

IV.

CALIFORNIA.

UPPER California was discovered by Cabrillo, a Spanish navigator, A. D. 1548. It was first colonized in 1768.

Presidios, or garrisoned forts, were established at San Diego, first, at Santa Barbara, Monterey, San Francisco; the form of all of them is nearly the same; adobe walls twelve feet high, enclosing a square of six hundred feet fronts, and including a chapel and store houses; they were weak, but sufficient for defence against wild Indians, whom they called gentiles; the garrisons were of about eighty horsemen, some auxiliaries, and small detachments of artillery.

Missions of Franciscans accompanied, or immediately followed them, at San Diego first; from time to time above twenty more. There was one near each presidio, walled like them. They included handsome churches, some of stone, ample quarters,

work shops, store houses, granaries and courts. They gradually extended their claims to territory, and so came to include nearly the whole country. The conversion of natives went hand in hand with their instruction in agriculture and mechanical arts, and the use of the Spanish language; they were the laborers in the erection of those great structures. Their villages, called rancherias, were near the missions; they lived in thatched conical huts. Small military detachments were quartered at the rancherias to keep order. In 1822 the number of the converts was estimated at twenty-two thousand, besides gentiles settled near by.

There was some immigration from Mexico; the soldiers generally brought wives, and thus the white population was slowly increased. The white race, living an active out-door life, in a most genial climate, was healthy and strong, and of extreme fecundity; the presidial companies came to be composed of them; but it was difficult for them to secure the ownership of land, against the encroachments of the powerful missions, which discouraged immigration, and under an irregular and weak territorial government, the head of which was the commandante-

general. Thus their state was not far above savagery; there were no schools; a little wheat, beans, etc., was raised by families; their diet was chiefly fresh meat; even milk was seldom used, and butter almost unknown. They were indolent although active; almost lived on horseback, and were wonderful riders; they and the Comanches more nearly realizing the fabled centaurs than any people known to us. Horse-racing, gambling, and dancing were their chief occupations. Still they had received from the poor Indians the designation of people of reason (*jente de razon*).

The cattle and horses introduced—the latter said to be of Arabian breed—wonderfully increased on the rich grasses in a most favorable climate. Up to 1826, horses which had become wholly wild, so overran the land, that it was common for the men to join together to drive them into great pens, prepared for the purpose, and when thus confined, after securing some of the finest animals, to slaughter the rest.

In 1816 a foreign trade in hides and tallow was opened; an annual ship came from Boston; in 1822 near forty thousand hides and about the same

number of arrobas (twenty-five pounds) of tallow were exported. Hides became known as California bank notes, of the value of two dollars.

The Spanish power in California was overthrown by the Mexican revolution of 1822; and the policy of the ever-changing governments of Mexico showed itself constant in the secularization of the government of California. The Missions began to decline in wealth and power in 1824. The decree for the expulsion of all native Spaniards was enforced on their priests; and by 1836 the Fathers were finally stripped of their possessions.

It was a sad change for the Indians, who were strongly attached to their spiritual guides and governors, and were happy and content under their jurisdiction. The Missions gradually despoiled,—the Californians taking an active part—under secular administration, the proselytes became scattered or subject to every oppression and cruelty,—mere serfs.

But this wrong and devastation had compensating effects upon the people at large. The lands became divided, and came into individual ownership; industry and enterprise were encouraged in those

who were no longer dependent upon the bounty and the will of priests.

In the spring of 1846 the white population of California was, by estimate, no higher than ten thousand ; including about two thousand foreigners chiefly from the United States. These last beginning to arrive so rapidly, their superior intelligence and energy had aroused the jealousy of prominent natives.

The year before there had been (no uncommon thing) a revolution headed by natives,—Castro, Alvarado and Pio Pico, in which foreigners took part—which resulted in the expulsion of General Micheltoarena, the Mexican governor.

General Castro assumed command of the military, and soon after issued a proclamation, understood to require all Americans to leave the country. But no immediate measures were taken to enforce the order, and it was disregarded by the immigrants.

In the winter of 1845-6, Brevet Captain Fremont, topographical engineers, under favor of a roving commission of explorations, by extraordinary coincidence, made his appearance at the head of sixty or seventy well armed adventurers, in government pay, among the northern settlements; and he

obtained permission from Castro to remain, for the purpose of refreshing his men and horses. Rumors of a change and of an intended attack by Castro, reached him; whereupon he fortified himself in the mountains which overlook Monterey. But after remaining a few days, he determined, early in the month of March, to proceed to Oregon, and before the middle of May he had reached Lake Klamath in Oregon.

Suddenly he was overtaken in that mountain wilderness by a messenger from Washington city. It was Lieutenant Gillespie, of the United States Marine Corps. Captain Fremont turned with his "surveying" party to retrace his journey.

This remarkable occurrence has its explanation. Senator Thomas H. Benton with the foresight of a statesman, aspiring to be, if not actually, the controlling influence of President Polk's administration, was tempted by paternal ambition to anticipate legal war, and used his influence to have sent, long before its occurrence, a messenger to California, where, he must have had reason to believe, Captain Fremont would be found; he bore a communication to Fremont urging, of course, his great opportunity as the head of

seventy veteran woodsmen and the hardy immigrants in Northern California to forestal the war and revolutionize the country, or, at the least, to be present and ready to reap the first fruits of the war.* Lieutenant Gillespie, an officer of fine address, who spoke perfectly the language of Mexico, was selected and sent through that country, then the speediest route. Arrived at Monterey, with a dispatch for our consul there—probably to require his assistance—he found that Captain Fremont, seemingly with no taste for the commotions already begun, and the threatened attack of Castro, had abandoned to the Mexican revolutionist the field of a great opportunity. Then Gillespie's true mission was developed, and he proceeded at great risks to follow his trail, until he overtook him and delivered instructions which he could not fail to heed.

About the 1st of June the lieutenant commanding the Mexican garrison of Sonoma was ordered to remove a drove of government horses from the mission of San Rafael to Santa Clara, General Castro's headquarters. To accomplish this, the

* Early in the war Colonel Benton was nearly successful in an intrigue to be appointed a Lieutenant-General, to supersede Winfield Scott.

officer and small party crossed the Sacramento at Sutter's Fort, New Helvetia, the nearest point at which the horses could swim the river. An Indian, having seen the movement, reported among the American settlers that two or three hundred armed men were advancing up the Sacramento Valley.

The alarm was spread through the valley by swift messengers; and most of the immigrants joined Captain Fremont, who by this time was sixty or seventy miles above Sutter's Fort.

The truth with regard to the lieutenant's party was soon known, with the addition, true or not, that the object of the slight affair was to mount a force to march against the Americans.

After consultation it was resolved that the California party should be pursued, as the capture of the horses would weaken Castro, and for a time frustrate his designs. Twelve men volunteered and chose a Mr. Merritt for their leader. They followed and surprised the party June the 10th, when it surrendered, without resistance, the horses and their arms. They were given each a horse to ride, and were released. The "Bear" revolution was now fairly begun, and the only safety lay in its vigorous

prosecution. The same party, increased to above thirty, marched directly upon Sonoma, and on June 14th, took possession without resistance of the town and military post; they found there nine pieces of artillery and two hundred stand of small arms. Several officers of high rank were captured, but with much consideration and politeness on both sides, General Vallejo, one of them, sent for his caballada and remounted the whole party. Private property was scrupulously respected.

A small garrison was left in Sonoma, and was soon increased to forty men under command of William B. Ide.

June 18th, his garrison assenting, Mr. Ide, filled with the spirit of '76, and infected by the grandiloquent style of the people of the land which they wished to adopt as their own, issued a proclamation; General Castro had issued two, the day before.

A proclamation to all persons and citizens of the district of Sonoma, requesting them to remain at peace, and follow their rightful occupations without fear of molestation.

The Commander-in-chief of the troops assembled at the fortress of Sonoma, gives his inviolable pledge to all persons in California, not found under arms, that they shall not be disturbed in their persons, their property, or social relations, one with another, by men under his command.

He also solemnly declares his object to be, to defend himself and companions in arms, who were invited to this country

by a promise of lands on which to settle themselves and families; who were also promised a Republican government; when having arrived in California, they were denied the privilege of buying or renting lands of their friends; who, instead of being allowed to participate in, or being protected by a Republican government, were oppressed by a military despotism; who were even threatened by proclamation, by the chief officers of the aforesaid despotism, with extermination if they should not depart out of the country, leaving all their property, arms, and beasts of burden; and thus deprived of their means of flight or defence, we were to be driven through deserts inhabited by hostile Indians, to certain destruction.

To overthrow a government which has seized upon the property of the Missions for its individual aggrandizement; which has ruined and shamefully oppressed the laboring people of California, by their enormous exactions on goods imported into the country,—is the determined purpose of the brave men who are associated under my command.

I also solemnly declare my object, in the second place, to be to invite all peaceable and good citizens of California, who are friendly to the maintenance of good order and equal rights, and I do hereby invite them to repair to my camp at Sonoma, without delay, to assist in establishing and perpetuating a Republican Government, which shall secure to all, civil and religious liberty; which shall encourage virtue and literature; which shall leave unshackled by fetters, agriculture, commerce, and manufactures.

I further declare that I rely upon the rectitude of our intentions, the favor of Heaven, and the bravery of those who are bound and associated with me, by the principles of self-preservation, by the love of truth, and the hatred of tyranny, for my hopes of success.

I furthermore declare, that I believe that a government to be prosperous and happy, must originate with a people who are friendly to its existence; that the citizens are its guardians, the officers its servants, its glory its reward.

(Signed)

WILLIAM B. IDE.

Headquarters, Sonoma, June 18th, 1846.

General Castro's two short proclamations, issued practically at the same time, were moderate for a Mexican, and should be considered in any view of the merits of the situation.

The citizen Jose Castro, lieutenant-colonel of cavalry in the Mexican army, and acting general-commander of the department of California.

Fellow Citizens:—The contemptible policy of the agents of the United States of North America, in this department, has induced a portion of adventurers, who, regardless of the rights of men, have daringly commenced an invasion, possessing themselves of the town of Sonoma, taking by surprise at that place, the military commander of that border, Colonel Don Mariano Guadalupe Valléjo, Lieut.-colonel Don Victor Prudon, Captain Don Salvador Valléjo, and Mr. Jacob P. Leese.

Fellow Countrymen:—The defence of our liberty, the true religion which our fathers possessed, and our independence, calls upon us to sacrifice ourselves, rather than lose these inestimable blessings; banish from your hearts all petty resentments, turn you, and behold yourselves, these families, these innocent little ones, which have unfortunately fallen into the hands of our enemies, dragged from the bosoms of their fathers, who are prisoners among foreigners, and are calling upon us to succor them. There is still time for us to rise "en masse" as irresistible as retributive. You need not doubt but Divine Providence will direct us in the way to glory. You should not vacillate because of the smallness of the garrison of the general headquarters, for he who first will sacrifice himself will be your friend and fellow citizen.

JOSE CASTRO.

Headquarters, Santa Clara, June 17th, 1846.

Citizen Jose Castro, lieutenant-colonel of artillery in the Mexican army, and acting general-commander of the department of Upper California.

All foreigners residing among us, occupied with their business, may rest assured of the protection of all the authorities of the department, while they refrain entirely from all revolutionary movements.

The general commandancia under my charge will never proceed with rigor against any persons, neither will its authority result in mere words, wanting proof to support it; declaration shall be taken, proofs executed, and the liberty and rights of the laborious, which is ever commendable, shall be protected.

Let the fortune of war take its chance with those ungrateful men, who, with arms in their hands, have attacked the country, without recollecting they were treated by the undersigned with all the indulgence of which he is so characteristic. The inhabitants of the department are witnesses to the truth of this. I have nothing to fear, my duty leads me to death or victory. I am a Mexican soldier, and I will be free and independent, or I will gladly die for these inestimable blessings.

JOSE CASTRO.

Headquarters, Santa Clara, June 17th, 1846.

About this time, two young men, T. Corvie and Fowler, were captured in the neighborhood of Sonoma by one Padilla. They were taken to his camp, and, a day or two after, were cruelly tortured to death.*

Their disappearance was soon known, and their murder suspected; and the commander of Sonoma hearing of several prisoners in Padilla's camp, sent Captain Ford and twenty-one men to attack him, at his supposed position at Santa Rosa plains. Arrived

* "What I saw in California," by E. Bryant, afterward captain of Fremont's battalion, and Alcalde of San Francisco.

there, it was found that Captain De la Torre had joined Padilla with seventy men, and that they had gone in the direction of San Rafael. Marching all night, Ford, having ridden sixty miles, surprised the enemy, taking breakfast, twelve miles from San Rafael; they were in a house about sixty yards from a clump of brushwood. Dismounting there, Captain Ford, ordering that not a shot should be wasted, advanced upon the house. After a short resistance, a sergeant and party charging upon the Americans, the Californians took to flight, leaving eight killed and two wounded. They rallied on a hill, about a mile off; but showing no disposition to return, Captain Ford exchanged his tired horses for fresh ones, found there in a corral, and rode back to Sonoma.

"Captain Fremont, having heard that Don Jose Castro was crossing the bay with two hundred men, marched and joined the garrison of Sonoma, on the 25th of June. Several days were spent in active pursuit of the party under Captain De la Torre, but they succeeded in crossing the bay before they could be overtaken. With the retreat of De la

Torre ended all opposition on the north side of the Bay of San Francisco."*

Captain Fremont, then, with about one hundred and seventy men, returned to the mouth of the American River near Sutter's Fort.

A small party under R. Semple was ordered to cross the Bay, to the town of San Francisco, then called Yerba Buena, to seize the captain of the port, R. T. Ridley; which was done, and Ridley was taken to New Helvetia, (Sutter's Fort,) July 8th; there other prisoners were in confinement.

Commodore Sloat, in the United States Frigate *Savannah*, arrived at Monterey on the second of July; he had heard of a collision in arms upon the Rio Grande, but not of the declaration of Congress that war existed. But on the 7th, he determined to hoist the American flag in Monterey, and it was done by Captain Mervine with two hundred and fifty seamen and marines, amid cheers of troops and foreigners, and with a salute from each of the ships in the harbor. At the same time a proclamation was read, and posted in the town, both in English and Spanish.

* "What I saw in California." p. 293.

In it he announced that the two nations being actually at war, he should carry the flag throughout California; he came as the best friend of the inhabitants as "henceforth California will be a portion of the United States." Judges and alcaldes were invited to continue to execute the functions of their offices; and supplies and provisions should be promptly paid for at fair rates. Under instructions from Commodore Sloat, Captain Montgomery, of the *Portsmouth*, which lay at San Francisco, landed seventy sailors and marines and hoisted the United States flag in the public square; and a volunteer company of Americans was immediately organized for the defence of the town. On the 10th, a national flag was sent by Captain Montgomery to Sonoma; the Bear flag was lowered, and the American flag was raised amid the shouts of the garrison.

Purser Fauntleroy, of the *Savannah* at Monterey, had been ordered to organize a mounted company, from the ships and citizens, in order to keep up communication with the northern posts held by immigrants; it marched July 17th, to take possession of the Mission of San Juan, about thirty miles east of

Monterey. Captain Fremont, having left his position on the Sacramento River on the 12th, arrived at San Juan about an hour before him, and occupied the Mission without opposition. Nine pieces of cannon, two hundred old muskets and a store of ammunition were found there. Both parties marched to Monterey next day.

At every important point in northern California the American flag was now flying.

Fortifications at Monterey were begun immediately after its occupation. Commodore R. F. Stockton arrived there July 15th, in the frigate *Congress*, and on the 23d Commodore Sloat sailed in the *Levant* for Panama.

General Castro retreating, had joined Governor Pio Pico at Santa Barbara, when the joint forces numbered about six hundred; they then marched for Los Angeles and arrived there early in August.

Immediately after taking command, Commodore Stockton sailed in the *Congress*, July 25th, for San Pedro, the port of Los Angeles, and at the same time sent the *Cyane*, Captain Dupont, with Captain Fremont and volunteers on board, to San Diego. The

frigate *Savannah* remained at Monterey, and the sloop Portsmouth at San Francisco.

Arrived at San Pedro, twenty-five miles south of Los Angeles, Commodore Stockton landed a large force of sailors and marines from the Congress, and marched for Los Angeles, his artillery being dragged by oxen. At his approach to the camp of the Californians, close to the town, they fled without resistance; and the capital was occupied without opposition on the 12th of August. The Californians dispersed, and General Castro with a few followers took the road to Sonora.

Captain Fremont had previously been landed at San Diego, about one hundred and forty miles south of Los Angeles, and met with difficulty in procuring horses; he marched to Los Angeles with eighty men, and arrived several days after Castro's flight.*

Commodore Stockton, on the 17th of August, issued a proclamation as "Commander-in-chief, and Governor of California." It announced that the "Territory of California now belongs to the United States," and the people were "requested to meet in their several towns and departments, at such time

* What I saw in California, p. 297.

and place as they may see fit, to elect civil officers to fill the places of those who decline to continue in office, and to administer the laws according to the former usages of the territory."

Thorough protection in "liberty of conscience," persons and property was promised.

"The California battalion of mounted riflemen will be kept in the service of the territory, and constantly on duty, to prevent and punish any aggressions by the Indians, or any other persons, upon the property of individuals, or the peace of the territory: and California hereafter shall be so governed and defended as to give security to the inhabitants, and to defy the power of Mexico.

"All persons are required, as long as the territory is under martial law, to be in their houses from ten o'clock at night until sunrise in the morning."

On the 22d he issued a proclamation for the election of alcaldes to take place September 22d, and soon after another without date, announcing a territorial form of government.

In an official letter, dated August 27th, to "Major Fremont, California battalion," he authorized him to increase the battalion to three hundred men,

and to garrison the five principal towns, and informed him that before he left the territory, it was his intention to appoint him "governor, and Captain Gillespie the secretary thereof."

Captain Gillespie was left in command at Los Angeles; fifty men had been ordered to constitute the garrison.

On the 27th of September, about a month later, the frigate *Congress*, Captain Livingston, bearing the broad pennant of Commodore Stockton, and the frigate *Savannah*, Captain Mervine, anchored in the harbor of San Francisco, having sailed from Monterey a day or two before.

October 1st, a courier arrived from the south with news of an insurrection of the Californians, which occurred September 23d at Los Angeles, and of the capture by them of an American merchant-vessel lying at San Pedro. The *Savannah* immediately sailed for San Pedro.

At this time there were in the harbor of San Francisco, vessels of many nations, and among them a ship of the French navy, and a Russian brig from Sitka, commanded by a naval officer, and laden with wheat.

Commodore Stockton having given two days' notice, landed October 5th, being received with a great parade, naval, marine and civil, with music and speeches; rode out to the mission of San Francisca Dolores, to a collation at the house of Captain Leidesdorff,—at which he spoke an hour—returning to a ball in town that night.

Major Fremont, who had returned to the north to recruit his battalion, having arrived from the Sacramento with his volunteers, on the 12th, the next day Commodore Stockton in the *Congress*, and Fremont's one hundred and eighty volunteers in a transport, sailed for the south—San Pedro or San Diego, it was understood.

Meantime Captain Mervine, having arrived at San Pedro, landed about four hundred of the sailors and marines of the *Savannah*, and marched for Los Angeles; being met on the Mesa by a large force of insurgents, he was defeated, losing six men killed, and retreated to his ship. Captain Gillespie surrendered Los Angeles. Santa Barbara was beleaguered, but Lieutenant Talbot, with his garrison of twenty-five men, forced his way out, and after suffering many hardships, reached Monterey in safety.