

V. PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

The documents presented hitherto are formal and official. They were written at the time of the events concerned and were intended to inform higher authority or to argue a case. The language has been censored, the ideas organized in a coherent manner. This is the type of documentary material which exists for every historical period and which constitutes the backbone of our knowledge.

There is another type of literature, however—that which is produced by the participants in events, either at the time or long afterward. No personal gain or loss is at stake. Anything may be said with impunity. The ethnographic and historical value of such writing is that it gives a picture of what really happened. The day-to-day personal give-and-take is set forth in unembellished terms. We see what was happening behind the screen of the stilted official correspondence, and we get an idea of the naked struggle for possession of the frontier. We find out how the aboriginal inhabitants behaved under pressure, and we see the fight for existence which they faced.

All this is not very pleasant. There are no passages of military rhetoric, but merely the earthy language of ranchers, soldiers, and Indians. There is vulgarity, obscenity, and unspeakable cruelty. Good taste is offended. Yet if we are to assess properly the racial conflict of the 1830's and 1840's we are entitled to know just what was going on, and there is no better way to learn this than through the written recollections of participants.

It is unfortunate that no native Indian was able to record his memories. Informants of the early ethnographers, such as Kroeber and Merriam, gave second-hand, highly expurgated versions, in diluted language, of dynamic events. We have therefore only the accounts of the white men (of course highly biased), and relatively few of those.

From the recollections dictated to Hubert Howe Bancroft's assistants by old-timers in 1877-1878 I have selected four. These seem to me the most extensive and valuable of the score or more which might be cited. They are crude, rough, and at times vicious. If they are offensive, remember that here are the pioneers and the heroes who are apotheosized in cinema and television today. This was what was going on in the California Arcadia of the mid-nineteenth century.

I add the following biographical information concerning the four persons whose recollections are here quoted.

Juan Bernal. (See Bancroft, History of California, Vol. II, p. 718.) Date of birth unknown, perhaps 1810, since he was 67 when he gave his reminiscences to Bancroft. Bancroft knows little about him. Thomas Savage, who wrote down the memoirs, says in his introduction that he saw Bernal at San Jose, in May, 1877. He was in very reduced circumstances. "He is an old man of very lively disposition, much of a dandy—illiterate to the extreme of not being able to read or write. He showed himself well disposed to furnish all he knew, but it was quite difficult to get it out of him, owing to his giddy, rambling way. Nevertheless with perseverance and by persuasion I managed to obtain from him what appears in this volume. . . ."

José María Amador. (See Bancroft, History of California, Vol. II, pp. 585-586, footnote 3.) Born in San Francisco 1794; died in Gilroy 1883. He was a soldier from 1810 to 1827. Bancroft says: "He is proud of his experiences as an Indian fighter, boasts of many acts of barbarous cruelty, shows the scars of many wounds, and declares he received for his service nothing but scanty rations and an occasional garment."

"In 1877, poor, crippled with paralysis, residing with his youngest daughter . . . near Watsonville, he dictated to Mr. Savage . . . his recollections of early times. . . . The author's memory is still unimpaired . . . though as might naturally be expected the old soldier draws the long bow in relating adventures of Indian warfare, and is very inaccurate in his dates."

Inocente Garcia. (See Bancroft, History of California, Vol. III, pp. 752-753.) Born in Los Angeles 1791; still alive in 1885. He was active politically prior to 1845 and was at one time administrator of Mission San Miguel. Bancroft says: "In '78 he was living at San Luis [Obispo] in poverty, strong in body and mind, though 88 years old, and of good repute." Thomas Savage, in his introduction to the memoirs, writes: "The old man bears a good name for veracity among those who have known him well during many years and even though reduced to such poverty as to rely for the support of himself, wife and a couple of orphan children in their charge, mostly on the assistance of such as feel pity for the wretched condition of an aged man who at one time was in affluent circumstances."

José Francisco Palomares. (See Bancroft, History of California, Vol. IV, p. 766.) Born in Santa Barbara 1808. A resident of San José. He held various local public offices. Bancroft and Savage are both very sparing in their comment. Bancroft says: "In '77 at San José he gave me a long Memoria of his adventures chiefly as an Indian fighter—all of them strictly true as is to be hoped." Savage in his introduction to the Memoria says: "Palomares is an old man, not in good pecuniary circumstances. . . . How much faith to put on his statements, I am unable to say, as I could learn nothing for or against his character." It is clear that neither Bancroft nor Savage entertained a high regard for Palomares, either as a person or a narrator. The content of the Memoria shows him to have been of undoubted psychopathic tendencies.

Juan Bernal: "Memoria" (pp. 11-23)
1848: Pursuit of Indian horse thieves.¹

In April of 1848 we went to a round-up; about 20 persons between laborers, cowboys and owners, to Rancho de la Laguna belonging to Juan Alvirez. Robert Livermore went with us, commissioned by Sutter to accept 1,000 head of cattle which we were to turn over to him. We were busy with the rodeo when, at Ojo de la Coche on the road to Monterey, we came upon the tracks of numerous horses, and found also three animals killed by arrows. When the rodeo was finished and we were all reunited we resolved to pursue the Indians who had made off with part of the horses.

¹For notes see pp. 209-211.

To this end some of us were commissioned to look for weapons among the nearby ranches; others were to kill a steer and cook meat for food; the rest were to prepare everything else needed for the expedition.

When those looking for weapons returned they had old muskets, swords, rifles, knives and some even had clubs. As soon as the food was ready, 16 of us, mounted and armed set out on the trail of the Indians. As I remember the names they were as follows: Pedro Chaboya, Antonio Maria Pico, Demesio Berreyesa, Mariano Hernandez, Agustin Bernal, Bruno Bernal, Robert Livermore, Juan Pablo Bernal (the narrator), José Higuera, José Bernal, Cornelio Hernandez, Isidro Higuera.²

José Bernal, nicknamed El Cacalote (the crow) was the one who followed the trail. Crossing gullies, climbing slopes, crossing streams, climbing cliffs, we finally arrived at a place near the peak of San Luis Gonzaga, near a lake to be found between high hills.³ On the road four of the company were designated to rest the animals. They went back and only those whom I have mentioned reached the lake.

José Bernal, a man very experienced in following tracks, was the one who found them first. There were nine Indians. Some were bathing in the pond, others were cooking horse meat, and the rest were combing wool. Bernal, taking care that the Indians did not discover him, returned to the place where we were coming up behind, and told us where the Indians were. Then we went into conference on the matter of attacking them so that not one would escape. It was unanimously resolved, at the suggestion of Chaboya, that we surround them and cut off every means of escape. This was accomplished in complete silence so that the Indians would not suspect the stratagem. Then José de Jesus Bernal, as had been determined beforehand, went to explore the camp of the enemy. Naked, crawling like a snake among the tulares, at the edge of the lake, he reached a place where he could observe the movements of the Indians without their detecting him.

Soon he returned in the same silent way, telling us in a very low voice that we might attack, and that the Indians were very careless. This was carried out by those of us near the lake, and where they could most easily escape, so as to cut off their line of retreat. When they saw that we were falling upon them they ran to find their weapons. Those who were swimming hurried to get out and armed themselves as best they might naked. Then they began to dance their war dances, jumping hither and yon making horrible gestures and contortions, threatening with their bows as if to fire and giving such yells as if three thousand of them were assembled there. One of them screamed "Now these pieces of dung are going to die."

On seeing all this José Higuera, who was on a little hill, took out his pistols, and showing them to the Indians, said in their language: "Now all you fellows are going to die because we have a lot of pistols and powder and bullets to kill you." Such was the terror with which the Indians were imbued by these words that each one tried to escape by the most direct route, but we had them surrounded and it was a matter of fighting man to man.

Some of the comrades prepared their lassoes. Bruno Bernal, my brother, chased an Indian with his lasso, and on descending a hill, managed to plant it around his neck. He ran with his victim to where we were, saying: "I caught this rascal, who had only an arrow in his hand to defend himself, and I snagged him with my rope." The body of the Indian was completely

skinned and on looking down from our horses we saw that he was dead.⁴

I came upon one of the enemy and after I had avoided several arrows which he shot at me I managed to land a bullet in his hip, it penetrating from side to side. The Indian fell face down. On seeing this Cornelio Hernandez, who was near me, ran toward the Indian saying "Now I will finish him." But when he got close the Indian jumped up suddenly and discharged an arrow which hit him under his Adam's apple, piercing his throat and remaining in position. The Indian who perhaps had used his last strength in this attack fell backwards, dead. Hernandez, badly wounded as he was, dragged himself to the body, pulled out a service knife which he carried and tried to stick it between the ribs [of the Indian], but it broke. Nevertheless with the piece that was left, he succeeded in making a great gash, and at the same time that he was cutting a path to the heart with his piece of a knife he was repeating as if the corpse could hear him: "I forgive you, brother; I forgive you brother."

I was attending the wounded man when I heard my nephew José Bernal yelling "You! come! here we have three Indians, José Higuera and I." I left Hernandez and ran to where they were. All the company had gathered there, except Hernandez. I said: "The sun is setting and the Indians are getting away." My brother Agustin and Robert Livermore answered: "You are so brave because you have not fought them." But Pedro Chaboya said: "You and the two Josés attack from this side, I with Demesio Berreyesa and Mariano Hernandez will attack from the other." This we did. Chaboya fought an Indian hand to hand. The Indian shot arrows with an extraordinary dexterity and very close, in spite of his being advanced in years. Finally Hernandez succeeded in killing him. All his clothing was pierced with arrows but he did not receive even one wound.

On the other side also, bloody combat was raging. The Indians died one by one, harassed relentlessly on all sides by their enemy who were well mounted and who had better weapons. The group whom I last mentioned was busy chasing two Indians of the three whom they had surrounded. They were fleeing in the direction of the lake, into which they threw themselves. One we managed to kill, but the other one eluded us. When we pulled out the body, Demesio Berreyesa cut off his ears and carried them away as a trophy of war. I may note that the body, punctured with spear holes and bullet holes lay on the edge of the lake about 100 yards from where we camped for the night.

Of the nine Indians only one escaped. The rest remained stretched out on the battlefield and we did not bother to bury the corpses. We had Cornelio Hernandez severely wounded in the throat by an arrow, as has been related, and his brother Mariano slightly wounded in the hand. At nightfall we retired to camp, designating some of the company to care for the horses which the Indians had stolen. They amounted to about 160 head, without counting those killed on the road.

Since Cornelio felt very badly when we took him to camp, he wanted to make his will. Antonio Mario Pico offered to write it. Hernandez, with the arrow sticking in his throat could scarcely speak and at times we could not understand what he was saying. The notary wrote with a pencil on an old piece of paper found in one of the saddlebags. The table was the head of a saddle and the light bundles of grass secured for the purpose. The testator, half dead, and in an almost inaudible voice, dictated his will thus: "A hide for a mass