Edwin Bryant
1846

About the same time Sir George Simpson was visiting Yerba Buena, the first California-bound wagon train to cross the Sierra arrived after a grueling six-month trek. The sixty-nine-member team had followed the Oregon Trail to present-day Idaho and split up, half going on to the Oregon territory and half—led by John Bidwell and John Bartelson—following the Humboldt River into California. Oregon was the more appealing destination and attracted the majority of settlers in the early 1840s because it featured unlimited land and no bothersome Mexican government. But glowing descriptions from Bidwell and other pioneer-cum-publicists like John Marsh and Lansford W. Hastings convinced more and more emigrants to choose California. Two hundred and fifty made the trip in 1845, and more than 500 came the following year. Like the mountain men who had forged their trails, most overland emigrants resisted integration into Spanish-speaking communities. Bringing their families and neighbors with them, these Americans created their own farm colonies segregated from Californio culture. In 1841 fewer than 400 foreigners from the U.S. and Europe lived in California; over the next seven years that number would steadily rise to about 7,000, outnumbering the Californio population.

The Californian who played the largest role in promoting westward migration was Johann August Sutter, a self-aggrandizing fugitive who abandoned a wife, five children, and massive debts in Switzerland in 1834. He arrived in Monterey in 1839 and, calling himself Captain John Sutter of "the Royal Swiss Guard of France," managed to secure a gigantic, 48,000-acre grant of land in the Sacramento Valley. At the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers he established a large fort, cattle ranch, and farm he dubbed New Helvetia, maintained by Hawaiian and Indian servants. "The Indians I did not marry or bury, I was everything [to]: patriarch, priest, father & judge," he boasted. Beginning with Bidwell in 1841, Sutter employed a growing number of American emigrants, as well as dispatched supplies to help wagon trains in trouble in the Sierra and sold land to new settlers once they arrived.

Another central figure in the ongoing Americanization of California was John Charles Frémont. Though of illegitimate birth, his charm and dashing good looks helped him secure a commission with the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers. At age twenty-seven he won the hand of sixteen-year-old Jessie Benton, the daughter of influential Senator Thomas Hart Benton. The senator helped Frémont gain authorization for a series of western exploring expeditions (including two to California) in the early 1840s. Frémont's reports of the expeditions—written with help from his young wife—were astonishingly popular with East Coast readers and catapulted the couple to national fame.

As egotistical and ambitious as Sutter, Frémont returned to California in early 1846 with sixty armed men, intending to test Governor José Castro's resolve. Frémont's timing was not accidental; he knew that there was a growing resentment among newly emigrated Americans toward the Mexican government and hoped to encourage a revolt. Castro expelled Frémont and his battalion to Oregon, setting off rumors (encouraged by Frémont) that Mexico was about to evict all foreign settlers. In June a group of disgruntled American squatters stole 170 horses from Castro's soldiers.

Emboldened by their success, they decided to capture Mariano Vallejo's home in Sonoma (an ironic choice because Vallejo, a well-respected retired military colonel, actually supported U.S. annexation of California).

Later that day the would-be revolutionaries fashioned a crude flag with a bear and star and declared the Bear Flag Republic of Independent California, telling the residents of Sonoma, "As enemies we will kill and destroy you! But as friends we will share with you all the blessings of liberty." They imprisoned Vallejo and a few others in Sutter's Fort while planning their next move. Frémont reappeared, christened the group his "California Battalion," and led their raid on the San Francisco *presidio* (by now little more than a muddy, ungarrisoned ruin). At this point, news reached them that President Polk, citing grievances but clearly coveting annexation of California, had officially declared war on Mexico two months earlier. The ridiculous Bear Flag Revolt, only a month old, promptly ended; Frémont volunteered to help U.S. Commodore Robert F. Stockton fight the Mexicans.

Both Sutter and Frémont would figure into the life of Edwin Bryant. Born near Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1805, Bryant had an unhappy childhood. His parents, Ichabod and Silence Bryant, were first cousins, and his father was frequently in prison, leaving Edwin to be raised by various relatives. Bryant left Massachusetts at age twenty-five for Kentucky, where he found work as a newspaper writer and editor. Stridently pro-Whig, Bryant became friends with Kentucky Senator Henry Clay and his family. The stresses of journalism took their toll on Bryant's health, and in 1846 he decided to accompany a wagon train to California and write a book about the experience. If expecting a vacation, he would soon learn better.

He left Louisville on April 18 and took a steamer to Independence, Missouri, origin of the Oregon and Santa Fe trails. Independence was a bustling outfitting center with a population of about 1,000; Bryant wrote that "the small town seemed to be literally overflowing with strangers of every grade of character and condition of life,

collected from all parts of the continents of America and Europe, civilized and uncivilized." By May, Bryant's emigrant train (led by William H. Russell) had joined dozens of others on the Oregon Trail. As they traveled west, a rumor circulated from wagon to wagon that war had broken out with Mexico. "We read it as a good joke in which even the ladies and children participate," scoffed Russell. On June 19 Bryant and ten other men separated from Russell's group in order to travel faster. West of Fort Bridger, Wyoming, a plethora of routes were available; Bryant chose "Hastings' Cut-off," a trail that wound south around Great Salt Lake and along the Humboldt River. A few days later, the Donner Party—unlike Bryant, burdened with wagons, oxen, and children—followed a slightly more southern path with famously disastrous results.

Bryant—weak, lean, and weather-beaten from his 3,000-mile journey—crossed into California on August 30 and rested for a few days at William Johnson's ranch on the Bear River. Johnson had on hand a copy of the first newspaper printed in California, the *Californian*, which described the ongoing Mexican War. "This seemed and sounded very odd," wrote Bryant. "We had been traveling in as straight a line as we could, crossing rivers, mountains, and deserts, nearly four months beyond the bounds of civilization, and for the greater distance beyond the boundaries of territory claimed by our government; but here, on the remotest confines of the world as it were, where we expected to visit and explore a foreign country, we found ourselves under American authority, and about to be 'annexed' to the American Union." From there Bryant went on to visit Sutter, who impressed him with his genteel, European manners and obvious wealth. He reached Yerba Buena on September 21, 1846, and learned that a U.S. flag had flown over the small port for more than two months.

A few weeks later Bryant volunteered to join charismatic Frémont in battle against Mexican army captain José María Flores in southern California, one of the final campaigns of the Mexican War. The fighting proved to be short-lived. With help from General

Stephen Kearny and hundreds of settlers like Bryant, the Americans quickly overwhelmed the Mexican forces, who were weakened by a chronic lack of gunpowder, dissension among its military leaders, and widespread hopelessness among its soldiers. Flores and Governor Pío Pico surrendered on January 13, 1847. Although official annexation would not occur until the drafting of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo a year later, for all intents and purposes the U.S. conquest of California was now complete.

Bryant was back in Yerba Buena by February 13. General Kearney, replacing Mexican officials with American ones, asked him to become the town's *alcalde*. Bryant served there for a year before returning overland to Louisville to finish *What I Saw in California*, published in 1848 to immense popularity. His straightforward newspaperman's style and thorough notations of time, landscape, and weather would be studied by the thousands of gold-seekers who followed Bryant's overland path in subsequent years. On his return trip to San Francisco in 1849, the other forty-niners treated him like a celebrity.

In middle-age Bryant retired to rural Kentucky and lived off book royalties and lecture fees. He made a last, ill-fated revisit to California in 1869, this time by train. The long trip left him bedridden from exhaustion, and he committed suicide in December 1869 by throwing himself out of a Louisville bedroom window to escape his pain. Given his lifelong ill-health, it is remarkable the amount of land Bryant managed to cover in his sixty-four years. *What I Saw in California* went through countless printings during and after the gold rush; today it provides a dependable, firsthand account of an intensely turbulent period in California history. This excerpt from his account begins on September 3, 1846, outside Sutter's Fort.

EDWIN BRYANT

from *What I Saw in California*

September 3. We remained encamped near Sutter's Fort, or Fort Sacramento, as subsequently it has been named. This morning we were visited by numerous Indians from the neighboring *rancherías*, who brought with them watermelons, muskmelons, and strings of pan-fish, taken from a small pond about half a mile distant, with a sort of hand trap. The Indians wade into the pond with their traps in hand and take with them the fish, sometimes by dozens at a haul. These they wished to trade for such small articles as we possessed and the cast-off clothing of the members of our party. Some of these Indians were partially clothed, others were entirely naked, and a portion of them spoke the Spanish language. They exhibited considerable sharpness in making a bargain, holding their wares at a high valuation, and although their desire to trade appeared to be strong, they would make no sacrifices to obtain the articles offered in exchange for them. But such was the desire of our men to obtain vegetables, of which they had been for so long a time deprived, that there was scarcely any article that they possessed which they would refuse to barter for them.

The Indians generally are well made and of good stature, varying from five feet four inches to five feet ten and eleven inches in height, with strong muscular developments. Their hair is long, black, and coarse, and their skin is a shade lighter than that of a mulatto. They appear to be indolent and averse from labor of every kind, unless combined with their sports and amusements, when they are as reckless of fatigue and danger as any class of men I have seen.

Sutter's Fort, 1849, by Joseph Warren Revere, a naval officer who came to California to fight in the Mexican War. *Courtesy of the California Historical Society, Templeton Crocker Collection, FN-30530.*

By invitation of Captain Sutter, addressed to myself and Mr. Jacob, we visited and dined at the fort. The fort is situated near the confluence of the Río de los Americanos and the Río Sacramento. The valley of the Sacramento is here of great width, and consequently the fort is surrounded by an extensive plain, bounded by distant mountains on the east and on the west. This plain exhibits every evidence of a most fertile soil. The grasses, although they are now brown and crisp from the periodical drought, still stand with their ripened seeds upon them, showing their natural luxuriance. Groves or parks of the evergreen oak relieve the monotony of the landscape and dot the level plain as far as the eye can reach.

Captain Sutter received us with manifestations of cordial hospitality. He is a gentleman between forty-five and fifty years of age, and in manners, dress, and general deportment, he approaches so near what we call the "old school gentleman," as to present a gulfy contrast from the rude society by which he is surrounded. Captain Sutter is a native of Switzerland and was at one time an officer in

John Augustus Sutter (1803–1880). *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.*

the French army. He emigrated to the United States and was naturalized. From thence, after a series of most extraordinary and romantic incidents, to relate which would furnish matter for a volume, he planted himself on the spot where his fort now stands—then a savage wilderness and in the midst of numerous and hostile tribes

of Indians. With the small party of men that he originally brought with him, he succeeded in defending himself against the Indians, until he constructed his first defensive building. He told me that several times, being hemmed in by his assailants, he had subsisted for many days upon grass alone. There is a grass in this valley that the Indians eat that is pleasant to the taste and nutritious. He succeeded by degrees in reducing the Indians to obedience, and by means of their labor, erected the spacious fortification, which now belongs to him.

The fort is a parallelogram, about 500 feet in length and 150 in breadth. The walls are constructed of *adobes*, or sun-dried bricks. The main building, or residence, stands near the center of the area, or court, enclosed by the walls. A row of shops, storerooms, and barracks are enclosed within and line the walls on every side. Bastions project from the angles, the ordnance mounted in which sweep the walls. The principal gates on the east and the south are also defended by heavy artillery, through portholes pierced in the walls. At this time the fort is manned by about fifty well-disciplined Indians and ten or twelve white men, all under the pay of the United States. These Indians are well-clothed and fed. The garrison is under the command of Mr. Kern, the artist of Captain [John C.] Frémont's exploring expedition.

The number of laboring Indians employed by Captain Sutter during the seasons of sowing and harvest is from two to three hundred. Some of these are clothed in shirts and blankets, but a large portion of them are entirely naked. They are paid so much per day for their labor, in such articles of merchandise as they may select from the store. Cotton cloth and handkerchiefs are what they most freely purchase. Common brown cotton cloth sells at one dollar per yard. A tin coin issued by Captain Sutter circulates among them, upon which is stamped the number of days that the holder has labored. These stamps indicate the value in merchandise to which the laborer or holder is entitled....

The laboring or field Indians about the fort are fed upon the offal of slaughtered animals and upon the bran sifted from the ground wheat. This is boiled in large iron kettles. It is then placed in wooden troughs standing in the court, around which the several messes seat themselves and scoop out with their hands this poor fodder. Bad as it is, they eat it with an apparent high relish; and no doubt it is more palatable and more healthy than the acorn mush, or *atole*, which constitutes the principal food of these Indians in their wild state.

The wheat crop of Captain Sutter, the present year (1846), is about 8,000 bushels. The season has not been a favorable one. The average yield to the acre Captain S. estimates at twenty-five bushels. In favorable seasons this yield is doubled; and if we can believe the statements often made upon respectable authority, it is sometimes quadrupled. There is no doubt that in favorable seasons—that is when the rains fall abundantly during the winter—the yield of wheat and all small grains in California is much greater per acre of land than in any part of the United States. The wheat fields of Captain S. are secured against the cattle and horses by ditches. Agriculture, among the native Californians, is in a very primitive state, and although Captain S. has introduced some American implements, still his ground is but imperfectly cultivated. With good cultivation the crops would be more certain and much more abundant. The crop from the same ground the second and third years, without sowing, is frequently very good.

Wheat is selling at the fort at two dollars and fifty cents per *fanega*, rather more than two bushels English measure. It brings the same price when delivered at San Francisco, near the mouth of the bay of San Francisco. It is transported from the Sacramento valley to a market in launches of about fifty tons burden. Unbolted flour sells at eight dollars per 100 pounds. The reason for this high price is the scarcity of flouring mills in the country. The mills that are now

going up in various places will reduce the price of flour, and probably they will soon be able to grind all the wheat raised in the country. The streams of California afford excellent water power, but the flour consumed by Captain Sutter is ground by a very ordinary horse mill.

I saw near the fort a small patch of hemp, which had been sown as an experiment, in the spring, and had not been irrigated. I never saw a ranker growth of hemp in Kentucky. Vegetables of several kinds appeared to be abundant and in perfection, but I shall speak more particularly of the agricultural productions of California in another place, when my knowledge of the country and its resources becomes, from observation, more general and perfect.

Captain Sutter's dining room and his table furniture do not present a very luxurious appearance. The room is unfurnished, with the exception of a common deal table standing in the center, and some benches, which are substitutes for chairs. The table, when spread, presented a correspondingly primitive simplicity of aspect and of viands. The first course consisted of good soup, served to each guest in a china bowl with silver spoons. The bowls, after they had been used for this purpose, were taken away and cleansed by the Indian servant, and were afterwards used as tumblers or goblets, from which we drank our water. The next course consisted of two dishes of meat, one roasted and one fried, and both highly seasoned with onions. Bread, cheese, butter, and melons constituted the dessert. I am thus particular because I wish to convey as accurately as I can the style and mode of living in California of intelligent gentlemen of foreign birth, who have been accustomed to all the luxuries of the most refined civilization.

It is not for the purpose of criticizing, but to show how destitute the people of this naturally favored country have been of many of the most common comforts of domestic life, owing to the wretched system of government which has heretofore existed. Such

has been the extortion of the government in the way of impost duties, that few supplies that are included among even the most ordinary elegancies of life have ever reached the inhabitants, and for these they have been compelled to pay prices that would be astonishing to a citizen of the United States or of Europe, and such as have impoverished the population. As a general fact, they cannot be obtained at any price, and hence those who have the ability to purchase are compelled to forego their use from necessity.

With our appetites, however, we enjoyed the dinner as much as if it had been served up in the most sumptuously-furnished dining saloon, with all the table appurtenances of polished silver, sparkling crystal, and snow-like porcelain. By our long journey we had learned to estimate the value of a thing for its actual utility and the amount of enjoyment it confers. The day is not distant when American enterprise and American ingenuity will furnish those adjuncts of civilization, of which California is now so destitute, and render a residence in this country one of the most luxurious upon the globe. The conversation at dinner turned upon the events that have recently occurred in the country, and that I shall narrate in another place.

From the 3rd to the 7th of September we remained encamped. Our camp is near an Indian *ranchería*. These *rancherías* consist of a number of huts constructed of a rib-work or frame of small poles or saplings in a conical shape, covered with straw, grass, or tule, a species of rush, which grows to the height of five or six feet. The huts are sometimes fifteen feet in diameter at their bases, and the number of them grouped together vary according to the number of the tribe which inhabits them. A different language in many respects is spoken at the different *rancherías*. In this remark I refer to the gentile Indians, as they are here called, and not to the christianized, the last of whom speak the Spanish. There was a large gathering at the *ranchería* on the night of the 6th to celebrate some event. Dancing,

singing, loud shouting, and howling were continued without intermission the whole night. One of their orgies consisted in fixing a scalp upon a pole and dancing around it, accompanying the dance with, at first, a low, melancholy howl, then with loud shrieks and groans, until the performers appeared to become frantic with excitement of some kind, it would be difficult to tell what. The noise made by them was such as to prevent sleep, although a quarter of a mile distant from our camp.

The Sacramento River, at this point, is a stream nearly half a mile in width. The tide rises and falls some two or three feet. The water is perfectly limpid and fresh. The river is said to be navigable for craft of 100 tons burden, at all seasons, a hundred miles above this place. In the season of high waters, from January to July, it is navigable a much greater distance. The Sacramento rises above latitude 42° north and runs from north to south nearly parallel with the coast of the Pacific, until it empties into the bay of San Francisco by several mouths in latitude 38 1/2° north. It is fringed with timber, chiefly oak and sycamore. Grapevines and a variety of shrubbery ornament its banks and give a most charming effect when sailing upon its placid and limpid current. I never saw a more beautiful stream. In the rainy season, and in the spring, when the snows on the mountains are melting, it overflows its banks in many places. It abounds in fish, the most valuable of which is the salmon. These salmon are the largest and the fattest I have ever seen. I have seen salmon taken from the Sacramento five feet in length. All of its tributaries are equally rich in the finny tribe. American enterprise will soon develop the wealth contained in these streams, which hitherto has been entirely neglected.

The site of the town of Nueva Helvetia, which has been laid out by Captain Sutter, is about a mile and a half from the Sacramento. It is on an elevation of the plain and not subject to overflow

when the waters of the river are at their highest known point. There are now but three or four small houses in this town, but I have little doubt that it will soon become a place of importance.

Near the *embarcadero* of New Helvetia is a large Indian "sweat house," or *temescál,* an appendage of most of the *rancherías.* The "sweat house" is the most important medical agent employed by these Indians. It has, I do not doubt, the effect of consigning many of them to their graves, long before their appointed time. A "sweat house" is an excavation in the earth, to the depth of six or eight feet, arched over with slabs split from logs. There is a single small aperture or skylight in the roof. These slabs are covered to the depth of several feet with earth. There is a narrow entrance, with steps leading down and into this subterraneous apartment. Rude shelves are erected around the walls, upon which the invalids repose their bodies. The door is closed and no air is admitted except from the small aperture in the roof, through which escapes the smoke of a fire kindled in the center of the dungeon. This fire heats the apartment until the perspiration rolls from the naked bodies of the invalids in streams. I incautiously entered one of these caverns during the operation above described and was in a few moments so nearly suffocated with the heat, smoke, and impure air that I found it difficult to make my way out.

In the afternoon of the 7th we received a note from Captain Sutter, stating that he had succeeded in obtaining a room in the fort for our accommodation and inviting us to accept of it. He sent two servants to assist in packing our baggage; and accepting the invitation, we took up our lodgings in the fort. By this change we were relieved from the annoyance of mosquitoes, which have troubled us much during the night at our encampment. But with this exception, so long have we been accustomed to sleeping in the open air, with no shelter but our blankets and the canopy of the heavens, that our

encampment was preferable to our quarters within the confined walls of the fort.

It is scarcely possible to imagine a more delightful temperature or a climate which is more agreeable and uniform. The sky is cloudless, without the slightest film of vapor apparent in all the vast azure vault. In the middle of the day the sun shines with great power, but in the shade it is nowhere uncomfortable. At night so pure is the atmosphere that the moon gives a light sufficiently powerful for the purposes of the reader or student who has good eyesight. There is no necessity of burning the "midnight oil." Nature here lights the candle for the bookworm.

On the 9th, we commenced preparations for leaving the fort for San Francisco, a journey by land of about 200 miles. Our intention was to leave early the next morning. While thus engaged, some couriers arrived from the settlements on the Sacramento, about 100 miles north, with the startling information that 1,000 Walla-Walla Indians, from Oregon, had made their appearance in the valley for hostile purposes. The couriers, who were themselves settlers, appeared to be in great alarm and stated that they had seen the advance party of the Walla-Wallas, and that their object was to assault the fort for a murder, which they alleged had been committed one or two years since, by an American upon a chief of their tribe, and for some indebtedness of Captain Sutter to them, in cattle, etc. In the event of a failure in their assault upon the fort, then they intended to drive off all the cattle belonging to the settlers in the valley. This was the substance of their information. It was so alarming that we postponed at once our departure for San Francisco and volunteered such assistance as we could render in defending the fort against this formidable invasion.

The Walla-Wallas are a powerful and warlike tribe of Indians, inhabiting a district of country on the Columbia River. They are

reported to be good marksmen and fight with great bravery and desperation. Their warriors are armed with good rifles and an abundance of ammunition, which they procure from the Hudson's Bay Company. They are rapidly advancing in civilization, and many of them have good farms under cultivation, with numerous herds of cattle and horses.

Couriers were immediately dispatched in every direction to apprise the settlers in the valley of the invasion, and to the nearest military posts for such assistance as they could render under the circumstances. The twelve pieces of artillery by which the fort is defended were put in order, and all inside were busily employed in preparing for the expected combat. Indian spies were also dispatched to reconnoiter and discover the position and actual number of the invaders.

The spies returned to the fort on the 11th without having seen the Walla-Walla invaders. A small party of some forty or fifty only are supposed to be about twenty-five or thirty miles distant, on the opposite side of the Sacramento. On the 12th, Lieutenant Revere[1] of the Navy, with a party of twenty-five men, arrived at the fort from Sonoma to reinforce the garrison; and on the morning of the 13th, it having been pretty well ascertained that the reported 1,000 hostile Walla-Wallas were a small party only of men, women, and children, whose disposition was entirely pacific, we determined to proceed immediately on our journey to San Francisco....

September 13. We commenced today our journey from New Helvetia to San Francisco. Our party consisted, including myself, of Colonel Russell, Dr. McKee of Monterey, Mr. Pickett, a traveler in the country, recently from Oregon, and an Indian servant, who

[1] Joseph Warren Revere (1812–1880), grandson of Paul Revere, came to California in 1845 onboard the *Portsmouth*. He raised the U.S. flag at Sonoma and went on to serve as a brigadier general for the Union in the Civil War.

had been furnished us by Captain Sutter. Starting about three o'clock p.m., we traveled in a south course over a flat plain until sunset and encamped near a small lake on the *rancho* of Mr. [Martin] Murphy, near the Cosçumne [Cosumnes] River, a tributary of the Sacramento, which heads near the foot of the Sierra Nevada. The stream is small, but the bottom lands are extensive and rich. Mr. Murphy has been settled in California about two years and, with his wife and several children, has resided at this place sixteen months, during which time he has erected a comfortable dwelling-house and other necessary buildings and conveniences. His wheat crop was abundant this year, and he presented us with as much milk and fresh butter as we desired. The grass on the upland plain over which we have traveled is brown and crisp from the annual drought. In the low bottom, it is still green. Distance: eighteen miles.

September 14. We crossed the Cosçumne River about a mile from our camp and traveled over a level plain covered with luxuriant grass and timbered with the evergreen oak, until three o'clock, when we crossed the Mickelemes [Mokelumne] River, another tributary of the Sacramento, and encamped on its southern bank in a beautiful grove of live-oaks. The Mickelemes, where we crossed it, is considerably larger than the Cosçumne. The soil of the bottom appears to be very rich and produces the finest qualities of grasses. The grass on the upland is also abundant, but at this time it is brown and dead. We passed through large tracts of wild oats during the day; the stalks are generally from three to five feet in length.

Our Indian servant, or *vaquero,* feigned sickness this morning, and we discharged him. As soon as he obtained his discharge, he was entirely relieved from the excruciating agonies under which he had affected to be suffering for several hours. Eating his breakfast and mounting his horse, he galloped off in the direction of the fort. We overtook this afternoon an English sailor named Jack, who was

traveling towards Monterey, and we employed him as cook and hostler for the remainder of the journey.

A variety of autumnal flowers, generally of a brilliant yellow, are in bloom along the beautiful and romantic banks of the rivulet. Distance: twenty-five miles.

September 15. Our horses were frightened last night by bears, and this morning, with the exception of those that were picketed, had strayed so far that we did not recover them until ten o'clock. Our route has continued over a flat plain, generally covered with luxuriant grass, wild oats, and a variety of sparkling flowers. The soil is composed of a rich argillaceous loam. Large tracts of the land are evidently subject to annual inundations. About noon we reached a small lake surrounded by tule. There being no trail for our guidance, we experienced some difficulty in shaping our course so as to strike the San Joaquín River at the usual fording place. Our man Jack, by some neglect or mistake of his own, lost sight of us, and we were compelled to proceed without him. This afternoon we saw several large droves of antelope and deer. Game of all kinds appears to be very abundant in this rich valley. Passing through large tracts of tule, we reached the San Joaquín River at dark and encamped on the eastern bank. Here we immediately made large fires and discharged pistols as signals to our man Jack, but he did not come into camp. Distance: thirty-five miles.

September 16. Jack came into camp while we were breakfasting, leading his tired horse. He had bivouacked on the plain, and fearful that his horse would break loose if he tied him, he held the animal by the bridle all night.

The ford of the San Joaquín is about forty or fifty miles from its mouth. At this season the water is at its lowest stage. The stream at the ford is probably 100 yards in breadth, and our animals

crossed it without much difficulty, the water reaching about midway of their bodies. Oak and small willows are the principal growth of wood skirting the river. Soon after we crossed the San Joaquín this morning, we met two men—couriers—bearing dispatches from Commodore Stockton,[2] the governor and commander-in-chief in California, to Sutter's Fort. Entering upon the broad plain, we passed, in about three miles, a small lake, the water of which was so much impregnated with alkali as to be undrinkable. The grass is brown and crisp, but the seed upon it is evidence that it had fully matured before the drought affected it. The plain is furrowed with numerous deep trails, made by the droves of wild horses, elk, deer, and antelope, which roam over and graze upon it. The hunting sportsman can here enjoy his favorite pleasure to its fullest extent.

Having determined to deviate from our direct course, in order to visit the *rancho* of Dr. Marsh,[3] we parted from Messrs. McRee and Pickett about noon. We passed during the afternoon several tule marshes, with which the plain of the San Joaquín is dotted. At a distance, the tule of these marshes presents the appearance of immense fields of ripened corn. The marshes are now nearly dry, and to shorten our journey we crossed several of them without difficulty. A month earlier, this would not have been practicable. I have but little doubt that these marshes would make fine rice plantations, and perhaps, if properly drained, they might produce the sugarcane.

While pursuing our journey we frequently saw large droves of wild horses and elk grazing quietly upon the plain. No spectacle of

[2] Commodore Robert F. Stockton (1795–1866) was the self-declared military governor of California from July 1846 to January 1847.

[3] John Marsh (1799–1856), former Harvard graduate, Indian agent, and amateur physician, arrived in California in 1836. Using his Harvard degree as a license to practice medicine, he opened California's first doctor's office in Los Angeles, accepting hides and cattle as payment. Famously cantankerous and miserly, Marsh bought a *rancho* near Mount Diablo (worked by local Indians) and was a tireless promoter of California's charms. Three of his Indian *vaqueros*, upset after years of maltreatment and low wages, murdered him in 1856.

moving life can present a more animated and beautiful appearance than a herd of wild horses. They were divided into droves of some one or two hundred. When they noticed us, attracted by curiosity to discover what we were, they would start and run almost with the fleetness of the wind in the direction toward us. But arriving within a distance of 200 yards, they would suddenly halt, and after bowing their necks into graceful curves and looking steadily at us a few moments, with loud snortings they would wheel about and bound away with the same lightning speed. These evolutions they would repeat several times, until having satisfied their curiosity, they would bid us a final adieu and disappear behind the undulations of the plain.

The herds of elk were much more numerous. Some of them numbered at least 2,000, and with their immense antlers, presented, when running, a very singular and picturesque appearance. We approached some of these herds within fifty yards before they took the alarm. Beef in California is so abundant, and of so fine a quality, that game is but little hunted and not much prized. Hence the elk, deer, and even antelope are comparatively very tame and rarely run from the traveler, unless he rides very near them. Some of these elk are as large as a medium-sized Mexican mule.

We arrived at the *rancho* of Dr. Marsh about five o'clock p.m., greatly fatigued with the day's ride. The residence of Dr. M. is romantically situated near the foot of one of the most elevated mountains in the range separating the valley of the San Joaquín from the plain surrounding the bay of San Francisco. It is called Mount Diablo and may be seen in clear weather a great distance. The dwelling of Dr. M. is a small, one-story house, rudely constructed of *adobes* and divided into two or three apartments. The flooring is of earth, like the walls. A table or two, and some benches and a bed, are all the furniture it contains. Such are the privations to which those who settle in new countries must submit. Dr. M. is a native of New England, a graduate of Harvard University, and a

gentleman of fine natural abilities and extensive scientific and literary acquirements. He emigrated to California some seven or eight years since, after having traveled through most of the Mexican states. He speaks the Spanish language fluently and correctly, and his accurate knowledge of Mexican institutions, laws, and customs was fully displayed in his conversation in regard to them. He obtained the grant of land upon which he now resides—some ten or twelve miles square—four or five years ago; and although he has been constantly harassed by the wild Indians, who have several times stolen all his horses and sometimes numbers of his cattle, he has succeeded in permanently establishing himself. The present number of cattle on his *rancho* is about 2,000, and the increase of the present year he estimates at 500.

I noticed near the house a vegetable garden, with the usual variety of vegetables. In another enclosure was the commencement of an extensive vineyard, the fruit of which (now ripe) exceeds in delicacy of flavor any grapes that I have ever tasted. This grape is not indigenous but was introduced by the *padres* when they first established themselves in the country. The soil and climate of California have probably improved it. Many of the clusters are eight and ten inches in length and weigh several pounds. The fruit is of medium size, and in color a dark purple. The rind is very thin, and when broken, the pulp dissolves in the mouth immediately. Although Dr. M. has just commenced his vineyard, he has made several casks of wine this year, which is now in a state of fermentation. I tasted here, for the first time, *aguardiente,* or brandy distilled from the Californian grape. Its flavor is not unpleasant, and age, I do not doubt, would render it equal to the brandies of France. Large quantities of wine and *aguardiente* are made from the extensive vineyards farther south. Dr. M. informed me that his lands had produced a hundredfold of wheat without irrigation. This yield seems almost incredible; but if we can believe the statements of men

of unimpeached veracity, there have been numerous instances of reproduction of wheat in California equaling and even exceeding this.

Some time in July, a vessel [the *Brooklyn*] arrived at San Francisco from New York, which had been chartered and freighted principally by a party of Mormon emigrants, numbering between two and three hundred, women and children included. These Mormons are about making a settlement for agricultural purposes on the San Joaquín River, above the *rancho* of Dr. Marsh. Two of the women and one of the men are now here, waiting for the return of the main party, which has gone up the river to explore and select a suitable site for the settlement. The women are young, neatly dressed, and one of them may be called good-looking. Captain Gant—formerly of the U.S. Army—in very bad health, is also residing here. He has crossed the Rocky Mountains eight times, and, in various trapping excursions, has explored nearly every river between the settlements of the United States and the Pacific Ocean.

The house of Dr. Marsh being fully occupied, we made our beds in a shed a short distance from it. Suspended from one of the poles forming the frame of this shed was a portion of the carcass of a recently slaughtered beef. The meat was very fat, the muscular portions of it presenting that marbled appearance produced by a mixture of the fat and lean, so agreeable to the sight and palate of the epicure. The horned cattle of California that I have thus far seen are the largest and the handsomest in shape that I ever saw. There is certainly no breed in the United States equaling them in size. They, as well as the horses, subsist entirely upon the indigenous grasses at all seasons of the year; and such are the nutritious qualities of the herbage, that the former are always in condition for slaughtering, and the latter have as much flesh upon them as is desirable, unless (which is often the case) they are kept up at hard work and denied the privilege of eating, or are broken down by hard riding. The varieties of grass are very numerous, and nearly all of them are heavily

seeded when ripe and are equal if not superior, as food for animals, to corn and oats. The horses are not as large as the breeds of the United States, but in point of symmetrical proportions and in capacity for endurance, they are fully equal to our best breeds. The distance we have traveled today I estimate at thirty-five miles.

September 17. The temperature of the mornings is most agreeable, and every other phenomenon accompanying it is correspondingly delightful to the senses. Our breakfast consisted of warm bread, made of unbolted flour; stewed beef, seasoned with *chile colorado,* a species of red pepper; and *frijoles,* a dark colored bean; with coffee. After breakfast I walked with Dr. Marsh to the summit of a conical hill, about a mile distant from his house, from which the view of the plain on the north, south, and east, and the more broken and mountainous country on the west is very extensive and highly picturesque. The hills and the plain are ornamented with the evergreen oak, sometimes in clumps or groves, at others standing solitary. On the summits and in the gorges of the mountains, the cedar, pine, and fir display their tall, symmetrical shapes; and the San Joaquín, at a distance of about ten miles, is belted by a dense forest of oak, sycamore, and smaller timber and shrubbery. The herds of cattle are scattered over the plain—some of them grazing upon the brown but nutritious grass; others sheltering themselves from the sun, under the wide-spreading branches of the oaks. The *toute ensemble* of the landscape is charming.

Leaving Dr. Marsh's about three o'clock p.m., we traveled fifteen miles over a rolling and well-watered country, covered generally with wild oats, and arrived at the residence of Mr. Robert Livermore[4] just before dark. We were most kindly and hospitably

[4] Robert Livermore (1799–1858) was an English sailor who abandoned his ship in California in 1822, married Josefa Higuera, and established a large *rancho* in present-day Livermore Valley.

received and entertained by Mr. L. and his interesting family. After our mules and baggage had been cared for, we were introduced to the principal room in the house, which consisted of a number of small *adobe* buildings, erected apparently at different times and connected together. Here we found chairs and, for the first time in California, saw a sideboard set out with glass tumblers and chinaware. A decanter of *aguardiente*, a bowl of loaf-sugar, and a pitcher of cold water from the spring were set before us; and being duly honored, had a most reviving influence upon our spirits as well as our corporeal energies. Suspended from the walls of the room were numerous coarse engravings—highly-colored with green, blue, and crimson paints—representing the Virgin Mary and many of the saints. These engravings are held in great veneration by the devout Catholics of this country. In the corners of the room were two comfortable-looking beds with clean white sheets and pillowcases, a sight with which my eyes have not been greeted for many months.

The table was soon set out and covered with a linen cloth of snowy whiteness, upon which were placed dishes of stewed beef—seasoned with *chile colorado—frijoles,* and a plentiful supply of *tortillas*, with an excellent cup of tea, to the merits of which we did ample justice. Never were men blessed with better appetites than we are at the present time.

Mr. Livermore has been a resident of California nearly thirty years; and having married into one of the wealthy families of the country, is the proprietor of some of the best lands for tillage and grazing. An *arroyo,* or small rivulet fed by springs, runs through his *rancho* in such a course that, if expedient, he could, without much expense, irrigate one or two thousand acres. Irrigation in this part of California, however, seems to be entirely unnecessary for the production of wheat or any of the small grains. To produce maize, potatoes, and garden vegetables, irrigation is indispensable. Mr.

Livermore has on his *rancho* about 3,500 head of cattle. His horses, during the late disturbances, have nearly all been driven off or stolen by the Indians. I saw in his *corral* a flock of sheep numbering several hundred. They are of good size, and the mutton is said to be of an excellent quality, but the wool is coarse. It is, however, well adapted to the only manufacture of wool that is carried on in the country—coarse blankets and *serapes*. But little attention is paid to hogs here, although the breeds are as fine as I have ever seen elsewhere. Beef being so abundant and of a quality so superior, pork is not prized by the native Californians.

The Señora L. is the first Hispano-American lady I have seen since arriving in the country. She was dressed in a white cambric robe, loosely banded round the waist, and without ornament of any kind, except several rings on her small, delicate fingers. Her complexion is that of a dark brunette, but lighter and more clear than the skin of most Californian women. The dark, lustrous eye; the long black and glossy hair; the natural ease, grace, and vivacity of manners and conversation—characteristic of Spanish ladies—were fully displayed by her from the moment of our introduction. The children, especially two or three little *señoritas*, were very beautiful and manifested a remarkable degree of sprightliness and intelligence. One of them presented me with a small basket wrought from a species of tough grass and ornamented with the plumage of birds of a variety of brilliant colors. It was a beautiful specimen of Indian ingenuity.

Retiring to bed about ten o'clock, I enjoyed, the first time for four months, the luxury of clean sheets with a mattress and a soft pillow. My enjoyment, however, was not unmixed with regret, for I noticed that several members of the family, to accommodate us with lodgings in the house, slept in the piazza outside. To have objected to sleeping in the house, however, would have been considered discourteous and offensive.

September 18. Early this morning a bullock was brought up and slaughtered in front of the house. The process of slaughtering a beef is as follows: a *vaquero*, mounted on a trained horse, and provided with a *lasso*, proceeds to the place where the herd is grazing. Selecting an animal, he soon secures it by throwing the noose of the *lasso* over the horns and fastening the other end around the pommel of the saddle. During the first struggles of the animal for liberty, which usually are very violent, the *vaquero* sits firmly in his seat and keeps his horse in such a position that the fury and strength of the beast are wasted without producing any other result than his own exhaustion. The animal, soon ascertaining that he cannot release himself from the rope, submits to be pulled along to the place of execution. Arriving here, the *vaquero* winds the *lasso* around the legs of the doomed beast and throws him to the ground, where he lies perfectly helpless and motionless. Dismounting from his horse, he then takes from his leggin the butcher knife that he always carries with him and sticks the animal in the throat. He soon bleeds to death, when, in an incredibly short space of time for such a performance, the carcass is flayed and quartered, and the meat is either roasting before the fire or simmering in the stewpan. The lassoing and slaughter of a bullock is one of the most exciting sports of the Californians; and the daring horsemanship and dexterous use of the lariat usually displayed on these occasions are worthy of admiration. I could not but notice the Golgotha-like aspect of the grounds surrounding the house. The bones of cattle were thickly strewn in all directions, showing a terrible slaughter of the four-footed tribe and a prodigious consumption of flesh.

A *carretada* of fossil oyster shells was shown me by Mr. Livermore, which had been hauled for the purpose of being manufactured into lime. Some of these shells were eight inches in length and of corresponding breadth and thickness. They were dug from a hill two or three miles distant, which is composed almost entirely

of this fossil. Several bones belonging to the skeleton of a whale, discovered by Mr. L. on the summit of one of the highest elevations in the vicinity of his residence, were shown to me. The skeleton when discovered was nearly perfect and entirely exposed, and its elevation above the level of the sea between one and two thousand feet. How the huge aquatic monster, of which this skeleton is the remains, managed to make his dry bed on the summit of an elevated mountain, more experienced geologists than myself will hereafter determine. I have an opinion on the subject, however, but it is so contrary in some respects to the received geological theories that I will not now hazard it.

Leaving Mr. Livermore's about nine o'clock a.m., we traveled three or four miles over a level plain, upon which immense herds of cattle were grazing. When we approached they fled from us, with as much alarm as herds of deer and elk. From this plain we entered a hilly country, covered to the summits of the elevations with wild oats and tufts or bunches of a species of [perennial bunch] grass, which remains green through the whole season. Cattle were scattered through these hills, and more sumptuous grazing they could not desire. Small streams of water, fed by springs, flow through the hollows and ravines, which, as well as the hillsides, are timbered with the evergreen oak and a variety of smaller trees. About two o'clock p.m., we crossed an *arroyo* that runs through a narrow gorge of the hills and struck an artificial wagon road, excavated and embanked so as to afford a passage for wheeled vehicles along the steep hillside. A little farther on we crossed a very rudely constructed bridge. These are the first signs of road-making I have seen in the country. Emerging from the hills, the southern arm of the bay of San Francisco came in view, separated from us by a broad and fertile plain some ten or twelve miles in width, sloping gradually down to the shore of the bay and watered by several small creeks and estuaries.

We soon entered through a narrow street the Mission of San José, or St. Joseph. Passing the squares of one-story *adobe* buildings, once inhabited by thousands of busy Indians, but now deserted, roofless, and crumbling into ruins, we reached the *plaza* in front of the church and the massive two-story edifices occupied by the *padres* during the flourishing epoch of the establishment. These were in good repair, but the doors and windows with the exception of one were closed, and nothing of moving life was visible except a donkey or two, standing near a fountain that gushed its waters into a capacious stone trough. Dismounting from our mules, we entered the open door, and here we found two Frenchmen dressed in sailor costume, with a quantity of coarse shirts, pantaloons, stockings, and other small articles, together with *aguardiente*, which they designed retailing to such of the natives in the vicinity as chose to become their customers. They were itinerant merchants—or peddlers—and had opened their wares here for a day or two only, or so long as they could find purchasers.

Having determined to remain here the residue of the day and the night, we inquired of the Frenchmen if there was any family in the place that could furnish us with food. They directed us to a house on the opposite side of the *plaza*, to which we immediately repaired. The *señora*, a dark-skinned and rather shriveled and filthy specimen of the fair sex—but with a black, sparkling, and intelligent eye—met us at the door of the miserable hovel and invited us in. In one corner of this wretched and foul abode was a pile of raw hides, and in another, a heap of wheat. The only furniture it contained were two small benches, or stools, one of which, being higher than the other, appeared to have been constructed for a table. We informed the *señora* that we were travelers and wished refreshment and lodgings for the night. "*Está bueno, señores, está bueno,*" was her reply; and she immediately left us, and opening the door of the kitchen, commenced the preparation of our dinner. The interior of

the kitchen, of which I had a good view through the door, was more revolting in its filthiness than the room in which we were seated. In a short time, so industrious was our hostess, our dinner—consisting of two plates of jerked beef (stewed and seasoned with *chile colorado*), a plate of *tortillas*, and a bowl of coffee—was set out upon the most elevated stool. There were no knives, forks, or spoons on the table. Our amiable landlady apologized for this deficiency of table furniture, saying that she was "*muy pobre*" (very poor) and possessed none of these table implements. "Fingers were made before forks," and in our recent travels we had learned to use them as substitutes, so that we found no difficulty in conveying the meat from the plates to our mouths.

Belonging to the mission are two gardens, enclosed by high *adobe* walls. After dinner we visited one of these. The area of the enclosure contains fifteen or twenty acres of ground, the whole of which is planted with fruit trees and grapevines. There are about 600 pear trees and a large number of apple and peach trees, all bearing fruit in great abundance and in full perfection. The quality of the pears is excellent, but the apples and peaches are indifferent. The grapes have been gathered, as I suppose, for I saw none upon the vines, which appeared healthy and vigorous. The gardens are irrigated with very little trouble from large springs that flow from the hills a short distance above them. Numerous aqueducts, formerly conveying and distributing water over an extensive tract of land surrounding the mission, are still visible, but as the land is not now cultivated, they at present contain no water.

The mission buildings cover fifty acres of ground, perhaps more, and are all constructed of *adobes* with tile roofs. Those houses or barracks that were occupied by the Indian families are built in compact squares, one story in height. They are generally partitioned into two rooms, one fronting on the street, the other upon a court or *corral* in the rear. The main buildings of the mission are

two stories in height, with wide corridors in front and rear. The walls are massive and, if protected from the winter rains, will stand for ages. But if exposed to the storms by the decay of the projecting roofs or by leaks in the main roof, they will soon crumble or sink into shapeless heaps of mud. I passed through extensive warehouses and immense rooms, once occupied for the manufacture of woolen blankets and other articles, with the rude machinery still standing in them, but unemployed. Filth and desolation have taken the place of cleanliness and busy life. The granary was very capacious, and its dimensions were an evidence of the exuberant fertility of the soil, when properly cultivated under the superintendence of the *padres*. The calaboose is a miserable dark room of two apartments, one with a small loophole in the wall, the other a dungeon without light or ventilation. The stocks, and several other inventions for the punishment of offenders, are still standing in this prison. I requested permission to examine the interior of the church, but it was locked up, and no person in the mission was in possession of the key. Its length I should suppose is from 100 to 120 feet, and its breadth between thirty and forty, with small exterior pretensions to architectural ornament or symmetry of proportions.

Returning from our rambles about the mission, we found that our landlady had been reinforced by an elderly woman, whom she introduced as "*mi madre,*" and two or three Indian *muchachas,* or girls, clad in a costume not differing much from that of our mother Eve. The latter were obese in their figures, and the mingled perspiration and filth standing upon their skins were anything but agreeable to the eye. The two *señoras*, with these handmaids near them, were sitting in front of the house, busily engaged in executing some needlework.

Supper being prepared and discussed, our landlady informed us that she had a husband, who was absent but would return in the

course of the night, and if he found strange men in the house, he would be much offended with her. She had therefore directed her *muchachas* to sweep out one of the deserted and half-ruined rooms on the opposite square, to which we could remove our baggage and in which we could lodge during the night; and as soon as the necessary preparations were made, we retired to our dismal apartment. The "compound of villainous smells" that saluted our nostrils when we entered our dormitory for the night augured unfavorably for repose. The place had evidently been the abode of horses, cattle, pigs, and foul vermin of every description. But with the aid of a dark-colored tallow candle, which gave just light enough to display the murkiness and filth surrounding us, we spread our beds in the cleanest places and laid down to rest. Distance traveled: eighteen miles.

September 19. Several Californians came into the mission during the night or early this morning; among them the husband of our hostess, who was very kind and cordial in his greetings. While our man Jack was saddling and packing the mules, they gathered around us to the number of a dozen or more and were desirous of trading their horses for articles of clothing; articles which many of them appeared to stand greatly in need of, but which we had not to part from. Their pertinacity exceeded the bounds of civility, as I thought; but I was not in a good humor, for the fleas, bugs, and other vermin, which infested our miserable lodgings, had caused me a sleepless night by goring my body until the blood oozed from the skin in countless places. These ruinous missions are prolific generators and the nurseries of vermin of all kinds, as the hapless traveler who tarries in them a few hours will learn to his sorrow. When these bloodthirsty assailants once make a lodgment in the clothing or bedding of the unfortunate victim of their attacks, such are their

courage and perseverance that they never capitulate. "Blood or death" is their motto—the war against them, to be successful, must be a war of extermination.

Poor as our hostess was, she nevertheless was reluctant to receive any compensation for her hospitality. We, however, insisted upon her receiving a dollar from each of us *(dos pesos),* which she finally accepted; and after shaking us cordially by the hand she bade us an affectionate *adiós,* and we proceeded on our journey.

From the mission of San José to the *pueblo* of San José the distance is fifteen miles, for the most part over a level and highly fertile plain, producing a variety of indigenous grasses, among which I noticed several species of clover and mustard, large tracts of which we rode through, the stalks varying from six to ten feet in height. The plain is watered by several *arroyos,* skirted with timber, generally the evergreen oak.

We met this morning a Californian *carreta,* or traveling cart, freighted with women and children, bound on a pleasure excursion. The *carreta* is the rudest specimen of the wheeled vehicle I have seen. The wheels are transverse sections of a log, and are usually about two-and-a-half feet in diameter, and varying in thickness from the center to the rim. These wheels are coupled together by an axletree, into which a tongue is inserted. On the axletree and tongue rests a frame, constructed of square pieces of timber, six or eight feet in length, and four or five in breadth, into which are inserted a number of stakes about four feet in length. This framework being covered and floored with raw hides, the carriage is complete. The *carreta* that we met was drawn by two yokes of oxen, driven by an Indian *vaquero,* mounted on a horse. In the rear were two *caballeros,* riding fine spirited horses, with gaudy trappings. They were dressed in steeple-crowned, glazed *sombreros, serapes* of fiery colors, velvet (cotton) *calzoneros,* white cambric *calzoncillos,* and leggins and shoes of undressed leather. Their spurs were of immense size.

The party halted as soon as we met them, the men touching their heavy *sombreros* and uttering the usual salutation of the morning, *"Buenos días, señores,"* and shaking hands with us very cordially. The same salutation was repeated by all the *señoras* and *señoritas* in the *carreta.* In dress and personal appearance the women of this party were much inferior to the men. Their skins were dark, sallow, and shriveled, and their costume, a loose gown and reboso, were made of very common materials. The children, however, were all handsome, with sparkling eyes and ruddy complexions. Women and children were seated, *à la Turque,* on the bottom of the *carreta,* there being no raised seats in the vehicle.

We arrived at the *pueblo* de San José about twelve o'clock. There being no hotels in California, we were much at loss where to apply for refreshments and lodgings for the night. Soon, however, we were met by Captain Fisher, a native of Massachusetts, but a resident of this country for twenty years or more, who invited us to his house. We were most civilly received by Señora F., who, although she did not speak English, seemed to understand it very well. She is a native of the southern Pacific coast of Mexico, and a lady of fine manners and personal appearance. Her eldest daughter, about thirteen years of age, is very beautiful. An excellent dinner was soon set out, with a variety of the native wines of California and other liquors. We could not have felt ourselves more happy and more at home, even at our own firesides and in the midst of our own families.

The *pueblo* de San José is a village containing some six or eight hundred inhabitants. It is situated in what is called the *pueblo* valley, about fifteen miles south of the southern shore of the bay of San Francisco. Through a navigable creek, vessels of considerable burden can approach the town within a distance of five or six miles. The *embarcadero,* or landing, I think, is six miles from the *pueblo.* The fertile plain between this and the town, at certain seasons of the

year, is sometimes inundated. The *pueblo* valley, which is eighty or 100 miles in length, varying from ten to twenty in breadth, is well watered by the Río Santa Clara and numerous *arroyos,* and is one of the most fertile and picturesque plains in California. For pastoral charms, fertility of soil, variety of productions, and delicious voluptuousness of climate and scenery, it cannot be surpassed. This valley, if properly cultivated, would alone produce breadstuffs enough to supply millions of population. The buildings of the *pueblo*, with few exceptions, are constructed of *adobes*, and none of them have even the smallest pretensions to architectural taste or beauty. The church, which is situated near the center of the town, exteriorly resembles a huge Dutch barn. The streets are irregular, every man having erected his house in a position most convenient to him. Aqueducts convey water from the Santa Clara river to all parts of the town. In the main *plaza*, hundreds—perhaps thousands—of squirrels, whose abodes are underground, have their residences. They are of a brownish color and about the size of our common gray squirrel. Emerging from their subterraneous abodes, they skip and leap about over the *plaza* without the least concern, no one molesting them.

The population of the place is composed chiefly of native Californian land proprietors. Their *ranchos* are in the valley, but their residences and gardens are in the town. We visited this afternoon the garden of Señor Don Antonio Suñol.[5] He received us with much politeness and conducted us through his garden. Apples, pears, peaches, figs, oranges, and grapes, with other fruits that I do not now recollect, were growing and ripening. The grapevines were bowed to the ground with the luxuriance and weight of the yield; and more delicious fruit I never tasted. From the garden we crossed

[5] Spanish-born Antonio María Suñol (1800–1865) came to California in 1818 while serving in the French navy. He jumped ship in Monterey, married into the prominent Bernal family, and worked a *rancho* near the present-day city of Fremont.

over to a flouring mill recently erected by a son-in-law of Don Antonio, a Frenchman by birth. The mill is a creditable enterprise to the proprietor, and he will coin money from its operations.

The *pueblo* de San José is one of the oldest settlements in Alta California. Captain Fisher pointed out to me a house built of *adobes*, which has been standing between eighty and ninety years, and no house in the place appeared to be more substantial or in better repair. A garrison, composed of marines from the United States ships and volunteers enlisted from the American settlers in the country, is now stationed here. The post is under the command of Purser Watmough, of the United States sloop-of-war *Portsmouth,* commanded by Captain [John] Montgomery. During the evening I visited several public places (bar-rooms) where I saw men and women engaged promiscuously at the game of monte. Gambling is a universal vice in California. All classes and both sexes participate in its excitements to some extent. The games, however, while I was present, were conducted with great propriety and decorum so far as the native Californians were concerned. The loud swearing and other turbulent demonstrations generally proceeded from the unsuccessful foreigners. I could not but observe the contrast between the two races in this respect. The one bore their losses with stoical composure and indifference; the other announced each unsuccessful bet with profane imprecations and maledictions. Excitement prompted the hazards of the former, avarice the latter.

September 20. The morning was cloudy and cool; but the clouds broke away about nine o'clock, and the sun shone from a vaporless sky, as usual. We met, at the *pueblo*, Mr. Grove Cook, a native of Gerrard County, Kentucky, but for many years a resident of California. He is the proprietor of a *rancho* in the vicinity. We determined to leave our mules in charge of Mr. Cook's *vaquero* and proceed to San Francisco on hired horses. The distance from the

pueblo de San José to San Francisco is called sixty miles. The time occupied in performing the journey—on Californian horses at Californian speed—is generally six or seven hours. Procuring horses for the journey and leaving our baggage, with the exception of a change of clothing, we left the *pueblo* about eleven o'clock a.m.

The Mission of Santa Clara is situated about two-and-a-half miles from the town. A broad *alameda*, shaded by stately trees (elms and willows) planted by the *padres,* extends nearly the entire distance, forming a most beautiful drive or walk for equestrians or pedestrians. The motive of the *padres* in planting this avenue was to afford the devout *señoras* and *señoritas* a shade from the sun when walking from the *pueblo* to the church at the mission to attend Mass. A few minutes over the smooth, level road, at the rapid speed of our fresh Californian horses, brought us to the mission, where we halted to make our observations. This mission is not so extensive in its buildings as that of San José, but the houses are generally in better repair. They are constructed of *adobes*. The church was open, and entering the interior, I found the walls hung with coarse paintings and engravings of the saints, etc. The chancel is decorated with numerous images and symbolical ornaments used by the priests in their worship. Gold paper and tinsel, in barbaric taste, are plastered without stint upon nearly every object that meets the eye, so that when on festive occasions the church is lighted, it must present a very glittering appearance.

The rich lands surrounding the mission are entirely neglected. I did not notice a foot of ground under cultivation, except the garden enclosure, which contained a variety of fruits and plants of the temperate and tropical climates. From want of care these are fast decaying. Some excellent pears were furnished us by Mrs. Bennett, an American lady of amazonian proportions, who, with her family of sons, has taken up her residence in one of the buildings of the mission. The picture of decay and ruin presented by this once

flourishing establishment, surrounded by a country so fertile and scenery so enchanting, is a most melancholy spectacle to the passing traveler and speaks a language of loud condemnation against the government.

Proceeding on our journey, we traveled fifteen miles over a flat plain, timbered with groves and parks of evergreen oaks, and covered with a great variety of grasses, wild oats, and mustard. So rank is the growth of mustard in many places that it is with difficulty that a horse can penetrate through it. Numerous birds flitted from tree to tree, making the groves musical with their harmonious notes. The black-tailed deer bounded frequently across our path, and the lurking and stealthy *coyotes* were continually in view. We halted at a small cabin, with a *corral* near it, in order to breathe our horses and refresh ourselves. Captain Fisher had kindly filled a small sack with bread, cheese, roasted beef, and a small jug of excellent schiedam. Entering the cabin, the interior of which was cleanly, we found a solitary woman—young, neatly dressed, and displaying many personal charms. With the characteristic ease and grace of a Spanish woman, she gave the usual salutation for the hour of the day, *"Buenas tardes, señores caballeros,"* to which we responded by a suitable salutation. We requested of our hostess some water, which she furnished us immediately in an earthen bowl. Opening our sack of provisions, we spread them upon the table and invited the *señora* to partake of them with us, which invitation she accepted without the slightest hesitation and with much good nature, vivacity, and even thankfulness for our politeness. There are no women in the world for whose manners nature has done so much, and for whom art and education, in this respect, have done so little, as these Hispano-American females on the coast of the Pacific. In their deportment towards strangers they are queens, when, in costume, they are peasants. None of them, according to our tastes, can be called beautiful; but what they want in complexion and regularity

of feature is fully supplied by their kindliness, the soul and sympathy which beams from their dark eyes, and their grace and warmth of manners and expression.

While enjoying the picnic with our agreeable hostess, a *caballada* was driven into the *corral* by two *vaqueros,* and two gentlemen soon after came into the house. They were Messrs. Lightson and Murphy, from the *pueblo*, bound for San Francisco, and had stopped to change their horses. We immediately made ready to accompany them and were soon on the road again, traveling at racehorse speed—these gentlemen having furnished us with a change of horses, in order that we might be able to keep up with them.

To account for the fast traveling in California on horseback, it is necessary to explain the mode by which it is accomplished. A gentleman who starts upon a journey of 100 miles and wishes to perform the trip in a day will take with him ten fresh horses and a *vaquero*. The eight loose horses are placed under the charge of the *vaquero,* and are driven in front, at the rate of ten or twelve miles an hour, according to the speed that is required for the journey. At the end of twenty miles, the horses that have been rode are discharged and turned into the *caballada,* and horses that have not been rode, but driven along without weight, are saddled and mounted and rode at the same speed, and so on to the end of the journey. If a horse gives out from inability to proceed at this gait, he is left on the road. The owner's brand is on him, and if of any value, he can be recovered without difficulty. But in California, no one thinks of stopping on the road on account of the loss of a horse or his inability to travel at the rate of ten or twelve miles an hour. Horseflesh is cheap, and the animal must go as long as he can, and when he cannot travel longer he is left, and another horse is substituted.

Twenty-five miles, at a rapid gait over a level and fertile plain, brought us to the *rancho* of Don Francisco Sanchez, where we halted to change horses. Breathing our animals a short time, we

resumed our journey and reached the Mission of San Francisco Dolores, three miles from the town of San Francisco, just after sunset. Between the mission and the town the road is very sandy, and we determined to remain here for the night, corralling the loose animals and picketing those we rode. It was some time, however, before we could find a house to lodge in. The foreign occupants of the mission buildings, to whom we applied for accommodations for the night, gave us no satisfaction. After several applications, we were at last accommodated by an old and very poor Californian Spaniard, who inhabited a small house in one of the ruinous squares, formerly occupied by the operative Indians. All that he had (and it was but little) was at our disposal. A more miserable supper I never sat down to; but the spirit of genuine hospitality in which it was given imparted to the poor viands a flavor that rendered the entertainment almost sumptuous—in my imagination. A cup of water cheerfully given to the weary and thirsty traveler, by him who has no more to part with, is worth a cask of wine grudgingly bestowed by the stingy or the ostentatious churl. Notwithstanding we preferred sleeping on our own blankets, these poor people would not suffer us to do it, but spread their own pallets on the earth floor of their miserable hut, and insisted so strongly upon our occupying them that we could not refuse.

September 21. We rose at daylight. The morning was clear, and our horses were shivering with the cold. The Mission of San Francisco is situated at the northern terminus of the fertile plain over which we traveled yesterday, and at the foot, on the eastern side, of the coast range of mountains. These mountains are of considerable elevation. The shore of the bay of San Francisco is about two miles distant from the mission. An *arroyo* waters the mission lands and empties into the bay. The church of the mission and the main buildings contiguous are in tolerable repair. In the latter, several Mormon

families, who arrived in the ship *Brooklyn* from New York, are quartered. As in the other missions I have passed through, the Indian quarters are crumbling into shapeless heaps of mud.

Our aged host, notwithstanding he is a pious Catholic and considers us as heretics and heathens, gave us his benediction in a very impressive manner when we were about to start. Mounting our horses at sunrise, we traveled three miles over low ridges of sand hills, with sufficient soil, however, to produce a thick growth of scrubby evergreen oak, and brambles of hawthorn, wild currant and gooseberry bushes, rosebushes, briers, etc. We reached the residence of Wm. A. Leidesdorff,[6] Esquire, late American vice-consul at San Francisco, when the sun was about an hour high. The morning was calm and beautiful. Not a ripple disturbed the placid and glassy surface of the magnificent bay and harbor, upon which rested at anchor thirty large vessels consisting of whalemen, merchantmen, and the U.S. sloop-of-war *Portsmouth,* Captain Montgomery. Besides these, there were numerous small craft, giving to the harbor a commercial air, of which some of the large cities on the Atlantic coast would feel vain. The bay, from the town of San Francisco due east, is about twelve miles in breadth. An elevated range of hills bounds the view on the opposite side. These slope gradually down, and between them and the shore there is a broad and fertile plain, which is called the Contra Costa. There are several small islands in the bay, but they do not present a fertile appearance to the eye.

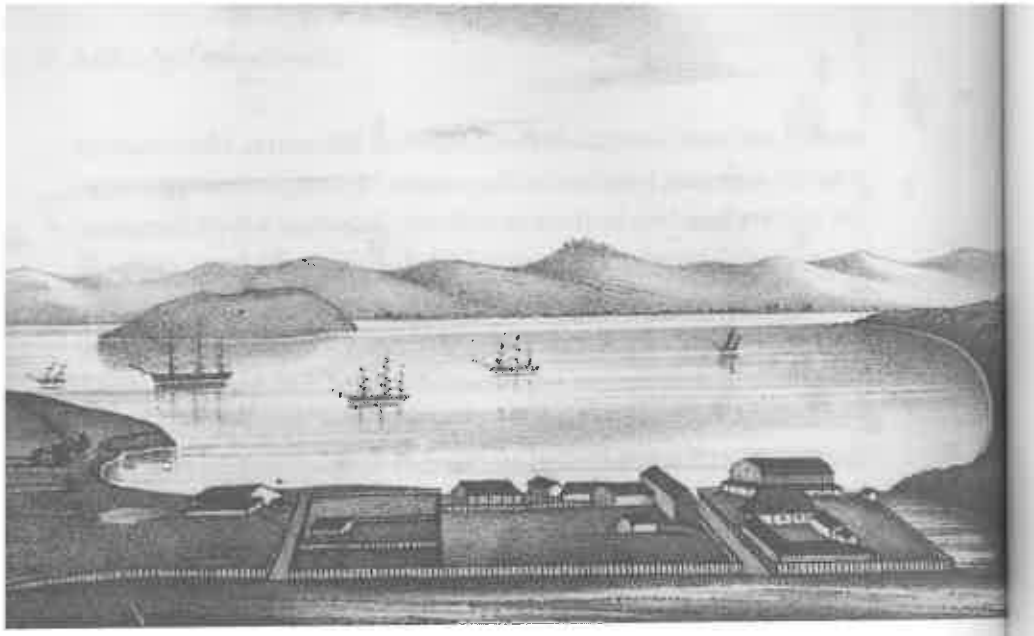
We were received with every mark of respectful attention and cordial hospitality by Mr. Leidesdorff. Mr. L. is a native of Denmark, was for some years a resident of the United States, but subsequently the captain of a merchant vessel, and has been established

[6] William Alexander Leidesdorff (1810–1848), born in the Virgin Islands, was the son of a Danish planter and a woman of African descent. After making a small fortune as a New Orleans cotton broker, Leidesdorff moved to Yerba Buena in 1841 and constructed the City Hotel. He died of typhus in 1848.

at this place as a merchant some five or six years. The house in which he resides, now under the process of completion, is the largest private building in the town. Being shown to a well-furnished room, we changed our travel soiled clothing for a more civilized costume, by which time breakfast was announced, and we were ushered into a large dining hall. In the center stood a table, upon which was spread a substantial breakfast of stewed and fried beef, fried onions and potatoes, bread, butter, and coffee. Our appetites were very sharp, and we did full justice to the merits of the fare before us. The servants waiting upon the table were an Indian *muchachito* and *muchachita,* about ten or twelve years of age. They had not been long from their wild *rancherías* and knew but little of civilized life. Our host, however, who speaks, I believe, nearly every living language—whether of Christian, barbarian, or savage nations—seemed determined to impress upon their dull intellects the forms and customs of civilization. He scolded them with great vivacity, sometimes in their own tongue, sometimes in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, German, and English, in accordance with the language in which he was thinking at the moment. It seemed to me that the little fat Indians were more confused than enlightened by his emphatic instructions. At the table, besides ourselves and host, was Lieutenant W.A. Bartlett,[7] of the U.S. sloop-of-war *Portsmouth,* now acting as *alcalde* of the town and district of San Francisco.

The *Portsmouth,* Commander Montgomery, is the only United States vessel of war now lying in the harbor. She is regarded as the finest vessel of her class belonging to our Navy. By invitation of Lieutenant Bartlett, I went on board of her between ten and eleven o'clock. The crew and officers were assembled on deck to

[7] Washington Allon Bartlett (ca.1820–1871) came to California onboard the *Portsmouth* and—because he could speak Spanish—was named Yerba Buena's first American *alcalde*. In January 1847 he renamed the town San Francisco.



"View of the Place of Anchorage at Yerba Buena in St. Francisco," ca. 1847, by F. Swinton. *Courtesy of the California Historical Society, FN-31312.*

attend Divine service. They were all dressed with great neatness and seemed to listen with deep attention to the Episcopal service and a sermon, which were read by Commander Montgomery, who is a member of the church.

In the afternoon I walked to the summit of one of the elevated hills in the vicinity of the town, from which I had a view of the entrance to the bay of San Francisco, and of the Pacific Ocean. A thick fog hung over the ocean outside of the bay. The deep roar of the eternally restless waves, as they broke one after another upon the beach, or dashed against the rock-bound shore, could be heard with great distinctness, although some five or six miles distant. The entrance from the ocean into the bay is about a mile-and-a-half in breadth. The waters of the bay appear to have forced a passage through the elevated ridge of hills next to the shore of the Pacific. These rise abruptly on either side of the entrance. The water at the entrance and inside is of sufficient depth to admit the largest ship

that was ever constructed; and so completely land-locked and protected from the winds is the harbor, that vessels can ride at anchor in perfect safety in all kinds of weather. The capacity of the harbor is sufficient for the accommodation of all the navies of the world.

The town of San Francisco is situated on the south side of the entrance, fronting on the bay, and about six miles from the ocean. The flow and ebb of the tide are sufficient to bring a vessel to the anchorage in front of the town and to carry it outside, without the aid of wind, or even against an unfavorable wind. A more approachable harbor, or one of greater security, is unknown to navigators. The permanent population of the town is at this time between 100 and 200,[8] and is composed almost exclusively of foreigners. There are but two or three native Californian families in the place. The transient population, and at present it is quite numerous, consists of the garrison of marines stationed here, and the officers and crews attached to the merchant and whale ships lying in the harbor. The houses, with a few exceptions, are small *adobes* and frames, constructed without regard to architectural taste, convenience, or comfort. Very few of them have either chimneys or fireplaces. The inhabitants contrive to live the year round without fires, except for cooking. The position of San Francisco for commerce is, without doubt, superior to any other port on the Pacific coast of North America. The country contiguous and tributary to it cannot be surpassed in fertility, healthfulness of climate, and beauty of scenery. It is capable of producing whatever is necessary to the sustenance of man, and many of the luxuries of tropical climates, not taking into the account the mineral wealth of the surrounding hills and mountains, which there is reason to believe is very great. This place is, doubtless, destined to become one of the largest and most

[8] Bryant's footnote: "This was September 1846. In June 1847, when I left San Francisco on my return to the United States, the population had increased to about 1,200, and houses were rising in all directions."

opulent commercial cities in the world, and under American authority it will rise with astonishing rapidity. The principal merchants now established here are Messrs. Leidesdorff, Grimes & Davis, and Frank Ward, a young gentleman recently from New York. These houses carry on an extensive and profitable commerce with the interior, the Sandwich Islands, Oregon, and the southern coast of the Pacific. The produce of Oregon for exportation is flour, lumber, salmon, and cheese; of the Sandwich Islands, sugar, coffee, and preserved tropical fruits.

California, until recently, has had no commerce in the broad signification of the term. A few commercial houses of Boston and New York have monopolized all the trade on this coast for a number of years. These houses have sent out ships freighted with cargoes of dry goods and a variety of knick-knacks saleable in the country. The ships are fitted up for the retail sale of these articles, and trade from port to port, vending their wares on board to the *rancheros* at prices that would be astonishing at home. For instance, the price of common brown cotton cloth is one dollar per yard, and other articles in this and even greater proportion of advance upon home prices. They receive in payment for their wares, hides and tallow. The price of a dry hide is ordinarily one dollar and fifty cents. The price of tallow I do not know. When the ship has disposed of her cargo, she is loaded with hides and returns to Boston, where the hides bring about four or five dollars, according to the fluctuations of the market. Immense fortunes have been made by this trade; and between the government of Mexico and the traders on the coast, California has been literally skinned, annually, for the last thirty years. Of natural wealth the population of California possesses a superabundance and are immensely rich; still, such have been the extortionate prices that they have been compelled to pay for their commonest artificial luxuries and wearing apparel, that generally they are but indifferently provided with the ordinary necessaries of

civilized life. For a suit of clothes, which in New York or Boston would cost seventy-five dollars, the Californian has been compelled to pay five times that sum in hides at one dollar and fifty cents; so that a *caballero,* to clothe himself genteelly, has been obliged, as often as he renewed his dress, to sacrifice about 200 of the cattle on his *rancho*. No people, whether males or females, are more fond of display; no people have paid more dearly to gratify this vanity; and yet no civilized people I have seen are so deficient in what they most covet....

On the 21st, by invitation of Captain Montgomery, I dined on board of the sloop-of-war *Portsmouth*. The party, including myself, consisted of Colonel Russell, Mr. Jacob, Lieutenant Bartlett, and a son of Captain M. There are few if any officers in our Navy more highly and universally esteemed for their moral qualities and professional merits than Captain M. He is a sincere Christian, a brave officer, and an accomplished gentleman. Under the orders of Commodore [John Drake] Sloat, he first raised the American flag in San Francisco. We spent the afternoon most agreeably, and the refined hospitality, courteous manners, and intelligent and interesting conversation of our host made us regret the rapidly fleeting moments. The wines on the table were the produce of the vine of California, and having attained age, were of an excellent quality in substance and flavor.

I attended a supper party given this evening by Mr. Frank Ward. The party was composed of citizens of the town and officers of the Navy and the merchant and whale ships in the harbor. In such a company as was here assembled, it was very difficult for me to realize that I was many thousand miles from home, in a strange and foreign country. All the faces about me were American, and there was nothing in scene or sentiment to remind the guests of their remoteness from their native shores. Indeed, it seems to be a settled opinion that California is henceforth to compose a part of the

United States, and every American who is now here considers himself as treading upon his own soil, as much as if he were in one of the old thirteen revolutionary states.