ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

HANDBOOK TO THE NEW GOLD-FIELDS

Robert Michael Ballantyne

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

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Introduction
Handbook to the New El-Dorado

The problem of colonisation in the north-western portion of British America is fast working itself out. The same destiny which pushed forward Anglo-Saxon energy and intelligence into the rich plains of Mexico, and which has peopled Australia, is now turning the current of emigration to another of the "waste-places of the earth." The discovery of extensive goldfields in the extreme west of the territories now occupied by the Hudson's Bay Company, is a great fact. It no longer comes to us as the report of interested adventurers, or the exaggeration of a few sanguine diggers, but with well-authenticated results—large quantities of gold received at San Francisco, and a consequent rush of all nations from the gold regions of California, as well as from the United States and Canada. The *thirst for Gold* is, as it always has been, the most attractive, the strongest, the most unappeasable of appetites—the impulse that builds up, or pulls down empires, and floods the wilderness with a sudden population. In those wild regions of the Far West men are pouring in one vast, gold-searching tide of thousands and tens of thousands, into the comparatively unknown territory beyond the Rocky Mountains, for which our Legislature has just manufactured a government. How strange is the comparison instituted by the *Times* between the rush to Fraser River and the mediaeval crusades, which carried so large a portion of the population of Europe to die on the burning plains of Palestine! At Clermont Ferrand, Peter the Hermit has concluded his discourse; cries are heard in every quarter, "It is the will of God! It is the will of God!"; Every one assumes the cross, and the crowd disperses to prepare for conquering under the walls of the earthly, a sure passage to the heavenly, Jerusalem. What elevation of motive, what faith, what enthusiasm! Compare with this the picture presented by San Francisco Harbour. A steamer calculated to carry 600 persons, is laden with 1600. There is hardly standing room on the deck. It is almost impossible to clear a passage from one part of the vessel to the other. The passengers are not knights and barons, but tradesmen, "jobbers," tenants, and workmen of all the known varieties. Their object in of the earth, earthy—wealth in its rawest and rudest form —gold, the one thing for which they bear to live, or dare to die. Although in the comparison the crusades may have the superiority in many points, yet so little have ideal, romantic, and sentimental considerations to do with the current of human affairs, that while the crusades remain a monument of abortive and objectless folly, fatal to those who embarked in them, and leaving as their chief result a tinge of Asiatic ferocity on European barbarism, the exodus of San Francisco, notwithstanding the material end it has in view, is sure to work out the progress of happiness and civilisation, and add another to the many conquests over nature, which the present age has witnessed.

In a year more than ordinarily productive of remarkable events, one of the most noteworthy, and that which is likely to leave a lasting impression on the world, is this discovery of gold on the coasts of the Pacific. The importance of the new region as a centre for new ramifications of English relations with the rest of the world cannot well be exaggerated either in a political or a commercial point of view. It will be the first really important point we shall have ever commanded on that side of the Pacific Ocean, and it cannot but be of inestimable value in developing our relations with America, China, Japan, and Eastern Russia.

This new discovery must also tend to make the western shore of the American continent increasingly attractive, from Fraser's River down to Peru the rivers all bear down treasures of a wealth

perfectly inestimable. Emigration must necessarily continue to flow and increase. Gold digging is soon learned, and there will be an immense demand for every kind of labour at almost fabulous prices.

It is further valuable as tending to open up a direct communication from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Europe across the continent of America to India and China. This is a grand idea, and the colonial minister who carries it out will accomplish a greater thing than any of his predecessors, for he will open up the means of carrying English civilisation to the whole of that vast continent and to the eastern world.

The pioneers in this movement will conquer the territory not with arms in their hands, but with the gold-rocker, the plough, the loom, and the anvil, the steam-boat, the railway, and the telegraph. Commerce and agriculture, disenthralled by the influences of free institutions, will cause the new empire to spring into life, full armed, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter. Its Pacific ports will be thronged with ships of all nations, its rich valleys will blossom with nature's choicest products, while its grand rivers will bear to the sea the fruits of free and honest labour. Great as have been our achievements in the planting of colonies, we have never entered upon a more magnificent work than the one now before us, in which the united energies of the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race will be engaged, heart and hand.

While the present volume is intended chiefly for those desiring information on the subject of the gold discoveries, it also addresses itself to the general public, for the condition and character of the country and its inhabitants cannot fail to be a subject of inquiry with all who can appreciate the importance of its situation. The book lays claim to no merit but that of careful collation. Little information is given but what is derived from sources of general access; but it does profess to set forth the truth as far as that could be obtained from the conflicting statements of different parties.

While the following pages will be found to contain ample proof as to the extent and richness of the gold fields; as well as the salubrity of the climate, it is satisfactory to be able to state here that the country is proved to be easily accessible both for English and American merchandise. The public have now certain, though unofficial news, of the journey of the Governor of Vancouver's Island as far as Fort Hope, about one hundred miles above the mouth of the Fraser River and seventy above Fort Langley. This voyage has established the extremely important fact, that the river is navigable for steamers at least up to this point, where the mines are now known to be of extraordinary wealth, although it is reported that their yield regularly increases as the stream is ascended. It is now proved that these districts are actually within from fifteen to twenty-three hours steam of Victoria, the principal town of the Vancouver's Island colony. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this fact. It is true that the same voyage which the steamer carrying the Governor of Vancouver's Island successfully performed, was attempted without success by another steamer about the same time—a fact which probably indicates that the river will be navigable only for vessels of small draught, and possibly, perhaps, not equally navigable at all seasons; for we must remember that in the early part of June, when this attempt was successfully made, the waters of the river had already begun to rise, in consequence of the melting of the snow from the Rocky Mountains, from which it springs. But they were then by no means at their full height; and even if the river be only navigable by vessels of small draught, that is a fact of very little importance as compared with the certainty that it is navigable at all to so considerable a height. Fort Hope is, as we have said, about one hundred miles up the river—that is to say, about one hundred and ninety from Victoria in Vancouver's Island, the voyage across the Gulf of Georgia being about ninety miles. The rich diggings between Fort Yale and Fort Hope are, therefore, not so far from the fertile land of Vancouver's Island as London from Hull and the distance from Victoria to the mouth of the river, where gold is at present found inconsiderable quantities, is not so great as the distance from Liverpool to Dublin. Now, as almost all the importance of a mining district depends on easy communication with a provision market—and the very richest will be rendered comparatively insignificant if provisions can only be carried thither at enormous cost and labour—no fact has yet been established of more importance than the easy navigability of the

Fraser River. Immediately above Fort Yale, which is twelve miles higher up the river than the point reached by the steamer, a succession of cataracts begin, which, of course, interrupt all navigation, but thence even to "the Forks," or junction between the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, there is certainly not more than one hundred miles of road, which, as we learn from the government map, are mostly practicable for loaded waggons. Hence it is evident that the new gold district will be easily accessible both for English merchandise from England, and for the provision market of Vancouver's Island.

In explanation and refutation of the prejudice which almost universally exists against the climate and soil of North America generally, but especially of the divisions included in the Hudson's Bay Company's Territories, we cannot do better than quote the following just remarks from the Reverend Mr Nicolay's treatise on Oregon. He says:—

"A predisposition towards one opinion, or bias to one side of an argument, too often warps both the judgment and the understanding; and one man in consequence sees fertile plains where another could see only arid wastes on which even the lizards appear starving, while the other looks forward to their being covered with countless flocks and herds at no very distant period of time. Both Cook and Vancouver, having previously made up their minds against the existence of a river near parallel 46 degrees, passed the Columbia without perceiving it, and the former even declared most decidedly that the strait seen by Juan de Fuca had its origin only in the fertility of the pilot's brain. As they were discovered to be in error, so it is not impossible that others not less positive in their assertions may be convicted of the same carelessness of examination as those navigators, so remarkable in all other respects for their accuracy, and so indefatigable and minute in their researches, that little has been left to their successors but to check their work.

"With respect, however, to the attributed barrenness of great part of the territory, so peremptorily insisted on by many, there is some excuse for the earlier travellers from whom that opinion is derived. Ignorant of the best routes, and frequently famishing in the immediate neighbourhood of plenty, they most justly reflect back to others the impressions they received; but in so doing, though they speak truth, they give very erroneous ideas of the country they think themselves to be describing most accurately, and of this very pregnant examples are found in the travels of Lewis and Clarke, and the party who came overland to Astoria: both struck the head waters of the Saptin, both continued its course to its junction with the main stream, both suffered—the latter party intensely; but had they, by the fertile bottoms of Bear and Rosseaux Rivers, found access to the valley between the Cascade and Blue Mountains—or, keeping still further west, crossed the former range into that of the Wallamette, they would have found game, been banished from their pages, and the Oregon would have appeared in her holiday attire—

"A nymph of healthiest hue—"

and the depth of ravines and the elevation of rocks and precipices would have been changed into the unerring evidences of fertility and luxuriance of vegetation afforded by the dense forests and gigantic pine-trees of the coast district. We can scarce estimate the transition of feeling and change which would have been produced in their estimate of the country, if they could have been suddenly transported from their meagre horse-steak—cut from an animal so jaded with travel as to be in all probability only saved from death by starvation and fatigue, by being put to death to save over-wearied men from famine, and this cooked at a fire of *bois de vache*, with only the shelter of an overhanging rock—to the fat venison and savoury wildfowl of the woods and lakes, broiled on the glowing hardwood embers under the comfortable roof of sheltering bark, or the leafy shade of the monarch of the forest; while the cheerful whinny of their well-fed beasts would have given joyful token that nature in her bounty had been forgetful of nothing which her dependent children could desire.

"While such and so great is the power of circumstances to vary the impressions made upon the senses, some hesitation must be used in their reception until fully confirmed, or they must be limited by other accounts, as unbiassed judgment may direct, especially as the temperament of individuals

may serve to heighten the colouring, whether sombre or sunny, in which circumstances may have depicted the landscape. It is not every traveller who can, with Mackenzie, expatiate on the beauty of scenery while in fear of treachery from fickle and bloody savages; or like Fremont, though dripping from the recent flood, and uncertain of the means of existence even for the day, his arms, clothes, provisions, instruments, deep in the whirlpools of the foaming Platte, stop to gaze with admiration on the 'fantastic ruins' Nature has 'piled' among her mountain fastnesses, while from his bare and bleeding feet he draws the sharp spines of the hostile cacti. Truth from travellers is consequently for the most part relative. Abstractedly, with reference to any country, it must be derived from the combined accounts and different phases of truth afforded by many."

Chapter One
Richness and Extent of the Gold Fields

"Destiny, which has lately riveted our attention on the burning plains of the extreme East," says the *Times* of 9th July, "now claims our solicitude for the auriferous mountains and rushing rivers of the Far West and the shores of the remote Pacific. What most of us know of these ultra-occidental regions may be summed up in a very few words. We have most of us read Washington Irving's charming narrative of 'Astoria,' sympathised with the untimely fate of Captain Thorn and his crew, and read with breathless interest the wanderings of the pilgrims to the head waters of the Columbia. After thirty years, the curtain rises again on the stormy period of the Ashburton Treaty, when the 'patriots' were bent upon 'whipping the Britishers' out of every acre of land on the western side of the Rocky Mountains. And now, for the third time, we are recalled to the same territory, no longer as the goal of the adventurous trader or the battle ground of the political agitator, but as a land of promise —a new El Dorado, to which men are rushing with all the avidity that the presence of the one, thing which all men, in all times and in all places, insatiably desire is sure to create."

This El Dorado lies between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific; it is bounded on the south by the American frontier line, 49 degrees of latitude, and may be considered to extend to the sources of Fraser River, in latitude 55 degrees. It is, therefore, about 420 miles long in a straight line, its average breadth from 250 to 300 miles. Taken from corner to corner, its greatest length would be, however, 805 miles,—and its greatest breadth 400 miles, Mr Arrowsmith computes its area of square miles, including Queen Charlotte's Island, at somewhat more than 200,000 miles. Of its two gold-bearing rivers, one, the Fraser, rises in the northern boundary, and flowing south, falls into the sea at the south-western extremity of the territory, opposite the southern end of Vancouver's Island, and within a few miles of the American boundary; the other, the Thompson River, which rises in the Rocky Mountains, and flowing westward, joins the Fraser about 150 miles from the coast. It is on these two rivers, and chiefly at their confluence, that the gold discoveries have been made.

Fraser River is about as famous a point as there is today on the earth's surface—as famous as were the Californian diggings in 1848, or the Australian gold mines in 1853. It is now the centre of attraction for the adventurous of all countries. The excitement throughout the Canadas and Northern States of America is universal. In fact, the whole interior of North America is quite in a ferment —the entire floating population being either "on the move," or preparing to start; while traders, cattle-dealers, contractors, and all the enterprising persons in business who can manage to leave, are maturing arrangements to join the general exodus. Persons travelling in the mining regions reckon that, in three months, 50,000 souls will have left the State of California alone. The rapidity and extent of this emigration has never been paralleled.

It is now established that the district of British Columbia, holding a relation to Puget's Sound similar to that of Sacramento Valley to the Bay of San Francisco, contains rich and extensive gold beds. The Fraser River mines have already been mentioned in the British Parliament as not less valuable and important than the gold fields in Australia, Geologists have anticipated such a discovery; and Governor Stevens, in his last message to the Legislative Assembly of Washington Territory, claims that the district south of the international boundary is equally auriferous.

The special correspondent of the *San Francisco Bulletin*, a reliable authority, writes from Fort Langley, twenty-five miles up the Fraser, under date the 25th May, that he had just come down from Fort Yale, where he found sixty men and two hundred Indians, with their squaws, at work on a "bar" of about five hundred yards in length—called "Hills Bar," one mile below Fort Yale, and fifteen miles from Fort Hope, all trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. "The morning I arrived, two men (Kerrison and Company) cleaned up five and a-half ounces from the rocker, the product of half a

day's work. Kerrison and Company the next day cleaned up ten and a-half ounces from two rockers, which I saw myself weighed. This bar is acknowledged to be one of the richest ever seen, and well it may be, for here is a product of fifteen and a-half ounces of gold, worth 247 and a half dollars, or 50 pounds sterling, from it in a day and a-half to the labour of two rockers. Old Californian miners say they never saw such rich diggings. The average result per day to the man was fully 20 dollars, some much more. The gold is very fine; so much so, that it was impossible to save more than two-thirds of what went through the rockers. This defect in the rocker must be remedied by the use of quicksilver to 'amalgamate' the finer particles of gold. This remedy is at hand, for California produces quicksilver sufficient for the consumption of the 'whole' world in her mountains of Cinnabar. Supplies are going on by every vessel. At Sailor Diggings, above Fort Yale, they are doing very well, averaging from 8 to 25 dollars per day to the man. I am told that the gold is much coarser on Thompson River than it is in Fraser River. I saw yesterday about 250 dollars of coarse gold from Thompson River, in pieces averaging 5 dollars each. Some of the pieces had quartz among them. Hill, who was the first miner on the bar bearing his name, just above spoken of, with his partner, has made some 600 dollars on it in almost sixteen days' work. Three men just arrived from Sailor Diggings have brought down 670 dollars in dust, the result of twelve days' work. Gold very fine. Rising of the river driving the miners off for a time."

Correspondents from several places on the Sound, both on the British and American territories, men of various nationalities, have since written that the country on the Fraser River is rich in gold, and "equal to any discoveries ever made in California." The *Times'* correspondent, writing from Vancouver's Island on 10th June, says, "The gold exists from the mouth of Fraser River for at least 200 miles up, and most likely much further, but it has not been explored; hitherto any one working on its banks has been able to obtain gold in abundance and without extraordinary labour; the gold at present obtained has been within a foot of the surface, and is supposed to have averaged about ten dollars per diem to each man engaged in mining. Of course, some obtain more, some less, but all get gold. Thompson River is quite as rich in gold as Fraser River. The land about Thompson River consists of extensive sandy prairies, which are loaded with gold also; in fact, the whole country about Fraser and Thompson Rivers are mere beds of gold, so abundant as to make it quite disgusting. I have already seen pounds and pounds of it, and hope before long to feast my eyes upon tons of the precious metal." And the same high authority writes on 17th June,—"There is no longer room to doubt that all the country bordering on Fraser River is one continuous gold bed. Miners abandoning the partially exhausted *placers* of California, are thronging to this new *Dorado*, and the heretofore tranquil precincts of Victoria are now the scene of an excitement such as was witnessed at San Francisco in 1849, or since in Melbourne. Land has run up to prices fabulously high; and patches that six months ago were, perhaps, grudgingly purchased at the colonial price of 20 shillings the acre, are re-selling daily at a hundred times that amount. The small number of steam ships hitherto found sufficient for the commerce between San Francisco and these vicinities no longer suffices to convey a tithe of the eager applicants for passage. An opening for the enterprise of British capitalists such as was not anticipated has thus suddenly arisen, and the opportunity will, of course, be seized with alacrity.

"Lest I should appear too sanguine in my representations, I will cite one instance to illustrate the richness of these newly discovered diggings. Three men returned for provisions lately, after an absence of seven days; they had during this interval extracted 179 ounces of gold. I state this fact on the authority of Governor Douglas, who has just returned from the mining regions, whither he went with the view of establishing certain regulations for the maintenance of order. In short, all who have visited the mines are impressed with the conviction that their richness far excels that of California in its palmiest days."

And, again, the correspondent of the *New York Times*, in a letter dated 21st June, gives the following corroborative testimony:—"The gold is found everywhere, and even during the extreme height of the river, parties are averaging from ten to twenty dollars per day, digging in the banks or on

the upper edge of the bars, nearly all of which are overflowed. Big strikes of from fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars are frequently reported. Nearly all the work at present is carried on between Forts Langley and Yale, and for some twenty or thirty miles above the latter an entire distance along the river of about a hundred miles. Some few are digging on Harrison River, and other tributaries, where the gold is found in larger particles. Those who were engaged in mining on the forks of Thompson River shew still richer yields, but have been compelled to leave on account of the high stage of the water, the want of provisions, and the opposition of the Indians. The gold where the most men are located (upon the bars of the river), is found in very minute particles, like sand. No quicksilver has been used as, yet, but when that is attainable, their yield is sure to be greatly augmented. At Hill's Bar those at work had averaged fifty dollars per day the whole time they had been there. The Indians all have gold, and are as much excited as the whites. It is of no use to cite various reports of individual successes in this or that locality. The impression of all who have gone is unanimous and conclusive as to the great facts of new gold fields now being explored equal to any ever yet developed in California or elsewhere. No steamer has yet returned with more than twelve or fifteen passengers, and nearly every one of these had come down to obtain supplies for himself or his party left behind in the diggings. They all say they are going back in a few weeks."

The following personal testimony may also be cited:– "On Sunday," says the *San Francisco Globe*, "we received a visit from Messrs Edward Campbell and Joseph Blanch, both boatmen, well known in this city, who have just returned from the mines on Fraser River. They mined for ten days on the bar, until compelled to desist from the rise in the river, in which time they took out 1340 dollars. They used but one rocker, and have no doubt that they could have done much better with proper appliances. There were from sixty to seventy white men at work on Hill's Bar, and from four to five hundred Indians, men, women, and children. The Indians are divided in opinion with regard to Americans; the more numerous party, headed by Pollock, a chief, are disposed to receive them favourably, because they obtain more money, for their labour from the 'Bostons' than from 'King George's men', as they style the English. They have learned the full value of their labour, and, instead of one dollar a-day, or an old shirt, for guiding and helping to work a boat up the river, they now charge from five to eight dollars per day. Another portion of the Indians are in favour of driving off the 'Bostons,' being fearful of having their country overrun by them."

The proprietor of the San Francisco *News Letter* had determined to be at the centre of the present excitement in the El Dorado, and to judge for himself, or, rather to solve the problem of how much gold, how many Indians, and how much humbug, went on board the Pacific mail steam-ship *Cortes*, Captain Horner, and made the passage to Victoria, 840 miles, in five days. Although nine hundred persons were on board, yet no actual inconvenience was felt by the high-pressure packing; the greatest good humour and accommodating spirit prevailing, controlled by the gentlemanly conduct of Captain J.B. Horner and his officers. On the day of arrival, the operations of the Government Land Office at the fort in Victoria was 26,000 dollars. The importance of the amount can best be realised by comparing it with the prices, viz. 100 dollars per lot, 60 by 100 feet, unsurveyed. Some of these lots have been sold at 200 to 1000 dollars. Lots at first sale, surveyed price, 50 dollars; lots, second and last sale, 100 dollars each, are now being sold from 500 to 1000 dollars each. Six lots together in the principal street are valued at 10,000 dollars. The figures at Esquimault Harbour and lots in that vicinity assume a bolder character as to value, from the fact that the harbour is a granite-bound basin, similar to Victoria, with an entrance now wide and deep enough to admit the Leviathan. Victoria has a bar which must be dredged, dug, or blown away. We noted at Victoria that the most valuable lot, with a flat granite level, with thirty feet of water, sufficient for any ship to unload without jetty, is now covered by a large building constructed of logs, belonging to Samuel Price and Company. A ship was unloading lumber at this wharf at 35 dollars per M, which was the ruling price. At Victoria, on the 21st June, a Frenchman landed from the steamer *Surprise*, who came on board at Fort Langley with twenty-seven pounds weight of gold on his person, which we saw and lifted. Another passenger,

whom we know, states that there are six hundred persons within eight miles of Fort Hope, who are averaging per man an ounce and a half of gold per day minimum to six and a half ounces per day maximum. The largest sums seem to be taken out at Sailor's Bar, five miles above Fort Hope. The lowest depth as yet reached by miners is fifteen inches; these mere surface scratches producing often 200 dollars per day. At Fort Hope, potatoes were selling at 6 dollars per bag; bacon, 75 cents per pound; crackers, 30 cents. From Fort Hope to Fort Thompson the road is good, with the exception of twenty miles. For 20 dollars, the steamers will take miners from Victoria to the diggings at Fort Hope, and for three or four dollars more an Indian will accompany you to Fort Yale. Bowen, steward of the *Surprise*, says that about a hundred Indians usually ran after him to obtain little sweet cakes, which he traded off four or five for 1 dollar in gold dust. Sugar at Fort Langley, 1 dollar 50 cents per pound; lumber, 1 dollar 50 cents per foot; tea and coffee, 1 dollar per pound; pierced iron for rockers, 8 dollars; plain sheets, 2 dollars each; five pounds of quicksilver sold for 40 dollars—10 dollars per pound was the ordinary price. The actual ground prospected and ascertained to be highly auriferous extends to three hundred and fifty miles from the mouth of Fraser River. One hundred miles of Thompson River has been prospected, and found to be rich, south-east of Fraser River. The same will apply to all the tributaries of Thompson River. A large extent of auriferous quartz has been discovered ten miles from Fort Hope. Exceedingly rich quartz veins have been found on Harrison River.

The most astounding facts have yet to be divulged. A river emptying into the Gulf of Georgia, not a hundred miles north of Fraser River hitherto supposed to contain no gold, has proved fabulously rich. An Indian arrived at Victoria from this locality, having twenty-three pounds weight of pure gold, obtained solely by his own labour, in less than twenty days. In confirmation of our figures, and being short of space, we append the following statistics, derived from an official and authentic source of the strictest reliability. We deem the above facts sufficient to cause an exodus of a far more alarming character, and of higher proportions as to number, than any hitherto known in history. Suffice it to say, that the present *furore* is well founded; that it holds out busy times, high prices, speculations, contracts, and employments of a thousand kinds.

Fountain's Diggings (Fraser River, at 51 degrees 30 minutes north), month of June 1858.

Five rockers worked by half-breed Canadians.

June	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
	dollars	dollars	dollars	dollars	dollars
1	38	50	42	40	50
2	40	51	38	29	51
3	41	53	39	51	52
4	28	55	18	33	56
5	32	60	54	54	53
6	64	62	39	58	55
7	52	58	48	52	64
Total	295	385	268	327	381
Average	42.14	55.50	38.70	46.72	54.40

A highly reliable correspondent sends the following from San Francisco, under date 5th July:—

The emigration for Fraser River has gone on for months with no signs of growing less. The best means of judging what grounds there are for the belief in the existence of gold in large quantities on its banks, is by letters received from persons who are engaged in mining. It is worthy of note that there is no discrepancy between the accounts given by different individuals, all their statements agreeing. The mines are reported to be exceedingly rich, and yielding large returns to those engaged in digging. The river is very high, and miners have been driven from several of the most lucrative bars until the water subsides. Mr Hill, from whom Hill's Bar took its name, is mining some distance above that point. He and six hands were making from an ounce to an ounce and a-half of gold dust a day to each man. For three weeks prior to the freshet, Mr Hill and one man averaged one hundred to one hundred and fifty dollars a day. The freshet, however drove him off for the time being. Mr E.R. Collins, who has spent some time in the Fraser River gold region, and who brought down last week a quantity of dust, has communicated the following intelligence to the *Alta California*. Mr Collins is a trustworthy gentleman. He left San Francisco in March last, and was at Olympia when the excitement first broke out. He then, in company with three others, proceeded to Point Roberts, from whence they proceeded up Fraser River to the mouth of Harrison River, about twenty-five miles above Fort Langley. This portion of the journey they performed without guides or assistance from the natives. The current was moderate, and occasionally beautiful islands were discovered with heavy timber, which presented a beautiful appearance. From Fort Hope to Fort Yale, a distance of fifteen miles, the river runs narrow, and the current running about seven miles per hour, though, in some places, it might be set down at ten or twelve. At Fort Yale, the first mining bar was reached. It extended out from the left bank a distance of some thirty yards, and was about half a mile long. Twenty or thirty squaws were at work with baskets and wooden trays, while, near by, large numbers of male Indians

stood listlessly looking on. Here some of Mr Collins' companions, who had now increased to twenty, proposed to stop and try their luck, but the majority resolved to go on, having informed themselves satisfactorily that further up the "big chunks" were in abundance. After resting a while, therefore, the party went ahead. Two miles from Fort Yale they entered upon the commencement of the real difficulties and dangers of navigation on Fraser River, the water for a distance of thirty-five or forty miles passing through deep gloomy cañons, and over high masses of rock. At this time the river had attained only a few feet above its usual height, so that by perseverance and the skill of the native boatman they were enabled to make slow progress. Numerous portages were made—one of them, the last, being four miles long. These portages could not be avoided, the cliffs rising perpendicularly on either side of the river, sometimes to a height of fifty or sixty feet, affording not the slightest footpath on which to tow. At other places the whirls, and rocks partly submerged, rendered a water passage utterly impracticable. At every bar and shallow spot prospected in these wild localities gold was obtained in paying quantities, all of very fine quality—rather difficult to save without the use of quicksilver. From the head of the cañons to the forks of Thompson's River, thirty-five miles more, the current and general appearance of the river seemed about the same as from Fort Hope to Fort Yale, gold also being found where there was an opportunity for a fair "prospect". At the Forks the party were told by Travill, a French trader, whom they met by accident, that the richest and best diggings were up Thompson's; but that river being navigable but a few miles up, it was thought best to keep on up Fraser, which they did for a distance of forty miles, encountering no serious obstacles beyond a few rapids, and they were passed by towing. Five miles above the Forks some twenty white men were at work, making with common rockers from ten to sixteen dollars per day. Arriving at a bar about ten miles below, where white men were congregating in numbers considered sufficient for mutual protection, they took up a claim and commenced digging. They worked here steady twenty-four days, averaging fifteen dollars per day to each man. The greatest day's work of one man was thirty-one dollars. These figures, it is thought, would apply to all the miners.

Our latest news from the new mines reach to the beginning of July. At that time there were immense numbers of miners on the banks of Fraser River, waiting for the stream to fall and enable them to go to work on the bars, which are said to be fabulously rich. Some dry diggings had also been discovered in the neighbourhood of the river; but owing to the presence of a large number of Indians, not of the most friendly disposition, the miners dared not then extend their researches far from the stream, where the bulk of the whites were congregated. The town of Victoria, on Vancouver's Island, has sprung rapidly into importance. Great advances have been made on real estate there. Lots, which a few months ago were sold by the Hudson's Bay Company at twelve pounds ten shillings, are now selling at over 250 pounds. A newspaper, called the *Victoria Gazette* has been started there; and an American steamer, *The Surprise*, is also running regularly between Victoria and Fort Hope, which is one hundred miles above the mouth of Fraser River. In the last week of June the arrivals by steamers and vessels at the various ports of British Columbia reached the large daily average of one thousand, while those who have lately travelled through the mountains say that the principal roads in the interior present an appearance similar to the retreat of a routed army. Stages, express waggons, and vehicles of every character, are called into requisition for the immediate emergency, and all are crammed, while whole battalions are pressing forward on horse or mule back, and on foot. Of course, the shipments of merchandise from San Francisco and other ports are very large, to keep pace with this almost instantaneous emigration of thousands to a region totally unsupplied with the commodities necessary for their use and sustenance. Up to the present no outbreak or disturbance has occurred, and a certain degree of order has already been established in the mining region, through the judicious measures adopted by the governor. Justices of the peace and other officials have been appointed, and a system protective of the territorial interests organised. Licences, on the principle of those granted in Australia, are issued; the price, five dollars per month, to be exacted from every miner. There was a good deal of talk, as to the right or propriety of levying this tax when it was first proposed,

and some of the Francisco papers were load in their denunciations; others took a calmer view. It is satisfactory to add that little difficulty has so far been experienced on this head. As a body, the miners are reported to be a steady set of men, well conducted, and respectful of the law.

Chapter Two
Climate, Productions, and Soil

Next to the extent and richness of the gold mines, the most important inquiry is as to the character of the climate and soil. And in this respect the Fraser River settlement does not lose any of its attractions, for, though seven hundred miles north of San Francisco, it is still one or two degrees south of the latitude of London, and apparently with a climate of a mildness equal to that of the southern shores of England, being free from all extremes, both of heat and cold. One hundred and fifty miles back from the Pacific, indeed, there lies a range of mountains reaching up to the regions of perpetual snow. But between that and the coast the average temperature is fifty-four degrees for the year round. Snow seldom lies more than three days. Fruit trees blossom early in April, and salad goes to head by the middle of May on Vancouver's Island. In parts of this region wheat yields twenty to thirty bushels to the acre. Apples, pears, pease, and grains of all kinds do well. The trees are of gigantic growth. Iron and copper abound, as does also coal in Vancouver's Island, so that altogether it bids fair to realise in a short time the description applied to it by the colonial secretary (Sir E.B. Lytton), of "a magnificent abode for the human race."

When introducing the "Government of New Caledonia bill," on 9th July, the Colonial Secretary said in his place in the House of Commons:– "The Thompson River district is described as one of the finest countries in the British dominions, with a climate far superior to that of countries in the same latitude on the other side of the mountains. Mr Cooper, who gave valuable evidence before our committee on this district, with which he is thoroughly acquainted, recently addressed to me a letter, in which he states that 'its fisheries are most valuable, its timber the finest in the world for marine purposes; it abounds with bituminous coal, well fitted for the generation of steam; from Thompson River and Colville districts to the Rocky Mountains, and from the 49th parallel some 350 miles north, a more beautiful country does not exist. It is in every way suitable for colonisation.' Therefore, apart from the gold fields, this country affords every promise of a flourishing and important colony."

The *Times* special correspondent, in a letter from Vancouver's Island, published on 10th August, says, "Productive fisheries, prolific whaling waters, extensive coalfields, a country well timbered in some parts, susceptible of every agricultural improvement in ethers, with rich gold fields on the very borders—these are some of the many advantages enjoyed by the colony of Vancouver's Island and its fortunate possessors. When I add that the island boasts a climate of great salubrity, with a winter temperature resembling that of England, and a summer little inferior to that of Paris, I need say no more, lest my picture be suspected of sharing too deeply of *couleur de rose*."

Of the southern part of this district Lieutenant Wilkes, who commanded the late exploring expedition under the United States government, says, "Few portions of the globe are so rich in soil, so diversified in surface, or so capable of being rendered the happy homes of an industrious and civilised community. For beauty of scenery and salubrity of climate it cannot be surpassed. It is peculiarly adapted for an agricultural and pastoral people, and no portion of the world beyond the tropics can be found that will yield so readily with moderate labour to the wants of man."

Perhaps the fullest account of the country yet given is that contained in "The Narrative of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Slopes of the Rocky Mountains," by Ross Cox, one of the earliest explorers of British North America. He says, "The district of New Caledonia extends from 51 degrees 30 minutes north latitude to about 56 degrees. Its extreme western boundary is 124 degrees 10 minutes. Its principal trading post is called Alexandria, after the celebrated traveller Sir Alexander Mackenzie. It is built on the banks of Fraser River, in about latitude 53 degrees north. The country in its immediate vicinity presents a beautiful and picturesque appearance. The banks of the river are rather low; but a little distance inland some rising grounds are visible, partially diversified by groves

of fir and poplar. This country is full of small lakes, rivers, and marshes. It extends about ten days' march in a north and north-east direction. To the south and south-east the Atnah, or Chin Indian country, extends about one hundred miles; on the east there is a chain of lakes, and the mountains bordering Thompson River; while to the westward and north-west lie the lands of the Naskotins and Clinches. The lakes are numerous, and some of them tolerably large: one, two, and even three days are at times required to cross some of them. They abound in a plentiful variety of fish, such as trout, sucker, etcetera; and the natives assert that white fish is sometimes taken. These lakes are generally fed by mountain streams, and many of them spread out, and are lost in the surrounding marshes. On the banks of the river, and in the interior, the trees consist of poplar, cypress, alder, cedar, birch, and different species of fir, spruce, and willow. There is not the same variety of wild fruit as on the Columbia; and this year (1827) the berries generally failed. Service berries, choke-cherries, gooseberries, strawberries, and red whortleberries are gathered; but among the Indians the service-berry is the great favourite. There are various kinds of roots, which the natives preserve and dry for periods of scarcity. There is only one kind which we can eat. It is called *Tza-chin*, has a bitter taste, but when eaten with salmon imparts an agreeable zest, and effectually destroys the disagreeable smell of that fish when smoke-dried. Saint John's wort is very common, and has been successfully applied as a fomentation in topical inflammations. A kind of weed, which the natives convert into a species of flax, is in general demand. An evergreen, similar to that we found at the mouth of the Columbia, with small berries growing in clusters like grapes, also flourishes in this district. Sarsaparilla and bear-root are found in abundance. White earth abounds in the vicinity of the fort; and one description of it, mixed with oil and lime, might be converted into excellent soap. Coal in considerable quantities has been discovered; and in many places we observed a species of red earth, much resembling lava, and which appeared to be of volcanic origin. We also found in different parts of New Caledonia quartz, rock crystal, cobalt, talc, iron, marcasites of a gold colour, granite, fuller's earth, some beautiful specimens of black, marble, and limestone in small quantities, which appeared to have been forced down the beds of the rivers from the mountains. The jumping-deer, or chevreuil, together with the rein and red-deer, frequent the vicinity of the mountains in considerable numbers, and in the summer season they oftentimes descend to the banks of the rivers and the adjacent flat country. The marmot and wood-rat also abound: the flesh of the former is exquisite, and capital robes are made out of its skin; but the latter is a very destructive animal. Their dogs are of diminutive size, and strongly resemble those of the Esquimaux, with the curled up tail, small ears, and pointed nose. We purchased numbers of them for the kettle, their flesh constituting the chief article of food in our holiday feasts for Christmas and New Year. The fur-bearing animals consist of beavers; bears, black, brown, and grizzly; otters, fishers, lynxes, martins; foxes, red, cross, and silver; minks, musquash, wolverines, and ermines. Rabbits also are so numerous that the natives manage to subsist on them during the periods that salmon is scarce. Under the head of ornithology we have the bustard, or Canadian *outarde* (wild goose), swans, ducks of various descriptions, hawks, plovers, cranes, white-headed eagles, magpies, crows, vultures, wood-thrush, red-breasted thrush or robin, woodpeckers, gulls, pelicans, hawks, partridges, pheasants, and snow-birds. The spring commences in April, when the wild flowers begin to bud, and from thence to the latter end of May the weather is delightful. In June it rains incessantly, with strong southerly and easterly winds. During the months of July and August the heat is intolerable; and in September the fogs are so dense that it is quite impossible to distinguish the opposite side of the river any morning before ten o'clock. Colds and rheumatisms are prevalent among the natives during this period: nor are our people exempt from them. In October the falling of the leaves and occasional frost announce the beginning of winter. The lakes and parts of the rivers are frozen in November. The snow seldoms exceeds twenty-four inches in depth. The mercury in Fahrenheit's thermometer falls in January to 15 degrees below zero; but this does not continue many days. In general, I may say, the climate is neither unhealthy nor unpleasant; and if the natives used common prudence, they would undoubtedly live to an advanced age. The salmon fishery commences about the middle of July, and ceases in October.

This is a busy period for the natives; for upon their industry in saving a sufficiency of salmon for the winter depends their chief support. Jub, suckers, trout, and white-fish, are caught in the lakes; and in the month of October, towards the close of the salmon-fishery, we catch trout of a most exquisite flavour. Large-sized sturgeon are occasionally taken in the *vorveaux*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.