INTRODUCTION

During a comparatively short period in time, the attention and the hope of the world were focused upon the American West. The discovery of gold in California brought fortune-hunters by overland and sea routes – prospectors from the States and from China, from the penal colony of Australia and from Mexico and South America. Armed with pick and shovel they swarmed in to stake their claims, camping on the mountains. California's population mushroomed, its 20,000 inhabitants of 1848 increasing to well over 200,000 four years later. In the wake of the goldseekers came the gambling saloons and the lawlessness that triggered the formation of Vigilante Committees. A quiet community of Spanish-American ranchers was suddenly metamorphosed into a commonwealth of hustlers and a new State of the Union.[1]

The non-mining areas of California reacted to the changes in the State. In Santa Cruz County the decade 1850 to 1860 was labeled with good reason the Squatters' Period. A population of less than 650 centered about the Mission; other inhabitants

1. Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, *The Pocket History of the United States* (New York [1951]), pp. 197 f; Louis B. Wright, *Life on the American Frontier* (New York [1971]), pp. 162, 170, 172, 175.

were scattered in ranch houses around Pescadero. Schooners plied to San Francisco from the port of Santa Cruz. Over mountain and plain cattle ranged in the thousands. The County of grazing pastures, orchards and farms soon attracted emigrants and miners who could exchange their gold dust for land renting at $100 an acre. Having built their houses of shakes and clapboards, the Americans began to imitate the costume and style of the Spanish don while their women, few in number, wore poke bonnets. To visit neighboring ranches they traveled *a caballo,* by horseback, fording the streams, for there were no bridges, taking two days for the journey to San Francisco.

The emigrants stirred up Santa Cruz. The 1850's were years of potato farming, the shipping of lumber from County sawmills, Spanish trade. They were years of fierce political campaigns and duels. Newspapers were established; a County jail was built. To the diversion of an old-fashioned camp meeting was added the attraction of a discussion on new-fashioned reforms fresh out of the East. By the end of the decade the Santa Cruz Turnpike had been completed and the County's population approached 5,000.[2]

2. Rolin G. Watkins, ed., *History of Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, California* (Chicago, 1925) I, 434, 437-450.

One American settler in Santa Cruz was a woman who brought to the West a belief in self-development and in universal brotherhood that helped shape the land of her adoption. She brought also a perceptive eye and a fluent pen that would record the progress of the Far West during its most exuberant and flamboyant period. Out of her life in Santa Cruz she would produce a book of extreme significance that mirrored with precision "the wonderful country to which, for the last five years, the eyes of the civilized world have been turned with new hope."[3] Like all of El Dorado, Santa Cruz had many Argonauts. Not the least of them was Eliza Farnham.

By the time she arrived in Santa Cruz she was thirty-four years old, a woman whose attitudes had been formed by the life she had lived. If she believed in self-development, she did so with cause for she had almost literally developed herself. Born Eliza Burhans in 1815 in Rensselaerville, New York State, she had early lost her mother and been separated from brother and sisters. Barely tolerated in the home of unsympathetic relatives and denied schooling, she had somehow found books that filled moments snatched from farming chores in a back-

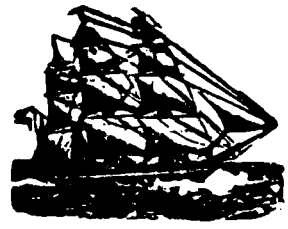
3. Eliza W. Farnham, *California, In-Doors and Out* (New York, 1856), p. 366. All quotations, throughout, unless otherwise indicated, are from this work.

By this time Eliza Farnham had given birth to two more sons and had seen her husband depart for his second journey to California. There he practised law, built a schooner and carried on a freighting business on San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento River – a business that became extremely brisk after the discovery of gold. In addition, as a reward for legal services, he was given a tract of valley land beyond the Santa Cruz Mission. In September of California's eventful year of 1848, Thomas Jefferson Farnham contracted "intermittent fever" and died in San Francisco.[8]

The thirty-two-year-old Eliza Farnham who had long been familiar with death and separation now had two sons to support and an estate to take charge of three thousand miles away. Besides the personal considerations of a widow, she was evolving the more grandiose project of a reformer. She would assemble a company of cultivated eastern women to help civilize and populate the rude and

Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848 (Ithaca, N.Y., [1965]), pp. 177, 236-251.

8. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works* (San Francisco, 1886) XX, 734; *Santa Cruz County, California. Illustrations Descriptive of its Scenery* (San Francisco, 1879), p. 27. Thomas Jefferson Farnham's death notice appeared in the [San Francisco] *Californian* (September 16, 1848), p. 3 – an issue that contained considerable information on the recent discovery of gold.



SHIP ANGELIQUE.

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN WOMEN.

NEW YORK. FEBRUARY 2D, 1849.

THE death of my husband, THOMAS J. FARNHAM, Esq., at San Francisco, in September last, renders it expedient that I should visit California during the coming season. Having a desire to accomplish some greater good by my journey thither than to give the necessary attention to my private affairs, and believing that the presence of women would be one of the surest checks upon many of the evils that are apprehended there, I desire to ask attention to the following sketch of a plan for organizing a party of such persons to emigrate to that country.

Among the many privations and deteriorating influences to which the thousands who are flocking thither will be subjected, one of the greatest is the absence of woman, with all her kindly cares and powers, so peculiarly conservative to man under such circumstances.

It would exceed the limits of this circular to hint at the benefits that would flow to the growing population of that wonderful region, from the introduction among them of intelligent, virtuous and efficient women. Of such only, it is proposed to make up this company. It is believed that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of such females in our country who are not bound by any tie that would hold them here, who might, by going thither, have the satisfaction of employing themselves greatly to the benefit and advantage of those who are there, and at the same time of serving their own interest more effectually than by following any employment that offers to them here.

It is proposed that the company shall consist of persons not under twenty-five years of age, who shall bring from their clergyman, or some authority of the town where they reside, satisfactory testimonials of education, character, capacity, &c., and who can contribute the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars, to defray the expenses of the voyage, make suitable provision for their accommodation after reaching San Francisco, until they shall be able to enter upon some occupation for their support, and create a fund to be held in reserve for the relief of any who may be ill, or otherwise need aid before they are able to provide for themselves.

It is believed that such an arrangement, with one hundred or one hundred and thirty persons, would enable the company to purchase or charter a vessel, and fit it up with every thing necessary to comfort on the voyage, and that the combination of all for the support of each, would give such security, both as to health, person and character, as would remove all reasonable hesitation from the minds of those who may be disposed and able to join such a mission. It is intended that the party shall include six or eight respectable married men and their families.

Those who desire further information will receive it by calling on the subscriber at

ELIZA W FARNHAM.

The New-York built Packet Ship ANGELIQUE has been engaged to take out this Association. She is a spacious vessel, fitted up with state rooms throughout and berths of good size, well ventilated and provided in every way to secure a safe, speedy and comfortable voyage. She will be ready to sail from New-York about the 12th or 15th of April

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WE, the undersigned, having been made acquainted with the plan proposed by MRS. FARNHAM, in the above circular, hereby express our approbation of the same, and recommend her to those who may be disposed to unite with her in it, as worthy the trust and confidence necessary to its successful conduct.

HON. J. W. EDMONDS, Judge Superior Court
HON. W. T. McCOUN, Late Vice Chancellor.
HON. B. F. BUTLER, Late U. S. Attorney.
HON. H. GREELEY.
ISAAC T. HOPPER, Esq.
FREEMAN HUNT, Esq.
THOMAS C. DOREMUS, Esq.
W. C. BRYANT, Esq.
SHEPHERD KNAPP, Esq.
REV. GEORGE POTTS, D. D.
REV. HENRY WARD BEECHER.
MISS CATHARINE M. SEDGWICK.
MRS. C. M. KIRKLAND

TRESBITT, PRINTER.

ELIZA FARNHAM'S 1849 CIRCULAR INVITING YOUNG WOMEN
OF THE EAST TO GO TO CALIFORNIA

sparsely settled communities of the West. A short term as instructor at the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston[9] did not interfere with her purpose and on February 2, 1849, she issued a circular describing the plan for western emigration by the distaff side:

> The death of my husband, Thomas J. Farnham, Esq., at San Francisco, in September last, renders it expedient that I should visit California during the coming season. Having a desire to accomplish some greater good by my journey thither than to give the necessary attention to my private affairs, and believing that the presence of women would be one of the surest checks upon many of the evils that are apprehended there, I desire to ask attention to the following sketch of a plan for organizing a party of such persons to emigrate to that country.
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> It would exceed the limits of this circular to hint at the benefits that would flow to the growing population of that wonderful region, from the introduction among them of intelligent, virtuous and efficient women. Of such only it is proposed to make up this company. It is believed that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of such females in our country who are not bound by

9. Maud Howe [Elliott] and Florence Howe Hall, *Laura Bridgman* (Boston, 1903), pp. 232 f; Lewis, *op.cit.*, pp. 250, 256.

any tie that would hold them here, who might, by going thither, have the satisfaction of employing themselves greatly to the benefit and advantage of those who are there, and at the same time of serving their own interest more effectually than by following any employment that offers to them here.

It is proposed that the company shall consist of persons not under twenty-five years of age, who shall bring from their clergyman, or some authority . . . satisfactory testimonials of education, character, capacity, &c., and who can contribute the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars, to defray the expenses of the voyage, make suitable provision for their accommodation after reaching San Francisco, until they shall be able to enter upon some occupation for their support, and create a fund to be held in reserve for the relief of any who may be ill, or otherwise need aid before they are able to provide for themselves.

It is believed that such an arrangement, with one hundred or one hundred and thirty persons, would enable the company to purchase or charter a vessel, . . . and that the combination of all for the support of each, would give such security, . . . as would remove all reasonable hesitation from the minds of those who may be disposed and able to join such a mission. . . .

The New-York built Packet Ship ANGELIQUE has been engaged to take out this Association. She is a spacious vessel, . . . ready to sail from New-York about the 12th or 15th of April.[10]

10. The broadside circular was reproduced by The Book Club of California, through the courtesy of which, and

Eliza Farnham's project was recommended by several of the nation's bigwigs, among them the editor Horace Greeley and the poet William Cullen Bryant, the preacher Henry Ward Beecher and the spiritualist judge J.W. Edmonds. But despite such endorsements from high places, the plan did not materialize. Eliza herself fell ill and apparently the unattached women of the East did not share her belief in the advantages of a universal sisterhood in the West. As Eliza would put it, "Only three ladies, of more than two hundred who communicated with me, came out in my company."

It was a voyage that would have tested the stamina of the staunchest of women. One of the sea routes to California at mid century was via Cape Horn, a passage that lasted between four and six months.[11] Eliza's voyage was perhaps more difficult than most for the ship, commanded by a brutal and cruel captain, carried bad water and insufficient fire. The twenty-two passengers aboard included Eliza's two sons, Charles and Edward, and their nurse who

through the good graces of Mr. David Magee, it has again been reproduced. See *Eliza Farnham's Bride-Ship An 1849 Circular Inviting Young Women of the East to go to California* (The Book Club of California, 1952). Eliza's circular was reprinted in her *California,* pp. 25-27; see also p. 380.

11. T.J. Farnham, *Life, Adventures, and Travels in California* (New York and St. Louis, 1849), p. 432.

defected from service by marrying the steward. "The universal topic of conversation on all vessels bound to California," Eliza would write, "is gold. Digging, the size of lumps, the operation of quartz machinery, amalgamators, coarse gold, fine gold, northern mines, southern mines, . . . dry diggings" – these considerations occupied "the weary months." A nine-day stop at Santa Catharina, Brazil, for fresh water – the result of Eliza's petition – punctuated the long voyage. After they had rounded the Horn a stop at Valparaiso, Chile, proved all but fatal to her plans. There she engaged a Chilean woman as nurse for her boys and upon the captain's refusal to allow the native aboard without a passport, Eliza hastened to the consul's office. In the course of her visit there the ship set sail with her sons aboard. Left with a single shilling, "destitute, in a city of strangers," Eliza Farnham was supplied with money and a wardrobe by a resident clergyman and after a month's wait boarded the "Louis Philippe" out of Baltimore for San Francisco. After the thirty-eight-day voyage she was forced to wait another nine before "getting within the Golden Gate." Finally in fog and rain the ship dropped anchor off North Beach and Eliza's extraordinary peregrinations came to a happy end. Her boys had been cared for by a friend aboard ship; a family reunion terminated the adventurous

saga and heralded a new life in California.

A two-month interim in San Francisco, occupied principally with litigation, preceded Eliza's arrival in Santa Cruz. Her "annoyances and trials" in the City of the Golden Gate were such as to preclude any immediate relish of its colorful contrasts. She would visit there again however in a mood more receptive to its attractions. Meanwhile, her initial reaction was that a woman in the San Francisco of 1850 was a freak in a sideshow:

> At that period in the history of San Francisco, it was so rare to see a female, that those whose misfortune it was to be obliged to be abroad felt themselves uncomfortably stared at. Doorways filled instantly, and little islands in the streets were thronged with men who seemed to gather in a moment, and who remained immovable till the spectacle passed from their incredulous gazé. Bold-faced unfortunates, . . . were occasionally to be seen in bar-rooms, or, perhaps, hatless and habitless on horseback in the streets, or the great gaming-houses that never were emptied of their throngs.

Santa Cruz seemed kindlier to the woman who was Eliza Farnham. After the voyage from San Francisco topped by a two-mile walk, she arrived on February 22, 1850, with her two small sons, her ship's companion Miss Sampson, and a farmer at the estate bequeathed her by her husband, El Rancho

La Libertad. The valley of Santa Cruz, about seventy miles south of San Francisco and twenty miles north of Monterey, with its old Mission buildings, its coastal stream the San Lorenzo emptying into the Bay, its view of the Pacific, its heights and plains, was to be Eliza's home for more than five years.

Against the beauty of its background, El Rancho La Libertad seemed a "forlorn habitation." A casa made of slabs, it boasted "not a foot of floor, nor a pane of glass, nor a brick, nor anything in the shape of a stove." Hearing the sound of the distant surf, seeing the redwoods pierce the sky, Eliza in her "meditations . . . inverted the black walls, turned them inside out, laid an ideal floor, erected imaginary closets, . . . set apart corners for bedrooms." Before reconstruction could begin, the barrels and packing-cases which had been landed through the surf on the beach had to be transported to the house – a process that cost $25 for landing every boat-load of goods and another $8 for removing each wagon-load the two miles to La Libertad. Eliza's years in Prairie Land had taught her how to keep house in a near wilderness. Now, dining on steak, crackers and milk provided by neighbors, sleeping in a tent, she lived a half-nomadic life while she attacked the problems of

creating order out of chaos. The stove she had shipped was unboxed; the wetted linens and clothing were dried; with hired help a door and windows were cut and glazed with cloth. By March 1, the house had been made habitable. It would serve until a new one could be built.

Meanwhile there was farming to be done. Although it was mining that made California a State, there was far more to the State than mining. Similarly there was far more to Eliza Farnham than housekeeping.

She faced the task of farming in Santa Cruz with no team, a two years' sward to be turned, and dilapidated fences. For $75 she bought an "Eagle" plow in San Francisco, borrowed two horses and a mule, and, with her hired hands, began plowing in March 1850. While planting, fencing and even making implements went on, Eliza Farnham was introduced to the problem of labor relations in the California of the mid-century, where $2 a day was the minimum wage and the scarcity of competent help the major difficulty:

> In California, the relation that elsewhere exists between employer and employed is reversed. The man who does not know but he might make a hundred dollars per day at the mines is not likely to engage with you at two or three dollars, without causing you to feel . . . the favor he confers by staying. Most of the floating laborers . . . were

> either too infirm in health to be able to go to the mines, or too intemperate to trust themselves there. Invalids, or drunken sailors, were the staple of the laboring community.

With the often dubious help of Spanish or Indian laborers, Eliza confronted the problems of farming in general and of farming in Santa Cruz in particular. One crop was attacked by grasshoppers and half the planting destroyed; herds of cattle searching for food ravaged the potato field; wild mustard grew among the wheat; the trees she had ordered were delayed so long on the Isthmus that they were dead upon arrival; in one season the ground was planted four times without yielding a single crop for harvest.

Yet there were harvests and there were rewards. While wood was sawed at a mill six miles away for Eliza's new house, she took charge of her ranch. Asparagus and potatoes, melons and tomatoes, squash and beets, parsnips, carrots and onions were planted; twenty-five acres of wheat were sown. Fences, ditches and water-courses were repaired; grape and strawberry vines set out; fruit trees ordered from New York and scions from a neighbor's orchard cut.

Eliza herself was the focal point of her ranch. Dressed in a costume antedating the "Bloomer," *"à la monsieur,"* with red top boots – her grave face shaded by a sombrero – she rode off to round up a

cow or superintend her fields. The chores continued. The plows moved on while seagulls, blackbirds and buzzards wheeled overhead. Cattle, purchased on foot from a Spaniard who had lassoed them, were slaughtered and the salt meat diet gave way to fresh beef. Cows were milked; a "bee" of neighbors gathered together to help eradicate the mustard weed; wheat was harvested; cabbages might sell for $1.50 apiece. A pig, dubbed Susannah the Second, was imported to become the pet of the rancho. At night Eliza read aloud while the household made sacks for the harvest.

As the months and the years passed, Eliza Farnham saw enough of farming in Santa Cruz to formulate a set of interesting opinions on the State's agricultural operations and one woman's part in them. One day she would write:

> To the struggling advocates of Woman's Rights, it may seem a hopeful sign of the times that one of their sex should put forth a book claiming to be in any degree descriptive of farming, especially when they make the delightful discovery that the writer speaks in a great measure from personal experience in the business. But it must not be forgotten that life in California is altogether anomalous, and that it is no more extraordinary for a woman to plough, dig, and hoe with her own hands, . . . than for men to do all their household labor for months.

She became convinced that there was no other State in which agriculture could be so successfully pursued

as here in the land of the vine and the olive:

> If half the stout hearts and strong hands, that every year leave home for the mining regions of California, were as resolutely directed towards her teeming vales and plains and hills, . . . there would be an annual saving of wealth, health, life, and virtue.

"I . . . have an abiding faith," she concluded, "that there is something in California besides its mines."

Yet mining – the dry or wet diggings – the piles of gold dust – were literally embedded in the State of California and were already part of its history. An observer as keen as Eliza Farnham could scarcely spend years in El Dorado without visiting the mines and voicing her opinions on the miners.

Leaving her boys in charge of Miss Sampson and the hands, she occasionally took off *a caballo* to mining country. Mining methods interested her sufficiently for her to record the techniques used with shovel, pick and pan in dry diggings and their yield of from one cent to ten dollars a pan. Elsewhere she saw banks of earth thrown up, ponderous engines for crushing quartz – "one of the most impressive and significant sights of this age." She observed with intelligence the use of rocker, tom, long tom, sluice, and later on the hydraulic process in river mining. She took notes on what she saw and heard – the rush of the current, the clink of spades among the gravel – and once she herself washed a panful of

earth for a speck of gold.

Eliza comprehended the far-reaching significance of that June day in 1848 when the first gold nugget had been discovered in California and she interpreted it perceptively:

> News was sent to the Bay. Men roused themselves from their sleepy trading, mounted horses, or took . . . small boats . . . and set out for the mines. The first excited adventurers came down with laden pockets and crazed brains; sailors left their vessels; lazy Spaniards their ranchos; merchants their stores; clerks their desks. The news flew over the country, and went to sea in vessels . . . and thus commenced that gathering which has since revolutionized – physically as well as politically – one of the most beautiful . . . lands . . . and opened an era in history which . . . inspires the progressive mind with more rational hope for man, than any that has preceded it.

The less beneficent effects of the discovery were not lost on the woman who rode through the diggings. The dominating motive of the gold-hunting emigrant was necessarily selfish; the effect of his emigration upon his family often disastrous. "The lamentable consequences of the deterioration which women suffer in the journey across the plains are painfully manifest in all the mining towns," she would write, and she would note in the towns themselves the pervading addiction to drink and profanity, scheming and gaming. By his very nature the

gold-hunter was a speculator and "the first tide of gold . . . turned every town into a continuous gaming-house." Indeed, the country's entire trade struck her as a game of chance where there was no ordered scale of profits, no regulation of sale based upon cost, where $40 could be demanded for a spring-balance worth $1. The California Yankee was simply the New England Yankee with his sharpness sharpened, the wooden nutmeg genus converted into a manufacturer of gold beads, his sights set upon "some *'spec'* . . . some scheme."

The transitory mining population with no deep stake in the social welfare increased the incidence of crime – often abetted by the connivance of unscrupulous officials. As a result the public relied upon Lynch Law and Vigilance Committees, those "people's courts" to which Eliza Farnham would give close attention when she came to record her California experiences:

> Juries have been empanneled on the spot; witnesses examined; and proof made, . . . and, if the accused were found guilty, his doom was pronounced, and swiftly executed, in a cool, altogether unique manner; and the people, in an hour or two, fell quietly back upon their picks, pans, and toms, as if nothing had happened out of the daily routine of their lives.

Concepts stimulated Eliza's mind but people captivated her imagination. With broad brush strokes

she would paint the dramatis personae of the mining towns – the rude and churlish Pike County people, the chattering Frenchmen and Spaniards, the Sonorians and Chileans, the Missourians, Chinese and Irish, the Kanakas and Yankees who patronized a roadside "hotel" that was bar-room and store, post-office and gambling-saloon in one. "In the course of your hour's rest," she marveled, "you have seen representatives from a dozen different nations, and each of the four quarters of the globe – a succession which the wilds of no country but California can present, and what is even more wonderful, each of your parties is equally at home."

It was not only to visit the mining regions that Eliza donned her riding habit and mounted her horse Sheik. An excursion for strawberries might lure her several miles up the coast while her growing reputation as a homeopathic "medico" might take her on "doctoring" trips to neighboring ranchos. Dons and caballeros, Indian boys and women drudges sat unknowingly for their portraits while Mrs. Farnham treated a case of rheumatism with magnetic passes. The woman who had been matron of Sing Sing visited California's State Prison, exposed its mismanagement and helped effect its reform. Eventually she took to the lecture circuit in the Golden State, appearing in Sacramento or

Oroville, Butte County, to discourse upon "The Organic Laws Applied to Human Conditions."[12]

Eliza's most frequent horseback journeys were those to and from San Francisco, where she saw to her funds. Accompanied by an escort armed with two revolvers, she rode past redwoods and shale cliffs, missions and orchards, spending a night in a Spanish rancho and dining on *tortillas, caldo* and *frijole.* As she had taken notes on the diggings she now took notes on the City of the Golden Gate. The facts she gathered would enrich her book as her vignettes would color it. In 1853, sixteen newspapers were issued in San Francisco, most of them "fearless, in times of public commotion." Between thirty and fifty vessels entered or departed the port each day. At its wharves she could see tall clipper masts and steamers, great store-houses and commission establishments. Malays and Chinese, Swedes, Yankees and Britons swarmed as white-sailed vessels dipped down to the Golden Gate. Though the city had been six times destroyed by fire it had become – in Eliza's view at least – "the fourth if not the third city on the continent." Its schools and churches, its bars and theaters testified to its extraordinary growth. Its only constant attri-

12. *American Phrenological Journal* (April, 1856), pp. 84 f; *Life Illustrated* (April 12, 1856), p. 189.

bute was change. Its architecture changed with its population. In the kaleidoscope that was San Francisco one could view the Spanish or Mexican woman "sitting at monte, with a cigarita in her lips," the bearded miner with his leather sack of gold, Chinese tailors, Parisian artistes and Swiss watchmakers, riders on the Mission Road bound for the bull and bear fights, parvenus and nouveaux-riches, the pretentious and the upright. The social state of San Francisco was "chaotic"[13] and – to one observer at least – San Francisco was "an epitome of the state." Eliza would write:

> California is well represented, in many of its features, by its metropolis. The rapid growth, the incongruous character, the extremes of condition, the inextinguishable energy, the material luxury, and the spiritual coarseness – the pretension and the ignorance . . . in San Francisco, characterize the state.

Of all these, "inextinguishable energy" alone characterized the household of El Rancho La Libertad. By the summer of 1850 the lumber had been sawed for Eliza's new house and on the appropriate date of July 4th, after the first celebration of Independence Day in Santa Cruz, the

13. Compare the remark of Mrs. Frank Leslie after her 1877 journey to the coast: "Let us conclude that the climate, like the society, like the morals, and like the social habits of San Francisco, is a little mixed." See *California A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate* (New York, 1877, reprinted Nieuwkoop, 1972), pp. 119 f.

lines were stretched to mark its plan and foundation. The woman who was dairy-maid and farmer, housekeeper and "doctor" now became journeyman carpenter. While Miss Sampson cooked and cared for the boys in the shanty, the site was leveled and sills were cut, hewn and drawn. In her Turkish pants Eliza joined in the construction work: "My first participation in the labor of its erection was the tenanting of the joists and studding for the lower story, a work in which I succeeded so well, that during its progress I laughed . . . at the idea of promising to pay a man $14 or $16 per day for doing what I found my own hands so dexterous in." Sometimes she spent the entire day on the roof, shingling. Equipped with hammer and nail-pocket she alternated roofing with discussions of Swedenborg, shingling with reading aloud. Zinc and paints, stores and fixtures were shipped in but often lost when boat-loads capsized in the surf. For zinc lying at the bottom of the Bay, tin cannisters were substituted. At last two rooms were partitioned and floored, calico was stretched on the walls, a carpet laid, and the week before Christmas the household moved from the old shanty to the new house:

> We occupy the smaller of the two apartments into which the house is divided – the outer and larger being a store-room for trunks, boxes, furniture, etc., which the tents cannot receive. We

> have a rough floor laid in the apartment we live in, through the middle of which ascends a pillar, which we call Pompey's pillar since it has been covered with white cloth . . .. Pompey's pillar, with the help of a curtain on one side and the foot of a bedstead draped on the other, subdivides this commodious apartment into a bedchamber and room for general purposes. In the former, Miss S. [Sampson], the two boys and myself, have our lodgings. . . . On the other side of this wall, in the outer room, the men have their beds or berths. . . .
>
> Our room . . . was . . . fifteen feet in length on one side, and about ten feet on the other. The width, at one end, was ten feet, at the other fourteen, and the roof sloped down at the narrow end to the height of about five feet from the floor. It would astonish housekeepers at home to know that in this space we kept and used every day . . . two bedsteads of ordinary size, a sofa, a large dressing-table, a breakfast-table, six or eight chairs, a . . . closet, generally from sixty to eighty volumes on shelves about the walls, and four or five large trunks. In the space left after these were stowed, we received visitors, took our meals, made our butter, . . . and did the other household offices of the family.

A mill was rented for flour that would be preferable to "the sour stuff we had been getting from San Francisco at $40 to $60 the barrel." Eliza Farnham had a new backdrop against which to play out her role as Californian.

During days filled with farming and housekeeping in the new Rancho La Libertad she some-

how found time to participate in the social activities of the West and to introduce to it the reforms she had imported from the East. Attendance at temperance meetings or church services would yield interesting observations when she came to write her book. The Methodist denomination she would label "the first to take up the outposts of new society," and of Puritanism she would remark with acumen, "Tough and tenacious though it was, [it] would have been shorter lived had the Mayflower landed her inflexibles on this laughing coast."

Reading – often aloud – was Eliza's forte; she carried "some convenient-sized volume (bless the duodecimo)" on all her excursions and from her publishing friends, the phrenologists Fowler and Wells in New York, she ordered books on Swedenborg and spiritualism, Carlyle's *Miscellanies* and Emerson's *Essays,* along with stories for her boys. "Send them as early as you can for I think I want them to night."[14]

It was not only spiritualism that excited Eliza's attention but most of the other fads and fancies, eccentricities and reforms of her day. She was in-

14. Eliza W. Farnham to Fowler and Wells, Santa Cruz, November 15, 1850, reprinted in Madeleine B. Stern, "Two Letters from The Sophisticates of Santa Cruz," *The Book Club of California Quarterly News-Letter* (Summer, 1968), pp. 51-62. The original is in the Fowler-Wells Collections, Collection of Regional History and University Archives, Cornell University.

terested in the various phases of the "newness," from magnetism and mesmerism to health fads and dress reform, from phrenology to hydropathy, from the rights of prisoners to the rights of women. What is more, seeking always to improve society, she sought also to impart her beliefs and interests in "the new philosophy" to any willing ears in Santa Cruz. As another visitor to the area would observe, "The most agreeable people were westernized Yankees, who had forgotten the cramped life of the East, but had not divested themselves of the . . . good taste in which they had been trained."[15] Such as these might listen to the disquisitions of Eliza Farnham, but as for the women she herself sadly concluded: "There is little in the condition of California society . . . to engage the higher orders of female intelligence, and, among all earnest women of this class whom I have met, there is a universal feeling of being sadly out of place, . . . The necessities to be served here are physical . . .. None but the pure and strong-hearted of my sex should come alone to this land."

During part of her sojourn in Santa Cruz, Eliza was joined by a woman apparently "pure" and assuredly "strong-hearted." Georgiana Bruce, who

15. Georgiana Bruce Kirby, *Years of Experience An Autobiographical Narrative* (New York and London, 1887), p. 231.

as assistant matron at Sing Sing had shared many of Eliza's experiences there, shared also her interests in the many-faceted reforms of the day. Curiously enough, her earlier life too bore many points of comparison with Eliza's. She was the woman who would figure importantly in Mrs. Farnham's *California* under the transparent disguise of "Geordie."

Born in Bristol, England, in 1818, Georgiana Bruce had been a posthumous child and, as she herself would write, "It is a bad beginning to be born of grief. It narrows the chest and makes the blood less buoyant."[16] Georgiana's grief intensified when her mother made an unfortunate second marriage. The family's funds were soon dissipated and, forced to earn her own living, Georgiana ventured to America with a younger brother. At about twenty-two she served as pupil-teacher in the celebrated socialist community of Brook Farm, Massachusetts, where she met the brightest lights on New

16. Kirby, *Years of Experience, op.cit.*, p. 2 and *passim.* For Georgiana Bruce Kirby, see also Georgiana B. Kirby, *Transmission; or, Variation of Character through The Mother* (New York [1889]), *passim; The Phrenological Journal* (April, 1887), p. 224; Stern, "Two Letters from The Sophisticates of Santa Cruz," *loc.cit., passim;* Information from Miss Gladys Tilden, Berkeley, California; *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* (August 2, 1873), pp. 5 f. Wallace Stegner caricatures Georgiana Kirby as Mrs. Elliott in his recent novel, *Angle of Repose* (New York [1971]).

England's horizon from Nathaniel Hawthorne to that citizen of the world, Margaret Fuller, with whom she "talked freely on the marriage question." With Eliza Farnham she acted freely on the penal reform question. After her work at Sing Sing she was offered a position in Columbus, Ohio, as teacher of children who were three-fifths white. In order to test the complexion of applicants she was asked to use a card stained the appropriate shade. This requirement was as distasteful to Georgiana Bruce as she was to her superiors. Castigated as a "Garrison Abolitionist" and a colleague of Eliza Farnham, she returned to the East. Georgiana's many talents included "a natural gift for nursing." By the time the California gold fever had spread over the Union she decided that, since "everywhere . . . men congregated there would be more or less sickness,"[17] her healing art might stand her in good stead out West. In May 1850, therefore, she followed her friend Eliza on the road to El Dorado where she would remain for the rest of her long, productive life.

With her she brought not only her teaching and nursing abilities but "endless tidings . . . of coteries; of societies; of individuals; of late books; of reform

17. G.B. Kirby, *Years of Experience, op.cit.,* pp. 268 f, 314 f.

movements; . . . The association people, the anti-slavery folks, the prison reformers, the phrenological set, . . . authors, editors,. . . female medical colleges and practitioners, Homoeopathy, water-cure, spiritual knockings, Swedenborg revelations." In their Turkish or Albanian dress of pants and tunic the two women transplanted onions or rode on horseback, discussed the rights of women and introduced to Santa Cruz the latest fads and isms of a century peppered with fads and isms.

Within the next few years Georgiana would marry, becoming Georgiana Bruce Kirby, and Eliza would remarry. A short and stormy union with an Irishman, William Fitzpatrick, would end in separation and divorce. Eliza would also lose her son Edward. The medical skill of neither Georgiana nor Eliza was sufficient to restore the health of the ten-year-old boy who had never been vigorous and in 1855 he died.[18] Eliza, who had now lost two sons and one husband and was about to part with her second husband, would return East with her remaining son Charles.

Before she did so, however, she would co-ordinate her reactions to California and write her book on the subject. Her conclusions, scattered

18. Burhans, *op.cit.*, p. 226; *Notable American Women* I, 599.

among her pages, are as fresh and provocative today as they were in the mid-nineteenth century. In the West nothing was constant but fluctuations and contradictions. Hand in hand with "brilliant achievements" went "moral turpitude." "If . . . the modern hell of the world is 'not to succeed,' it is the concentrated, intensified hell of California." Yet signs of progress were omnipresent – towns and cities rising up, schools, libraries, churches, hospitals. If mining had led to crime it had also stimulated the "growth of that republican sentiment whose rugged justice threatens the throne and smiles upon the hovel." The heterogeneous elements of California's first generations, representing "every variety of mental condition, of hereditary prejudice, of traditional influence, and every extreme of social and religious bigotry" had here all been brought "upon a common platform."

Much of the evil of California could be expunged, she believed, by the presence of courageous women. She did not hesitate to reveal such evils as she had found – the "frauds, forgeries, and briberies," the "relics of ancient tyranny" witnessed by reactionary laws on the property rights of women and the death penalty for theft. California was indeed the gateway between the old and the new worlds. In Eliza Farnham's thoughtful eyes it was also "the world's nursery of freedom" and "the

nucleus and home of the extreme of democratic tendencies." She wore the mantle of prophecy when she wrote:

> The moral and political elements of this state will almost surely make it the theatre of first test for the most radical questions.

Besides crystallizing these opinions in her mind, Eliza Farnham gave herself two research assignments before completing her book. Primarily to prove woman's ability to endure the extremes of hardship, she gathered information from several survivors of the ill-fated Donner expedition which in 1846 was caught in an early blizzard in the Sierras.[19] Marooned in the mountains, many died of exposure or starvation while others yielded to cannibalism. From John Breen, who had been a fourteen-year-old member of the Donner party, Eliza solicited reminiscences, making a contemporary record of the desolation and agony of this dread episode in the westward migration. Published as an Appendix this "Narrative of the Emigration of the Donner Party to California, in 1846" would enrich her book.

To bring her work up to date Eliza also culled information for what would be a supplementary

19. The Donner expedition, the subject of George R. Stewart's *Ordeal by Hunger The Story of the Donner Party* (Boston, 1960) has recently been used as the subject of a narrative poem, *The Donner Party*, by George Keithley, reviewed in *The New York Times Book Review* (February 6, 1972), pp. 7 and 22.

chapter entitled "The Present Crisis in California." The Vigilance Committee, formed in San Francisco in June 1851 when venal judges and false witnesses had abetted crime, had been adjourned when it completed its task of policing the city and arresting, banishing or hanging offenders. Now in 1856 the Vigilance Committee had been revived to extirpate the frauds, crimes and corruption of a later date. Eliza's detailed and contemporary record would supply a source of prime importance for these popular tribunals of California. Her endorsement of this form of judgment was understandable if short-sighted. She saw little danger in a precedent that would one day lead to the Ku Klux Klan, but rather an experiment in self-government, "an expression . . . by the *people* of California, of their determination to be no longer wronged and disgraced by the worst men among them."

Indeed in 1856 Eliza Farnham held that "this is the commencement of an era of improvement in California . . .. Society will rise, because open villainy will no more strut proudly in high places . . .. The period of wild enthusiasm and insane hopes has passed over California; but a better is before her. In the proceedings of the last few months, she has proved her claim to the confidence of those who, in thinking of emigration, entertain other considerations than those of the mineral wealth of the

country, or the chances it affords to speculators. Business will become better regulated, and labor more settled, as the population takes on a quieter character."

The explorer John Charles Frémont had recently been nominated by the Republican Party to exclude slavery from all the Territories and Eliza allied herself with his purposes which, she believed, would vastly benefit the Golden State:

> If the great cause with which Mr. Fremont is identified should happily succeed, this fall, the friends of California will, indeed, have cause of rejoicing . . .. We may look to his elevation as a means of giving her a right position, by connecting her with the Eastern states, and by preserving from the withering presence of slavery the territories which border upon her. . . . Plant slavery all over the broad plains that stretch between the Mississippi and the Sacramento, and there could be no vital circulation between the commercial, thriving East and that remote free state. Slavery ties the arteries of civilization. No life and vigor can travel eastward or westward through its dark dominion. May its black shadow never come nearer to the soil of California than it is today.
>
> But let the 'talking-wires' span free soil from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and let free labor, with its enterprise, progress, and intelligence, possess and build up Kansas and Nebraska, through which California will ultimately be connected, by railroad, with the East, and, in a few years, she will be garden of the Union. There is no prosperity to which she cannot attain.

With this radiant vision of a golden West linked to a vibrant East by an as yet nonexistent transcontinental railroad, Eliza Farnham would conclude her book on California.

She had written much of it in 1851 and so she recorded the early phases in the State's development: the "breaking out" of mines, of squatting, of speculation. She did not complete it until 1856 and so she recorded the incredible changes that had occurred during the interim: "such changes . . . as half a century would not produce in many older countries. . . . Where . . . there was scarcely a mile of fence . . . continuous grain-fields . . . substantial farm-houses . . . upon the sites of . . . little canvas shanties" and in place of clumsy wagons "the best Concord or Troy coaches" on all the main roads. With her supplementary chapter on the revived Vigilance Committee and with a few footnotes she brought her eye-witness account up to the date of her preface completed at Santa Cruz, July 1856.

California, In-Doors and Out; or, How we Farm, Mine, and Live generally in the Golden State was published by the New York firm of Dix, Edwards & Co. in 1856, bound in cloth and priced at $1.00.[20]

20. Orville A. Roorbach, *Addenda to The Bibliotheca Americana, 1855-1858* (New York, 1939), p. 76.

The following February, *Graham's Illustrated Magazine* reprinted Eliza's report of the Donner party's emigration under the heading, "Perils of the Overland Route to California," explaining that "the following thrilling account of the adventures and sufferings of a party of emigrants who started for California by the overland route, is taken from Eliza W. Farnham's new and interesting work on California, just published by Messrs. Dix, Edwards & Co., New York."[21]

While the twentieth-century writer George R. Stewart was to characterize the Farnham version of the Donner story a "sentimentalized" defense of a woman member of the party, the earlier historian Hubert Howe Bancroft labeled her book "a pleasing picture of life on the Pacific coast."[22] It was far more than that. Eliza Farnham's mild addiction to purple passages and flowery effusions did not hide the facts or impede the flow of her narrative. Her book serves today not only as the fascinating story of one woman's pioneering in California but as a documentary source of no small importance.

Out of her western experience Eliza would write still another book, *The Ideal Attained,* a novelized,

21. *Graham's Illustrated Magazine* (February, 1857), pp. 113-126.

22. Bancroft, *op.cit.,* XX, 734; Stewart, *op.cit.,* pp. 385 f.

romanticized and discursive version far less successful than her straightforward narrative. *The Ideal Attained* would be copyright by the author's only surviving son Charles and published in 1865.[23] It was a posthumous publication.

In 1856, partly because of her son Edward's death and her divorce, partly to supervise the New York publication of her book, Eliza returned to the East. In June 1857 her character analysis, based upon a phrenological reading, appeared in the *American Phrenological Journal*, emphasizing her "stoutness of character," her "breadth of affection," her "vigor and compass of thought. . . . She is one of the strongest female thinkers and writers in America; and . . . in many . . . spheres of action, she has shown her stamina of character and strength of mind."[24]

In the short period still allotted to her, Eliza Farnham expanded those already wide spheres of action. She used both voice and pen to elucidate woman's potential, speaking before the Woman's Rights Convention in 1858, publishing an ambitious two-volume study, *Woman and Her Era*, in 1864. In between she revisited California where she lectured

23. Eliza W. Farnham, *The Ideal Attained; being The Story of Two Steadfast Souls, and how they Won Happiness and Lost it not* (New York, 1865).

24. *American Phrenological Journal* (June, 1857), p. 133.

and served as matron of the Stockton Insane Asylum. During the Civil War she returned East and, active in the Women's Loyal National League, helped petition Congress for an amendment to abolish slavery and went to Gettysburg as volunteer nurse.[25]

In December of 1864, as the war was entering its last campaigns, Eliza Farnham died and was buried in the Hicksite Friends' Burying Ground in Milton, New York. In her forty-nine years she had encompassed many lives, not the least fruitful of which was her life in the Golden State. Out of it had come a book which – now reprinted for the first time – recaptures for a later age the hardship and exuberance, the vitality and stamina of a woman pioneer in El Dorado.

25. For her later life and her death, see *The New-York Times* (May 14, 1858), p. 5 and (December 18, 1864), p. 3; *New-York Tribune* (December 16, 1864), p. 4; *Notable American Women* I, 599 ff; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, N.Y., 1887) I, 669. For details of *Woman and Her Era*, see also Helen Beal Woodward, *The Bold Women* (New York, [1953]), pp. 337-356.