



The Silverado Squatters by Robert Louis Stevenson, Fiction, Classics, Historical, Literary

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The scene of this little book is on a high mountain. There are, indeed, many higher; there are many of a nobler outline. It is no place of pilgrimage for the summary globe-trotter; but to one who lives upon its sides, Mount Saint Helena soon becomes a center of interest. It is the Mont Blanc of one section of the Californian Coast Range, none of its near neighbors rising to one-half its altitude. It looks down on much green, intricate country. It feeds in the spring-time many splashing brooks. From its summit you must have an excellent lesson of geography: seeing, to the south, San Francisco Bay, with Tamalpais on the one hand and Monte Diablo on the other; to the west and thirty miles away, the open ocean; eastward, across the corn-lands and thick tule swamps of Sacramento Valley, to where the Central Pacific railroad begins to climb the sides of the Sierras; and northward, for what I know, the white head of Shasta looking down on Oregon.

The author's experiences at Silverado were recorded in a journal he called "Silverado Sketches," parts of which he incorporated into Silverado Squatters in 1883 while living in Bournemouth, England, with other tales appearing in "Essays of Travel" and "Across the Plains." Many of his notes on the scenery around him later provided much of the descriptive detail for Treasure Island (1883).

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Wren Liddell says

Honestly I do not believe this story deserves such a low rating as three stars. Nonetheless I have given such an appraisal simply because the story was uninteresting to me.

Robert Louis Stevenson's writing is amazing, and flows with something like a poetic air. However, the tale he wove with these words was less than intriguing.

It took me quite awhile to slog through and I dearly hope I do not have to read it again.

Justin Burt says

'The happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotchman. You must pay for it in many ways, as for all other advantages on earth. You have to learn the paraphrases and the shorter catechism; you generally take to drink; your youth is a time of louder war against society, of more outcry and tears and turmoil, than if you had been born, for instance, in England. But somehow life is warmer and closer; the hearth burns more redly; the lights of home shine softer on the rainy street; the very names, endeared in verse and music, cling nearer round our hearts.'

Shannon says

Short, interesting little book about the Napa/Sonoma area in the late nineteenth century.

Sue says

Excellent travel memoir of Robert Louis Stevenson's time spent in the Napa Valley/Calistoga region, in particular the old mining town called Silverado. His descriptions of the people and the area (in 1880) are wonderfully detailed and almost poetic. I could see the old mines, the ramshackle, abandoned house and the beautiful, mesmerizing, all encompassing fog.

I highly recommend this for Napa Valley/California/the old West fans.

James M. says

A most interesting honeymoon, spent in an old mining camp, on Mount Saint Helena in California, Stevenson rarely mentions his new wife. He does a remarkable job in fleshing out the other characters in his tale, including an odd "respectful anti-semitism" no doubt fashionable in that time, and some curious thoughts and bright observations of the fellow inhabitants of the mountain. Most impressive are his physical depictions of the the mountain: the fog rolling in, like a great andulivian flood, while he remains above it, and the beauty and quiet of the night in this refuge. He also enjoys the company of Joe Strong, an artist who

comes for a visit. Strong, a Hawaiian missionary's son, who will later resurface in RLS's Pacific journeys, and will later be stricken from all his later works after a family feud--this is a side reference worth investigating, as well as the skillful paintings of Mr. Strong, which deserve a wider audience. The book is charming, and will definitely transport you to 100 years past, and is well worth the journey. According to the book, by the way, there is no evidence that Stevenson was there to prospect silver, as was touted by a California outdoor reference guide to the nearby RLS State Park.

Erick says

It's amazing to me how he can write about something so simple and uninteresting yet so perfectly make you feel like you are there. He captures your interest by the deep realism and understanding of humans and how they see the world. The subject was not that interesting but the writing is so so good.

Marley says

I delightful little gem from Roberet Lewis Stevenson--an account of his honeymoon in the more-or-less ghost town of Silverado. I got a little tired ofhis descriptions of the landscape and natural wonders (I know!), but they are beautifully written. Of more interest to me were the people he met along the way. Real characters. This should be a classic travel book.

Kathryn says

Clever, funny, descriptive ... Not a honeymoon I'd envy, but a wonderful description to make you feel you were there.

Snow Ford says

a nice little novella of Stevenson's rustic honeymoon on a mountain above Calistoga in a deserted mining camp. I chose this book because I wanted to read a story with my boys that had mellifluous writing, with more complex vocabulary but was still accessible. This was a good choice, since we had familiarity with "A Childs Garden of Verses" and "Treasure Island", and the local tie in. Each chapter is a little vignette, making it a good choice for bedtime. It was a delight to read aloud, with language that really sang. My older son was able to grasp the story line, despite the circumlocutious sentence structure. My youngest made me laugh with his comment "The words are so long. I forget them so fast."

Georgetowner says

Incredibly well written, if not always engaging. More than a story, it is a series of observations on a truly unique adventure. Stevenson's turn of phrase and imagery is remarkable, and at times laugh-out-loud funny! All that said, though the book is quite short, there were still times I felt I was slogging though to the next

truly great moment. Even still, I highly recommend this book especially if traveling in the Napa region. I bought it in one visit to the RLS museum, and read it several years later when back in Napa.

Deke says

Who knew RLS wrote nonfiction so eloquently and even reverently? Highly recommended if you live in or love California's wine country, of and on which he waxes poetic, transporting you to a place and time that's almost mythical. His comment that napa valley wine is "bottled poetry" is well known around there, but it's his description of waking to find the valley below him filled with fog, like a lake, that I found most poetic.

Dean says

Interesting view on early California history. The place seemed so small then.

Scott Cox says

This book is somewhat of travel memoir for Robert Louis Stevenson who spent about one year in California before returning to Europe (and ultimately Samoa, where he died & is buried). It is a story of Stevenson and his new bride "squatting" in the abandoned housing of an old mine, the Silverado. The abandoned silver & gold mine is on Mt. Saint Helena near the Napa wine country town of Calistoga. Stevenson describes the natural beauty of the area, providing an entire chapter on looking down upon the "Sea Fogs." He also describes the nascent Napa Valley wine industry, visiting pioneer wineries of Schram and M'Eckron. The most disturbing aspect of the book is the attitude portraying Chinese and Jews, perhaps reflecting a not-so-tolerant era. Another excellent book regarding Stevenson's California days is "From Scotland to Silverado" edited by James D. Hart.

Jori Richardson says

I came across this little book in the dollar bin of a used bookstore, and was intrigued because I had never heard of this particular manuscript by Stevenson.

Basically, it is a simple, concise collection of various portraits of scenery, all located in the California mountains around Napa Valley. The descriptions were charmingly pastoral. However, after a little while all the descriptions of houses, valleys, and mountains seem to merge and become all one and the same.

Extremely repetitive.

Hope says

I thought that this would be a fun book to read because we had gone to the Petrified Forest in CA where Robert Louis Stevenson had been and this book had been written about his account there. But, I forgot that the author was Scottish and a poet and I really didn't like the way he wrote. I had a hard time following his writings as he jumped around so much. I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone unless they like the

writings of Robert Louis Stevenson.
