

The Shirley Letters from the California Mines in 1851-52

Louise Clappe (Dame Shirley)

Introduction

***I suggest reading Delano's *Life on the Plains and Among the Diggings* first, then read Dame Shirley.*

Louise Clappe, born in 1819, grew up in the college town of Amherst, Massachusetts. An avid reader, Louise attended a number of "female seminaries," but finished her education at the Amherst Academy. She married Fayette Clapp in 1849, the same year the couple left New England for California.

Despite the fact that they were both quite ill, Louise Clappe¹ and her husband Fayette travelled to California in January, 1850 hoping, like so many others, to find adventure and wealth in the Gold Rush. They first settled in San Francisco but quickly set out for the mountains and gold fields, first in Plumas City, and then to Rich Bar and Indian Bar. Trained as a physician, Fayette worked as a mining supervisor and camp doctor while Louise managed affairs within the camp. While staying at Rich Bar (the same Bar Alonzo Delano discussed in his account of the Gold Rush), Louise wrote a total of 23 letters to her sister Mary Jane, or Molly, detailing life in the camps. After she separated from her husband in 1854 (they would divorce in 1857), an editor for San Francisco's *The Pioneer* magazine published her letters under her pseudonym Dame Shirley (she signed her letters to Mary as Dame Shirley). There is some debate over whether Clappe intended her letters to be published or not; either way, her writing offers a unique and often startling picture of the early Gold Rush mining camps. Following the publication of her letters, Clappe settled in San Francisco where she taught writing for another 40 years.

Alonzo Delano and Louise Clappe both published the accounts of the Gold Rush in 1854, reflecting the insatiable desire of Americans to read and hear tales from California.

Below are excerpts from two of her letters home. Don't freak out about the page length. This is really interesting stuff, and the letters are not difficult to read. Also, please take note of her tone in the letters².

Primary Source

LETTER *the* SECOND
[*The PIONEER*, March, 1854]
RICH BAR—ITS HOTELS *and* PIONEER FAMILIES
Rich Bar, East Branch of the North Fork of Feather River,

¹ Louise Clappe was born Amelia Louise Knapp. She married Fayette Clappe, whose family changed the spelling of their last name to "Clapp" in 1857. When Louise divorced Fayette in 1857, she changed the spelling of her last name to "Clappe." I use her preferred spelling.

² *The Shirley Letters from the Mines of California, 1851-52*. [Full source is believed to be in the public domain.](#)

September 15, 1851

I believe that I closed my last letter by informing you that I was safely ensconced—after all the hair-breadth escapes of my wearisome, though at the same time delightful, journey—under the magnificent roof of the "Empire," which, by the way, is *the* hotel of the place, not but that nearly ever other shanty on the Bar claims the same grandiloquent title...It was built by a company of gamblers as a residence for two of those unfortunates who make a trade—a thing of barter—of the holiest passion, when sanctified by *love*, that ever thrills the wayward heart of poor humanity.

To the lasting honor of *miners* be it written, the *speculation* proved a decided failure. Yes! these thousand men, many of whom had been for years absent from the softening amenities of female society, and the sweet restraining influences of pure womanhood,—these husbands of fair young wives kneeling daily at the altars of their holy homes to pray for their far-off ones,—these sons of gray-haired mothers, majestic in their sanctified old age,—these brothers of virginal sisters, white and saintlike as the lilies of their own gardens,—looked only with contempt or pity on these, oh! so earnestly to be compassionated creatures. These unhappy members of a class, to one of which the tenderest words that Jesus ever spake were uttered, left in a few weeks, absolutely driven away by public opinion. The disappointed gamblers sold the house to its present proprietor for a few hundred dollars.

Mr. B., the landlord of the Empire, was a Western farmer who with his wife crossed the plains about two years ago. Immediately on his arrival he settled at a mining station, where he remained until last spring, when he removed to Rich Bar. Mrs. B. is a gentle and amiable looking woman, about twenty-five years of age. She is an example of the terrible wear and tear to the complexion in crossing the plains, hers having become, through exposure at that time, of a dark and permanent yellow, anything but becoming. I will give you a key to her character, which will exhibit it better than weeks of description. She took a nursing babe, eight months old, from her bosom, and left it with two other children, almost infants, to cross the plains in search of gold! When I arrived she was cooking supper for some half a dozen people, while her really pretty boy, who lay kicking furiously in his champagne-basket cradle, and screaming with a six-months-old-baby power, had, that day, completed just two weeks of his earthly pilgrimage. The inconvenience which she suffered during what George Sand calls "the sublime martyrdom of maternity" would appall the wife of the humblest pauper of a New England village.³

Another woman, also from the West, was with her at the time of her infant's birth, but scarcely had the "latest-found" given the first characteristic shriek of its debut upon the stage of life, when this person herself was taken seriously ill, and was obliged to return to her own cabin, leaving the poor exhausted mother entirely alone! Her husband lay seriously sick himself at the time, and of course could offer her no assistance. A miner, who lived in the house, and hoarded himself, carried her some bread and tea in the morning and evening, and that was all the care she had. Two days after its birth, she made a desperate effort, and, by easy stages of ten minutes at a time, contrived to get poor baby washed and dressed, after a fashion. He is an astonishingly large and strong child, holds his head up like a six-monther, and has but one failing,—a too evident and officious desire to inform everybody, far and near, at all hours of the night and day, that his lungs

³ What is Clappe saying here about this 25-year-old mother? Reread this.

are in a perfectly sound and healthy condition,—a piece of intelligence which, though very gratifying, is rather inconvenient if one happens to be particularly sleepy.

Mr. and Mrs. B., who have three pretty children, reside in a log cabin at the entrance of the village. One of the little girls was in the barroom to-day, and her sweet and birdlike voice brought tearfully, and yet joyfully, to my memory "Tearsoul," "Leilie," and "Lile Katie." Mrs. B., who is as small (indeed, I have been confidently informed that she weighs but sixty-eight pounds), keeps, with her husband, the "Miners' Home." (Mem.—The lady tends bar.) *Voilà*, my dear, the female population of my new home. Splendid material for social parties this winter, are they not?

LETTER *the* FIFTH
[*The PIONEER*, June, 1854]
DEATH of a MOTHER—LIFE of PIONEER WOMEN
Rich Bar, East Branch of the North Fork of Feather River,
September 22, 1851.

It seems indeed awful, dear M., to be compelled to announce to you the death of one of the four women forming the female population of this Bar. I have just returned from the funeral of poor Mrs. B., who died of peritonitis (a common disease in this place)⁴, after an illness of four days only. Our hostess herself heard of her sickness but two days since. On her return from a visit which she had paid to the invalid, she told me that although Mrs. B.'s family did not seem alarmed about her, in her opinion she would survive but a few hours. Last night we were startled by the frightful news of her decease. I confess that, without being very egotistical, the death of one, out of a community of four women, might well alarm the remainder.

Her funeral took place at ten this morning. The family reside in a log cabin at the head of the Bar, and although it has no window, all the light admitted entering through an aperture where there *will* be a door when it becomes cold enough for such a luxury, yet I am told, and can easily believe, that it is one of the most *comfortable* residences in the place. I observed it particularly, for it was the first log cabin that I had ever seen. Everything in the room, though of the humblest description, was exceedingly clean and neat.

On a board, supported by two butter-tubs, was extended the body of the dead woman, covered with a sheet. By its side stood the coffin, of unstained pine, lined with white cambric. You, who have alternately laughed and scolded at my provoking and inconvenient deficiency in the power of observing⁵, will perhaps wonder at the minuteness of my descriptions; but I know how deeply you are interested in everything relating to California, and therefore I take pains to describe things exactly as I *see* them, hoping that thus you will obtain an idea of life in the mines *as it is*.

⁴ Peritonitis is an inflammation of the abdomen caused by bacterial infection. Serious, but treatable, if you have the means to afford medical attention (in 1851 or today).

⁵ Salty.

The bereaved husband held in his arms a sickly babe ten months old, which was moaning piteously for its mother. The other child, a handsome, bold-looking little girl six years of age, was running gayly around the room, perfectly unconscious of her great bereavement. A sickening horror came over me, to see her, every few moments, run up to her dead mother and peep laughingly under the handkerchief that covered her moveless face. Poor little thing! It was evident that her baby-toilet had been made by men. She had on a new calico dress, which, having no tucks in it, trailed to the floor, and gave her a most singular and dwarf-womanly appearance.

About twenty men, with the three women of the place, had assembled at the funeral. An extempore prayer was made, filled with all the peculiarities usual to that style of petition. Ah, how different from the soothing verses of the glorious burial service of the church! As the procession started for the hillside graveyard, a dark cloth cover, borrowed from a neighboring monte-table, was flung over the coffin. Do not think that I mention any of these circumstances in a spirit of mockery. Far from it. Every observance usual on such occasions, that was *procurable*, surrounded this funeral. All the gold on Rich Bar could do no more; and should I die to-morrow, I should be marshaled to my mountain-grave beneath the same monte-table-cover pall which shrouded the coffin of poor Mrs. B.

I almost forgot to tell you how painfully the feelings of the assembly were shocked by the sound of the nails (there being no screws at any of the shops) driven with a hammer into the coffin while closing it. It seemed as if it *must* disturb the pale sleeper within.

To-day I called at the residence of Mrs. R... The little sixty-eight-pounder woman is queen of the establishment. By the way, a man who walked home with us was enthusiastic in her praise. "Magnificent woman, that, sir," he said, addressing my husband; "a wife of the right sort, *she* is. Why," he added, absolutely rising into eloquence as he spoke, "she earnt her *old man*" (said individual twenty-one years of age, perhaps) "nine hundred dollars in nine weeks, clear of all expenses, by washing! Such women ain't common, I tell *you*. If they were, a man might marry, and make money by the operation."

I looked at this person with somewhat the same kind of *inverted* admiration wherewith Leigh Hunt⁶ was wont to gaze upon that friend of his "who used to elevate the commonplace to a pitch of the sublime," and he looked at *me* as if to say, that, though by no means gloriously arrayed, I was a mere cumberer of the ground, inasmuch as I toiled not, neither did I wash. Alas! I hung my diminished head, particularly when I remembered the eight dollars a dozen which I had been in the habit of paying for the washing of linen-cambric pocket-handkerchiefs while in San Francisco. But a lucky thought came into my mind.

As all men cannot be Napoleon Bonapartes⁷, so all women cannot be *manglers*. The majority of the sex must be satisfied with simply being *mangled*. Reassured by this idea, I determined to meekly and humbly pay the amount per dozen required to enable this really worthy and agreeable little woman "to lay up her hundred dollars a week, clear of expenses." But is it not

⁶ A British essayist and newspaper editor.

⁷ Napoleon Bonaparte led a military coup against the Republican government of France in 1804, and shortly crowned himself Emperor of France.

wonderful what femininity is capable of?⁸ To look at the tiny hands of Mrs. R., you would not think it possible that they could wring out anything larger than a doll's nightcap; but, as is often said, nothing is strange in California. I have known of sacrifices requiring, it would seem, superhuman efforts, made by women in this country, who, at home, were nurtured in the extreme of elegance and delicacy.

Mr. B. called on us to-day with little Mary. I tried to make her, at least, look sad as I talked about her mother; but although she had seen the grave closed over her coffin (for a friend of her father's had carried her in his arms to the burial), she seemed laughingly indifferent to her loss. Being myself an orphan, my heart contracted painfully at her careless gayety when speaking of her dead parent, and I said to our hostess, "What a cold-blooded little wretch it is!" But immediately my conscience struck me with remorse. Poor orphaned one! Poor bereaved darling! Why should I so cruelly wish to darken her young life with that knowledge which a few years' experience will so painfully teach her? "All *my* mother came into my eyes" as I bent down and kissed the white lids which shrouded her beautiful dark orbs, and, taking her fat little hand in mine, I led her to my room, where, in the penitence of my heart, I gave her everything that she desired. The little chatterer was enchanted, not having had any new playthings for a long while. It was beautiful to hear her pretty exclamations of ecstasy at the sight of some tiny scent-bottles, about an inch in length, which she called baby decanters.

Mr. B. intends, in a day or two, to take his children to their grandmother, who resides somewhere near Marysville, I believe⁹. This is an awful place for children, and nervous mothers would "die daily" if they could see little Mary running fearlessly to the very edge of, and looking down into, these holes (many of them sixty feet in depth), which have been excavated in the hope of finding gold, and of course left open.

LETTER *the* NINETEENTH
[*The PIONEER*, August, 1855]
Murder, Theft, Riot, Hanging, Whipping, &c.
From our Log Cabin, Indian Bar,
August 4, 1852.

... We have lived through so much of excitement for the last three weeks, dear M., that I almost shrink from relating the gloomy events that have marked their flight. But if I leave out the darker shades of our mountain life, the picture will be very incomplete. In the short space of twenty-four days we have had murders, fearful accidents, bloody deaths, a mob, whippings, a hanging, an attempt at suicide, and a fatal duel. But to begin at the beginning, as, according to rule, one ought to do.

I think that, even among these beautiful hills, I never saw a more perfect bridal of the earth and sky than that of Sunday, the 11th of July. On that morning I went with a party of friends to the

⁸ She really drags this man who walked home with them espousing his opinions about feminine wiles. *Manglers* means what it sounds like – the ability to destroy. What does Clappe have to say about this man's claim that men are "mangled" by women? "

⁹ The same town (outside of Oakland) where Mr. Brinkerhoff went to recover in Alzono Delano's memoirs.

head of the ditch, a walk of about three miles in length. I do not believe that nature herself ever made anything so lovely as this artificial brooklet. It glides like a living thing through the very heart of the forest, sometimes creeping softly on, as though with muffled feet, through a wilderness of aquatic plants, sometimes dancing gayly over a white-pebbled bottom, now making a sunshine in a shady place, across the mossy roots of the majestic old trees, and anon leaping with a grand anthem adown the great solemn rocks which lie along its beautiful pathway.

A sunny opening at the head of the ditch is a garden of perfumed shrubbery and many-tinted flowers, all garlanded with the prettiest vines imaginable, and peopled with an infinite variety of magnificent butterflies. These last were of every possible color, pink, blue and yellow, shining black splashed with orange, purple flashed with gold, white, and even green. We returned about three in the evening, loaded with fragrant bundles, which, arranged in jars, tumblers, pitchers, bottles, and pails, (we are not particular as to the quality of our vases in the mountains, and love our flowers as well in their humble chalices as if their beautiful heads lay against a background of marble or porcelain,) made the dark old cabin a bower of beauty for us.

Shortly after our arrival, a perfectly deafening volley of shouts and yells elicited from my companion the careless remark that the customary sabbath-day's fight was apparently more serious than usual. Almost as he spoke there succeeded a deathlike silence, broken in a minute after by a deep groan at the corner of the cabin, followed by the words, "Why, Tom, poor fellow, are you really wounded?" Before we could reach the door, it was burst violently open by a person who inquired hurriedly for the Doctor, who, luckily, happened at that very moment to be approaching¹⁰. The man who called him then gave us the following excited account of what had happened. He said that in a *mêlée* between the Americans and the foreigners, Domingo, a tall, majestic-looking Spaniard, a perfect type of the novelistic bandit of Old Spain, had stabbed Tom Somers, a young Irishman, but a naturalized citizen of the United States, and that, at the very moment, said Domingo, with a Mexicana hanging upon his arm, and brandishing threateningly the long, bloody knife with which he had inflicted the wound upon his victim, was parading up and down the street unmolested¹¹. It seems that when Tom Somers fell the Americans, being unarmed, were seized with a sudden panic and fled. There was a rumor (unfounded, as it afterwards proved) to the effect that the Spaniards had on this day conspired to kill all the Americans on the river. In a few moments, however, the latter rallied and made a rush at the murderer, who immediately plunged into the river and swam across to Missouri Bar. Eight or ten shots were fired at him while in the water, not one of which hit him. He ran like an antelope across the flat, swam thence to Smith's Bar, and escaped by the road leading out of the mountains from The Junction. Several men went in pursuit of him, but he was not taken, and without doubt is now safe in Mexico.

¹⁰ Louise's husband, Fayette, was the camp doctor.

¹¹ "Spaniard" refers to a person from Spain. During the nineteenth century, many people in Mexico referred to themselves as "Spanish" instead of "Mexican." The distinction indicated both race and class. "Spanish" meant European, affluent, and political powerful. Spain colonized and rules Mexico for centuries before Mexico won their War for Independence in 1821 (this should be in your notes), roughly 30 years before the murder Clappe describes here. There were still plenty of men from Mexico who insisted they were descended from the ruling class, thus, were Spanish. Nevertheless, it seems as if Clappe is referring to men from Spain, although it's likely some of the men were Mexican.

Mexicana means a woman from Mexico.

In the mean while the consternation was terrific. The Spaniards, who, with the exception of six or eight, knew no more of the affair than I did, thought that the Americans had arisen against them, and our own countrymen, equally ignorant, fancied the same of the foreigners. About twenty of the latter, who were either sleeping or reading in their cabins at the time of the *émeute*, aroused by the cry of "Down with the Spaniards!" barricaded themselves in a drinking-saloon, determined to defend themselves as long as possible against the massacre which was fully expected would follow this appalling shout. In the bakeshop, which stands next door to our cabin, young Tom Somers lay straightened for the grave (he lived but fifteen minutes after he was wounded), while over his dead body a Spanish woman was weeping and moaning in the most piteous and heartrending manner. The Rich Barians¹², who had heard a most exaggerated account of the rising of the Spaniards against the Americans, armed with rifles, pistols, clubs, dirks, etc., were rushing down the hill by hundreds. Each one added fuel to his rage by crowding into the little bakery to gaze upon the blood-bathed bosom of the victim, yet warm with the life which but an hour before it had so triumphantly worn. Then arose the most fearful shouts of "Down with the Spaniards!" "Drive every foreigner off the river!" "Don't let one of the murderous devils remain!" "Oh, if you have a drop of American blood in your veins, it must cry out for vengeance upon the cowardly assassins of poor Tom!" All this, mingled with the most horrible oaths and execrations, yelled up as if in mockery into that smiling heaven, which, in its fair sabbath calm, bent unmoved over the hell which was raging below.

After a time the more sensible and sober part of the community succeeded in quieting, in a partial degree, the enraged and excited multitude. During the whole affair I had remained perfectly calm,—in truth, much more so than I am now, when recalling it. The entire catastrophe had been so unexpected, and so sudden in its consummation, that I fancy I was stupefied into the most exemplary good behavior. F. and several of his friends, taking advantage of the lull in the storm, came into the cabin and entreated me to join the two women who were living on the hill. At this time it seemed to be the general opinion that there would be a serious fight, and they said I might be wounded accidentally if I remained on the Bar. As I had no fear of anything of the kind, I pleaded hard to be allowed to stop, but when told that my presence would increase the anxiety of our friends, of course, like a dutiful wife, I went on to the hill.

We three women, left entirely alone, seated ourselves upon a log overlooking the strange scene below. The Bar was a sea of heads, bristling with guns, rifles, and clubs. We could see nothing, but fancied from the apparent quiet of the crowd that the miners were taking measures to investigate the sad event of the day. All at once we were startled by the firing of a gun, and the next moment, the crowd dispersing, we saw a man led into the log cabin, while another was carried, apparently lifeless, into a Spanish drinking-saloon, from one end of which were burst off instantly several boards, evidently to give air to the wounded person. Of course we were utterly unable to imagine what had happened, and, to all our perplexity and anxiety, one of the ladies insisted upon believing that it was her own husband who had been shot, and as she is a very nervous woman, you can fancy our distress. It was in vain to tell her—which we did over and over again—that that worthy individual wore a *blue* shirt, and the wounded person a *red* one. She doggedly insisted that her dear M. had been shot, and, having informed us confidentially, and rather inconsistently, that she should never see him again, never, never, plumped herself down upon the log in an attitude of calm and ladylike despair, which would have been infinitely

¹² Rich Barians refers to the miners working on Rich Bar.

amusing had not the occasion been so truly a fearful one. Luckily for our nerves, a benevolent individual, taking pity upon our loneliness, came and told us what had happened.

It seems that an Englishman, the owner of a house of the vilest description, a person who is said to have been the primary cause of all the troubles of the day, attempted to force his way through the line of armed men which had been formed at each side of the street. The guard very properly refused to let him pass. In his drunken fury he tried to wrest a gun from one of them, which, being accidentally discharged in the struggle, inflicted a severe wound upon a Mr. Oxley, and shattered in the most dreadful manner the thigh of Señor Pizarro, a man of high birth and breeding, a porteño of Buenos Aires¹³. This frightful accident recalled the people to their senses, and they began to act a little less like madmen than they had previously done. They elected a vigilance committee, and authorized persons to go to The Junction and arrest the suspected Spaniards¹⁴.

The first act of the committee was to try a Mexicana who had been foremost in the fray. She has always worn male attire, and upon this occasion, armed with a pair of pistols, she fought like a very fury. Luckily, inexperienced in the use of firearms, she wounded no one. She was sentenced to leave the Bar by daylight,—a perfectly just decision, for there is no doubt that she is a regular little demon. Some went so far as to say she ought to be hanged, for she was the *indirect* cause of the fight. You see, always it is the old cowardly excuse of Adam in Paradise,—the *woman* tempted me, and I did eat,—as if the poor frail head, once so pure and beautiful, had not sin enough of its own, dragging it forever downward, without being made to answer for the wrong-doing of a whole community of men¹⁵.

The next day the committee tried five or six Spaniards, who were proven to have been the ringleaders in the sabbath-day riot. Two of them were sentenced to be whipped, the remainder to leave the Bar that evening, the property of all to be confiscated to the use of the wounded persons. O Mary! imagine my anguish when I heard the first blow fall upon those wretched men. I had never thought that I should be compelled to hear such fearful sounds, and, although I immediately buried my head in a shawl, nothing can efface from memory the disgust and horror of that moment. I had heard of such things, but heretofore had not realized that in the nineteenth century men could be beaten like dogs, much less that other men not only could sentence such barbarism, but could actually stand by and see their own manhood degraded in such disgraceful manner¹⁶. One of these unhappy persons was a very gentlemanly young Spaniard, who implored

¹³ Porteño refers to a man from a port city such as Buenos Aires, Argentina.

¹⁴ Committees of Vigilance were semi-organized mobs of armed white men who were either hired by a mining company - or took it upon themselves - to police and punish the people living in camps as well as cities like San Francisco and Sacramento. They intimidated, attacked, and murdered people with impunity, but were the only semblance of "law enforcement" around in the first few years of California statehood (this should be in your notes).

¹⁵ Truth.

¹⁶ Clappe seems to forget about the nearly 3 million enslaved people subjected to whipping, torture, murder, and of course, enslavement in 1854. Nevertheless, Shirley's point is well-taken then and now: hard to believe we call ourselves civilized and "great" when we continue to allow barbarity to rule the day. If you are unaware of the migrant/refugee camps on the border right, [please read this article](#). We are allowing torture and murder of children right now. Children under the age of 5 have been kept in these cells without any family or help for months. So, to update Shirley's observation..."I had heard of such things, but heretofore had not realized that in the... TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, CHILDREN...could be beaten like dogs, much less that other men not only could sentence such barbarism, but could actually stand by and see their own manhood degraded in such disgraceful manner."

for death in the most moving terms. He appealed to his judges in the most eloquent manner, as gentlemen, as men of honor, representing to them that to be deprived of life was nothing in comparison with the never-to-be-effaced stain of the vilest convict's punishment to which they had sentenced him. Finding all his entreaties disregarded, he swore a most solemn oath, that he would murder every American that he should chance to meet alone, and as he is a man of the most dauntless courage, and rendered desperate by a burning sense of disgrace which will cease only with his life, he will doubtless keep his word.

Although, in my very humble opinion, and in that of others more competent to judge of such matters than myself, these sentences were unnecessarily severe, yet so great was the rage and excitement of the crowd that the vigilance committee could do no less. The mass of the mob demanded fiercely the death of the prisoners, and it was evident that many of the committee took side with the people. I shall never forget how horror-struck I was (bombastic as it *now* sounds) at hearing no less a personage than the Whig candidate¹⁷ for representative say that the condemned had better fly for their lives, for the "Avenger of Blood" was on their tracks! I am happy to say that said very worthy but sanguinary individual, the Avenger of Blood, represented in this case by some half-dozen gambling rowdies, either changed his mind or lost scent of his prey, for the intended victims slept about two miles up the hill quite peacefully until morning.

The following facts, elicited upon the trial, throw light upon this unhappy affair. Seven miners from Old Spain, enraged at the cruel treatment which their countrymen had received on the Fourth, and at the illiberal cry of "Down with the Spaniards," had united for the purpose of taking revenge on seven Americans, whom they believed to be the originators of their insults. All well-armed, they came from The Junction, where they were residing at the time, intending to challenge each one his man, and in fair fight compel their insolent aggressors to answer for the arrogance which they had exhibited more than once towards the Spanish race. Their first move, on arriving at Indian Bar, was to go and dine at the Humboldt, where they drank a most enormous quantity of champagne and claret¹⁸.

Afterwards they proceeded to the house of the Englishman whose brutal carelessness caused the accident which wounded Pizarro and Oxley, when one of them commenced a playful conversation with one of his countrywomen. This enraged the Englishman, who instantly struck the Spaniard a violent blow and ejected him from the shanty. Thereupon ensued a spirited fight, which, through the exertion of a gentleman from Chile, a favorite with both nations, ended without bloodshed. This person knew nothing of the intended duel, or he might have prevented, by his wise counsels, what followed. Not suspecting for a moment anything of the kind, he went to Rich Bar. Soon after he left Tom Somers, who is said always to have been a dangerous person when in liquor, without any apparent provocation struck Domingo (one of the original seven) a violent blow, which nearly felled him to the earth. The latter, a man of "dark antecedents" and the most reckless character, mad with wine, rage, and revenge, without an instant's pause drew

¹⁷ The Whig Party should be in your notes. I will say this – California was overwhelmingly Democrat in the 1850 (and thus voted with the southern slave states on most issues). I suspect the "Whig candidate's" histrionic enthusiasm for murdering the Mexican suspects was a way to ingratiate himself to men who were most likely Democratic voters. Anti-immigrant sentiment has always been a bulwark of our political discourse.

¹⁸ Local restaurant.

his knife and inflicted a fatal wound upon his insulter. Thereupon followed the chapter of accidents which I have related¹⁹.

On Tuesday following the fatal sabbath, a man brought news of the murder of a Mr. Bacon, a person well known on the river, who kept a ranch about twelve miles from Rich Bar. He was killed for his money by his servant, a negro, who, not three months ago, was our own cook. He was the last one anybody would have suspected capable of such an act.

A party of men, appointed by the vigilance committee, left the Bar immediately in search of him. The miserable wretch was apprehended in Sacramento, and part of the gold found upon his person. On the following Sunday he was brought in chains to Rich Bar. After a trial by the miners, he was sentenced to be hanged at four o'clock in the evening. All efforts to make him confess proved futile. He said very truly that whether innocent or guilty they would hang him, and so he "died and made no sign" with a calm indifference, as the novelists say, worthy of a better cause. The dreadful crime and death of Josh, who, having been an excellent cook, and very neat and respectful, was a favorite servant with us, added to the unhappiness which you can easily imagine that I was suffering under all these horrors.

On Saturday evening, about eight o'clock, as we sat quietly conversing with the two ladies from the hill,—whom, by the way, we found very agreeable additions to our society, hitherto composed entirely of gentlemen,—we were startled by the loud shouting, and the rushing close by the door of the cabin, which stood open, of three or four hundred men. Of course we females, with nerves somewhat shattered from the events of the past week, were greatly alarmed.

We were soon informed that Henry Cook, vice Josh, had, in a fit of delirium tremens, cut his throat from ear to ear. The poor wretch was alone when he committed the desperate deed, and in his madness, throwing the bloody razor upon the ground, ran part of the way up the hill. Here he was found almost senseless, and brought back to the Humboldt, where he was very nearly the cause of hanging poor Paganini Ned, who returned a few weeks since from the valley; for his first act on recovering himself was to accuse that culinary individual of having attempted to murder him. The mob were for hanging one poor Vattel without judge or jury, and it was only through the most strenuous exertions of his friends that the life of this illustrious person was saved. Poor Ned! It was forty-eight hours before his corkscrews returned to their original graceful curl. He threatens to leave us to our barbarism, and no longer to waste his culinary talents upon an ungrateful and inappreciative people. He has sworn war to the knife against

¹⁹ Clappe tells the story of what happened that night backwards, reflecting the way the story was told to the white miners. An Irishman was murdered by Spanish men. That was the first story. By the way, anti-Irish/anti-Catholic sentiment was at a high point during the 1850s. The Know-Nothing Party should be in your notes. It is interesting how the Irish become white when convenient, in this case, to justify mob violence and murder against the Spanish/Latino community. Here, however, Clappe explains the *real reason* for the fighting in the first place - because a Latino (Argentina) man spoke too intimately to a white woman in front of a white man. Clappe is on point here as well - the torture and murder of nonwhite men has long been justified under the auspices of protecting white womanhood.

Henry, who was formerly his most intimate friend, as nothing can persuade him that the accusation did not proceed from the purest malice on the part of the would-be suicide²⁰.

Their majesties the mob, with that beautiful consistency which usually distinguishes those august individuals, insisted upon shooting poor Harry, for, said they,—and the reasoning is remarkably conclusive and clear,—a man so hardened as to raise his hand against his *own* life will never hesitate to murder another²¹! They almost mobbed F. for binding up the wounds of the unfortunate wretch, and for saying that it was possible he might live. At last, however, they compromised the matter by determining that if Henry should recover he should leave the Bar immediately. Neither contingency will probably take place, as it will be almost a miracle if he survives.

On the day following the attempted suicide, which was Sunday, nothing more exciting happened than a fight and the half-drowning of a drunken individual in the river, just in front of the Humboldt.

On Sunday last the thigh of Señor Pizarro was amputated, but, alas! without success. He had been sick for many months with chronic dysentery, which, after the operation, returned with great violence, and he died at two o'clock on Monday morning, with the same calm and lofty resignation which had distinguished him during his illness. When first wounded, believing his case hopeless, he had decidedly refused to submit to amputation, but as time wore on he was persuaded to take this one chance for his life for the sake of his daughter, a young girl of fifteen, at present at school in a convent in Chile, whom his death leaves without any near relative. I saw him several times during his illness, and it was melancholy indeed to hear him talk of his motherless girl, who, I have been told, is extremely beautiful, talented, and accomplished²².

The state of society here has never been so bad as since the appointment of a committee of vigilance. The rowdies have formed themselves into a company called the "Moguls²³," and they parade the streets all night, howling, shouting, breaking into houses, taking wearied miners out of their beds and throwing them into the river, and, in short, "murdering sleep" in the most remorseless manner. Nearly every night they build bonfires fearfully near some rag shanty, thus endangering the lives (or, I should rather say, the property, for, as it is impossible to sleep, lives are emphatically safe) of the whole community. They retire about five o'clock in the morning, previously to this blessed event posting notices to that effect, and that they will throw any one

²⁰ Henry Cook (definitely not his real last name) replaced Josh as the cook at the Humboldt (hence "vice" Josh). Ned also worked as a cook at the Humboldt, and accused Henry Cook of trying to murder him before he went to the Valley. Paganini refers to Italian virtuoso violinist Niccolò Paganini, who died in 1840, just 12 years before Clappe recalls this incident. Clappe discusses Ned's musical talent in other letters, as well as his culinary talent. According to Clappe, Ned was an outstanding chef and musician. Vattel refers to Emer de Vattel, an eighteenth-century political philosopher. Vattel's book, *The Law of Nations*, published in 1758, is still considered one of the most important treatises on international law. I think Clappe references Vattel here to emphasize the absence of law and order for Black men. Even the Spanish men involved in the riot got a (corrupt) trial before being sentenced to death.

²¹ Wow.

²² What do you suppose happened to her?

²³ Powerful people unaccountable to anyone.

who may disturb them into the river. I am nearly worn out for want of rest, for, truly, they "make night hideous" with their fearful uproar²⁴.

Mr. Oxley, who still lies dangerously ill from the wound received on what we call the "fatal Sunday," complains bitterly of the disturbances; and when poor Pizarro was dying, and one of his friends gently requested that they be quiet for half an hour and permit the soul of the sufferer to pass in peace, they only laughed and yelled and hooted louder than ever in the presence of the departing spirit, for the tenement in which he lay, being composed of green boughs only, could, of course, shut out no sounds. Without doubt, if the Moguls had been sober, they would never have been guilty of such horrible barbarity as to compel the thoughts of a dying man to mingle with curses and blasphemies, but, alas! they were intoxicated, and may God forgive them, unhappy ones, for they knew not what they did²⁵. The poor, exhausted miners—for even well people cannot sleep in such a pandemonium—grumble and complain, but they, although far outnumbering the rioters, are too timid to resist. All say, "It is shameful," "Something ought to be done," "Something *must* be done," etc., and in the meantime the rioters triumph; You will wonder that the committee of vigilance does not interfere. It is said that some of that very committee are the ringleaders among the Moguls²⁶.

I believe I have related to you everything but the duel, and I will make the recital of this as short as possible, for I am sick of these sad subjects, and doubt not but you are the same. It took place on Tuesday morning, at eight o'clock, on Missouri Bar, when and where that same Englishman who has figured so largely in my letter shot his best friend. The duelists were surrounded by a large crowd, I have been told, foremost among which stood the committee of vigilance! The man who received his dear friend's fatal shot was one of the most quiet and peaceable citizens on the Bar. He lived about ten minutes after he was wounded. He was from Ipswich, England, and only twenty-five years old when his own high passions snatched him from life. In justice to his opponent it must be said that he would willingly have retired after the first shots had been exchanged, but poor Billy Leggett, as he was familiarly called, insisted upon having the distance between them shortened, and continuing the duel until one of them had fallen.

There, my dear M., have I not fulfilled my promise of giving you a dish of horrors? And only think of such a shrinking, timid, frail thing as I *used* to be "long time ago" not only living right in the midst of them, but almost compelled to hear, if not see, the whole. I think I may without vanity affirm that I have "seen the elephant." "Did you see his tail?" asks innocent Ada J., in her mother's letter. Yes, sweet Ada; the entire animal has been exhibited to my view. "But you must remember that this is California," as the new-comers are so fond of informing *us!* who consider ourselves "one of the oldest inhabitants" of the Golden State²⁷.

²⁴ This is law enforcement in the CA mining camps and cities.

²⁵ Hmm. I have some doubts.

²⁶ Still an issue today.

²⁷ The Clappes arrived in California in January, 1850. If you only count people who moved to CA for the Gold Rush, then yes, they were "old settlers." These parameters, of course, are completely absurd, although typical of white Americans who moved to CA as part of the Gold Rush. No one was there and nothing happened until they showed up.

And now, dear M., adios. Be thankful that you are living in the beautiful quiet of beautiful A.²⁸, and give up "hankering after" (as you know what dear creature says²⁹) California, for, believe me, this coarse, barbarous life would suit you even less than it does your sister.

²⁸ Amherst, Massachusetts.

²⁹ Clappe used this term throughout her letters, always in the plural, referring to the miners themselves. I am not sure why she used the singular form. She might be referring to her husband, Fayette, who was keen to travel west.