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# THE RALSTON-FRY



## EDDING

## AND THE WEDDING JOURNEY TO YOSEMITE MAY 20, 1858

From the Diary of Miss Sarah Haight  
[Mrs. Edward Tompkins]

edited by  
*Francis P. Farquhar*

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William Chapman Ralston  
*Courtesy of Mrs. Arthur Page*

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Elizabeth Fry Ralston  
*Courtesy of Mrs. Arthur Page*

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## PREFACE

When has such a thing ever happened before? Has such a thing ever happened since? The bridegroom inviting the entire wedding party to join him and his bride on their honeymoon! But that is what William C. Ralston did when he married Lizzie Fry in San Francisco on May 20, 1858. Ralston was thirty-two years old at the time; his bride twenty-one. He was at the beginning of a spectacular career in banking and in the grandiose speculations of the Comstock mining era with its bonanzas and borrascas, a career that ended in 1875 with his body floating in the waters off North Beach in San Francisco Bay. At the time of the wedding he was merely the junior partner of the banking firm of Fretz & Ralston. Things were moving rapidly in San Francisco, however, and he was becoming more and more closely associated with Joseph A. Donohoe, an energetic young importer with whom he shortly formed a partnership in banking. Donohoe was

one of the wedding party and, incidentally, was to remain a lifelong friend of Mrs. Ralston. Another member of the wedding party was Edgar Mills, of Sacramento, brother of the better-known Darius Ogden Mills. Then there were Thomas H. Morrison, a teller in Ralston's banking firm, a Judge McRae, Mr. and Mrs. Kincaid, and several others, some of whom went along for only a few days.

The bride, Lizzie Fry, more precisely Miss Elizabeth Red, was a niece and adopted daughter of Colonel (by courtesy) John D. Fry, formerly sheriff of Green County, Illinois, and a member of the Illinois legislature. He had come to California in 1849 with William Sharon and was to be associated with Ralston in various ventures in the next few years, including their victimization in the famous Diamond Fraud of 1872. Elizabeth Red, born in Illinois, had, upon adoption, taken her uncle's name and had followed him to California after he had established himself there.

In the midst of this galaxy of young bankers and burgeoning businessmen, the ladies might well have been overlooked. But the records show that they were quite equal to the occasion. An account written thirty years later, but evidently derived from contemporary sources, is found in *The Daily Examiner*, San Francisco, Sunday, September 30, 1888:

It was an afternoon wedding, and the nuptial knot was tied by the Rev. Dr. Scott in Calvary Church, on Bush Street, which was crowded with their friends, and the bride, a pretty brunette, looked charmingly in a most becoming wedding costume. A short reception followed at Mrs. Darling's at North Beach, and then the ladies of the party donned Bloomer dresses [not quite so soon, according to the *Diary*] and all departed for a honeymoon camping-out frolic in the Yosemite Valley, a very amusing account of which was written by Josh Haven, who accompanied them, for *The Wide West*, one of the Sunday papers of the period.

And here is Josh Haven's account, at least as far as it goes—for nothing about the stay in the Valley can be found:

THE EVENT OF THE WEEK WAS THE WEDDING.—On Thursday last, as everybody knows, a certain banking firm extended their business by taking into the concern a new partner, (probably not a silent one.) . . . The gathering at Dr. Scott's church, on Thursday, to see the happy couple united, was very large, and crinoline abounded. We don't know when we have seen so strong a turn-out of the "beauty and the fashion" of our city. It was an exciting occasion to them, and the numbers who crowded the church gave evidence of the interest taken in the prominent actors in the scene. Daylight was excluded, and the happy conceit of lighting the church with gas gave great effect—it was a brilliant idea and a good one. It is unnecessary to remark that the bride looked beautifully, and was gracefully supported through the trying scene by her charming bridesmaid—and how staunchly he was supported. The ladies were all there, and we can't tell them anything about it. They know more in a minute about such matters than we can tell them in a month. The Happy couple left on the *Helen Hensley*, at 4 P.M., for Stockton, accompanied by a large party of friends, some of whom continue on with them to the Big Trees—thence to Yo-Semite Falls. As the boat left the wharf, three hearty cheers were given, and a salute was fired from the steamers *Sierra Nevada* and *Orizaba*. The *Helen Hensley* and several other boats were dressed in flags, and the *Orizaba* and *Sierra Nevada* spread their bunting from hull to topmast.

Which brings us to the "charming bridesmaid," author of our *Diary*, Miss Sarah Haight. Of approximately the same age as the bride, she was the daughter of Judge Fletcher M. Haight, who came to California in 1854, and at one time owned a large part of Carmel Valley. Her brother, Henry Huntley Haight, was later Governor of California, 1867-1871. Haight Street, San Francisco, was named for her uncle. William H. Brewer, in *Up and Down California in 1860-1864* (pp. 107-108), gives a picture of the Haight family as he saw them at Carmel in May, 1861: "Judge Haight is a fine old man, a man of much intellect, lives in a comfortable house, has with him two daughters, most lovely young women, of perhaps eighteen and twenty-two years—pretty, agreeable, cultivated, and sensible."

As one becomes acquainted with her through the *Diary*, it is pleasant to know that a few years later, on December 23, 1861, Sarah had her own wedding party, when she was married, at the residence of Samuel Knight, to Edward Tompkins, the Rev. Thomas Starr King officiating. Edward Tompkins, though not as spectacular as William Ralston, was, nevertheless, a man of considerable distinction. At the time of his death, in 1872, he was a State Senator from Alameda County and a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California. A resolution of that Board, February 7, 1873, states: "He was a native of Oneida County, New York, a graduate of Union College, a successful member of the bar, first in his native State and then, in California, a student of literary and philosophical subjects, an earnest advocate of the higher education, and the generous promoter of all good undertakings in the community where he dwelt."

Sarah and Edward Tompkins had quite a different kind of honeymoon from that of the Ralstons. They went to San Jose, and were there caught and held immobile for some time by the flood arising from the extraordinary rains that deluged the whole of central California. However, in the following May, Sarah had a wedding excursion of her own, deferred to be sure, and not on the grand scale of her friend Lizzie's, but none the less memorable. She and her husband joined a field party of the State Geological Survey, led by Professor Josiah Dwight Whitney, on an excursion to the summit of Mount Diablo. Included in the party were William H. Brewer, Whitney's chief assistant, and the Rev. Starr King.

In a letter written in 1930, their daughter, Miss Elizabeth Knight Tompkins, says: "My father was 20 years older than my mother, a widower with children, but it was a very happy marriage. According to her old friends, a great many men wanted to marry my mother." It was Miss Elizabeth Tompkins who preserved her mother's diary and eventually presented it to the Bancroft Library. She died only a few years ago, 1955, at her home in Pacific Grove, at the age of ninety.

The threads of the Ralston, Haight, Donohoe, and Tompkins families continued to intertwine. for many years and now are brought together again through the publication of this *Diary*. The participants of the wedding party are all gone. The last to go was the bride herself, Mrs. Elizabeth Fry Ralston, who for many years lived in a peaceful little cottage near Georgetown in the foothill country. She died in San Francisco, November 30, 1929, at the age of ninety-two. Her daughter, Mrs. Arthur (Emelita Ralston) Page, lives to enjoy this souvenir of the wedding of her father and mother; while many of the third generation will smile at a record of events in which their grandfathers and grandmothers played so sprightly a part.

## DIARY OF MISS SARAH HAIGHT

[Editor's note: this book set the diary text in *italic* font. In order to make the text more readable, I removed the *italic* font.]



AY 20th.  
[1858]

Marched into church with slow and measured footsteps to the sound of solemn music. At first the impulse was strong upon me to hurry and get through as soon as possible. But fortunately, I recollected myself in time and walked with serenity and composure up to the altar where the words were pronounced which united Lizzie Fry and William Ralston in the bonds of holy matrimony. The bride looked beautiful, with just sufficient of a rose tint upon her cheek to relieve the complete whiteness of her dress.

We each went to our respective houses and laid aside our white silks, tulle, and orange flowers for something more appropriate for travelling. Four o'clock found us on board of the Stockton boat and after innumerable farewells and congratulations from friends and acquaintances we left the wharf. Received salutes from the steamships *Orizaba* and *Sierra Nevada* which fairly made my head ache. We had a very nice dinner until our arrival at Benicia, when our party separated; part to return to San Francisco and the rest to go on to the Big Trees. This was our first breaking-up and though it took no one whose absence particularly regretted, yet it saddened me, for all leave-takings, however trivial, are sad. I do not think with E. that it is pleasant to say good bye. He says that the sweetest, holiest and pleasantest emotions of our nature are concentrated in a good bye. But I have said too many that have been eternal to wish to say many more.

After dinner Mr. Hallock and I sat on the guards and had a long talk about the prospects of California. I was not suffered to continue it very long, for I was presently summoned to pack my valise for Coulterville. It was a matter of some speculation to me as to whether I would venture to put on my "Bloomer" after I got there, but I supposed I should become reconciled to it by necessity as I had no other suit with me that I could possibly wear. We retired early that we might take an early start in the morn'g. It seemed to me as if we had but just fallen asleep when I heard Mr. Haven's voice calling to us to get up. We obeyed the summons with the greatest difficulty, for our eyes were but half open, and were soon up and dressed in our travelling dresses and sun bonnets from whose depths we were scarcely visible.

MAY 21st.

It was pleasant this beautiful bright morning to ride through green fields, though I can imagine that it would not have had that charm in the heat of noon. The country between Stockton and Mugginsville, where we stopped to breakfast, was level and struck me as being rather monotonous, which may perhaps have been on account of my not having breakfasted. At the Grove of Mugginsville we found a good substantial meal waiting for us. Immediately after having satisfied the demands of nature the gentlemen started forth to reconnoitre the place. The bride and I, not trusting in the prudence or discretion of the party, followed close on their footsteps. What was our astonishment to see a crowd of gentlemen issuing from the store (that together with the bar formed the thriving city of Mugginsville) all wearing green spectacles. It was some time before the bride could recognize the loving eyes of her husband. We shrank back somewhat aghast at the green-eyed monsters who seemed bent on making our acquaintance. We were soon reassured, however, on finding that the party was our own.

The country through which we passed was undulating and picturesque and we saw miners at work in the sun digging for gold. Where there are diggings the beauty of the immediate country is destroyed—rough, unsightly mounds of earth, suggestive of freshly made graves, and piles of refuse quartz that but add to the general barren aspect of the country. I could not help moralizing a little on the somewhat stale subject of filthy lucre: how unsightly it makes the country appear; how few flowers or how little vegetation there is where there is gold; how it sometimes tells the same story on nations surfeited with it; and how often its blighting effects are on the human heart. The miners' cottages have none of that air of comfort and even beauty which marks that of the poorest peasant in other countries. The tavern is generally the best-looking house in the place—for a good reason, because it is the best supported.

Towards noon we passed through Angel's Camp, a place that seemed to me composed of quartz mills, the hammers of which gave the only sounds of life that were heard throughout the town. A few miles from there we stopped to change horses, and while I was quietly engaged looking out of the window I saw Mr. H. R. D. rush up towards a somewhat red-faced blue-shirted elderly gentleman and embrace him *con gusto*. I thought the aforesaid gentleman seemed to receive it *con disgusto*, but before he had had time to remonstrate or straighten his necktie, which to say the truth was considerably twisted by the violent welcomes of his friends, he was dragged up to the coach window and introduced to the ladies who had been amazed and amused spectators of the scene.

Towards evening the air became more pleasant and the dust less troublesome, and before arriving at "Murphy's," which had been our projected stopping place, we ladies were all desirous of proceeding on to the Big Trees that night. The matter was talked over and all agreed to it. For the last few miles of our way we were gradually going up hill and the breeze which sprang up came fresh from the mountains with afreshness that was delightful after the heat of the day. We reached Murphy's about sunset and Lizzie and I stood at the door of the hotel and looked off in the distance, far over the cabins and canvas houses of the little town, and watched the sun slowly gathering the clouds around him and then leaving them tinged with his own brightness to console the world a little while for his departure. And we watched them until their brightness, too, departed and they grew black and then grey. So have man seen and cherished fair hopes that were only bright with a departing lustre.

We turned from the grey outside aspect of the hamlet to the brighter one inside. A cheerful fire burned in the open grate and an excellent dinner soon raised our already high spirits to a still greater degree of buoyancy. During dinner I endeavored to obtain from Labarge, who was my right hand neighbour, some information as to the name of the town. I believe the town was named after a man by the name of Murphy. All the information I could obtain was that it was named for a blundering Irishman and as an instance of his verdancy it is

related that one evening, sitting smoking around some of his companions who were talking of the West, he suddenly raised his head and said "Is Illinuy as big as St. Louis?" "Illinuy big as St. Louis?" exclaimed another Green Islander, "Why it's 20 times bigger nor St. Louis." "20 times bigger nor St. Louis? Sure its talking ye are and I'll no be after believing a thing ye've said this blessed night." And so saying he took his pipe and departed fully convinced that every word that had been said on the subject of the West was for the purpose of deceiving him.

After dinner a committee of war was held and the ladies were all asked if they were not too tired to proceed any farther that night. Of course none of them were, and the gentlemen were ashamed after such a good example to mention anything of their fatigue, and it was accordingly decided that we should go. But little heed was paid to the rather threatening aspect of the clouds, for as the dry season was far advanced it was judged impossible for us to be incommoded with rain, and, after mustering every vehicle that the little town afforded we proceeded on our way.

Mr. Mills and I started ahead as he was supposed to know the road perfectly. The lingering twilight rapidly closed around us before we had gone far from the village, and when we had taken the mountain road that was to take us to the Big Trees there was not light enough to show us the mountain torrent that rushed impetuously on each side of the road. The effect of the rushing water was like snow. Gradually the mist that we had all observed when we first started became a decided rain and the heavens poured it down with no illiberal hand. Right glad was I then that I had persisted in wearing my serape, for its fine texture was impervious to water and, secure and dry under its ample folds, I could enjoy the night adventure very much. But I cannot say as much for my companion, for the time came when our wearied horse, which did not weigh much more than both of us put together positively refused to go up any more hills, and when all other inducements failed, Mr. M. would get out and lead him. If my companion felt any fatigue, uneasiness or disgust, he did not reveal them to me and I on my part, quite enjoyed myself. It was so grandly solitary in those old woods and that fine cold mountain air was of itself so bracing.

At last we came to a road, or rather, to two roads. After a few moments we decided to take the left hand one, and there our horse dropped his head and went on more wearily and painfully than ever. About a half a mile's travel brought us to a sawmill which evidently disturbed my conductor, who recollected nothing of the kind on the route. Labarge and Mr. Tobin, having closely followed us, we all determined that it was best to wake up the denizens of the mill and find out where we were. I suppose that the man was not thoroughly awake, for he gave us some not altogether intelligible directions about retracing our steps for a short distance and then turn up a hill to the left. We did as he directed but that same hill was worse than any we had encountered so far. It was evident that but few wheeled vehicles had ever before attempted it. When we arrived at the top, Mr. Mills and Labarge started off through the woods to reconnoitre, each disputing which should have the first chance at a grizzly, should one make its appearance. As they disappeared in the gloom of the forest the rain fell more heavily and I began to debate within my own mind as to whether we could continue to keep dry in case we had to pass the night in the forest. Fortunately, after half an hour's wandering, the gentlemen found traces of the road. After considerable holloing we were answered by the rest of the party and, guiding ourselves in the direction of their voices, came to the right road. In the gloom and silence of the forest, at about 12 o'clock midnight, we reached the hotel at the "Big Trees." A bright blazing fire and dry towels soon made us forget the cold and rain without, and a sweet sleep completely rested us after our ride of 87 miles. So ended the first day's travel. Of course, there was no end to the jokes and quizzing about my eloping, etc.

MAY 22nd.

This morning's sun dispersed the clouds and the sweet singing of the birds dispelled any dream of wandering through dark forests without a guide, and awoke me to the beautiful realities of life. In the midnight gloom I had not realized the rise of the great monsters towering up above us. But when I stood at the base of one of the trees and looked up to the top, and when I saw how like pigmies the gentlemen looked walking around the base, the longer I looked the more their grandeur grew upon me, and then I could realize this vast handiwork of nature. "What a freak of nature," says Mr. H. "Wonderful are thy works, O Lord!" thought I, looking up to where the treetops seemed to extend to the blue space. One cannot help a feeling of awe in wandering among those majestic trees. Why are they there in that particular place? Did not some of the sons of Noah emigrate to California and plant them there? Or perhaps that locality was not reached by the flood. I felt an almost irresistible desire to question the great giants—but it was a consoling reflection to me that pigmy as I am, I could remember what has passed before me during my little life, while these giants of nature can do nothing but grow and sometimes hum a mournful song amid their branches.

The dog-wood is in full bloom, and very beautiful do their large white flowers look, glittering with raindrops and contrasted with the dark green of the forests. Sometimes in the distance I would see clusters of them together, half hid by the foliage of some tree, and I could not help imagining them to be some white-robed fairies who had not had time to get out of sight before we intrusive mortals came upon them. This latter mental hallucination, I must acknowledge, belongs to my near-sightedness, which, whatever trouble it may generally give me, contrives sometimes to give distant objects a very great charm. How beautiful it is to walk in the forests in the early morning—to smell the flowers before the dew is off of them and feel the grandeur and stillness that pervades the scene only then and in the night. In the noon has not such charms for it lights up all the glades and ravines and takes away the charm of mystery from the scene.

We walked around the place as long as our time would permit and then tore ourselves away. We had not proceeded far on our way when the clouds that had been for some time threatening again poured down upon us, this time accompanied with hail. I could now see in the morning light that the trees gradually increased in height from Murphy's up to the "Big Trees" and could also have the pleasure of seeing the effect of the rain in the forest. How the old veterans seemed to enjoy it, and how they seemed to drink in the refreshing showers; and all the time we were regaled with that spicy herby fragrance that is so peculiar to California. It is not strange that mountaineers are generally such a noble race of men. I think that the clear bracing air that they breathe has much to do with it.

When within a few miles of Murphy's a turn in the road and a gap in the forest showed a beautiful prospect. The sun and clouds were still struggling for mastery of the sky, and from, our elevated position we had a most beautiful view of field and forest stretching onward for miles and lighted or shaded by the sun or clouds. At last the sun achieved a brilliant victory and a party drove up to Murphy's so different from the one that left there the night before that none but particular friends could possibly have recognized them. The gentlemen with hats whose original stillness was all taken out of them and the ladies' sun-bonnets all clung to their faces. Though the party looked

thus dismally, there was no inward depression that anyone could see. All were in the highest possible spirits and laughed and sang and danced in a manner that must have alarmed the people of the hotel.

After a most excellent dinner, which everyone was ready to do justice to, we again started on our winding way. The woods were beautiful and we were in the highest possible spirits. Mr. Donohoe and Mills and Mrs. Ralston and myself rode in an open stage. After a few miles the road became very rough and some amusing things happened. Mrs. R. was precipitated into the arms of Mr. Donohoe and into those of Mr. M. on very short notice. They were very much shocked at such proceedings and gave us a lecture on propriety that was not well finished before another jolt threw us both into our former position. There was no use trying; the road was very rough and threw us around in a very promiscuous manner. We passed the other coach and I fancied they looked with some little envy on us for they were all listening to a solemn tirade of the Judge's and we were disposed to be very merry.

At length we came to the top of a mountain, where we were all advised to walk, as the road wound down the sides of a mountain and was very steep. The scenery was very beautiful. The late rain had washed off every tree and limb and the syringa grew along the roadside and bloomed as I have never seen it under cultivation. We gathered it and put it in Lizzie's hair. I asked her if it did not remind her of her wedding day, for it was what she then wore in her hair.

At the foot of the mountain, or rather between two mountains, rolled the rapid stream of the Stanislaus. We were as if separated from all the world and the only outlet seemed to be where the river rushed through a narrow gorge. The mountains on both sides were covered with verdure, trees, and shrubs, the wild strawberry and syringa being most abundant. Mr. D. and I had a long talk about truth—how much we ought to speak it one to another—and we came to the good understanding of always talking it one to another. We struck up quite a friendship there on the mountainside.

When we arrived at the foot of the mountain and crossed the ferry, Mr. Haven insisted upon my riding up as the mountain was one mile and a half high, but it was too pleasant to ride, so I continued my walk, not, however, without a struggle, for Mr. H. insisted upon again stopping the coach for me to get in, and in order to escape his importunities I said I *would* not and Mr. M. accused me of bringing my foot down rather too hard upon the ground for feminine delicacy. The sun was slowly setting when we began the ascent and by the time we reached the top he sank among clouds of brilliant hues. We turned and looked back. The river was in deep shade, but the sides of the opposite mountain still reflected the sun's last rays, while the side on which we stood was bathed in the light of a young moon. I shall never forget the scene. The lights and shadows, sunset and moonlight, are all things that I can feel but not paint.

We drove by moonlight into Columbia. All our noisy mirth was gone, but the gentle chastened feeling that a beautiful landscape never fails to leave on most minds was upon all of us, and silently but happily we rode the next few miles on to Columbia. Along the road-side the miners were busy "panning" up, as they call it; i.e., washing out the sluices and counting the gold dust. Now Columbia to Sonora is but three miles, and there we drove quickly, for in addition to the other feelings, we knew that the next day we should separate and some of us go on to the YoSemite Falls and the rest return to San Francisco. We drove up to the hotel at Sonora at about eight o'clock, and about nine were all seated to a splendid supper and making farewell speeches for we knew that we should have very little time for that at our hurried breakfast the next morning. Soon after, the ladies, all but me, retired to rest. But I could not sleep, for the day has been one of excitements and impressions of beautiful things which keep me awake until this late hour, writing. While sitting in the parlor of the hotel, the Judge came and had a low talk with me. At length I began to be sleepy and, bidding good night to the judge, I crept into my bed and was soon asleep, visions of beauty mingling with my dreams.

MAY 23rd.

Messrs. Hallock, Young, Tobin, and Haven, and Mrs. Darling bid us good-bye this morning, and I fancy that was the reason why we all felt rather sad and quiet. I leaned back in my seat and pulled my bonnet over my face and pretended to go to sleep, but the exclamations of the party in regard to the scenery soon compelled me to look around me. The road wound along the side of a mountain, curving like a horse-shoe, and many hundred feet below us they were washing out gold. It was a wild, desolate-looking country through which we passed, and during the whole day we did not meet but one team.

We arrived at Coulterville this evening about five o'clock and after dinner we all arrayed ourselves in our bloomer costumes and walked out to see the beauties of the place. I was walking up and down in front of the place, enjoying the moonlight, when I was surprised to see a rough-looking man apparently following me. I turned to go into the house when I heard a laugh that sounded familiar. I turned and recognized Mr. D. We were both tired of sitting still and so continued our walk for some distance up the road.

The village or town of Coulterville is named after the man who keeps the hotel of the place and is very prettily situated between high hills on every side and is a place of some mining importance.

HAZEL GREEN, MAY 24th.

We left Coulterville at seven this morning and travelled for a little while on a dusty wagon-road until we exchanged it for a mountain trail. I have heard much of mountain scenery but had always connected with it some idea of sterility and gloom, but the Sierras certainly do not realize that in the month of May, for on all sides we passed beautiful flowers and bright green grass.

At about twelve miles from Coulterville we dismounted from our horses and were invited to take a short walk to see the Cave. I went rather unwillingly, for I had but little idea of what I was going to see. Here Captain Tyler joined us. The Captain was a steamboat man on the Mississippi River and a regular character in his way. He was about six feet high, stalwart as a giant, with a peculiar honest expression in his handsome face. He will be a very great addition to our party, I can see. The next in order and importance is Captain Ackley, our guide. The Captain has evidently been a good looking man once but is much disfigured with a sabre cut across his cheek. He has been in the Mexican War and has seen some service, but I think not quite all that he pretends to. He occasionally forgets himself and has been in too many battles at the same time and, if one can trust his own account, has performed deeds to which Gonzalvo de Cordova or the Cid were entirely unequal. Nevertheless, he is quite an addition to our party, though I observe he is never in a hurry to work.

Next comes Mr. Wilson, who purchased all our outfit and was most kind and attentive on the way, working harder than any one in the party. I must not omit Tom Scott, an active, energetic young fellow who could turn his hand to anything and who constituted our lifeguard for he carried the only pistol in the party. Tom had charge of the animals, and the greatest trials he had were with one obstinate

little donkey who, with a pack as high as himself, would wander of the road into some inaccessible place whenever the grazing was particularly good. Truth compels me to say that Tom said some very unhandsome, uncomplimentary things in Spanish to that little donkey, who was only actuated by a laudable desire to better his condition, as most of us are in this world. Our cook was a light-haired, light-eyed man who did his work well and had plenty of it. Those were the numeraries of our party, and now, for fear I may forget, I must describe the remainder.

Firstly, The bridegroom, alias Toppy, a man who is never tired. He travels the fastest, works the hardest and has one of the biggest hearts in existence. The bride is a pretty, rather delicate little girl, as her husband calls her, who has much more strength and endurance of fatigue than anyone gave her credit for. She looked very pretty in her black-and-white check bloomer, with her hair braided in long braids down her back. Mr. Kinkaid, alias John Gillfillen, is one of the best travelling companions I ever knew. His wife accompanied him and was a very fine rider and a very pleasant little woman. Miss Sarah Haight, alias Di Vernon, was a somewhat large specimen of a female, whose bloomer was not particularly becoming to her style, who whenever the weather was cold enough, sported a Mexican serape and always wore a brown straw-hat, the gift of Mr. D. This young woman, though ordinarily well enough behaved, on extraordinary occasions and in dangerous places, required the restraining hand of her friends.

The three single gentlemen who accompanied the expedition were Judge McRae, Mr. Donohoe, and Mr. Mills. The former deserves more description than my limited space will allow. He was very tall, very thin, very precise and slow in all his movements. He was a good scholar possessed of much *e-ru-di-tion*, as Dominie Sampson would observe, and had a happy faculty of getting waited upon. Messrs. D and M. were two mirth-loving, kindhearted gentlemen, which last recommendation I have had abundant reason to test. I have diverged much from my subject to write these characters, but having written them I shall confine myself to the description of our journey.

We were just going to the Cave when I made such a long digression. Capt. T. led Mrs. Ralston, and I followed. After a short ascent we came suddenly upon a flight of steps which we ascended and the beauties of the cave burst upon us. For a few moments we could do nothing but gaze, and then, the first impressions having in some degree subsided, we had leisure to look. We descended about seventy-five feet on steps constructed for that purpose before reaching the floor of the cave. Its floor on the right is covered with large rocks cushioned with green moss whose color and texture no upholsterer could rival. The cave at the top is partially open, and the trees, called boxwood elders, grow among the rocks and thrust their tops out of the opening. The rays of light that come into the cave through these green leaves are chastened and softened to a proper degree. The place does not want the broad glare of the sun in it. From the right-hand side, where the trees are, the ground slopes gradually to the shore of a beautiful lake, clear as crystal—though forty feet deep, every stone on its bottom is distinctly visible. There is no knowing how deep it may be underneath the rocks, for it has apparently no bottom.

There was a little boat there into which I got and Captain T. rowed me about the tiny lake. It gave me a strange feeling, like awe, to go in under the rocks where it was so cold, dark, and solitary. Sitting in the boat and looking up on the rocks, it resembled a theatre with the side scenes. There were grotesque faces and bats and owls carved in rock, but when you changed your position the resemblance would vanish. There was one figure that seemed to me to be very distinct. It was a female figure with her head bent down and clinging to the rock as if in agony. It was very satisfactory to us to see in one corner a rock cascade. There was a depression in this corner of the rock above and it looked as if there had been a fall of water there that had suddenly turned to stone. Between the cascade and the theatre there was an organ, the pipes of which were very distinct.

Going up a flight of steps to the left, we entered a spacious shanty, which bears the name of the ballroom, though I should imagine the floor somewhat rough for a dance. But my favorite place was in the little boat on the lake—to watch the rays of light as they stole in through the opening of the cave with softened rays, giving it that softened light that a painter would love. Innumerable swallows flew twittering around, and they, with some pretty little green lizard were the sole occupants of the cave. The water of the lake is beautifully clear and cold. The proprietor, Nicholas Arni, told us that fish put in the lake entirely disappeared, probably by some subterranean outlet. The trees, rocks, and sides of the cave are everywhere covered with beautiful green moss. The honor of naming it was conferred on Judge McRae, who called it the “Bower Cave.” At last we were compelled to go away and we left with regret, but promising ourselves a visit on our return.

Again in the saddle, we rode rapidly on and passed the last Chinaman digging for gold and heard their last “How do John,” and passed the last houses or shanties that we were likely to see for some time, and then we were alone with our party in the mountains. The trail was marked by the trees being “blazed,” as it is called. We could not travel more than a hundred yards without crossing little mountain brooks running merrily along over their pebbly bottoms and filled with cold water.

The forests are unlike those of the Eastern states. There is no underbrush and the branches of the trees are very far from the ground. The smell of the pines, too, is very pleasant. Our trail is frequently crossed by a fallen tree that some tempest had brought down. A tempest in the mountains and among those pines must be a grand thing. How the wind would howl and roar, and how the ground would shake when one of them fell! In one place a pine tree had fallen and crushed two or three others in its fall and together they had rolled down the mountain sides.

Today I tried to walk, but gave it up after two miles and felt very glad to be in the saddle again. We have gradually been ascending all day and tomorrow we must get to the top of some of these mountains and see the beautiful views. Since four o'clock the ride has been very pleasant. We rode slowly and stopped to admire the views of the distant mountains as we passed along. It happened I was riding with Cap. that night about sunset we came to a grove of young pine trees. They seemed to me to resemble Ohio in the mist of the other states. “God save me,” said he, “from the thoughts those trees give me. There was such a tree as that growing on the grave of my little girl when I last saw it.” The tears fell from his eyes as he spoke and, coming as it did from a rough strong man, this little incident touched me.

Arrived in camp all was bustle and confusion for a short time and then our tent was erected, our campfires blazing. I was very much interested in the cooking operation and seated myself on a log to watch it. If I had only stayed there. But I started to go to the other fire and, being very stiff from riding so long, stumbled and sprained my ankle. No supper that ever I ate tasted half so good as that one, the long ride having given us very good appetites. In front of our camp was a blazing fire, and when the moon was rising over the scene we all went to sleep.

MAY 25th.

This morning all were in the saddle at an early hour. We saw some of the most magnificent fir prospects I have ever beheld—at the foot of the mountain upon whose summits we were was a beautiful green level prairie with a little stream flowing through its midst and the trees were all like orchard trees. So cultivated did it look that we could scarcely believe that it was not cultivated. Above it on the opposite side towered a mountain covered with trees, and still beyond that rose another and another, range on range, and the last were covered with snow. How grateful the cold wind coming from the snow felt in the noon, and the snow was so pure and white that you could scarce distinguish it from the clouds resting midway on its sides. Looking back of us we could see the coast range of mountains at a distance of two hundred miles and conspicuous among them was Mt. Diablo. How that glimpse of the old veteran carried me home to my own room, where it is the first thing I can see on looking out of my window in the morning.

The road has been getting gradually wilder and the hills sterner. Immense granite rocks rest on the mountain above the trail with a threatening aspect. In some places they appear to have fallen and carried large pine trees along with them. In one place I saw where a large pine tree had torn up a rock in its fall, exactly as a dentist extracts a tooth with his pincers. This afternoon, when about two miles from the entrance of the valley, we saw the Bridal Veil, the first fall in the valley. It looked like a silver thread in the distance and relieved the solemn grandeur of the surrounding hills.

As we approach the valley it grows ever wilder, and when we commence the descent we compare it involuntarily to the entrance to the infernal regions. The mountains that are in view are covered with great white rocks. The trail is over rocks, and a little stream below us tumbles and rushes over its rocky bottom as if it were mad. It is without exception the wildest scene I have ever seen. The only flowers that grow here are the beautiful scarlet ice plant, as it is called, and some fungi. The steep toilsome descent is at last accomplished. We came in view of all the party stretched on the ground beneath the shade of a tree. I am sorry to say my fortitude gave way. My foot pained me. I was very tired and threw myself exhausted on the ground.

After half an hour's rest we again proceeded on our way, and what a change! The desolation of the way we had passed was not visible to us. We rode through beautiful green meadows, under the shady branches of trees, and the fragrance of the wild honeysuckle was a pleasant exchange for the reflection of the sun's rays from the great white rocks. To the right of us was what is called a "Cathedral" in the gothic sole, and where could there be a church more magnificent? We rode on, at our left "El Capitan," a man wrapped in a Spanish cloak with a slouched hat. We drew rein on the banks of the Merced, where it was very still and deep, and lay down on our blankets under the protection of the "Sentinel." Never did the beauty of the Twenty-third Psalm present itself so before me. I had been frightened and disturbed and was very weary, and the words, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.—Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rode and thy staff they comfort me," filled me with quiet and peace. we had been walking through the valley of the shadow of death, as it seemed. By my request the camp was called "Stillwater Camp."

From the camp we were not in sight of either of the falls, though we could hear them very plainly. A large fire was burning. All the party were tired and stretched themselves out in various postures, but I was so happy and so occupied with the beautiful scene that I could not sleep. Behind me was the Sentinel—it was only by lying on my back that I could see its summit 4,000 feet above me. The valley was in shade when the moonlight crept softly downwards until it was about half-way down its sides, and then I saw the moon itself advance hesitatingly above the brow of opposite rocks. The hesitated advance withdrew and then came boldly forward. She was closely followed by a star that advanced trembling to the edge of the rocks, rose and fell several times, then followed her mistress. Gradually the moonlight advanced and covered the whole camp and shone on the beautiful river.

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## Bibliography



*Sarah Haight Tompkins. Photograph  
by Isah West Taber, 1881, San Francisco.  
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Miss Sarah Haight (Mrs. Edward Tompkins, Sarah H. Tompkins), (1835 - after 1881) *The Ralston-Fry Wedding and the Wedding Journey to Yosemite May 20, 1858 From the Diary of Miss Sarah Haight [Mrs. Edward Tompkins]* (original in California State Library). Edited by Francis P. Farquhar, 1887-1974. 24 p. 2 color portraits. 30 cm. Paperbound. Rough cut. *Grabhorn Press Bibliography*, v. 3, no. 626. Printed by Grabhorn Press, which was Francis Farquhar's personal press. This booklet is still available for sale (2007) from Friends of the Bancroft Library.

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