

FREDERICK WILLIAM BEECHEY

1826

After ten years of bloody revolution, Mexico finally declared its independence from Spain on September 28, 1821. Two years later, a new constitution established the Federal Republic of Mexico and, at least on paper, granted the right to vote and own property to all men, including Indians. The territories of California, Texas, and New Mexico were officially controlled by the Mexican Congress. However, widespread corruption and a series of civil wars would cripple Mexico's attempts at establishing consistent administrative or economic policies.

News of Mexico's independence did not reach California for seven months. When it did arrive, it changed little in day-to-day life, certainly not for the Indians living at the region's twenty missions, who were never informed of their new political freedom. Independence meant little more for them than the substitution of an eagle for a lion on a flag. The non-Indian residents of California (who haughtily called themselves *gente de razón*, meaning "people of reason") were more shaken by the news. Although few had been born in Spain, they viewed it, not Mexico, as their homeland. But most pledged allegiance to the new government in the hope of receiving much-needed economic aid.

Despite the change in government, California remained in the 1820s as poverty-stricken and lawless as ever. José María Echeandía, the first governor of California appointed by the Federal Republic of Mexico, arrived in 1825. A hypochondriac who left a wife and four daughters behind in Mexico City, Echeandía's administration was beset by nonstop crises and rebellions. When he rejected living in the foggy capitol of Monterey in favor of San Diego, he enraged northern officials, who elected their own governor in 1832. In 1826 American fur trapper Jedediah Strong Smith led the first overland party into California; Echeandía, frightened by the precedent, ousted him. In 1829 a group of destitute and demoralized presidial soldiers marched south from Monterey, demanding compensation for years of unpaid salaries. They backed down only when Echeandía met them near Santa Barbara with a battalion of troops. That same year, an escaped neophyte named Estanislao from Mission San José organized a large war band of Indians in the San Joaquín Valley; 100 Mexican soldiers could not quash the rebellion.

After 1822, the shadowy commerce between Californians and English, American, and Russian ships came out in the open as a permanent institution. Mexican independence ended many restrictions on foreign trade, and the new government's lack of authority and scattered coastal patrols made collecting import and export tariffs difficult. In 1821, the last year of Spanish control, nine ships visited California; the following year the number rose to twenty, and to forty-four in 1826.

One of those ships that anchored at California in 1826 was the *Blossom*, a sizable British sloop equipped with sixteen guns, a hull strengthened against icebergs, and a crew of 100 men, commanded by Frederick William Beechey. The *Blössom*'s expedition was not a single voyage, planned as a complete enterprise in itself, but rather a part of British polar exploration aimed at discovering the Northwest Passage before the Russians. Beechey was dispatched in May 1825 to meet up with an overland party led by Captain John Franklin that was charting the northern Alaskan shoreline. In order to secure

sailors for what was sure to be a cold and dreary voyage, Beechey offered the men six months advance pay and stocked the *Blossom* with plenty of anti-scorbutics and unusual luxuries such as preserved meats, soup, pickles, spices, and chocolate.

The trip was actually Frederick Beechey's second foray into the icy waters of the North Pacific. He was born in 1796, the second of eighteen children of Sir William Beechey, a painter who had worked his way out of obscurity to high social position by painting portraits of the royal family and aristocracy. In keeping with his new-found status, Sir William was anxious that his sons should establish respectable careers and so entered Frederick into the navy at the age of ten. As a young midshipman, Frederick Beechey saw little action during the Napoleonic wars, although he took part in a campaign against New Orleans. His entry into polar exploration came in 1817, when he was appointed second-in-command on the *Trent* under Captain Franklin. While attempting to sail around the northern tip of Greenland, the ship encountered ice that Franklin had expected to be melted. The *Trent* nearly capsized near Spitzbergen. Although a disaster, the voyage prepared Beechey for command of the *Blossom* a few years later.

As instructed, the *Blossom* sailed around Cape Horn, stopped for supplies at Chile, and spent a few weeks in the South Pacific surveying and collecting "rare and curious specimens" for the ship's team of scientists. Onboard were two artists, William Smyth and Richard Brydges Beechey (Frederick's younger brother), who painted superb watercolors of scenes along the way. They reached the rendezvous point in Kotzebue Sound near the Bering Strait, but Franklin's land party never arrived. In September, Beechey decided to leave supplies there for Franklin and sail south for warmer waters. He anchored in the bay of San Francisco on November 6, 1826.

While resupplying, Beechey asked *presidio* commander Ignacio Martinez for permission to make a detailed survey of the bay. Martinez agreed, providing that Beechey left a copy of the map for the Mexican government. Taking soundings throughout the bay,

Beechey discovered a dangerous sunken rock he named after the *Blossom*, leaving what he thought would be a permanent memento of the voyage. His precise map of the bay, along with his charts of the coast south of San Francisco, became the standards used by later visitors. Beechey did make one mistake—he accidentally and permanently reversed the names for Yerba Buena and Alcatraz islands given by Captain Ayala fifty years earlier.

Today, the most important aspect of the *Blossom*'s fifty-two-day stay at San Francisco is Beechey's description of the missions in their heyday. The number of missions had swelled to twenty-one, each sitting upon an enormous tract of land and equipped with a grain-mill and sawmill. Nearly 30,000 neophytes tended the missions' ten million acres of fields and gardens and watched over nearly two million head of cattle, sheep, horses, goats, and mules. With Mexico unable to send much aid, California's soldiers and civilians were forced to barter with the missions for food, clothing, soap, leather goods, and furniture, all produced by Indian laborers. The missions supported approximately two-thirds of California's Spanish-speaking population.

Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Beering's Strait, Beechey's journal of the voyage of the *Blossom*, was published in London in 1831 during an era when travel diaries were enjoying considerable popularity throughout Europe. Narratives of even minor voyages often ran through several printings almost as soon as they appeared. But by the 1830s almost all of the major discoveries that could be made by sea voyage had already been accomplished; if a naval explorer wished to gain public recognition, he had to write something more than a bare record of his travels. Beechey's account epitomized this new genre—the popularized travel narrative. Only after the *Blossom*'s return to England did Beechey compile the final version of *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific*, carefully arranging his selection of material from his own log and several crew members' diaries so that even the most mundane parts of the voyage would seem exciting. Beechey's generally fine writing is marred only by its

heavy moralistic overtone, especially present when condemning Californian society.

After seeing San Francisco, the *Blossom* visited Monterey, the Sandwich Islands, China, and Kamchatka before returning to the Bering Strait. There was still no sign of Franklin (who was delayed and never actually reached the Strait), so Beechey stopped again for supplies at California in the autumn of 1827 before rounding Cape Horn and sailing for England. The command of the *Blossom* was the last voyage of exploration Beechey undertook. Health failing, he spent the last thirty years of his life living in semi-retirement, overseeing minor surveying work along the coast of Ireland while keeping apprised of new explorations through the Royal Geographic Society. At the time of his death in 1857, he was serving as its president. In 1870, in a great explosion that drew thousands of onlookers, Blossom Rock was destroyed as a hazard to navigation, and the last tangible reminder of the *Blossom*'s visit vanished from the bay. This excerpt from Beechey's *Narrative* begins November 6, 1826.

FREDERICK WILLIAM BEECHEY

from *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific
and Beering's Strait*

When the day broke, we found ourselves about four miles from the land. It was a beautiful morning, with just sufficient freshness in the air to exhilarate without chilling. The tops of the mountains, the only part of the land visible, formed two ranges—between which our port [San Francisco Bay] was situated—though its entrance, as well as the valleys and the low lands, were still covered with the morning mist condensed around the bases of the mountains. We bore up for the opening between the ranges, anxious for the rising sun to withdraw the veil, that we might obtain a view of the harbor and form our judgment of the country in which we were about to pass the next few weeks. As we advanced, the beams of the rising sun gradually descended the hills, until the mist, dispelled from the land, rolled on before the refreshing sea wind, discovering cape after cape, and exhibiting a luxuriant country apparently abounding in wood and rivers. At length two low promontories—the southern one distinguished by a fort and a Mexican flag—marked the narrow entrance of the port.

We spread our sails with all the anxiety of persons who had long been secluded from civilized society and deprived of wholesome aliment; but after the first effort of the breeze, it died away and left us becalmed in a heavy NW swell....

The fort, which we passed upon our right, mounts nine guns and is built upon a promontory on the south side of the entrance, apparently so near to the precipice that one side will, before long,



San Francisco Bay and *presidio*, 1826, by Richard Brydges Beechey, the younger sibling of Captain Frederick William Beechey, who accompanied his brother to California onboard the *Blossom*. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Henry S. Dakin. Photograph courtesy of North Point Gallery.

be precipitated over it by the gradual breaking away of the rock. Its situation, nevertheless, is good, as regards the defense of the entrance; but it is commanded by a rising ground behind it. As we passed, a soldier protruded a speaking-trumpet through one of the embrasures and hailed us with a stentorian voice, but we could not distinguish what was said. This custom of hailing vessels has arisen from there being no boat belonging to the garrison and the inconvenience felt by the governor in having to wait for a report of arrivals until the masters of the vessels could send their boats on shore.

The port of San Francisco does not show itself to advantage until after the fort is passed, when it breaks upon the view and forcibly impresses the spectator with the magnificence of the harbor. He then beholds a broad sheet of water—sufficiently extensive to contain all the British navy—with convenient coves, anchorage in every part, and, around, a country diversified with hill and dale, partly

wooded and partly disposed in pasture lands of the richest kind, abounding in herds of cattle. In short, the only objects wanting to complete the interest of the scene are some useful establishments and comfortable residences on the grassy borders of the harbor, the absence of which creates an involuntary regret that so fine a country, abounding in all that is essential to man, should be allowed to remain in such a state of neglect. So poorly did the place appear to be peopled that a sickly column of smoke rising from within some dilapidated walls—misnamed the *presidio* or protection—was the only indication we had of the country being inhabited....

As we opened out the several islands and stopping places in the harbor, we noticed seven American whalers at anchor at Sausalito, not one of which showed their colors. We passed them and anchored off a small bay named Yerba Buena—from the luxuriance of its vegetation, about a league distant from both the *presidio* and the mission of San Francisco. I immediately went on shore to pay my respects to Don Ignacio Martínez,¹ a lieutenant in the Mexican army, acting governor in the absence of Don Luís [Antonio Argüello],² and to the priest, whose name was Tomaso, both of whom gave me a very hospitable and friendly reception, and offered their services in any way they might be required. Our first inquiries naturally related to supplies, which we were disappointed to find not at all equal to what had been reported. In short, it seemed that with the exception of flour, fresh beef, vegetables, and salt, which might be procured through the missions, we should have to depend upon the American vessels for whatever else we might want, or upon what might chance to be in store at Monterey, a port of more

¹ Ignacio Martínez was later named *comandante* of San Francisco *presidio* (1822–1827). His daughter, Maria Antonia, married William A. Richardson, an Englishman who founded the town of Yerba Buena in 1835.

² Beechey was misinformed; Luís Antonio Argüello, *gobernador* from 1822 to 1825, had been recently replaced by José María Echeandía, California's first *gobernador* appointed by the Federal Republic of Mexico.

importance than San Francisco, and from being the residence of a branch of a respectable firm in Lima, [Peru,] better supplied with the means of refitting vessels after a long sea voyage.

It was evident from this report that the supplies were likely to be very inadequate to our wants, but that no opportunity of obtaining them might be lost, I dispatched Mr. Collie the surgeon and Mr. Marsh the purser overland to Monterey—with Mr. Evans as interpreter—with orders to procure for the ship what medicines, provisions, and other stores were to be had, and to negotiate government bills, on which the exchange was far more favorable there than at the Sandwich Islands. The governor politely furnished a passport and a guard for this service; and our hospitable friend Tomaso, the *padre* of the mission, provided horses for them free of any charge. In the meantime we arranged with a relation of the governor for the daily supply of the ship's company, an arrangement which it afterwards appeared increased the jealousy that had long existed between the *presidio* and the missions by transferring to the pocket of the commandant the profits that would otherwise have been reaped by the *padre*.

We were happy to find the country around our anchorage abounding in game of all kinds, so plentiful, indeed, as soon to lessen the desire of pursuit. Still there were many inducements to both the officers and seamen to land and enjoy themselves, and as it was for the benefit of the service that they should recruit their health and strength as soon as possible, every facility was afforded them. Horses were fortunately very cheap, from nine shillings to seven pounds apiece, so that riding became a favorite amusement; and the Spaniards, finding they could make a good market by letting out their stud, appeared with them every Sunday opposite the ship, ready saddled for the occasion, as this was a day on which I allowed every man to go out of the ship. Some of the officers purchased horses and tethered them near the place, but the Spaniards,

finding this to interfere with their market, contrived to let them loose on the Saturday night in order that the officers might be compelled to hire others on the following day. The only difficulty to the enjoyment of this amusement was the scarcity of saddles and bridles, some of which cost ten times as much as a decent horse. The ingenuity of the seamen generally obviated these difficulties, while some borrowed or hired saddles of the natives. For my own part, I purchased a decent-looking horse for about thirty-five shillings sterling, and on my departure presented it to a Spaniard who had lent me the necessary accoutrements for it during my stay, which answered the purpose of both parties, as he was pleased with his present, and I had my ride for about a shilling a day—a useful hint to persons who may be similarly circumstanced.

Such of the seamen as would not venture on horseback made parties to visit the *presidio* and mission, where they found themselves welcome guests with the Spanish soldiers. These two places were the only buildings within many miles of us, and they fortunately supplied just enough spirits to allow the people to enjoy themselves with their friends, without indulging in much excess—a very great advantage in a seaport.

The roads leading to these two great places of attraction in a short time became well-beaten, and that to the mission very much improved by having the boughs removed which before overhung it. It was at first in contemplation to hire a Spaniard to lop them, but our pioneers, who stopped at nothing, soon tore them all away, except one, a large stump, which resisted every attack and unhorsed several of its assailants.

Martinez was always glad to see the officers at the *presidio* and made them welcome to what he had. Indeed, nothing seemed to give him greater pleasure than our partaking of his family dinner; the greater part of which was dressed by his wife and daughters, who prided themselves on their proficiency in the art of cooking. It was

not, however, entirely for the satisfaction of presenting us with a well-prepared repast that they were induced to indulge in this humble occupation; poor Martinez, besides his legitimate offspring, had eighteen others to provide for out of his salary, which was then eleven years in arrears. He had a sorry prospect before him, as, a short time previous to our visit, the government, by way of paying up these arrears, sent a brig with a cargo of paper cigars to be issued to the troops in lieu of dollars; but, as Martinez justly observed, cigars would not satisfy the families of the soldiers, and the compromise was refused. The cargo was, however, landed at Monterey and placed under the charge of the governor, where all other tobacco is contraband; and as the Spaniards are fond of smoking, it stands a fair chance, in the course of time, of answering the intention of the government, particularly as the troops apply for these oftener than they otherwise would, under the impression of clearing off a score of wages that will never be settled in any other manner. Fortunately for Martinez and other veterans in this country, both vegetable and animal food are uncommonly cheap, and there are no fashions to create any expense of dress.

The governor's abode was in a corner of the *presidio* and formed one end of a row, of which the other was occupied by a chapel. The opposite side was broken down and little better than a heap of rubbish and bones, on which jackals, dogs, and vultures were constantly preying. The other two sides of the quadrangle contained storehouses, artificers' shops, and the jail, all built in the humblest style with badly-burnt bricks and roofed with tiles. The chapel and the governor's house were distinguished by being whitewashed.

Whether viewed at a distance or near, the establishment impresses a spectator with any other sentiment than that of its being a place of authority; and but for a tottering flagstaff, upon which was occasionally displayed the tri-colored flag of Mexico, three rusty field pieces, and a half accoutred sentinel parading the gateway

in charge of a few poor wretches heavily-shackled, a visitor would be ignorant of the importance of the place. The neglect of the government to its establishments could not be more thoroughly evinced than in the dilapidated condition of the building in question, and such was the dissatisfaction of the people that there was no inclination to improve their situation or even to remedy many of the evils which they appeared to us to have the power to remove.

The plain upon which the *presidio* stands is well adapted to cultivation, but it is scarcely ever touched by the plow, and the garrison is entirely beholden to the missions for its resources. Each soldier has nominally about three pounds a month, out of which he is obliged to purchase his provision. If the governor were active and the means were supplied, the country in the vicinity of the establishment might be made to yield enough wheat and vegetables for the troops, by which they would save that portion of their pay that now goes to the purchase of these necessary articles.

The garrison of San Francisco consists of seventy-six cavalry soldiers and a few artillerymen, distributed between the *presidios* and the missions, and consequently not more than half a dozen are at anytime in one place.

They appeared to us to be very dissatisfied, owing not only to their pay being so many years in arrear, but to the duties that had been imposed both on the importation of foreign articles and on those of the Mexican territory, amounting in the first instance to 42 1/2 percent, whereas, under the old government, two ships were annually sent from Acapulco with goods, which were sold duty free, and at their original cost in that country, and then, also, their pay being regularly discharged, they were able to purchase what they wanted. A further grievance has arisen by the refusal of the government to continue certain privileges that were enjoyed under the old system. At that time soldiers entered for a term of ten years, at the expiration of which they were allowed to retire to the *pueblos*—

villages erected for this purpose and attached to the missions, where the men have a portion of ground allotted to them for the support of their families. This afforded a competency to many; and while it benefited them, it was of service to the government, as the country by that means became settled and its security increased. But this privilege has latterly been withheld, and the applicants have been allowed only to possess the land and feed their cattle upon it, until it shall please the government to turn them off. The reason of this, I believe, was that Mexico was beginning to turn her attention to California and was desirous of having settlers there from the southern districts, to whom it would be necessary to give lands; and until they could see what would be required for this purpose and for the government establishments—and had the limits of the property already allotted, defined—they did not wish to make any new grants. The real cause, however, was not explained to the soldiers; they merely heard that they could not have the land ceded to them for life as usual, and they were consequently much dissatisfied.

The same feeling of discontent that was experienced by the garrison pervaded the missions, in consequence of some new regulations of the republican government, the first and most grievous of which was the discontinuance of a salary of 400 dollars per annum heretofore allowed to each of the *padres*; the support the former government had given to the missions amounted, according to Langsdorff, to a million *piastres* a year. Another grievance was the requisition of an oath of allegiance to the reigning authorities, which these holy men considered so egregious a violation of their former pledge to the king of Spain that, until he renounced his sovereignty over the country, they could not conscientiously take it; and, much as they were attached to the place in which they had passed a large portion of their lives, and though by quitting it they would be reduced to the utmost penury—yet, so much did they regard this pledge that they were prepared to leave the country and to seek an

asylum in any other that would afford it them. Indeed, the prefect preferring his expulsion to renouncing his allegiance had already received his dismissal and was ready at the seaport of Monterey to embark in any vessel the government might appoint to receive him. A third grievance—and one which, when duly considered, was of some importance, not only to the missions but to the country in general—was an order to liberate all those converted Indians from the missions who bore good characters and had been taught the art of agriculture or were masters of a trade, and were capable of supporting themselves, giving them portions of land to cultivate, so arranged that they should be divided into parishes, with curates to superintend them, subservient to the clergy of the missions who were to proceed in the conversion of the Indians as usual, and to train them for the domesticated state of society in contemplation.

This philanthropic system at first sight appeared to be a very excellent one, and every friend of the rights of man would naturally join in a wish for its prosperity; but the Mexican government could not have sufficiently considered the state of California and the disposition of the Indians, or they would have known it could not possibly succeed without long previous training, and then it would require to be introduced by slow degrees.

The Indians whom this law emancipated were essential to the support of the missions, not only for conducting their agricultural concerns but for keeping in subordination by force and example those whom disobedience and ignorance would exempt from the privilege; and as a necessary consequence of this indulgence, the missions would be ruined before the system could be brought into effect, even supposing the Indians capable of conducting their own affairs. So far from this being the case, however, they were known to possess neither the will, the steadiness, nor the patience to provide for themselves. Accustomed, many of them from their infancy, to as much restraint as children and to execute, mechanically, what

they were desired and no more, without even entertaining a thought for their future welfare, it was natural that such persons, when released from this discipline, should abandon themselves entirely to their favorite amusements, pastimes, and vices. Those also who had been converted in later life would return to their former habits, and having once again tasted the blessings of freedom, which confinement and discipline must have rendered doubly desirable, would forget all restraint; and then being joined by the wild discontented Indians, they would be more formidable enemies to the missions than before, inasmuch as they would be more enlightened. But I will not anticipate the result, which we had an opportunity of seeing on our return the following year, and from which the reader will be able to judge how the system worked.

The *padres*, however, dreading the worst, were very discontented, and many would willingly have quitted the country for Manila. The government appeared to be aware of this feeling, as they sent some young priests from Mexico to supplant those who were disaffected, and desired that they should be trained up in the mission and should make themselves acquainted with the language and usages of the Indians, in order that they might not promote discontent by any sudden innovation....

The object of the missions is to convert as many of the wild Indians as possible and to train them up within the walls of the establishment in the exercise of a good life, and of some trade, so that they may in time be able to provide for themselves and become useful members of civilized society. As to the various methods employed for the purpose of bringing proselytes to the mission, there are several reports, of which some were not very creditable to the institution. Nevertheless, on the whole I am of opinion that the priests are innocent, from a conviction that they are ignorant of the means employed by those who are under them. Whatever may be the system, and whether the Indians be really dragged from their

homes and families by armed parties, as some assert, or not, and forced to exchange their life of freedom and wandering for one of confinement and restraint in the missions, the change according to our ideas of happiness would seem advantageous to them, as they lead a far better life in the missions than in their forests, where they are in a state of nudity and are frequently obliged to depend solely upon wild acorns for their subsistence.

Immediately the Indians are brought to the mission. They are placed under the tuition of some of the most enlightened of their countrymen, who teach them to repeat in Spanish the Lord's Prayer and certain passages in the Romish litany, and also, to cross themselves properly on entering the church. In a few days, a willing Indian becomes a proficient in these mysteries and suffers himself to be baptized and duly initiated into the church. If, however, as it not infrequently happens, any of the captured Indians show a repugnance to conversion, it is the practice to imprison them for a few days and then to allow them to breathe a little fresh air in a walk 'round the mission, to observe the happy mode of life of their converted countrymen; after which they are again shut up, and thus continue to be incarcerated until they declare their readiness to renounce the religion of their forefathers.

I do not suppose that this apparently unjustifiable conduct would be pursued for any length of time; and I had never an opportunity of ascertaining the fact, as the Indians are so averse to confinement that they very soon become impressed with the manifestly superior and more comfortable mode of life of those who are at liberty, and in a very few days declare their readiness to have the new religion explained to them. A person acquainted with the language of the parties, of which there are sometimes several dialects in the same mission, is then selected to train them, and having duly prepared them takes them to the *padre* to be baptized and to receive the sacrament. Having become Christians, they are put to trades, or if

they have good voices, they are taught music and form part of the choir of the church.³ Thus there are in almost every mission weavers, tanners, shoemakers, bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and other artificers. Others again are taught husbandry, to rear cattle and horses, and some to cook for the mission; while the females card, clean, and spin wool, weave, and sew, and those who are married attend to their domestic concerns.

In requital of these benefits, the services of the Indian, for life, belong to the mission, and if any neophyte should repent of his apostasy from the religion of his ancestors and desert, an armed force is sent in pursuit of him and drags him back to punishment apportioned to the degree of aggravation attached to his crime. It does not often happen that a voluntary convert succeeds in his attempt to escape, as the wild Indians have a great contempt and dislike for those who have entered the missions, and they will frequently not only refuse to readmit them to their tribe, but will sometimes even discover their retreat to their pursuers. This animosity between the wild and converted Indians is of great importance to the missions, as it checks desertion and is at the same time a powerful defense against the wild tribes, who consider their territory invaded and have other just causes of complaint. The Indians, besides, from political motives, are, I fear, frequently encouraged in a contemptuous feeling toward their unconverted countrymen by hearing them constantly held up to them in the degrading light of *bestias!* and in hearing the Spaniards distinguished by the appellation of *gente de razón*.

The produce of the land and of the labor of the Indians is appropriated to the support of the mission, and the overplus to amass a fund that is entirely at the disposal of the *padres*. In some of the establishments this must be very large, although the *padres* will not admit it and always plead poverty. The government has lately

³In fact, at Mission San José, Father Narcisco Durán taught neophytes to read music and organized a thirty-piece orchestra.

demanded a part of this profit, but the priests who, it is said, think the Indians are more entitled to it than the government, make small donations to them, and thus evade the tax by taking care there shall be no overplus. These donations in some of the missions are greater than in others, according as one establishment is more prosperous than another; and on this also, in a great measure, depends the comforts of the dwellings and the neatness, the cleanliness, and the clothing of the people. In some of the missions much misery prevails, while in others there is a degree of cheerfulness and cleanliness which shows that many of the Indians require only care and proper management to make them as happy as their dull senses will admit of under a life of constraint.

The two missions of San Francisco and San José are examples of the contrast alluded to. The former in 1817 contained a thousand converts, who were housed in small huts around the mission; but at present only 260 remain—some have been sent, it is true, to the new mission of San Francisco Solano,⁴ but sickness and death have dealt with an unsparing hand among the others. The huts of the absentees, at the time of our visit, had all fallen to decay and presented heaps of filth and rubbish; while the remaining inmates of the mission were in as miserable a condition as it was possible to conceive and were entirely regardless of their own comfort. Their hovels afforded scarcely any protection against the weather and were black with smoke. Some of the Indians were sleeping on the greasy floor; others were grinding baked acorns to make into cakes, which constitute a large portion of their food. So little attention indeed had been paid even to health that in one hut there was a quarter of beef suspended opposite a window in a very offensive and unwholesome state, but its owners were too indolent to throw it out. San José, on

⁴Mission San Francisco Solano, located in the present-day city of Sonoma, was the last mission to be founded in California (1823)—and the only one established under Mexican control.



Mission San Carlos Borromeo [Mission Carmel-Monterey], 1827, by William Smyth, an admiralty mate aboard the *Blossom*. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.

the other hand, was all neatness, cleanliness, and comfort. The Indians were amusing themselves between the hours of labor at their games; and the children, uniformly dressed in white bodices and scarlet petticoats, were playing at bat and ball. Part of this difference may arise from the habits of the people, who are of different tribes. Langsdorff observes that the Indians of the mission of San José are the handsomest tribe in California and in every way a finer race of men, and terms the neophytes of San Francisco pygmies compared with them. I cannot say that this remark occurred to me, and I think it probable that he may have been deceived by the apparently miserable condition of the people of San Francisco.

The children and adults of both sexes, in all the missions, are carefully locked up every night in separate apartments, and the keys are delivered into the possession of the *padre*; and as, in the daytime, their occupations lead to distinct places, unless they form a matrimonial alliance they enjoy very little of each other's society.

It, however, sometimes happens that they endeavor to evade the vigilance of their keepers and are locked up with the opposite sex; but severe corporeal punishment—inflicted in the same manner as is practiced in our schools, but with a whip instead of a rod—is sure to ensue if they are discovered. Though there may be occasional acts of tyranny, the general character of the *padres* is kind and benevolent, and in some of the missions the converts are so much attached to them that I have heard them declare they would go with them if they were obliged to quit the country. It is greatly to be regretted that with the influence these men have over their pupils, and with the regard those pupils seem to have for their masters, that the priests do not interest themselves a little more in the education of their converts, the first step to which would be in making themselves acquainted with the Indian language. Many of the Indians surpass their pastors in this respect and can speak the Spanish language, while scarcely one of the *padres* can make themselves understood by the Indians. They have besides, in general, a lamentable contempt for the intellect of these simple people and think them incapable of improvement beyond a certain point. Notwithstanding this, the Indians are, in general, well clothed and fed; they have houses of their own, and if they are not comfortable, it is, in a great measure, their own fault; their meals are given to them three times a day, and consist of thick gruel made of wheat, Indian corn, and sometimes acorns, to which at noon is generally added meat. Clothing of a better kind than that worn by the Indians is given to the officers of the missions, both as a reward for their services and to create an emulation in others.

If it should happen that there is a scarcity of provisions, either through failure in the crop or damage of that which is in store, as they have always two or three years in reserve, the Indians are sent off to the woods to provide for themselves, where, accustomed to hunt and fish, and game being very abundant, they find enough to

subsist upon and return to the mission when they are required to reap the next year's harvest.

Having served ten years in the mission, an Indian may claim his liberty, provided any respectable settler will become surety for his future good conduct. A piece of ground is then allotted for his support, but he is never wholly free from the establishment, as part of his earnings must still be given to them. We heard of very few to whom this reward for servitude and good conduct had been granted; and it is not improbable that the *padres* are averse to it, as it deprives them of their best scholars. When these establishments were first founded, the Indians flocked to them in great numbers for the clothing with which the neophytes were supplied; but after they became acquainted with the nature of the institution and felt themselves under restraint, many absconded. Even now, notwithstanding the difficulty of escaping, desertions are of frequent occurrence, owing probably, in some cases, to the fear of punishment; in others to the deserters having been originally inveigled into the mission by the converted Indians or neophytes, as they are called by way of distinction to *los gentiles*, or the wild Indians; in other cases again to the fickleness of their own disposition.

Some of the converted Indians are occasionally stationed in places that are resorted to by the wild tribes for the purpose of offering them flattering accounts of the advantages of the mission and of persuading them to abandon their barbarous life; while others obtain leave to go into the territory of the gentiles to visit their friends and are expected to bring back converts with them when they return. At a particular period of the year, also, when the Indians can be spared from the agricultural concerns of the establishment, many of them are permitted to take the launch of the mission and make excursions to the Indian territory. All are anxious to go on such occasions, some to visit their friends, some to procure the manufactures of their barbarous countrymen (which, by the by, are

often better than their own), and some with the secret determination never to return. On these occasions the *padres* desire them to induce as many of their unconverted brethren as possible to accompany them back to the mission, of course—implying that this is to be done only by persuasion—but the boat being furnished with a cannon and musketry, and in every respect equipped for war, it too often happens that the neophytes and the *gente de razón*, who superintend the direction of the boat, avail themselves of their superiority, with the desire of ingratiating themselves with their masters and of receiving a reward. There are, besides, repeated acts of aggression that it is necessary to punish, all of which furnish proselytes. Women and children are generally the first objects of capture, as their husbands and parents sometimes voluntarily follow them into captivity. These misunderstandings and captivities keep up a perpetual enmity amongst the tribes, whose thirst for revenge is almost insatiable.

We had an opportunity of witnessing the tragical issue of one of these holy day excursions of the neophytes of the mission of San José. The launch was armed as usual and placed under the superintendence of an *alcalde* [a town's leading civil officer] of the mission, who, it appears from one statement (for there were several), converted the party of pleasure either into one of attack for the purpose of procuring proselytes or of revenge upon a particular tribe for some aggression in which they were concerned. They proceeded up the Río San Joaquín until they came to the territory of a particular tribe named Cosemenes [sic],⁵ when they disembarked with the gun and encamped for the night near the village of *los gentiles*, intending to make an attack upon them the next morning. But before they were prepared, the gentiles, who had been apprised of their intention and had collected a large body of friends, became the assail-

⁵The Cosumnes Indians, a Miwok-speaking people, lived in present-day El Dorado County on the banks of the Cosumnes River.

ants and pressed so hard upon the party that—notwithstanding they dealt death in every direction with their cannon and musketry, and were inspired with confidence by the contempt in which they held the valor and tactics of their unconverted countrymen—they were overpowered by numbers and obliged to seek their safety in flight, and to leave the guns in the woods. Some regained the launch and were saved, and others found their way over land to the mission, but thirty-four of the party never returned to tell their tale.

There were other accounts of this unfortunate affair, one of which accused the *padre* of authorizing the attack, and another stated that it was made in self defense; but that which I have given appeared to be the most probable. That the reverend father should have sanctioned such a proceeding is a supposition so totally at variance with his character that it will not obtain credit; and the other was in all probability the report of the *alcalde* to excuse his own conduct. They all agreed, however, in the fatal termination of their excursion, and the neophytes became so enraged at the news of the slaughter of their companions that it was almost impossible to prevent them from proceeding forthwith to revenge their deaths. The *padre* was also greatly displeased at the result of the excursion, as the loss of so many Indians to the mission was of the greatest consequence, and the confidence with which the victory would inspire the Indians was equally alarming. He therefore joined with the converted Indians in a determination to chastise and strike terror into the victorious tribe, and in concert with the governor planned an expedition against them. The mission furnished money, arms, Indians, and horses, and the *presidio* provided troops headed by the *alférez*, Sanchez, a veteran who had been frequently engaged with the Indians and was acquainted with every part of the country. The troops carried with them their armor and shields, as a defense against the arrows of the Indians. The armor consisted of a helmet and jerkin made of stout skins, quite impenetrable to an arrow, and

the shields might almost vie with that of [Greek warrior] Ajax in the number of its folds.

The expedition set out on the 19th of November, and we heard nothing of it until the 27th. But two days after the troops had taken the field, some immense columns of smoke, rising above the mountains in the direction of the Cosemenes, bespoke the conflagration of the village of the persecuted gentiles. And on the day above mentioned, the veteran Sanchez made a triumphant entry into the mission of San José, escorting forty miserable women and children, the gun that had been taken in the first battle, and other trophies of the field. This victory, so glorious, according to the ideas of the conqueror, was achieved with the loss of only one man on the part of the Christians, who was mortally wounded by the bursting of his own gun; but on the part of the enemy it was considerable, as Sanchez the morning after the battle counted forty-one men, women, and children, dead. It is remarkable that none of the prisoners were wounded, and it is greatly to be feared that the Christians, who could scarcely be prevented from revenging the death of their relations upon those who were brought to the mission, glutted their brutal passion on all the wounded who fell into their hands....

The prisoners they had captured were immediately enrolled in the list of the mission, except a nice little boy whose mother was shot while running away with him in her arms, and he was sent to the *presidio*, and was, I heard, given to the *alferez* as a reward for his services. The poor little orphan had received a slight wound in his forehead. He wept bitterly at first and refused to eat, but in time became reconciled to his fate.

Those who were taken to the mission were immediately converted and were daily taught by the neophytes to repeat the Lord's Prayer and certain hymns in the Spanish language. I happened to visit the mission about this time and saw these unfortunate beings under tuition. They were clothed in blankets and arranged in a row

before a blind Indian, who understood their dialect and was assisted by an *alcalde* to keep order. Their tutor began by desiring them to kneel, informing them that he was going to teach them the names of the persons composing the Trinity, and that they were to repeat in Spanish what he dictated.

The neophytes being thus arranged, the speaker began, "*Santisima Trinidad, Dios, Jesu Christo, Espiritu Santo*"—pausing between each name to listen if the simple Indians, who had never spoken a Spanish word before, pronounced it correctly or anything near the mark. After they had repeated these names satisfactorily, their blind tutor, after a pause, added "*Santos*" and recapitulated the names of a great many saints, which finished the morning's tuition. I did not attend the next schooling to hear what was the ensuing task, but saw them arranged on their knees repeating Spanish words as before.

They did not appear to me to pay much attention to what was going forward, and I observed to the *padre* that I thought their teachers had an arduous task. But he said they had never found any difficulty, that the Indians were accustomed to change their own gods, and that their conversion was in a measure habitual to them. I could not help smiling at this reason of the *padre*, but have no doubt it was very true, and that the party I saw would feel as little compunction at apostatizing again whenever they should have an opportunity of returning to their own tribe.

The expenses of the late expedition fell heavy upon the mission, and I was glad to find that the *padre* thought it was paying very dear for so few converts—as in all probability it will lessen his desire to undertake another expedition, and the poor Indians will be spared the horrors of being butchered by their own countrymen or dragged from their homes into perpetual captivity. He was also much concerned to think the Cosemenes had stood their ground so firmly, and he was under some little apprehension of an attack upon

the mission. Impressed with this idea, and in order to defend himself the more effectually, he begged me to furnish him with a few fireworks, which he thought would strike terror into his enemies in case of necessity.

Morning and evening Mass are daily performed in the missions, and high Mass as it is appointed by the Romish church, at which all the converted Indians are obliged to attend. The commemoration of the anniversary of the patroness saint took place during my visit at San José, and high Mass was celebrated in the church. Before the prayers began, there was a procession of the young female Indians, with which I was highly pleased. They were neatly dressed in scarlet petticoats and white bodices, and walked in a very orderly manner to the church, where they had places assigned to them apart from the males. After the bell had done tolling, several *alguaziles* went 'round to the huts to see if all the Indians were at church, and if they found any loitering within them, they exercised with tolerable freedom a long lash with a broad thong at the end of it—a discipline which appeared the more tyrannical, as the church was not sufficiently capacious for all the attendants, and several sat upon the steps without. But the Indian women who had been captured in the affair with the Cosemenes were placed in a situation where they could see the costly images, vessels of burning incense, and everything that was going forward.

The congregation was arranged on both sides of the building, separated by a wide aisle passing along the center, in which were stationed several *alguaziles* with whips, canes, and goads to preserve silence and maintain order, and, what seemed more difficult than either, to keep the congregation in their kneeling posture. The goads were better adapted to this purpose than the whips, as they would reach a long way and inflict a sharp puncture without making any noise. The end of the church was occupied by a guard of soldiers under arms with fixed bayonets—a precaution which I suppose ex-

perience had taught the necessity of observing. Above them there was a choir consisting of several Indian musicians, who performed very well indeed on various instruments and sang the "Te Deum" in a very passable manner. The congregation was very attentive, but the gratification they appeared to derive from the music furnished another proof of the strong hold this portion of the ceremonies of the Romish church takes upon uninformed minds.

The worthy and benevolent priests of the mission devote almost the whole of their time to the duties of the establishment and have a fatherly regard for those placed under them who are obedient and diligent; and too much praise cannot be bestowed upon them, considering that they have relinquished many of the enjoyments of life and have embraced a voluntary exile in a distant and barbarous country. The only amusement which my hospitable host of the mission of San José indulged in during my visit to that place was during mealtimes, when he amused himself by throwing pancakes to the *muchachos*, a number of little Indian domestics who stood gaping 'round the table. For this purpose, he had every day two piles of pancakes made of Indian corn; and as soon as the *olla* was removed, he would fix his eyes upon one of the boys, who immediately opened his mouth and the *padre*, rolling up a cake, would say something ludicrous in allusion to the boy's appetite or to the size of his mouth and pitch the cake at him, which the imp would catch between his teeth and devour with incredible rapidity, in order that he might be ready the sooner for another, as well as to please the *padre*, whose amusement consisted in a great measure in witnessing the sudden disappearance of the cake. In this manner the piles of cakes were gradually distributed among the boys, amidst much laughter and occasional squabbling.

Nothing could exceed the kindness and consideration of these excellent men to their guests and to travelers, and they were seldom more pleased than when anyone paid their mission a visit. We always

fared well there and even on fast days were provided with fish dressed in various ways and preserves made with the fruit of the country. We had, however, occasionally some difficulty in maintaining our good temper, in consequence of the unpleasant remarks that the difference of our religion brought from the *padres*, who were very bigoted men and invariably introduced this subject. At other times they were very conversable, and some of them were ingenious and clever men; but they had been so long excluded from the civilized world that their ideas and their politics, like the maps pinned against the walls, bore date of 1772, as near as I could read it for fly spots. Their geographical knowledge was equally backward, as my host at San José had never heard of the discoveries of Captain Cook, and because Otaheite [Tahiti] was not placed upon his chart, he would scarcely credit its existence....

At some of the missions they pursue a custom said to be of great antiquity among the aborigines and which appears to afford them much enjoyment. A mud house or rather a large oven, called *temescál* by the Spaniards, is built in a circular form, with a small entrance and an aperture in the top for the smoke to escape through. Several persons enter this place quite naked and make a fire near the door, which they continue to feed with wood as long as they can bear the heat. In a short time they are thrown into a most profuse perspiration; they wring their hair and scrape their skin with a sharp piece of wood or an iron hoop, in the same manner as coach horses are sometimes treated when they come in heated; and then plunge into a river or pond of cold water, which they always take care shall be near the *temescál*....

Formerly the missions had small villages attached to them, in which the Indians lived in a very filthy state. These have almost all disappeared since Vancouver's visit, and the converts are disposed of in huts as before described; and it is only when sickness prevails to a great extent that it is necessary to erect these habitations, in

order to separate the sick from those who are in health. Sickness in general prevails to an incredible extent in all the missions, and on comparing the census of the years 1786 and 1813, the proportion of deaths appears to be increasing. At the former period there had been only 7,701 Indians baptized, out of which 2,388 had died; but in 1813 there had been 37,437 deaths to only 57,328 baptisms.

The establishments are badly supplied with medicines, and the reverend fathers, their only medical advisers, are inconceivably ignorant of the use of them. In one mission, there was a seaman who pretended to some skill in pharmacy, but he knew little or nothing of it and perhaps often did more harm than good. The Indians are also extremely careless and obstinate and prefer their own simples to any other remedies, which is not infrequently the occasion of their disease having a fatal termination.

The Indians in general submit quietly to the discipline of the missions, yet insurrections have occasionally broken out, particularly in the early stage of the settlement, when Father Tamoral and other priests suffered martyrdom. In 1823, also, a priest was murdered in a general insurrection in the vicinity of San Luis Rey; in 1827, the soldiers of the garrison were summoned to quell another riot in the same quarter.

The situations of the missions, particularly that of San José, are in general advantageously chosen. Each establishment has fifteen square miles of ground, of which part is cultivated, and the rest appropriated to the grazing and rearing of cattle; for in portioning out the ground, care has been taken to avoid that which is barren. The most productive farms are held by the missions of San José, Santa Clara, San Juan [Bautista], and Santa Cruz. That of San Francisco appears to be badly situated, in consequence of the cold fogs from the sea, which approach the mission through several deep valleys and turn all the vegetation brown that is exposed to them, as is the case in Shetland with the tops of every tree that rises above the

Hides and tallow constitute the principal riches of the missions and the staple commodity of the commerce of the country. A profitable revenue might also be derived from grain, were the demand for it on the coast such as to encourage them to cultivate a larger quantity than is required by the Indians attached to the missions. San José, which possesses 15,000 head of cattle, cures about 2,000 hides annually, and as many botas of tallow, which are either disposed of by contract to a mercantile establishment at Monterey or to vessels in the harbor. The price of these hides may be judged by their finding a ready market on the Lima coast. Though there are a great many sheep in the country—as may be seen by the Mission San José alone possessing 3,000—yet there is no export of wool, in consequence of the consumption of that article in the manufacture of cloth for the missions.

Husbandry is still in a very backward state, and it is fortunate that the soil is so fertile and that there are abundance of laborers to perform the work, or I verily believe the people would be contented to live upon acorns. Their plows appear to have descended from the patriarchal ages, and it is only a pity that a little of the skill and industry then employed upon them should not have devolved upon the present generation. It will scarcely be credited by agriculturists in other countries that there were seventy plows and 200 oxen at work upon a piece of light ground of ten acres; nor did the overseers appear to consider that number unnecessary, as the *padre* called our attention to this extraordinary advancement of the Indians in civilization and pointed out the most able workmen as the plows passed us in succession. The greater part of these plows followed in the same furrow without making much impression until they approached the *padre*, when the plowman gave the necessary inclination of the hand, and the share got hold of the ground. It would have been good policy for the *padre* to have moved gradually along the field, by which he would have had it properly plowed; but he seemed



Vaqueros lassoing cattle near Mission San José, 1826, by William Smyth. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

walls. Still, with care, more might be grown in this mission than it is at present made to produce. Santa Cruz is rich in supplies, probably on account of the greater demand by merchant vessels—whalers in particular—who not infrequently touch there the last thing on leaving the coast and take on board what vegetables they require; the quantity of which is so considerable, that it not infrequently happens that the missions are for a time completely drained. On this account it is advisable, on arriving at any of the ports, to take an early opportunity of ordering everything that may be required.

A quantity of grain, such as wheat and Indian corn, is annually raised in all the missions, except San Francisco, which, notwithstanding it has a farm at Burri Burri, is sometimes obliged to have recourse to the other establishments. Barley and oats are said to be scarcely worth the cultivation, but beans, peas, and other leguminous vegetables are in abundance, and fruit is plentiful. The land requires no manure at present and yields on an average twenty for one....

to be quite satisfied with the performance. Several of the missions, but particularly that of Santa Barbara, make a wine resembling claret, though not near so palatable, and they also distill an ardent spirit resembling arrack [Middle Eastern liquor].

In this part of California, besides the missions, there are several *pueblos*, or villages, occupied by Spaniards and their families, who have availed themselves of the privileges granted by the old government, and have relinquished the sword for the plowshare. There are also a few settlers who are farmers, but, with these exceptions, the country is almost uninhabited....

By Christmas day we had all remained sufficiently long in the harbor to contemplate our departure without regret: the eye had become familiar to the picturesque scenery of the bay, the pleasure of the chase had lost its fascination, and the roads to the mission and *presidio* were grown tedious and insipid. There was no society to enliven the hours, no incidents to vary one day from the other, and to use the expression of Donna Gonzales, California appeared to be as much out of the world as Kamschatka.

On the 26th, being ready for sea, I was obliged to relinquish the survey of this magnificent port, which possesses almost all the requisites for a great naval establishment and is so advantageously situated with regard to North America and China, and the Pacific in general, that it will, no doubt, at some future time, be of great importance.