

# **“CALIFORNIA GOLD”**

by Josef F. Rodriguez

**“Gold!”**

**“Yes? ... Where?”**

**“Over there in California toward the west!”**

**And the wagons moved ....**

**Moved westward toward a distant magic Eden land**

**That lay beside a stretch of sea**

**That stretched as far as eyes could see**

**Over the mountains toward a valley**

**Toward a golden sunswept valley**

**The wagons moved ....**

**“Yes, there’s gold in California, Sir.**

**The stuff that dazzles on the heads of kings**

**The thing that makes a girl’s eyes shine**

**When slivered and circled into the shape of rings**

**The stuff that drives men mad**

**Is waiting there in California, sir**

**To be picked up by pan and hand**

**It lies on the earth like yellow grains of sand, sir!”**

**And the wagons moved ....**

**Moved over the prairie, the long, land-sea prairie.**

**There are many bones to feed the prairie grass ....**

**Bones the wagons left behind**

**Some have headstones**

**Stark, against the wind ....**

Some have nothing to remark,

“Here lies a man ....”

There are bones also on sand

White

Beneath a glowering sky

Like smooth dry dulled enamel pieces of slim, broken chalk

A wordless epitaph

To remind

That once the wagons moved by here

Slowly ....

Miners!

They danced and sang

And laughed and fought and bled

And filled the quaking meek with dread.

They raised the dust

And shot up the town

And panned the gold

And cursed

And cussed

Miners!

The Forty-Niner miners

In their time,

That golden time

There was no time

For men to be weak

**For men to grow old ....**

**It was Live!**

**And let your raucous voice be heard**

**And pan the gold ...**

**Like a river the miners flowed in**

**And pushed the Spanish out ....**

**And the miners stayed**

**And panned the gold ....**

**Gold**

**It is not an ever-thing ...**

**Gold**

**Has but a brief fling in time and then is through.**

**And the pans lay idle in the stream**

**To rust and decay as those times and that day ....**

**And there was no more gold in California.**

**The miners turned from the flowing stream and the pan**

**To the land**

**To the rich, good land.**

**They plowed and sowed the hills and valleys**

**Creating vast and thriving industries**

**They fished the rivers and the seas**

**And built great dams and giant cities**

**They made the dark earth bear the richest fruit it had ever borne**

**Oranges and tangerines**

**Vermilion apples and yellow corn**

**Lemons and limes**

**And grapes and pears –**

**They knew the ways of land, those ancestors ....**

**And there was no more gold in California.**

**But yet**

**They took the dry hot wasted desert sand**

**And changed it into a green and flowing Eden land**

**And there was no more gold in California?**

**“Gold!”**

**“Yes? ... Where?”**

**“Over there in California toward the west!**

**It’s everywhere!**

**It’s in a handful of raisins**

**Dark**

**In the sun**

**It’s in the golden trickles of sunlight that bleed slender glittering veins**

**Down the thick burnt-sienna limbs of tall redwood trees ....**

**It’s in a field of thick butter-gold poppies ....**

**It’s in the skin of a man**

**Tanned**

**Dark-deep by the sun**

**It’s in everyone**

**Who calls himself**

**‘Californian!’”**