this onrush of men with the "California fever," the leisure-loving pastoral civilization of the Spanish-Californians was swept into oblivion. It disappeared as fast as the way of life of the short, dark aborigines had disappeared three-quarters of a century before. The Yankee conquerors, all citizens of the same Nation, were still "of every possible variety," as traveler Bayard Taylor wrote in 1849. They differed individually from each other almost as much as they differed collectively from their predecessors.

People from nearly every nation of the earth still mingle in a polyglot conglomeration. In the dark and grotesque alleyways of Chinatowns in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and smaller cities live the Chinese, descendants of pioneers who came in the Gold Rush. The Japanese are found in Los Angeles' "Little Tokyo," and in small towns and farms in southern California. In Imperial Valley, in Los Angeles and its suburbs thousands of Mexican field workers live in rude shacks. The short brown men of the Philippine Islands gather in employment agencies and shabby roominghouses of the big cities. The vineyards around Santa Rosa and Napa, the fishing fleets of the seaports, the shops of San Francisco's North Beach give employment to the Italians. On the dairy farms of Alameda County live the Portuguese; in the lumber towns of the northern coast, the Scandinavians. In the big cities are colonies of Russians, Germans, French, and people of every other nation in Europe. Negroes live in the Central Avenue District of Los Angeles and the West End of Oakland—railroad porters and waiters, domestics and bootblacks, entertainers, and businessmen.

The people differ in more than their place of origin. Their lives have been shaped by the parts of the State in which they have settled. The sawmill workers of the bleak mountain shack towns of Weed and Westwood are a world removed from the orange growers of garden-surrounded Whittier and Pomona. It is a far cry from the tough-skinned, wizened old-timers of the Mother Lode ghost towns to the comfortable, retired midwestern farmers and storekeepers of Long Beach and San Diego, and a farther cry from the cowboys and sheepherders of Susanville and Alturas to the cameramen and movie extras of Hollywood. The vineyardgrowers of the sun-warmed Napa and Sonoma valleys, the grease-stained oil workers of the torrid Kettleman

Hills, the wandering pea-and-cotton-pickers of the San Joaquin Valley's river-bottom camps—all are strangers to each other.

The Union's second largest State in area might well have been christened by its discoverers *Las Californias*, for there are several Californias. Of all the many rivalries that make the life of the State an exciting clash of opposites, the chief has always been the rivalry between San Francisco and its neighbor cities and Los Angeles and its neighbor cities. Northern California was peopled with Americans during the Gold Rush, four decades before real estate booms brought settlers to southern California. Los Angeles remained a lazy village long after San Francisco had grown into a thriving city. San Francisco, with its more deeply rooted population, has the charm and conservatism of an older town, holding still to some of the traditions of gold rush days. In the interior towns of the north, more characteristically rural than those of the south, are the old-fashioned houses and quiet, tree-lined streets of a country village "back East"—especially in the towns of the mining country, where descendants of forty-niners live in almost clannish isolation from the State's more up-and-coming sections. In rural southern California, on the other hand, the inhabitants are more likely to be recent immigrants from the Middle West, and their towns have the neon lights, the stucco "Spanish" bungalows, and the chromium-trimmed cocktail bars of their big-city neighbors. The southlanders, for the most part, have had only a short time to get used to what is still a strange wondrous land—which accounts, perhaps, for their famed susceptibility to unorthodox religions, architectures, and political movements frowned upon by northerners. The inter-sectional rivalry has often prompted demands for the division of the State; yet despite the geographical, temperamental and commercial differences, the sentiment for divorce has never grown very strong.

No matter how fervent his local patriotism, the Californian will stop arguing the claims of rival regions when faced with the challenge of an out-of-State visitor. At once he becomes a citizen of "the greatest State of all," just as the *caballeros* of pre-American days haughtily set themselves up as *Californios*, a race apart. Whether northerner or southerner, native son or transplanted Iowan, the true Californian develops a proprietary interest that prompts him to tell the world about his State. So fond is he of bragging about it that he is always ready to "sell" California to whoever will lend an ear. Few joys in life so please him as an opportunity to declare with pride—and perhaps even on occasion with justification—that it has the tallest trees, the highest mountains, the biggest bridges, the fastest-growing population—in fact, the best, the most, or the greatest of whatever is being discussed at the moment.

The Californian may possibly be pardoned his pride in the exten-

sion, by three or four generations of human effort, of the bounties of nature. The aggressive energy of the Yankees, against which the leisure-loving ways of the easy-going *Californios* could not prevail (with some few exceptions in the south) still moves a people who have built aqueducts from faraway mountains to reclaim whole deserts, strung power lines from mighty dams across inaccessible wilderness to distant cities, dredged one of the Nation's great harbors from mud flats and flung the world's biggest bridges across a bay. The wild wastes of a century ago are dotted now with lumber mills, mine shafts and smelters, power plants and factories. The valleys are squared off in grain field and pasture, vegetable patch, vineyard and fruit orchard, watered with a labyrinth of irrigation ditches and criss-crossed with highways and railroads. Mountain streams have been dammed for electric power; plains and slopes drilled for oil. Under the earth extends a network of pipelines for oil and natural gas and above it, a network of high-tension wires for electric current. The canneries and packing houses, oil refineries, aircraft factories and movie studios ship their products to every corner of the Nation and beyond. The Californian of today feels a personal pride in the State's gargantuan public works: highways, bridges, dams, and aqueducts. And most of all, of course, he exults in the region's "happy future."

The days when the American people finally reached land's end on the Pacific are almost within the memory of living men. If Californians seem to display the brash boastfulness of adolescents, perhaps they deserve charitable forgiveness; for after all, they are citizens of a young State. And boastfulness is not the only telltale sign of its youth. The restlessness of the men who made the westward trek persists in the unquenchable wanderlust with which their descendants have taken to the automobile, thronging the highways with never-ending streams of traffic bound for seashore, deserts, forests and mountains. And the sturdy instinct for independence that inspired the rough-and-ready democracy of the mining camps and towns has lasted too; quiescent at intervals, it has always revived in time to save Californians from unprotesting resignation to hardship. They hope, perhaps, that the stubborn search for a better land that brought their grandfathers here to the shores of the Pacific has not spent itself. They hope, in fact, that they can yet make of El Dorado the promised land that has fired men's imaginations for four hundred years.