

SIR GEORGE SIMPSON

1841-42

Yerba Buena, the tiny anchorage in San Francisco Bay where Dana's ship docked in 1836, was founded a year earlier by William A. Richardson. An English whaler who deserted his ship in 1822, Richardson adopted Catholicism and married into a prominent Californio family. After the secularization order, he opened a modest trading post a few miles east of San Francisco's *presidio* opposite Yerba Buena island. The settlement began as a single tent, later a shanty of rough boards. By 1841 Yerba Buena consisted of several *adobe* buildings and a scattering of sheds and cattle pens.

Californio society managed to integrate most foreigners (like Richardson) who arrived in California via ship but had a harder time with the growing number of American mountain men who crossed the Sierra Nevada in the 1830s seeking beaver furs. Such trailblazers as James Ohio Pattie, Ewing Young, William Wolfskill, and Joseph Reddeford Walker improved upon Jedediah Strong Smith's 1826 route. They forged the Oregon and California trails and revived the Old Spanish Trail, routes used by subsequent wagon trains. Those mountain men who stayed in California (such as Job Dye, Isaac Graham, Isaac Sparks, Jonathan T. Warner, and Isaac Williams) usually kept their American citizenship and felt little desire to learn Spanish.

Americans were not the only trappers to penetrate California's borders in the 1830s. Britain's Hudson's Bay Company, enjoying a monopoly of the Canadian fur trade after merging with rival North West Company in 1821, began sending annual expeditions to hunt beaver in the streams of the Central Valley in the mid-1830s. In early 1841 it established a store and warehouse alongside William A. Richardson's trading post in Yerba Buena. There was talk in England of a possible British annexation of California.

It is telling that this British attention on California worried the United States more than Mexico. Every visitor to California remarked on the obvious weakness of Mexican control, and the U.S. was determined to be the nation to test it. In 1835 President Andrew Jackson unsuccessfully offered Mexico \$3.5 million for San Francisco Bay and the land north of it. Soon after, American military expeditions—ostensibly exploring in the Pacific Northwest—increasingly began to wander into Mexican territory. The near-extinction of the sea otter meant Russia was no longer a threat, but France and England showed just enough interest in the region to make U.S. officials nervous.

Sir George Simpson's visit to California in 1841 grew directly out of this unsettled state of affairs. Born in Ross-shire, Scotland, in 1787, he worked during his teenage years as an apprentice for his uncle at the sugar trading company Graham & Simpson. As unscrupulous as he was ambitious, Simpson rose quickly through the ranks of the Hudson's Bay Company. Before his fortieth birthday, he was named governor of the company's extensive holdings in all of Canada, a title he held for thirty years.

Simpson was wise enough to realize that for the Company to remain in control of such a vast, trackless land with only a few hundred men, it would have to secure the trust of the region's Indians. Therefore he encouraged intermarriage between Company officers and the daughters of native potentates, acted as an impartial arbiter of local disputes, and did not attempt to force change into the Indians' lives. While Simpson dealt fairly with the Indians in business, he

had little respect for them as individuals. In his early years with the Company, he kept a succession of Indian mistresses whom he referred to in letters as his "bits of brown" and "little articles." As he became jaded or they pregnant, they were replaced without hesitation. Simpson sired at least three mixed-blood sons with these mistresses; of illegitimate birth himself, he provided his sons with an elementary school education and jobs in the fur-trade business, but made it clear he would grant no further favors. In 1830, he married a respectable Englishwoman (who happened to be his first cousin) and adopted puritanical views that in his younger days he would have found most inconvenient to practice.

A great admirer of Napoleon, Simpson no doubt felt he deserved his nickname as the "Little Emperor" of the North. Like Junípero Serra, another diminutive and industrious leader, Simpson drove himself tirelessly. A contemporary described him as "the toughest-looking old fellow I ever saw, built...like one of those massy pillars one sees in an old country church....He is a man whom nothing will kill." To underlings he was a terrifying dictator; at one point in the 1830s he compiled a "character book" in which he expounded in considerable detail on the failings of each of the Company's servants.

For his achievements, Simpson was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1841. Sir George then embarked on a voyage around the world, crossing the Atlantic on steamer and trekking across Canada inspecting the many posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. Before turning north for Siberia, he decided on a lengthy detour to California to determine whether to invest the Company's considerable resources in a foreign land with an uncertain future. He was interested in purchasing Fort Ross from the Russians and suspected they were desperate to sell; they were asking for \$30,000, but Simpson wrote the Hudson's Bay Company directors that he had "no doubt the whole might be purchased at from \$15,000 to \$20,000." When he reached Yerba Buena in December 1841 he learned the Russians had sold out two weeks earlier to a Swiss émigré named John Sutter. Simpson went on to visit Sonoma, Monterey, and Los Angeles. In Santa Barbara he met


Doña Concepción Argüello—by now a middle-aged nun—whom he boorishly informed that Count Rezanov, her betrothed, was long dead.

Rather than any special sensitivity or literary excellence, it is Simpson's consummate expertise in the economics of the frontier that gives his account of California lasting value. It is almost certain that the published version of *An Overland Journey Round the World*, while based on a journal Simpson dictated to his secretary, was polished and edited by a team of later writers. It was not published until 1847, two years after Simpson closed the Hudson's Bay Company outpost in Yerba Buena and conceded California to the United States. *An Overland Journey Round the World* offers Simpson's tantalizing vision of a British North Pacific that never came to pass.

The Hudson's Bay Company retreated out of California in 1845 but held its monopoly over Canadian lands until forcibly broken up by British Parliament in 1859. A lifelong Company man, Simpson himself testified before Parliament on behalf of his employer, but to no avail. He died the following year. This account of his visit to California begins on December 30, 1841.

SIR GEORGE SIMPSON

from *An Overland Journey
Around the World*

 On the morning of [December] 30th, a light breeze enabled us again to get under way and to work into the port. After crossing the bar, on which, however, there is a sufficient depth of water, we entered a strait of about two miles in width, just narrow enough for the purposes of military defense, observing, on the southern side of the mouth, a fort well-situated for commanding the passage, but itself commanded by a hill behind. This fort is now dismantled and dilapidated; nor are its remains likely to last long, for the soft rock, on the very verge of which they already hang, is fast crumbling into the undermining tide beneath. A short distance beyond the fort, and on the same side of the strait, is situated a square of huts, distinguished by the lofty title of "Presidio of San Francisco" and tenanted, for garrisoned it is not, by a commandant and as many soldiers as might, if all told, muster the rank and file of a corporal's party; and though here the softness of the rock does nothing to aid the national alacrity in decaying, yet the *adobes*, or unbaked bricks, of which Captain Prado's stronghold is composed, have already succeeded in rendering this establishment as much of a ruin as the other.

In addition to this *presidio* there are three others in the upper province, situated respectively at Monterey, Santa Barbara, and San Diego. But their principal occupation is gone. From the very commencement of the system, the pious fathers deemed it rash and inexpedient to encounter the heathen with spiritual arms only, and as

neither the Jesuits nor the Franciscans could themselves lawfully carry carnal weapons, both the orders remedied this defect in their constitutions by enlisting soldiers in their service—a kind of fellow-laborers unknown to St. Paul’s missionary experience. Now it was as the headquarters of these booted and spurred apostles of the faith that the *presidios* were primarily introduced, though each of them incidentally became the seat of government for its own subdivision of the province....

On proceeding along the strait, one of the most attractive scenes imaginable gradually opens on the mariner’s view: a sheet of water, of about thirty miles in length by about twelve in breadth, sheltered from every wind by an amphitheater of green hills, while an intermediate belt of open plain, varying from two to six miles in depth, is dotted by the habitations of civilized men.

On emerging from the strait, which is about three miles long, we saw on our left, in a deep bay known as Whalers’ Harbor [Sausalito Harbor], two vessels—the government schooner *California* and the Russian brig *Constantine*, now bound to Sitka with the last of the tenants of Bodega and Ross on board. As we observed the Russians getting under way, I dispatched Mr. Hopkins in one of our boats, in order to express my regret at being thus deprived of the anticipated pleasure of paying my respects in person. Mr. Hopkins found about a hundred souls—men, women, and children—all patriotically delighted to exchange the lovely climate of California for the ungenial skies of Sitka, and that, too, at the expense of making a long voyage in an old, crazy, clumsy tub, at the stormiest season of the year; but to this general rule there had been one exception, inasmuch as they had lost two days in waiting—but, alas, in vain—for a young woman who had abjured alike her country and her husband for the sake of one of the dons of San Francisco.

Mr. Hopkins further learned that though it was Thursday with us, it was Friday with our northern friends—a circumstance that,



Sir George Simpson (1792–1860). Courtesy of the California Historical Society, North Baker Research Library, Templeton Crocker Collection, FN-31310.

besides showing that the Russians had not the superstition of our tars as to days of sailing, forcibly reminded us that between them the two parties had passed round the globe in opposite directions to prosecute one and the same trade in furs, which the indolent inhabitants of the province were too lazy to appropriate at their very doors.

On our right, just opposite to the ground occupied by the *Constantine* and the *California*, stretched the pretty little bay of Yerba Buena, whose shores are doubtless destined, under better auspices, to be the site of a flourishing town, though at present they contain only eight or nine houses, in addition to the Hudson’s Bay Company’s establishment. Here we dropped anchor, in the

neighborhood of four other vessels—the American ship *Alert* and brig *Bolivar*, the British bark *Index*, and the Mexican brig *Catalina*—and, after firing a salute, went ashore to visit Mr. Rae,¹ the Hudson's Bay Company's representative in this quarter....

In the face of all these advantages and temptations, the good folk of San Francisco, priests as well as laymen, and laymen as well as priests, have been contented to borrow, for their aquatic excursions, the native *balsa*, a kind of raft or basket, which, when wanted, can be constructed in a few minutes with the bulrushes that spring so luxuriantly on the margins of the lakes and rivers. In this miserable makeshift they contrive to cross the inland waters, and perhaps, in very choice weather, to venture a little way out to sea, there being, I believe, no other floating thing besides, neither boat nor canoe, neither barge nor scow, in any part of the harbor, or, in fact, in any part of Upper California, from San Diego on the south to San Francisco on the north. In consequence of this state of things, the people of the bay have been so far from availing themselves of their internal channels of communication that their numerous expeditions into the interior have all been conducted by land, seldom leading, of course, to any result commensurate with the delay and expense. But, inconvenient as the entire want of small craft must be to the dwellers on such an inlet as has been described, there are circumstances which do, to a certain extent, account for the protracted endurance of the evil. Horses are almost as plentiful as bulrushes; time is a perfect glut with a community of loungers; and, under the plea of having no means of catching fish, the faithful enjoy, by a standing dispensation, the comfortable privilege of fasting, at meager times, on their hecatombs of beef.

¹ William Glenn Rae, the unstable son-in-law of a high-ranking Hudson's Bay Company official, ran the Company's post in Yerba Buena until committing suicide in 1845.

The world at large has hitherto made nearly as little use of the peculiar facilities of San Francisco as the Californians themselves. Though at one time many whaling ships, as the name of Whalers' Harbor would imply, frequented the port, yet, through the operation of various causes, they have all gradually betaken themselves to the Sandwich Islands. In point of natural capabilities for such a purpose, the Sandwich Islands are, on the whole, inferior to San Francisco. If they excel it in position, as lying more directly in the track between the summer fishing of the north and the winter fishing of the south, and also as being more easy of access and departure by reason of the steadiness of the trade winds, they are, in turn, surpassed in all the elements for the refreshing and refitting of vessels by a place where beef may be had for little or nothing, where hemp grows spontaneously, where the pine offers an inexhaustible supply of resin, and where suitable timber for ship building invites the ax within an easy distance. But though nature may have done more for San Francisco than for the Sandwich Islands, yet man has certainly done less to promote her liberal intentions. The Sandwich Islands afford to the refitting whaler an ample supply of competent labor, both native and foreign, at reasonable wages, while San Francisco, turning the very bounty of Providence into a curse, corrupts a naturally indolent population by the superabundance of cattle and horses, by the readiness, in short, with which idleness can find both subsistence and recreation. Moreover, even on the score of fiscal regulations, the savage community has as decidedly the advantage of the civilized as in point of industrious habits. In the Sandwich Islands the whaler can enter at once into the port which is best adapted for his purposes, while in San Francisco he is by law forbidden to remain more than forty-eight hours, unless he has previously presented himself at Monterey and paid duty on the whole of his cargo. What wonder, then, is it that, with such a government and such a people, Whalers' Harbor is merely an empty name?

Few vessels, therefore, visit the port, excepting such as are engaged in collecting hides or tallow, the tallow going chiefly to Peru, and the hides exclusively either to Great Britain or to the United States. It was in the latter branch of the business that most of the vessels which we had found at anchor were employed, the mode of conducting it being worthy of a more detailed description.

To each ship there is attached a supercargo, or clerk, who, in a decked launch, carries an assortment of goods from farm to farm, collecting such hides as he can at the time, and securing, by his advances, as many as possible against the next *matanza*, or slaughtering season, which generally coincides with the months of July and August. The current rate of a hide is two dollars in goods, generally delivered beforehand, or a dollar and a half in specie, paid, as it were, across the counter; and the great difference arises from the circumstance that the goods are held at a price sufficient to cover the bad debts that the system of credit inevitably produces, the punctual debtor being thus obliged, in California as well as elsewhere, to pay for the defaulter. But even without this adventitious increase of their nominal value, the goods could not be sold for less than thrice their prime cost, so as to enable the vessels to meet a tariff of duties averaging about 100 percent in addition to very high tonnage dues, and the accumulating expenses of two tedious voyages, with a far more tedious detention on the coast. Thus, under the existing state of things, the farmer receives for his hide either about as many goods as may have been bought in London for half a crown or two shillings, or about as much hard cash as may here buy the same at ready-money rates.

The detention on the coast, to which I have alluded as an element in the price of goods, is occasioned by various circumstances. In the first place, there are too many competitors in the trade. The provincial exports of hides do not exceed, at the utmost, the number of 60,000, and though such a vessel as our neighbor the *Index*

has room for two-thirds of the whole, yet there are at present on the coast fully sixteen ships of various sizes and denominations, all struggling and scrambling either for hides or for tallow. Supposing half of them to be engaged in the latter branch of business, there still remain eight vessels for such a number of hides as must take at least three years to fill them; and in illustration of this I may mention that our neighbor the *Alert*, belonging to one of the oldest and most experienced houses in the trade, has already spent eighteen months on the coast but is still about a third short of her full tale of 40,000. In the second place, the very nature of things necessarily involves considerable delay. As a vessel, whether large or small, cannot possibly load herself at any single point, she must keep paddling from post to pillar and from pillar to post, taking the chances of foul winds and bad anchorages through all the five ports of San Francisco, Monterey, Santa Barbara, San Pedro, and San Diego. But even if hides were more plentiful, the climate would, in a great measure, impose a similar necessity. As the hides are all green, or nearly so, for the skinning of the animal is pretty much the extent of Californian industry, each vessel must undertake the process of curing them for herself; and as the upper half of the coast to a depth of about fifteen miles is peculiarly exposed during the summer—which is of course the best time for the purpose—to the rains and fogs of the prevailing northwesterers, the hides of each season, in order to be cured, must be carried to the drier climate of the southern ports, more particularly of San Diego. Moreover, the mere task of curing a cargo causes a great loss of time—a task too laborious to be undertaken by the sellers and too nice to be entrusted to them....

But to return to San Francisco. The trade of the bay, and in fact of the whole province, is entirely in the hands of foreigners, who are almost exclusively of the English race. Of that race, however, the Americans are considerably more numerous than the British, the former naturally flocking in greater force to neutral ground, such

as this country and the Sandwich Islands, while the latter find a variety of advantageous outlets in their own national colonies. At present the foreigners are to the Californians in number as one to ten, being about 600 out of about 7,000, while, by their monopoly of trade and their command of resources, to say nothing of their superior energy and intelligence, they already possess vastly more than their numerical proportion of political influence. Their position in this respect excites the less jealousy, inasmuch as most of them have been induced, either by a desire of shaking off legal incapacities or by less interested motives, to profess the Catholic religion and to marry into provincial families.

The Californians of San Francisco number between 2,000 and 2,500, about 700 belonging to the village or *pueblo* of San José de Guadalupe and the remainder occupying about thirty farms of various sizes, generally subdivided among the families of the respective holders.

On the score of industry, these good folks, as also their brethren of the other ports, are perhaps the least promising colonists of a new country in the world, being in this respect decidedly inferior to what the savages themselves had become under the training of the priests, so that the spoliation of the missions, excepting that it has opened the province to general enterprise, has directly tended to nip civilization in the bud.

In the missions, there were large flocks of sheep, but now there are scarcely any left—the Hudson's Bay Company, last spring, having experienced great difficulty in collecting about 4,000 for its northern settlements.

In the missions the wool used to be manufactured into coarse cloth, and it is, in fact, because the Californians are too lazy to weave or spin—too lazy, I suspect, even to clip and wash the raw material—that the sheep have been literally destroyed to make more room for the horned cattle.



Californio man and woman of Monterey, 1837, by an unidentified artist who accompanied French explorer Abel Du Petit-Thouars to California. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.*

In the missions, soap and leather used to be made, but in such vulgar processes the Californians advance no further than nature herself has advanced before them, excepting to put each animal's tallow in one place and its hide in another.

In the missions, the dairy formed a principal object of attention, but now neither butter nor cheese, nor any other preparation of milk whatever, is to be found in the province.

In the missions, there were annually produced about 80,000 bushels of wheat and maize, the former, and perhaps part of the latter also, being converted into flour; but the present possessors of the soil do so little in the way of tilling the ground, that, when lying at Monterey, we sold to the government some barrels of flour at the famine rate of twenty-eight dollars, or nearly six pounds sterling, a sack—a price which could not be considered as merely local, for

the stuff was intended to victual the same schooner which, on our first arrival, we had seen at anchor in Whalers' Harbor.

In the missions, beef was occasionally cured for exportation, but so miserably is the case now reversed, that, though meat enough to supply the fleets of England is annually either consumed by fire or left to the carrion birds, yet the authorities purchased from us, along with the flour just mentioned, some salted salmon as indispensable sea stores for the one paltry vessel that constituted the entire line of battle of the Californian navy.

In the missions, a great deal of wine was grown, good enough to be sent for sale to Mexico; but, with the exception of what we got at the Misión Santa Barbara, the native wine that we tasted was such trash as nothing but politeness could have induced us to swallow.

Various circumstances have conspired to render these dons so very peculiarly indolent. Independently of innate differences of national tastes, the objects of colonization exert an influence over the character of the colonists. Thus the energy of our republican brethren and the prosperity of the contiguous dependencies of the empire are to be traced, in a great degree, to the original and permanent necessity of relying on the steady and laborious use of the ax and the plow; and thus also the rival colonists of New France—a name which comprehended the valleys of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi—dwindled and pined on much of the same ground, partly because the golden dreams of the fur trade carried them away from stationary pursuits to overrun half the breadth of the continent, and partly because the gigantic ambition of their government regarded them rather as soldiers than as settlers, rather as the instruments of political aggrandizement than as the germ of a kindred people. In like manner, Spanish America, with its sierras of silver, became the asylum and paradise of idlers, holding out to every adventurer, when leaving the shores of the old country, the prospect of earning his bread without the sweat of his brow.

But the population of California in particular has been drawn from the most indolent variety of an indolent species, being composed of superannuated troopers and retired office-holders and their descendants. In connection with the establishment of the missions, at least of those of the upper province, there had been projected three villages or *pueblos* as places of refuge for such of the old soldiers as might obtain leave to settle in the country; but as the priests were by no means friendly to the rise of a separate interest, they did all in their power to prevent the requisite licenses from being granted by the crown, so as to send to the villages as few denizens as possible and to send them only when they were past labor, as well in ability as in inclination. These villages were occasionally strengthened by congenial reinforcements of runaway sailors, and, in order to avoid such sinks of profligacy and riot, the better sort of functionaries, both civil and military, gradually established themselves elsewhere, but more particularly at Santa Barbara, while both classes were frequently coming into collision with the fathers, whose vexatious spirit of exclusiveness, even after the emancipation of the veterans, often prompted them nominally to preoccupy lands that they did not require.

Such settlers of either class were not likely to toil for much more than what the cheap bounty of nature afforded them—horses to ride and beef to eat, with hides and tallow to exchange for such other supplies as they wanted. In a word, they displayed more than the proverbial indolence of a pastoral people, for they did not even devote their idle hours to the tending of their herds. As one might have expected, the children improved on the example of the parents through the influence of a systematic education—an education which gave them the *lasso* as a toy in infancy and the horse as a companion in boyhood, which, in short, trained them from the cradle to be mounted bullock-hunters, and nothing else; and if anything could aggravate their laziness, it was the circumstance that many of

them dropped, as it were, into ready-made competency by sharing in the lands and cattle of the plundered missions.

The only trouble which the Californians really take with their cattle is to brand them, when young, with their respective marks, and even this single task savors more of festivity than of labor. Once a year the cows and calves of a neighborhood, which, because of the absence of fences, all feed in common, are driven into a pen or *corral*, that every farmer may select his own stock for his own brand, at the same time keeping, if he is wise, a sharp eye on the proceedings of his associates, and after the cattle are all branded and again turned out to their pastures, the owners and their friends wind up the exciting business of the day with singing and dancing and feasting. In addition, however, to this, each farmer does occasionally collect his own cattle into his pen, partly to prevent them from becoming too wild and partly to ascertain how far his neighbors have kept the eighth commandment before their eyes.

Upon this latter point a man must be pretty vigilant in California, for a centaur of a fellow with a running noose in his hand is somewhat apt to disregard the distinctions between meum and tuum, and so common, in fact, is this free-and-easy system, that even passably honest men, merely as a precautionary measure of self-defense, occasionally catch and slay a fat bullock that they have never branded. In order to break the scent in such cases, the fortunate finder, knowing that the hide alone of a dead animal can tell any tales, obliterates the owner's mark by means of a little gunpowder and overlays it with his own in its stead. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, these brands are held to be a conclusive proof of property, and on this account a transfer, in order to be valid and safe, requires a sale brand to be placed over the seller's mark, so as to give the buyer's mark all the force of an original brand. In ignorance of this custom, Mr. Douglas, one of the Hudson's Bay Company's officers, lately committed a capital mistake. After

collecting the sheep that I have already mentioned, he bought some horses for his drivers, which were subsequently sold on the *Columbia* to Commodore Wilkes² for the use of his party that went by land from the Willamette to San Francisco; and no sooner did the animals make their appearance in their old haunts than they were claimed by the sellers, whose marks still remained, as stolen property, to the no small astonishment of their real owners.

The income of every farmer may be pretty accurately ascertained from the number of his cattle, excepting that the owners of small stocks, as is the case at present with many of the plunderers of the missions, do not venture to kill so large a proportion of the whole as their more wealthy neighbors. The value of a single animal, without regard to the merely nominal worth of its beef, may average about five dollars, the hide fetching, as already mentioned, two dollars, and two or three *arrobas* of tallow, of twenty-five pounds each, yielding a dollar and a half by the *arroba*, and as the fourth part of a herd may generally be killed off every year without any improvidence, the farmer's revenue must be, as nearly as possible, a dollar and a quarter a head. Thus General Vallejo,³ who is said to possess 8,000 cattle, must derive about 10,000 dollars a year from this source alone, and the next largest holders, an old man of the name of Sánchez and his sons, must draw rather more than half of that amount from their stock of 4,500 animals.

² American naval officer Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) led an exploratory and scientific expedition to the South Pacific, North Pacific, and Antarctica from 1838 to 1842. In 1841 he sailed into San Francisco Bay while an exploring party marched south to it from Astoria. In his widely read *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, published in 1845, he predictably praised California but disparaged the Californios. "Although I was prepared for anarchy and confusion, I was surprised when I found a total absence of all government in California, and even its forms and ceremonies thrown aside," he commented.

³ By the time of Simpson's visit, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo owned vast *ranchos* in present-day Solano and Sonoma counties.

On the same principles of calculation, the incomes of the missions must have been enormous, San José having possessed 30,000 head, and Santa Clara nearly half the number, and San Gabriel to the south being said to have owned more cattle than Santa Clara and San José put together. Even now, after all the pillage that has taken place for the benefit of individuals, the secularized wrecks of the establishments, if honestly administered, as they are not, would yield large returns to the government, Santa Clara alone, as an average instance, still mustering about 4,000 cattle. In addition to the value of hides and tallow, such of the farmers as understand the breaking of horses may turn their skill in this way to profitable account. A well-trained steed sometimes brings 150 dollars, the worth of thirty head of cattle, while the wild animal may be had at no great distance for the trouble of noosing him. In fact, horses had at one time become so numerous as to encroach on the pasturage of the cattle, and accordingly they were partly thinned out by slaughter and partly driven eastward into the valley of the San Joaquín....

Having celebrated New Year's Day to the best of our ability, we made preparations for starting on Monday, the 3rd of the month, to pay our respects to General Vallejo, who was residing at the Misión San Francisco Solano, situated, as already mentioned, on the northern side of the bay of San Pablo. Accordingly, at nine in the morning of the day appointed, we left the *Cowlitz* in the long and jolly boats, accompanied by Mr. Rae, and also by Mr. Forbes, living near the Misión San José, and acting in that neighborhood as an agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, and to whom we were much indebted during our stay, not only for his general politeness, but also for his special assistance as interpreter.

After a heavy pull of some hours against a stiff breeze, we reached the strait which communicates between Whalers' Harbor and the inner waters, having the point of San Pedro on our left and that of San Pablo on our right. As we here found the tide as well as

the wind opposed to us, we were obliged to encamp on the former point a good while before it was dark. The place of our encampment, once a part of the lands of Misión San Rafael Arcángel, was now the property of an Irishman of the name of Murphy,⁴ and as we had started without any stock of provisions, we were glad to find ourselves the guests of a gentleman who, besides our claims on him as his fellow-subjects, had got his cattle on such easy terms. Having made up our minds, therefore, to share with Mr. Murphy in the spoils of the church, we sent out several hunters to bring home a bullock for our supper, but, to our great mortification, we were less successful in plundering our host than he had been in plundering the priests, for our emissaries had not been able to approach within shot of a single animal, a man on foot being such a prodigy in this land of laziness as to make the very cattle scamper off in dismay. In addition to the want of beef, one of those heavy fogs, which here a northwester so frequently brings in its train, enveloped us in complete darkness, at the same time soaking through our clothes. In fact, our old fortune, whenever we slept ashore, seemed to pursue us from the Columbia to San Francisco.

Timothy Murphy, who unconsciously played the part of so inhospitable a landlord on this occasion, resides at the Misión San Rafael as *administrador* on behalf of General Vallejo, to whom, as one of the prime movers in the revolution of 1836, there fell the lion's share of prize money in the shape of the two nice snuggeries of San Rafael and San Francisco Solano. The general, who shows his sagacity by systematically allying himself with foreigners, selected Mr. Murphy as a fitting mate for one of his sisters, the prettiest girl of the family, giving him, in advance, as an earnest of the bargain, the management of San Rafael, with a good slice of the booty for his own private use. The lady, however, could not, or

⁴Timothy Murphy (1800-1853), an Irish-born rancher with holdings in present-day Marin County, came to California in 1829 on a hide-and-tallow brig.



Elk crossing the Carquinez Strait, 1889, by Emanuel Wyttenbach, based on a description by William Heath Davis. Davis, a Hawaiian-born merchant and ship owner who married into a prominent Californio family, described in his autobiography seeing elk herds of 3,000 or more near San Pablo Bay in the early 1840s. *Courtesy of the California Historical Society, gift of John Howell, FN-30528.*

would not, fancy Timothy, and the matter ended by the general's acquisition of two foreigners instead of one: Mr. Leese⁵ having obtained the doña's hand, and Mr. Murphy having kept her dowry.

But the jilted *administrador* is not without his share of pleasant society, in the person of one of the few priests who remained in the country after the confiscation of their establishments. Father Quijas is one of those jovial souls who show that, in the New World as in the Old, power and wealth are more than a match for monastic austerities; nor has the removal of the corrupting influences

⁵In 1836, American merchant Jacob P. Leese (1809-1892) built Yerba Buena's first substantial structure, a house at the corner of present-day Clay Street and Grant Avenue. Earlier in 1841, he had sold the house to the Hudson's Bay Company, married Vallejo's sister, and moved to Sonoma.

rendered his reverence a more rigid observer of his vows, excepting always (thanks to Murphy and Vallejo) the single article of poverty. The two friends lately led each other into trouble in a way which forcibly illustrates the state of government in general and the character of Vallejo in particular.

As the bay of San Pablo is separated only by a ridge of green hills from the valley of Santa Rosa, in which are situated the settlements of Bodega and Ross, Murphy and Quijas, whether it was that the former was in search of stray bullocks, or that the latter wished to ease the schismatics of a little of their brandy, fell into the snare of visiting the Russians, against all rule and precedent. The treason soon came to the general's ears, and on the very evening after their return the delinquents were politely invited to attend at headquarters by a sergeant and five troopers. As the night was wet and stormy, they tried to bribe the soldiers with their best fare into a respite of a few hours, pleading at the same time the want of horses. But while the sergeant disclaimed all official knowledge of wind and weather, the troopers caught the requisite number of nags, and the next morning the luckless wights were thrown, all drenched and splashed, into the general's *calabozo* or dungeon, to chew the cud, in hunger and thirst, on the contraband hospitalities of Bodega and Ross. So much for the freedom and equity of Californian republicanism.

Early the next morning we got under way with a breeze from the southeast, and though the ebb tide was sweeping and tumbling through the straits like a rapid, we succeeded in crossing the bay to the entrance of the creek of Sonoma, which here flows, as do also several other creeks in the neighborhood, through one of the flats or marshes so common on the shores of the inlet of San Francisco. We tolled up the windings of this stream against a powerful current, looking in vain for a dry spot to put ashore, the banks being so low that they are regularly overflowed at high tide, and it was six in the evening before we reached the landing place, distant about ten miles

from the bay and about three from the mission. Our standing luck here stuck to us, for we had no sooner pitched our tents and secured our baggage than the southeaster, after the day's reprieve, brought down its usual accompaniment of heavy rain. Finding an Indian at the landing place, we dispatched him with a note to the general explaining the object of our visit and requesting the favor of his sending us horses to enable us to pay our respects to him in the morning. During the night a northwest wind had taken the place of our southeaster, bringing, at this distance from the ocean, not the chilly fogs of the coast, but beautifully clear weather, rendered perhaps more pleasant by the bracing air of a sharp frost.

The sun, however, had hardly risen when the air became agreeably warm, and while we were making the most of a light breakfast the Indian returned with a polite message from the general, to the effect that horses would be with us immediately. In fact, before he had well delivered his errand, a band of thirty chargers came in sight, and soon after a still larger herd, the whole escorted by a sergeant and two troopers, with a rabble of native auxiliaries. Out of this supply nine or ten of the best-looking animals were quickly caught for us with the *lasso*, and the whole of the motley cavalcade now proceeded over a rich plain studded with scrub-oaks and embosomed within well-wooded hills of considerable height. In consequence of heavy rains, and more particularly of the bursting of a waterspout, the roads were flooded; for the plain, being low and level, not only receives far more than its share of whatever falls, but also retains nearly all it receives—a circumstance which, however inconvenient to the traveler, is, in general, peculiarly beneficial to agriculture. In fact, so dry is the climate during all the best seasons of the year that the valley is intersected in every direction by artificial ditches, which are fed from the creek for the purposes of irrigation. These artificial ditches, by the by, were the first symptom of human energy that we had seen in California, but, on inquiry, we

found that they had been dug, under the direction of the priests, by the reluctant labor of the converts.

At Sonoma—for the very name of the mission has been secularized—we were received by the firing of a salute and the hoisting of the colors, the former mark of respect being complimentary in proportion to the scarcity of gunpowder in this land of *lassos*. Through a gateway and a courtyard we ascended a half-finished flight of steps to the principal room of the general's house, being of fifty feet in length and of other dimensions in proportion. Besides being disfigured by the doors of chambers, to which it appeared to be a passage, this apartment was very indifferently furnished, the only tolerable articles upon the bare floor being some gaudy chairs from Oahu, [Hawaii,] such as the native islanders themselves often make. This was California all over, the richest and most influential individual in a professedly civilized settlement obliged to borrow the means of sitting from savages who had never seen a white man 'til two years after San Francisco was colonized by the Spaniards. Here we were received by Don Salvador Vallejo and Mr. Leese, our host's brother and brother-in-law, and immediately afterwards the general, being somewhat indisposed, received us very courteously in his own chamber.

General Vallejo is a good-looking man of about forty-five years of age, who has risen in the world by his own talent and energy. His father, who was one of the most respectable men in California, died about ten years ago at Monterey, leaving to a large family of sons and daughters little other inheritance than a degree of intelligence and steadiness almost unknown in the country. The patrimonial estate, such as it was, descended to the eldest son, while the second, now the prop of the name, was an ensign in the army, with the command of the *presidio* of San Francisco. Having acquired considerable influence in the party, which styled itself democratic and aimed at something like independence, he was promoted

by a conciliatory governor to be commandant of the frontier of Sonoma. Soon afterwards, taking advantage of this same governor's death, he became the leader in the revolution of 1836, securing for a nephew of the name of Alvarado the office of civil governor, and reserving to himself the important post of commander of the forces. As to the rest of the family, Don Salvador became a captain of cavalry, and another brother was made *administrador* of the Misión San José, while the girls were married off, most of them to foreigners with shrewd views to the strengthening of the general's influence.

In addition to what I have already said as to the power and value of foreigners, a recent rebellion [against the Mexican government], which has made Vallejo a great man, was brought to a crisis by the spirited conduct of an individual of that class. The insurgents, having entered the Presidio of Monterey, were brought to a stand by the Mexican commandant's refusal to surrender; but one of their foreign associates, after apostrophizing their "eyes" and ejaculating something about "humbug," loaded a gun to the muzzle and shot off part of the roof of the commandant's place of retreat—a hint to capitulate, which could no longer be misunderstood or neglected. The foreigners were pretty nearly unanimous in favor of the insurgents, some of them from the love of a row, many through matrimonial connections, and the Americans in the hope of seeing the new republic hoist the Stars and Stripes of the Union.

After spending about half an hour with our host, we left him to partake of a second breakfast, at which we were joined by the ladies of the family. First in honor and in place was Señora Vallejo, whose sister is married to Captain Wilson of the bark *Index*, an honest Scot from "Bonny Dundee"; next came one of her sisters-in-law, who is the wife of Captain Cooper⁶ of the schooner *California*,

⁶John Rogers Cooper (1792–1872), born in England, emigrated to California in 1826. Known widely as Captain Cooper, he was a well-known shipmaster, merchant, and rancher during the Mexican era.



Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo (1808–1890) with his daughters and granddaughters. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.

and who resides at Sonoma as a pledge for the fidelity of the provincial navy; and lastly followed Mrs. Leese with an unmarried sister and Mrs. Cooper's daughter. It won't be the general's fault if the

English race does not multiply in California. So far as names went, we might have supposed ourselves to be in London or in Boston.

In front of Mr. Leese, who sat at the head of the table as master of ceremonies, was placed an array of five dishes—two kinds of stewed beef, rice, fowl, and beans. As all the cooking is done in out-houses—for the dwellings, by reason of the mildness of the climate, have no chimneys or fireplaces—the dishes were by no means too hot when put on the table; while by being served out in succession to a party of about twenty people, they became each colder than the other before they reached their destinations. It was some consolation to know that the heat must once have been there, for everything had literally been seethed into chips, the beans or *frijoles* in particular having been first boiled and lastly fried, with an intermediate stewing to break the suddenness of the transition. Then every mouthful was poisoned with the everlasting compound of pepper and garlic, and this repast, be it observed, was quite an aristocratic specimen of the kind, for elsewhere we more than once saw, in one and the same dish, beef and tongue, and pumpkin and garlic, and potatoes in their jackets, and cabbage and onions, and tomatoes and peppers, and heaven knows what besides—this last indefinite ingredient being something more than a mere figure of speech, considering that all the cookery, as one may infer from the expenditure of so much labor, is the work of native drudges, unwashed and uncombed. When to the foregoing sketch are added bad tea and worse wine, the reader has picked up a perfect idea of a Californian breakfast, a Californian dinner, and a Californian supper, and is quite able to estimate the sacrifice which a naturalized John Bull makes for the pleasures of matrimony and the comforts of Roman Catholicism. Such varieties as cheese and butter and milk and mutton and fish are, as I have already mentioned, here unknown. Even game, whether of the land or of the water, is at a discount, not only as a matter of business, but also as an object of amusement; and the very

beef has been parboiled in the feverish blood of the unfortunate bullock, first heated and infuriated by the chase, and then tortured and strangled with the *lasso*.

Immediately after breakfast our horses were brought to the door, and we started to see the country, accompanied by Don Salvador and an escort of three or four soldiers. We first ascended a steep hill at the back of the mission, whence we obtained an extensive view of the surrounding region. In the distance lay the waters of the magnificent harbor, while at our feet stretched a plain, for it exhibited nothing of the valley but its wall of mountains, about fifteen miles long and three broad. This plain is composed of alluvial soil, which is so fertile as to yield about fifty returns of wheat, and the hills present abundance of willow, poplar, pine, chestnut, and cedar. If one may judge from appearances, this valley once formed an arm of the bay of San Pablo, and in fact the whole harbor, in remote ages, was most probably an inland lake which has forced its way to the ocean through the same barrier of soft rock that, as already mentioned, still continues to melt into the tide.

In the course of our ride we saw several deer on the road, these animals being so tame as often to approach the houses in large herds. For beasts of chase, if here the phrase is not a misnomer, California is a perfect paradise. The Californian is too lazy to hunt for amusement, and as to any necessity of the kind, his bullocks supply all his wants, excepting that the red deer is occasionally pursued on account of the peculiar hardness and whiteness of its tallow. Hence the number of wild animals is very considerable. Beaver and otter have recently been caught within half a mile of the mission, and there are also the red deer, the wild goat [antelope], the bear, the panther, the wolf, the fox, the rabbit, etc.

Having descended from the hill, we traversed a great portion of the plain. The waterspout, which has been already mentioned, had done a great deal of damage, sweeping away the newly

sown seed from several large fields of wheat. These fields had been highly prized by the general, as the grain had been procured from the Columbia River and was superior in quality to his own. As one might expect from the abundance of land, the fertility of the soil, and the indolence of the people, agriculture is conducted in the rudest possible way. As the surface of the plain presents so few obstacles to cultivation, the same land is never cropped for more than two successive years, and as General Vallejo's farm contains from 500 to 600 acres, he thus annually breaks up about 300 acres of what may be called wild land, either fresh from the hands of nature or refreshed by rest. In the fields that had been stripped by the water-spout, we saw several plows at work, or rather at what expects to be called work in this country. The machine consists of little more than a log of wood pointed with iron, from the top of which rises in a sloping direction a long pole for the oxen, while an upright handle for the plowman is fixed to the unpointed end of the share, or, if possible, is formed out of the same piece of timber as the share itself. The oxen, as if to prevent even them from putting forth their strength, are yoked by the horns, and considering that there are only two such animals to so clumsy a piece of workmanship, the topsoil alone is scratched to a depth of not more than two or three inches.

Having learned from us during our excursion that we wished to see an exhibition of the *lasso*, Don Salvador had kindly sent back orders to make the requisite preparations, and accordingly, on our return to the mission, we found everything ready for action. A band of wild horses had been driven into a pen or *corral* of very strong build. The door being thrown open, Don Salvador and one or two others entered on horseback, and the former, having his *lasso* coiled up in his hand, swung it 'round his head to give it an impetus, and then with a dexterous aim secured in the noose the neck of a fiery young steed. After plunging and rearing in vain, the animal was at length thrown down with great violence. Soon, however, it was

again on its legs, and its captor, having attached the *lasso* to his saddle-bow, dragged it tottering out of the *corral*, 'til, with eyes staring from its head and nostrils fearfully distended, it fell panting and groaning to the ground. The *lasso* being now slackened, the animal regained its breath, and, infuriated with rage, started away at its utmost speed, Don Salvador, of course, following at an equal pace. One of the assistants now spurred forward his steed, and overtaking the victim, seized it by the tail with his hand, and at length, watching a favorable moment, he threw the animal by a jerk to the earth with such force as threatened to break every bone in its body. This cruel operation was repeated several times, 'til we begged hard that the wretched beast should be released from further torture. A second horse was then caught and thrown down in a manner still more painful. The captor suddenly stopped his horse when at full gallop, which, being well trained, threw its weight toward one side in expectation of the impending jerk, while the captive steed was instantaneously pitched head over heels to a distance of several yards.

Cruel as the sport was, we could not but admire the skill of the Californians in the management of their horses. One of the people, whether by accident or design dropped his *lasso*, of which the other end was attached to a wild horse in full career, and following 'til he came up with it as it trailed on the ground, he stooped to it from his saddle and picked it up without slackening his pace for a moment. But, with all their dexterity and experience, the riders often meet with serious, and even fatal, accidents by being thrown from their horses. Don Salvador himself had had his full share of this kind of thing. He had broken two ribs and fractured both his thighs, the one in two places and the other in three, so that he had now very little left in reserve but his neck. There is, moreover, one peculiar danger to which the thrower of the *lasso* is exposed. The saddle of the country has an elevated pommel, round which the *lasso*, after noosing its victim, is rapidly twisted, and in this operation the captor not

unfrequently sees the first finger of his right hand torn off in an instant. These evils are, of course, often aggravated by the want of proper assistance, our host's present indisposition being a curious instance of this. While engaged with the *lasso* the general had dislocated his hip. The joint, however, was replaced, and he was doing well till he bruised it slightly. He sent a messenger to the only practitioner at San Francisco, one Bail from Manchester, for a strengthening plaster, but the doctor, who sometimes takes doses very different from those which he prescribes, sent by mistake a blister of cantharides, which, being supposed to be salutary in proportion to the pain of its application, was allowed to work double tides on the poor general's bruise so as to turn it into a very pretty sore, which had confined him to his bed.

During the day we visited a village of General Vallejo's Indians, about 300 in number, who were the most miserable of the race I ever saw, excepting always the slaves of the savages of the north-west coast. Though many of them are well-formed and well-grown, every face bears the impress of poverty and wretchedness, and they are, moreover, a prey to several malignant diseases, among which a hereditary syphilis ranks as the predominant scourge alike of old and young. They are badly clothed, badly lodged, and badly fed. As to clothing, they are pretty nearly in a state of nature. As to lodging, their hovels are made of boughs wattled with bulrushes in the form of beehives, with a hole in the top for a chimney, and with two holes at the bottom, towards the northwest and the southeast, so as to enable the poor creatures, by closing them in turns, to exclude both the prevailing winds. As to food, they eat the worst bullock's worst joints, with bread of acorns and chestnuts [buckeyes], which are most laboriously and carefully prepared by pounding and rinsing and grinding. Though not so recognized by law, they are thralls in all but the name, while, borne to the earth by the toils of civilization superadded to the privations of savage life, they vegetate

rather than live, without the wish to enjoy their former pastimes or the skill to resume their former avocations.

This picture, which is a correct likeness not only of General Vallejo's Indians, but of all the civilized aborigines of California, is the only remaining monument of the zeal of the church and the munificence of the state. Nor is the result very different from what ought to have been expected. In a religious point of view, the priests were contented with merely external observances, and even this semblance of Christianity they systematically purchased and rewarded with the good things of this life, their very first step in the formation of a mission having been to barter maize-pottage, by a kind of regular tariff, for an unconscious attendance at church and the repetition of unintelligible catechisms.

With regard, again, to temporal improvement, the priests, instead of establishing each proselyte on a farm of his own, and thus gradually imbuing him with knowledge and industry, penned the whole like cattle and watched them like children, at the very most making them eye-servants through their dread of punishment and their reverence for a master. In truth, the Indians were then the same as now, excepting that they shared more liberally in the fruits of their own labor and possessed spirit enough to enjoy a holiday in the songs and dances of their race. The true tendency of the monkish discipline was displayed by the partial emancipation which took place, as already mentioned, in 1825; and when the missions were confiscated in 1836, the proselytes, almost as naturally as the cattle, were divided among the spoilers, either as menial drudges or as predial serfs, excepting that some of the more independent among them retired to the wilderness, in order, as the sequel will show, to avenge their wrongs by a life of rapine.

These sons and daughters of bondage—many of them too sadly broken in spirit even to marry—are so rapidly diminishing in numbers that they must soon pass away from the land of their

fathers, a result which, as it seems uniformly to spring from all the conflicting varieties of civilized agency, is to be ultimately ascribed to the inscrutable wisdom of a mysterious Providence. If anything could render such a state of things more melancholy, it would be the reflection that many of these victims of a hollow civilization must have been born in the missions, inasmuch as, even at San Francisco, those establishments had taken root sixty years before the revolution, and it was truly pitiable to hear Vallejo's beasts of burden speaking the Spanish language, as an evidence that the system, wherever the fault lay, had not failed through want of time.

Previously to dressing for dinner we took a closer survey of the buildings and premises. The general's plan seems to be to throw his principal edifices into the form of a square, or rather of three sides of a square. The center is already filled up with the general's own house, flanked on one side by a barrack and on the other by Don Salvador's residence, but as yet the wings contain respectively only a billiard room and Mr. Leese's dwelling, opposite to each other. On the outside of this square are many detached buildings, such as the *calabozo*, the church, etc. The *calabozo* is most probably a part of the original establishment, for every mission had its cage for refractory converts; but the church, which even now is large, has been built by Vallejo to replace a still larger one, though no priest lives at Sonoma, and Father Quijas of San Rafael, after his experience of the dungeon, has but little stomach for officiating at headquarters.

All the buildings are of *adobes*, or unbaked bricks, which are cemented with mud instead of mortar, and in order to protect such perishable materials from the rain, besides keeping off the rays of the sun, the houses are very neatly finished with verandas and overhanging eaves. If tolerably protected for a time, the walls, which are generally four or five feet thick, become, in a measure, vitrified, and are nearly as durable as stone. To increase the expenditure of labor and materials, the partitions are nearly as thick as the outer walls,

each room of any size having its own separate roof, a circumstance which explained what at first surprised us—the great length and breadth of the apartments.

At this season of the year [January] we found the houses very comfortless in consequence of the want of fireplaces, for the warmth of the day only rendered us more sensible of the chilliness of the night. The Californians remedy or mitigate the evil by the ludicrous makeshift of wearing their cloaks, and even among the foreigners not more than two or three dwellings with chimneys will be found from one end of the province to the other.

The garrison of Sonoma is certainly well officered, for the general and the captain have only thirteen troopers under their command, this force and Prado's corps, if they could only get *balsas* enough to effect a junction, forming a standing army of about twenty men for San Francisco alone. The absurdity of the thing consists not in the number of soldiers, for they are sixteen times more numerous in proportion than the Army of the United States. The essential folly is this: that a scattered population of 7,000 men, women, and children should ever think of an independence that must either ruin them for the maintenance of an adequate force or expose them at one and the same time to the horrors of popular anarchy and of military insubordination.

If one may judge from the variety of uniforms, each of the thirteen warriors constitutes his own regiment, one being the "Blues," another the "Bufs," and so on; and as they are all mere boys, this nucleus of a formidable cavalry has at least the merit of being a growing one. The only articles common to the whole of this baker's dozen are an enormous sword, a pair of nascent *mostachos*, deer-skin boots, and that everlasting *serape* or blanket with a hole in the middle of it for the head. This troop the general turns to useful account, being clearly of opinion that idleness is the very rust of discipline. He makes them catch his cattle, and, in short, discharge the

duty of servants-of-all-work—an example highly worthy of the imitation of all military autocrats. The system, however, has led to two or three revolts. On one occasion a regiment of native infantry, being an awkward squad of fifteen Indians, having conspired against the general, were shot for their pains; and more recently the Californian soldiers, disdainful to drive bullocks, were cashiered on the spot and replaced by new levies. Besides the garrison, the general possesses several field-pieces and carronades, which, however, are, by reason of the low state of the ammunition, rather ornamental than useful.

There is a small vineyard behind the house, of about 300 feet square, which, in the days of the priests, used to yield about 1,000 gallons of wine. The general, on coming into possession, replanted the vines, which bore abundantly in the third season, and now, at the end of only five years, they have just yielded twenty barrels of wine and four of spirits, equal to sixteen more of wine, of fifteen gallons each, or about 540 gallons of wine in all. The peaches and pears also, though only three years old, were from fifteen to twenty feet high and had borne fruit this season. In short, almost any plant might here be cultivated with success.

During the short winter, snow is never seen, excepting occasionally on the summits of the highest hills, while at noon the heat generally ranges from sixty-five degrees to seventy degrees in the shade, and in summer the average temperature of the day is seldom lower than ninety degrees. As the northwest fogs do not penetrate into the interior more than fifteen miles, there are, in fact, two climates at San Francisco, and General Vallejo has chosen the better one for himself, as also for his brother [Don José de Jesús], the *administrador* of Misión San José.

At dinner the general made his appearance, wrapped in a cloak, and we had now also the pleasure of being introduced to the dowager *señora*, an agreeable dame of about sixty, and we could

not help envying the old lady the very rare luxury of being immediately surrounded, at her time of life, by so many as five grown sons and daughters. This meal was merely a counterpart of the breakfast—the same Mr. Leese, the same stews, the same *frijoles*, and the same pepper and garlic, with the same dead-and-alive temperature in every morsel—and the only difference was, that, as we were a little better appetized, we took more notice of the want of attendance, the only servant, besides my own, being a miserable Indian dressed in a shirt, with bare legs and cropped hair.

Immediately after dinner the ladies retired, the gentlemen at the same time going out for a stroll, but soon afterwards the ladies again met us at tea, reinforced by one or two of the more juvenile *doñas* of the establishment. Dancing was now the order of the day. Don Salvador and one of his troopers played the guitar while we were “toeing it and heeling it” at the *fandango*, the cotillion, and the waltz. The scene was rather peculiar for a ballroom, both gentlemen and ladies, when not on active service, smoking furiously, with fully more, in some cases, than the usual accompaniments.

Among the persons present was a very fierce, punchy little man enveloped in an immense cloak. He proved to be no less a personage than Commandant Prado of the *presidio* of San Francisco, successor, in fact, of Vallejo in the same office that formed the stepping-stone to his present elevation. Besides having been engaged in many skirmishes against both Californians and Indians, he has had several narrow escapes with his life in private brawls. About two years ago a religious festival was celebrated at the Misión San Francisco de Asís in honor of the patron saint, passing through all the usual gradations of Mass, bullfight, supper, and ball. In the course of the evening, Don Francisco Guerrero, the steward of the mission, stabbed Prado with the ever-ready knife for presuming to interpose in an altercation between himself and his mistress; but the corpulent commandant was not to be so easily run through, for though

breadth of beam is not generally an advantage to a soldier, on this occasion Prado's fat did succeed in saving his bacon. Such a termination of a religious festival is so much a matter of course that at one that took place a few months back, one of Prado's numerous enemies came up to him, and, drawing his knife, said, "What! here's daylight, and no one yet stabbed!" and it required all the influence of Vallejo, who happened to be present, to nip so very promising a quarrel in the bud. On such occasions the cloak is often invaluable as a shield, and in fact, when both parties are on their guard, there is commonly far more of noise than of mischief.

Our evening, however, passed over most amicably and agreeably, winding up, after several other songs, with "Auld Lang Syne," in which the Californians joined the foreigners very heartily, so that, as next day was Old Christmas, I could almost have fancied that I was welcoming Auld Yule in the north of Scotland.

On the morning of the 6th we left the mission about seven o'clock, under a pretty heavy rain, to the great surprise of its amiable and hospitable inmates. We breakfasted at the landing place, on the site of our old camp, after which we made our way to the mouth of the creek with the ebb tide, but as the wind was blowing hard from the southeast, we could not face the bay and were obliged to retrace our steps, encamping for the third time at the landing place, after nearly a whole day's exposure and toil. In all the course of my traveling I never had occasion to go so far in search of an encampment as I did this day, but between our encampment and the bay there really was not a single spot where, even in the direst necessity, we could have obtained a footing. The banks of the creek were a mere marsh, and we saw and heard thousands upon thousands of cranes, geese, ducks, curlew snipe, plover, heron, etc. These birds enjoy a perpetual holiday. They, of course, are quite safe from the *lasso*, and so long as the Californians can get beef without gunpowder, they are not likely to expend it on any less profitable quarry.

By next morning the wind had returned to the northwest. We accordingly got under way at six o'clock, and, after a pleasant run down the creek, we stood across the bay of San Pablo, passed our old encampment on Murphy's estate, and at four in the afternoon arrived in safety on board of the *Cowlitz*.

It had been our intention on this trip to visit Captain Sutter,⁷ the purchaser, as already mentioned, of the Russian-American Company's stock in Ross and Bodega, who had settled, under the sanction of the government, on the banks of the Sacramento, but as this prolongation of our excursion would have occupied us at least eight or ten days, we were reluctantly obliged to return without beating up the captain's quarters. Besides having thus lost the opportunity of seeing a little of the interior, we had reasons of a less romantic character for regretting our disappointment, as Sutter, a man of speculative turn and good address, had given to the Hudson's Bay Company, in common with many others less able to pay for the compliment, particular grounds for taking an interest in his welfare and prosperity. He was understood to have served in the bodyguard of Charles X and to have emigrated, after the three glorious days of 1830, to the United States, a country that, by its acquisition of Louisiana, offers far more powerful inducements to French enterprise than any one of the rickety colonies of the grand nation. He had successively tried his fortune in St. Louis, among the Shawnee Indians, in the Snake country, on the Columbia River, at the Sandwich Islands, at Sitka, and at San Francisco, uniformly illustrating the proverb of the rolling stone, but yet generally contriving to leave anxious and inquisitive friends behind him.

Sutter was now living on a grant of land about sixty miles long and twelve broad, trapping, farming, trading, bullying the

⁷ Swiss émigré Johann Augustus Sutter (1803-1880) oversaw a huge *rancho* at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers. In early 1841, he bought Fort Ross from the Russians—to Simpson's chagrin.

government, and letting out Indians on hire—being, in short, in a fairer way of figuring in the world as a territorial potentate than his royal patron's heir, the Duke of Bordeaux. If he really has the talent and the courage to make the most of his position, he is not unlikely to render California a second Texas. Even now the Americans only want a rallying point for carrying into effect their theory that the English race is destined by "right divine" to expel the Spaniards from their ancient seats, a theory which has already begun to develop itself in more ways than one.

American adventurers have repeatedly stolen cattle and horses by wholesale, with as little compunction as if they had merely helped themselves to an installment of their own property. American trappers have frequently stalked into the Californian towns with their long rifles, ready for all sorts of mischief, practically setting the government at defiance and putting the inhabitants in bodily fear; and in 1836 the American residents, as also some of the American skip-pers on the coast, supported the revolution, in the hope of its merely transferring California from Mexico to the United States.

Now, for fostering and maturing Brother Jonathan's ambitious views, Captain Sutter's establishment is admirably situated. Besides lying on the direct route between San Francisco on the one hand and the Missouri and the Willamette on the other, it virtually excludes the Californians from all the best parts of their own country—the valleys of the San Joaquín, the Sacramento, and the Colorado. Hitherto the Spaniards have confined themselves to the comparatively barren slip of land, varying from ten to forty miles in width, which lies between the ocean and the first range of mountains; and beyond this slip they will never penetrate with their present character and their present force, if Captain Sutter, or any other adventurer, can gather 'round him a score of such marksmen as won Texas on the field of San Jacinto. But this is not all, for the Americans, if masters of the interior, will soon discover that they

have a natural right to a maritime outlet, so that, whatever may be the fate of Monterey and the more southerly ports, San Francisco will, to a moral certainty, sooner or later fall into the possession of Americans—the only possible mode of preventing such a result being the previous occupation of the port on the part of Great Britain. English, in some sense or other of the word, the richest portions of California must become. Either Great Britain will introduce her well-regulated freedom of all classes and colors, or the people of the United States will inundate the country with their own peculiar mixture of helpless bondage and lawless insubordination. Between two such alternatives, the Californians themselves have little room for choice, and even if there were ground for hesitation, they would, I am convinced, find in their actual experience sufficient reason for deciding in favor of the British, for they especially and emphatically complain that the Americans, in their mercantile dealings, are too wide awake for such drowsy customers as would rather be cheated at once than protect themselves by any unusual expenditure of vigilance and caution. So much as to Captain Sutter's history and prospects.