Miner's Luck

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THE FUNCTION OF LUCK in locating mines today seems to have come down in the world from its former position of importance. Nowadays anyone starting a mining enterprise consults not Lady Luck, but his banker, geology experts, locally experienced miners, and, for uranium, Geiger counters. Chance seems entirely eliminated from modern mining, though one still hears occasionally, even in 1956, of prospectors wandering over the desert (albeit in jeeps), of divining or gold-witching rods, perhaps even of men with a "feeling" or "smell" for rich ore.

If this annexation of mining by the realms of right reason be no mere mirage, the development is historically a rational one. The Old West with an average of less than two persons per square mile, with large areas of mountain and desert left practically unexplored, as in California of 1850, left a good deal more scope for fortuitous finds than the California of 1955, with almost every single canyon and hillside scoured once and again by vanished prospectors. Both geology and the banker tell us, "Look here and not there," and are usually right. Is Lady Luck then out? *Quien sabe?*

For those of us who are mentally adventurous, it is none the less a relief to transport ourselves in imagination back to those Western days when men were men, and the least wise, wealthy, and ambitious of us had a practically equal chance for fortune with that of the most blessed. Yet at the outset of our backward view, it is sobering to find that even in Gold Rush days, the virtuous were often believed to have an edge over their merely lucky brethren. Indeed, an important question was asked very early in California mining days: Which are more useful for success in gold-finding—the established virtues of education, hard work, persistence, and frugality; or sheer luck and good fortune? Can the same moral standards be applied to mining as to other work? Perhaps they do not apply to effective search for gold and silver. It was a serious problem in practical ethics, and did not find a ready answer.

Expressing an in-between position, veering toward belief in Lady Luck, but not averse to hard work, was an 1849 editorial paragraph in the Sacramento *Placer Times:*

> The mines of California have baffled all science and rendered the application of philosophy entirely nugatory. Bone and sinew philosophy, with a sprinkling of good luck, alone can render success certain. We have met with many geologists and practical scientific men in the mines, and have invariably seen them beaten by unskilled men, soldiers and sailors, and the like. The simple secret is that gold

has been thrown promiscuously about by volcanic power, and distributed by mountain torrents along the margin of streams and in river beds, and it is the hard-working and lucky man who may restore it.[1]

The conventionally virtuous, those on the side of the angels, distrusted luck, and placed their chief reliance upon persistence, hard work, economy, and the cooperative spirit. The most successful miners, they would have us believe, were economical and persevering men, though often in the possession of the better kind of claims. They often united into working companies, occupying the same cabin, sharing the same fare. It was these companies of industrious and intelligent men which built great flumes, sturdy dams, and pumps for large-scale placer operations, and to them the state is chiefly indebted for its wealth.

On the other hand, we are told deprecatingly, there was the class of miners who believed entirely in luck. These usually worked individually or in small groups, and frequently changed their associates and place of residence.

> They wander over the whole extent of the State and waste in riotous living the gold which they earn by hard labor. As a class they are the terror of the storekeeper, to whom they are almost constantly in debt. Sometimes chance favors them, and then they are constant visitors to the gambling table till they are rid of their troublesome metal. They who go to the mines to labor seriously, to create a future, should avoid these gypsies of the mountains as they would avoid fire.[2]

One subdivision only of this individualistic and erratic group is conceded by the hard-working and virtuous miner to be respectable or to have any serious value, and that is the prospector. Yet even here, approval is hesitant, and hedged with reservations.

To begin, we may note as a fact that pluck and industry seem to be of most value to those who go to work in the mines *subsequent* to their general discovery by some *lucky* man. In the early placer mining days particularly stick-to-itiveness often appears to have been richly rewarded.[3] During the summer of 1850, for instance, there came to the city of Stockton an eminently successful placer miner from the southern mines on the banks of the Stanislaus, near Sonora. This man, once a ruined merchant in the courts of bankruptcy, had since 1848 accumulated treasure to the amount of $50,000. His gold varied in size from a grain to a twelve-pound lump; several pieces weighed from one to eight pounds; but the bulk of the hoard was in the usual run of placer gold, won solely by industry and persistence. He was no darling of fortune, but was known as the hardest worker in the camp, "unelated by the sudden

[1] Sacramento *Placer Times,* July 20, 1849.

[2] San Francisco *California Chronicle,* Oct. 10, 1854; *Echo du Pacifique.*

[3] See Wayland D. Hand, "California Miners' Folklore—Above Ground," *California Folklore Quarterly,* I (1942), 37–39; also his "Folklore from Utah's Silver Mining Camps," *Journal of American Folklore,* LIV (1941), 135.

acquisition of gold or depressed by long continuance of none. The rising sun beheld him with bowl and shovel, engaged in his toil. No useless complaining escaped him, nor did he waste his time in seeking fresh diggings, just because rumor made them richer than the place he was working."[4] Such virtue would appear to deserve, and in this instance did obtain, its reward.

To this class of virtuous miners also belongs the man who, characterized by a kind of dogged, indomitable persistence, battles through a maze of seemingly interminable obstacles, and then just as he has arrived at the end of his resources, financial, physical, and spiritual, has his reward in a bonanza. Dick Swickheimer, who found a rich mine on Dolores Mountain, in the Durango area of Colorado, is an example. Somehow or other he became convinced that if he would dig a shaft in a certain spot on this mountain he should make a good strike. He used up his original funds in the venture, borrowed some more, exhausted this, tapped one of his friends and backers after the other, but no strike. No more money was forthcoming seemingly from any source, when to everyone's astonishment a lottery ticket Dick had bought in an absent-minded moment paid him $40,000. Instead of retiring, he proceeded to use it to continue sinking his shaft. Finally, at long last, his unprecedented pluck was rewarded by the vein that became the famous Enterprise mine and made him a millionaire.[5]

To the California Rand district in the 1890's came Silas Drouillard, grubstaked by the sheriff and his deputies in Bakersfield. He wandered to and fro in the desert until his food and water were entirely gone. Mazed in that forbidding country, he dropped in exhaustion beside a rock, where there was a small patch of shade against the sun's rays. As a parting blow in the face of fate he struck the rock with his hammer, breaking off a small chunk. This piece, even in the boom days of early Randsburg, held the place of honor in a saloon there, the treasure embedded in it making newcomers stare.[6]

Another rags-to-riches story involving a determined stand against adversity is that of Alvinza Hayward. He was a Vermonter, who, with a man named Chamberlaine, was working a gold lead that was full of indications but yielded nothing to speak of. Chamberlaine at last gave up and went away, assigning Hayward all his interest. Hayward kept on digging and digging, with no results except a deeper shaft, while his resources melted away, his laborers deserting him, as did practically every friend he had in the world, except his old partner, Chamberlaine.

"My God!" he one day said to this man, who was now a rancher; "I'm on the verge of a great strike. I know it! Can't you give me a little money?"

Chamberlaine had been practically broke himself several times, and he

[4] Sacramento *Transcript*, Aug. 26, 1850; Stockton *Times*.
[5] Los Angeles *Express*, Dec. 26, 1896; Durango (Colo.) *Democrat*.
[6] Wallace M. Morgan, *History of Kern County, California* (Los Angeles, 1914), pp. 118–119.

shook his head sadly. But he had $3,000—his all—buried under a haystack, and he went and dug it up. With this money Hayward started on his shaft once more. Finally even this fund was all spent, and his men were reduced to a bag of beans for nourishment. Then it was that the precious ore suddenly blazed up—the Amador mine, for so it came to be called, the richest in the area. When the mine was paying $40,000 a month, Hayward made over to his friend a one-third interest. Chamberlaine sold out for $1,500,000, Hayward buying back the entire enterprise. Finally Hayward himself retired, and a stock company took over operations. This company in 1871 made a net profit of $450,000. Hayward's fortune later dwindled from $5,000,000 to $3,000,000, then went back again to $5,000,000.[7]

Sometimes, to be sure, the tale of virtuous effort fails to have its happy ending, as when the miner stops, unwittingly, just short of his goal. In 1850 a man named Cassidy held a claim in a ravine a mile and a half from the North Fork of the Yuba. He worked here for a considerable period, but with little positive results. Having located another claim, he transferred his old one to a Dr. Thom. The doctor and four other men went to work on the claim about three o'clock in the afternoon, and by sundown had washed out sixty-four ounces of gold! Cassidy had come within two feet of the point where the treasure lay.[8]

Incidents of this sort are usually cited as examples of bad luck. There are some instances of this "if I only had"-luck connected with neglect to purchase shares in mines that later became famous. A man in Durango, Colorado, complained that he had been offered half of the Enterprise mine at Rico for $200, but had been diverted from it by a telegram announcing the serious illness of his son. Through this neglect he lost at least $1,000,000. On the other hand, a stock clerk in Aspen gave a prospector $75 worth of lumber for one fourth of the Aspen mine, which later made him a millionaire. There is also the unimpressive-looking prospector who came into Durango one day offering a quarter of his claim for a gun, worth about seven or eight dollars at the time. But he failed to get his rifle. Several years later such a quarter share in this mine could not have been bought for all the guns in San Juan County.[9]

By what a narrow margin virtuous effort sometimes wins out may be seen in the story George Hearst used to tell of how he became the rich and powerful figure of later years.

I was 49 years old [he said], when the row made over the discovery of the Comstock silver mines in Nevada made the whole coast wild. I had been disappointed in the work I had been at, and found myself pretty nearly broke. I had enough to buy a horse and outfit, and started over the mountains with a party of the boys.

[7] Winnemucca (Unionville) *Silver State,* Feb. 3, 1872; San Francisco Correspondent, Chicago *Tribune.*

[8] Sacramento *Transcript,* Oct. 15, 1850.

[9] Los Angeles *Express,* Dec. 26, 1896; Durango (Colo.) *Democrat.*

That broke me, and I wasn't feeling happy, because I'd worked and struggled and speculated for a good many years, and it struck me as rather rough that a man of my age should have to start out, as I did then, like a young fellow. There were about ten or twelve of us in the party, and as I was blue they let me rather alone, and my mustang being worn down, I stopped on the trail, put my arm through the bridle, and picked out a rock to sit on.

The rest of the boys rode on, but I sat there. There wasn't any reason why I should particularly, only I did. The whip I had was a willow switch I'd pulled from a tree as I rode along. As I sat there I switched the dust of the trail, and thought, "Shall I go with them, or shall I go back?" I switched and switched, and thought and thought. I saw behind me all the hard work I'd done, all the chances I'd taken and lost on; I felt old and used up and no good. My sense told me to turn back and make my fight where I was known. There was safety in that anyhow. But I'd been camping night after night with the boys ahead of me, and it made me lonesome to think of parting company with them. So after switching and switching the dust on the trail, and feeling weak and human because I yielded, I mounted my horse again and rode after the party. I got to the Comstock, and in six months I'd made a half million dollars. That was the foundation of what I've done since. Now, why shouldn't I have turned back when I hesitated? I would have been sensible, conservative to do that, but I didn't, and because I didn't I won. If you're ever inclined to think there's no such thing as luck, just think of me.[10]

Determination and basic pluck may have played an equal part with true luck in the winning of George Hearst's eventual fortune, but quite certainly there exists in fact that operation of mere chance, which followed by unpredictable success is called good luck. The remainder of this paper will relate what appear to be instances of such luck, or its reverse, in mining operations, especially in the finding of new ore deposits. Belief in the dominance of this factor of luck was widespread among miners, and therefore the majority of our sources cite cases of luck rather than pluck. The spectacular quality and news value of such finds also aided their recording and preservation.

First, we shall consider some examples of sheer accident.[11] The lighting of a match brought the discovery of a gold mine near Sonora. A certain Mr. Bours, in 1851, had dismounted from his mule to light a cigar. He kicked from the earth a piece of quartz with which to ignite his match, when to his surprise he found it studded with gold. In this casual manner, Mr. Bours stumbled upon one of the richest mines then in California. The vein was ten inches thick, and parts of it nearly half gold.[12]

In the hills near Socorro, New Mexico, a prospector named John Quincy Adams in 1883 was tramping over the desolate hills, when he suddenly discovered that his haversack was on fire. This he afterward said must have been caused by accidental focusing of the sun's rays through a prospector's glass

[10] San Francisco *Mining and Scientific Press,* Oct. 11, 1890, p. 232; Virginia City *Chronicle.*

[11] Hand, *CFQ,* I (1942), 27–30; Hyman Palais: "Black Hills Miners' Folklore," *California Folklore Quarterly,* IV (1945), 260–261; F. Wrubel: *Sammlung Bergmännischer Sagen* (Freiberg, 1882), Pt. I, Nos. 2, 3b, 5, 7, 8, 13.

[12] Sacramento *Transcript,* Jan. 25, 1851; Stockton *Times.*

which he carried loosely over his shoulder. The haversack contained about six pounds of blasting powder, and therefore as soon as the man discovered the fire he dropped the bundle and dashed away as fast as his legs would carry him. The haversack rolled into a crevice between two rocks, and soon there was a tremendous explosion. Mournfully, the prospector came back to gather such of his effects as might still be in existence, when something in the appearance of the shattered rock struck his eye. He examined it closely—it was horn silver. The now jubilant miner located his claim at once, which he named appropriately, the "Close Shave," and in less than a week he had disposed of a one-third interest for $13,000. His "close shave" soon became a byword in the mining camps round about.[13]

Romance likewise tinges the discovery of the Amulet mine, on Lynx Creek, near Prescott, Arizona. In July, 1886, F. E. Doggett, with pick and shovel on his shoulder, was climbing the Lynx Creek mountains on his way to examine a mine. Becoming tired, he sat down to rest under the friendly boughs of a juniper. When he got up to resume his climb, he grasped his pick, and in the attempt to swing it onto his shoulder it slipped from his hands. It fell down behind him, and in doing so its sharp point struck him painfully in the leg. Vehemently he seized the offending pick and struck it deep into the ground, saying it could remain there, and limped away. He had gone but a short distance when his anger cooled, and returning, he pulled the pick from the ground. To his astonishment, it brought with it some bright and shining metal. In his fury he had unknowingly struck the pick into a blind ledge. He located the site as the Amulet mine, from which by 1891, $70,000 worth of ore had been extracted.[14]

As useful a method for good luck as any, perhaps, is for the mine finder to lose his way.[15] For example, a prospector who was threading the trackless wastes of eastern Nevada in 1870 got out of touch with his landmarks, and wandered lost in those savage deserts for a number of days. His supply of water ran out, and his end seemed near. Half delirious, he happened upon a small stream trickling from a ledge. He drank, and lay for hours more dead than alive. When he had sufficiently recovered to notice details of the environment, his eye was caught by the glitter of a small nugget in the bed of the stream beneath the ledge. He glanced about, then with a shout made for its parent ledge a short distance away. Yes, the ledge itself was speckled with gold! He had made a bonanza strike. The prospector finally made his way to the White Pine district and there organized a party to revisit and open up the lucky strike. Its location, though left indefinite, was set as some 215 miles from Treasure City, either in a northeasterly or southeasterly direction. The

[13] Los Angeles *Herald,* Oct. 25, 1883; Las Vegas (N. Mex.) *Gazette.*
[14] Long Beach (Calif.) *Breaker,* Mar. 21, 1891; Prescott *Miner.*
[15] Wrubel, Pt. I, No. 4.

gold quartz vein had been traced, the finder said, for fifteen miles, with loose gold abundant both in the ledge and in the nearby placer sand.[16]

Then, too, one can forget prospecting, and go out hunting. Such malingerers are said sometimes to have been favored by Lady Luck with rich placers or quartz outcroppings. A misbehaving ramrod was in one instance the immediate cause of the good fortune. A Forty-niner with the unusual name of Bennager Rasberry, when out hunting one day near Angel's Camp, found the ramrod had become jammed in the barrel while loading. He pulled the trigger, aiming to dislodge the ramrod from the gun by force of the powder explosion. The ramrod took an upward, sidelong flight, lodging in a manzanita bush some distance away. The ramrod was found imbedded in the roots of the bush, and in the effort to dislodge it, Rasberry pulled the shrub up by the roots. There came up with the roots in the pulling, a small piece of the underlying quartz, which glittered with gold. The fortunate hunter dug out $700 that afternoon, the next day $2,000, the third day $7,000. The vein continued to yield these fabulous riches for months.[17]

Hunting was prominent in another find, this time at Sonora. In that mining camp in early days there was a rough, whisky-loving fellow named Bill, who divided his time among gambling, drinking, and deer hunting. Bill didn't like work, but he did like hunting. One day he set out with his rifle, but wandered among the hills for a long time without seeing any game. On a spur of Bald Mountain, a few hundred yards below the summit, he sat down to rest in the shade of a stunted tree. Idly he began with his hunting knife to dig into the loose quartz upon which he was sitting. "What's this!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Hurrah! I've struck it! It's gold! It's gold!" And so it was. Bill, the ne'er-do-well, had struck a rich pocket. Marking the spot, he hurried back to Sonora, where he provided himself with a large, iron-bound water bucket and a light pick. After several days he returned with his treasure, amounting to $40,000. Claims were staked all around where Bill made his find, but with no result. Bill had exhausted the pocket, and much digging failed to reveal more.[18]

Following the trail of blood left by a deer he had shot and wounded, a hunter named Sherlock, of Agua Fria, near Mariposa, found not the deer he sought, but fame and a mule-load of gold. Sherlock was a hunter who sold venison and other game to the miners. On one of his hunting trips, Sherlock wounded a deer, which, escaping, left a trail of blood behind it. Thinking he would soon capture the enfeebled animal, he followed the gory trace for some distance, and where it crossed an outcropping quartz vein he noticed several nuggets of gold. He took out his hunting knife, and began picking

[16] Ely (Treasure City) *White Pine News,* Mar. 23, 1870.
[17] Edna Bryan Buckbee, *Pioneer Days of Angel's Camp* (Angel's Camp, Calif., 1932), pp. 13–14.
[18] O. P. Fitzgerald, *California Sketches* (Nashville, Tenn., 1879), pp. 179–180.

out other nuggets in the disintegrated top quartz. By evening he had a pouch full of gold, which he hid in a safe place on the mountain. Arrived at the camp, he met the banter of the miners over his ill-luck that day as a hunter, with the remark that he was really getting pretty tired of hunting, and that perhaps he would prospect a bit. The next day he took some mining tools and went off and was not seen again for several months.

Accidentally one day, he was discovered working with a rocker in the remote spot where his find was located. Since he had left camp he had worked tirelessly early and late and had skimmed over the easiest and best of the accessible ground. As soon as this became known, hundreds of miners poured into the place and took up claims all about the lucky spot. The name given the place was Sherlock's Creek, and Sherlocktown; there came also to be a Sherlock's Falls, and even the flat on the other side of the river was called Sherlock's Flat. Sherlock himself did not remain after his whereabouts had been discovered. He loaded a mule with the rich proceeds of his labor—gold to the amount of no less than $100,000—and disappeared down the road. He was never seen or heard of afterward, and it is thought that before arriving at Sacramento he may have been robbed and slain by Murieta and his gang.[19]

Let us now consider the "prospecting" function of animals. In addition to various wild creatures, those domestic animals so useful to prospectors and miners—the burro, mule, and horse—may also play a direct part in mine finding.[20] If the horse you are riding should happen to slip and fall, even to tumble over the edge of a steep cliff and carry you with him, you may be glad it happened—if you live to tell the tale. About Christmas time in 1879 a San Francisco actor named Snow was riding along a trail above Spring Gulch, near Sonora. He had come out from the city for a bit of holiday prospecting and hunting, and was not too serious in his search for gold, recreation being his main object. The horse he rode was at the end of the procession, and thus when it stumbled and fell over the brink, carrying its rider with it, the rest of the party were some time in finding that their companion had disappeared. Returning to the scene of the accident, they hurried down over rock and through underbrush, expecting to find man and horse seriously injured. Suddenly they caught sight of the truants—the horse was standing quietly behind some bushes; while Mr. Snow was atop a ledge of moss-covered rock, doing a kind of wild jig, a piece of quartz in each hand.

The rescuers began to fear that the fall had unbalanced Snow's reason, when he suddenly stopped, and beckoned them to approach. He showed them the quartz he had in his hands. The fragments were almost pure gold, which

[19] Newell D. Chamberlain, *The Call of Gold: True Tales on the Gold Road to Yosemite* (Mariposa, Calif., 1936), pp. 17–18.

[20] For the part that animals play in prospecting, see Hand, *CFQ*, I (1942), 30–33; Palais, pp. 260–261; Wrubel, Pt. I, Nos. 1, 6, 9, 11; Paul Sébillot: *Les Travaux Publics et les Mines dans les Tradition et les Superstitions* (Paris, 1894), pp. 409–410, 418–420.

he had hastily broken some minutes earlier from the ledge on which he now stood. The sliding horse had brought up against this ledge, and the spirited animal, kicking vigorously in his efforts to rise, had struck off some of the moss from the stone, disclosing the gold. The find was appropriately named "Christmas Gift," and its generous owner subsequently gave away several shares in it to his friends. His own share was valued at more than $25,000. This mine became later one of the most productive in California.[21]

A couple of keen-scented mules were the true discoverers of the famous Silver King mine at Queen Creek, fifty miles from Florence, in Pinal County, Arizona. The year was 1875; and several prospectors—Copeland, Mason, Reagan, and one or two others—were looking for a place to camp, one that would be reasonably safe from a possible raid of the Apaches, then extremely active. They were riding along slowly, when suddenly one of the pack mules gave a snort and, with ears pointed forward, stood stock still. As a mule's scent for an Indian is said to be keener than a dog's for game, the party knew that there was danger ahead.

They dismounted and reconnoitered. Copeland tied his mount, also a mule, to a clump of sagebrush that grew in the cleft of a ridge of float rock. While he was gone, something scared the mule and the animal jerked up the sagebrush to which it was tethered and started on a gallop down the canyon. Meantime, the party discovered a rancheria of Indians a mile off, and wisely beat a retreat undiscovered. On the way back they retrieved the mule, the sagebrush still hanging to its bridle.

Copeland detached the sage, and was about to throw it away, when something clinging to the roots attracted his attention. It was a piece of shattered white quartz as large as a walnut, the disintegrated mass being held together by a perfect network of pure white silver threads the size of fine wire. The three men were greatly excited, but at the time did not dare go back to the spot where the mule had been tied, for fear of the Indians. They did, however, make careful note of the exact locality.

Two weeks later, careful scouting found the Indians no longer there, and the coast clear. For several hours they searched among the rocks and scoria of the vicinity, and at last Copeland found the place where the sagebrush had been uprooted. A few minutes' digging revealed the top of the most beautiful silver quartz ledge any one of the prospectors had even seen. They dug there for several days and laid bare a section twenty feet long and ten wide. The vein, without foot or hanging wall, was of white quartz with streaks of native silver and blotches of black sulphurets running through it.

Thus had come about the discovery of the famous Silver King mine, in which later many public men of note made investments. The mine by 1885

[21] Tombstone *Epitaph,* July 29, 1880; Sonora *Independent;* Los Angeles *Herald,* Oct. 9, 1894; Chicago *Times.*

had produced $3,400,000 worth of silver, paying out $1,500,000 in dividends. It is odd that the Silver King ledge seems to stand alone. Scores of locations were made around it on all sides, but no silver was found in any of them.[22]

There is a variant of this story, told a good many years later by a pioneer Arizona resident, which has the prospectors returning from Globe, and camping for the night at the foot of the old Stoneman grade. During the night, a mule was said to have pawed the ground deeply, uncovering a ledge of black-looking rock, from which one of the men broke off a sample. Finding it very heavy, he scratched it with a knife. Much to his surprise and joy, the blade cut into the soft metal, which he at once recognized as native silver. Thereupon the men located the property, naming it the Silver King.[23]

There is still another version of the Silver King discovery, in which, while other details change, the mule still remains the hero and principal character. The story was told by an old Arizona resident, A. J. Doran, in 1928. Doran sets the discovery date as early as 1873. Two soldiers belonging to General Stoneman's command were discharged, and started off from the post for Florence on foot. When they arrived at the foot of the Stoneman grade, on the south side of the mountain, across the range from Picket Post, they stopped to rest. One of them picked up an odd-looking rock nearby, and took it with him to Florence, showing it to Charlie Mason. Mason had the specimen assayed, and found it very rich in silver, being almost solid chloride of silver, known to prospectors as "horn silver." The soldiers disappeared, and were never seen or heard of again.

On the strength of the assay, Charlie Mason, Billy Long, and Mr. Reagan organized a party to hunt for this ledge. They searched for a long time, without success. Just as they were about to return to Florence, one of their mules, a white one, strayed from camp. Billy Long started out to look for him. Finally he caught sight of the missing mule, standing on a round, reddish-colored hill, warming himself in the morning sun. Long went up the hill, haltered the mule, and in so doing, discovered the animal was standing on the outcroppings of what was afterwards known as the Silver King Mine.[24]

In our study of miners' luck, we must not overlook the well digger. The modest well digger, unlucky in his search for water, has sometimes found ample compensation in a ledge of precious mineral. A certain Mr. Lester, who had, in 1869, a place of business in the upper part of Hamilton, Nevada, concluded to sink a well on his property. At a depth of twelve feet, he struck spar rock, in which were fossil bones and, more important, rich chloride ore, some of it showing bright native silver. A claim was at once located, and the erstwhile well changed into a mine.[25]

[22] Los Angeles *Herald,* Sept. 6, 1885; Chicago *Herald.*

[23] Arthur L. Walker, "Recollections of Early Day Mining in Arizona," *Arizona Historical Review,* VI, No. 2 (Apr. 1935), 18.

[24] A. J. Doran, "Reminiscences," *Arizona Historical Review,* I, No. 3 (Oct. 1928), 56.

[25] Hamilton (Nev.) *Inland Empire,* May 20, 1869.

Even the casual excavator in that most unlikely of places—the incorporated limits of a town or city—may unearth precious ores. How many are aware that in 1864 a highly promising gold mine was allegedly discovered out on Telegraph Road, three and a half miles from downtown Oakland? Says the San Francisco *Alta:*

> A. D. Pryal, the discoverer of the Temescal gold mine, three and a half miles from Oakland, on the Telegraph road, was in town yesterday and exhibited to us some of the richest specimens of gold-bearing quartz we have ever seen from any mine, and that too, from but a few feet below the surface of the ledge. It would be almost a joke should it turn out, after all, that while the capitalists and laboring men of San Francisco have been hunting the whole country over from Cariboo to Sonora, and from the Mission mountains to the mountains beyond Salt Lake, in search of paying mines, that one of the richest lay undeveloped and unknown under our very eyes and noses. We are half convinced that such is the fact after all.

Of the fate of this Telegraph Road project there is no apparent record.[26]

Perhaps most stimulating, to the imagination, of all these urban bonanzas was the cinnabar (quicksilver ore) ledge found in 1893 in the heart of San Francisco, at Divisadero and McAllister streets, by a man named McCarty. Assays of this ore showed a yield of $250–$300 of quicksilver per ton. J. J. Crawford, state mineralogist at the time, accompanied by a chemist of the State Mining Bureau, visited the ledge and took away with him several good specimens of the ore. One of these was placed in the permanent mining exhibit in the Pioneer Building on Fourth Street, and the other was sent for exhibit to the then current World's Fair at Chicago. McCarty, the discoverer and owner of the ledge, seems to have been a mild-mannered man, yet the notoriety and the incessant calls for free specimens soon began to undermine his temper, and he was advised to charge two and four bits for specimens, with no free views of the ledge. The chief obstacle to the profitable working of the mine was that the city government objected to the erection of reduction works in or near the city, because of the dangerous fumes emitted.[27]

Good luck sometimes strikes, with a kind of blind justice, the most unlikely persons. In mine finding, you need not, as according to a later proverb, "have money to burn." The poor, and even the lazy, are sometimes exceptionally blessed. In 1857 a big placer field was found, in the vicinity of Columbia, by two men who were out of money and whose credit with their landlord had failed. Somewhere or other they had drummed up a two-day grubstake, and with this as backlog set out on a prospecting tour. They had proceeded about two miles from town, when becoming tired they stopped to rest. Idly, one of them began to wash out a pan of dirt from the surface, in a hole of water. There was a good trace of gold left in the pan, and eagerly they fell to digging a hole. After four feet, bedrock was struck. From one pan of this dirt five

[26] Austin (Nev.) *Reese River Reveille,* June 28, 1864; San Francisco *Alta California.*
[27] Los Angeles *Herald,* May 1, 1893; Ventura *Venturian* and San Francisco *Call.*

and three-quarters ounces of gold were obtained. This occurred about dusk. That same evening the two favorites of Lady Luck returned to town and for $21 of their gold purchased provisions for a week. They went off secretly during the night, remaining at their placer for eight days, being rewarded with $11,000. A report of the incident says: "We have seen the sacks containing the gold, and felt of them too. There is no humbug in this."[28]

Not only impecunious persons, but actual tramps may be touched on the shoulder by inscrutable Fortune. A tramp, in 1882, was wandering aimlessly about the Calico mining district, near Barstow. Kicking at a chunk of rock, he found it to be a lump of native silver. For once in his life the tramp set vigorously to work, and soon uncovered a lode, which at the time was reported in extent and richness bidding fair to exceed the best of the Calico mines. The finder of the lode at once staked out and registered his claim, and at last reports was given a good chance of becoming a bonanza king.[29]

Lazy men are not overlooked. An Idaho character named Frank Martin, living at Era, in Alturas county, Idaho, in 1885, had for a considerable time been living with his brother and family, paying not a single cent or doing any material service in return. One day his sister-in-law asked him to cut her some wood for the kitchen range. He refused, whereupon she beat him out of the house with a rolling pin, and forbade him ever to enter her doors again. Sad and dejected at this state of affairs, Martin walked up a hill back of the house, and some distance from its summit he sat down gloomily upon a rock to meditate his future. While there he stretched out his legs, bracing his feet against a small boulder lightly set in the ground. Under the pressure, the rock gave way, and started rolling down the slope. Something strange about the boulder struck Martin, and he started out at a run to recover it. Picking it up, he was impressed with its weight and general appearance. He showed the stone to some miners soon after, and they pronounced it to be horn silver of the richest character. Upon prospecting the place, Martin found a rich ledge. In less than a month he had from three to five thousand dollars worth of ore ready for smelting, and six months later he sold the mine for a total of $56,000.[30]

For long-term luck, however, we must lay our wager on those who are congenitally and consistently lucky. Men there are, goes a popular belief, who were born under a lucky star, whose careers are one seemingly effortless success after another, men who appear to have a kind of second sight with regard to mineral deposits. There was, for example, J. G. Divoll. Wonderful luck attended him in all his mining ventures. Coming to Sonora, in the Tuolumne area, in 1862, his intermittent mining activity was invariably successful.

[28] Sacramento *Bee,* May 21, 1857; Columbia *Gazette.*

[29] Los Angeles *Herald,* May 4, 1882.

[30] San Francisco *Mining and Scientific Press,* 57: 2 (July 7, 1888); Nez Perce (Idaho) *News.*

Divoll was somewhat a rolling stone and not too much interested in hard work. He worked pockets on Saratoga Hill for a time, making strikes at short intervals that kept him well supplied with money. About 1885 he acquired an interest in the so-called Bonanza mine. This mine was worked for several months without result, and it was only under Divoll's directions, taken at first under protest, that the mine began to yield. This it did so handsomely, to the tune of several hundred thousands, that it made each of its owners rich. After the period of high returns, Divoll came to own the whole mine, the other stockholders considering it exhausted. A few days after he took possession, he pointed out to his managers where more gold was located, and soon an additional $60,000 was added to his pile.

Like the extraordinary man he was, he concluded that he now had enough money for all possible uses, and let the mine lie idle for a considerable period. Subsequently he leased it to a company of miners, who, however, had little success until Divoll pointed out to them where pockets ought to be found, and were, indeed, found. During the two-year lease period, almost if not quite $150,000 was taken out.

At the end of this period, Divoll in person took over the actual operation of the mine. Upon this report, the editor of the Sonora *Democrat* wrote:

> Now that Divoll himself intends working the mine, it will surprise no one here to learn that another fabulous amount has been added to the circulating medium of the country. Every time he gets to mining it seems what he touches turns to gold, and those who were connected with him have enjoyed the benefit of his luck. Whether he be a good miner or not, he has thus far been successful, and that is the best test to be had. He seems to have an intuitive knowledge of the way lodes and leads run, and can tell by a fissure or seam what will be found by following it. He is confident that larger sums remain than have yet been extracted. With his knowledge and luck there will be no surprise at any amount of gold he may yet take out of the Bonanza.[31]

Another man apparently born to good fortune in mining was Lucky Jim Rule, whose name, according to a commentator of the day, is as indissolubly connected with the big bonanza days of the Comstock as are those of Mackay, Fair, Flood, and Jones. Lucky Jim was a native of Cornwall, England, and came to America in 1855. After working for some time in Yuba county, he drifted to Nevada with the Comstock excitement, and there began to be recognized as a man blessed by good luck. When John P. Jones started to work the Consolidated Virginia, Lucky Jim Rule was appointed foreman, but owing to a disagreement, Rule left. Some time later, Rule declared he knew where there was a big ore body lying undiscovered near the south line of the Gould and Curry. He was put there, and in a comparatively short time unearthed a good-sized bonanza, in the Savage division, almost exactly where

[31] San Francisco *Mining and Scientific Press*, 57: 7 (July 7, 1888); Sonora *Tuolumne Democrat*.

he had said it would be. There was a brisk rise in stocks, and his luck thenceforward was unquestioned. Rule turned his attention to California, operated a gold mine in Calaveras county for a time and, as usual, did well.

In 1893, in one of the periodical periods of dullness in the mines and on the stock exchange, Rule came to San Francisco and told the directors of the Consolidated Virginia that for nearly twenty years he had known where there was a hidden mass of rich ore on a certain level of that mine. His luck and former success impelled the directors to enlist his services. He was authorized to spend, if necessary, $4,000 a month for as long as six months. Thus the famous "Rule drift" began to be run. Stocks took a spurt, and it seemed as though old times were come again; but at the end of six months no bonanza had been uncovered, and for the first time in his life he failed to make good his prophecies and promises. Stupefied by the breaking of his luck, Rule quit, and for a period worked some Tuolumne mines in which he had an interest. His end came a few months later, in the early summer of 1895. Concludes the editor, upon hearing of Rule's death: "There was probably no man living who could 'see into the earth' farther than Jim Rule, and his memory will live as long as that of the famous mines with which he was so long connected."[32]

Let us examine the reverse of this medal: there are bad luck miners as well as their opposites.[33] Perhaps best known of the unlucky ones is Dow of Dow's Flat as immortalized by Bret Harte in his poem of the same name. There was another, fully as unlucky—"Concatenation Bill." When or where the nickname was first attached to Bill is not known, but certain it is that it was so attached and henceforth was irredeemably a part of his personality. Bill himself, to a stranger who suggested that he was rather out of luck, spoke somewhat fatalistically on the subject: "Out of luck! Well, I wish to Heaven I was; you may gamble on *that;* but I ain't. Why God bless you, stranger, I'm just in a perfect streak of luck from morning to night, and from one year's end to the other; and the *cussedest* luck! Why, I have had more luck than would sink a ship, and have got it yet."

Bill (it is not known if he had a previous record of bad luck) started for California in 1849 with a team of good horses and a wagon. One of the horses was stolen the first night out of St. Joseph, the second was traded for a yoke of oxen and a cow. The Indians stole one of the oxen, the other and the cow both died before arriving at the Humboldt.

At Placerville, Bill made a small stake as hotel waiter, increasing it to $1,180 at faro, the whole of which a young lady promptly ran off with, Bill having naïvely understood that he and she were going to get married and operate a hotel together. Once again he made a stake, this time in the mines,

[32] San Francisco *Mining and Scientific Press,* July 20, 1895 (p. 39).

[33] For persistent bad luck reflected in mine names, see Palais, p. 268.

but lost it at draw poker. Fraser River and Washoe were both visited, but to no avail. At the lower Colorado river placers of 1862–1863, he had no luck. At La Paz, Arizona, he located a claim, which he managed to sell for $300. With the money he bought a small saloon, but almost the first day a man fell dead of heart disease while standing at Concatenation Bill's bar. The rumor flew about that Bill's liquor had killed a man. A crowd gathered, all Bill's liquor was drunk, without payment, and Bill had to flee for his life. On his arrival at Wickenburg, he was thrashed by a bad man who had mistaken him for someone else. Finally Concatenation Bill was caught telling a tall tale in the guise of truth, that made him the hero of a current Indian fight, and again he had to flee. This time unlucky Bill was heard of no more; it was assumed in barroom gossip that he had been killed, in a final quirk of bad luck, by the then rampant Apaches.[34]

A few words about the tenderfoot. The tenderfoot, the inexperienced gold hunter, is not essentially at a disadvantage if luck be with him. Tenderfoot luck, in truth, is proverbial.[35] Newcomers are known to have been sent out to dig at most unlikely spots, and to the astonishment of all the old-timers have there made rich stakes. A mining multimillionaire named Stratton is often pointed to as an example of such luck. He found his famous Independence mine where hundreds of experienced prospectors had repeatedly looked over the ground. Newcomers with a lucky touch also located the richest mines of Cripple Creek over which had grazed for years the cows of those who cursed their luck for not being able to strike pay rock. There comes to mind Dave Moffatt, who had no technical knowledge of mining or experience. He struck it rich, with his Deer's Horn mine and finally sold out for $40,000.[36]

This luck of the greenhorn may extend to associated enterprises such as sales of mines or mining stock. John Robins, a newspaper man of Winnemucca, who in the early 1870's was taking a trip to San Francisco, on a venture offered for sale there some Winnemucca mines that had been on the market for a long time. Old-timers in Nevada had repeatedly tried to sell them to various capitalists, but with no luck. In a short time, Robins, the greenhorn salesman, made a deal whereby he realized $10,000 in commissions, and the owners of the mines obtained the price they had asked.[37]

"A drunken sailor for luck" was believed to be a truism by many miners in the early placer mining days, and there was some apparent basis for the belief. A typical instance cited is that of a drunken sailor named Clark who

[34] Albert S. Evans, *A La California: Sketches of Life in the Golden State* (San Francisco, 1873), pp. 257–271.

[35] Hand, *CFQ*, I (1942), 36–37; Palais, 256; Verne Bright, "Sailors' Diggings in the Siskiyous," *Western Folklore*, XI (1952), 166.

[36] Arthur J. Burdick, *The Mystic Mid-Region: The Deserts of the Southwest* (N. Y., 1904), pp. 136–139.

[37] Winnemucca (Unionville) *Silver State*, May 11, 1872.

deserted his vessel in 1849 and during a spree stumbled upon a drift yielding $70,000 in two weeks. Three other booze-inspired sailors in September 1850, at Murderer's Bar on the American, on their first day took from the sands 29 pounds of gold. In a month's time they were the possessors of about 500 pounds of gold valued at $105,000.[38]

The good luck of greenhorns and sailors does not apparently extend to dudes and city slickers. An Englishman, William Kelly, who later wrote a valuable book on his experiences, in 1849 visited the placers on the Middle and North Forks of the American River. Sensitive to incongruities, he spied one day a "very flash company of the dandy class," just in from Pittsburgh. This company regulated their movements by sound of trumpet; and their tents, uniforms, and implements were fine enough for a display window. It was quite a treat, remarks Kelly, to see them turning out in the morning with military order and precision, managing everything with great system and success. Everything, that is, save and except the matter of getting gold. While ragged fellows with rusty picks and clumsy shovels regularly took home of evenings their one and two ounces of gold, the polished tools and formal appearance of the Pittsburghers seemed actually to repel the gold, they being able to boast scarcely a daily pinch of the metal per person. Their chief difficulty seems to have been that they were unable to distinguish the gold-bearing stratum from ordinary surface soil, an accomplishment no amount of organization or equipment could supplant.[39]

Good luck, as well as bad luck, is thought to run in streaks, like quartz or porphyry. Even a miner blessed by consistent good luck may find his general and average good luck interrupted by short periods of bad luck. This will hold good of mines as well as miners. Men in the North Consolidated Virginia, on the Comstock, had for three years prior to 1878 suffered no accidents. In October of that year, however, a workman there had his thigh crushed. Immediately the word went that a "bad streak" had been hit and more accidents might be expected. Sure enough, within a few days two more men were injured by falling thirty feet into the sump. This was, strangely enough, caused by the unexplained breaking of a two-inch plank that had seemed sturdy enough to bear a dozen men, let alone two.[40] Such a run of bad luck, nevertheless, gives way in short order to customary good luck, and may be said to presage it. Hence the saying "You're due for some good luck."

Exceptionally good luck, however, as distinguished from an average run of good luck with no outstanding high spots, like lightning is believed never to strike twice in the same spot. Charles Peters in his autobiography tells of one miner who for all that, seems to have beat the prevalent rule of "high

[38] *The Autobiography of Charles Peters: The Good Luck Era, The Placer Mining Days of the '50's* (Cleveland, n. d. [1916?]), p. 135.

[39] William Kelly, *An Excursion to California* (London, 1851), II, 34–35.

[40] Los Angeles *Express,* Oct. 14, 1878; Virginia City *Chronicle.*

good luck never visits twice," thereby winning some degree of fame as an anomaly. His name was Daniel Hill. Being about as near down and out as anyone could be, he found in the year 1866, in Plumas county, a nugget weighing some 66 pounds, and worth $14,000. He went to San Francisco and there spent his goodly sum at the rate of $5,000 a month. Broke once again, Hill returned to the mines, and one day near Dutch Flat he stooped down to wash his hands in a pool of water. Glancing down, he saw at the bottom a lump of quartz about the size of a football, across which gleamed a streak of gold. From this lump he obtained $12,300. Again Hill squandered the entire proceeds, but good luck did not knock again. He probably died a pauper.[41]

Lucky charms may be of value and draw good luck upon one's efforts. A horseshoe may be nailed above the entrance of a drift,[42] or a newly wedded wife may be looked upon by her husband as bringing him good luck.[43] It may be his Bible, together with the pious perusal thereof. H. H. White, a worker in the Dunkirk mine near Prescott, was one Sunday in 1883 reading the Holy Book in the shade of some large pines half a mile east of the mine and edging a cliff some fifty feet in height. Drowsing, he dropped the book, and it tumbled over the precipice. Descending into the canyon to recover it, Mr. White found it lying face upward opened at the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 7, while a large piece of rich quartz, which had been dislodged by its fall, lay on top. The quartz had torn a jagged hole in the seventh verse so familiar to all Christians: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Accepting this as a good omen, Mr. White searched, and allegedly in a few minutes succeeded in locating the parent ledge. It is over two feet wide, the rock assaying $225 per ton. The find was considered the richest thing yet struck in the district, and the fortunate owner declined an offer of $500 for it.[44]

A prospector at Ehrenburg in 1868 possessed what he considered a lucky shovel. He had packed his outfit on the back of his burrow for another prospecting trip, when he noticed that the handle of his shovel was cracked. He tried to get another one at the stores around town, but none was to be had. Finally a woman of his acquaintance had lent him hers. On that trip he found an unworked placer from which in a short time he took $20,000. Being of a generous cast, he gave the woman half his takings, asking in return only one thing—the shovel she had lent him. "It's a damn lucky shovel," he explained, "If you'll let me keep it, I won't never have to worry about finding what I need."[45]

Finally, some object or animal may be for a particular miner an omen of

[41] *Autobiography of Charles Peters,* p. 90.
[42] Los Angeles *Express,* Oct. 14, 1878; Virginia City *Chronicle.*
[43] Winnemucca (Unionville) *Silver State,* Nov. 30, 1872.
[44] Los Angeles *Herald,* Aug. 11, 1883; Prescott (Ariz.) *Miner.*
[45] Philip A. Bailey, *Golden Mirages* (New York, 1941), p. 3.

good luck. Dave Moffatt, finder of a rich mine, chanced upon a deer horn lying on the ground. Feeling it was a favorable omen, he began to dig on the spot where the horn lay. He was not disappointed, finding a ledge which he later named the Deer's Horn, and sold for $40,000.[46]

Black cats even, to some, may bring good luck. An example is James G. Prowning, finder of a rich tungsten mine on McGee Creek near Bishop. He had come to Bishop to buy grub, when a black kitten ran up his trouser leg, playing and purring. Apparently being a man who liked cats, black or otherwise, he was not disconcerted. Some time before this he had brought to town samples of a heavy white substance which he and his partners had washed out in the hills, but whose identity and source they had been unable to determine. The substance was then analyzed as tungsten, but at the time of the black kitten episode, Prowning was still ignorant of the source of the deposit. On the day after the playful kitten had left the imprint of its claws on Prowning's leg, he was out on McGee Creek hunting jackrabbits for supper. He shot one, and going up to retrieve the carcass he noticed near a canyon wall along which he had tramped scores of times, a chunk of garnet float and in it nothing less than more white tungsten. Looking about, he found the main outcroppings only a short distance away. This was in 1913, and three years later a large tungsten mill with an associated camp were in course of construction on the spot, with $2,000 worth of the mineral being turned out every day. At the time the deposit was believed to be the largest on record.[47]

To sum up: Virtue in the mines is often not without its due reward; and perseverance, hard work, and courage do accumulate a fortune sometimes, or even tap a narrowly won bonanza. However, by and large it is believed that luck, especially in the finding of mines, is supreme. Sheer accident, the activities of animals, finds while hunting, all have chalked up impressive results. The well digger may find not water but a mine; incorporated cities may contain previously unknown mines. As to persons blessed by luck, they may be poor, lazy, even outright tramps. The tenderfoot, greenhorns, and soldiers and sailors are deemed lucky, but not city slickers. There are certain persons who in regard to mining are born under a lucky star, others as obviously under an evil sign or jinx. Good luck in the mines, like bad luck, runs in streaks, but exceptionally good luck, like lightning, never strikes twice in the same spot. Individualized lucky charms can be of great advantage.

Venice, California

[46] Burdick, pp. 136–139.
[47] Los Angeles *Times*, July 8, 1916.