

**Keel and saddle: a retrospect of forty years of military and naval service. By Joseph W. Revere.**

Revere, Joseph Warren, 1812-1880.  
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## XX.

IN October, 1846, while in command of the military post of Sonoma, I purchased the estate of San Geronimo, consisting of two square leagues (*dos sitios de ganada mayor*), about five miles from the old mission of San Rafael, in what is now called Marin County.

The *Cañada* (hollow, or vale) of San Geronimo is one of the loveliest valleys in California, shut in by lofty hills, the sides of which are covered with red-wood forests, and pines of several kinds, and interspersed with many flowering trees and shrubs peculiar to the country. Through it flows a copious stream, fed by the mountain-brooks; and the soil in the bottom-lands is so prolific, that a hundred bushels of wheat to the acre can be raised with the rudest cultivation, and other crops in corresponding abundance.

While hunting elk in that neighborhood, I had come upon this beautiful valley, and determined to possess it, if possible; and in due time I acquired the property, and stocked it with horned cattle and mares in the usual fashion of making a settlement in California.

In my absence the cattle had increased to about five hundred head of animals of all kinds, which roamed at will in a state of nature over my domain, the *mayor-domo* engaged to take charge of them having left the place, and gone off to the *bonanza* (corruption of *abundancia*), a few months before my arrival.



I laid in a stock of tools, farming-utensils, &c., and arrived at the mission of San Rafael, where I was hospitably received by my old friend — mentioned in the "Tour of Duty" — Don Timoteo Murphy. Here we sojourned for several weeks; but, finding it impossible to engage in any regular pursuit in consequence of the unsettled state of the country, I concluded to follow the current setting towards the "placer." A party was formed of my neighbors the rancheros, who, with their Indian servants and *vaqueros*, made a company of some thirty persons. We had a *caballada* (herd of horses) of a hundred head, and drove with us over two hundred head of beef cattle, collected from the herds that ranged over our lands, which we intended to sell in the mining country.

The cattle, being perfectly wild, were always driven on the full run, so that a day's drive was quite wearisome; the cattle seizing every opportunity to escape, bolting suddenly from the column in order to return to their *acarencias* (grazing-grounds). At the end of each day's march, or run, we were all too happy to rest, to wash if possible, and to cook and eat our suppers of beef, often without bread or salt; such was the scarcity of articles usually considered necessaries, but which we should have ranked among luxuries. Before dawn we were astir, after passing the night on the hard ground, with nothing between us and it save our saddle-leathers, the saddle-trees being our pillows, and *serapes* (blankets) our only covering: then, after a hurried breakfast of beef, we collected the scattered herd, and began another day's hot and dusty ride.

Good pasture-fed California beef broiled on the coals of a wood-fire, with plenty of spring-water, was our diet; and very good fare it was. My health was never better, my physical powers never greater, than when I was a *ranchero* in that glorious country. Constant exercise, and sleeping in the open air, — no hardship in that pure, dry atmosphere, — hardened



and South-Americans. They possessed all the qualities which insure success, — skill in prospecting, quick eyes for gold-bearing formations, rapidity in extracting or washing the auriferous earth, and great industry and patience, — although lazy, and indeed useless in other employments. Honesty pervaded the little community; for the Botany-bay men had not yet arrived in California.

After a stay of several weeks, we returned to our homes, bearing with us the fruits of our industry; and I set to work at San Geronimo with about a score of Indians; and having scratched up with the rude ploughs of the country about fifteen acres of ground, and enclosed it with a brush fence, I set out for San Francisco to procure seed for planting.

Many vessels had arrived since my last visit; and the cry was, "Still they come." Their crews would scarcely wait long enough to furl sails after their arrival, so impatient were they to leave for the diggings. Most of these ships had brought over emigrants from Europe, in a sorry plight after their long voyage. Among them were young and energetic men, some hopeful, others sad and despairing; old men and women, who had followed those they loved to this distant land, only to lay their bones in it; mothers, accompanying their children to an unknown destiny; and all expecting to reap in California the harvest denied to them at home. Let Europeans say what they please of our country: to a great part of their population it is a paradise. In Europe all cannot have bread and work. Their governments and social constitutions leave them to suffer in silence; and their more fortunate fellows give them nothing but advice, — to be resigned. They are like pegs driven into the ground, and must be content to occupy the same places in the social organization from birth till death. Of course all do not find America the land of promise they expected; but they may have land and liberty, and that is all the Almighty gave Adam and Eve. It is



then, for them, a paradise. The emigrant comes to America, and is received with an affectation of generosity: but it cannot be denied, that, in giving this welcome, we obey our own interest quite as much as the dictates of charity; and our reception of him is not unmixed with ostentation.

After all, we are *parvenus*; good, without being tender or polished. We distribute to the emigrant tools and seeds; apportion to him, with a significant gesture, a portion of the soil; and go about our affairs, saying to him in effect, "Here you are; fix yourself; I am busy." Thus those who receive this curt hospitality are not oppressed with a load of obligation: they work, take root, and are soon occupied in conquering a position for themselves, and seeking rights denied them elsewhere. They are not mendicants gratefully obliged, but poor men who become citizens.

Among the ships in the harbor, I found an old friend of other days in command of a brig from Honolulu, sitting in solitary state in his cabin, his crew having left him. From him I obtained a few barrels of potatoes which he had among his stores, — poor and small, it is true, but the only ones to be had; and, with this prize seed, I returned to San Geronimo, where I planted the precious seed in the enclosure.

I then left the place in charge of my Indian servants, and addressed myself to the duties of my office as timber-inspector.

In the intervals of these duties I piloted several vessels up the Sacramento River, among which was a bark from Peru, with a company of miners on board, organized at an immense expense, and with whom I remained for several weeks.

While these Peruvians were working in the diggings, I observed that they consumed much less provisions than other miners, while doing the same amount of work, or even more; and that they also seemed better able to endure exposure to the heat of the sun and the dews of night. Asking their



## XXI.

MY crops turned out beyond my most sanguine expectations; and I had the satisfaction of reaping a splendid harvest, which was disposed of at high prices. Agriculture, even the grazing interest, at that time the leading one of California, had been entirely lost sight of, the whole population having been busily engaged in securing the dazzling dust and nuggets; and food of all kinds was held at enormous prices.

Every article of breadstuffs was brought from abroad, while the emigration of 1849 probably amounted to a hundred thousand persons. The small seed-potatoes, not larger than a walnut, which I planted, produced at least twenty-fold; and the improvement in quality over the seed was really wonderful. The virgin soil, of pure vegetable *humus*, so nourished and stimulated their growth, that I had several hundred bushels of potatoes in the crop, each of which weighed ten pounds avoirdupois, or over; and the average of the rest would not fall below a pound. The sale of this crop at one real (twelve and a half cents) per pound, which was the market price, fully repaid the expense and trouble of planting.

San Francisco had become a city of some forty thousand people, and was the business centre of the rising State. With the increase of population, the irregular placer-mining became obsolete, or practised by those only for whom its adventurous character had a peculiar charm; while rude machinery, dams,



Adieu!" said my philosopher with a smile, "Æternumque vale."

Returning to our ranchos with a fair share of profits in the autumn, we began the usual routine of work, holding a *herradura* (branding cattle) every week in succession on the different ranchos in accordance with the custom, and with the not as yet obsolete laws of the *mesta*. Crops of vegetables were not as remunerative as the year before, so many cultivators having entered the field, tempted by the high prices; and the business was overdone.

I built a new house on my place, and projected other improvements; and my neighbors, stimulated at last to enterprise in that direction, began to bestir themselves. But we were all annoyed by the incursions of the "Gentiles," — as the wild Indians are called in contradistinction to the "Christians," or tame Indians, — who came stealthily upon our lands to steal horses. The rogues always selected these animals, as they could run them in a single night beyond all possible successful pursuit.

At last, in self-defence, we organized an expedition to suppress these frays, and at the same time to indemnify ourselves, by securing some of these "Gentiles," intending to keep them as hostages, and to use them, meanwhile, as laborers. A council of rancheros was accordingly summoned at the "Baulinas," — a rancho on the sea-coast belonging to Don Juan Briones, — at which I assisted with several others; and a plan of operation was formed.