

INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Frank Leslie took her *Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate* in 1877 – a crucial period in the history of westward expansion in the United States. The journey fell almost midway between 1860, when the trans-Missouri West was wilderness and much of the land belonged to Indian tribes roaming the plains and subsisting on buffalo, and 1890, when the earth had been tunneled by miners, the Indians were undergoing the process of “civilization,” the buffalo were all but extinct, and the frontier no longer existed.¹

A prime factor in this dramatic metamorphosis was the railroad which linked the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.² On May 10, 1869, at Promontory Point, Utah, the meeting of the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific lines had been celebrated by a nation still recovering from the tragedy of civil war. It had been an historic rendezvous, for it heralded at once the exhilarating expansion of the country and the end to its frontier. Upon miles of track the coach-wheel brought miners and cattlemen, farmers and immigrants to settle the American West. During the spectacular 'seventies the Age of the Pioneer gave way to the Age of Steel.

At this significant moment, the Leslie journey was undertaken and its events recorded by a woman who produced in her graphic vignettes of western life – its Indians, scouts and miners – a colorful source for Western Americana. But Mrs. Leslie's *California* is distinguished from most travel books of the American West because the journey she describes was neither rugged nor austere but lavish and luxurious. She viewed the West from the vantage point not of a pioneer woman but of a

1. Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, *The Pocket History of the United States* (New York [1951]), pp. 309-310.

2. Louis B. Wright, *Life on the American Frontier* (New York [1971]), pp. 206-209.

flamboyant *grande dame*, and in writing her history she achieved not merely a solid contribution to American travel literature but a fresh and original, if at times disdainful, version of western life during a time of startling change.

Her own background motivated her point of view and many of the events in her remarkable career culminated in the journey she narrated. Her book is in a sense a mirror of herself. To appreciate it to the full, the reader must therefore acquaint himself with the extraordinary life and dazzling personality of its author.³

Between 1836, when she was born in New Orleans, and 1914, when she died in New York, Mrs. Frank Leslie, under a variety of names, lived many lives. As Miriam Florence Follin, illegitimate daughter of Charles Follin (a descendant of French Huguenots) and of Susan Danforth (daughter of a Revolutionary soldier) she spent her early years in the colorful Vieux Carré of New Orleans, Queen City of the Mississippi. There she was educated by her father to develop into a *grande dame* and to this end she was tutored privately in French and Spanish, Italian, German and Latin. The copper-haired gray-eyed Miriam proved an apt pupil in most philological mysteries, especially in the idiom of romance.

At the age of eighteen, after the family had removed to New York, she experienced a short, forced and unsavory union with a jeweler's clerk who for a brief period gave her the name of Mrs. David Charles Peacock. This marriage, which ended in separation, was to play an extremely important part in the history of *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate*. Its sensational details were placed on record in a Judgment Roll in New York's Supreme Court – a Judgment

3. Madeleine B. Stern, *Purple Passage: The Life of Mrs. Frank Leslie* (Norman, Okla., [1953], reprinted Norman, Okla., [1971]), *passim*. Throughout, all biographical details are based upon this, the only full-length life of Mrs. Leslie.

Roll which, many years later, would be aired in an attempt to ruin the author of certain derogatory statements in that seemingly innocuous travel book.

Long before that time the charming and beautiful Miriam played other roles under other intriguing names. She took to the road as "Minnie Montez," stage sister of the legendary adventuress, Lola Montez. That association also had connections with Mrs. Leslie's interest in the West for it had been in the mining settlement of Grass Valley, California, that the actress Lola Montez had met Miriam Follin's half-brother Noel Follin. Noel's letters from California undoubtedly aroused in his young half-sister an early interest in the background of the American West. His own interest had been aroused in the spectacular Lola, whom he accompanied on a theatrical tour to Australia. On board ship Noel Follin either fell or was thrown overboard. In her remorse at this tragedy Lola Montez journeyed east, offered her services to the Follin family, and took young Miriam under her histrionic wing.

Such dramatic skills as she mastered sped her on the way to becoming the embodiment of grace. By the time Miriam was twenty-one she conquered the impressive scholar and celebrated archeologist, Ephraim George Squier, to whom she was married in 1857. She remained Mrs. E.G. Squier for fifteen tumultuous years in the course of which she translated Alexandre Dumas' *Demi-Monde*, attended Lincoln's first inaugural ball, and whetted her taste for travel in journeys to Europe and Peru. During that period she also met the publishing magnate who would introduce her to life on Publishers' Row and to the fascinations of the American West. He would also become, after her divorce from Squier, her third husband.

Frank Leslie, with his lively eyes and ruddy, bearded face, was a man of energy, vigor and dynamic magnetism. His *Illustrated Newspaper* had made him a power on Publishers' Row. Into its folio pages he poured just enough text to float his pictures instead of just enough pictures to adorn his text.

Having gauged the public taste with skillful precision, he catered to it promptly, providing avid readers with graphic renditions of the murders and executions, the wars and prize fights that titillated their appetite. In time he would provide them with pictures of a West opened up by the iron horse.

Meanwhile, with a host of other weeklies and monthlies, almanacs and illustrated books appearing over his imprint, the name of Frank Leslie was becoming a household word. The well-known archeologist, E.G. Squier, joined the editorial staff of what was swiftly developing into a publishing empire, and in 1863 his wife became editor of *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine*. To her various skills Miriam now added the arts of flowery prose writing and editorial acumen. From her editorial corner she watched the House of Leslie expand until it employed from three to four hundred assistants including seventy wood engravers and boasted an aggregate circulation of some half a million copies per week.⁴

To her study of the arts of publishing Miriam joined an equally intense study of the arts of the publisher. It was inevitable that, after a sensational divorce from the now unbalanced E.G. Squier, she should acquire yet another name — Mrs. Frank Leslie. On July 13, 1874, the thirty-eight-year-old editor of a woman's magazine was married to the suave and elegant fifty-three-year-old magnate of Publishers' Row. One month later, E.G. Squier was committed to an asylum for the insane, a circumstance that would also assume some part in the history of Mrs. Frank Leslie's *California*.

Luxuriously, prodigally, against an ornate background in

4. Madeleine B. Stern, *Imprints on History: Book Publishers and American Frontiers* (Bloomington, Ind., 1956), pp. 221-232. Frank Leslie's method of producing his pictures marked an innovation in the art of illustration. Dividing the woodblock into small sections so that a number of engravers could work on the same picture at the same time before the wooden squares were screwed together, he completed large double-page engravings in a single night instead of in two weeks.

New York or at their summer seat in Saratoga Springs, the Leslies lived out their life together. The hospitable host and radiant hostess entertained lavishly and among the notables who graced their table were General Ulysses S. Grant and a variety of United States Senators; Don Carlos, pretender to the throne of Spain; Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil; and Joaquin Miller, the Poet of the Sierras, who could tell many a racy tale of Indians, mining camp and pony express.

In 1869, after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Frank Leslie had sent a staff artist to record the journey for his *Illustrated Newspaper*. Now, in 1877, a year after the United States Centennial celebration, the Leslies decided to make the journey themselves. To their fascination with the country's developing network of railroads – which offered their services free in return for Leslie publicity – was added their intense interest in the West. To enrich the columns of Leslie's weekly with descriptions and illustrations of frontier landscapes and western towns, Frank Leslie assembled his traveling entourage. As for Mrs. Frank Leslie, she would provide the public with a record of the journey in a book that reflected the allure both of her own extraordinary personality and of the American West during the exuberant 'seventies.

On April 10, 1877, the party of twelve editors, journalists and artists assembled at New York's Grand Central Station. Besides the Leslies (and Miriam's Skye terrier Follette) the travelers included their friends the Hackleys, the writers Edwin A. Curley and Bracebridge Hemyng, the artists Miss Georgiana A. Davis, Water R. Yeager and Harry Ogden, the photographer W.B. Austin, the business manager Hamilton S. Wicks, and W.K. Rice, son of the Governor of Massachusetts. They watched while champagne baskets and hampers were loaded onto the sumptuous "Palace" car that had been renamed the "Frank Leslie." Amid cheers and waving handkerchiefs, whistles and the exploding of signal torpedoes, the train pulled out of the station

and one of the most lavish nineteenth-century transcontinental journeys began. The two-month Leslie excursion would cost \$15,000 despite the fact that the railroad service was free. Its details would be recorded in a lengthy succession of articles that would run in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* between April 1877 and May 1878.⁵

In her own special way Miriam Leslie would capture the highlights of the spectacular extravaganza known as the Leslie Transcontinental Excursion. Her perceptive observations would be filtered through the crucible of her own personality. She would produce no dry-as-dust run-of-the-mill baedeker, but a book filled with personalized comments on miners and Indians, tycoons and magnates, on the moral climate of San Francisco and the "Prunes, Prisms, and Propriety" to which she was exposed. Despite her often flowery style, despite an occasional looking down the nose at western crudities, she would reflect the social consciousness of a responsible woman in a position of some power as she aired a genuine indignation at social injustices toward the Orientals of California. "Let the nineteenth century answer," she would write, taking notes from the vantage point of a hotel on wheels, watching the kaleidoscopic parade of America flash by. Her book would be the product not of the hardworking pioneer woman settler but of the exalted woman visitor from the East. As such it would present a study in sharp contrast to the earlier record of such a traveler as Eliza

5. The start of the journey was described in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (April 28, 1877), pp. 140-141. The series "Across the Continent" ran in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* between July 7, 1877 and May 25, 1878, with some western features running later. Some of those articles were reprinted in Richard Reinhardt, *Out West on the Overland Train* (Palo Alto, Calif., [1967]). See also Robert Taft, "The Pictorial Record of the Old West, XI. The Leslie Excursions of 1869 and 1877," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* (May 1950), reprinted in Robert Taft, *Artists and Illustrators of the Old West: 1850-1900* (New York, 1953). Quotations are from Mrs. Leslie's *California*.

Farnham⁶ and it would offer a view of western life that few other women could have duplicated.

"The nineteenth century," Mrs. Leslie wrote, "flies upon the coach-wheel." To this now all but obsolete method of transportation she gave particular attention and her notes on railroad travel in 1877 have an extraordinary fascination. In Chicago the Wagner Palace Car with its curtained couches and divans, its salon and ornamental panels, was exchanged for a Pullman Palace Car named the "President" which had cost \$35,000 to build and had recently been exhibited at the Centennial Exposition. Its kitchen boasted a mammoth roaster and a charcoal broiler; its refrigerator and larder were contained in boxes beneath the car. Fish was caught en route, trout and antelope were foraged for by the conductor. The Leslie party enjoyed Delmonican repasts as they sped by at twenty miles an hour while the coyote howled outside. Subsequently other trains would be described by the author — the Pacific Railroad, "the road of the world," a private Palace car that was "a perfect little *bijou*," a train on a narrow-gauge road, an emigrant car, a Pullman accommodating an editorial party from Nebraska "on board with a small press, on which they printed the daily journal of their travels." As the Leslie party moved farther west, a stand of arms was carried in the baggage car for protection against highwaymen. Astutely Mrs. Leslie saw connections between the coming of the railroad and the introduction of tokens of "civilization." As she would remark to a Mormon Elder, "the railway has come and brought a whole train of French milliners and fashion plates," imports which, in the eyes of the high-styled Mrs. Leslie, must result in the elevation and enlightenment of women and hence in the eventual decline of polygamy.

Long before her encounters with the Mormons, Mrs. Frank

6. Eliza Farnham, *California, In-Doors and Out* (New York, 1856, reprinted Nieuwkoop, Netherlands, 1972).

Leslie took careful notes on a West that sat for its portrait while the nineteenth century ran upon the coach-wheel. The wooden pavements of Chicago – “a city of magnificent beginnings” – gave way to the bluffs of Omaha with its bearded emigrants in alligator boots, its border ruffians and gambling sharps, its miners and Indians. The *dramatis personae* was enlarged at Fremont, where loose-limbed Westerners and tourists in linen dusters joined the gallery of mounting portraits. Through the Platte Valley they sped, on to Cheyenne – “the Magic City of the Plains” – where the party alighted. Scouts in sealskin caps and fringed buckskin, Mexicans, teamsters, miners en route to the Black Hills, crowded the streets of this “Town of a Day,” this “straggling settlement of wooden houses.” At McDaniel’s Theatre – its “bar gorgeous with frescoed views of Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples,” its stage wings adorned with statues of the Venus de Medici and “another undressed lady of colossal proportions,” the redoubtable Mrs. Leslie observed the injunction printed in bold letters above the bar: “Gents, be liberal.”

Miriam drew her prose vignettes of frontier life as rolling prairie gave way to low bluffs, canyons and buttes to the grand sweep of mountains. The backdrop shifted. Herds of cattle and wild horses dotted the landscape, log houses and sagebrush, canvas-topped wagons and cinnamon bears, a stream of Mormons and Chinese laborers along the railroad. While she held her aristocratic nose at repulsive-looking braves in striped blankets, she was enthralled by moonlight on the white alkali patches of the desert. On the planked sidewalks of Carson City, Indians lounged in their calico rags and red paint. After the snows of the Sierras, the valley of the Sacramento lay before her. The background and characters of a continent captured in her notebook, Miriam Leslie had arrived at the City of the Golden Gate.

San Francisco unfolded its colors and contrasts to the perceptive editorial eye of the *grande dame* from Gotham. The XIV

Leslie party was ensconced in the suite at the Palace Hotel recently occupied by Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil. Warren Leland, prince of landlords, welcomed them to the fabulous seven-storied caravansery of the West with its tiers of balconies, its palms and banana trees, its fountains and Doric columns. From this ornate and plush background they emerged for their encounter with San Francisco in the spectacular 'seventies. There, Mrs. Leslie observed, "the climate, like the society, like the morals, and like the social habits . . . is a little mixed." As she walked the streets of the city on the Pacific she saw a sideshow of fortune-telling monkeys and howling dervishes, prestidigitators and patent medicine dealers. Shop windows were resplendent with oriental carpets and Chinese brocades. From the wooden wharves and jetties she could note the flags of many nations flying from the masts of their ships. The Russian fleet, lying in harbor, would shortly sail at proclamation of the Russo-Turkish War. San Francisco was cosmopolis to this completely cosmopolitan visitor who "saw very elegant toilets, and very fine jewels, both in carriages and upon pedestrians to whom we had no letters of introduction."

To most of the city's bigwigs the Leslies did have introductions. Mayor Bryant drove them about behind his elegant four-in-hand. The Nevada Senator William Sharon, now a California Croesus, invited them to his country estate at Belmont — a palace filled with all the luxuries known to man save one: "We did not, in all that mansion, see a book, or a bookcase, or any spot where one might fitly have been placed, or expected to be placed!" Coleman, owner of the whole of the San Rafael valley, invited them for the day and Ex-Governor Stanford was their host at dinner in "the most magnificent house on this Continent."

From the Barbary Coast to the county jail, from Woodward's Gardens to the Mission Dolores, the visitors wandered. Chinatown, seen under the guidance of a detective, was especially interesting to Mrs. Leslie, who attended Scene 102 of Act 53 at

the Royal Chinese Theatre, made her own obeisances at a Joss House, and wandered through a honeycomb of rooms in an opium den. "The cry of 'cheap labor,'" she would write, "so furiously raised against the Chinese, principally by the classes to whom any labor is abhorrent, is as unfounded as it is malicious. A good man-cook in a family gets \$35.00 per month, and a waiter \$25.00. . . . Whether we like him or not, the Chinaman in California has become a fixed fact, and one not to be done away with except by giving the lie to our own Institutions."

At the suggestion of "Lucky" Baldwin, another California tycoon, the Leslies visited his ranch at Santa Anita, near Los Angeles. The "semi-tropical air" of Los Angeles impressed Miriam immediately. Its shops, "most of them open to the street," its abundance of fruits and flowers that made one feel as if "promenading the hall of an Agricultural Fair," its Mexican women in mantillas, its Spanish and Chinese were all grist for the mill of the note-taking woman editor from Publishers' Row, who commented: "Los Angeles has, within ten years, become a 'live' American city, and might in one sense date its existence from about that time, although in another claiming a century's growth. At any rate, like some other creatures of an uncertain age, Los Angeles is more charming on acquaintance than at first sight." Of apparently certain age was the so-called oldest woman in the world, Eulalia Pérez, whom Mrs. Leslie interviewed in Spanish. Claiming to be one hundred forty, with grandchildren of eighty, Eulalia made the astute and flattering comment that her interviewer need not have "married a man with white hair."

A tour of the Yosemite completed the California extravaganza. On the way, Miriam enlarged her studies in contrasts with a night at Cold Spring Station, a settlement consisting of two houses and a watering trough. In a three-room cabin — half posting house and half grocery shop — the party passed a memorable night in the course of which Mrs. Leslie concocted a meal and slept on the supper table, pillowing her coiffured head on a bag of salt. She had brought not only her fashion but her

fortitude to the West.

Having observed much of the high life and some of the low life of California, Miriam was prepared to return home with her husband, her friends and her notes. The journey back was marked by sojourns at two unusual cities which called into play all of her descriptive powers. Indeed, her delineations proved so graphic that their documentary value is matched only by their biographical interest.

Virginia City, Nevada, was a mining town that had sprung up in the wake of the Comstock Lode. Although its C Street presented to the passer-by a succession of saloons, opium dens and brothels, the town was proud of its history and its mines, its International Hotel and its newspaper, the *Territorial Enterprise*, on whose staff Mark Twain had worked. Frank Leslie, who was almost as interested in silver mining as in railroads, explored the depths of Virginia's Bonanza Mine while his wife explored the shabby streets perched halfway up the Nevada Mountains. Her conclusions, shortly to be published in the penultimate chapter of her book, were devastating:

To call a place dreary, desolate, homeless, uncomfortable, and wicked is a good deal, but to call it God-forsaken is a good deal more, and in a tolerably large experience of this world's wonders, we never found a place better deserving the title than Virginia City.

The remainder of Chapter XXXII would substantiate her generalizations. Virginia's architectural style, she observed, might perhaps be inferred "from the fact that about two years ago the whole town burned down one night, and was rebuilt as good as ever in six days." "Every other house," she continued, "was a drinking or gambling saloon, and we passed a great many brilliantly lighted windows, where sat audacious looking women who freely chatted with passers-by or entertained guests within." An evening stroll was possible only with a police escort. In sum: "Virginia City boasts of forty-nine gambling

saloons and one church, open the day we were there for a funeral, an event of frequent occurrence in the lawless little city. The population is largely masculine, very few women, except of the worst class, and as few children." Mrs. Leslie was apparently unaware that one member of Virginia City's masculine population was Rollin M. Daggett, the fighting editor of the town's *Territorial Enterprise*, who had not merely a chauvinistic pride in the city of the Comstock Lode, but close connections with her second husband E.G. Squier.

Eager to forget Virginia's assay office and wooden shacks, its prostitutes and gamblers, the erstwhile Mrs. Squier turned her attention to another city whose laws interested her more closely than the lawlessness of the Bonanza town. Although the Leslie party had visited Salt Lake City, Utah, on the westward trip, they were sufficiently curious about Mormonism to make a repeat stop on the homeward journey. The Mormon doctrine and practice of polygamy especially interested the oft-wed Mrs. Leslie. Indeed its beneficent economic effects were borne out as the party approached the "verdant fields" and neat cottages, the schoolhouses and co-operative store of a Mormon settlement. As Mrs. Leslie succinctly phrased it, "Certainly, polygamy is very wrong, but roses are better than sage-brush, and potatoes and peas preferable as diet to buffalo grass." Whenever opportunity offered she seized the occasion to interview Mormons on the intriguing and debatable subject. From Salt Lake's photographer and editor, banker, merchant and Elders she elicited opinions. Miss Snow, widow of the Mormon leader Joseph Smith and at present temporarily "sealed" to Brigham Young, announced, "We consider ourselves among the finest women in the world, and aim to compete with our sisters elsewhere in every pursuit and every branch of education." When the persistent interviewer inquired "if the various wives of one husband got along amicably among themselves, . . . she decisively replied: 'Perfectly so, their religion inculcates it; and besides, their work is so large, and their aims so high, that they

XVIII

have no time and no capacity for petty jealousies.’ ”

Having observed President Brigham Young’s background – his residence the Lion House, the Beehive House that housed a dozen of his wives, the schoolhouse for his seventy children, the Mormon Tabernacle, Mrs. Leslie approached with alacrity the Mormon leader himself, for none was better equipped to discuss the “peculiar institution of Utah.” Under her skillful questioning, the interview which began perfunctorily gathered momentum. “Do you suppose, Mr. President, that I came all the way to Salt Lake City to hear that it was a fine day? ” “ ‘I am sure you need not, my dear,’ was the ready response of this cavalier of seventy-six years, ‘for it must be fine weather wherever you are!’ The conversation established after this method went upon velvet.”

Seated on the sacred sofa, Mrs. Frank Leslie quickly captivated the Mormon President who, looking like a well-fed Senator, allowed himself to be drawn out on Mormon history and Mormon doctrine, Mormon wives and Mormon husbands, domestic relations and the eugenics of Mormonism. The children, he informed her, were trained from infancy to respect the concepts of polygamy. But who, she demanded, trained the mothers? “What religion can make a woman happy in seeing the husband whom she loves devoted to another wife, and one with equal claims with herself. Any woman, I should think, would spend all her strength, use every effort of mind, body and soul, to attract and retain his love, admiration and attention. Isn’t it so, Mr. President? ” With an “inquisitorial glance” at his astute and seductive interviewer, Mr. President replied: “You look like just the woman to do that sort of thing, but fortunately, perhaps, there are not many of that mind among us.” “Do Mormon husbands feel no preferences? ” she persisted. “Well, perhaps,” Brigham Young replied, “human nature is frail, but our religion teaches us to control and conceal those preferences as much as possible, and we do – we do.”

With so quotable an interview trapped in her notebook,

Mrs. Leslie headed east. On June 7, the party returned to New York — and to the crisis of 1877. The expenses of the trans-continental excursion, coupled with large personal debts, the over-expansion of the Frank Leslie Publishing House on the one hand and the decline in circulation of its publications on the other — all had contributed to a disastrous financial situation. Leslie faced it by making a temporary assignment of his property for the benefit of his creditors and by serving as general manager of the establishment he had founded.

Meanwhile, the series of illustrated articles headed “Across the Continent” continued to appear in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* and Mrs. Frank Leslie polished up her own notes of the journey. In December 1877, *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate* was issued by G.W. Carleton & Co. of New York, publishers of the popular humor of “Josh Billings” and “Artemus Ward,” as well as of numerous other best-sellers. Carleton’s device — the Arabic symbol for “books” which, upside down, seemed to spell his initials — was imprinted now on Mrs. Leslie’s contribution to the literature of travel.⁷

The reviews must have gratified her. They were widely distributed, appearing in *The Evening Post* and the *New York Herald*, the *Providence Journal* and, of course, *Frank Leslie’s Lady’s Journal*. According to *The Sun*, “the author brought, to unusual opportunities of social study, the taste and insight of a cultivated woman, and a happy faculty of description,” while another review went so far as to assert, “Had Madame de Sévigné been able to perform a journey from New York to San Francisco . . . she would have written some such a work as Mrs. Leslie’s.” The consensus was that she had written “a charming account of a charming trip,” a “pleasantly written” history.⁸

7. Stern, *Imprints on History*, *op.cit.*, pp. 191-205.

8. For reviews, see *The Evening Post* (December 27, 1877), p. 1; *Frank Leslie’s Lady’s Journal* (January 5 and January 19, 1878), pp. 130 and 162; *New York Herald* (January 27, 1878), p. 6; *Providence Journal* (December 31, 1877), p. 1; *The Sun* (April 7, 1878), p. 2.

It was not until July 14, 1878 that the charm and pleasantness of Mrs. Leslie's *California* were ruthlessly challenged. Virginia City's *Territorial Enterprise* of that date devoted its entire mammoth-sized front page to an article entitled: OUR FEMALE SLANDERER. MRS. FRANK LESLIE'S BOOK SCANDALIZING THE FAMILIES OF VIRGINIA CITY – THE HISTORY OF THE AUTHORESS – A LIFE DRAMA OF CRIME AND LICENTIOUSNESS – STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS. A twenty-four-page pamphlet of the same date entitled TERRITORIAL ENTERPRISE EXTRA. CONTAINING A FULL ACCOUNT OF "FRANK LESLIE" AND WIFE reprinted the vicious exposé in handy format.⁹ Miriam Leslie's derogatory remarks about Virginia City, which would shortly be substantiated by Mrs. M.M. Mathews in her *Ten Years in Nevada*,¹⁰ had instigated a detailed and baneful series of revelations. From Miriam's illegitimate birth to the episodes with David Peacock and Lola Montez, from her extra-marital activities to her divorce from E.G. Squier, the sordid details of her "strange, eventful history" were maliciously aired. Based largely upon the Peacock Judgment Roll which had been supplied by E.G. Squier, the *Territorial Enterprise Extra* formed a defamatory indictment far more damaging than the remarks that had provoked it. Leslie's efforts to buy up every copy were not entirely successful, and the violent excoriation with its Virginia City imprint provides today not only a sought-for piece of Western Americana but a fascinating insight into Mrs. Frank

9. *Daily Territorial Enterprise* (Virginia, Nevada, July 14, 1878), p. 1; reprinted as *Territorial Enterprise Extra. Containing A Full Account of "Frank Leslie" and Wife* (Virginia City, Nevada, 1878). See also Madeleine B. Stern, "Mrs. Leslie Goes West," *The Book Club of California Quarterly News Letter* (Fall 1959), pp. 77-80.

10. Mrs. M.M. Mathews, *Ten Years in Nevada* (Buffalo, 1880), p. 193: "Many of the men support more women than the law allows them. They live after the Salt Lake style . . . Here they marry but one, and the unmarried ones are always dressed the richest."

Leslie's early life and her *Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate*.

She would survive both the fulminating indictment and other disasters that followed it. Indeed the events of her later life were as dramatic as those of her salad days. After Frank Leslie's death in 1880, Miriam inherited not only the Publishing House but its debts and opportunities. She paid the former and developed the latter by capitalizing upon an event of national importance. President Garfield's assassination in 1881, his lingering illness and death provided material for a journalistic coup that re-established the bankrupt publishing empire. By issuing three illustrated papers in a single week to fill the public demand for graphic reports of the brutal tragedy, Miriam Leslie – who changed her name legally to “Frank Leslie” – made money and history. Her tour de force was an achievement unparalleled in the newspaper world. As head of the House which phoenix-like had risen from the ashes, she herself became an almost legendary figure on Publishers' Row. Reorganizing every department of her business, she was acclaimed an “Empress of Journalism,” a “commercial Joan of Arc.”

Meanwhile her private life kept pace with her public career, as the “Empress of Journalism” enacted the role of *femme fatale*. A French marquis, a Russian prince and a Spanish grandee slipped eventually in and out of her net. In 1891, when she was fifty-five, she married Oscar Wilde's brother, William Charles Kingsbury Wilde – her last matrimonial adventure which, like the first two, was to end in divorce. By the time she died in 1914 after the outbreak of the First World War, she left a fortune of nearly two million dollars to the cause of woman suffrage – a windfall that doubled the impetus of the movement in America. The woman who all her life had lived woman's rights helped carry the cause to certain victory after her death.

Before her dramatic departure from the earthly scene, Miriam made two return trips to the California she had described in 1877. In 1892 the first annual convention of the International League of Press Clubs was held in the City of the Golden Gate. Willie Wilde and his wife, "Frank Leslie," were members of the party that left Grand Central and journeyed by rail to the West. In the course of her speech on "Reminiscences of a Woman's Work in Journalism," delivered at the League's Open Session, Miriam spoke of her deep desire to revisit San Francisco since it had been after her return from that city fifteen years before that she had met "the great crisis of her life." Once again, in 1910, after she had adopted yet another name - that of Baroness de Bazus, which she claimed as a family title - the *grande dame* returned to San Francisco. The city had weathered fire and earthquake and had changed as markedly as the author of *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate*. Now in her seventies, Miriam was a guest of the Pacific Coast's women's press association. For the benefit of a reporter at the old Palace Hotel she once again relived the exuberant days of the Leslie Transcontinental Excursion of thirty-three years before.

Both the excursion and the book that recorded it deserve a niche in American travel literature. Mrs. Frank Leslie was the author of several other books - largely inconsequential commentaries on social life that bear no comparison with her major work on California. As the account of a high-style journey to the West at a significant moment in American history, the record is a valuable one. Its vivid and graphic sketches of railroad travel and western settlements enrich our knowledge of the American background during the 1870's. The viewpoint of the sophisticated woman from the East heightens the interest of her observations. The work adds to our knowledge both of the West and of Mrs. Frank Leslie, and so it is invested with documentary and biographical importance.

The book which incited such a violent reaction after its publication has now become scarce and sought after. Nearly one hundred years after its original appearance it is at last reprinted. The twentieth century may thus be reminded of a nineteenth century that ran grandiosely on the coach-wheel to a California gaudy with contrasts, and of the fascinations of the woman who recorded the journey and painted a scene that she herself adorned.