

EARLY HISTORY OF CLOUD COUNTY

BY H.E. SMITH

Timid Sims

All the white men on the river were agreed on one point, that the "Ark" would drown somebody ere its mission was ended. On this being told Wang Chu, as an additional precaution he painted another eye in the stern, sacrificed a pig to some Mongolian marine deity, burnt more joss-sticks, and terminated the ceremonies with another outpouring of gin and opium.

In the summer time a California mountain river is an attenuated, feeble stream that one may ford at every few hundred yards; and alternation of rivulets, motionless pools, bowler covered islands, and great granite bowlers, rearing themselves high out of the waters, But when swollen by the long continued rains of winter, or the melting snows of Sierras in the spring, its quiet, peaceful character vanishes; it becomes a turbulent, roaring, treacherous monster; it sets death traps in every direction. Here a whirling eddy, smooth enough on its surface and seemingly harmless, yet possessed of invisible arms, more powerful than those of the devil fish, to suck and carry men down into its lowest depths; there a maelstrom, raging and roaring over the rocks hidden beneath. During the freshet the banks quiver and tremble as the immense power whirls and foams past, and your voice is caught from your lips and hurled into indistinctness. From "49" upward, every one of these mountain gold-bearing streams has claimed a long list of victims, and many a brave fellow has been caught in their deadly embrace never to be seen afterward.

The Stanislaus was "booming" one spring afternoon at its highest water mark, when five Chinamen, encumbered with their blankets, bundles, rockers, jacks, pans, and shovels, came stringing down the Park Hill trail. They stopped and refreshed themselves for a time at the China store, and then, accompanied by Wang Chu, placed themselves and baggage in his boat to be ferried over.

A quarter of a mile below their starting place was Black Rock, a gigantic boulder, which for centuries had pitted itself against the stream. It was not more than 150 yards from the shore, and the Stanislaus at this point was not more than double that distance in width. Here the waters suddenly narrowed to this compass betwixt rocky walls, rushed rather in a succession of great waves or bursts than a regular current. This, in fact, was the upper entrance of the Big Canon, two miles in length, and by reason of the rocky walls and raging current, no mining could ever be successfully accomplished here at the most favorable season.

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Register of Deeds
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