

Book Reviews

By J. Gregg Layne

SEEING THE ELEPHANT. Letters of R. R. Taylor, Forty-niner. Edited by John Walton Caughey. The Ward Ritchie Press, 1951 Pp. xv, 107 8vo Ills. \$7.50

In the Gold Rush days of '49, one who had been to the mines, had mined successfully or unsuccessfully, had suffered the inconveniences that were attendant to living at the diggings, and who had tried his hand at various of the lucrative occupations — either at the mines or in the hurly-burly town of San Francisco — had “seen the elephant”.

R. R. Taylor, “R. R.” in his letters, even to his wife, was one who had “seen the elephant.” He wrote a whole sheaf of letters to his wife at home, that gave more interesting details of life in California and the journey to the mines than were given by the average gold seeker of that era. Those letters have now been printed in a beautiful book by the Ward Ritchie Press under the cryptic title “SEEING THE ELEPHANT.”

The Taylor letters, 19 in number, give a vivid description of the sea trip to Panama, across the Isthmus, and up the west coast to San Francisco. On the first lap of the voyage “R. R.” traveled a little more luxuriously than did many a '49er. He seemed well supplied with money, and it was only after leaving Panama that his money bought him no special favors.

An interesting interlude on the first half of the trip was a forced stop in New Orleans, waiting for a more sea-worthy vessel, where he used his eyes and descriptive powers to tell all he saw.

His unsuccessful mining ventures and his equally unsuccessful efforts to make money by clerking in stores both at the mines and

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in San Francisco, quickly awakened him to the fact that his New England home was the place for him and he took advantage of the earliest opportunity to return to it.

The Taylor letters are among the best that have appeared in print. They were understandingly written and besides the vivid pictures he gives of the mines he pictures life in San Francisco graphically.

Dr John Caughey's editing and notations have made the letters into a worthwhile book for the student of California history — Ward Ritchie's designing and printing have made it a book to be desired by any booklover, and the size of the edition — but 250 copies — makes this handsome volume an item to be sought and guarded by the collector.

THE DICTIONARY OF CALIFORNIA LAND NAMES. Compiled by Phil Townsend Hanna. Revised and enlarged. The Automobile Club of Southern California Los Angeles, 1951. Pp. xxii, 392 Octavo \$5.

In 1946 Phil Townsend Hanna prepared, and the Automobile Club of Southern California published, his fine "DICTIONARY OF CALIFORNIA LAND NAMES." That edition has been exhausted for several years, and now the same compiler and publisher have brought out a new and greatly enlarged edition of the valuable book. New names have been added, an extended bibliography has been compiled, and some corrections have been made.

THE DICTIONARY OF CALIFORNIA LAND NAMES is invaluable to the man or woman who wants information quickly upon some town or locality within the state. Not too large, it can easily be slipped into a coat pocket or carried in one's traveling bag. It is of greatest aid in creating a keener interest in a vacation tour, or a business or pleasure trip up and down the state.

As an example of the manner in which the "Dictionary" has been brought up-to-date, the locality in Death Valley, named Desolation Canyon, hardly three years ago, on January 8th, 1949, at Furnace Creek Inn, at the meeting held to organize the now famous pageant that took place later that year, is given and fully described in this new edition of the **DICTIONARY OF CALIFORNIA LAND NAMES.**