

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Some Christmas Books

The Christmas season always brings an intriguing list of very special books, both old and new and the catalogues which arrive from the rare book dealers should be immediately assigned to the waste basket unless the receiver can resist temptation and merely read the titles and reviews inside the well designed covers.

We are thinking of John Howell's announcement of the publication of "Filings From an Old Saw," the reminiscences of San Francisco and California's conquest, by Joseph T. Downey, edited by Fred Blackburn Rogers. This book contains a series of 18 articles from the rare file of "The Golden Era" (San Francisco, 1853) with a reproduction of the Thomas Sully portrait of Commodore Robert Field Stockton, preface, appendix, discussing the authorship, notes and index.

Warren Howell, who succeeded his late father in the John Howell Book Shop, writes of the newest publication: "The narrative, the first lengthy serial to appear in any California newspaper, is of national as well as state-wide interest for it tells of the operations which gained California for the United States of America.

"'Filings' writes of individual Californians and the ranchos, of his shipmates on the Portsmouth, of Stockton, Fremont, and many others – all with human interest and humor. The characters of Yerba Buena pass in review. He makes you feel that you were present with him."

The editor is known to all interested in California history as the author of "Soldiers of the Overland," "Bear Flag Lieutenant," and many other articles on early history of the West. The book is the first in a series of three, dealing with the United States Navy in old California. It is designed by Lawton Kennedy and printed by the Howell-North Press of Berkeley. The edition is limited to 750 copies, at \$10 each plus tax. It has been described as a reading nugget for anyone interested in the lusty, comical, ripsnorting days of 1845-47, when California became a part of the United States.

Another valuable book which will be well worth owning as a collector's item as well as for its unusually beautiful

printing and the story it tells, is: *The Wreck of the Golden Mary, a Saga of the California Gold Rush,* by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. The Allen Press of Kentfield printed the volume and the handsome wood engravings are by the noted English artist Blair Hughes-Stanton, who, for 25 years, has contributed to the beauty of British press books.

"The Wreck of the Golden Mary" is a wonderful story, full of sentiment, noise and humble heroism, about the wreck of an English ship bound for California in 1851. The story is told in the first person throughout, with the captain speaking at the start, and the first mate taking over when the captain collapses at the tiller of one of the two lifeboats in which the passengers and crew take refuge when the ship went down, according to the announcement sheet as sent by Lewis and Dorothy Allen.

Although some of them finally arrive in San Francisco and at the gold diggings, their harrowing experiences make for drama of the first order. Dickens and Collins wrote this tale especially for the Christmas, 1856, number of "Household Words."

This unusual edition is limited to 200 copies, entirely set by hand on handmade Japanese vellum, and sells for \$15.

Still another holiday book which sounds interesting and of course expensive because of its handsomely printed pages, the facsimiles of Warre's drawing, is "Quebec Mission," notices and voyages of the famed mission to the Pacific Northwest by Fathers Blanchet and Demers, together with those of Fathers Boldue and Langlois, 1838 to 1847. The price is \$12.50 per copy as printed for the Oregon Historical Society by the Champoege Press.