

**The Following is from All That Glitters  
By Elizabeth Jameson**

The Summit of Pisgah

Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land. Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the Land of Ephraim and Manasseh; the whole land of Judah as far as the Western Sea; the Negeb; and the Plain – the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees – as far as Zoar. And the Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ‘I will assign it to your offspring.’”  
- Deuteronomy 34:1-4

A small, cone-shaped mountain called Mt. Pisgah overlooks Cripple Creek, Colorado. Named for the slope east of Jordan from which Moses viewed the Promised Land, from its deceptively low and accessible summit a 360-degree panorama unfolds. We can only guess what promises its namer dreamed might lie below in a land that lured thousands to the gold and silver of its streams and slopes. The view from this peak can seem breathtakingly unreal – the old western mining town, patches of golden aspen and dark pines, the craggy blue-green and purple peaks, the hazy reaches of South Park in the distance. But that is only the surface. This landscape hid its rich ores for millennia. It does not easily reveal the stories of the people who tried to mine them, of what they sought or what they found.

Pikes Peak lies to the east. A massive beacon – “Pikes Peak or Bust” – it fueled the dreams of gold seekers in the Pikes Peak rush of 1859. The gold, however, lay not on its slopes but to the north around Cherry Creek and in many small mining camps, mostly short-lived and long-dead, around South Park, stretching in vast pastel hazes to the northwest. Its remote loveliness tells little of the dreams that drew those early argonauts or of the daily grubbing their hope demanded.

But south and east of Mt. Pisgah, the next generation of miners left their footprints. When I first saw it in 1973, the town of Cripple Creek had shrunk considerably from its heyday as the commercial center of “the World’s Greatest Gold Camp.” The mines had closed, its sprawling residential neighborhoods were gone, and the houses were torn down. Vacant lots gaped like missing teeth in its once bustling downtown. On Myers Avenue, the legendary red light district that once housed an astonishing variety of gambling parlors, saloons, dance halls, and all classes of prostitution, only one building still stood: the fanciest of the parlor houses, the old Homestead, restored and refurbished as a museum. Beyond the Old Homestead, Myers Avenue meandered eastward into Poverty Gulch. There, in 1890, a sometimes cowhand named Robert Womack hit gold in the El Paso lode that had eluded him through twelve years of stubborn prospecting.

Womack’s discovery turned a sleepy cow pasture into one of the world’s leading industrial mining centers. Cripple Creek captured the imagination of the nation and the interest of most of the financial world during the economically troubled 1890s. It saved Colorado’s crashing economy when Congress repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1893 and silver mines closed throughout the Rockies. To a country rocked by a massive depression and to a state shakily based in a silver mining economy, the gold discovery was one of the few bright spots in an otherwise dismal economic picture. Cripple Creek produced more than \$65 million in gold during its first decade. Deservedly called the World’s Greatest Gold Camp, its riches stabilized the national monetary system. Within a decade, the District, only six miles square, held ten towns, some thirty thousand residents, and more than seven hundred producing mines. Their shafts and rock dumps still dot the slopes....

Labor conflicts punctuated the history of western mining as they did most of industrializing America. Formed after a strike in Idaho’s Coeur d’Alenes in 1892, the Western Federation of Miners waged strikes that have aptly been called “labor wars” in Leadville, Colorado in 1896, in the Coeur d’Alenes again in 1899, in Telluride, Colorado in 1901, throughout Colorado (including Telluride and Cripple Creek) in 1903 and 1904, in Goldfield, Nevada in 1906 and 1907, in Lead, South Dakota in 1909, in Calumet, Michigan in 1913 and 1914, and in Bisbee, Arizona in 1917.

The 1894 Cripple Creek strike was atypical as mining conflicts went. Typical enough in the defensive nature of its goals – to resist wage cuts and a longer workday – it was remarkable because the miners won, and in seemingly inauspicious circumstances. As silver mines closed in 1893, throwing thousands of skilled miners out of work, members of the newly founded WFM won an eight-hour day, \$3 minimum daily wage, and the right to union membership. Equally remarkable, they won their victory with the help of the state. Gov. Davis Waite intervened against sheriff’s deputies from Colorado Springs, the county seat and the mine owners’ political stronghold. It was the only mining strike of the period in which the power of the state protected civil peace rather than mine owners’ property.