

# EPICURUS IN THE WEST

By Thomas Robins

ILLUSTRATION BY E. C. PEIXOTTO

Epicureans, taught—if they  
The ends of being would secure, and win  
The crown of wisdom—to yield up their souls  
To a voluptuous unconcern.

THE EXCURSION.



It is a clear, bright day in early September. The hot sun of a long rainless summer is tempered by distant fog upon the Southern ocean. A broad modern boulevard crowded with vehicles resounds with the clear, crisp stamp of horses' hoofs on the asphalt, mingled with the wail of hurrying automobiles. A leisurely crowd throngs the footways, which are lined on both sides of the street by two-story wooden buildings, gleaming white and gay with bunting; not displeasing architecturally, but with a look of the ephemeral hardly consistent with the substantial character of roadway and sidewalk. It is a gay throng, moving to and fro in leisurely fashion, or darting in and out of shops whose windows display in brilliant profusion the costliest fabrics of all countries; and it is evidently one interested in the pomps and vanities, for a florist seems to share with a jeweller in preëminent popularity.

An electric car, crowded to the lowest step, labors on its way westward. It bears on the front a flaring sign, "To the Chutes—Vaudeville to-day." A band is playing in a restaurant whose front is adorned with clipped bays and orange-trees in tubs. The crowd stops to listen, and is amused by a couple of urchins who perform a clog dance to the music of ragtime. Everyone appears to be regardless of any skeleton at the feast; yet in easy sight, to the eastward, above the low skyline of the shops, as far as the eye can reach, and farther, following the contour of the hills from the Golden Gate to the Potrero, are four square miles of dust, ashes, and desolation, ruins of what were but a few short weeks before the homes of three hundred thousand people.

When the gaze has swept the horizon, and returns to the moving throng of holiday

makers, there seems to be something as irreconcilable between the two as between life and death. Can it be possible that these people, so intent on the diversions of a Saturday afternoon, were but yesterday the inhabitants of those homes? Can it be they who were driven thence by earthquake or fire, leaving behind every family treasure hallowed by association, every necessity which makes civilization, as well as every luxury which marks refinement? Is it they who escaped with little more than the clothes on their backs, to lie for many nights under the stars on the sand-hills? How can they carry the disaster in their memories and yet, to all seeming, put it so completely out of their minds?

Every settled community has a soul, but in our raw civilization it is hard to refine upon the difference between the spirit of this place and of that. In Europe cities have inherited from the Middle Ages the characteristics and traditions which have given them distinction. Modern ease of communication has only affected the surface, and that but little. The veriest novice can appreciate wherein Naples, Rome, and Florence are unlike. In America all cities seem identical, only differing in the degree of intensity with which the same pursuits are followed. On the lighter side of life that sameness is deadly. Our rivalries and contrasts are commercial rather than social, and it requires close observation of a community to detect its soul. Not so with San Francisco. During the past forty years of American rush, excitement, and fervent worship of the material, in which refinement has marked time, whilst luxury has hurried on a forced march, one community in this Philistine Western world has held aloof, although not uninterested, has remained indifferent, but not hostile. Even superficially, distinctions were noticeable. No stranger could remain in San Francisco for twenty-four hours without encountering habits of life and thought in which she differed not only from his own home, but

from every other American city. With a longer association, the conviction was ever strengthening that the unlikeness was real and fundamental. The cast of mind peculiar to newer communities was wanting. The visitor heard no proclamation of pride in growth and numbers; he found no joy in fierce rivalry with neighbors; he discovered no eager craving to tell him of her ambitions, of her progress, of her advantages and possessions. Those restless characteristics which have ever been deemed inseparable from Yankee activity, which we have been accustomed to regard as essential symptoms of growth, without which a city is dead, were all absent. Yet this was no city in decay. Here rather was one growing steadily, and as steadily increasing in wealth and prosperity; but her people did not seem to wish that she should be measured by exports, imports, and bank clearings. San Francisco was what she was. She must be loved for herself, not for her possessions.

There was never any hurry in her crowded streets. The people were occupied, but always seemed willing to trust something to the succeeding day. Even in their amusements the San Franciscans were unflurried, although the popularity of the race-course and the prize-ring proved that a love of excitement was never absent. About this people there was none of that disposition to take pleasure feverishly, but sadly, which is characteristic of Americans on the Atlantic Coast and in the Middle West. There was through everything a serenity which seemed to belong to some other country.

The study of local characteristics and the endeavor to assign causes for those habits and peculiarities which make one place different from another are always interesting; and in the case of San Francisco all the more so because of her unlikeness not only to certain other cities but to every other city. Nor was this investigation pursued without difficulty; for among the fascinations of this enticing spot were the inconsistencies of its people. Every now and again, amid the strangeness, aggressive New-World characteristics cropped out to upset preconceived ideas. It was a place in which it was safer to gain impressions than to form conclusions.

San Francisco had no youth. In 1850—although but one year old—she was already

a world centre. In economic importance this straggling settlement of canvas and shanties ranked for the time among the most important cities of the Old World. A few grains of gold in Captain Sutter's tail-race heralded a financial revolution hardly second to that which followed the discovery of America. The new El Dorado came in the nick of time to deliver Europe from a scarcity of the precious metals, already severe, and threatening disaster to industrial progress. The gold of California changed the United States from a poor to a rich country, was an indispensable aid in the railroad expansion of the next decade, and during that immediately following enabled the nation to endure the strain of a four years' civil war. No wonder that San Francisco stepped immediately into the centre of the stage. Within a few months the remote and lonely cove between Telegraph Hill and Rincon was crowded with ships from every country, bringing supplies to the miners and recruiting their numbers from cabin and fore-castle. Every great banking-house in the world was represented there. Commerce, quickening the pulses of London, of Paris, and of Amsterdam, had its beginning in a few words passed across an unplanned board amid the freedom, roughness, and lawlessness of a frontier camp. The flower of America's vigorous youth came to this unkempt and straggling phantom of a city. It was a different migration from that which, early in the century, crossed the Alleghanies and peopled the Middle West. The California adventurers were not home-seekers. Few of them had any idea of settling permanently on the shores of the Pacific. They had been reared in comfort, often in affluence. Many had money or represented people of substance in the East, and were attracted by the opportunity of quickly turning their capital over and over, and then returning whence they came. The Creole from the Mississippi Valley was there, bringing with him the habits of pre-Revolutionary France. There, too, was the son of the cotton planter, trained to command, brought up amid careless profusion, but finally forced from home by that blight which had already begun to settle upon the South of slavery. This mixed influx of adventurers from the East met in San Francisco an even more motley crew of adventurers from the great world outside. The Chinaman and

the Kanaka, there already, suggested a mysterious Oriental life. The habits and traditions of old California were congenial to Mexicans and South Americans, who flocked thither upon the first rumors of gold. They found the cock-fight and the horse race already established, along with other diversions welcome to the indolent and pleasure-loving of sunny climes. The gambler from New Orleans met the gambler from Mazatlan. The Sydney convict and the Tammany "Shoulder-hitter" came quickly from the nearest two Anglo-Saxon ports; and quickly, too, came the adventurers from everywhere. This mixed immigration, bringing with it the varied customs and habits of former homes, set at once a far higher standard of material comfort than had ever been known before in a frontier settlement. In the earliest days, in a city of shanties, French restaurants were already established, and with them vice assumed the more attractive mien of the Continent, and lost the brutality usual in English-speaking communities. Nor was it degraded by mystery. San Francisco first and last was unmoral rather than immoral. She loved the light; she hated hypocrisy and prurience.

The new-comers from the East soon discarded that self-restraint and feeling of obligation to convention and to the community which characterize settled and stable societies. Mothers and sisters were far away. The gold-seekers found themselves in close daily communication with that side of the cosmopolitan underworld which, in 1850, they could hardly have known in Puritan Boston, in provincial New York, or in semi-rural Philadelphia, then only just emerging from the eighteenth century. Probably the New Orleans of slave days displayed to its youth more of Old-World freedom and Old-World vice; but, to the average immigrant, San Francisco, with its adventurers, male and female—themselves experiencing a new-found sense of freedom from the police—was pre-eminently a place to shatter tradition. The time given to endurance of vice and to pity for the vicious was short, and the youthful stranger soon threw himself into the life with the ardor of a novice and a convert.

Richard Henry Dana points this out in the addendum to his "Two Years Before the Mast," written in 1859, after his second visit to California. "I found," he says,

"individuals, as well as public bodies, affected in a marked degree by a change of oceans and by California life. One Sunday afternoon I was surprised at receiving a card of a man whom I had known, some fifteen years ago, as a strict and formal deacon of a Congregational society in New England. He was a deacon still in San Francisco, a leader in all pious works, devoted to his denomination and to total abstinence—the same internally, but externally—what a change! Gone was the downcast eye, the bated breath, the solemn, non-natural voice, the watchful gait, stepping as if he felt responsible for the balance of the moral universe!"

This was a mild case. A more radical example of readjustment to California habits is shown in the diary of a young Southerner, carefully bred amid religious surroundings in Savannah. He had just arrived in San Francisco, and as a *cicerone* and mentor there was at hand one who was destined in after-years to show the world to many another inexperienced youth. His journal read somewhat as follows:

"May 16th I sauntered about the plaza with Sam W—. We entered a brightly lighted building which turned out to be a gambling house. I was surprised and shocked to see Sam put down his bag of gold dust and play cards for money."

"June 8th, lost \$85 at Faro."

The Anglo-Saxon prevailed commercially, but socially the triumph of the Latin was complete.

During the years between the discovery of gold and the outbreak of the Civil War the city grew steadily in population and developed in solidity and the outward manifestations of wealth. The shanties were rapidly disappearing, and were being replaced by buildings substantial in construction and dignified—even stately—in appearance. As time went on many of the Argonauts who had come to make a quick turn and go back to the East concluded to stay for a while longer. Either the turn was not so quick as they had anticipated, or the fascination of quick turns—with money-lending at twelve per cent. a month—grew upon them. They sent for their families, and started houses on Rincon Hill or overlooking North Beach. The leading men of those days were, many of them, destined to play an important part in the great drama of

the succeeding decade. There was Captain Halleck, lawyer and valued adviser to men of affairs. He was intimate then with Major Sherman, the banker and commander of the State militia. Probably neither of them cared to cultivate an intimacy with Captain Grant, and the knowledge gained by Halleck of Grant in his unfortunate California days seems to have given to his narrow and formal mind a twist which was never quite straightened out.

Captain Farragut, of Mare Island, must have often met on Long Wharf young Stephen J. Field, the promising lawyer of Marysville. And there, too, Winfield Scott Hancock and his friend, Lewis Armistead, might have been seen together, little dreaming that within a few years they were to meet in almost hand-to-hand conflict at Gettysburg, where the Virginian was destined to die of wounds inflicted by men under the Pennsylvanian's command. John W. Geary, future major-general and Governor of Pennsylvania, was First Alcalde of San Francisco in the early fifties. Many of the titles to land in the older portions of the city originated with him. There, too, was Edward D. Baker, future senator, who fell at Balls Bluff in command of a regiment of returned California adventurers. John C. Frémont was a well-known figure in the San Francisco of those days. I can mention only the most prominent; but there were many others.

With the outbreak of the great war ended the first period of San Francisco's career. Even before 1861 many of the well-born and well-connected pioneers had been drawn back to the East and South. Some had made fortunes, and had returned to parts of the world less remote to spend them. Many had realized that as the production of placer gold diminished, San Francisco was bound to lose its importance as a centre of world commerce, and that, for the future, New York would offer greater opportunities for the increase of that "pile" which originated in the foot-hills of the Sierras. But the attack on Sumter drew away others who were destined never to return; and interest in California was turned to Virginia and the Mississippi Valley. All of that spirit of adventure, that love of the open sky which had driven the youth of '49 to the Pacific Slope, was directed to the gigantic struggle in which the

slave power was fighting for life. The boy of '61 went to war along with his elder brother, who brought to the life of camp and battle the same spirit ripened by the experience of California. And San Francisco lapsed into the humdrum of an isolated provincial life. Even the opening of the Central Pacific Railroad did little to reawaken the energy of her world-centre days. She was in a back-water, out of the current of events; and, until our own times she remained remote, isolated, and aloof, living in her own traditions and largely uninfluenced by outside thought and prejudices; but like a faded belle, unaware of the passing of her bloom, she still retained many of the airs and graces of the days when she was much sought and famous. She ever endured the departure of her captains and kings with smiling equanimity. She had moved in the best society, and she exacted respect. She did not permit her children to lose the habit of speaking of "New York and San Francisco."

During those years of quiet—sometimes of torpor—the soul of San Francisco was developing. The slowly increasing population was largely recruited from Europe and other communities in California. By 1906 at least one-third of the population was foreign born; probably more than one-third spoke at home a language other than English. The immigration from the Continent of Europe—at first entirely German and French—was later heavily Latin. The peasant from the Rhine Valley pruned vines beside the mountaineer from Piedmont; the fisherman from the Bay of Naples spread between the Golden Gate and the Farallones the dull-red sails from his old home, stiffened by a wind now chill out of the Bering Sea, now warmed into fog by the Japan current. The American sought diversion. San Francisco was the only city upon the whole coast. Seattle and Tacoma were yet unborn; Portland and Los Angeles were little more than villages. The miner of the interior who had made his pile in Grass Valley or "on the Comstock" came to San Francisco to spend it. The planter from "the Islands" who had prospered, and desired city life and amusements for himself and good schools for his children came also. The same motive brought the successful farmer from the valley, or the successful store-keeper from the



decaying towns of the Sierras. To these must be added a sprinkling of business men from the Middle West, tired of hard winters, scorching summers, and doing things "on the jump"—the advance guard of that army of the tired which has since peopled the San Gabriel Valley, and built for itself a city consecrated to sun worship. These immigrants sought leisure, and not gain. They came to spend a competence, not to acquire one; and so they were quite ready to fall into the ways of the pleasure-loving community.

As the years went by the pioneers passed away, and sons and daughters entered into an inheritance largely increased by the unearned increment. They too sought pleasure and cultivated ease. They had been educated in Europe with the leisure class of the Old World, and had largely acquired their habits. There was almost chronically a superabundance of money and a scarcity of labor in San Francisco. Wages were higher than in Eastern cities. The wage-earner could live generously by the labor of four days in the week. On the remaining days he, too, was added to the army of seekers after amusement. And so it came to pass that by evolution, and all unconsciously, an entire community resolved itself into a huge garden consecrated to the cult of the Greek philosopher who had preached, as a gospel, the pursuit of placid contentment—

A land in which it seemed always afternoon.

San Francisco lived in the open; the streets were crowded day and night. It was a slow-moving throng, forming small groups in front of outdoor shops or lingering in the broad entries of saloons. Much business was transacted in the streets and finally signed, sealed, and delivered at the neighboring bars unrestrained by any Phariseism about drinking in business hours. Each district had its own peculiar outdoor population. Merchants were in one quarter; brokers in another. The shoppers were on Kearney and Post Streets; on Market Street the small shops and cheaper shows combined to attract the sporting element. The theatres were, for the most part, situated in a triangle bounded on two sides by Geary and Market Streets, and extending indefinitely southwestward as those streets diverged. At night this district was crowded with the frequenters of the tender-

loin, the racing and prize-fighting "push." The cold summer winds did not permit of sitting in the open air in front of cafés, as in European cities, but otherwise the life was that of the Boulevard and Corso.

Americans usually sustain existence by a hastily bolted luncheon; but in San Francisco the midday meal was a function. In half a dozen French restaurants as many *maitres d'hotel* displayed voluble interest in the individual and his peculiarities. Everywhere, from the great court of the Palace Hotel to the smallest bakery, it was recognized that business was in abeyance, and that the event of the day was to be pursued in leisurely happiness. Many offices were closed. The districts of trade were deserted, and lawyers, merchants, and bankers adjourned to the club, where they met the physician, who had cut his round of visits short as the clock struck twelve. The best markets in the world combined with the best of fellowship to make of these daily reunions a veritable feast. Who can forget them? How refreshing the repose! How stimulating the talk! How playful the merriment! How we lingered over it, and with what reluctance came the parting at last!

Growing out of the open-air life of the town there was common to all a keen love of the country and the outing. On every Saturday, Sunday, and holiday the town largely depopulated itself and wandered afield. Many were attracted across the Golden Gate to Tamalpais, its wooded slopes and the meadows of its well-watered valleys, or to Shellmound and the hills of Alameda, or down the Peninsula to San Mateo, Palo Alto, and San José. In the summer thousands of families left the city for camps in the Sierras, the lake country, or along the shores of the Bay of Monterey. In the autumn and winter the woods, bays, and marshes resounded with the crack of the gun. The outing was a real outing, conducted simply and cheaply without paraphernalia. The camps were real camps, not villas disguised with sham logs and birch-bark veneer. Nor should I forget that yearly festival celebrated in the late summer by the Bohemian Club in the tall redwoods. An unconscious pagan tribute to Pan, to Bacchus, to Apollo and the Muses, it concluded with a ceremony which would have been dear to the heart of old Epicurus, the formal Burial of Care, an allegorical expression of his doctrine

that the true test of pleasure is the removal and absorption of all that gives pain.

San Francisco loved the drama and was a prolific mother of dramatic artists. Ever since, in the earliest days, she discovered Edwin Booth she had been stage-struck. It would require a volume to set out adequately her record as a producer of actors, musicians, and painters. Nor can the world ever know how great is the debt of a country not on the whole artistic to this remote corner of her territory whose achievements have been so far out of proportion to its population and opportunities. How many of those whom Modjeska has charmed by her graceful and finished art know that but for San Francisco she would have been lost to the American stage? How many of the hundreds of thousands whose deepest emotions have been stirred during the past two years by David Warfield know that to the "Music Master" the city by the Golden Gate is home? And she has generally shown good taste and discrimination in the appreciation of the stranger within her gates. Many a successful performer will bear witness to the value of the inspiration which he has received at her friendly hands. She was always impatient of quacks in art, however she might show partiality to them in other walks of life. Hysteria was never substituted for appreciation. She bowed to reputation, but was not enslaved by it.

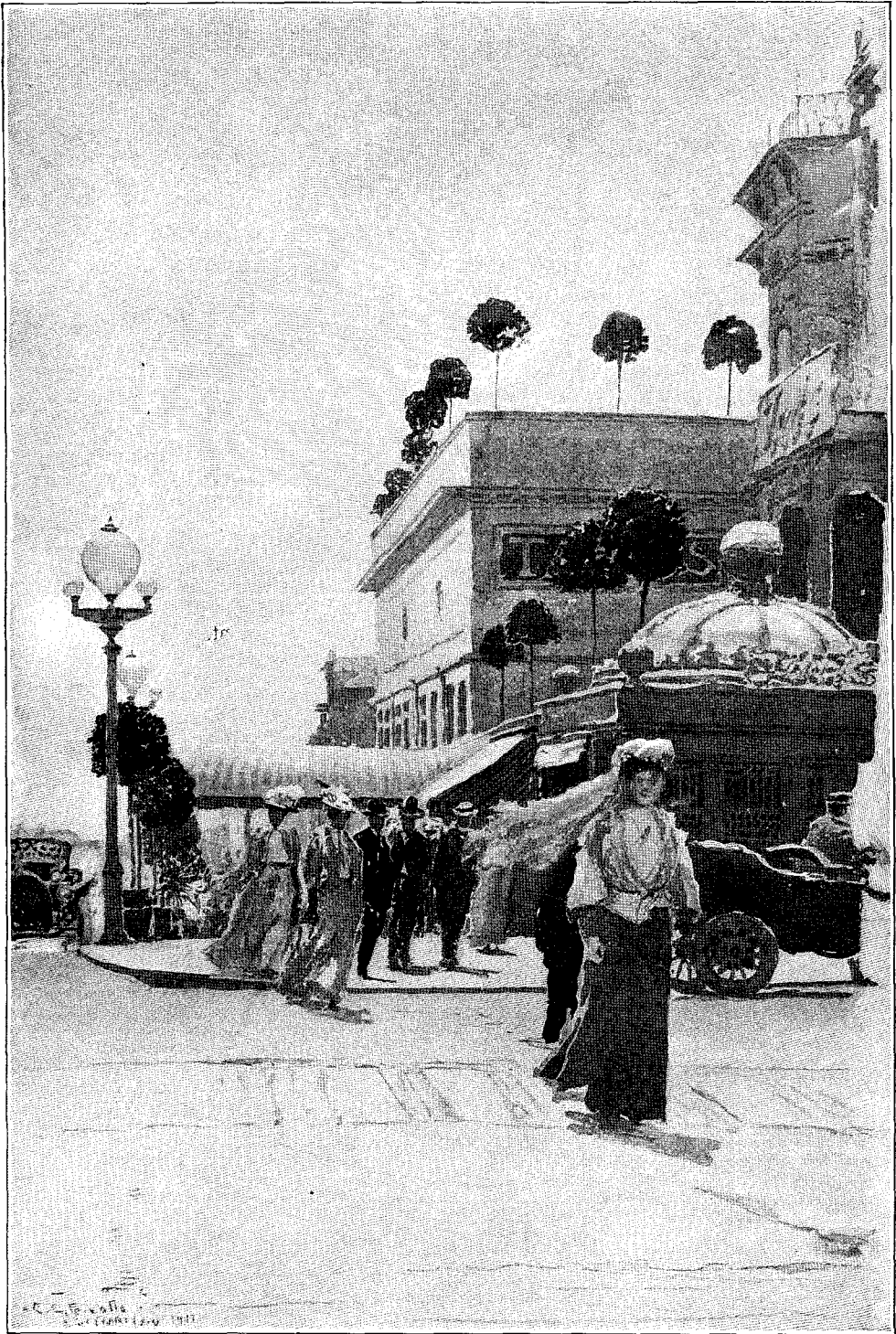
And in her fifty-six years what an inspiration was her life and atmosphere to literary production! She first recognized Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Henry George. She produced Frank Norris, David Belasco, Jack London, and Joaquin Miller. She enthralled Robert Louis Stevenson.

But the picture has a reverse side. The individual was supreme. The public as the holder of an opinion, or the sufferer from a wrong, was hardly recognized. The San Franciscan was largely lacking in public spirit. He viewed each new question as it arose not as it would affect the mass and contribute to the general good, but as it might affect his own personal welfare, convenience, or pocket. The idea of the commonwealth was as inadequately appreciated in the city by the bay as it was effectually utilized by her younger sister in the San Gabriel Valley. There was much local pride in San Francisco, but there was no civic pride. This intense individualism

made it difficult to organize and combine for any purpose, and especially when the citizen was asked to give up his ease or any of his smaller personal rights for the betterment of public administration. The forces of evil were not closely organized as compared with Tammany Hall; but the forces that should have made for good were never organized at all. Individualism seemed to induce a state of mind destructive to the power of co-operation. It made the people impatient of distinction. They liked to feel that no one man was rising above his neighbor. As soon as a head emerged from the common level of the crowd it became a target for missiles; so men naturally tall cultivated a stoop. San Francisco was no place for the very rich; and most of those who made large fortunes there showed their appreciation of the fact by moving away. Wealth brought no distinction, nor did display excite wonder and the desire to emulate. Ordinary people cared little for the horse-power of a man's automobile or the number of his servants. Neither curiosity nor adulation waited upon ostentation. It rather produced disdain. Nor were there any paupers in San Francisco. Even after an unparalleled disaster, the Relief Committee found it difficult to spend their fund. She was the paradise of the average man seeking average comfort, average amusement, average happiness. On the other hand, she loved her eccentrics—those who were conspicuous for peculiar or archaic costumes or cheap ostentations and vanities. She pampered them because they defied the conventional; and she spoiled them all the more if that defiance was in the way of inverted snobbery, consisting in the accentuation of some quality supposed to be peculiar to the plain American—the typical Uncle Sam. This grew out of her hatred of distinction. Naturally Mrs. Grundy could not live in such a society; neither could the snob who asserts superiority, nor the snob who cheerfully concedes inferiority. When the sins of San Francisco are told let this also be told as a memorial of her.

It was not easy, it must be confessed, to appeal to San Francisco on the moral side. She neither loved righteousness nor hated iniquity. She was good-humoredly tolerant of both. But even the lack of public opinion and public conscience, the aversion to co-operation, had their compensations. Side





*Drawn by E. C. Peixotto.*

A corner of Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, at the present time.

by side with them, and growing out of them, was an intense and ardent love of liberty. Preëminent was San Francisco above other American cities in her resistance to all attempts, on the part of the forces of intolerance, to restrain the freedom of the individual. Political liberty, an article of faith elsewhere, might often be held as only a pious opinion by her people when fast bound by some boss; but personal liberty—that which permits every man to order his life as he will without fear of general reprobation or even of mild disapproval—was her very heart's blood. Tyranny indorsed by custom or tradition had no place with her; nor was there patience with attempts to play Providence to others in minor matters of conduct. At an early period of her history she realized that there are ways of moving a neighbor's landmark which do not involve physical trespass, and by unwritten law she forbade such intrusions.

Is it not this confidence in mutual toleration which creates a light-hearted community? Who can tell how much of human tissue is wasted in the struggle to obtain, in the trifles of life, the approbation—or to avoid the disapprobation—of friends, neighbors, and the world at large? And in matters of moment, how does the love of righteousness and the hatred of iniquity eat out the heart! The lack of competition in the smaller externals makes for a peaceful and simple life; and fearlessness of

friend as well as of foe, cultivated early, easily becomes a habit. When her great tragedy came, it found San Francisco unafraid, and its results left her undaunted. But her courage was not that of the Puritan—a resignation in the present and hope for the future; a calm, deliberate appraisal of the calamity, and a high stern resolve to live it down through coming years. Neither was it that of the savage—a stubborn, unmoved, and dumb insensibility. Something was it rather between the two, and partaking of neither. To appreciate it, we must turn to other lands, to an older civilization, where life was a kingdom wholly of this world, in which courage had a different inspiration as well as a different manifestation.

The philosopher at whose feet these people had been unconsciously sitting lived two thousand years ago in another sunlit land of olive, vine, and laurel, of mountains and bluesea. Would not the genial Athenian have been proud of this community, this new garden of philosophy by the Golden Gate of the Western world? Without doubt, could he have viewed with us the light-hearted loiterers on Van Ness Avenue, so disdainful of calamity, he would have known them for his own—a people realizing that the true test of pleasure is the removal and absorption of all that gives pain. Earthquake and fire, flood and drought, sunshine and rain—all in the day's work.

## THE OLD SOUL

By Edith M. Thomas

*"Not in Entire Forgetfulness."*

THE Old Soul came from far,  
Beyond the unlit bound;  
There had gone out a star,  
And a great world was drowned,  
Since birth, and death, and birth,  
Were hers, upon the earth.

For she had robed anew  
Time and time out of mind;  
And, as the sphere of dew