

The Memoirs of  
**THEODOR CORDUA**

The Pioneer of New Mecklenburg  
in the Sacramento Valley



*Edited and Translated by*  
Erwin G. Gudde

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Great great great great grandson Theodor "Ted" Cordua:*



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# The Memoirs of Theodor Cordua

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## INTRODUCTION

WHILE there is no dearth of diaries and memoirs written in the hectic years following the discovery of gold, we have only few contemporary sources which give us a glimpse of the history of California during the period preceding this event. I was therefore rather pleased when I accidentally discovered that the memoirs of Theodor Cordua, the first settler in the Sacramento Valley north of Sutter's establishment, were still in the possession of Cordua's family in Germany. Through the kind efforts of Frau Laura Cordua, a niece of the pioneer, I secured the permission of her family to translate and publish the manuscript. The following account of Cordua's life and fortunes in California forms the tenth chapter of his highly interesting autobiography which I hope to publish in the near future.

Theodor Cordua was born on the 23rd of October, 1796, on his father's estate, "Wardow," near Laage in Mecklenburg. His family was probably of Spanish descent, having settled in Northern Germany in the Sixteenth or Seventeenth Century.

As a boy he showed little inclination for his studies and preferred to roam about the fields, dreaming of ocean travel and of adventures in foreign lands. At the age of fourteen he decided to become an apprentice to a retail merchant, for he hoped that the mercantile profession would offer him the best chances to see the world.

After a few dreary years spent as a grocery clerk, Cordua left Germany in November, 1816, and worked his way via Amsterdam and Capetown to Batavia. There he remained three years, first as a clerk to a German merchant, then as an official in the Dutch Colonial service. He returned home in 1819, and left in December of the same year for Paramaribo in Dutch South America. There Cordua established himself as a commission merchant, whose trade soon extended over the whole of Central America. In due course he became very wealthy, but lost his whole fortune in 1841.

After having tried in vain to gain a foothold in the United States he embarked for the Hawaiian Islands. In Honolulu he heard glowing accounts of Sutter's good fortune in California and decided to settle in this new and little known region of Mexico.

After his sad experience during the gold rush he resided in Hawaii for several years, and in 1856 returned to his native land. For some time he entertained the plan of trying his luck in foreign lands a third time by settling on Vancouver Island. But before the project could be realized the restless pioneer closed his eyes forever. He died in Gustrow on the 8th of October, 1857.

## ARRIVAL IN CALIFORNIA

In a San Francisco weekly, the *Alta California*, December 1, 1855 (No. 47), the following article appeared:<sup>1</sup>

## HISTORY OF MARYSVILLE

The early settlement of Marysville is a matter of much importance to its correct history, and it is due those whose enterprise opened the way to what is now a flourishing city, that their names, at least, appear as the true Pioneers. In 1841, Theodore Cordua settled in the forks of the Yuba and Feather rivers, where the city now stands, under a lease from Gen. Sutter, running nine years with the privilege of nine more. He remained in person on the property until January, 1849. During this term of nearly eight years, he erected several adobe houses, including his residence, granaries and other out-houses necessary for a ranch. These were at the foot of D and High streets, where a portion of the adobe walls are still standing. Cordua had from 3000 to 4000 head of cattle, and about 1000 head of horses—all of which might be termed wild stock, there being no market to justify the pains necessary to tame them. The cattle were only killed for the hide and the tallow, the meat being given to the Indians as far as they could use it.

In October, 1848, Charles Covillaud purchased one-half of Cordua's entire interest, being the lease of about two leagues from Sutter, and the Honcut Ranch of seven leagues, which was granted to Cordua by the Mexican Government, 1849—the lease and grant joining each other, and also the stock before named. In the spring of 1849, M. C. Nye and William Forster bought the remaining interest of Cordua in the land and stock. In the fall of the same year they sold the interest they had purchased of Cordua to Mr. Covillaud, who then became owner of this vast and valuable ranch. In the latter part of 1849, Mr. Covillaud sold three-fourths of his interest to John Sampson, J. M. Ramirez and Theodore Sicard; and in January, 1850, the town of Marysville was laid off by the four parties in connection, under the name of C. Covillaud & Co.

There were a great variety of opinions as to what should be the name of the embryo city. Some wanted to call it Yubaville, and some deeds were made out in that name. Others wanted to call it "Yuba City," some "Norwich" and some "Sicardora"—that being the favorite of Colonel Perry. While the discussion of the name was pending, a public meeting was called to take into consideration the general interests of the new city. At this meeting, Capt. Edward Power, from St. Louis, proposed to name it after Mrs. Covillaud, who was then the only white lady living on the town plot. Her name being Mary, it was then and there determined that the city should be named MARYSVILLE.—*Marysville Express*.

In general the data in this short history of the origin of the important town of Marysville are correct. Yet several minor mistakes and inaccuracies have crept in which I shall endeavor to correct when the occasion arises.

On the twentieth of May, 1842 (not 1841), I landed safely in Monterey, the residence of the Governor and [the site of] the chief custom house of Upper California. The Governor at that time was Señor Alvarado. All ships which wanted to trade in California had to anchor first at Monterey in order to pay the high duty according to the Mexican tariff. Monterey had a Catholic church and but few streets which were built up entirely. Many streets had only a few houses here and there. There was not yet any pavement nor were there any gates. The whole place looked as if it were yet to become a town. From a distance, however, its two hundred white adobe houses on a gentle slope, surrounded on all sides by proud coniferous forests, made a very interesting and even surprising impression upon me, a northern European who came from the tropics. On the arrival of a ship from Boston or from the Sandwich Islands a ball was usually arranged. All foreigners were invited, and from the surrounding country the rancheros with their families assembled. The dances were similar to ours. *Guadrillos*, waltzes, and *reales* followed one after another. The music was primitive. A wind instrument, the tambourine, the guitar and one violin made up the usual orchestra.

In September, I made a boat trip via Yerba Buena (later San Francisco) to visit Captain Sutter and his Fort of Nova Helvetia in the Sacramento Valley.<sup>2</sup> I conceived the plan of settling there too as a farmer. Before settling, however, I decided to visit the southern part of Upper California. For this purpose I took passage in Yerba Buena on the bark *Don Quijote*; Captain John Paty had recently arrived from the Sandwich Islands to trade his cargo of goods for skins and tallow. All harbors from San Diego to the Bay of San Francisco were visited going and returning. The supercargo usually traveled on horse and announced the arrival of the ship to customers and friends. In the stern of the ship, in front of the cabin staircase, the steerage was like a regular store provided with all kinds of goods. Here

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from the *Daily Alto California*, Nov. 28, 1835, Vol. IV, No. 298.

<sup>2</sup> Sutter had established his famous settlement in 1839.

one could make purchases, retail and wholesale, according to one's wishes. As soon as the anchor had been cast in the harbor, the prospective customers came aboard so that at times a regular little fair was improvised. Captain Paty had his wife and son with him. The supercargo, in whose veins flowed Hawaiian blood, was Mr. William Davis of Honolulu, a good business man and a pleasant companion. During the trip, however, he was too busy to be much in our company.

From the Bay of San Francisco we first visited Monterey. Here we had an opportunity to witness the cruel entertainment, which is rather popular in California, of a fight between a large grizzly bear of about six hundred pounds and a spirited steer of about twice the size. In a circular enclosure a fore-leg of one animal was tied to that of the other by a rope 20 yards long. As soon as the steer saw the bear and felt that the latter was hindering it from moving about freely, it rushed toward the poor grizzly and ran his horns into the bear's ribs. After many such violent thrusts, the bear finally clutched its great paws around the neck of the steer and embraced it so tightly that the bull could not move and showed its fear by frantic bellows. Frequently the bull is strangled in this manner while the bear clings to its neck with its entrails dangling. The two animals participating in the fight we observed, were still alive after a struggle of two hours, although they were mortally wounded. The butcher gave them the death-blow with his knife.

From Monterey we traveled to Santa Barbara, a city of about two thousand inhabitants, and at that time the most beautiful in California. It is the residence of the bishop, situated not far from the sea, in a valley whose background is formed by high mountains. At the foot of these mountains bubble several hot springs. Even at that time it was the residence of several English and American families, who did everything in their power to make the stay of a stranger in Santa Barbara as pleasant as possible. Here, I had the pleasure of attending a wedding in one of the most prominent families in California. The marriage was solemnized in the beautiful church. On the way home all the guests, who had been at the nuptials, accompanied the bridal couple. The young husband, escorting his wife, threw handfuls of dollars from time to time among the children following the procession, as the custom demanded. In this manner more than one hundred dollars were given away. Every one who married, whether rich or poor, had to make a similar sacrifice according to his means. I have not been able to learn how this custom originated. The procession went back to the home of the parents-in-law of the husband where the wedding feast was served, followed by a fandango. Fandango here is not a single dance, but music and dancing in general. Every once in a while the ladies would throw an egg filled with eau de cologne at the young gentlemen they favored. Every throw which hit the mark increased the joy and the laughter. Besides that all kinds of jokes were played, especially such as would embarrass the young couple. A celebration like this lasted sometimes for a week or a fortnight.

From Santa Barbara we visited San Pedro. This harbor is situated about twenty English miles from the Pueblo de Los Angeles, in a charming valley with brooks which flow constantly and irrigate all the gardens of the place. Pueblo de Los Angeles, at that time the largest city in California with about twenty-five hundred inhabitants, appeared to be a garden.<sup>3</sup> Nearly every house was surrounded by vineyards and fruit trees. These gardens were open to every known foreigner. We were in Los Angeles at the time when all fruits were ripe. The trees, especially the peach, were almost breaking under their burden. In the garden of an old Frenchman<sup>4</sup> I saw ripe oranges. I enjoyed the delicious grapes, the delicate pears, figs, and peaches. Although I daily ate many fruits I always remained in good health. Dysentery, which is so common in my home country in the fall, is not known here at all. In southern Upper California only a few valleys are suited for the cultivation of wheat, corn, and vegetables. As it does not rain here very often there is no agriculture to speak of, except where artificial irrigation is possible. But everywhere in the whole of southern Upper California, in the mountains as well as on the plains and in the valleys, cattle, horses, and sheep are raised with great success. The cattle are nearly always fat in July, but they often suffer a want of food from November to February because the first rains in the fall spoil the old dry grass and the young grass grows but slowly. Since this part of Upper California was the first to be settled one could find here, at my time, numerous and

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<sup>3</sup> Cordua probably meant the outlying settlements. In old pictures Los Angeles looks like a rather bleak town.

<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly Jean Louis Vignes, or "Don Lois," a French cooper and distiller who had come to California via Honolulu in 1831. Settling at Los Angeles, in a few years he possessed the largest vineyard and made the best wine in California. He also had much to do with the growing of oranges at Los Angeles, and was instrumental to causing many French citizens to immigrate to California. He died in 1862 at the age of 79 (or 82). (Hittell, *History of California*, III, 179; Bancroft, *History of California*, V, 762.)

beautiful ranchos. There is in general little timber. In the summer the usual temperature ranges from seventy to one hundred degrees, and in the winter from fifty to sixty degrees Fahrenheit. In general the climate is mild and very healthful.

One hundred years have not yet passed since the first settlers from Mexico made their homes in this part of Upper California. They were Jesuit monks<sup>5</sup> who had emigrated from Mexico by ship or come from the eastern part of Lower California and Sonora over the land route. The first settlements (see Forbe's work about California)<sup>6</sup> or missions were established at San Diego, San Gabriel, San Luis Obispo, and San Fernando. The Indians who lived near or far were compelled to accept the Catholic religion and forced to work at the missions. Not acquainted with the Spanish language, they understood little of the Christian religion and could be governed at first only with force. At the first missions, cattle raising and agriculture were undertaken in large measure. Of land there was no scarcity. The real estate of every mission was the size of a principality. In its most flourishing period, the Mission San Gabriel owned over 5,000 Indians, 120,000 heads of cattle, 100,000 horses, and 25,000 sheep. Under the cloak of religion, the priests and monks ruled like magnates and were the kings of California, while the poor Indians had to do all the work.

## II

### THE BEGINNINGS OF NEW MECKLENBURG

The beginning of November we returned to the Bay of San Francisco and anchored at the small town of Yerba Buena which at that time could be called neither village nor city. Here I met my German compatriot, Mr. Flugge<sup>7</sup> from Hanover, who was in the service of Sutter, and who induced me to return to Nova Helvetia with him. The idea of settling in Sutter's neighborhood in the Sacramento Valley I had almost given up in the meantime. I had heard many complaints about Sutter, especially that he had contracted many debts and did not think of repaying them; for this reason I naturally somewhat lost my confidence in him. Mr. Carl Flugge, whose uncle I had known since 1815, in Grossen Helle, Mecklenburg, as a very worthy and respectable man, had been in California for some time and was better acquainted with the conditions than I was. Therefore I followed his advice although he was a friend of Sutter and had been his pal<sup>8</sup> from the time they had met in St. Louis. He advised me not to give up my plan and I returned to Sutter's Fort with him. Sutter, who owned a grant of thirty leagues<sup>9</sup> (about thirty German square miles or one hundred and fifty thousand acres) in the Sacramento Valley, wished to have settlers in his neighborhood. He also wanted to buy the goods which I had brought from the Sandwich Islands and which he needed very badly just then. His many promises finally led to a deal.<sup>10</sup>

To Mr. Sutter I sold goods valued at about \$8,000, for which I was to receive in exchange heifers at \$4 a head, wild cows at \$6, domesticated cows and oxen at \$15, wild mares at \$3, domesticated mares at \$15, and well-broken horses at \$20. Mr. Flugge guaranteed everything and became my partner for a few months. Sutter, in accordance with his promises, also gave me all the land north of the Yuba to which he held claim. This permission to live on a part of his holdings and to use it at my pleasure for nine years was given to me by contract. If I would move away at the end of nine years, Sutter would pay me for the newly constructed buildings, but if I were to use the land another nine years, the buildings, too, would become Sutter's property. In addition to the five leagues I received from Sutter,

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<sup>5</sup> A mistake of the writer. There were only Franciscan missions in Upper California.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, Alexander, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California* .... London, 1839.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Flügge, who had come to California in 1841, was for some time the legal adviser and "diplomatic representative" of Sutter. He negotiated the latter's treaty with Micheltorena.

<sup>8</sup> The word "Duzbruder," used by the author, means that they used the familiar "do" in addressing each other.

<sup>9</sup> Sutter's grant consisted of only eleven leagues at that time.

<sup>10</sup> [Cordua's note:] As is well known, the Spanish or Mexican Government gave grants here and elsewhere to settlers who applied for them. These deeds were supposed to be absolutely free, but they could be obtained only by bribing the governmental secretary. If one was in the possession of such a deed, which had received the signature of the governor and had been confirmed by the annual assembly of the *Junta* (consisting of twelve elected citizens of California), no one could contest this title. The grants were of various sizes, the largest of thirty leagues and the smallest of two leagues. In Missouri one still speaks of the old Spanish grants. Such a grant was given only to the family and could not be transferred to other persons without the consent of the government. In this respect the grants resembled our feudal fiefs. The limitations on the right to sell the property were discontinued after California had become a part of the United States.

I applied to the Mexican Government a little later for a grant of seven more leagues, situated at the boundary of Sutter's grant. The size of this additional property was probably ten leagues, but I have never received a written document for it. I was loath to take the trip to Monterey or to the distant Pueblo de Los Angeles, the residence of the last two Mexican Governors, Micheltoarena and Pico. Neither was I willing to bribe the government officials at those places. Nevertheless everybody considered me as the owner of the Honcut Ranch. This name I had given my ten-league grant, because the Honcut River formed the northern boundary of my entire holdings of about fifteen square miles. On the east, my possessions were bounded by the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, on the south by the Yuba and on the west by the Feather River.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Mexican laws I could consider the six to seven thousand Indians inhabiting the land as my subjects. They were not allowed to work for any other settler, but received wages and board from me whenever I needed them.

My ranch was in every respect one of the finest farms in California suitable for soil cultivation as well as for cattle raising. The whole estate was a valley with hardly any trees. There were only a few beautiful oaks. The banks of the river were lined with oaks, alders, willows, and sycamores; here and there were arbors of wild grapes. By the rivers spread the finest meadows and the most beautiful grazing land, lowlands of five hundred to two thousand acres. On the whole plain of the Sacramento River not a single shrub is found, only here and there near the river are a few oaks. But it is covered with fine grasses, and in the month of March many flowers blossom. At this time it resembles a carpet of all colors. The soil of this plain is a yellow loam, toward the mountains it becomes reddish-brown and is less fertile. In the lowlands by the rivers are alluvial lands, light soil mixed with much humus and hence very fertile. The luxurious growth of grass makes this sufficiently evident.

Thus I established myself in the late fall of 1842, as a farmer or ranchero on the Yuba River, within the fork formed by the Yuba and Feather rivers, 39° 20' north latitude, not far from the place where the Yuba empties into the Feather River. I called my whole settlement Neu-Mecklenburg, hoping that I would be able to share it with many of my own countrymen. In the beginning I had to struggle with unspeakable difficulties. The virgin soil had to be broken with the plowshare, and it was extremely difficult to instruct the laborers on account of the language. The first good ox-hide served as a mattress, and the saddle as a pillow, the stumps of trees as a table and chairs. Mr. Flugge left me after a few months. He had invested nothing in the business, yet he was not satisfied with fifty per cent, of the profits which, to be sure, would amount to very little during the first few years. He wanted to make his fortune as soon as possible and went to the southern part of Upper California. Everything I saw and heard was "Greek" to me, although I had been born and reared in the country and was not entirely unacquainted with cattle raising and agriculture. But the cattle were treated here in a manner which not only would have surprised the Mecklenburg farmer, but would have intimidated him. Until 1844, I was the only settler of the Upper Sacramento Valley, in a distant part of the unknown California, almost without neighbors and surrounded by thousands of wild Indians. I lived two hundred miles away from Yerba Buena, and all the necessities had to be carried up the Sacramento, Feather, and Yuba rivers by boat or canoe. Captain Sutter was my only neighbor, yet he lived fifty miles as the crow flies, or seventy-five miles along the stream, from me. Under such circumstances, and especially since I saw everything around me in a wild state, my courage changed sometimes to despondency and all my dreams in anticipation of a pleasant life in this beautiful wilderness seemed to fade. But with persistent industry and courageous efforts I finally reached my goal, and—since a human being is a victim of habit—I became satisfied with everything that had been foreign to me at first.

<sup>11</sup> [Corduas note]: Since the Indians had no special name for this river (Yuba) I called it after the Indian village of Yuba, situated on the opposite shore of the Feather River. The Feather River received its name from the French Canadians who many years before my arrival hunted beavers and otters in this district for the Hudson's Bay Company and who took several million dollars worth of furs out of the country. They found many Indian villages at the river whose inhabitants adorned their heads with diadems of woodpecker feathers and likewise wove goose feathers into their hemp blankets which they used as coats. For this reason the beautiful river was rightly called Rio de las Plumas, or by the Americans, Feather River. The names of the rancheros or Indian villages I found rather pretty, for instance Boga, Deitchera, Honcut, Macalome. Yuba, Mimal, Hock, Sisum, Olash. (The villages of Boga and Deitchera are not mentioned in Kroeber's *Handbook of the Indians of California*.—E.G.G.)

In the spring of 1843, I was in the happy position to erect structures of clay, frame, and straw, and to build several enclosures for the cattle and horses on my ranch. I could lay out gardens and fields and provide them with fences and ditches.<sup>12</sup>

Not until this time did I receive the horses and cattle I had bought from Sutter. I also provided my ranch with hogs and chickens now. The term “wild stock” may give the impression that wild horses and cattle were running about in great numbers in the Sacramento Valley, of which I might get as many as I desired. In the San Joaquin Valley there were, indeed, wild horses, but no wild animals could be found in my district. Whoever wanted to own cattle had to buy them, or, as it was done frequently, steal them. While we had no wild stock in the Sacramento Valley, we let our animals run freely in the open. This could be done all year around because there is no winter here. In order to be able to gather the cattle at the desired time, we trained them by driving them to the rodeo, which was usually one or two miles from the living quarters. At first we made this drive daily, then weekly, and finally monthly. After some time the cattle ran at full speed to the rodeo as soon as a few men on horseback rode about calling, “Rodeo, Rodeo.” In this manner the cattle could be driven into large solid enclosures to brand them or for other purposes. At the rodeo we gave them salt to lick and thus kept them together for several hours. When the cattle had arrived at the rodeo, they acted like domesticated animals. They rested and stood around and one could ride through the herd without any trouble.

My grazing land spread over an open plain from twenty to thirty miles and when ten vaqueros at daybreak shouted “Rodeo,” all the animals galloped with raised tails toward the intended place. All was done galloping and usually by ten o’clock everything was assembled. If one wanted to catch a single animal ten or twenty miles away from the ranch or if one wanted to bring it home or to another place, one would attach a lasso to a *cabreço*. In this way one could catch the wildest steer or the most spirited stallion and lead it wherever one needed it.<sup>13</sup> If one desired to separate fifty or more heads from the herd, one placed the *cabreço* a short distance away from the animals and brought the cattle which one desired to separate to this place. As soon as the desired number was there, one let the animals go and they were led by the *cabreço* to an enclosure near the house. The cattle were large and strong. The horses were divided into *manadas*. A *manada* consisted of twenty-five mares and one stallion. In guarding them one gradually accustomed them to stay at certain places where water and food were not lacking. The stallion watched over the mares very carefully. If a strange horse approached he would run toward it and try to chase it away by kicking and biting. The *manadas* had to be driven every month to an enclosure by the house to keep them from becoming too wild. If one wanted to train a colt, of three years, one tied it with the *jaquima* (a halter made of horsehair) and left it without food and water for two or three days. The horse then was mounted by a man who was tied on. After many jumps the poor animal began to run and was spurred on until it sweat and trembled and could hardly stand on its feet any longer. The best of the colts were, of course, rendered worthless in this manner. The horses were of an excellent stock. Since the animals ran about day and night, one tried to prevent stealing and exchanging by branding them. This was done by burning a sign (mine was TC) on the hind thigh of each horse or cattle. Besides this, the cattle were marked on the ears. These signs had to be registered at the office of the alcalde in order to make a future claim legal. If an animal was sold, the seller receipted the value received by putting his mark on the front leg and the buyer burned his mark on the hind leg, below that of the seller. Thus one saw at times horses with many brandings, with which the animals surely did not gain in beauty.

My stock in 1843 amounted to: Cattle—820 cows with 100 calves, among them 20 tame milk cows, 100 bulls (one estimated one bull for fifteen cows), 80 oxen; an increase of 800 head. Horses—200, 50 of them tame; an increase of 150 head. Hogs—originally 5, increased to 54. Chickens—originally 5 hens and 1 rooster, increased to 120.

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<sup>12</sup> [Cordua’s note]: Almost the whole year around I employed eleven white people of all nationalities and twelve Indians, all of whom lived and boarded under my roof. For ordinary agricultural laborers I could always get as many Indians as I needed from the surrounding villages. I paid white people twenty to fifty dollars a month, the Indians received a dollar with board and goods for two weeks.

<sup>13</sup> [Cordua’s note]: *Cabriços* are oxen which are trained for this purpose.



To acquire this stock no very great amount of money had been necessary since I paid, as mentioned above, \$4 for a cow and \$3 for a young mare.

The manufacture of butter and cheese was very limited. One could find ranchos of twenty to thirty thousand head of cattle and yet no milk could be procured for coffee. Cattle-raising was undertaken chiefly for skins and tallow. Soil-cultivation, too, was still very primitive. With a simple plow, the upper crust of the soil was broken about four or five inches deep. Upon this ground, as in Germany, the seed was broadcast in the fall as well as in the spring. If one had no harrow a crooked young oak tree was used. The harvest began at the end of June, and was very productive, in spite of the poor preparation of the ground, because soil and climate were very well suited to wheat, barley, peas, and beans. In the interior of the country rust was still unknown, but it could be found along the coast as far north as Oregon. On Vancouver Island, which is situated on the coast, although farther north than Oregon, rust was entirely unknown. There were hardly any failures of crops. Only when the wheat was very milky and when the temperature was too hot, it ripened too quickly and lost in weight. The grain was cut with sickles and knives, but not thrashed. The grain was separated by having the horses trample upon it on an open thrashing floor, as it was done by the Jews of old. Colza should thrive excellently here, but it was not cultivated in my time.

### III

#### THE CAMPAIGN OF 1845 AND THE EMIGRATION FROM THE UNITED STATES

Until the end of the year 1844, we lived a tranquil life. Everything followed a general routine. Diseases and illnesses among the animals and men were known but little. In December of this year, however, a dark cloud arose on the horizon. The country resounded with revolution and civil war. In Europe this sounds terrible. but in the large and small Spanish republics such a thing was taken with great calmness because every one knew that the unsettled situation would not last long. From Mexico several hundreds of freed convicts had been sent to California as soldiers.<sup>14</sup> These offended the good Californian citizens because they did not shrink from robbery and murder. The officers, to be sure, were a noticeable exception, especially their general, Governor Micheltorena, who was a good man and a friend to every one—only a little too lenient in dealing with these vagabonds. Now, the citizens, who wanted to keep Micheltorena but send the soldiers home, took up arms. Captain Sutter, who wished to receive forgiveness for a former offense against Mexico, sided with the Governor. Through a number of intrigues he succeeded in gathering about two hundred Europeans and Americans as well as two hundred and fifty Indians. Some of those who did not wish to volunteer were forced to join. I was one of these. The foreigners were mostly settlers from the Sacramento Valley and Upper California. Sutter proposed to elect a leader, firmly expecting that he himself would be chosen. The choice, however, fell upon the brave Captain Gant<sup>15</sup>, an old doughty American, who formerly had been in the service of the United States. For his adjutant Captain Rufuss, a German<sup>16</sup>, was selected. Sutter and I remained unnecessary associates.<sup>17</sup> In the Salinas Valley, near Monterey, we united with the troops of Micheltorena. Our whole army consisted of about eight hundred men, a copper field piece, and two old rusty cannon. Our batteries were placed upon an old ox-cart. All good Californian citizens as well as the foreigners below Monterey opposed us with an army of about the same strength.

The incidents of this little campaign I can skip easily. I only wish to mention that in May of the following year, 1845, the campaign ended near Pueblo de Los Angeles with a defeat of our party. With the exception of a horse

<sup>14</sup> Micheltorena and his soldiers had been sent to California in 1842.

<sup>15</sup> John Gantt, who had come to California in 1843 with the Chiles-Walker party. He died in Napa valley in 1849.

<sup>16</sup> According to Sutter's *Reminiscences*, Ernst Rutuss was in command of the Indian company. Bancroft says (*Hist. of Calif.*, V, 706) that he was naturalized in 1844 and was grantee of the Cazadores grant in the Sacramento Valley. In 1845, in partnership with William Benitz he leased the Fort Ross property from Sutter. and in '46 was grantee of the Rancho de German north of Ross, of which he sold part in 1847, but he resided in Sonoma County at least until 1879.

<sup>17</sup> A facsimile of the roster of the forces which left Sutter's Fort on January 1, 1845, to march to the aid of Governor Manuel Micheltorena against the revolting Californians under José Castro and former Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, is to be found in *The Diary of Johann August Sutter*, published by the Grabhorn Press, San Francisco, 1932.

which lost its tail, there were no casualties on either side. Many of my brave comrades had run away before the battle commenced. I received the honorable commission of an official messenger and was wise enough not to return.<sup>18</sup> General Micheltorena with his soldiers was sent back to Mexico. The good fellow had promised every one on his side legal titles for their land after the completion of the campaign. He was, however, embarked on the *Don Quijote*, Captain John Paty, and expectations to receive legal titles came to nought.<sup>19</sup>

The immigrant trains for Oregon and California usually collected in spring at Westport, on the extreme western frontier of Missouri, and started on their trail over the Rocky Mountains at the beginning of April. The carriages in which most of the immigrants take this trip are ordinary covered wagons occupied by one family and packed with the complete household equipment. Every wagon is drawn by two or three oxen, with as many oxen in reserve. Some travelers ride on mules or horses. To be sure of finding sufficient fodder and water, the large trains are separated into detachments of ten to sixty wagons. Each detachment elects a leader or captain charged with the enforcement of order. Such a caravan covers fifteen to twenty miles a day. At places where good grass and water are found, a rest of several days is made. Near the Platte River on the wide plains and in the river valley, great numbers of buffalo are seen far and near. Usually they graze quietly on the nourishing buffalo-grass. They easily can become dangerous to the caravan when they are chased because they unite in large herds and stampede, crushing everything in their way. Occasionally a halt is called and a buffalo-hunt is undertaken until enough of the palatable meat of these animals is obtained and dried to last for some time. It is said that the tongue of the buffalo is very tasty and a hunter who is eager to get this delicacy will often kill a buffalo just for its tongue.<sup>20</sup> The route to Oregon was established by Clark's and Lewis' first expedition, but the world-famous traveler, Colonel Charles Fremont, has opened more convenient routes.<sup>21</sup> At Fort Hall the roads to Oregon and to California separate. In general the road to California leads over wide treeless plains, over easily passable mountain ranges, through valleys and rivers.

Not far from the Bear River, which empties into the Salt Lake, are the famous soda springs whose water is said to surpass in taste the Selterser.<sup>22</sup> Of the springs some are boiling hot, some lukewarm and some are ice-cold. Here the immigrants usually stop to refresh themselves. In the basin of the Great Salt Lake, on the other hand, is a stretch where the caravans have to travel about seventy-five miles without finding grass or water. In this region many a poor animal must die on account of thirst or weakness. After that one passes Utah, the great Mormon settlement in the Valley of the Bear River at the great Salt Lake, an example of what cooperative work is capable of achieving. After that, one has to pass the Truckee River. It is only two or three feet deep and about fifty feet wide and flows rapidly over a stony bed. This river has to be crossed some forty times before one can leave its banks. After this river has been left behind, the country begins to rise. The road leads now over small hills covered with good grass and winds from valley to valley up the Californian mountains. After about ten days, the high point of the road is reached, about eight thousand feet above the sea level. Up to this point the difficulties are not insurmountable and a caravan still can cover eight miles in a single day. But from here down to the California Bear River the trail leads over naked rocks and through dark canyons and valleys without the slightest sustenance for man or beast. There are places where the wagons must be taken apart and lowered down by ropes. The oxen must almost be rolled down or dragged over large layers of rock, so that they are half dead when the train arrives in the beautiful Bear Valley. The distance from Westport to the Sacramento Valley is said to be twenty-two hundred miles. I do not believe that the difficulties over this immense land route are very great. Commodore Stockton, in 1847, made this trip very comfortably in two months with horses and mules. It is, however, self-evident that one must prepare everything thoroughly and proceed very carefully. In the Rocky Mountains the white man often fares worse than the Indian. Laws do not exist there at all. Of this an example: In the fall of 1845, two Germans came to California; both had been engaged by Böhme, a German mineralogist in St. Louis, one as a cook and the other as a driver. They were to bring Mr. Böhme to Oregon. Near Fort Laramie, Mr. Böhme was found dead with a bullet in his head. He had been

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<sup>18</sup> It is small wonder that Sutter, who wrote a glowing account of this somewhat quixotic campaign, does not speak highly of Cordua in his writings.

<sup>19</sup> Sutter himself had received a grant of twenty-two leagues which later was declared void by the United States Supreme Court.

<sup>20</sup> The same is reported by John Bidwell (*Echoes of the Past, Chicago, 1928, p. 30*).

<sup>21</sup> Frémont reached Oregon for the first time late in 1843, and crossed the Sierra into California early in 1844, but the Overland Route had been opened already by the Bartleson-Bidwell-Weber party in 1841, followed by the Chiles-Walker party in 1843. Lansford W. Hastings and his party had also come via Oregon in 1843.

<sup>22</sup> A German mineral water.

shot from behind. Since the cook, Heinrich Bunte of Elberfeld, usually hunted with Mr. Böhme and had been with him on the same day, the immigrants maintained unanimously that Bunte was Böhme's assassin. Since there was no plaintiff, no judgment was given. Mr. Böhme has disappeared from this world, mourned by his relatives who perhaps do not know the manner of his death.

In the fall of 1845, there arrived from the United States the largest immigration overland which I had seen so far. The immigrants arrived with two hundred wagons, not far from my ranch at the Bear River in the Sacramento Valley. Of these immigrants I took four Germans in my employ, among them Madame Kunzen from Baden. I entrusted her with the kitchen<sup>23</sup> while her husband, a tailor, who knew something about gardening was put in charge of the garden.<sup>24</sup>

The year 1846, was of greatest importance in the history of California. After the Mexican War the country was annexed by the United States and was later received as a free state by the Union. Since I was far away from the hubbub of the war I considered it advisable, as a Mexican citizen, to remain neutral, although Colonel Fremont wanted me to participate in the struggle. It was only accidental that I was not drafted. Later on I had to provide several horses and saddles, but up to now I have not received any payment for them.

In August, I made the first matanzas, slaughtering two hundred old fattened cows and full-grown steers. The animals which were to be slaughtered were driven into an enclosure the day before. They were caught with a lasso, thrown to the ground, killed and skinned. All fatty parts were separated from the flesh. The fat was boiled down and the meat cut into strips, about the thickness of a thumb and one or two ells<sup>25</sup> long, salted in layers and the next morning hung in the sun to dry. The head was not used and the tongue was very seldom cut out. The bones were boiled down in large kettles and used in making soap. The skin was cleansed as much as possible of the flesh, stretched out and, if possible, dried in the shade. The boiled tallow was wrapped in sacks made of the hides of large bulls and brought to the market. A dried skin of about thirty pounds costs \$2; an arroba<sup>26</sup> of tallow \$1.50; an arroba of dried meat 50¢, a pound of soap 12½¢<sup>27</sup>. Those were the fixed prices in all California in bartering or exchanging of goods. In paying cash, twenty-five per cent was deducted, because cash money was as rarely found in California as good workers. In this manner I made my first matanzas. I can not be proud of the fact that I used only the skins and tallow and presented the meat to the Indians. In the missions and large cattle ranches the sites of the matanzas and even the surroundings of the dwellings resembled a flaying-ground with mounds of bones. Here no one paid any attention to the bones or even the most beautiful horns. The export of hides from all of California went principally to Boston in the United States and amounted to about one and one-half million skins. Tallow of about one million pounds annually was exported to Lima.

My ranch, Neu-Mecklenburg, with its complete live stock and all the improvements up to the first matanzas, had cost me about fifteen thousand dollars. These matanzas gave me the first large income with which I could pay nearly all of my debts in California.

The year 1846 ended with a terrible calamity in the California mountains. In November of this year, at about the place where the trail from the United States reaches its highest point in the mountains, some twenty belated wagons with emigrants from the United States were caught in a terrible storm and snowed in over night. All the animals and sixty human beings found their death in the snow. The survivors were without the least food after a few days and had to sustain their lives with boiled hides and the bodies of their companions which they had dragged out of the

<sup>23</sup> [Cordua's note] Because of the lack of a good housekeeper I had been obliged to learn how to sew, wash, cook, and bake. I was already able to sew up and catch the pancake like an experienced cook.

<sup>24</sup> [Cordua's note]: Gardening, chicken raising, and taming of wild animals as bears, deer, antelopes, and quails, were my hobbies. The affairs around the house and garden improved now considerably. Every second day a fat steer was slaughtered. A large vegetable garden yielded everything for the kitchen. Fowls and hogs, butter, milk, cheese-everything was in abundance. Occasionally deer, elks, bears, antelopes, wild geese, ducks and quails were hunted. The rivers contained the most delicious fish, as salmon, sturgeon, perch, etc. Nothing was lacking except good drinks such as tea and coffee. Clear water from the Yuba and rich milk were used in their place. Since there were no good lodgings in the Sacramento Valley I had guests at my house practically always; in the winter of 1845 as many as twenty. Everything was free as is the custom in new settlements. One does not receive thanks for it although hospitality sometimes pays in the future.

<sup>25</sup> One ell equals forty-five inches.

<sup>26</sup> Twenty-five pounds.

<sup>27</sup> [Cordua's note]: The dollar or piaster figured at one hundred cents.

snow. Neither oxen nor horses could be found. All had been let free the evening before the storm and had been lost in the snow. After contemplating several days, thirteen persons, three women and ten men, together with two Indians, whom Captain Sutter had sent with flour to assist the party, decided to attempt the trip through the snow on foot. After three weeks the three women, but only two of the men, arrived in the Sacramento Valley alive.<sup>28</sup>

The two Indians had been the first victims. The women assured me, by the way, that the flesh of the Indians had tasted much better than that of the white people and that they had preferred the heart and liver to the flesh.

The first news of this sad happening soon spread over the whole Sacramento Valley and the whole of California. Immediately, preparations were made to save these sufferers in the high mountains. At intervals, stations were erected [on the way] to the camp of the immigrants, and in this manner food was carried to them, and the unfortunates were brought into the Sacramento Valley. Käseberg from Bielefeld was one of the last to arrive alive. He has become notorious as a cannibal<sup>29</sup>. It has been proven that many terrible scenes and even murder had occurred in connection with this incident.

#### IV

#### A PROSPEROUS YEAR

In the year of 1847, little of note occurred. I planted and sowed and made considerable improvements. In June of this year I was visited by Mr. Hartweg, a traveler for the London Botanical Society<sup>30</sup>. With my guest I enjoyed frequent hunting and fishing trips and helped him to collect plants in the California mountains. We also visited the beautiful Bear Valley in those mountains. This valley of about the size of half a square mile forms a square, level meadow through which a brook flows slowly. This is the small Bear River which empties into the Feather River. The small mountain valley was covered with the most beautiful green grass and a mass of spring flowers, while in the shadowy canyons of the mountains the snow had not yet melted. In the center of the valley we found a small isolated fir which caused the greatest surprise to the botanist because this species was entirely unknown to him. In spite of a thorough search we could not find a second tree of this kind in the vicinity. At the end of the valley was a great block of granite, larger than the largest building of Europe. Attracted by this immense mass of rock, I called to my companion, "Tell me, how did this giant stone get here?" Mr. Hartweg, who was already on the block looking for moss and other plants, and holding a beautiful flower in his hand triumphantly replied, "But, please tell me first how this strange little flower gets here, where the tiniest moss hardly finds nourishment?" From this rock one saw the Yuba River making its way into a canyon about five hundred feet deep, foaming and roaring over thousands of rocky crevices and over innumerable cliffs, and now and then plunging over a rocky wall, forming a beautiful cascade. On the other side the eye fell upon a labyrinth of rugged mountains, whose valleys were shaded by proud coniferous growth, while their rocky peaks lay bald and deserted in the glaring sunlight. In the distance, high peaks covered with eternal snow appeared on the horizon. We remained several days on this beautiful high plateau, shot several deer, and Mr. Hartweg discovered many an unknown plant. The great grizzly bear, from which the valley and river derive their name, lived here in large numbers. The reason we did not see any bears was that they lie hidden during the day and do not start on their wanderings until twilight. Our small store of venison and beef must have attracted a bear because we noted his tracks a few steps from our camp. The scent of man, however, is sufficient to put this dangerous animal to flight. Only when he is tormented by hunger will he go so far as to attack a man.

The elevation of Bear Valley is estimated at 6,500 feet, that of the Emigrant Pass at 8,000 feet, and the highest peak of the Sierra Nevada from 11,000 to 12,000 feet. In the small valleys and the barren plateaus between five and eight thousand feet, the black-tailed as well as the red-tailed deer is found. Here it is less disturbed by the Indians,

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<sup>28</sup> Cordua refers here to the "Forlorn Hope" of the ill-fated Donner party.

<sup>29</sup> Most of the terrible stories told about Lewis Keseberg have been discredited by C. F. McGlashan in his *History of the Donner Party*. (Truckee, 1879).

<sup>30</sup> Bancroft spells the name Hartwig.

who live more in the middle and lower mountains. As soon as the snow is melted by the sun and the grass begins to sprout, the deer climbs up into the high mountains and, feeding upon rich greens, becomes very fat. One might see herds of as many as thirty deer. This is in general a good field for a hunter. At the elevation of 5,000 feet the region of coniferous growth begins. We found silver fir with a circumference of twenty-eight to thirty feet at a height of six feet from the ground; the lowest branches, however, were about one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet from the ground. The tallest trees usually stand in the impassable canyons and valleys.

We were satisfied to admire these trees, but the bold Yankee who surmounts even unsurpassable difficulties will know how to make use of them. At an elevation of 5,000 feet down to the 2,000-foot level the region of coniferous and deciduous trees extends. Among the latter the oak is most common. Here forests are open and light. Here and there regions without trees are found, where the slopes of the mountains are partially covered with manzanitas. The Indians use the leaves of this shrub as tobacco and its small red fruit makes an agreeable cooling drink, a healthy nourishing mush, or a tasty cake when pounded into meal and baked. Large valleys with fine grass and clover cut through this region of the mountains in all directions. The lower region, in which prevails the above mentioned reddish-brown clay, does not have many trees. Only here and there one finds thick thorny bushes and isolated crippled oaks and firs. Here are found rabbits, foxes, wolves, and occasionally deer. Here also live whole flocks of quails whose heads are adorned with feathers standing upright. Very seldom one meets with a beautiful species of pheasant which ordinarily does not fly but runs on the ground.

Thus, the time until 1847 passed with hunting, fishing, and botanizing. Instead of the ordinary *matanzas* I was prepared to salt the meat so that my profit on a head of cattle was about \$20.00, twice as much as formerly. The *matanzas*, by the way, became larger every year. This time, for instance, I slaughtered six hundred oxen and one hundred and fifty hogs. I salted and smoked meat and bacon, and made hams, sausages, and headcheese. I had harvested fifteen hundred *fanegas*<sup>31</sup> of wheat, three hundred of barley and one hundred of peas. Some of the wheat I had ground into flour. One *fanega* of wheat of one hundred and twenty-eight pounds gave one hundred pounds of flour of medium quality. I profited greatly by this because a *fanega* of wheat cost two dollars but a *fanega* of flour, eight dollars. It was a handicap that the mill was two hundred miles away—one hundred ninety miles by water and an additional ten miles by land.

Everything increased daily and the fertile soil of California yielded everything one could desire. Chickens I had by the thousands and there was no lack of butter and cheese. Salmon was salted and smoked in great quantities. Caviar, which the Russians considered as good as that of the Volga, was made from the spawn of the sturgeon. I had a candle and soap factory. My hunters of otter and beaver curried leather from the deer skins and made trousers and shoes. Skins of the otters and beavers I sold to the Hudson Bay Company, and the castor<sup>32</sup> I preserved in bladder and tallow for export to the East Indies. The salable products naturally increased from year to year, but there was no special market for them. Therefore I had to think of finding one, and concluded that the Mexican harbor of Mazatlan and the Sandwich Islands might be suitable. If I wanted to realize my plan I had to procure a ship. I made a contract with three English carpenters, according to which they undertook to build a schooner of one hundred and fifty tons at my settlement on the Yuba, by October, 1848. In November I thought I should be able to load the ship with my products: skins, salted beef and pork, hams, hog's lard, tallow, candles, soap, flour, Indian corn, potatoes, onions, salmon and to take them to Mazatlan in order to sell the ship and cargo there. I hoped to repeat this annually in a growing scale. For the construction of the ship, I had the finest timber, some in my Neu-Mecklenburg, but a greater part in the mountains. Since I had sufficient timber and iron and had hired the carpenters and a smith, I was well prepared for the construction of the ship. But many things which were necessary for the complete equipment of the ship, as ropes, sails, anchor, chains, etc., had to be procured. For this I needed several thousand dollars. In order to procure the money I contracted with the American Government to deliver in June, 1848, for their cavalry, one hundred and ninety tons of hay, the ton of two thousand pounds at \$16.50. In February, 1848, I signed the contract and hired at once twelve Americans to deliver the hay 4 for ten dollars a ton at the designated place. I promised to pay them with young cows at five dollars a head.

<sup>31</sup> One *fanega* equals about 1.60 bushels.

<sup>32</sup> Cordua doubtless refers here to the castoreum, the brown substance used for medical purposes and in perfumery.

The year 1847 ended with the greatest expectations and it seemed that the following year would crown my success. Around my dwelling, whose doors were never locked, the former wilderness had changed into gardens and large fields of various kinds of grain. The antelope and deer had been replaced by large herds of cattle and horses which grazed unhampered and unguarded. Even the wild Indians appeared to be not unimpressionable by culture and civilization. With my Indians I always lived in peaceful and harmonious relations. What they lost by my cattle as to acorns, grass seeds, etc., I replaced with wheat, corn, melons, etc., which I planted and shared with them.

Almost in all directions I now had neighbors, so that the social relations were considerably improved. In addition, I enjoyed the greatest freedom which any human being could enjoy and was frequently in a position to give the deciding vote in a judgment over life and death. Then gold was found in my district and my great hopes came to naught.

## V

## THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In the southern part of Upper California, near the Mission San Fernando, thirty miles from the Pueblo de Los Angeles, a gold placer<sup>33</sup> was known for many years. An industrious worker could, with many privations and good luck, make one-half to one dollar daily. In the year 1842 I saw in Pueblo de Los Angeles in the house of Don Luis<sup>34</sup>, a Frenchman, a small piece of gold of the value of about ten dollars. At the beginning of March, 1848, I went to Sutter's Fort. With an air of great importance Sutter showed me a small flask containing about three ounces of fine gold dust. This gold had been discovered by Mr. James Marshall, an American, in digging a ditch for a sawmill. The place of discovery lay in the intermediary mountains of California, at the American River, sixty miles east from where it empties into the Sacramento River, at 38° 30' north latitude. The building of the sawmill was costing Captain Sutter much more than it could ever yield for him in later years. Similarly, the securing of these few ounces of gold had, according to Sutter's own statement, cost three times its value of about fifty dollars. In various gold countries, as Chile, Peru, and Colombia, I had heard that gold digging is a very unprofitable business. Therefore this discovery did not impress me very much; I did not yet divine that I would be drawn into the turmoil and that my fortune would be destroyed in connection with it. Without paying much attention to the discovery of gold I embarked at the end of April with twenty-five Indians for San Francisco in order to fetch the twelve hired Americans and with them to prepare the contracted hay in the Napa Valley at the Bay of San Francisco. But all of them had gone off already to the rich gold mines. At the time when I had left Neu-Mecklenburg there had been no panning for gold as yet, neither at the Yuba River nor at the Feather River. All had streamed to the mill at the American Fork. The twelve Americans had gone there too. With much effort and great difficulties I succeeded in getting other laborers, but only at higher wages. Most of these workers stayed but a short time, and finally I could not get any help even for fifty dollars a day. Only my Indians remained loyal to me. One hundred and forty tons of hay were pressed and baled ready for delivery; over one hundred tons still lay unpressed on the ground. My hay contract was thus filled on my part as well as it was possible under the circumstances, although under the conditions at that time no contract was respected. The soldiers left their posts with arms, horses, and saddles; the sailors left their ships; officers, mates, captains, citizens, lawyers, officials, alcaldes—all hurried to the gold regions in the Sacramento Valley. Yet, the agent of the United States, Quartermaster Folsom,<sup>35</sup> did not treat me very honorably. He was not ashamed to deduct one thousand dollars for fifty tons of hay which had not been pressed. Thus I did not get any profit from my contract although I had filled it as loyally as it was possible! Had I been less honorable and plain-dealing what could I not have done with my twenty-five Indians during this time in the mines! I would have

<sup>33</sup> Gold was discovered by Francisco Lopez on the San Francisco rancho near San Fernando Mission in March, 1842, and by May the gold region had been found to extend over two leagues. Abel Stearns sent some of this gold to Philadelphia by Alfred Robinson before the end of that year, and the placer was worked more or less continuously, chiefly by Sonorans, down to 1846. (Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, IV, 297, and Duflot de Mofras, *Exploration du territoire de l'Orègon, des Californies...*, Paris, 1844, I, 489.)

<sup>34</sup> See Note 3.

<sup>35</sup> Captain Joseph Folsom was Assistant Quartermaster with the New York Volunteers.

considered Folsom's procedure not unreasonable if his government would have had any disadvantage in this deal. Later he could find no ships to freight the hay and had to let the whole shipment lie with the exception of a few tons, until the fall and winter rain spoiled everything.

At the end of June, I returned to my ranch. My majordomo received me, but he was intoxicated to such an extent that he could not stand on his legs. At the time when gold was discovered, I had in my employ a German, Adolf Brühheim<sup>36</sup> from Hamburg, for a butcher and cook, an American for majordomo, an American for blacksmith, three Englishmen and a Scotchman as carpenters, and an Englishman for captain of my boat and my canoes. With the exception of a few Indians and the intoxicated majordomo all of my people had left me. The carpenters who were supposed to build the ship had gone so far as to pull up the floors of my house. Of the two thousand board feet stolen in this manner they had built a machine to wash gold at the mines, receiving one-third of the yield. In the fields, the stalks were weighted down with over-ripened grain. With great effort and much expense I harvested the larger part and put it in stacks near my home. However, this grain was spoiled later by the rain and by the cattle because of the lack of laborers. Most of my neighbors left all the grain unharvested in the field. In the fall from six to eight dollars were paid for a bushel, about sixty pounds, of wheat or barley. I could have had a harvest of about five thousand bushels this year. Many who went to the mines or returned from them, called at my house because my place was the most convenient for all the northern mines. This caused me much trouble and I did not receive any thanks for it. While everybody was searching for gold I had nothing but expenses and work. Even the most respectable people went into the rich Californian mountains, whose river beds had been filled with gold since time immemorial. One spoke of nothing but ounces and pounds. Some of my former employees claimed to have made as much as ten to twenty thousand dollars. Although I was but twelve miles away from the rich Yuba washings I could not participate in the rush because I had no help and was obliged to watch the house. The few who were still with me were always intoxicated, so everything was in the greatest disorder. A colored cook I could not hold even for twenty dollars a day. To an old Englishman I paid a thousand dollars monthly for doing nothing except driving the cattle to the mines. The price of a head of cattle had increased to \$40 and \$60, and horses were sold from one hundred to three hundred dollars a head. Compared to former times, these were enormous prices, but what benefit does a captain derive from high freight rates when he can secure no sailors, and of what avail is a high grain price to a farmer if he is obliged to let his harvest spoil? To aggravate matters, no one paid any attention to the laws which had been in force until now. Everybody had his own code of law or recognized only the law of the club; there was more stolen than bought. These were the beautiful golden times in which almost all of the old and well-to-do Californians became poor. Had I had only a few honest Mecklenburgers in my employ or in my district for neighbors! How we could have been the happiest and richest people, not by digging for gold but by the possession of land, by agriculture, and cattle raising! Although the value of the land in my district and the price of products had not increased so enormously, a young married man with a capital of two thousand dollars could have been a well-to-do man in ten years without any trouble. In the year 1845 I was prepared to grant homesteads to one hundred families, so that each would have received a farm of about seven *lasts*.<sup>37</sup> In addition, I would have been able to supply them with cows, oxen, horses, hogs, and chickens, and yet I could have had enough land left to graze thirty thousand head of cattle. In the year 1848 I was the richest man in the Sacramento Valley and as good a ranchero as could be found in California.

Before the discovery of gold I wrote repeatedly to my home country, informing people of what I knew of California's great fertility, its valuable products, and its healthful climate. I asked my friends to send me active young people. They could have made their fortunes here, but no one followed my well-meaning suggestions at that time. Thus, in 1843, after I had traveled over almost all of Upper California, and after I had become acquainted with the country, climate, and the various conditions, I wrote to my brother, Ferdinand, who lived at that time in Luebeck. He had come to Surinam at my solicitation and had lived there a long time with me and should have known me well. I wrote to him about everything: about the grass, about the oaks, the fir and pine trees of four hundred and fifty

<sup>36</sup> Adolph Bruheim had come on the *California* from Honolulu in 1842, as a servant to one of the passengers. Being permitted to remain, he went to New Helvetia and was later employed by Cordua. In 1846 he entered into a contract with the United States Government to carry mail from Sacramento to Sonoma, and early in 1847 he was a member of the Donner relief expedition. (Batscroft, *Hist of Calif.*, II, 733, and Watson, Douglas, "The First Mail Contract in California", this *Quarterly*, X, 4, pp. 353-54.)

<sup>37</sup> "last" is an old German measure. A farm of seven "lasts" would produce about fourteen tons of grain.

feet,<sup>38</sup> about the lead and the silver and gold, about the humming bird and great grizzly bear, about the anchovies and about the whales. I asked my brother to send me one or two experienced Mecklenburg farmers who would have been able to judge whether my opinion of California was right and whether the land was suited for North German immigrants. Everything else I could have arranged easily then. However, in 1845, two years after I had written, I received an unfavorable answer from my brother, and thus, time passed without results. A highly esteemed friend of my youth, John Pogge of Roggow, at least, called the attention of the Patriotic Society to my information and made my communication public in newspapers. But these efforts, too, were entirely without results. Had I had a chance to go to Europe myself I certainly should have found enough people willing to come to California.

Already in 1846, immediately after the American occupation of California, I acquired a lease on a small country estate from Captain [J. B. R.] Cooper. It was a beautiful site, known by the name of Corte Madera, on the north side of San Francisco Bay, not far from the coast and thirteen miles from San Francisco.<sup>39</sup>

In the course of the same year Corte Madera was visited by forty to fifty whalers and many warships. Since San Francisco was not in a position to provide sufficient provisions, I intended to victual these ships. The large ships could anchor about two miles from Corte Madera. I had built a dwelling place and a large chicken house, brought five hundred chickens, one hundred tame milk cows, one thousand sheep, ten hogs and all kinds of implements for agriculture and horticulture to this estate. Furthermore, I had fenced in one square mile, six hundred and forty acres, for the purpose of raising all kinds of vegetables so that I could supply the ships with everything, from a head of lettuce and an egg to one thousand barrels of salted meat. The north side of the Bay is much cooler and hence more suitable than the Sacramento Valley for salting and smoking meat as well as for raising onions, potatoes, and cabbages. This establishment, combined with a tannery and a wagon factory,<sup>40</sup> would have become a regular gold mine even before the discovery of gold. How much more would this have been true later on in view of the proximity of San Francisco! At that time the price of a bottle of milk was \$1 to \$1.50, one pound of butter was \$1.50, one pound of beef 30¢, one pound of pork 70¢, one melon \$3 to \$5, one pound of potatoes, \$1, one pound of onions \$1.50, and everything else in similar proportions. My residence, Neu-Mecklenburg, was over two hundred miles away from Corte Madera. I, myself, could not reside at Corte Madera because I would have had to neglect my principal business. A good, honest man who was suited to be a manager I could not find. Therefore I had to return this establishment with loss in 1847. It consisted of about ten thousand acres of land and was covered with the most beautiful timber in California, such as pines, firs, cedars, and oaks. The only improvement I had to make for a ten years' lease of the place was the erection of an adobe house of the value of about three hundred and fifty dollars. According to my contract I would have become the owner of the property on payment of five thousand dollars after ten years—that meant in 1856. In the year 1849, the land was sold to the American Government for \$95,000.

## VI

### THE END OF NEW MECKLENBURG

Just during the unfortunate period of the intoxication caused by the first gold rush, in October, 1848, I received another letter from my brother, Ferdinand, which was just as unfavorable as his former communication. At the same time Mr. A. Neumann in Surinam, an old friend and acquaintance of mine, who had just become my son-in-law, wrote that he was willing to come, but wanted to know first under what conditions I would receive him. I could not blame him for this because he had a good business in Surinam. Yet, if he had come I should have gladly transferred to him and to my daughter, Marie, half of my property. Now I saw all my plans come to naught. I was alone without assistance and without friends, surrounded by vagabonds who thought only of their own interests. Ill and desperate I had to look around for some kind of assistance and was obliged to take a partner. I found a suitable man in Charles

<sup>38</sup> [Cordua's note]: According to Fremont, there are pines of this enormous height in California. The mammoth pine, whose bark was shown at an exhibition in New York was three hundred and sixty-three feet high.

<sup>39</sup> [Cordua's note]: See the article, "Vier Tage in der Bai von San Francisco" by [Friedrich] Gerstäcker in Nos. 162-64 of the *Ausland*.

<sup>40</sup> In the German text it is not quite clear whether Cordua means a wagon factory or an express business.



Covillaud, an Americanized Frenchman from Cognac. Extremely poor, he had come to me from North America in 1846. I employed him as a cooper and he worked as such from October, 1846, until December, 1847. Although he was not a good cooper, nevertheless, I was satisfied with him. In December, 1847, I discharged him because I did not need him at that time. Thereupon he became a gold washer on the Yuba River and at the same time carried on a profitable trade with my Indians. This was the principal reason for selecting him as my partner because naturally I now became a partner of his claim and of his trade. At the same time I had a most convenient location to which I could drive my cattle in order to slaughter them for the miners of the Yuba region.

In the spring of this year I had about five thousand head of cattle, by fall I had sold twelve hundred, and when Covillaud became my partner I still owned thirty-eight hundred head. Of these, 500 were sold during our partnership. Thus Covillaud had acquired in October, 1848, half of my possessions. When men are in distress or occupy an inferior position they are often kindly and good, but as soon as their conditions improve they frequently become the opposite. In the case of my Frenchman I soon learned that he was a very bad fellow without any character. He acted entirely against my interest and did not pay any attention to our contract. Since there were hardly any laws, the one who owned the most had to suffer. This and other things induced me to sell the other half of my property to Covillaud's brothers-in-law, Mr. Nye and Mr. Forster,<sup>41</sup> for twenty thousand dollars. Martin Nye was an American, born of German parents. He had been my majordomo for several years, but had lived for the last two years on his little farm on the other side of the Yuba above my estate. He was known as a cattle thief and never hesitated to steal what he could from me. In 1846, Colonel Fremont wanted to have him shot for the theft of some forty head of cattle from my ranch. I saved him, however, from this fate. Mr. Foster was a gentleman through and through, "every inch a gentleman," as the Americans say. Later these two sold their shares to Covillaud, who now united "lease and grant" by buying the lease from Captain Sutter.

When the news of the discovery of gold in California reached Europe many of my countrymen, even my brother, wanted to come to California. Now, however, I could not advise them to do so any longer. Everything was too late! On the first of January, 1849, I transferred my Neu-Mecklenburg to the new owner, and left it with tears in my eyes the end of February. I went with three hundred pounds (4,800 ounces = 120,000 *talers*<sup>42</sup>) of the finest gold which had been gathered at the Yuba and Feather Rivers down-stream to San Francisco. My intention was to embark for Europe, but there was no opportunity to do so. Steam shipping was not yet in existence. To make matters worse, all Europe was in a state of revolution, according to the letters of my brother, and many of my affairs had not been settled. Thus I remained for the time being in San Francisco.

I participated in almost all of the newly started towns of California. In Sonoma, in Napa, and in Benicia I had one building lot each, and in San Francisco four large lots. Upon one of these San Francisco lots a little house was built which later became the great banking and express business of Adams and Company.<sup>43</sup> Since the year 1845, I owned one-fifth (800 lots) of the town of Suttersville, which had been founded and surveyed at the Sacramento River. But Sacramento City (the former Nova Helvetia), which was located nearby, was a strong competitor. Sacramento did not have the favorable location of Suttersville because the latter was situated on the only elevation that could be found along the Sacramento River as far as two hundred miles inland. The land at the Sacramento River, where the large city of Sacramento was to develop, on the other hand, experiences a flood almost annually. Very often I have traveled there with my boat and have measured eight to ten feet of water. Yet through the intrigues of A. Sutter, Jr., and several American speculators, Sacramento City has become the large beautiful inland metropolis which adorns the shore of the Sacramento River. Suttersville, on the other hand, did not prosper and is today nothing but pasture and garden land. In the floods by which Sacramento City suffered in later years, not only many people were killed, as in 1850, but millions of dollars of goods were lost. Therefore it has been necessary to elevate the whole city more

<sup>41</sup> Covillaud had married Mary Murphy, for whom Marysville was later named. Michael C. Nye (according to Bancroft) came overland with the Bartleson party in 1841, was naturalized in 1844 and was granted the Willy rancho on the Yuba, doubtless for his services in the Micheltorena campaign. He married, in 1847, Mrs. Harriet Pike (née Murphy) of the Donner party. He was a resident of Marysville in 1858, but later went to Oregon. William M Foster, with his wife, Sarah Murphy, came to California with the Donner party. He was at New Helvetia in 1847, had a furniture store in San Francisco in 1847-48, and later kept a store at the mines, giving his name to Foster's Bar. He died in San Francisco in 1874. (Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, II, 770; III, 745; IV, 756.)

<sup>42</sup> About \$90,000.

<sup>43</sup> At 99 Montgomery Street.

than seven feet. This is typical of the wild speculations of the Yankees!

In order to make a success of Suttersville the owners had to do something. With two of my partners, George MacKinstry<sup>44</sup> and John Bidwell, I decided therefore to establish a business house. I trusted both of these men because I knew them for eight years as bookkeepers and agents for Sutter and as honest people. They had, by gold washings and trading under the firm name of MacKinstry and Company, earned with three men at the Feather River fifty-four thousand dollars within three months. I now bought several shipments of goods cheap at auction. As I did not like MacKinstry's way of acting from the very beginning I employed a well-recommended young man from Hamburg, Gustav Wilhelm Berteau, at a salary of five hundred dollars a month to take care of my interests in Suttersville. But the evening before the schooner *Itrovide* was to sail with the first shipment, accompanied by Mr. Berteau, to Suttersville, Mr. Berteau resigned, remarking that he believed that he would be able to make more money in the southern mines. In this way two complete shipments of goods fell in the hands of MacKinstry and Company and were lost to me by careless trading and speculating. The loss which I suffered by this and by the failure of Suttersville in general, I estimated at fifty thousand dollars.

It had been my intention originally to establish a business in San Francisco with agencies in Suttersville and at the Yuba. Now, however, the goods which were left, I brought with much effort and great expense to the mines in the Yuba region. My business flourished quite well here because almost all of my former Indians were gathered around me and brought me their daily output of gold every evening and received goods in exchange for payment. This angered the envious Americans and caused them to add to their local and mining laws the clause that no Indian was allowed to pan gold at the river. Many a good Indian who did not want to obey such arbitrary laws was shot by the greedy gold hunters and I, myself, was in danger of losing my life.

In May, 1850, an old acquaintance, Mr. Rudolf Westhoff from Coblenz, visited me at the Yuba River. It happened that I was not at home at the time. His companion, Mr. Görlitz from Breslau, made a fire, and in a few moments everything was turned into ashes. My loss was twenty-eight thousand dollars. It was an accident for which the careless fellow from Breslau was responsible. Practically with each of the numerous fires in San Francisco I suffered losses, as I did also in the great flood of Sacramento City in the winter of 1850. From the chief pay-office of the government with Captain Folsom in charge, my deposit of one hundred ounces of gold was stolen. At the Yuba River my agent Ferary robbed me of another two hundred ounces of gold. At various places people stole four of my houses from their foundations. In one night at the Yuba River thirty-three mules, valued at two hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars each were stolen, and at various times six fine saddle horses were taken. All I had left was a wagon with two mules. With this I left the Yuba mines and went by way of Marysville down the Sacramento River. At the Hock Farm I was introduced by Sutter to Mr. F. Gerstäcker,<sup>45</sup> who was returning from an unsuccessful gold expedition to the Feather River. He, as well as his companions, was soaking wet from head to foot, partly because of the incessant rain and partly because of having to wade through small rivers which are formed here during the rainy season. They were all on foot and had reached this point after many tribulations.

In the dress of a California gold miner no one could be recognized, neither the rich nor the scholar. In the Hotel de France at Sacramento City, I met through Sutter, Prince Paul of Württemberg. The prince, a scholar and a widely traveled man, tall and corpulent, was very simple, without the slightest conceit and extremely interesting in conversation. Nothing but curiosity had led him, immediately after the discovery of gold, to come to the wild, disorderly California where not the slightest comforts could be obtained—even for money. He had left his escorts in Mexico and knew how to put up with everything. Often I had the pleasure of drinking a toast to Germany with him. I was pleased to note also that he would acknowledge the cordial greeting of a blunt American with a hearty handshake.

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<sup>44</sup> George McKinstry, Jr., was an overland immigrant of 1846 who became the first sheriff of the northern district, at Sutter's Fort, 1846-47. He was active in relief measures for the Donner party and his letters on this subject were published in the *Californian Star*. He was prominent in public affairs in Sacramento in early mining times, and had a trading post on the Cosumnes in 1849-50. He was a physician in Old San Diego in the early 70's. (Bancroft, *Hist. of Calif.*, IV, 725.)

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Gerstäcker, who was the author of *Gold! Ein californisches Lebensbild aus dem Jahre 1849*, Leipzig, 1858; *Kalifornien's Gold-u. Quecksilber-District, nach: The California Herald*, Leipzig, 1849, and various other stories and sketches about California, some of which were translated into French and English. He had a long career as a writer and became one of Germany's most popular novelists.

## VII

## FAREWELL TO CALIFORNIA

All my endeavors to make a success of Suttersville failed, and all my efforts to save what was left were in vain. Hardly any one paid his debts; the daily expenses were large. Without home and without comforts I journeyed from one place to another. Only a short time ago wallowing in gold, I was now without hopes for the future. Many a glass was emptied to chase away thoughts of numerous vexations. Almost everywhere fellow-sufferers met, who tried to drown their sorrows in drinking. I was on the verge of despair and ruin at the time in which the disorder of the masses of the people who had gathered in California reached its highest peak. Fortune's favorites acted often more foolishly than those upon whom the goddess had already turned her back.

Until the beginning of 1851, I lived like this. I traveled from one town to the other and looked into all sources in an attempt to work my way up again. In May of this year I established a hay business in connection with Mr. C. P. Scholl from Wurttemberg. In the Napa Valley, which is covered with tall wild oats, I still had two hay presses. On the 22d of May I began making hay with twenty-five men, pressing it and shipping it at once to San Francisco. At first we sold a ton here for sixty dollars; later, when the prices were falling, for twenty-five dollars. By July we had shipped and sold over four hundred tons. Five hundred more tons of the best hay, made of oats, barley, clover, and vetch, were still stacked on the shores of the Napa River. As the price had fallen considerably because of the large supply we intended to let our stores lie until the late fall or the spring of the following year. We were still busy with pressing when, unexpectedly, a quarter of a mile from our place in a field of stubble barley a fire broke out, caused by the carelessness of the people who were harvesting the barley. The fire quickly gained ground and all our stacks, together with the presses, were consumed by the flames. According to our figures, the loss amounted to about twenty thousand dollars.

A few days later I was in San Francisco and took lodging with Mr. Johann Huber<sup>46</sup> from Paderborn, with whom I had become acquainted at the Sacramento River and in the Yuba mines. In the year 1840, he had emigrated from Westphalia by the Osage in Missouri and had been lucky enough to buy twenty-one large building lots in San Francisco shortly before the discovery of gold.

With irresistible force I was drawn once more to the Sacramento and Yuba Rivers, into the California mountains. I desired to see again the spot of my former happiness, which had faded a long time ago, and to shake hands with my old dear friends and acquaintances. In March, 1852, I started on my last trip for the Sacramento Valley and the mountains. At four o'clock in the afternoon I left for Sacramento City with numerous fellow travelers. The mighty steamer quickly cut through the quiet waves of the Bay. But not until dawn of the next day—a mild spring morning—did we pass beautiful Suttersville with its green pleasant hills, defying the highest floods of the stream. It was not yet seven o'clock when we landed in front of Sacramento City—at the large high levee which had been built to protect the city from floods. After a short stay we went on to Marysville where we landed six hours later. Formerly I had needed six to eight days for this trip of two hundred miles, now I made it in sixteen hours. From the mouth of the Sacramento up to the Yuba, every bend of the river, almost every tree at the shore, and all the Indian villages had been known to me. Now the banks of the river, where formerly the Indians hunted bears, raccoon, and deer, were covered with growing cities, beautiful hotels, landing places, and farms of all kinds. All the Indian villages had disappeared. A similar change had taken place in the mountains. There too I found large cities, and highways lined with excellent inns. It appeared as if they had been there for centuries, but no trace of the natives could be found. My old place at the Yuba, which had been destroyed by fire, the neighbors had named "Cordua's Bar." Miners had made themselves at home there. Besides several Americans my cousin, Otto Hückstädt from Malchow, and a Mr. Simonis from Güstrow, were among them. Other Mecklenburgers whom I met in California

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<sup>46</sup> Bancroft (*Hist. of Calif.*, III, 789) mentions a Henry Huber, an overland immigrant with the Bartleson party in 1841, and grantee of the Honcut rancho in 1845 for which he was an unsuccessful claimant in 1853. He was at Sutter's Fort in 1846 and an owner of lots in San Francisco in 1847-48.

were Mr. Wöhler from Schwerin, Mr. Schmidt from Neustadt, Mr. Rose from Wismar, and a Jewish gentleman by the name of Schliemann from Neu-Buckow, an agent of Rothschild.<sup>47</sup> Without being able to greet my old friends, the Indians, I soon returned to San Francisco. My health was ruined, my future prospects very hazy, and the memory of the past few years so painful that I disliked to stay here any longer. I had lost all my courage and despaired almost of the whole world. In the ten years which I had spent in California I had not spent one hundred dollars for clothing and pleasure, and yet hundreds of thousands of dollars had disappeared. Where I had operated personally, I had earned much money; where others had done business for me I had lost. One misfortune after another had come—fire, water, swindle, and theft—until the devil had taken everything. In all my life I had not worked so-hard and had not been obliged to fight such terrible difficulties as within the last two years in California—yet I had lived like a dog. I probably would have been more fortunate if I had not been tortured always by the thought that I had to make good my losses in Surinam in order to go back to Europe as a made man, and if I had not made the mistake of selling my ranch, Neu-Mecklenburg. However, as far as the first point is concerned no one can reproach me for this unless he feels like defending the maxim: “Honesty is not always the best policy.” Similarly, no one can blame me for having sold my ranch. Anybody would have done the same under the unfavorable conditions, especially since my title was doubtful and the cattle, grazing without protection in the open, were stolen daily. In the course of twelve months, to be sure, the conditions improved considerably. On my ranch was established the beautiful city of Marysville. My property titles were recognized in 1854, by the commission appointed by the United States and now the value of my original property in California amounts to perhaps more than six million dollars. Yuba County, my old Neu-Mecklenburg, is now one of the most densely populated districts in the Sacramento Valley, inhabited by a population of about sixty thousand white people. Cattle and game have disappeared. Instead one sees on the roads and highways which cross in all directions migratory miners on horseback and on foot, stages, freight wagons, and pack-animals hurrying to and from the rich gold mines. The water of the Yuba was formerly as clear as crystal; now it is muddy on account of the gold washings. Marysville which was my former place of dwelling is one of the most prosperous towns of California with over twenty thousand inhabitants. A number of hotels, churches, and theatres are now in this town. At the spot where I had my garden are now several hundreds of large warehouses and stores with all kinds of goods. Fifteen to twenty steamers travel on the river, on which, fifteen years ago, I had been the first skipper, causing the Indians of the village on the shore to stare in amazement at my boat. My resolution to leave California was therefore final. In May, 1852, I took passage with the brig *Caesar*, Captain Weissenhagen, stopping in San Francisco on her voyage from Bremen to Honolulu.

## VIII

### NOTES ON NATURAL HISTORY

Before I end my story of California I desire to list on the following pages, to the best of my knowledge, the animals, plants, and natural resources of the country and make a few remarks about its natives.

#### 1. ANIMALS IN CALIFORNIA

##### *A. Mammals*

Three species of squirrel (the common, the flying, and the ground squirrel); one species of kangaroo-rat (nice, harmless animals which stay in the neighborhood of old decayed villages, but which we also found on my ranch where they danced around in large numbers on beautiful summer evenings; later when dogs and cats became more plentiful I saw one only occasionally); two species of mouse; one species of German marmot; one of gopher; one of mole; one of hare; one of rabbit; one of beaver, living at the lakes and rivers, usually in schools. (In general this beaver lives in a different manner from the beaver of the Rocky Mountains. The latter is forced by conditions to build large dams which the California beaver rarely needs.) Three species of marsupial; two of opossum; two of

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<sup>47</sup> Louis Schliemann, a brother of Heinrich Schliemann, the excavator of ancient Troy. The famous archaeologist himself visited California in 1851 after the death of his brother.

skunk (among them the pole-cat); one species of land-otter, in the rivers, inland swamps, and lakes. (Its fur is worth six to eight dollars.) One species of sea-otter, at the seacoast (Russia and China pay eighty to one hundred and fifty dollars for its fur); one species of weasel; two species of bear, the grizzly (which becomes six to twelve hundred pounds in weight and lives practically everywhere at the rivers and in the canyons of the mountains) and the small black bear (which is only found in the higher mountains in California); one species of raccoon; one species of wolf; three species of fox (among them the prairie wolf or coyote); one species of jaguar (the red tiger); one species of antelope (blue-grey with white neck; it is the same kind which one finds in the Rocky Mountains, in fact the only one which exists in North America); one species of elk; two species of deer, the black and the red-tail (the buck of the former is larger than the common deer of Germany).

#### *B. Birds*

Eleven species of hawk and falcon; two of vulture; two of owl; two of woodpecker; two of starling (one species entirely black, the other with beautiful red spots at the throat and on the breast. The latter is doing great damage to seed in the ground for it alights upon the fields in great numbers. It usually nests in the tule and follows the settlers. In the first years I did not find it on my fields, towards the end I saw it here and there.) One species of lark; two of linnet; four of pigeon; one of quail; one of pheasant; six of heron; one of ibis (of grey color); five species of snipe; three of sea-gull; one of pelican; one of swan (of white color and migratory); three of goose (among them a migratory bird found also in Germany); two species of diver; and finally twenty-seven species of duck. (Of these [last] about twenty species are migratory birds, which breed in the North and spend the winter in California. Among the species which stay in California is found our tame green-headed duck.)

#### *C. Amphibians*

Three species of water turtle; two of toad; three of frog; three of small lizard. (To these belongs the horned lizard which lives on the dry, sandy ground in the intermediary mountains of California and in the Rocky Mountains. It is, I believe, native only to North America.) Six species of snake, of which several are poisonous. (Among the poisonous snakes one frequently finds the rattlesnake; among the non-poisonous one is distinguished by red strips on both sides of the back.)

#### *D. Fish*

One species of sturgeon; one of bass; one of salmon (weighing from six to forty-five pounds); one of sea trout; one of anchovy; three of white fish.

#### *E. Insects and Other Small Invertebrates*

Mosquitoes, flies, wasps, ants, grasshoppers, butterflies, and beetles are found in great numbers. Among butterflies and beetles I have seen nothing special except a rather large wood beetle. The louse of the Indians differs from our louse. There is found here a species of crab, and among the mussels there is one large seamussel (*pelome*) whose shell glitters inside like mother-of-pearl, and also one edible river-mussel.

## **2. Plants**

Seven species of pine and fir, among them the largest of the earth (mammoth pines); five of oak, among them the evergreen oak; one species of sycamore; one of walnut; one of hazelnut; one of alder; one of willow; one of gooseberry in the intermediary mountains (the berry has a very thick skin, but grows as large as a pigeon's egg); one species of blackberry; one of manzanita; two of thorn; one of wild oat (its grain is very light, its stalk which grows six feet high becomes as thick as thin bamboo; one finds regions of ten to twenty square miles where nothing but this oat grows, so thick and luxurious that it surpasses many of our oat fields); eight species of grass (among them are three species of beautiful bush grass and one species whose seed resembles the canary seed, but is smaller); one

species of alfalfa (the best herb-like fodder for cattle, the seed is similar to that of the clover); two species of clover, red and white; one of caraway; one of onion; twenty-three species of bulbous plants (among them the soap-plant); one species of mustard which grows six to eight feet and is the worst weed among the grain; two species of thistle; two of teasel; one of strawberry.

### 3. Minerals

Gold and mercury are found in large amounts, silver and lead very little, sulfur, salt, rock salt, and iron ore are assumed to be in the ground.

## IX

### RELATIONS WITH THE INDIANS

The white population of California consisted, at the time of my arrival, chiefly of descendants of Mexicans. They liked to call themselves descendants of the old Spaniards although their Spanish blood is very thin. Their complexion is somewhat dark with the exception of the women of the upper classes. The genuine old Californians are in general good honest people although they are somewhat distrustful of foreigners and have a deadly hatred for Americans. Californians and Americans are, indeed, two peoples who, because of their differences in character, customs, and principles, will never be able to form a whole. The Californians are hospitable and friendly; they like games, dancing, and music, kiss and love each other, and have in general many of the habits of the people of our Mecklenburg. They like the Germans better than any other nation. On the other hand the Americans are cold, arrogant, proud, and sly. The religion of the Californians is Catholic. The Indians are of one race, but are divided into many tribes according to whether they dwell in the South or in the North or in the mountain regions. They differ somewhat in size and physiognomy. The Indians of Southern California have a language whose sounds are similar to the Polish language. Their faces are more pleasant, not infrequently they have a Roman nose and even lighter complexion than the Indians of the North. The latter tattoo themselves above the eyebrows, on the head and on the chin. The mountain Indians have a wiry stature but are considerably smaller than the others. It is fair to assume that there are thirty different tribes in the country and just as many languages. Practically every thirty miles one hears a different dialect. An example will show that the tribes are related to each other, and at the same time differ. The Indians of the Feather River call water, "mummi," those of the upper Sacramento call it, "mem," and those of the lower Sacramento, "kik." The reason for the development and the existence of these various dialects among the tribes living very close to each other one believes to have been found in the fact that the tribes formerly and even today live in continuous warfare. A single incident will show with what cannibalistic rage the hostile tribes tried to destroy each other. In my neighborhood at the Feather River, shortly before Sutter started his settlement, a whole village of over five hundred people was burned by a tribe which lived about ten miles away by the Sacramento River. Even in my time many skulls and bones could be found at the scene of the conflagration, a silent proof of the crime.

The Indian has hardly any conception of religion. He knows, however, very well what is mine and thine and is capable of distinguishing between good and bad. Everything disagreeable which afflicts him he ascribes to an evil spirit. A higher being which we call "God" he does not know. If a death occurs, the whole village assembles and mourns the deceased by howling aloud, and similarly they bewail their dead on a special day every year. A like wail is started after sunset when strange events as floods, diseases, and other plagues, whose causes are unknown to them, are about to occur. For the sun and moon, both of which the Indian calls suns (*panum*)—one of the night and one of the day—they have a special veneration. The Indians of the valley bury their dead in the village, wrapped up and placed in an oblique sitting position. The mountain Indians (Tankus) cremate their dead. Everyone makes a sacrifice at the cremation. The value of such a sacrifice depends upon the more or less friendly relations with the deceased, and many throw without consideration their most valued possessions into the flames. If a chief or his wife dies the very best things have to be sacrificed. I witnessed at the lower Sacramento how they took out the intestines

of the deceased chief and filled the body with Venetian and white corals. These corals are made of human bones, and the white ones are the more valuable to the Indians. As a symbol of mourning the women of the mountain Indians, especially the old ones, blacken their faces and cover their black hair with a kind of resin, so that the whole head appears as if covered by a tar plaster. For their dances they stand in a circle. These dances consist mainly of jumps and of pantomime. Men and women dance alternately. The songs of the women, drum beats, and harp playing accompany the dance. Both sexes are adorned with headgear which consist of artistically arranged upright feathers, ordinarily the tail feathers of a woodpecker. The men paint their entire bodies before the dance, especially the face, in red, black, and white. This is done too when they start on the war-path which is always opened by a war-dance. Otherwise the men are entirely naked. The women have a tuft of willow bast about a foot and a half in length fastened around the waist—both in front and in back. The men are passionately devoted to gambling, their principal entertainment and their greatest pleasure. They often gamble away all of their possessions. They play a very simple game of chance. The chief trick is deception. Both parties sit opposite each other, the player sings and whirls his fists, moving them around the body, from front to back, finally holding them again in front of him. The partner must guess in which hand the other player holds something, usually three little pieces of wood about an inch long. Who guesses correctly wins.

A young man who wishes to marry tries with gifts to get the consent of the parents of the chosen girl. A wedding ceremony does not take place at all. Outside of the hereditary chiefs, of which every village has one or two according to its size, a man has rarely more than one wife. But the chiefs have two or three. After marriage the husband and wife live together in a household. They are very much devoted to their children.

The principal foods of the Indians are acorns and grass seeds. Tribes of the Sacramento Valley celebrate, therefore, the "Festival of Grass Seed" in June and the "Festival of Acorns" in October. The various species of oaks produce acorns which differ in size and in taste. Of these they select the best. After the acorns are shelled and pounded into flour, the Indians know how to remove the bitter taste by water. Of the acorn flour they make wholesome and palatable bread, without any special dishes, at the banks of the river. Of grass seed they make a still better bread in the same manner. Green acorns, picked before they are ripe, shelled, split, dried, and pulverized make a good mush or a thick soup. Besides these, the Indians bake a fine cake of dried and pulverized grass-hoppers. Of game and fish there is never any lack. In the fall, salmon is caught in such amounts that they can live for months on dried fish. The sturgeon is caught during the month of May in great numbers and its dried spawn is the Indian's delicacy. The only cooking dish which the Indians have is a round, water-tight basket. This they make of especially prepared strands of tough roots which are sewed together circularly. In these baskets they cook soup on hot stones. The Indians do not know definite meal times. At times they eat very much, while at others they go without food for a long time. It is noticeable that the women in the Sacramento Valley eat no beef while the men like it very much. Bear meat and pork the Indian will not touch. As a primitive man the Indian is dependent upon the products of the soil, and thus the wild savage can get along nicely where a civilized European would die of hunger if left to himself.

The Indian easily learns how to work and knows how to help himself when in need or distress. Everything he starts he wishes to complete as soon as possible. His work is therefore very often unsatisfactory. If he has started something of which he can not see the end he becomes easily discouraged. He can carry immense burdens for miles and he is a good marksman with the bow and arrow. The river Indians are excellent divers and swimmers. In general the Indian is rather cowardly. He never trusts a man again who once has broken a promise to him. When he is offended he always tries to take revenge. If an Indian is killed by a white man the relatives of the Indian will kill the first white man who crosses their path. With the beginning of civilization and the introduction of the Christian religion in California the misfortune of the Californian Indian started. In consequence of the founding of the great missions the happily living children of nature were forced to leave their home, to live closely together in the barrack-like buildings of the missions and to work for foreigners. Populations of whole villages, even in the Sacramento Valley, were forced into these institutions. Old and incapable people were baptized immediately and then killed with a dagger.<sup>48</sup> The Indians who were capable of working, as well as the children, were driven into the

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<sup>48</sup> Cordua repeats here one of the unproven rumors which were current in those years.

missions. When Sutter established himself in 1839 in the Sacramento Valley, new misfortune came upon these peaceful natives of the country. Their services were demanded immediately. Those who did not want to work were considered as enemies. With other tribes the field was taken against the hostile Indian. Declaration of war was not made. The villages were attacked usually before daybreak when everybody was still asleep. Neither old nor young was spared by the enemy, and often the Sacramento River was colored red by the blood of the innocent Indians, for these villages usually were situated at the banks of the rivers. During a campaign one section of the attackers fell upon the village by way of land. All the Indians of the attacked village naturally fled to find protection on the other bank of the river. But there they were awaited by the other half of the enemy and thus the unhappy people were shot and killed with rifles from both sides of the river. Seldom an Indian escaped such an attack, and those who were not murdered were captured. All children from six to fifteen years of age were usually taken by the greedy white people. The village was burned down and the few Indians who had escaped with their lives were left to their fate.<sup>49</sup> Sutter usually claimed the children as a payment for the cost of the war. They became regular commercial objects because the inhabitants of the coast preferred the Indians of the Sacramento Valley as servants, and paid good prices for them. In this way a regular trade of human beings developed. Gradually there came to our settlements rude hunters who had crossed over the Rocky Mountains. They were mostly vagabonds without feeling and character who had fled from the United States on account of some crime. These were the real enemies of the Indians. They have committed many atrocious deeds without being called to justice. Sutter had been appointed as Alcalde and Commander of the North by the Mexican Government. As such he should have been the protector of all people, but he often failed because of selfish interest. As fast as the immigration from the United States into California increased, just so rapidly the number of Indians in the country decreased. Where the Anglo-Saxon appears the red-skin has to yield, says the American. He does not realize that the disappearance of The Indian is usually the consequence of the many diseases and vices which the white man brings along. By these the innocent and inexperienced natives are ruined, although it can not be denied that at the western boundary of the United States, in the Rocky Mountains, many tribes can still be found, being forced west by the young American nation. The Californian Indians could neither be driven out nor could they emigrate, because the neighboring Indians refused to admit them into their territories.

From my first appearance in California until my departure from this beautiful country I lived in peace with all the neighboring tribes in the valley as well as in the mountains. I could travel among them entirely alone and without fear of being annoyed whenever I wanted. Days and nights I have stayed with them without thinking of any danger. I have never participated in any of Sutter's campaigns against them, but have rather regretted these attacks. Only once, in the fall of 1846, was I forced to take up arms against a tribe which lived in the mountains about forty miles away from me. These were the Indians of the Luckno villages. They were hostile to the Indians who surrounded me and had stolen three horses and ten heads of cattle from me. As soon as my intention was known among the surrounding tribes all declared their willingness to participate in the campaign. With seven chiefs, about two hundred Indians, and two Europeans, Mr. Stevens, an old Holsteiner, and Mr. O'Fallan, an Irishman,<sup>50</sup> I took the field against the Luckno villages in war-like fashion. We reached their places on the afternoon of the second day. At our approach there arose in the valley where the villages were situated such a ghastly war-cry of the enemy that it echoed in the mountains. In a few moments I was deserted by everybody and heard only the howl in the distance. To my great pleasure I soon found the two Europeans. Shortly after twilight my Indians brought in four prisoners, among them the first chief of the enemy. Stevens, in his rage, drew a long knife out of the scabbard and wanted to decapitate the chief. I asked him, however, to wait with the punishment until the next morning. He was satisfied therefore to tie the prisoners' hands behind their backs. We found skulls and skeletons of the stolen animals in the villages, which proved sufficiently that they were guilty and the confessions of the captured Indians confirmed everything. A tent was pitched for myself and my two companions and in front of it a large fire was lighted. The Indians camped in the open around small fires. The four prisoners sat at the fire near our tent and were strictly

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<sup>49</sup> The animosity which Cordua felt toward Sutter explains these obvious exaggerations.

<sup>50</sup> Probably William Stevens, who was at Sutter's Fort in 1847, and Jasper O'Farrel. The latter was an Irish surveyor who had come to California in 1843, in 1845 served as quartermaster in Sutter's force, from 1844-46 lived at San Rafael. and in 1847-48 became the official surveyor of the northern district and made the permanent street survey of San Francisco. In 1848 he exchanged a Mann County rancho for that of Jonive in Sonoma County. Later he bought the adjoining Estero Americano, and for these and for Capay in Yolo County he was a claimant in 1852. He later served in the State senate and as State harbor commissioner, and died in San Francisco in 1875, at the age of 58. See also *Quarterly of the Society of Calif. Pioneers*, Vol. X, 1933, pp. 85-100.



guarded. Pondering about the fate of the poor Indians I lay on my straw bed without being able to sleep. Suddenly a shot fell nearby. The whole camp was aroused at once. The prisoners who had sat close together with their hands on their backs had untied themselves unnoticed. The chief had run away with a handsome young Indian. Stevens, who was on guard, had sent a bullet after them in vain. He was beside himself with anger while I was secretly pleased. I lay down again hoping that that two other Indians would follow the example of their companions. To my regret, I found them the next morning at the same place where I had left them. Both had confessed to having participated in the theft and the other Indians had confirmed this. Thus there was nothing left except to give a judgment. Stevens, O'Fallan, and all of the Indians were for capital punishment. As their chief I was forced to agree with them for leniency was out of the question. Both delinquents were tied and placed on a large rock. Stevens, an old soldier who had fought at Waterloo under Napoleon, executed the sentence. We placed the bodies on the rock, put the bones of the cattle in their hands and left the camp and place of the execution. O'Fallan had taken two beautiful young Indian girls of six and seven years as prisoners of war. I bought both of them for a tame cow. After two months I gave the children back to their mother, the wife of the chief, and forwarded a few presents along with them. In this manner the Indians of Luckno became my friends.

Since the cattle were not guarded in the open and since many Indians lived around us, we could not deal with cattle thieves otherwise than by punishing them with execution. If we had allowed the Indians to become accustomed to beef or horse meat, even capital punishment would not have kept them in check. Therefore, it was better to sacrifice a victim at the beginning than to be obliged to destroy whole tribes later on. In the San Joaquin Valley and the surrounding mountains lived many Indians who formerly belonged to the missions. These ate mainly horse meat and millions [!] of horses had been killed by them and thousands of tame horses are still stolen every year from the herds near the settlements on the coast.

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On May, 1852, after a stay of ten years I left California. Many people had I befriended, hundreds had I entertained at my table, my house always had been open and a free hotel for all travelers. Yet I did not leave a single friend behind. When my glance had fallen upon Yerba Buena for the first time there had been but six houses and ten huts, and the many bare sand hills had offered a sad sight. Now the barren hills had disappeared together with the old name of Yerba Buena. The parting glance fell upon the large and beautiful City of San Francisco, the queen of commerce of the whole western coast of America. A city of the size of Bremen, built from material and by people of all nations of the world. At points where ten years ago ships anchored there were large warehouses. This tremendous metamorphosis had taken place in hardly four years! He who knows me will realize that I am little inclined to sentimentality. Yet in this moment I had a feeling as if my chest was to burst open and I had to hide in a quiet corner in order to collect myself.