

Selections from A HISTORICAL POLITICAL AND NATURAL DESCRIPTION OF CALIFORNIA By DON PEDRO FAGES (1773)

TO THE VICEROY OF THESE KINGDOMS, DON ANTONIO MARÍA BUCARELI Y URSÚA

Your Excellency: Inasmuch as I was left in charge of the military command at the Presidio of San Carlos de Monterey in the early part of July of the year 1770, under instructions and orders given me at the time of his departure from the New Settlements in the northern part of California by my commander-in-chief, Captain of Dragoons of Spain Don Gaspar de Portolá, who set sail from the port of Monterey in the packet *San Antonio* on the ninth day of the same July, I busied myself for a long period of more than four years with all possible determination and diligence in reconnoitering those remote provinces in person, gathering information concerning whatever was conducive to a practical knowledge of them. . . .

The mission of San Diego de Alcalá was the first among the new missions of California, founded at the port of the same name in June, 1769, at the time when the sea and land expeditions were there united. The land expedition set out on July 14, as has previously been stated, in search of the port of Monterey. At San Diego there remained certain Mexican cuirassiers, with some of the members of my company of Volunteers of Catalonia who had become incapacitated by illness and who died within a few weeks. It happened, then, a short time after our expedition had left, that the Indians of the village situated near the port, having been joined by some of their neighbors, became so bold as to come and besiege the camp, doubtless feeling sure of victory, as they were superior numerically to our men, of whom few were able to take up arms and assume the defensive. They killed three natives and put to death some others who had been wounded. The rest were all put to flight, and have learned caution from experience, for since that time they have not committed nor even attempted any hostile act, at least publicly or as an affront. Under cover of night, however, and in the dark they have not hesitated to discharge arrows at the horses, killing some of our animals, perhaps rather for the sake of satisfying their hunger than by way of insult or of taking revenge. They remained in retirement for some time after their chastisement, but later they began to appear in the vicinity of the camp. Little by little they have been reduced, so that today the reverend fathers have already baptized more than eighty persons; among them are twelve families of a village not far distant, where they lodge in huts of brush and reeds. Those who are reduced attend regularly at Mass, indoctrination, and prayers; other natives yet unconquered who live with them come now and then and present themselves to the ministers of the Holy Gospel, who do not omit to attract them with suavity to the catechism. From the other villages (there are more than twenty) within a radius of ten leagues, there are a few who frequent the mission and listen to the recitation of the Christian doctrine. All the natives of that vicinage are very orderly, and have no cause to fear or to be feared.

It should be understood that the mission of San Diego was founded on a hill commanding the port and the Punta de Gujarras. . . . The church building is situated within a palisade; it is constructed after the native style, of poles and reeds. The dwelling and the office buildings are built partly of wood and partly of sun-dried clay blocks. The reverend fathers have sketched a plan, and have dug the foundation trenches for another and larger building, to be made entirely of

adobes. They have a supply of the latter as well as of stone; but the inevitable lack of food and supplies will not permit the acceleration of this important task.

NATURAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY The Indians of the entire region between San Diego and San Francisco Solano are of a light brown color with homely features and ungainly figures; they are dirty, very slovenly, and withal evil-looking, suspicious, treacherous, and have scant friendship for the Spaniards. Each village is despotically governed by a single captain, who has but one wife at a time, but each one dismisses his wives and takes others whenever he cares to do so. The education which they give their children consists merely of the fathers' teaching the boys whatever skill and dexterity they may themselves happen to possess; the girls are taught whatever best suits them, they having perfect liberty to choose. . . .

In this territory there are to be seen, besides a number of other land animals, deer, antelope, conies, hares with-out number, wildcats, wolves, some bears, coyotes, and squirrels of three kinds. Among the birds there are various kinds of thrushes, and a few birds of prey. There are also quail, sparrows, mocking birds, woodpeckers, vultures, and buzzards. The aquatic birds are pelicans, herons, ducks, divers, mud hens and other kinds. The land produces, though not in abundance, acorns, wild grapes, some asparagus, and a kind of berry (called gabarneda in Catalonia) on the bushes of the roses of Castile, which are really seed pods, and have a very pleasant flavor after they have been roasted for a short time in a slow fire. There are extensive growths of kidney beans (jojobas), and three varieties of cactus fruit. Along the seacoast of the territory under consideration there are seen some young whales and other marine animals. Among the desirable fish there occur the sole and the tunny.

Most of the natives of this region go absolutely naked. The few of them who take pleasure in the use of clothing wear a sleeveless doublet made of undressed strips of rabbit or otter skins twisted and put together with some degree of skill. Among the men this garment does not usually fall much below the waist. The women cover themselves with aprons made of the leaves of reeds softened by beating and gathered at one end into a belt worn around the waist but hanging for the remaining part loose down to the knees. Over this fine garment they wear a pair of undressed deerskins poorly tanned, which serve as a skirt. If the weather is cold and raw, they usually cover their backs with a third skin. Such is the simplicity of dress of these wretched people, and those who take even this small care are, as I have said, comparatively few.

There were seven Indian villages met with between San Francisco Solano and this place. They were all on the line of march near our camping places, and were quite populous; some of them were so much so, that, had the Indians borne arms, they would have given us great anxiety, for at one place more than 200 of them came out at a time, in a tumultuous fashion, to greet us; everywhere they paid us honors, and made gifts which helped greatly to reduce the cost of maintenance for the men, [and permitted] part of the supply of foodstuffs which we had to be reserved for other contingencies.

It is to be noted that, because terrifying earthquakes, which frequently recurred, had been experienced throughout a great part of this stretch of the journey, it was suspected that there might be some volcanoes in the mountains of the vicinage. Truly the indications did not belie this suspicion, for, at the foot of the range which runs up toward the west, on the road lying

between the Río de la Porciúncula and the Ojo del Agua de los Alisos, the scouts found pools of bitumen bubbling [out of the ground].

Between San Francisco Solano and the Río de Santa Clara is the new mission of San Gabriel, established in that valley which was mentioned in number five under the name of San Miguel. Estimating the distances made is according to the narrative of the diary, the mission is six leagues from the Río de los Temblores [River of the Earthquakes, now called the Santa Ana River], and two and one-half from the one named Río de la Porciúncula [full name: *El Río de Nuestra Señora La Reina de Los Ángeles de Porciúncula*, now called the Los Angeles River]. It is situated on a hill down the slopes of which flow numerous streams of water, in which the Río de San Miguel has its origin. There are at this place many willows, poplars, blackberry and grape vines, and roses of Castile. The mission was founded on September 8, 1771; the Indians of the near-by village, showing themselves to be very discontented [thereat] from the first, formed a confederacy with their neighbors for the purpose of besieging the camp. This they did a few days later, but our men, placed in a state of defense, succeeded in killing the leader or chief who commanded the Indians, whereupon the engagement was ended without further activity, the victory remaining with our men, and the Indians taking to flight, having learned a good lesson; they did not suffer themselves to be seen for a long time. Subsequently they have been much more amenable, and many had been baptized by November of '73 although no marriages had taken place.

The church and the dwelling, and the offices, which are within the stockade, are, like those in San Diego, of simple construction and not at all commodious, for nothing better is even to be thought of. The garrison is composed of seven cuirassiers and a corporal. There is a muleteer for carrying necessary things to the mission. At a short distance is the village in which the unconverted natives and the new Christians live; the latter attend regularly at Mass and the recital of the doctrine, and some of the former come that the missionary fathers may catechise them. Close to the same stockade there have been constructed a few small houses for the five families of reduced Indians which the reverend father president brought from [Lower] California for the purpose of employing them in tilling the ground and sowing wheat. There is a quantity of that grain here sufficient not alone for support of the mission, but as well for supplying the new converts; for having, as they do, good fields and abundance of running water, they can sow all that they like, and, indeed, wheat, corn, and beans have given very satisfactory results in the tests which have been made. It is very essential that those fields should respond productively to cultivation, for the natives of the district do not enjoy an abundance of wild seeds of pleasant taste, nor can they derive benefit from fishing, since they are distant from the sea about six or eight leagues by the shortest route, which is toward San Pedro Bay, where the packet San Carlos anchored in '69 with men and provisions, which will always be easy to transport [from San Pedro Bay to the mission] on mule back, because the way is so level and unbroken.

One league to the westward from the mission there are great forests of oak, from which a supply of acorns is obtained. A great many Indians live there, hidden in their villages, which are found also on the seashore and on the plain throughout the eight leagues mentioned. The Río de la Porciúncula, distant more than two long leagues, contains water sufficient to use for irrigation, as does also another copious stream which is farther on, some three leagues to the west. Nor are there lacking in the vicinity of the forest to which reference has been made, small streams from

which water can be taken for the cultivation of the adjacent fields, so that the entire locality is most alluring, and offers facilities for the settlement of a few families of Spaniards. These might, without prejudice to the mission, have an assignment of fertile fields, with places adapted for all kinds of cattle. They would live in comfort, and with them we might begin to have hopes of a very important settlement.

As this mission is more than forty leagues from San Diego, and the Indians of the numerous villages in the intervening territory are habitually restless, and commit hostile acts (as experience has shown) when parties pass near them without an escort large enough to be formidable to these savages, it would be very desirable to establish a few more missions with their corresponding presidios in the interval of this stage of the journey, after prudent efforts at examination and exploration of the numerous valleys which are met with in order to find out how and where it would be desirable to place the camps, and what expectation [there would be] of reducing the natives and populating the country. The fact is, that there has been left in this part a considerable tract of country in which no steps have been taken for the yearned-for reduction of the many indigenes, or for the safety of travelers who may be going into the interior without men and arms sufficient for their defense. As a consequence, it is absolutely necessary to traverse this stretch (whenever need arises for making the overland journey) in formation and with the organization of an expedition, as upon the first occasion. It is indeed believable that the deference and gentleness of the Indians toward our men might have been due rather to well-grounded fear than to their affability and benevolence-characteristics in truth too rare and appreciable to be attributed, without less equivocal proof, to savages so untaught and uncivilized in all else which concerns their intercourse and customs.

THIS PART DESCRIBES NATURAL AND POLITICAL MATTERS The natives throughout the tract described are, generally speaking, rather dark, dirty, of bad figure, short of stature, and slovenly, like the preceding ones, except those who live near the Río de los Temblores, on its banks and the adjacent beaches; these Indians are fair, have light hair, and are good looking.

As to the government of the villages, they resemble each other in that they are all subject to a despotic chief, who is the highest arbiter of peace and war; to him everyone contributes a part of what seeds and eatables he possesses. This captain is not only privileged to have two wives (the other Indians having only one), but he may put them away at his own caprice, and take from the same village any other two he may desire, provided they are maidens. As to dress, those few who use clothes wear them as do those who live between here and San Diego; nearly all the men and women wear their hair cut. They are idolators, and have a custom of burying their dead just where they die; if death occurs in their village, they move to another locality.

The men employ themselves in making nets of various patterns, large enough for carrying their food in the fields; they also use them to bind about the body. They make bows and arrows innumerable, and a kind of war club of tough wood in the shape of a well-balanced cutlass, which they use in war and in hunting conies, hares, deer, coyotes, and antelope, throwing it so far and with such certain aim, that they rarely fail to break the bones of such of these animals as come within range. The women know how to weave baskets of varying capacity, in which to collect their seeds, pine nuts, madroña berries, acorns, etc.

Cactus fruit of superior flavor, wild grapes, and brambleberries abound in the country. In the Cañada de Santa Clara there are many willows, from the fruit of which in season the Indians know how to make a certain wine which has no unpleasant flavor. The mountaineers know how to make also a kind of sweet paste, and sugar, which is not unworthy of the name among those people. These products are taken from certain vegetables in which themselves do not look very promising. They utilize the *tule* (cattail reed), making *atole* — gruel — from the seeds, and bread from the roots, as will be described in another place.

Besides deer, antelope (which is a kind of mountain goat), coyote, wolf, fox, cony, hare, squirrel, and skunk, there is here another land animal just like a sucking pig, which they call *mantugar*, and the flesh of which they eat, just as they do that of the other animals mentioned. There are also reptiles and poisonous animals, vipers, tarantulas, salamanders, and crabs. The entire country is overrun with fleas, but the chinch bug and the louse are unknown.

Under the topic of birds and fish, nothing said with reference to the territory previously described fails of application here, there being even some additional species. These Indians are, however, better equipped for fishing; they have their rafts of reeds on which to go out to sea, and by means of these the Indians of the plain of San Gabriel communicate with the islanders of San Clemente and Santa Barbara.

The men go clothed with a large cloak made of skins of cony, hare, fox, or sea otter; the garment reaches to the waist, the captain only being allowed to wear it reaching to the ankle, without other mark of distinction. The women wear skirts, made and fitted uncouthly of antelope hide, either colored or white, which do not extend below the knees. Most of them are decorated with various trinkets chosen from the smaller sea shells and stones of various colors. They wear the hair tightly bound and gathered at the back, forming a short, heavy queue, with a very handsome adornment of shells; they also wear collars and bracelets of snail shells and little sea shells. The few men who desire to cut their beards accomplish it not without great pain, by using a pair of shells of the clam or large oyster, which, being fastened together on one side by nature, can be given a kind of opening and shutting motion on the other. With these they extract the hair one at a time by the root, as though pulling with nippers. Those who like to wear the hair short, do so by burning it close to their pates — an uncomfortable and fatiguing operation, but necessary on account of their lack of any iron instrument.

They are idolators like the rest. Their idols are placed near the village, with some here and there about the fields, to protect, they say, the seeds and crops. These idols are nothing but sticks, or stone figurines painted with colors and surmounted with plumage. Their ordinary height is three hands, and they place them in the cleanest, most highly embellished place they can find, whither they go frequently to worship them and offer their food, and whatever they have.

Although in this district the captains commonly enjoy the privilege of taking two or three wives, and putting them away at will, the ordinary men have only one, and may abandon her only in case of adultery. The Indians of either sex who wish to marry a second time, may do so only with another widow or widower — a custom which seems not at all irrational if we consider what result such a practice should have in favor of the population.

I have substantial evidence that those Indian men who, both here and farther inland, are observed in the dress, clothing, and character of women—there being two or three such in each village — pass as sodomites by profession (it being confirmed that all these Indians are much addicted to this abominable vice) and permit the heathen to practice the execrable, unnatural abuse of their bodies. They are called *joyas*, and are held in great esteem. Let this mention suffice for a matter which could not be omitted, on account of the bearing it may have on the discussion of the reduction of these natives, — with a promise to revert in another place to an excess so criminal that it seems even forbidden to speak its name. . . .

The occupations and ordinary pursuits of these people are limited; some of them follow fishing, others engage in their small carpentry jobs; some make strings of beads, others grind red, white, and blue paint clays, and a certain kind of plumbiferous stones, which serve for the men to paint themselves with when they are celebrating and dancing or when they go to war, and which are used by the women for their usual adornment. They make variously shaped plates from the roots of the oak and the alder trees, and also mortars, crocks, and plates of black stone, all of which they cut out with flint, certainly with great skill and dexterity. They make an infinite number of arrows. The women go about their seed-sowing, bringing the wood for the use of the house, the water, and other provisions. They skillfully weave trays, baskets, and pitchers for various purposes; these are well made with thread of grass roots of various colors. . . .

Finally, that nothing may be omitted in the narrative, I will tell [the customs] which these Indians observe in their dances. The women go to them well painted, and dressed as has been described, carrying in both hands bundles of feathers of various colors. The men go entirely naked, but very much painted. Only two pairs from each sex are chosen to perform the dance, and two musicians, who play their flutes. Nearly all the others who are present increase the noise with their rattles made of cane dried and split, at the same time singing, very displeasingly for us, who are not accustomed to distressing the ear with this kind of composition. . . .

The mission of San Carlos was, as originally established in June, 1770, founded near the Presidio de San Carlos de Monterey, until by order of his Excellency the Marqués de Croix, it was changed both in location and name, being transferred in the following year to a spot one league farther down, where it now stands, on the banks of the Carmel River.

The new church, the dwelling, and the offices within the stockade, were built of good cedar and cypress, with earthen roofs. But, it having been found that this kind of roof does not last, and that the rain leaks through, they were finishing by the end of November, 1773, another and larger church. It was forty *varas* long and correspondingly wide, and was to be roofed with grass.

The reverend fathers had already baptized, counting great and small, one hundred and sixty-two natives; of these, eleven had died, and there had been twenty-six marriages. These twenty-six families, with the single persons and children, made a total of one hundred and fifty-one persons, who formed the camp contiguous to the stockade, where they had their small houses built after the manner of the country. Three volunteer soldiers of my company had married recently baptized Indian women, and a servant had married another. The new Christians attend Mass and indoctrination regularly, and the natives of the neighboring villages are accustomed to frequent the mission in very orderly fashion. Only the residents of the village called *de los Zanjonés*, six

leagues distant toward San Diego, have been so bold as to attack postriders and travelers, but they have been punished, not without its having cost the lives of a few highway robbers, though they have not been able, thank God, to kill any of our men. . . .

NATURAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY These Indians are well built, and the women are good looking, some of them being somewhat ruddy in color. They all have beautiful hair, are people of a good disposition, affable, and disposed to give all they have to the Spaniards. They govern themselves as will be told in the chapter on San Francisco. They are continually at war with their neighbors; for the purpose of going out on any of these expeditions, the men and women first gather to take counsel in the house of the captain in command whence the soldiers set out for the engagement bearing the proper orders. The affair is limited to setting fire to this or that village of the adversary, sacking it, and bringing away some of the women, either married or single.

It seemed to me worth while to notice the usages and customs which these natives observe in their marriages and reciprocal tokens which are given for the assurance of such a close alliance. The fact is that when a single man and a single woman are seen together at dawn savagely scratched, it is a sign that they have contracted matrimony during the night, and with this sole proof they are considered publicly and notoriously as man and wife by the entire village.

But there is still more to this: they never think of making legitimate use of the faculty permitted by marriage, without at the same time making use of the nails, repeating on such occasions the same cruel and barbarous expression of love and conjugal affection. This will seem an incredible thing, perhaps without parallel so far as is known of other nations, however untaught and savage they may be. There is no doubt, however, that this happens, and I write it after exact verification of the fact.

The education of the boys consists in the man's teaching them to manipulate the bow and arrow, and he makes them practice their lessons in the field, hunting squirrels, rabbits, rats, and other animals. The Indian woman takes the girls with her that they may learn how to gather seeds and become accustomed to carrying the baskets. In this group are usually included those who are called *joyas*, of whom we have made mention in other places. . . .

The true God supplies to these poor people for their sustenance three kinds of acorns, as well as other fruit like a red plum or cherry, from the seed or pit of which, with its surrounding substance, they make good *tamales*. They call it *yslay*, and they eat the little meat which the pit contains. There is also much *pil* and *tecsumá*, of which we shall speak farther on. There are madrones, and three kinds of *chia*, one of them [producing seeds] as large as lentils and the others smaller. There are many pine nuts like those of Spain, and a kind of very small white seed shaped like the eggs of lice; these seeds, mixed with flour, make the tortillas smooth and agreeable to the taste, as though they had been kneaded with lard. Another yellow seed, like rice, abundant only when it rains a great deal, has a very sweet taste. The Indians prepare it as they do the others, roasting or toasting it to reduce it to flour, and make their soups and bread; but this rice cooked without other preparation is much like vermicelli, and swells a good deal. They have plenty of sugar and sugar cakes (*melcocha*), concerning the preparation of which I will speak in following chapters. . . .

The natives of Monterey should be considered as divided into two parts for the purpose of dealing with their natural and political history, because the Indians of the port and its environs are not the same as the more remote ones, as for instance the hill tribes of Santa Lucía and other more distant villages. I shall therefore speak separately, first, of those of Monterey and the surrounding region and afterward I shall treat of the others, within a district of twenty leagues . . .

The Indians of this mission and its environs are well proportioned in body, but they do not have the best faculties of mind, and they are of feeble spirit. This apparently is attributable to their condition and the kind of life they lead, always fearful and unable to retire or make excursions of more than four or five leagues from the port of the Punta de Pinos, lest they come into conflict with their opponents who resist and persecute them on all sides. They love the Spaniards very much, and recognize in them a shelter and protection of which they were in absolute need. Nearly all of them go naked, except a few who cover themselves with a small cloak of rabbit or hare skin, which does not fall below the waist. The women wear a short apron of red and white cords twisted and worked as closely as possible, which extends to the knee. Others use the green and dry *tule* interwoven, and complete their outfit with a deerskin half tanned or entirely untanned, to make wretched undershirts which scarcely serve to indicate the distinction of sex, or to cover their nakedness with sufficient modesty.

They do not have fixed places for their villages, but wander here and there wherever they can find provisions at hand. Their houses are badly constructed, consisting solely of a few boughs placed in a circular arrangement. Their marriages, as in San Antonio, are celebrated with the barbarous practice of scratching each other when they cohabit, a foolish practice committed even by the newly converted and baptized, though the reverend fathers labor much with them in order to dissuade them from it. . . .

These Indians have a kind of bath—although I do not know whether it deserves the name or not—which conforms in a way with the *temescales* which are found throughout the kingdom. They erect a hut of branches, stakes, and fagots, after the fashion of an oven, without any air passage whatever. The Indian gets into it, and others make a fire for him with small pieces of wood near the door, and the one who is inside receives a good scorching for an hour, during which he perspires copiously, scraping himself with the poniard or spatula mentioned above. This done, he comes out quickly, and goes to wash himself all over in cold water wherever he may first find it. They have a custom of repeating this alternation, the first bath being in the morning, the others being at midday and at night. The women do not use these baths.

Speaking now of the natives who are remote from the district: It is first to be noted that those of the Valle de San Francisco [Footnote 58] are the ones who have the most culture and are least savage. They have their hemispherical houses of about four yards' diameter, and live very sociably, fixing their residences in large villages which, since they become infested with fleas in the springtime, they abandon for the purpose of passing this uncomfortable season in little brush houses which they construct at a short distance from their villages.

They are provided with many and various seeds for their sustenance; and they do not lack any kind of birds and land animals nor timber which have been mentioned in connection with other places. Here are seen some trees so large that eight men all holding hands could not span one of

them. It is not known to what species they belong, but they have been called *sabinos* on account of their enormous, gigantic size.

The Indians who live in the direction of the Punta de Año Nuevo, eight leagues inland and about twelve leagues from this royal presidio, are of good features, their skin is not so dark, and they wear long moustaches. They are very clever at going out to fish embarked on rafts of reeds, and they succeed, during good weather, in getting their provisions from the sea, especially since the land also provides them with abundance of seeds and fruits which have been mentioned a little above, although the harvesting of them and their enjoyment is disputed with bow and arrow among these natives and their neighbors, who live almost constantly at war with each other.

All those remote from Monterey within the bounds of the twenty leagues which have been indicated, have for their god the sun, to whom they offered, with gesticulations and ceremonies, all that we gave them, and they are accustomed to make various demonstrations of joy every day before this planet rises, while yet the dawning of the morning is announcing his coming. They believe in the transmigration of souls, asserting that those of the dead go to live in a certain island of the sea, from when they come to enter the bodies of those who are born. Their dead they inter in places like regular cemeteries, with the exception of those who die in war, for the latter are eaten by the relatives of the slayer. . . .

SEEDS, FRUITS, AND OTHER PRODUCTS OF THE VEGETABLE KINGDOM Mention should first be made of rice, which occurs in three or four different species; distinguishing them by color, they are yellow, whitish, blue, and black. The last named variety has a pasty color beneath its bark or pellicle. All three kinds are of good quality and flavor, and produce in this country three times as much as Spanish rice produces. The pine nut is rich and very oily; it can be hulled with the hand on account of the softness of its shell. There is yet another variety, which is smaller, very fine, and of better flavor, though it does not contain so much oil. In the vicinity of the Río de San Francisco are seen chestnuts which are as good as those found anywhere.

The acorns of all three species of oak, the live oak [*quercus ilex*], oak [*quercus robur*], and the cork tree, are all used to make *atole* [gruel] and *pinole* [parched meal]; the acorns are treated in this manner: After they have been skinned and dried in the sun, they are beaten in stone mortars similar to *almireces* [brass mortars for kitchen use] until they are reduced to powder or flour. This is mixed with a suitable quantity of water in close-woven baskets, washed repeatedly, and the sediment or coarse flour allowed to settle. This done, it is now put on the sand and sprinkled with more water until the mass begins to harden and break up, and become filled with cracks. It is now ready to eat, uncooked, and is called *pinole* or bread. A part may be boiled in a suitable quantity of water, when it is called *atole* or gruel.