

California Characteristics

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I write this my last sketch of California characteristics to verify by actual facts what can be established by disconnected testimony to verify some of my statements.

That is that there was a common center towards which all Californians' gravitate (with the few exceptions to all general rules) regardless of nationalities, religion or politics, Jew, Gentile, Catholic, protestant or Mormon. Merchant, Miner, teamster, rancher or gambler, under the same conditions were governed by the same impulses and acted along the same lines.

That was to aid the unfortunate, those in distress, by all the means at their command. With money if needed, also personal or any other service to alleviate the ills or misfortunes of their fellows.

This condition of affairs was the legitimate outcome of the circumstances under which this unique congregating of humanity of its character would naturally evolve. The absence of what we term refined society was the rich soil to produce such fruit.

The "Hail fellow!" "Well met!" informality of the rough (at least on the outside) free, independant set, not much dissimilar from the present western cowboy was well fitted in the very nature of issues to propagate and nourish such a spirit under all circumstances and the conditions prevailing in California at the time of which I write were doubly so.

No questions were asked of former life or cause, the simple facts of the case was sufficient to cause action. Former rivalry or enmity or ill will cut no figure. With a man on his back, enmity and ill will ceased. Such was the old style California magnet that drew to practically the whole population where individuals came in contact.

The animosities of the war spirit was the first shock it ever had. But that was more collective than individual, as the sequel will show.

The war left the south in a most deplorable state. Sherman's march to the Seas was like a tornado; left ruin and desolation in its tracks. The description of the British desolation of South Africa is applicable to parts of the south I passed through in 1866 as though they had been describing that particular section.

On both sides of the R. R. at Grand Junction in Mississippi on either side as far as could be seen not a house or barn was visible, but the standing chimneys showed a thickly settled country. The fences were all gone and the fields growing up in wild growths of various kinds. The population was all gone except a few at the R. R. Station.

All the way from Kentucky to New Orleans the signs of poverty and want was visible and frequent cases of starvation were reported. It is hard for for a woman to keep either a large or small family together under most favourable circumstances, when all are against her the situation may be imagined, but to be realized must be experienced.

It was December and cold weather coming on with no money, but little food and almost no stock in the country. From the conversations I heard on my two trips by the few passengers, from all sections the situation would be hard to exaggerate.

The Southern mails had been cut off from California so long and were so disorganized for sometime after, that many who had friends in California had lost track of them and the population of the South had so shifted it was hard to open communications between the two sections.

The first authentic account had in California of the conditions in Dixie came through O. I. Fitzgerald (who had made a trip to his old home in North Carolina after many years stay in California) and was started at San Juan in Santa Benito County.

I am not sure, but I think it was a yankee who gave it a start. From memory I will give a part of his account of it: He had just got back and was met on the street by an old acquaintance who jumped into an express wagon and

after the manner of an auctioneer, began:

"Hear ye!" "Hear ye!" "Do you know while we have plenty and to spare, our fellow citizens down south are going hungry and that women and children are suffering for lack of our abundance that we don't need. Here is a man just from there that can tell us all about it."

He was hoisted into the wagon and was telling what he had seen and making the best speech he could to the big crowd that had gathered, when one fellow pushed his way through the crowd, threw a \$5 piece in the wagon for a starter. The act was infectious. It knocked the speech out and for a while the coins literally rained into the wagon.

In the midst of the hurrah, a Newhampshire saloon keeper brought out an ornamental one-gallon keg filled with California wine to be auctioned off for the benefit of the south.

It was soon bid off at \$5.00. The buyer immediately offered it for sale again. It brought \$5.00 and was sold I think five times before the crowd dispersed. He never gave the amount, but said the keg man furnished a sack and he had a sack full.

Fitzgerald was publishing the Pacific Methodist and proposed to act as agent for all gifts raised for the South; to acknowledge all receipts through the paper. The express Company to transport all free of charge. The telegraph lines were offered free. As fast as the money came in it was telegraphed to Nashville to a committee for distribution.

All California contributed to that fund that reached \$96,000 in gold and relieved the suffering of no one knows how many.

If the letters of thanks that have come from the south to California from contributors to that fund and many who acted independent of the general fund, could be gathered, the reading of them would make many wet eyes.

Secret Societies sent relief to their brethren.

All told with private sums the whole amount would far exceed \$100,000--

gold, 40 premium.

That was old California and belong to all California. The old California spirit brushed aside Pike, Yank, Secesh and all other issues, only to give help where help was needed. While up and fighting ever ready to kill or go to any length to subdue, but when down and subdued just as willing and zealous to help and assist. For the cash came from all alike. The fact of political difference cut a small figure if any at all.

The funds were collected in varying amounts all over the rural districts and sent either direct to Nashville by private parties or to Frisco.

Had the general government acted along the same lines and in the same spirit, who can tell how much friction, ill feeling and direct, open raciality would have been averted.

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H. C. Bailey