

They Carry a Promise: Selected Poems

By Janusz Szuber; Translated by Ewa Hryniewicz-Yarbrough

The Stormy Life of Ex-Sergeant W.

In 1847 a grievous lack of women was felt in California.
That's why Dr. Feliks Wierzbicki complained
about his unmarried state and dirty linen.
With hydropathy he treated those sick of gold rush,
cut with knives and pierce with bullets.

This western has its prologue in Volhynia,
from which this underage soldier of the November Uprising
came. He was later deported by the Austrian authorities
to the United States, where he studied medicine,
allegedly in Connecticut.

Before he enlisted (arriving in California
after six months, by boat from New York), he wrote
a treatise: *The Ideal Man. Conversation between Two
Friends about Beauty, Goodness, and Truth.*

He didn't fight the Mexicans since in the meantime
the war had ended and Sergeant Wierzbicki, a private again,
left the local garrison and his superiors
with whom he couldn't come to terms.

We don't know if he searched for treasures.
He roamed on horseback and on foot,
crossed the Sierra Nevada, reached the great desert.
A book about the Gold Country was the outcome of that,
a best seller that went for five dollars a copy.

Maybe the defeat of the Uprising and the encyclical *Cum Primum* caused his attacks on the Church and the Jesuits.
However, the doctor's true passion was metallurgy,
And until his death he worked in a San Francisco mint.

Even though he published *An Essay on the History of Medicine*,
he died of pneumonia at the age of forty-five,
using steam baths instead of staying in bed
and taking appropriate medications.