

The Remarkable Good Order of Santa Cruz

By Mrs. E. S. Pringle

There is an impression abroad in the East [United States]--a hazy, vague impression, it is true, but still an impression--that the Californian goes about dressed in a slouch hat, red shirt, and large death-dealing revolvers. California is vaguely pictured as a land where people go forth at intervals to riotously slay a few fellowmen, after the slayer has wound up his tumultuous feelings with uncounted drinks of tanglefoot, taken to the accompaniment of much strange profanity. Such is the idea of California amusements which finds lodgment in the brain of more than a few intelligent Eastern people whose notions of one of the foremost States in the Union are acquired from lurid word-pictures of lurid mining camps that never existed, save in the writer's lurid imagination.

The men who came to California in the infancy of the State were the pick of the young men of the East, for the most part of the best American stock, reared in God-fearing and honest families. They did not leave either their training or their manhood behind. On the contrary, so universal was the respect for the rights of others that even in the days when as yet there were no organized tribunals of justice and every man did that which was right in his own sight, no miner locked his cabin door when he left it, and men left their yellow dust lying carelessly in the rude dwelling, sure that it would be there when they returned. Such was California in the green tree; and such it is in the dry.

The orderliness and sobriety of Santa Cruz is one of its best features. I know of no place in the United States which can surpass its admirable record. I doubt if there is one of the same size which can equal it. The three officers whose pictures appear on this page constitute the entire night and day police force of this city of nine thousand inhabitants, and they are found amply sufficient to police it. I almost dread to put down the plain facts about this phase of Santa Cruz life, for fear they will be disbelieved. But they remain facts, nevertheless. The arrests in the entire city, for drunkenness and crimes during the year 1896 did not average one a week. This includes every sort of arrest made by the city police. Nor was this due to any remissness of the force, for a more vigilant and fearless Chief of Police than Chief Matt Rawle is not in the State, and two more faithful and courageous officers than Officer Hugh Dougherty and Officer S. I. Horton it would be hard to find. The few arrests are due wholly to the almost total lack of drunkenness and crime.



The Santa Cruz Police Force

The writer has lived in Santa Cruz for two years. During the greater part of that time, his duties upon a morning daily paper took him upon the streets at all hours of the day and night. He cannot recall in all that time a half dozen instances of drunken men being on the streets; in all that time but one tramp appeared at his house to ask for food; and in all that time he was never called on to chronicle the occurrence of a single crime more serious than larceny, and but few of them.

Setting aside the unavoidable influx of pickpockets and petty thieves which comes upon such occasions as the great Water Carnival week, along with the thousands who then throng the city, the record of the police docket is practically clean all the year round. In the two years falling under the writer's observation no man has drawn a pistol, nor does the writer believe that a dozen men in the whole population carry such a weapon.

The sobriety of the people is simply remarkable. There are a number of saloons, and the custom of wine-drinking is wide-spread; yet there is not a town of nine thousand people in Kansas, or in Maine, or in Iowa, or in any other State, prohibition or not, in which drunkenness is so wholly absent. The writer does not attempt to explain this state of affairs on any hypothesis. He is not troubling himself with theories. It is his business to record facts.

It is absolutely safe for a woman or child, unattended, to traverse the streets of Santa Cruz after nightfall in any direction she chooses. Not only is a woman perfectly safe from danger of harm, but she is perfectly certain of immunity from anything bordering on insult. I dwell on these facts not because they excite any comment here, where they are taken as matters of course, but because they will help to eradicate from the Eastern reader's mind the absurd and unjust notion that the far West is "wild and woolly," that out here we go about with strange oaths in our mouths, much liquor in our stomachs, revolvers in our hands and with our souls filled with a great yearning to perforate some innocuous tenderfoot with leaden bullets. The truth is that Californians are an intelligent, cultivated, sober, orderly, and extremely good-natured folk, and California communities are much freer from deeds of violence and from drunkenness and disorder than are the most of the communities of the Eastern States. The writer gives this as the deliberate result of study and observation and experience as a newspaper man, gained in work in nearly every State, East and West, and certainly formed with no bias against the East, where he was born and spent his boyhood and most of his manhood years.

It is very true that the record of Santa Cruz is phenomenal, even among California towns, and much of this is due to the character of the three men [above]. So swift and certain has been the capture of rascals great and small, who have attempted to work in Santa Cruz, that the crooked gentry of the State give it a wide berth. The reputation of Chief Rawle and his men is well known to the criminals of the State, and but few of them include Santa Cruz in the itinerary of their travels.

Sources

- *In 1896, Santa Cruz County, a Faithful Reproduction in Print and Photography of its Climate, Capabilities and Beauties, was published. Its aim was to promote Santa Cruz and "to attract the attention of people in other parts of the country" (Prologue). It is a collection of articles on a wide variety of topics. No author is credited on the title page; some of the sections are signed. The following excerpt, pages 147-48, appears to be by Mrs. E. S. Pringle.—RAP ed.*

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