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### **Selfish Dr. Marsh**

John Bidwell, a pioneer of 1841 about whom we wrote in a previous Diary, arrived in California with a party which was probably the first to come direct to the West Coast from the East. He wrote an article for Century Magazine in 1890 in which he stated that the members of his party were, he thought the first white settlers, except the Bonneville party in 1833, that had ever crossed the Sierra Nevada.

Dr. John Marsh's ranch was the first settlement reached by them in California. This ranch was located in the eastern foothills of the coast range mountains, near the northwestern extremity of the great San Joaquin Valley and about six miles east of Mount Diablo, according to Bidwell's 1890 description.

Dr. Marsh has been described as a clear-headed, close fisted American – a Harvard man – and a friend of Governor Micheltorena, who took part in several uprisings in California. Dr. Marsh had come to California by way of New Mexico four or five years before Bidwell met him. He was in some respects a remarkable man. "In command of the English language," Bidwell wrote, "I have scarcely seen his equal. He had never studied medicine, I believe, but was a great reader; sometimes he would lie in bed all day reading, and he had a memory that stereotyped all he read. In those days in California such a man could easily assume the role of doctor and practice medicine. In fact, with the exception of Dr. Marsh there was then no physician of any kind anywhere in California."

When Bidwell and his party arrived in California they were overjoyed to find an American, and yet he said, when they became acquainted with him, they found him to be one of the most selfish of mortals.

"The night of our arrival," he wrote, "he killed two pigs for us." Men reduced to living on poor meat and almost starving have an intense longing for anything fat and so the meal of pork as a feast for them. They felt very grateful for they had by no means recovered from starving on poor mule meat and when Marsh set his Indian cook to making tortillas (little cakes) for us 'giving one to each – there were 32 in the party, they felt even more grateful and more so when they learned that he had had to use some of his wheat, for he had no other.

The newly arrived guests of the doctor, hearing that there was no money in California, and that butcher knives, guns, ammunition and everything of that kind was better than money, expressed their gratitude for his hospitality the first night by giving the doctor presents – one gave a can of powder, another a bar of lead or a butcher knife, and another a cheap but serviceable set of surgical instruments.

The next morning, Bidwell relates in his "Life in California Before the Gold Discovery," the doctor was in ill humor, he would scarcely answer a question, and among other things he said, "The company has already been over a hundred dollars expense to me, and God knows whether I will ever get a 'real' of it or not."

After a consultation the group decided to leave Dr. Marsh's ranch as soon as possible. Half of the party concluded to go back to the San Joaquin River, where there was much game, and spend the winter hunting, chiefly for otter, the skins being worth three dollars each.

About 14 members of the party decided to proceed about 40 miles to the south to the Pueblo de San Jose, which is now the city of San Jose. Bidwell chose to remain to guard the company's effects at Dr. Marsh's ranch, and while waiting for the return of his companions, to make short excursions about the surrounding country. Among the places he visited was the Livermore Valley where he stopped at the Robert Livermore ranch. Livermore was a native of England who had left by vessel when a mere boy and had married and lived like a native Californian. He had becomes very expert with the lasso.

The valley was full of wild horses and cattle – thousands of them – according to Bidwell. They were very dangerous to a man on foot but by dodging through gullies and behind trees he made his way to a Mexican ranch, one of the most noted of the early land holdings and belonging to a Californian called Don Jose Maria Amador – and later to a man named Dougherty.

(More Tomorrow)