

THE
Overland Monthly

JUNE, 1888.



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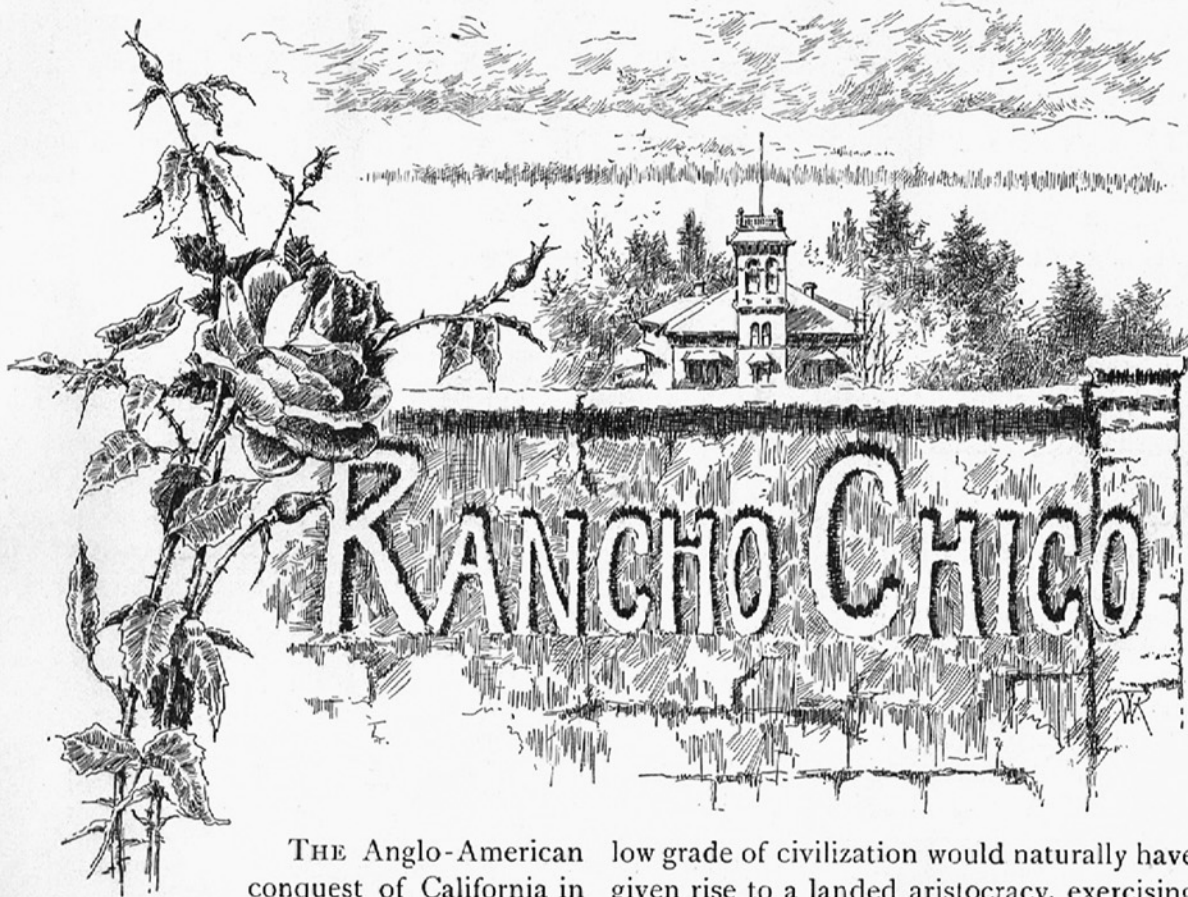
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THE OVERLAND MONTHLY.

VOL. XI. (SECOND SERIES.)—JUNE, 1888.—No. 66.



THE Anglo-American conquest of California in 1846 left in the hands of the victors not a few unsolved social problems. Among these not the least important was the outcome of the vast landed estates resulting from Spanish grants. These in the later years of Mexican authority were bestowed with a lavish hand on almost any respectable naturalized applicant on very easy conditions, and embraced some of the finest and most productive sections of the unoccupied public domain. What under a despotic government with a

low grade of civilization would naturally have given rise to a landed aristocracy, exercising a controlling power in the interests of the few, and reducing the masses to a condition of serfdom, was here brought under the modifying influence of republican institutions. In several cases these feudal domains remained in the hands of pioneer Americans, and have been managed and cultivated by them as personal estates, instead of being simply used for land speculation. The agricultural and social conditions resulting from such holdings in a republican State open a fruitful field to the

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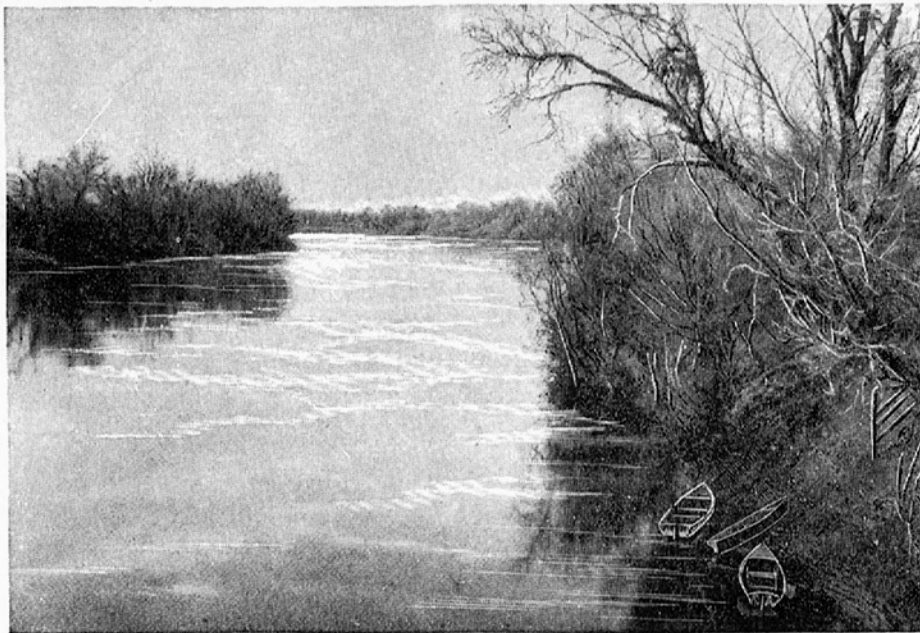
student of institutions. The most conspicuous and interesting case is that of the Rancho Chico. It cannot fairly be called a typical case, for not only is the domain exceptionally rich in natural advantages, but has been from the first in the hands of a man of exceptionally broad and progressive views and great public spirit, especially and patriotically associated with the history of California since the earliest advent of Americans. Moreover, a chapter probably without parallel elsewhere has here been added to the story of the Indian problem. All these things have given the Rancho Chico a historic importance among the Spanish land grants, second only to that of the Sutter grant.

The establishment of Sutter's Fort, or New Helvetia as it was named by its proprietor, located in 1839 as a frontier station on the navigable waters of the lower Sacramento, naturally created a point of rendezvous for American adventurers, who looked to it as a secure resting place from the hardships and fatigues of an overland journey, as well as an outfitting place for explorations in every direction. As a consequence it was here that definite information was best obtained of the features and resources of adjoining districts adapted for settlement. The temporary or permanent residents were,

almost of necessity, those connected with the enterprising proprietor in the development of this rich valley to which it was the point of entrance or exit.

Among the earliest to secure a definite location here was John Bidwell, a native of western New York, an early Ohio schoolmaster, a pioneer settler in Iowa and northwest Missouri, and finally, at the adventurous age of twenty-one years, a member of the Bartleson emigrant expedition of 1841, which a full year before Fremont had made his earliest exploration of the eastern Rocky Mountains had passed over the same ground, pushing their way by unknown routes beyond the mythical Salt Lake, and accidentally stumbling on the natural track of the St. Mary's or Humboldt valley to the foot of the Sierra Nevada, thence in straggling parties across this formidable mountain barrier to the open plains of the San Joaquin, and the frontier settlements in November of that year.

Afterward he met Dr. Marsh, who, by omitting to procure a passport for young Bidwell, subjected him to a short nominal imprisonment from the Mexican authorities at Mission San José. The young man somewhat later entered the employ of Captain Sutter, and thenceforth continued in the position

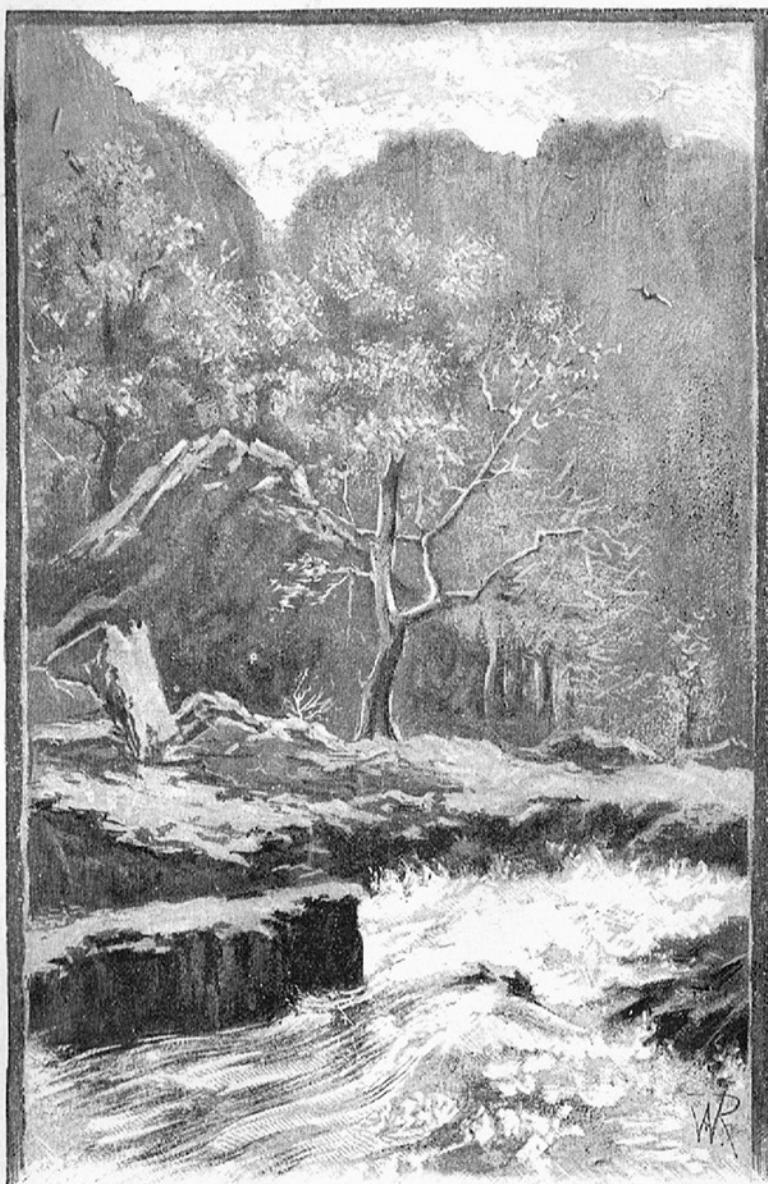


THE SACRAMENTO BELOW THE BRIDGE.

of book-keeper and confidential agent. He took charge of the transfer of the Russian property at Ross, in 1843, and subsequently engaged in several military expeditions, including the Micheltorena campaign in 1844.

During the period of the American war with Mexico Bidwell served as quartermaster in the Fremont battalion, and did efficient service in restoring the American possession of Southern California, after the formidable Californian revolt in the fall of 1846.

In his varied vocations while at Sutter's Fort, young Bidwell found occasion to put into practice his early experience as a surveyor, especially in running the boundaries of land-grants, in which service he acquired an accurate knowledge of the character of the various districts. His own personally selected grant in the lower bottom lands of the Sacramento proved unprofitable, however, and was abandoned. In the meantime, among the acquaintances that he had made at Sutter's Fort was one William Dickey, an educated Irishman, who came to California as early as 1832. This man, after a somewhat roving life, including a trip with Dr. Sandels, the naturalist, received on recommendation of Captain Sutter a grant of the Rancho del Arroyo Chico in 1844, while Edward A. Farwell secured another tract, the small stream of the Rio Chico forming the boundary between the two grants. It was during a run up this valley in 1843, in pursuit of an Oregon company, as well as in making a map of this grant in 1844 that surveyor Bidwell's attention was specially directed to the desir-



IN IRON CAÑON.

able features of this district; and after a successful mining enterprise on Feather river in 1848-1849, in which Mr. Dickey was a partner in the division of the proceeds, Mr. Bidwell bought the northern rancho from Dickey, who wished to leave the country. Subsequently, after tedious legal obstructions, the whole tract now known as Rancho Chico, enlarged by later purchases from the Farwell grant and others to 25,000 acres, was confirmed by the courts in the possession of John Bidwell. From this time he abandoned mining risks, and devoted himself to the quiet pursuit of agriculture. He had left the Mexican war with the title of major; and during

the War of Secession he was commissioned general by Governor Stanford, in view of possible military requirements, and by this latter title he is best known in California.

Here then the young pioneer found himself proprietor of a vast body of as rich land as any on which the sun shines, situated on the banks of a navigable river, and capable of producing everything desirable for civilized man. It was, however, wholly in a state of



GRAPE VINE TRACERY AND FESTOONS.

nature, and partially occupied by a degraded Indian tribe, which was rapidly wasting away before the aggression of the white man.

His first care was consistently to preserve, as far as was compatible with cultivated uses, the natural characteristics that had attracted him to the estate. Thus, the clear streams, only partially diverted from their course for irrigation or mechanical uses, are allowed to flow in their gravelly beds, bordered by over-arching trees of sycamore, alder, willow, and maple. The natural forest is encouraged to a more vigorous and symmetrical growth by the

removal of decayed limbs or the lopping of unsightly branches. The native vines are allowed to climb untrained over lofty trees, and swing their pendent branches in every variety of graceful festoons and leafy hammocks, now with the soft tints of early spring, then with the deeper green of summer, and later, in the chill autumnal breezes, flashing out into a perfect blaze of intense red, shaded off with a bright yellow or deeper purple. The

flocks of sheep, so destructive to all low blooming plants, are vigorously excluded from floral reservations, which show in early and late spring every beauty of color. Even in midwinter the manzanitas are in full bloom, and the white cedar (*Libocedrus*), transplanted from its mountain home, is loaded with pollen that shakes out in fine dust upon the passing breeze. There are native oaks that cast their leaves in winter, but retain their stately forms. One specimen in particular, which in its magnificent growth attracted the admiration of Sir Joseph Hooker, while visiting the rancho with his friend Dr. Asa Gray, has since been known by his name. On the river margin, which is here a clear stream, uncontaminated by mining debris, there are clumps of dense vegetation, alternating with gravelly bars and bare or grassy slopes, giving charming vistas of land and water from every exposed point. Here also is a substantial free bridge, which gives a civilized aspect to the scenery, and affords easy access to the fertile plains of Colusa County beyond. Occasional winter floods at some seasons cover

immense tracts of this rich alluvial soil, or sweep through a tangled forest, leaving high water marks on the trunks of trees, or drift material in their lower branches, very significant, but hardly appreciable to the passing traveler at ordinary times. But it is in the upper districts, safely removed from river overflows, that the most attractive features of natural scenery are presented.

Midway between the river and the projecting foothills, through which the great north and south valley railroad passes, lies the bulk of the productive agricultural lands,

the luxuriant orchards, the town of Chico and its suburban annex, Chico Vecino; here also is the Bidwell mansion, (which has supplanted the old historical adobe,) embowered in dense masses of foliage, — a strange mingling of native and foreign forms, all equally luxuriant and productive, including with the palm, the olive, the fig, and the orange of the south, the oak, the pine, the elm, and the walnut of northern climes. Beyond this, following up the banks of Chico Creek, you pass through the shades of "Val-lombrosa," or the more intricate mazes of "Sulambrosa." At one point on the route the stream divides in its downward course into two distinct arms, leaving a projecting point known as Cape Eden. During the rainy season, both of these stream-beds are allowed to carry the abundant water supplies; but later, when the supply is less copious, the right branch, called Arroyo Lindo, is left dry, the whole body of water being confined to Chico Creek, thus securing a perennial flow.

Above this point the vegetation plainly indicates a greater aridity of soil, and here the digger pine (*Pinus Sabiniana*) makes its first appearance, its gaunt trunk supporting branches with a singularly thin foliage casting only a scanty shade, while its limbs are

garnished with ponderous cones, armed with thick, spinous scales. Its fruit product is now in less request than when in early Indian times it furnished an important supply of native food. With this pine is associated a dense, clumpy chaparral growth, mainly composed of a California lilac (*Ceanothus cuneatus*) interspersed with occasional manzanita bushes and the bright green of the northern live oak (*Quercus Wislizeni*). These singular features of vegetation have been put to a practical use by laying out intricately winding roads appropriately named "The Mazy Way," whose sudden turns and twists are bewildering to any but the skilled driver or well trained horses.

And now comes in view over open plains, with scattering groups of the blue oak (*Quercus Douglasii*), the lower spurs of the foothills, here clothed with chaparral and low pines, rising farther up in castellated walls and terraces, among which is conspicuous the noted landmark of "Nimbus Knob," which marks the extreme limit of Rancho Chico in this direction, as the waters of the Sacramento do in the other. Along the steep slope is seen creeping in serpentine form a mountain lumber flume, which, penetrating the high timbered districts, discharges



SIR JOSEPH HOOKER OAK.



THE OLD ADOBE.

its timber products in the heart of the valley.

Beyond this the most interesting point is the deep rocky chasm known as Iron Cañon, through which the Rio Chico forces its way. Here beetling cliffs of dark ferruginous conglomerate hem in the contracted stream, and between them, as seen from the dizzy heights above, it twists and surges in its frantic efforts to escape their plutonic grasp. The crests of the cliffs, barely a stone's throw

apart, support a scant growth of shrubbery hardly obstructing the view; while below, in their deep crevices or crumbling terraces, they afford a precarious support to choice plants, safely removed from the clutch of the botanist or the outstretched neck of adventurous sheep. Seen from below this narrow gorge, obstructed by fallen rocks and stranded drift-wood, presents a tangled maze of rank vegetation through which it is difficult to force the way, and which has never yet been explored through its whole length. It is hardly necessary to add that such a narrow rocky defile presents in its simplest form the solution of the important problem of water storage for the valley below, and a source of unlimited water power.

To complete the view it is only necessary to climb up the steep slopes of the enclosing mountain wall five hundred feet or more, by a series of terraces. As you scramble upward through dense copses—in which the horse-chestnut, the scrub oak, the ceanothus, buckthorn, and manzanita are conspicuous—and



THE BIDWELL MANSION.

seek to assist the weary legs by calling the arms into vigorous use, it is well to avoid the tempting grasp of the supple poison oak, which stretches so invitingly its three-lobed leafy palm to your assistance; otherwise in wiping the beaded sweat from your brow you may unwittingly transfer its poisonous juices to face and eyes with disagreeable results. But the summit once gained, fatigue is forgotten in the magnificent view that opens on

plan, than the bringing latent possibilities to fruitfulness began. The town-site of Chico was selected, laid out with broad streets, and provided with ample reservations for public parks, churches, and school-houses, soon to be embowered in shade and made attractive by pleasant homes. Mountain roads were surveyed and constructed at great expense, to make accessible the adjoining mining and lumber districts. Mills were erected and



STREET IN CHICO.

the vision, — with the wide valley, the cultivated fields, the orchards and groves, the winding stream, and the distant snow-clad mountains spread beneath you in a magnificent panorama. So much for the natural features of Rancho Chico, attractive enough surely even in its wild state to justify its choice as the spot for the display of Anglo-Saxon energy in development and home-building.

No sooner was the land confirmed to General Bidwell, and the boundaries extended enough to enable him to carry out his full

supplied with the most approved machinery, and river navigation encouraged. In this latter enterprise General Bidwell met with a serious accident in a steamboat explosion, the marks of which are still borne upon his forehead. But above all, the products of field and orchard secured early and constant attention. Experiments on a large scale were made to test the adaptability of this location and soil for the production of the choicest kinds of grain or fruit that could be procured by extensive correspondence or personal application, and the results, sometimes



ON THE RIO CHICO.

of success and sometimes of failure, were soon made apparent in a strange mingling of varied vegetable life.

The fig and the olive, the native walnut and its Asiatic relative, flourished in unrestrained luxuriance. But the standard fruits of the orchard were submitted to more rigid discipline, clipped and pruned to check their natural exuberance of growth, to be bowed down by clustered fruit easily reached by the gathering hand, and less exposed to ruthless summer blasts.

There is no other section in which the cherry bears more plentifully or with greater certainty of return. The markets of the north as far as Portland, Oregon, depend upon the product of this region for their early fruit, and each year an enormous quantity finds utilization through the cannery. One cherry tree in this orchard during the past year bore almost a ton of cherries, which sold for an average of ten cents a pound, making a return of almost two hundred dollars for a single tree. In May the apricot

begins to yield its golden fruit, and before its day is past, apples, pears, peaches, plums, almonds, nectarines, prunes, quinces, and the endless variety of grapes come one after another to fill their places in an endless round. Aside from table grapes, all the vineyard product of the ranch is made up into raisins. There is something in the quality of climate and soil that is peculiarly favorable to the culture of the Malaga, and the finished product is sweeter than the average, and far excels the more famous Fresno brands in the thinness and tenderness of skin.

These comprehensive plans were intended to embrace every department of agricultural industry, carried out by the latest and most approved appliances. The staple wheat product here never failing was converted into the various grades of flour, to which the Chico Mills with the Bidwell brand gave unquestioned reputation. Hogs almost wild partly secured their own living in the oak groves; and in the nicely shaded pastures were large bands of horses and mules mainly devoted to working uses, the racing stock alone excluded, for which Rancho Chico had no use. An extensive bee ranch utilized the nectar secreted by the flowers of the field, the orchard, or the forest, to which was added a large patch of the white sage of the southern country, to give variety and flavor.

The constantly increasing fruit product called into active requisition every branch of manual labor for gathering and preserving, — including Indians, Chinese, and school children during their long summer vacation. One of the pleasantest sights in the height of the fruit season is seen in the hive of industrious workers assembled in the cannery, including both sexes and every available age, each with an appointed task, drones only being shut out. A still more picturesque scene is that presented by a group of Indians under the ample shade of a spreading oak, engaged in separating the husks from the almond, best accomplished by beating and hand-picking, the swarthy, half-clad forms engaged in these various processes, with the rude appliances for cooking and living, troublesome babies strapped to a board hung to the drooping limbs of the tree, all set in a

framework of cultivated fields browned by the summer sun, present a picture better fitted for the artist than the word-painter.

To give a more definite idea of the actual productive capacity of Rancho Chico and its business management, a few statistical facts may be here briefly stated.

Of the entire tract of 25,000 acres, about 7,000 acres are devoted to the ordinary field crops, principally grain and forage. Fruit orchards and vineyards occupy 1,500 acres, while over one-half of the whole is left to the natural growth of forest, copse, wood, and open pasture ground, intersected and made accessible by natural or artificial roads.

The ordinary annual yield of wheat in favorable seasons may be set down at 100,000 bushels, and of barley 50,000.

The hay crop, consisting mainly of partly

matured barley, wheat, or oats, supplemented with alfalfa and some other grasses, is about 1,000 tons, principally consumed on the ranch.

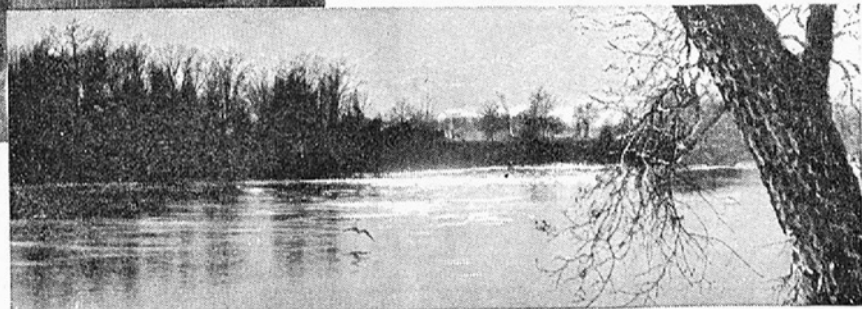
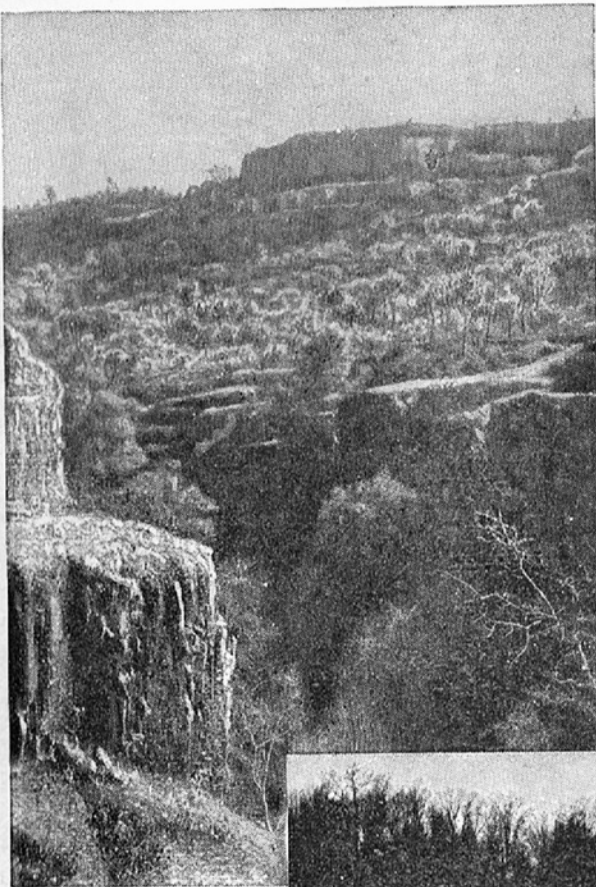
The live stock includes 1,000 cattle, 150 milch cows, 300 head of horses and mules, and 500 hogs.

The annual meat product requires the slaughter of 300 head of cattle and 1,200 sheep. The dairy, supplied from 150 cows, yields a gross income of \$12,000 per annum.

During last year (1887) the cannery turned out 370,000 two-pound cans of fruit.

The almond orchard yielded 30 tons. Of the dried fruits no definite estimate can be given. Last summer over 200 persons were employed in the cannery alone, and at no time is the ranch pay roll less than a hundred men. During the almond season about sixty Indians are kept busy, and sometimes in the height of the fruit season 500 or more men, women, and children, mostly Americans, are given employment on the ranch.

Among the earliest social problems claiming attention in connection with the development of Rancho Chico, was the disposition and treatment of the Indians originally attached to its soil. To the ordinary pioneer the readiest solution offered was a prompt extermination, or at the best allowing natural causes to work out more slowly the same result; but to one who regarded personal proprietorship as a trust, to be administered according to the strict rules of justice and right, such a view could not for a moment be entertained. Accordingly, from the first the almost



FROM NIMBUS KNOB TO THE SACRAMENTO.

hopeless task of elevating this degraded race to a higher civilized plane was taken up. By kind and considerate treatment, not rudely interfering with their natural habits, but encouraging those of cleanliness, sobriety, and thrift, by placing within their reach means for bettering their condition, and protecting them from lawless aggression, the noble task has been carried on. Later on he was efficiently aided in this work by Mrs. Bidwell, who took up the work of attempting to rescue this small remnant of a doomed race from utter extinction.

The problem has been solved so far as individual effort can accomplish it. Faithful, honest, industrious men and women, living in their own homes, and "acting just like white people," are what one sees in their village. They try as hard as they can to be good, to save their money, to take care of their families, to help each other, and to obey the laws. Some of them go to churches in Chico, evening lectures, and political meetings, in their neat Sunday clothes. They also have a chapel of their own, and attend regularly.

They fall in love and marry, and have their joys and sorrows, all with an intensity of earnestness almost Oriental in its strength. When their children die they are heart-broken; motherhood and fatherhood are immensely strong in the race. They have no tribal relation; in fact, as General Bidwell states, there were Indian villages in early California but not Indian tribes; and their life was communal, rather than tribal.

Their feeling towards General Bidwell is one of strong reverence; his house is always called by them "The Mansion." Towards Mrs. Bidwell, who has taken care of them when they were sick, taught and governed them, they show absolute devotion. She is their "white sister." They not only come to her in all troubles, but if any of them wish to leave the village for a few days, to fish in the river or camp in the hills, they come to her to tell her so; and if any one went away without doing this, the rest would consider it contemptible behavior. The slightest suggestion she makes is binding as law. Yielding such perfect obedience, they make the most



THE APIARY.

childlike claims and demands, but never in a troublesome way. They are allowed "gleaner rights" on the Rancho; wheat left after the harvester, fallen wood in the forest, windfall apples, late cherries on the highest boughs, are all theirs, and they never abuse the privilege. But Mrs. Bidwell once drew

life, and have a delightful sense of humor. They seem entirely to lack personal pride in dress, (except on really grand occasions,) but they have solid self respect, and show it constantly. The little girls taught in their school and in Sunday school are as modest, and well-behaved children as one could wish to

see, no darker than the Italian peasant children, and often quite as pretty. Their singing is as



PLOWING — FEBRUARY.

for them a lesson of providence from all this. The wind blew, and shook off the fruit, and beat down the grain, in the orchard and fields, making what men called "waste," in order to care for the poor Indians. And, a little later, a great wind-storm leveled one of the General's large wheat fields. The laborers began the difficult task of cutting the fallen grain. Up came an anxious delegation of Indians to Mrs. Bidwell, saying that the men were cutting the wheat that was meant for them. But, they were told, how can the General keep his flour mills going? Shall we stop the mills, and give you all the wheat field? No, they understood, it would not do, — the great storms were not to be counted, — and so went away perfectly satisfied.

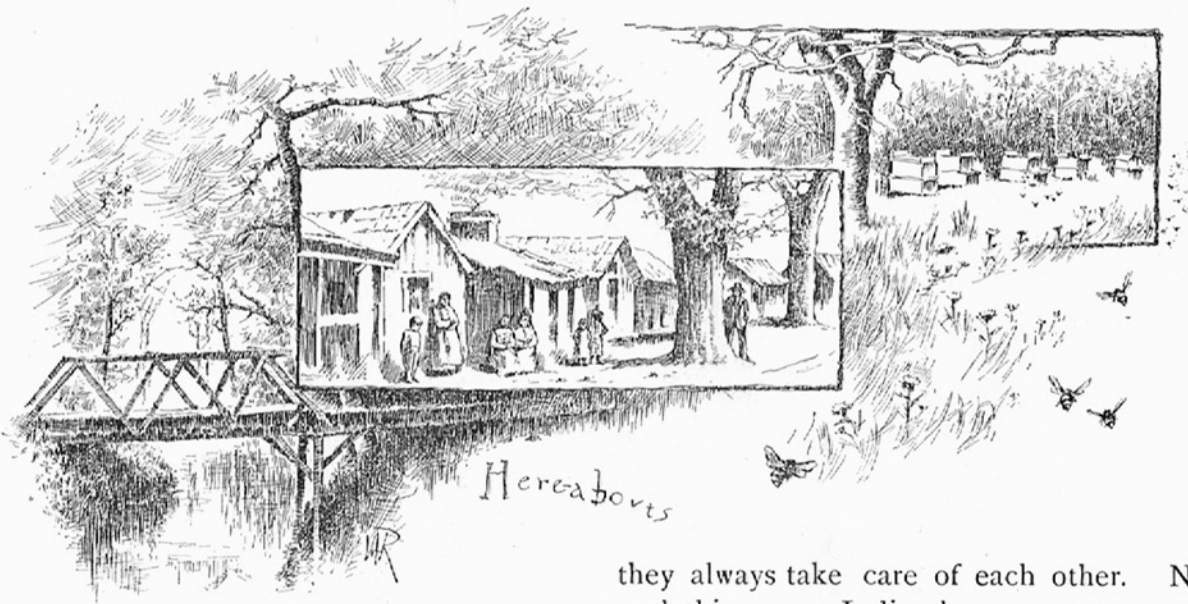
The Indian village, Mechoopka, is about ten minutes' walk from the mansion, beyond the orchard to the west. It lies in a group of cottonwoods, and is pretty and healthy. There is a school taught by a refined young American girl; the houses are plain wooden ones, quite as neat as ordinary Portuguese laborers' houses. When one enters, a few pictures, decent furniture, curtains, in some cases sewing machines, and musical instruments are seen. They show great dignity and simplicity in their intercourse with strangers. When better acquainted they are happy hearted and childlike; they enjoy

genuine as that of negro children. The children, too, are now the strongest influence to civilize the elders, for the Indians are all



THE WATER TOWER.

proud of their educated children. Most of the little niceties of dress and home come in this way. The children read and write and use



English; and so the parents follow. It is a pretty sight to watch the older children, after school, telling to their parents all they have



TREE DIGGING.

learned, or playing with the babies, in the village streets, like any other Californian girls and boys, healthy, happy and busy. The very great affection that the Indians have for each other keeps them from ever becoming rich as individuals; for in all misfortunes

they always take care of each other. No such thing as an Indian beggar was ever seen in the region, nor ever will be. They take sick Indians from elsewhere and care for them. It is part of their religion. And they have done more than this,—they have cared for sick white people, and once brought up a white baby deserted by its unnatural mother.

As we said, the social side of the problem is fast being settled. Not so with the political side. These honest, faithful people have no rights that any white man is bound to respect. Until recently, their oath was not taken in evidence under any circumstances. They cannot vote, nor hold land. Of the seventy-five men, women, and children in the village, all are deeply troubled over their situation. They have no homes; they cannot have any, under the laws. General Bidwell wishes to deed each family a piece of land in fee simple. Mrs. Bidwell, while in Washington, interviewed Attorney General Garland, but could get no decision. Senator Dawes and the friends of the Indians are working to secure laws that will permit them to hold land. Mrs. Bidwell says "the strict construction of the United States laws, recently passed, allowing Indians upon certain conditions to hold real estate is that it applies only to Indians on reservations, considered as wards of the government, and does not apply to the still more deserving class mainly or entirely self-supporting, as represented in California." It all turns on citizenship, and a test case will



"MARY."

be made some of these days. There are Indians in the village who can read and write, have been to the public schools for years, and would make first-rate citizens, and the village has had a school since 1875. It is a monstrous wrong to deny them the rights of voting and of holding property, and it is hoped this article will do something towards strengthening the forces of the friends of justice to the Indian. Cases are known in California

where the heirs of a man, despite his expressed wish in his will, drove Indians from their village. Associations holding land in trust for them are unsafe, besides being wrong in principle. Let us give them a fair chance — these civilized men and women, who earn their own living, and do not go on the war path, or lie drunk around reservations. If Rancho Chico can thus show one bright spot on the dark background of Indian op-

pression, the reader of the sadly romantic pages of *Ramona* will be able to point to one redeeming feature in the treatment of Indians on the Pacific slope.

With the view of meeting the necessary expenditures of these large enterprises, as well as enlarging their scope, General Bidwell some time ago decided to subdivide a portion of his estate, a step that is greatly to the advantage of the beautiful town of Chico and to the whole county of Butte. The especial tract chosen for this subdivision is designated as *Chico Vecino*. It embraces one thousand acres of the most fertile soil on the entire ranch, and is as its name implies adjacent to the present town of Chico. Here it is reasonably expected will be built up a prosperous and intellectual suburban community, retaining some of the best features of the noted Southern California colonies, with even more individual freedom and greater variety of life. In accordance with the pronounced temperance principles of the proprietor a prohibitory clause respecting the sale of intoxi-

cants forms a condition to each deed, while on the other hand liberal provision will be made for churches and schools. If other large landed proprietors of California could be persuaded to carry out similar enterprises the entire State would witness an immediate and marvelous growth.

The business center of the town of Chico is less than five minutes' walk from General Bidwell's residence. Chico is a city of trees, wide streets, and beautiful gardens. Its situation on Chico creek, and about midway between the Sacramento river and the Sierra foothills, is peculiarly attractive. It has seven churches, a good public school system, with over eight hundred pupils in daily attendance, and some excellent private schools. The town is well built, with many and substantial brick blocks and handsome private residences. Its population is about six thousand, making it the largest city in the valley north of Sacramento, nearly a hundred miles distant. The tributary territory is so extensive that energy and foresight cannot fail to



SOME OF THE NATIVES.

make Chico one of the large cities of California. The Holly system of water works is in operation, supplying ten thousand gallons of water daily. The Bank of Chico, with a paid-up capital of three hundred thou-

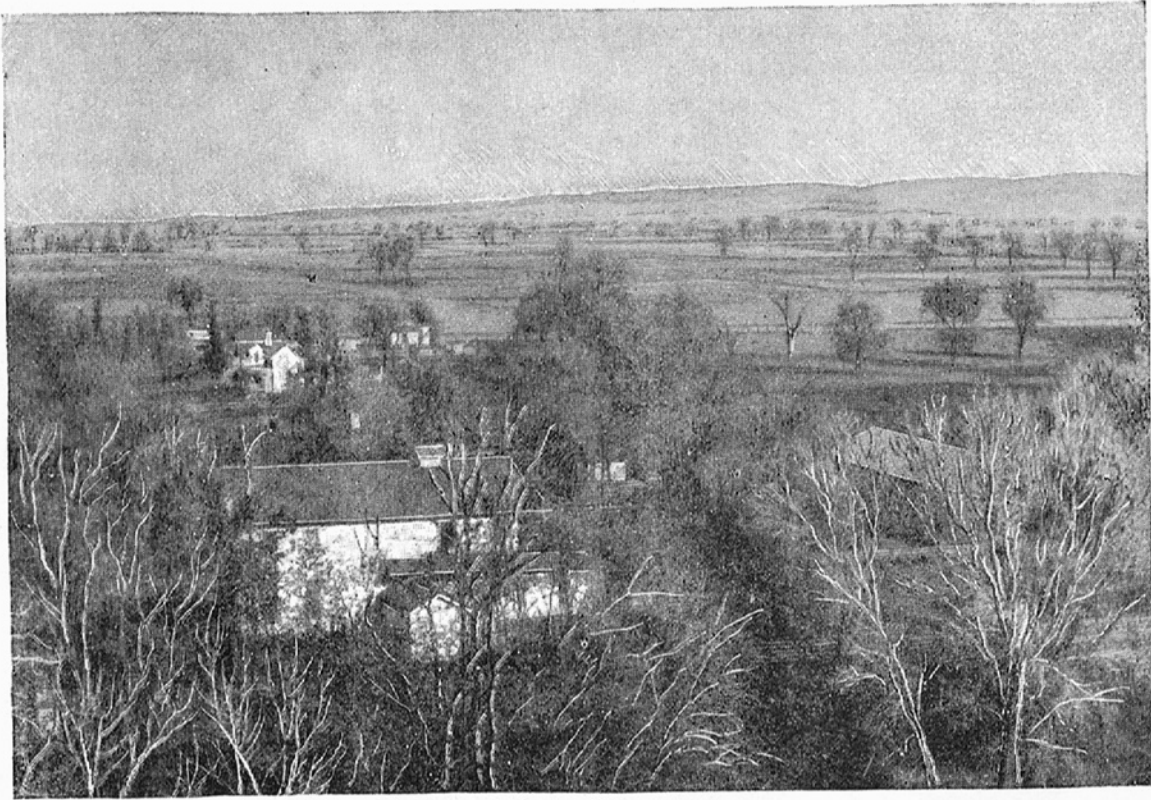
The northern branch of the State Normal School has been located at Chico, and fifty thousand dollars appropriated for the building now in process of construction. Sites were offered in many towns, but Chico gained



THE SMALL SINGER.—A SMILING MAIDEN.—THE CHIEF ILFONSO.—OLD SAWECO.—ONLY A BABY.

sand dollars, occupies its own building in the center of the city. The Bank of Butte County has a capital of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The Sierra Lumber Company, owning great bodies of timber in the mountains, has a flume forty miles long that delivers lumber in the city.

the prize, and the building will stand on a tract of eight acres of very choice land south of Chico creek, and facing Front street. This tract was donated by General Bidwell. The people of the town raised ten thousand dollars in cash, and the site was valued at fifteen thousand dollars. Its setting of winding



CHICO VECINO.

river and vine-clad oaks will render the fine Normal School building still more attractive.

The educational advantages of this district will be greatly promoted by the Normal School, and it is sincerely to be hoped that during the life-time of the General not a few of the enlarged schemes for public improvement will be consummated.

Whatever may be the outgrowth of Rancho Chico in the distant future, no taint of injustice or wrong can ever attach to this fair heritage; possible mistakes or short-comings will pass into oblivion, while the good and true will maintain a perennial freshness. Children

yet unborn will sport in the shade of stately trees yet enclosed in the embryo leaf; there will be delightful drives in the sylvan shades of Vallombrosa, or the Wild-way, cheerful picnics on the banks of Rio Chico; the cañon recesses will be explored by curious eyes; prying botanists will here make pilgrimage to collect from rock crevices the silvery knot-weed (*Polygonum Bidwelliae*); Nimbus Knob will attract hardy climbers; the luscious fruits of tree and vine will continue to refresh thirsty palates long after the head that planned and the hand that planted have been turned to dust.

C. C. Parry.



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THE DOOM OF THE CALIFORNIAN ABORIGINES.¹

My subject, which cannot be fully explained within the few words of a brief title, is an inquiry into the causes of the relative insignificance of the Californian aborigines in the present industry and society of the State.

In 1768 the red men of California numbered, perhaps, two hundred thousand. The friars and early navigators made no estimate of the numbers in any considerable region. The first and best estimates were made by J. S. Smith about 1830. After traveling from Tejon Pass to Mt. Shasta, he expressed the opinion that there were 150,000 people in the basin of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. A man of quick observation, cool judgment, and extensive experience, he is the best authority. That basin certainly did not contain more than three-fourths of the aboriginal population of California. It does not now contain one-half of the white population. The only censuses of the Indians taken before

the middle of this century were those of the missions, which held possession of about one eighth of the territory of the State. In 1826 they had 20,500 aboriginal subjects, and perhaps there were 2,000 more at the pueblos or villages and the presidios or fortified towns, making 22,500 as the highest figure of the mission Indian population.

Mofras publishes a table of the population, herds, and agricultural products, in 1830, showing that the Indians at the missions then numbered 30,000; but these figures though copied by Dwinelle and Gleason, and referred to as correct by other authors, are the products of ignorant supposition or of studious fraud, as any one can soon find by comparing them with the reports for the years 1827, 1828, 1829, and 1832, given in the fifth Mission volume of the Spanish archives, in the United States Surveyor General's office in San Francisco. Mofras says he got his figures from the Prefect of the Missions, and Mr. Hartwell, the Prefect, is not alive to

The substance of this article is from a lecture delivered before the Society of California Pioneers.

continued on next page

defend himself. Whoever the author, and whatever the motive of the misrepresentation, its effect is to convey the impressions that the missions reached a higher prosperity than they ever did, and that their prosperity continued to increase until 1830; whereas, in some important respects, their decay had made rapid progress before that year.

If the aborigines were as numerous in proportion to area in other parts of the State as in the mission domain in 1826, the total Indian population of California was then about 180,000. But we must remember that the red men had then been dying off at the missions for more than half a century; and that in its supplies of acorns, tule roots, clover, salmon, and pine nuts, — which furnished a large part of the aboriginal provisions, — the mission region was inferior to the remainder of the State generally, the deserts excepted.

The late George Yount told me that when he first became familiar with Napa, Suisun, and Knight valleys about fifty years ago, the Indian population there was large, and about Clear Lake really dense; and although he gave no figures, he conveyed the impression that there must have been 40,000 Indians west of the main ridge of the Coast Mountains, between San Francisco Bay and the Klamath River.

These remarks about the number of aboriginal inhabitants are offered not as conclusive, but as calling attention to the best authorities. Whether the number in 1768 was 200,000 or 150,000 or 75,000, there has certainly been a great decrease. The Indians of pure blood in California now do not exceed 5,000. They have entirely disappeared from regions in which they were numerous four generations since; and where a few remain they are the lowest samples of humanity within our borders.

The main causes of their decay are the low condition of their culture when civilized men came among them, and the physical and intellectual unfitness of low savages for civilized life. None were killed by compulsory labor, as in the Antilles, and relatively few by war as compared with the tribes in the basin of the Mississippi.

The Californian Indians generally were extremely low in culture. They did not till the soil, nor polish stone, nor burn pottery, nor weave cloth, nor make canoes, nor possess extensive political organization, nor submit themselves to permanent chiefs, nor even keep tame dogs. All the characteristics of a higher savagism observed among the aborigines on the Atlantic slope of the continent were here lacking. The natural capacity and intellectual activity, the military enterprise and oratorical genius, prominent among the Iroquois and Algonkins, were unknown west of the Sierra Nevada. Our sympathies for moral character, and our admiration for courage and public spirit, are not aroused by any Californian Pocahontas, King Philip, Brandt, Logan, Tecumseh, Red Jacket, or Black Hawk. Instead of rivals of the Creeks, Delawares, and Shawnees as warriors, orators, and cultivators of the ground, we find here a race which competes with the Bushmen, and aboriginal Australians and Tasmanians, for the lowest place in the scale of human existence.

As a general rule, savages die out when they come in contact with civilization. They have entirely disappeared in Tasmania and some of the Antilles; they are rapidly decreasing in Australia, Polynesia, and portions of Africa and North and South America; under the dominion of Britons, Americans, Frenchmen, and Spaniards, and under the ecclesiastical supervision of Catholics and Protestants. The wider the gap between the savagism and the civilization brought together, the more fatal the contact to the lower race; and nowhere has the gap been greater than in California. Our aborigines were so low that, like herbivorous beasts, all grew fat in the spring when clover was abundant, and lean in winter; and their children, at least in some districts, were nearly all born about the same season.

The Indians were brought to the Franciscan missions by force and held there as serfs. little force was needed and little used. Five Spanish soldiers were regarded as enough for a mission where, after a generation or two, there might be five hundred or more red

men. The Indian serfs were compelled to labor without pay; they were restricted to certain limits; they could make no legal contract; some of them were locked up at night; adults and women, as well as children and males, were subject to the lash at the order of the friars: and goads and whips were used by monitors in church to correct the irreverent and inattentive.

In church records and in common conversation, the friars designated the Indians as *gente sin razon*, people without reason, as distinct from the whites or reasoning people, *gente de razon*. No Franciscan or Dominican friar, no Jesuit objected to the use of this contemptuous designation in California or Lower California; none recommended an aborigine of California or Lower California as suitable for any responsible civil, military, or ecclesiastical office. After the Indians of the peninsula had been under the instruction of the Jesuits for more than two generations, they still, in the opinion of Venegas, lacked "rationality, manners, utility to themselves and to society, and every quality that gives dignity to humanity." He might have been more complimentary but scarcely more explicit. Baegert, a brother Jesuit, expressed himself in similar spirit. He said "they have neither reason nor regard for the future; they follow their impulses like cattle." La Pérouse, the distinguished French navigator, who visited Monterey about a hundred years ago, wrote that the friars had come to the conclusion that the reason of the Indians could not be developed; long instruction did not enable them generally to comprehend that four and four make eight. In 1792, the equally distinguished English navigator, Vancouver, could not discover that the Indians at San Francisco had derived any benefit from their conversion; they were still "in the most abject state of uncivilization." Kotzebue, the Russian navigator, obtained a similar impression from his inspection of the Indians at San Francisco in 1815. Eleven years later, Captain Beechey, at the head of a British exploring expedition, entered our bay, and in his presence the friars spoke of their red converts as *bestias*, beasts. He

said of them that they possessed "neither the will, the steadiness, nor the patience to provide for themselves." In 1839 Forbes wrote of them as "superstitious and pusillanimous slaves." He says "the act of making the cross, kneeling at proper times, and other such like mechanical rites, constitute no small part of the religion of these poor people." Something of the estimate in which the aborigines were held may be inferred from a story told by Beechey. While visiting the mission of San José, he took dinner there, and after the meal the friar in charge amused himself and his guest by wrapping pancakes or tortillas into balls, which he threw at the heads of his attendant Indian servant boys, whose duty it was to catch these missiles, on the wing, with their teeth and devour them.

The aborigines never showed any zealous faith in Christianity. Unlike the negroes in the southern States, they took no delight in singing hymns among themselves; unlike the Polynesian Christians, they never went out to convert the neighboring heathen. When they escaped from the missions, as they frequently did, they always left their new religion behind them. In the course of three-quarters of a century thousands of such fugitives fled to the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys, and to the Sierra Nevada, and mingled with the wild tribes, without leaving the least trace there of permanent Christian influence.

The friars did not teach the aborigines to be great mechanics. Among its Spanish settlers, the territory did not possess one blacksmith, carpenter, wheelwright, shipwright, or turner competent to take a respectable position among his fellow-craftsmen at the time in London, Paris, or New York. No good plough, good wagon, good boat, or good rifle was ever made in a mission workshop. The Indians did not have an opportunity to learn thoroughly any mechanical trade, or any of the finer branches of horticulture. There was no skillful nurseryman among them.

The missions under Spain produced nothing save tallow for exportation. They accumulated no wealth save by the natural increase

of their herds. They had seedling grapes, figs, pears, olives, and a few other fruits, but at most of the establishments not more than enough for the use of the white residents. Even grain was so scant in quantity that in ordinary seasons the Indian women were sent out at most of the missions to gather acorns and grass seeds, and the roots of wild plants, to supply the deficiency. The missions never paid their own expenses.

So soon as the aborigines fell under mission control, they began to die out. The number of the neophytes continued to increase for nearly sixty years, but always by additions from without, never by the excess of births over deaths. The proportions of males to females, and of adults to children, were usually very large. In 1828, Soledad had twice as many men as women; San Luis Obispo, San Antonio, and Santa Clara 90 per cent more; San José, Santa Clara, and San Carlos each 25 per cent more. In 1826 there were 5,600 children at all of the missions, or only about one-third as many as there should have been in a growing population. The small number of girls, as compared with boys, at some of the missions, suggests suspicions of infanticide.

The mortality was very large. In 1827 the deaths numbered 1,527, while the baptisms were 961, showing that there were 54 per cent more deaths than births. There was a decrease of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the entire Indian population at the missions in that one year. With the same number of deaths and no more births, the whole race would die out in 40 years. This great mortality is not attributed to any exceptional epidemic. At San Francisco the annual mortality in 1815 and 1816 was 25 per cent. The general average at the missions from 1769 till 1835 seems to have been about 7 per cent, or three times higher than that among the white inhabitants of California then and now.

There was no well educated physician among the Franciscan friars or their military companies. Various infectious and contagious diseases, introduced by the Spaniards, raged with destructive and almost unchecked fury among the aborigines. We hear noth-

ing of inoculation; nothing of vaccination until after the smallpox had prevailed extensively for thirty years. Under the aboriginal treatment, measles and diseases of little note in civilized communities were generally fatal to the red men.

There is no record to show that any of the friars ever studied the causes of this frightful mortality. It seems to have been regarded as a matter for which there was no remedy. The Indians did not work enough to hurt them. They were driven to toil, but never to excessive exertion. The feeling between them and the friars was generally very kind on both sides.

Under American rule the Indians have died as rapidly as under Spanish and Mexican. About 30 years ago several hundred Indian children were apprenticed as servants in American families, and, though treated with much kindness in many cases, most of them died of scrofula or consumption before reaching the age of 20, and nearly all before 30. After some inquiry I have heard of only one who has survived to be 40 years old.

Notwithstanding the great mortality among the Indians generally, some of the older generation reached a remarkable longevity. There is perhaps no other race in which so large a proportion of persons have reached an age of 110 years or more. The matrilarchal age of 130 is reported at San Gabriel and Santa Cruz.

Many of the Indian women at the missions became the wives of Spanish-American soldiers, themselves of mixed blood, and their descendants were a handsome, healthy, prolific race. They had however been bred in ignorance and contempt of agricultural and mechanical toil; and their idleness, fondness for gambling, careless management of their property, and willingness to mortgage their land for money at very high rates of interest, partly perhaps consequences of their Indian blood, have brought most of them to abject poverty, and many to gross demoralization.

After 119 years of association with white men in California, there is not now in our State one first-rate farmer, mechanic or book-keeper of pure aboriginal blood; not one

merchant or owner of a large herd of cattle. Many Indians have been good workers for a few weeks or months at a time in vineyards, orchards, hop-fields, grain fields, and sheep-shearing, but at the close of the season they have wasted their earnings in dissipation, and then lounged about in idleness until another period of high wages would stimulate them to exertion. This mode of life among the men, the degraded character of the women, the squalor of their dwellings, and the frequency of thefts near their camps, render them very undesirable as neighbors.

There never has been a time since 1846 when an Indian disposed to work faithfully could not get regular and profitable employment; when he could not save enough in a year to pay for forty acres of land; and when after buying he could not be protected in its possession. Thousands of white men, after arriving in California without a dollar, became rich by toil and economy; with better opportunities, for he was here when the common laborer could get \$10 or \$20 a day, not one Indian has done so.

The most successful Indians today in California are in Ukiah valley. They live in houses, support themselves without begging or thieving, and in the harvest season are in demand as laborers. They own wagons and horses. One aboriginal community has for years owned a farm of 120 acres, worth now perhaps \$15,000. They have a debt of about \$1,000, which neither increases nor diminishes. The head man of the party is a good farm laborer, but not a good manager. They are regarded with more favor than Chinamen by the white men, and are desirable neighbors about harvest time.

I should do injustice to my subject if I should pass, without notice, the false impressions of the Californian Indian character, and of the treatment of the aborigines in this State of the American government and people, conveyed in the popular romance "Ramona." Mrs. Helen Hunt Jackson wrote with noble motives, but without the studies requisite to get a safe basis for what she intended to be a faithful historical novel. She depicted the Californian Indian by types

which never belonged to his blood, even exceptionally. In his favor, she asserted directly and indirectly much that is false; on the other side, she omitted much that is true. There is no justification for her statement that the Americans would not let an Indian keep accounts, or for the other assertion that a typical Indian was ever competent to keep accounts. The assertion that under the dominion of Spain a redskin kept the books at San Luis Rey, and paid thousands of dollars monthly as wages in gold, is drawn from her fancy, and does not harmonize with the facts that in those times the coin usually seen at the missions — and very scarce — was silver, not gold; that the Indians received no wages; that not \$50 were paid as wages in a month to white men; that no Indian kept the accounts, or had charge of the Mission cash.

Among the numerous papers preserved in the Spanish archives I do not remember seeing one written under the dominion of Spain by a Californian Indian, and Mr. Forbes, the custodian of those archives, tells me that no such document is known to him.

Of the historical facts relating to the treatment of the Indians by the Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans in California; of the laws relating to the rights of the red men; of the ordinary life among the Indians, friars, and rancheros; and of the typical baptismal and family names of the Spanish Californians; of all these Mrs. Jackson knew so little that she blundered in every direction. Her hero's name Alessandro is Italian, not Spanish. The Spanish name is Alejandro. One of her male characters is called Luigo, evidently a modification of the Italian Luigi. She evidently did not know that Luis, as in San Luis Obispo, is the Spanish equivalent of the English Lewis, and of the Italian Luigi. Her knowledge of Italian and ignorance of Spanish crop out again in the Italian family names of Ortegna and Gonzaga, which have no appropriateness as typical of Spanish Californian life. One defender of Mrs. Jackson imagined that Alessandro was baptized by an Italian Franciscan, but there never was such a Franciscan at a Californian

mission under Spain or Mexico, and if there had been he could not have conferred the family names of Ortegna and Gonzaga, or have invented the half-breed word Luigo.

And yet we cannot withhold our admiration from generous zeal, even after we know that it has, by mistake, devoted itself to the wrong side. The general result of such effort, and special result in the case under consideration, will be the vindication and more common recognition of truth and justice. Besides, Californians will feel grateful to Mrs. Jackson for laying the scene of her story in their State; for recognizing the rich material for romance in our local history, scenery and people. Notwithstanding her mistakes of judgment, her memory will be cherished as that of a brilliant writer, a charming companion, and a good woman.

The Jesuit missions in Lower California were founded about 1700; and as the aborigines there are near akin to those of our State, we may say that the Californian Indians have

been in contact with civilization for nearly two centuries. The general result has already been stated: great decrease in numbers and moral discouragement. The doom of the red race is written in our local history, even in those districts where they are most numerous, and where they appear to the least disadvantage. They live in misery, and are steadily dying out. After a few generations, not one of pure blood will remain. They will leave no subject of boast to their descendants. They have no battle, no hero, no monument, no built fortification, no purposely built mound, no polished stone ax, no elegantly carved stone pipe, no song, no notable tradition or interesting legend, no speech that deserves a permanent record. A few shell mounds, a few arrowheads and mortars, a few names of counties, valleys, rivers and towns, a few drops of dark blood mixed with the white, — these will be all that will remain of its aboriginal population in the California of the twenty-first century.

John S. Hittell.

end of article

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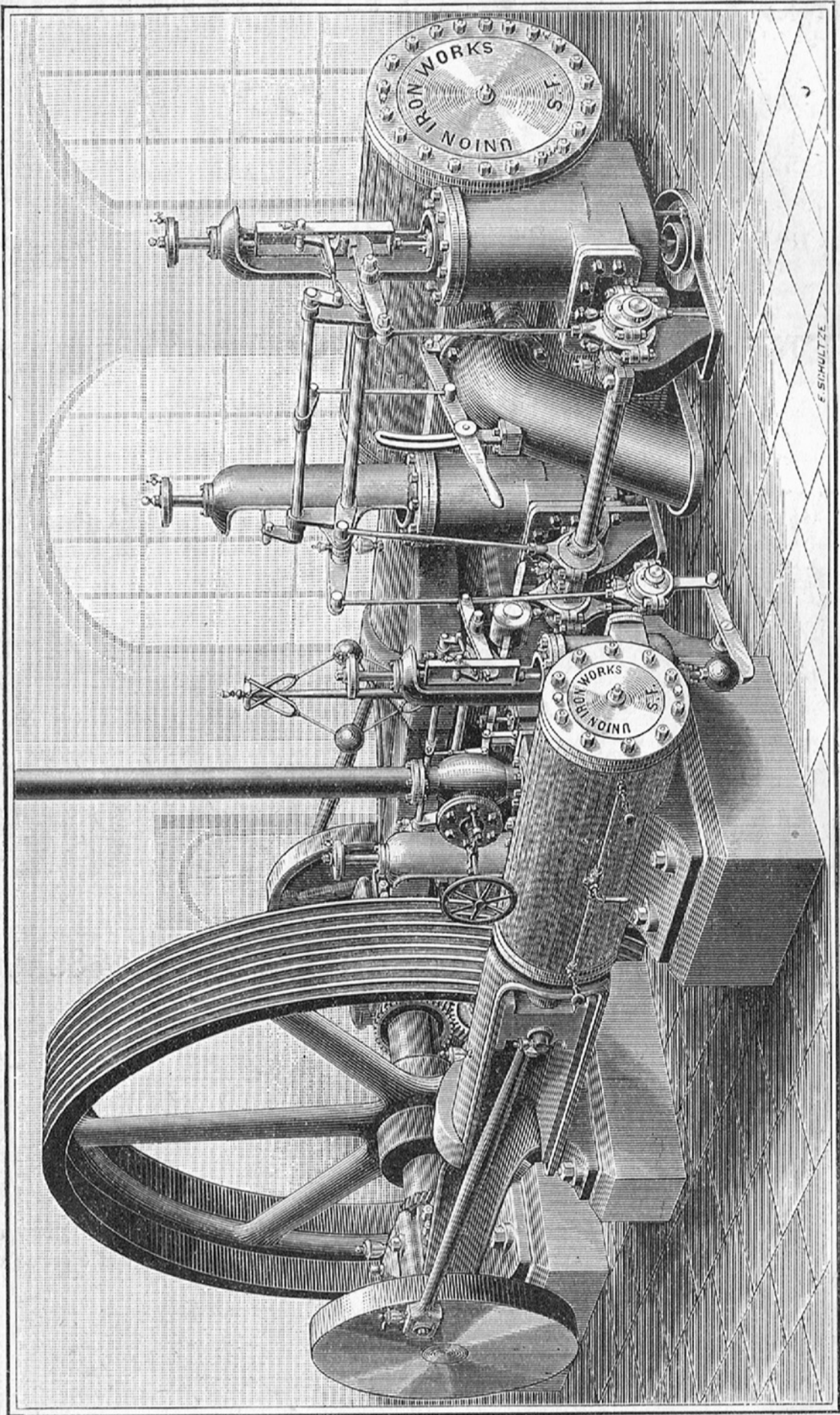
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