The Loss of a Reputation; or, The Image of California in Britain Before 1875

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When, in 1858, the publicist Ernest Sevd addressed his British readers and proclaimed that "the principal thing now wanting to complete and perpetuate . . . [California’s] prosperous state of things is an increase of population," he was making the obvious but fundamental point that no part of the undeveloped west of mid-nineteenth century America could hope to progress without a steady current of immigration. For, as he also pointed out, "with an increase of population, a proportionate increase of capital will always find profitable investment." California, however, was only one of the new states which were searching for population in mid-century. Iowa, Colorado, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan went so far as to support state agencies which labored in the Old World to recruit immigrants. Their promotional efforts were one of the two main ways by which a state could hope to attract population. The other was by force of reputation as an area of high opportunity. California never managed to mount a successful state immigration agency in the period under consideration, and it was, therefore, more at the mercy of its reputation than some other states. Since one of the most important and valuable sources of California’s population was Great Britain, its development was, thus, in part dependent on its image in the British Isles. The object of the present study is California’s reputation in Britain before 1875.

The meeting of capitalists that took place in San Francisco in April, 1857, indicates the early origin of concern about immigration to California. The group met to found an Immigrant Aid Association, a purpose which seven years before would have been considered an absurdity. At that time if there was any feeling on population growth, it was that it was proceeding too rapidly, at least as far as contingents from Australia and Latin America were concerned. But attitudes had changed during the mid-1850’s. California’s growth rate had appeared to slow down, and the full promise of the early years of the gold rush seemed to be about to suffer final disappointment. Those who owned land and other resources, who stood to gain most from a steady population growth, were dismayed, and they sought to check the decline, realizing full well the important connection.
between optimism and prosperity. The founders of the Immigrant Aid Association were men of this class who gathered to discuss the reasons for the falling off of expectations and to provide some remedies.

Meeting as the capitalists did in the aftermath of the 1856 vigilante movement, it is hardly surprising that they arrived at the diagnosis that they did. There was, in their view, one cause above all others for California’s distress. The state, they felt, had acquired a reputation for lawlessness and, consequently, an image of insecurity which was repelling just those men and women it should have been attracting—those sober, industrious, family-minded immigrants on whose efforts the progress of societies depended. This situation, they resolved, should be changed. They would found an association dedicated to improving the image of California in the world, and they would begin immediately with a manifesto. The document must address itself, they ascertained, to the primary problem facing California and provide a defense against the dangers implicit in the popular idea that the state was afflicted with a rampant and pervasive lawlessness.

The resulting address to the public was a remarkable public relations effort. Acknowledging the unfortunate image of the state, it read: “Though murders, assassinations, and various crimes against the laws of God and man, have heretofore stained our annals, as they have the annals of every civilized people, yet by whom have these crimes been committed?” Not, it was to be understood, by the ordinary and upright men and women whom the state wanted as immigrants, but “by outlaws, such as are found all over the world.” “Who, in the majority of cases,” the defense went on to ask, “have been the victims?” Not the law-abiding, it answered, who were perfectly safe in California despite vicious rumor to the contrary, but “men of a dissipated course of life, who engendered their own destruction, and would have done so had they been dwellers in any other clime or country.” The law-abiding immigrant had nothing to fear, the manifesto reassured, for “human life is as secure here as in the best regulated government in the world.” The paper continued somewhat weakly that “if the contrary appears
true, it is only an appearance, arising from the fact that all the crimes of a vast territory extending over many degrees of latitude and longitude, are concentrated semi-monthly in one burning focus, and as a consequence, are grossly exaggerated in the public mind.” Finally, the message of law and order was firmly, if grandiloquently, restated in the most convincing terms possible to the Victorian mind: “We reiterate our conviction that in no part of the world is the Christian Sabbath better observed, the sanctity of domestic life more honored, and intelligence, virtue and honorable dealing more respected, than in the Pacific States [principally, California] and Territories.”

It was almost a year later that Seyd’s work, to which reference has already been made, appeared in London. The purpose of the book was to attract the attention of both British emigrants and capitalists to California, and it is therefore significant that the author felt impelled to deal, as the Immigrant Aid Association had done, with the state’s reputation for lawlessness and insecurity. Seyd fully shared the association’s view that it was the image of disorder that was standing in the way of solid growth and prosperity, and he applied this conclusion to his effort to increase the positive ties between the British and California. The clearcut message of his promotional effort was that “California’s present position offers to both the emigrant and the capitalist better prospects of success than any country in the world” and the corollary that “the reports of murders, gambling, and other vices, and of the lawlessness reigning amongst us, have undoubtedly prejudiced the minds of many really intelligent and educated persons, and created the impression of a general insecurity of life and property in this state, deterring many from investing capital among us.” But, unlike the association, Seyd was confident that the worst was over and that California was well on the road to recovery, having been saved by the 1856 “Vigilance Commitee,” which he, unlike some later historians, had no doubt had “conducted itself in a manner reflecting the highest honor upon its members,” the consequence being that “California is now enjoying the great benefits of this well-timed and judicious movement, courageously entered upon, and unflinchingly persevered in,” so that the state “at the present moment enjoys the most profound peace.” Order and prosperity reign, he continued, “justice is duly administered, and very few murders and acts of violence have occurred since the above mentioned reform movement.” Altogether, California would “promote much more surely and satisfactorily” than other states “the accomplishment of the end and aim of all emigration—the amelioration of the moral, social, and physical condition of the immigrant and his family.”

It may fairly be said that Seyd, no pun intended, did not succeed. A reviewer of his book for the Edinburgh Journal evidenced the British reader’s unwillingness to concede that California’s days of disorder were over. The state, he remarked, was “by no means ‘progressing’ in the ratio which was at first expected,” and, for himself, he preferred Victoria as a destination for British emigrants, where, in contrast to California, order and growth were advancing hand in hand.

In London, The Times, which had never been very impressed by the idea of British emigration to California, did manage a few friendly remarks on Seyd’s work in May, 1858. The paper’s “Own Correspondent” in San Francisco was permitted to write that “laboring men and mechanics, with the ability and willing to work will vastly improve their pecuniary condition, and in some (not all) respects
add to their domestic comforts by emigrating to California. The same remark," he continued, "will apply with equal force to the practical shepherd without any other capital than his skill, and to all young women who have strength to work or good looks to recommend them to husbands." But these qualifiedly favorable remarks were the exception rather than the rule in The Times and in other writings on the state. The image of California remained unsatisfactory for at least another decade in Britain. In 1861, for instance, it was remarked that "a good deal that is evil has been said, and is still thought about California." In 1869 the Reverend Todd took it for granted that readers of his book would require an explanation of the prevalent disorder in California and ventured an essay in social pathology. He put the peculiar atmosphere of the state down to "the natural result of an unnatural state of society, the unnatural creation of property," which had produced a people "nervous, active, excited, wanting and determining to make money fast, ready to speculate, to run risks, and [who] expect to fall and rise, and rise and fall. If they don't speculate in mines, they are tempted to do so in stocks, in real estate, and in anything that gives them an opportunity." Another British visitor gave a different diagnosis, finding the root of the disease somewhat surprisingly in "the almost perfect climate" which produced "a great temptation to overwork, . . . [as] there is," he said, "no absolute necessity for rest as there is in the hot summer months of the Eastern States. Consequently it is said that people die suddenly and that insanity is very prevalent." All in all, another British visitor said, before the civilizing effect of the transcontinental railroad, California "was regarded as teeming with gold and abounding in iniquity; a paradise for paupers and a refuge for the scum of the earth." With such ideas about California current in Britain it is no wonder that when a body of private citizens did found an agency to attract immigrants to the state, after two years' work it was only able to claim a gain of ten direct arrivals from England, though it also claimed a gain of 882 Australians and 312 settlers from British Columbia. Naturally, part of the failure was due to California's distance from sources of population in the East and in Britain and to the consequent hazards and expenses of crossing an ocean and a continent. The agency could claim a small propaganda victory in that at least the writings of two observers of the emigrant scene reflected its views. But, in general, the British view of California resembled that of the easterner to whom it was said the state represented "a land of big beets and pumpkins, of rough miners, of pistols, bowieknives, abundant fruits, queer wines, high prices—full of discomforts and abounding in dangers to the peaceful traveler." Clearly, the battle for California's reputation which the Immigrant Aid Association had hoped to win in 1857 had not been won by 1875. To be answered are the following questions: when was the negative attitude towards California solidified in Britain and why was the mind-set so great that it proved irreversible for at least two decades. In a nutshell, the evidence points to the years 1849–1855 and to the creation at that time of the unshakeable idea that the gold rush had brought about a permanently unstable society in the state.

Before 1849 California's reputation in Britain was almost unblemished. The area first came into British consciousness at the end of the eighteenth century through the accounts of travelers who gave it a virtually paradisial character.
George Vancouver, for instance, who visited California on three occasions while forwarding British interests in the Nootka Sound controversy, remarked that California’s climate had “the reputation of being as healthy as any part of the known world.” At first he was less confident about the quality of the soil, saying “None seemed to be naturally sterile, although it presented that outward appearance,” but later he changed his mind so far as to speak positively of the “fertility of the soil [that] seems to exist with little variation through the plains and vallies of the interior country, extending in some places to the water’s edge on the sea coast.”

Forty years later, Dr. Thomas Coulter, traveling from Monterey to the junction of the Colorado and Gila rivers, while less sure of Southern California, remarked that the neighborhood of San Francisco Bay was “perfectly healthy.” In 1839 the climate of California was praised as one of the reasons why the region was “in the list of those countries which have always been most prized by mankind.” The soil won accolades from yet another British visitor who wrote that “the productive nature of the soil, when it has been turned up by the missions, and the immense plains of meadow land . . . show with how little trouble it might be brought into high cultivation by any farmers who could be induced to settle there.” Coulter had been less extravagant in his praise of the soil and more accurate in his assessments, but even he had spoken of “the country north and east of the Tule lakes” as “fertile, well-wooded and watered.”

Then, as Mexico’s grip on the area weakened during the 1840’s and contemporary events in the Far East following on the Opium War led to the opening of Chinese ports to western commerce, another dimension was added to California’s reputation. Increasingly the accent was placed upon its strategic and commercial advantages. Vancouver and Beechey had already noticed the magnificence of San Francisco’s harbor, when, in 1839, Forbes, voicing his dream of a British colonization of California to liquidate the Mexican debt to British bondholders, wrote longingly of California’s potential in the right hands. In the possession of Britain “or any other commercial and enterprising nation,” he believed, it could already have “rivaled Asia.” Sir George Simpson of the Hudson’s Bay Company also tried to raise British interest in the strategic possibilities of the area, but beyond further flattering it he had no success. By the time his book came out in 1847, California had been conquered by the Americans, so that any opportunity of Britain acquiring this remote Garden of Eden had been lost. Nevertheless, the idea that California was a highly attractive place and would be a valuable acquisition for British government and settler alike had so far developed by the 1840’s that it caused Americans to fear annexation by Britain and Britons to seek clarification of British government policy in Parliament.

It would be wrong to deny, however, that there were some British doubts about California. One reviewer of Forbes’ 1839 work made his criticisms seem general when he remarked, “California, we need hardly inform our readers is a remote, rebellious, ill-peopled, and ill-organized province of Mexico,” but he himself modified the full effect of these words by adding, “Notwithstanding its political disadvantages, . . . California, in its northern half, displays not in vain the temptations of a good soil and climate.” Indeed, the general view from Britain of California on the eve of the American conquest was rather that “there
In 1849 Punch (v. 16, p. 17) poked fun at the naïveté and unpreparedness of misled gold-seekers who flocked to California seeking easily-won riches.
is no country in the world that offers as flattering inducements to immigrants as Upper California; nor is there a country . . . on the face of the globe, so eminently calculated by nature herself to promote the prosperity and happiness of civilized and enlightened man.” After making allowance for the inflation in the language common to all tracts promoting emigration, be it to Uruguay or to the Cape of Good Hope, the impression is true that a favorable view of California was held in Britain, one which could support the case for emigration.

One aspect of the state’s later reputation was lacking in this period; there was little realization of the mineral wealth that was to give California the title of the modern El Dorado. Vancouver wrote that he “did not find that New Albion had yet been supposed to contain any valuable minerals, nor is California considered much richer in that respect.” Coulter said that whereas “Lower California is pretty rich in minerals . . . in Upper California” he knew “of no place where . . . [such had] been found, except to the eastward of Santa Ynez, where a small silver mine was successfully wrought for some time, till the owners were killed by the Indians; and in one of the streams falling into the southern Tule lake some gold has also been found by the beaver hunters, but as yet in very small quantity.”

The British visitor who found California distasteful due to the high prices and limited range of its products and who wrote, “It was with little regret, and no idea of the hidden treasures since discovered, that the anchor was weighed, and we under sail for the Sandwich Islands,” gave the rueful opinion of one, who like the whole British nation, must have wished he had had clearer vision.

Despite the presumed lack of mineral wealth, it is clear that California’s agricultural potential was sufficiently attractive to British writers. Theoretically, therefore, the discovery of gold should have raised the area to an unchallengeable primacy among emigrant destinations, but in point of fact it did the reverse. There is no paradox here. Those who controlled the image of California in Britain, those whose works came out in the years 1849-1855, did not translate gold into social and economic opportunity for the prospective emigrant. On the contrary they argued that it meant a disordered and feverish society in which the sober could not hope for steady advance. They thus provided California with the repellant image against which both the Immigrant Aid Association and Seyd protested.

The multitude of works that compromised California in Britain in the years 1849-1855 were epitomized by a book which was a fraud from beginning to end, but which was one of the most highly regarded of all the accounts of the gold rush at the time. This was Henry Vizetelly’s *Four Months Among The Gold-Finders in Alta California*, which he published under the pseudonym of J. Tyrwhit Brooks, M.D., in 1849. Though Vizetelly occasionally remarked on some of California’s more attractive qualities, like the fertility of the soil, he laid his emphasis on the widely prevalent disease, lawlessness, and Indian trouble. The work ended on a note of pessimism, as Vizetelly argued that the lack of government in California was ensuring that “as the number of diggers and miners augmented, robberies and violence became frequent.” Vizetelly also made out that he left the mines as poor as when he arrived. Reviewers unfriendly to California seized on this point and made much of the fact that California was the kind of place that did not live up to its promises. Despite the fraudulence of Vizetelly’s work—he wrote the book in ten days, never having left London—it is not unin-
important. Vizetelly copied his ideas from individuals who had been to California (including John C. Frémont and Colonel Richard Mason), and his role was therefore to give wider currency to their ideas. He did not invent his low opinion of the pandemonium on the Pacific. Nor was he alone in it.

Two works by American authors published in Britain in 1850 continued the tales of lawlessness. William R. Ryan’s study was particularly full in its second volume of stories of murders, lynchings, floggings, physical exhaustion, gambling, and a general absence of moral and legal restraint. Only the most diligent reader would have noticed that in passing Ryan called the climate of California “the healthiest in the world.” The majority would rather have noticed his final remarks that those returning from California were diseased in some way. The second work, by Bayard Taylor, was revealingly and strikingly called El Dorado: Or, Adventures in the Path of Empire and was, as its title suggested, akin to an adventure story. Gambling, fighting, disease, and severe weather were featured. Taylor’s final view was that Californian society was basically sound, vigorous, and progressive and that the versatile immigrant was sure to succeed there, but he put this message into his last six pages where its effect was swamped by stories which perforce, as a writer of an adventure tale, he included in the first part of the book.

Three works published in England in 1851 by British authors continued to add unflattering details to the picture of California. The Irishman William Kelly did the state a grave disservice by calling even its agricultural possibilities into doubt. “The soil,” he said, was admittedly “of an unsurpassing quality . . . capable of producing any crop,” but it had to face “the adverse operation of the seasons, which keep it saturated, and in most places submerged in water, from November until April and then before July it is so baked and cracked under a hot and cloudless sun, that not only is all further vegetation arrested, but everything above ground is crisped, and ready to fall into powder at the touch; while the streams that might be supposed available for irrigation are, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, completely dry.” Consequently, “California must ever be mainly dependent on the States, Oregon, Chili and the Sandwich Islands, for its supply of breadstuffs and the other great vegetable staples of existence; as to the climate, there is only one opinion amongst the people now resident there; which is, that it is highly unhealthy.” Altogether, he could hardly have been more damning, or wrong.

William Shaw went to California from Australia and continued the story of the “demoralizing effects of the gold mania.” He wrote very fully of the lawlessness, illness, Indian troubles, lynch law, incessant rain, and lack of steady employment that he met with and expected that all visitors, like himself, would leave California without regret. Edward Lucatt also landed from the Pacific but only stayed a short time. Surprisingly, he spoke of the great order that obtained in the mines in the early days when men safely left their watches hanging on trees; but he emphasized the dangers and disadvantages of California life, starting with the heat, continuing through poisonous night-dews, fever, ague, scurvy and “a leprous breaking out of the body,” running on through high prices, high rents, and gambling, the lack of friendliness, secure markets, and honor among contractors, and ended with the inevitable, from the author’s point of view, crowds waiting to leave.
The title of an anonymous work of this period indicates that Shaw, Lucatt, and the unknown author shared a prevailing view of California. Whoever produced The California Hoax in which are contrasted the good and bad effects to be derived from a voyage to California; showing the deprivation to be endured, with the utter impossibility of obtaining food, in the Golden Region implied that only the senile peasantry of Carmarthenshire, who were preparing to leave for California and whose ages ranged from seventy to ninety, would be mad enough to consider such a destination. 47

The year 1853 saw no slackening of the attacks on California’s reputation. Frederick Gerstaecker’s Narrative of a Journey Round the World was translated and published in London. The section recalling his visit to California stressed failure in the mines, lack of respect for mining property, fires, floods, gambling, and general lawlessness. 48 Gerstaecker concluded ominously that social anarchy and the lack of family life were likely to be permanent and that disorder was waxing, not waning, with the passage of time. 49 Two years later, Frank Marryat’s Mountains and Molehills added its disturbing quota of detail to the general story of drink, gambling, shootings, thefts, fire, and lynching law. Society, Marryat said, was so disordered in California that it was “prudent to look on every man as a rogue until you know him to be honest.” The last section of the book did speak of the ways in which California was settling down, but it was dominated by the section which had gone before. 50 Similarly, these works and others like Henry Coke’s A Ride Over the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California and Walter Brodie’s Pitcairn’s Island . . . with a Few Hints on California 51 overshadowed works more friendly to California like Alexander Mackay’s The Western World and John D. Borthwick’s Three Years in California. 52 Borthwick’s failure to alter the image of California despite having written a very good book is significant. He unfortunately published his work in 1857 by which time the stereotype of California as a land of lawlessness was too firmly fixed to be shaken.

Part of the difficulty for propagandists wishing to promote a different image of California in the years immediately after 1849, of course, lay in the fact that the kind of writing that could have presented the state as the realization of the pioneer farmer’s dream was so dull that it must necessarily have suffered by comparison with that which concentrated onynchings, highwaymen, or gambling saloons. It was both easier and more profitable, since it made the book sell more copies, to write about the present and horrific disorder than to predict future developments. At the same time lack of reliable detailed knowledge in 1849 made it hard to write more than that “the surface of California, being much broken by rocky mountains, contains not a very large proportion of arable land, but where the soil is arable it is usually rich,“ or that “the climate of Upper California is said to be very salubrious. The winter is much milder than in the countries on the eastern coast which lie in the same latitude. There are only two seasons: the rainy season, which is winter: and the dry season, which is summer.” 53

It would be incorrect to deny that some of the literature on California published in Britain at the time did try to take the offensive on the state’s behalf. But its countervailing attempts were very feeble. The writer who advised “all who have the means . . . [to] go there, for we are convinced they will be in a position to found happiness for themselves and children,” and he who judged that “as far
as climate, productions, extent, political and commercial position, and association with any native tribes are concerned in rendering a spot fit for emigration, Upper California is at least as highly favored as any part of the Pacific coast of America”64 were doing their best, but their writing was remaining at the general level of the days before 1849. That kind of general remark was sufficient in the early days, but since then California had ceased to be remote and undistinguished. It now had the reputation for certain characteristics and if its name was to be properly defended, then some discussion of these traits was necessary.

The most satisfactory of the works that came out with a favorable report on emigration to California in 1849, California: Its Past History; Its Present Position; Its Future Prospects did try to grapple with the problem. It emphasized that “the political institutions established . . . are in the highest degree favorable to freedom of individual action, and to the maintenance of such laws and institutions as are in consonance with the wants, the feelings, and the interests of the whole people.”55 The writer argued that gold and lawlessness were bound to be but temporary phenomena and argued that “when the gold fever has ceased . . . the most profitable occupation will be the development of the immense and varied agricultural and productive resources of the country.” Agriculture, not gold hunting, he predicted, “will probably be the destination of the large proportion of emigrants.”66 Such realism, however, was rare, and it went unheeded by readers.

Men and women in Britain in 1849 were fed rather on images of a different kind. They were warned against emigration to a land of chaos. In January, 1849, for instance, before any real evidence was available on conditions in California, the Illustrated London News was taking the line that “though a land of gold be good, a land of food, clothing and security is good also.”67 In March, 1849, a provincial paper, the Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald—because of its insignificance likely to be quoting the general viewpoint—commented that “it is the opinion of all well thinking men that the more money will be spent in seeking for gold than the value of the precious metal which will be found by the adventurers, in addition to the risk and toil of life by those who venture among the diggers.”68 Over two years later the same paper was still reiterating its point, if more humorously, reporting that a Californian’s clothing could be described as follows: “His pantaloons are made out of rag carpet, whilst his overcoat consists of a cellar door, with straps on either side for armholes.” The typical Californian, it continued, fed “on artificial spawn—fog sweetened with molasses.”69 To residents of Plymouth in 1851, California was synonymous with destitution.

At the other end of the scale of journalistic significance, The Times was at first not unfavorable to gold hunting and emigration to California, but the great molder of opinion soon reversed itself. Reviewing the matter in the light of “Brooks”-Vizetelly’s work, it found that if there was a moral in the gold rush it was that the English should “stay in England and work.”60 By July, 1849, its hostility had been solidified by news of fresh disorders in California, and it proclaimed that “the details of the doings and the mode of life at Panama and at San Francisco, together with the extravagant prices to be paid for the most trifling articles and services, and the inconveniences and sufferings to be expected, are amply sufficient to deter any Englishman with a moderate competence from trying his fortune in the far west.”61
The Athenaeum, another British molder of opinion, published its review of Brooks' account of California with an accent on the "lawless and savage spirit" in the mines. In July, 1849, its view was that "California is now under the code of Draco. Every crime is punished with death: murder, assault, theft, all offenses are treated as of equal magnitude," while "to the native and foreigner, [the American] colonists observe no law." Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine also spoke of "the terrific amount of crime and immorality of which the new American state has been the constant scene, up to the date of the most recent advices." Ignored in Great Britain was the more restrained and judicious comment of the West Briton that whereas California was no "Eden," it was "a spot where, with enduring patience and continued perseverance, a position may be attained which, if not immediately productive of wealth by fresh and more important discoveries, will at least give scope to talent and industry, and assure a return for capital in whatever direction it may be laid out." Punch commented pithily: "The ultimate effect of the discovery of the Diggings" would be "to raise prices, to ruin fools, to demoralize a new country first, and settle it afterwards."66

It is important to grasp the full size of the impact made on the British consciousness by the gold rush, especially in its first years, because it was the magnitude of the excitement which assured that any image of California formed then would endure. Created at white heat, it was not to be remolded in less combustible days. There is no doubt that the size of the impact of the news of the gold discoveries could hardly have been greater. The Athenaeum even went as far as to say that "after all," it was "becoming doubtful if the wondrous '1848' will be known in history as the 'year of revolutions'." The periodical suggested it was more likely to be recalled as the year of gold. Or, as a guide to the diggings more fancifully, but revealingly, put it:

During these fearful convulsions which have agitated the continent of Europe in the course of the past year, prostrating thrones and principalities in the dust, and threatening the very dissolution of society into its primitive elements... John Bull exhibited an aspect of unperturbable tranquillity which excited universal astonishment and admiration. No sooner, however, does Jonathan touch him with his golden wand, than his whole frame becomes tremblingly alive; his wonted adventurous spirit returns to him, and he already fancies himself freighting his rich galleon in the bay of San Francisco.

Few were untouched by the excitement or able to ignore it. Businessmen advertised goods supposedly specially suited to life in the mines. Poets, songwriters, and novelists found they had a new and best-selling theme. Political economists discussed the discoveries' effects on the international monetary system. Medical men thought about the medical effects of life in the mines. The following extract from the Liverpool Standard, reprinted by The Times, clearly reveals the level of the popular desire for any news about the gold regions: "There is at present to be seen at the Earl of Derby's estate at Knowsley, a considerable quantity of gold dust embedded in soil which has been brought from California along with some trees and plants." Even trivia seemed important by association with the magic idea of a real El Dorado.

What all this meant is the theme of this article. The image of a lawless, dangerous, insecure society which was so sharply and indelibly defined in these years frightened away immigrants. The professional givers of advice on the subject of
emigration connected lawlessness and failure and warned that California was quite the wrong destination for the aspirant emigrating classes. Some were explicitly condemnatory. One wrote that he would admit "California has a good climate and soil, admirably adapted for cattle, and not unsuited to cereals," but, he went on,

It is notoriously the region of gold, and also of that most desperate of all classes of men, gold finders. To the bold and intrepid, to all who are imbued with the spirit of adventure, to that frame of mind which is essentially gipsy, Kalmuck, and Arabian in its desire for a wandering and restless life, these regions offer the inducement of a climate which admits of constantly living in the open air, of productiveness which renders rough subsistence easy with little labour, and of the chances of getting rapidly rich by the lucky acquisition of the precious metal.

It was not the place for the sober immigrant, but "the destination only of men of desperate fortunes, and . . . a certain source of unhappiness to all persons of orderly, industrious, prudent, and virtuous habits." Another writer was equally as damning in omitting California from "The Best Parts of America To Go To." About the best that was allowed was that "the settler with a small capital may do well in some of the rising towns as a storekeeper, or in the country parts as a farmer or grazer," but he would not do "so well as he would be likely to do in a British colony." Well might Borthwick write that California's principal products were believed to be "rats, fleas, empty bottles and old clothes." Certainly, British capitalists were loath to invest their money in the state, reacting to the same adverse images as the prospective immigrants.

It is conceivable that if British capitalists had possessed a faith in the investment possibilities of California, they might have done something to try to counter the negative images of California held in Britain. But by a stroke of ill-fortune for the state, the gold rush had disenchanted them as it had done so many British visitors. One reason for this lay in the failure of the British investments in quartz mining, which was publicized by the Allsop brothers. Thomas Allsop went out to look

Mocking the California craze of 1849, Punch (v. 16, p. 20) characterized the Argonauts as rowdy, greedy, inefficient, and a bit silly.
at the possibilities in person and carried out a thorough investigation which led him to the conclusion “after an examination of more than three hundred ledges, in the richest and most productive part of California,” that whereas placer mining was returning a 400 per cent profit, quartz mining led to a loss of 80 per cent of initial capital invested. The failure of all the companies floated in London bore out his reasoning and explained the capitalists’ disinterest in California against which Seyd was raising his voice in 1858.

California has always relied on its reputation as a land of superior quality to attract population. It has been rightly said that its growth "owes much to travelers' published narratives, both domestic and foreign." But it is arguable that it was not until the 1880's that the state was sufficiently ordered to present an unchallengeable image of burgeoning, assured progress. Before that date the general opinion, at least in Britain, was that there were far preferable destinations for the man who was looking for a new home for himself and his family. It is, thus, further arguable that published narratives could also impede growth, and

In the face of negative public opinion, would-be British Californians could turn to The Times' want-ads, such as this portion from the February 28, 1849, issue, to be titillated by venturesome individuals seeking companions, sales, and capital.

CALIFORNIA.—To Merchants, Manufacturers and Traders.—The advertiser, who has been engaged in commercial transactions, being about to proceed to San Francisco to establish himself as general merchant and commercial agent, is ready to PURCHASE, or receive on consignment, goods of every description suitable for that market. Address, pre-paid, to S. C., care of Moors, Woollett and Nephews, shipbrokers, 1 Lime-street-square.

CALIFORNIA.—COOK, BAKER, and Co., shipping and commission merchants, San Francisco. Upper California, will be happy to attend to the SALE of any GOODS or PRODUCE consigned to their care, and shippers may rely on prompt sales and returns. References.—Mears, Barnard, and Co; L. Baker, Esq., New York; E. D. Brigham and Co., Boston; Lemuel Goddard, Esq., Crescent, Minories, London, who will attend to the shipment of all goods consigned to C. B., and Co.

CALIFORNIA.—A gentleman, who is proceeding to San Francisco with a cargo of goods to establish a store there, is desirous to meet with a suitable companion as an ASSISTANT. He must have had considerable experience in business, and it would be desirable he should have some capital, say from £500 to £1,000, to invest and take a moderate share in the profits. If he has a knowledge of dry goods it would be considered an advantage. Character and connections must bear the strictest investigation, as will the advertiser’s; and to save trouble it is requested that the name and address of the person in charge may be given with any application. Address, pre-paid, to O. P. Q., Mr. Hooper’s advertising office, 5 Thavies-in-n. Holborn.

CALIFORNIA and the GOLD REGIONS.—As it appears from the most recent accounts that manual labour is still only to be procured in the gold district at such an enormous rate as to consume all the profits of the speculation, the attention of emigrants that shippers is requested to a PATENT ORANGE-WASHING MACHINE, which has been used for a considerable time in England with the greatest success, and by which a boy can do as much work as six men. Failure particular and much valuable information on the subject will be given to actual purchasers on application to Mr. W. K. Whitehead, consulting engineer, 3 Sherborne lane, city.

CALIFORNIA.—Caution.—The undersigned, having ascertained that GALVANIZED METAL has lately been shipped by various parties to California, without application to or license from them, hereby give notice, that they or their appointed agents have the exclusive right to import, sell, or manufacture galvanized metal of any description, in California or any part of the United States, and that any such metal shipped without their consent or license in writing will be stopped on its arrival, and the importers will subject themselves to heavy penalties. Any parties desirous of shipping this material, which is admirably adapted for the construction and roofing of warehouses, dwellings, and other purposes, in California or elsewhere, for which iron is not to be had, or such license is required, will please apply. A list is required, will please apply, etc. To Mr. Morewood and Rogers, patentee of the galvanized tinned iron, Steel-yard-wharf, Upper Thames-street, London.

FOR CALIFORNIA.—LAYCOCK'S PORTABLE IRON-FRAMED AND FIRE-PROOF HOUSES, consisting of two rooms and an excellent large store, can be set up in two days by two ordinary men. Price moderate.—39, Old Hall-street, Liverpool.

EMISSION to CALIFORNIA.—BENJAMIN EDGINGTON, 2 Duke-street, Southwark, London-bridge, inspects applicants to inspect his EMIGRATION TENTS, which are made of canvas with every requisite at a moderate cost. May be seen any day at his mercantile, 2 Duke-street, Southwark, one being purposely erected, with cot, stool, table, and camp most complete. A warehouse, etc. 205, Piccadilly.
that insofar as California’s growth in the mid-nineteenth century depended on injections of British labor and capital, they did just that. When the census of 1860 disclosed that there was a greater number of violent deaths per capita of the population in California than in any other state except Texas, and when the census of 1870 revealed a marked decrease in the growth rate of California’s population, there were those who connected the two sets of statistics. The Immigrant Aid Association and Ernest Seyd did so long before the two censuses were taken. British immigrants recoiled from the events creating the first set of statistics and their reaction did much to ensure that the second set of statistics came about. California discovered in the process that while publicity can aid an image, it can also often harm it.

NOTES

1. Ernest Seyd, California and Its Resources (London, 1858), 18.
3. The unsuccessful attempts of the legislators who wanted a state-supported immigration agency can be followed in California, Journal of the Senate, Eighteenth Session (Sacramento, 1870), pp. 396, 574, 627, and in Journal of the Assembly, Eighteenth Session (Sacramento, 1870), p. 440 and in Journal of the Senate, Nineteenth Session (Sacramento, 1872), pp. 265, 820. The story of the nearest thing to an immigrant agency which the state ever established can be followed in the Annual Report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Emigrants to California (New York, 1860), in Appendix to the Journals of the Assembly in California, Twelfth Session (Sacramento, 1861). This body only produced one report in its lifetime and was not a success, in part, because the commissioner was not granted a salary by the legislature.
4. The number of British-born and of other foreign-born groups in California in 1870 will be found in the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1872), 1:345–377.
6. Address of the Pacific Immigrant Aid Association of California (San Francisco, 1857); San Francisco Daily Alta California, April 19, 1857.
7. Seyd, California, 20–21.
8. Ibid., 23, 24.
9. Ibid., 138.
11. The Times, May 28, 1858.
20. Ibid., 2:402; see also 3:335.
22. Alexander Forbes, California (London, 1839), 163. See also p. 311.
25. Vancouver, Voyage of Discovery, 1:432; Beechey, Narrative, 2:3, 64, 67.
34. The first announcement that this work was a fraud was contained in Henry Vizetelly, Glances Back Through Seventy Years (2 vols., London, 1893), 1:343. See also Douglas S. Watson, 'Spurious Californiana—"Four Months Among the Gold Finders" Henry Vizetelly's Confession to an Astounding Literary Hoax," California Historical Society Quarterly, 11:65-68 (1932). The work is highly valued in Robert E. Cowan, A Bibliography of the History of California and the Pacific West 1510-1906 (new edn., Columbus, Ohio, 1952), 25.
35. Brooks, Four Months, 9, 100.
37. Ibid., 201, 202.
38. See the reviews quoted in Vizetelly, Glances Back, 1:343.
40. Ibid., 2:278, 311, 329.
42. William Kelly, An Excursion to California over the Prairie, Rocky Mountains, and Great Sierra Nevada (2 vols., London, 1851), 2:14-15, 16. His remarks were repeated by The Athenaeum (1851), p. 450.
44. Ibid., 59-61, 89-93, 95-98, 101-113, 114, 120, 147-148, 169, 177, 239-240.
45. Edward Lucatt, Rovings in the Pacific, from 1837 to 1849; with a glance at California (London, 1851), 341.
46. Ibid., 339, 341, 342-343, 345, 348-349, 360, 363.
49. Ibid., 2:51, 56-57, 58.
51. Published in London in 1852 and 1851 respectively.


56. Ibid., 132. See also p. 224.


58. Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald, March 10, 1849.

59. Ibid., November 22, 1851.

60. For early favorable comment see, for instance, The Times, January 5, 1849; for the quoted comment Ibid., April 11, 1849.

61. The Times, July 7, 1849.


63. Ibid., 741.


66. Punch (1849), p. 64.


68. Guide to California, 5. See also Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (1852), p. 98, for similar, if more restrained, remarks.

69. The Times, January 4, 24, 26, 29, 31, February 9, 13, 16, 28, August 27, 1849; Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald, July 21, 1849; Robert Richards, The Californian Crusoe; or, The Lost Treasure Found! (London, 1854); Montague H. P. Hall, California: A Poem (London, 1849).


71. The Times, March 1, 1849.


75. Borthwick, Three Years in California, 54.


