

Historic Yankee Jims  
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Chapters IX & XII

Through the eyes and ears of youth impressions are made upon the mind which remain with us, and to no little extent they determine our attitude towards persons and incidents associated with our childhood days. These impressions may be entirely disconnected, yet colored as they are by individual sentiment, they present a picture that is truly satisfying.

To Mrs. L.D.H., (earlier known as Nell McCoy) we are grateful for the following panoramic pen-picture.

In Retrospect

Yankee Jims, named after the picturesque horse-thief, who met his end suddenly with his boots on—a faraway place among the hills, beautiful for situation—once a tremendously lively mining town, but now quiet and mellowed—Every home a garden spot of beauty, with knotted and gnarled apple trees and enormous old fig trees—The streets lined with the Tree of Heaven (Chinese trees) and very old flowering locusts.

In this setting it was the privilege of a child to be born, one who proved to be of a dreamy nature, yet with lively imagination, who sat for hours listening to tales told by the oldsters, then gazing with awe and almost reverence at the very spot where this or that happened.—The place on Georgia Hill, named by some prospectors from Georgia, who settled there very early in California's history; where Lon Colwell and his companion were washed down the mountain gorge, by the bursting of a shaft which they were endeavoring to tap. [April 18, 1882—Three men, Jim Edline, Len Cowell and Micajoh Vier, were cleaning out an old tunnel on Georgia Hill, intending to tap a shaft which was filled with water and debris. While Edline was outside, the shaft which was nearer than they had thought, suddenly gave way, and the rush of water and slime carried the two men through the tunnel and out over the dump, hurling their bodies onto the jagged bedrock below and down the steep hillside.

Vier's body was carried only a short distance and lodged among the rocks, crushed to death. Colwell was found in the canyon below, after Edline who heard the sound of rushing water and realized at once what had happened, had rushed for help. The first to reach the scene was Emma Colwell, Lon's sister, who had presence of mind enough to catch up a blanket as she ran. Perhaps Edline had told her there was not a shred of clothing left on Lon's body except one boot. The Georgia Hill experience left numerous scars on Colwell's body, but in defying death on at least two later occasions, he has proved himself a tough customer for the Grim Reaper. He still lives in Yankee Jims and enjoys many a chuckle over those "tight scrapes."

The miner, sitting through the night with his gun across his knees guarding his gold, before the clean-up, from marauding Chinese.—The wonderful dances and fandangos in the old brick hall, now in ruins.—Peering down the great gaping shafts, and playing on the dirt cars of the abandoned mines, worked out, empty and silent now, with tools lying about.

Most fascinating to the child was the broad dusty road that wound through the middle of this quaint old town. It suggested endless possibilities for adventure.

The outstanding event of the day was the arrival of the stage, a high uncomfortable affair, drawn by four horses, which dashed up to the small hotel at full gallop, coming to a stop with a great clatter and bang.—The passengers wore a queer robe called a duster; no wonder, for horses, stage and people were well covered with a fine coat of the good brown earth.—Then there were the freight wagons drawn by six or eight large horses gaily decorated with big red tassels on their heads, and an arch strung with bells on the shoulders; bell-teams, we called them.—The plodding horses, the dust and heat, and—that wonderful oasis called Duncan's Well.

After heavy storms when the surface dust was washed away, the Indian squaws would

squat near the puddles left by the rain and pan gold out of the earth which they had gathered from the streets.—The children would gather around, fascinated by the small nuggets appearing in the black sand, but half fearful of the low mutterings of the Indians.

A still, hot afternoon in the late summer;—every living thing is seeking shelter or drowsing lazily—the sunshine seems to turn a deep orange color—Announcing itself with a mighty roar, a forest fire has crept up the opposite mountainside, and by night the entire mountain is seething with flames.—The men go out to fight the fire, while the women and children watch through the night, afraid to sleep. The Indians huddle together down at their camp and howl dismally—all very weird and intensely exciting.

Certain interesting characters form the pageant of memory—Ed Terry, the poet-dreamer, who would expound to the children by the hour, in beautiful language and lengthy words, some of which were of his own invention. His quaint sayings were quoted for years after his passing.—Mr. Smith, called “Ginger Pop”, who was very proud of his fine writing and took pride in doing an old dance which was rather well executed for one so ancient.—Ike Holmes, living in a lonely cabin down on Shirttail Canyon, where the sun rose at seven and set at five on the longest summer days, a kindly, cultured gentleman who found his peace in solitude.

Dave, the jovial Dutchman, who drove a close bargain, but was generous to the youngsters.—The belles of the past, whose beauty Father Time has somewhat altered, still enjoy telling of the gay times so long ago when they wore bonnets and curls, hoopskirts, ribbons and laces, and small dainty shoes; and who held a prominent place in the social life of the period.

So the procession passes.—The chattering Chinese, trotting along in a row, as geese do.—The stolid Indians, with tar on their heads to remind them to cry for their dead.—The ancient miner with his burro laden with pick and shovel and gold pans.—And there, the pageant fades. .