

# HAPPENINGS

A SERIES OF SKETCHES OF THE  
GREAT CALIFORNIA OUT-OF-DOORS

BY

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PORTERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

1927

## A FLURRY IN BORAX.

Near Daggett, in San Bernardino County, there are large beds of colored clays containing a material amount of borate of lime—a source of boracic acid, and borax. These deposits were worked with some success, for several years. The clays were treated with sulphuric acid, the released borates being washed from the mud, and afterward recovered from the liquor by evaporation. Colmanite, a nearly white crystal, superseded marsh borax, and is the most concentrated form of the salt in nature.

The working of the Daggett clays was only possible when colmanite was scarce, and found only in out-of-the-way places. The high-grade mines near Daggett were exhausted and abandoned; and the Pacific Coast Borax Company was operating the "Lila C" mine near Death Valley Junction, on the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad, which the Company had built from Ludlow, on the Santa Fe, and later connected with Tonopah and Goldfield. The "Lila C" was a large deposit, and further on, near Death Valley, the Company had much greater ones, on Monte Blanco, now inaccessible. That did not stop the low-grade oper-

ations. The Pacific Coast people even bought the 98 per cent production of the Western Mineral Company; and Dawes & Milar, of the Standard Sanitary Company, Pittsburg, popularly known as the "Bath-Tub Trust," used the product of its own low-grade plant, in Daggett.

But the low-grade operator was always looking for high-grade ores, while the colmanite people wanted to hold it all, and prevent competition. Outside borax plants were owned by the Stauffer Chemical Company, in San Francisco, Dawes & Milar, in Pittsburg, and Thomas Thorkildsen, in Chicago, all working on low-grade concentrates.

The superintendent at Daggett was a chemist, and a very bright, and agreeable young man, who worked low-grades by day, and dreamed of high-grades by night. He was such a good mixer, and general all-around good-fellow, that he was dubbed "Blumy", and any success he might have would be popular in the community.

Now, this story was told me by Wash Cahill, whom I used to know when he was shoveling borax on the dump at Daggett. Wash had climbed step by step, until he was Superintendent of the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad, and he knew his job. Seated in his office in the terminal depot at Ludlow, we talked over old times, while I was waiting for the midnight train on his line. He had tendered me a berth in Mr. Ryan's private car, that was going out that night. Cahill knew

the story in every detail, and told it well. He was an unfortunate part of it.

"It was a hot fight, while it lasted," said Cahill; "but it was over quickly, leaving several wounded, but no dead. One day Blumenberg got a letter from Los Angeles, saying the writer was sending him a sample of colmanite, from a very large deposit near that city. Now, that seemed silly. He had received many such letters, and paid many good dollars in express charges on worthless rocks; but this was the first suburban borax mine he had heard of. So, it was with no particular expectation that he walked into the express office.

"Let's see that latest fake sample."

"All right. Look it over; but I want two dollars before you open it."

"What's that? Doubling up on me, are you? Well, you keep it for a paper weight!"

"The agent threw the sample back in the safe, and smiled.

"He knew his man—and waited.

"Next day, "Blumy" dropped in again and fingered the package, feeling for colmanite crystal facets. But there were too many thicknesses of paper for him to be sure. Two days longer, he hesitated, and finally gave in.

"He took the package home and opened it. Out rolled a five-pound lump of the finest glistening and sparkling colmanite he had ever seen. Without assay, he saw it was equal or superior to any

borate ore ever mined in California. And he had waited four days!

"Had the others received samples? And was he left at the post? But he'd take no more chances; so he wired the writer, and was on the next train.

"That was Blumy's lucky day. Fortune had knocked at three doors, and he was the only one at home. Stauffer's sample lay on his desk a week, and mine came the day I left with my family for Los Angeles. We met face to face in the depot, the morning he came in. He turned pale, and looked sick. And I guess he was. He thought I was ahead of him.

"Blumenberg found his man, and they went out on the train to Lang, thirty miles North of the city. Then they took to the hills. About eight miles out, they came to croppings that fairly took away Blumy's breath. I saw them two days later, when it was too late, so I know just how he felt. Not big, but massive, and extending for a mile or more, with laterals, over the hills. And when he was asked but \$25,000 for the entire property, with a ten days' option for \$1000 down, his heart choked him with joy. He drew up a contract, and without wondering if there was a fly in the ointment, rushed his man back to the city, and gave him the certified check for the thousand, that same day.

"Then he did one wise, and one foolish thing.

He wired full particulars to his people,—and then talked to a Los Angeles Times reporter.

“He had forgotten Thorkildsen. He knew him in ordinary times; but not in an emergency. To a Times reporter Blumenberg told the entire story, of how he had secured the biggest and finest borax mine in the world—and right in the world. Thorkildsen had been Borax Smith’s confidential man for years, but was now allied with the Stauffer people. Blumy overlooked him.

“Of course, Thorkildsen happened to be in Los Angeles; and of course, he read Blumy’s story before that gentleman was up the following morning. And before seven o’clock, “Torky”, as we used to call him, was riding thirty miles an hour in an auto, and was at Lang by eight o’clock.

“Here he soon found the fly in the ointment, that Blumy had overlooked. This was a second set of stakings, covering all the properties as quartz locations. Blumenberg had seen only the placer stakes; and his man had not enlightened him. He had bought the placer claims only. The quartz filings were the older. Very likely, the placer filings were the proper ones, but the others were a decided cloud on the title.

“And before night, Thorkildsen had found the quartz locators, tied them up for ninety days, and taken possession of the property, with good, determined men in charge.

“ I saw the story that evening, and it made me

ill. I was in the city the next morning, but too late.

“A triangle was formed, but the Pacific was out of it, in an active way. The Standard people had Blumenberg’s contract to the placer title. The Stauffer Company had Thorkildsen’s contract to the quartz claim; and neither dared to make a move. The latter could wait ninety days. The former must pay a large sum in ten. And Thorkildsen was in possession.

“There was but one way out. Dawes & Milar dismissed Blumenberg, as a bungler, and combined with Stauffer. Orders were given to shut down the low-grade plants, and colmanite began to move from the Lang deposit to the plants of Stauffer, the Standard, and Thorkildsen, in San Francisco, Pittsburg, and Chicago.

“But hold on! I’m a little ahead of my story. Blumenberg was dismissed, and presumably fades out of the tale. He was too strong on publicity, and too short on observation.

“But just as the first lot of big teams drove up to load with colmanite, they found a stout fence and locked gate across the only available entrance to the property, a mile below where Thorkildsen’s men were camped. On a post, were copies of a deed to the land, from hill to hill, and of both quartz and placer claims, encircling the entire property of the combined Borax Kings. There was no road through the gap—and therefore no

road right. A comely young woman sat in a buggy; and four stout men stood by the gate. They had a permanent camp.

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“The ore was moved; but not till Stauffer and the Standard paid a large sum of money to Mrs. Blumenberg, a person whom we never knew existed. There are some peoples that are hard to “down.”