

My Years with CHIEF SOLANO

By ISIDORA (*Princess Solano*)

Translated by Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez

MY name is Isidora, and I am ninety years old. The Indians who knew me when I was the wife of Captain Solano, and who then called me "Princess," still give me the title, and some of the whites, such as Remijio Berreyesa, Gonzalo Ramices, Captain Salvador Vallejo, and many others, who from time to time come to *Lachrymamontis* [M. G. Vallejo's country home] to visit me, still call me "Princess." They do this because they remember that always when my husband became angry I did everything possible to pacify him.

It is true that in my youth, like the rest of the Indians of my tribe, I worshipped the god called Puis, who was no more than a mortal being the same as I. He dressed himself entirely in white feathers, except the head, on which he placed black ones, and my people worshipped him as though he were a true god. Afterwards I married the great Solano, Prince of the Suisunes, Topaytos, Yoloitos and Chuructos. He became Prince of the Topaytos after he had conquered them; and during his life he made the whole world tremble, both whites and Indians, with the exception of his friend General Guadalupe Vallejo. He always rejected the friendship of Sutter, Yount and many other fair-haired persons who wished to be his friends.

The curate Guias, as Prince Solano always called the Reverend Fray Lorenzo de la Concepción Quijas, baptized me and gave me the name of Isidora Filomena. He taught me to be very charitable towards the poor, very submissive to my husband, and compassionate to prisoners. For this reason, when my husband, at the head of 8000 men, conquered all his enemies, I prevented him from killing them, as was then customary, by tying them to trees and shooting them with arrows. I said to him, "Turn them loose with Vallejo, who will make them work the land." Padre Guias gave him the same advice, and, since Solano accepted it, the lives of many poor people were saved.

I belonged to Solano before I married him; even before I was baptized. I am not a Suisun like him, but I belong to the tribe of Chuructos, and once

Editor's NOTE

FRANCISCO SOLANO, chief of the Suisun Indians, was an important ally and aid to General M. G. Vallejo, in keeping the Indians of North Central California in subjection. Solano County was named in his honor. His widow, Isidora, was still living in 1874, at which time she dictated her memoirs for the use of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Western historian. These reminiscences became a part of the extensive manuscript collection of the Bancroft Library, now a part of the University of California. Their publication for the first time here in a complete translation from her simple and broken Spanish, is made possible through the coöperation of the library and the courtesy of Dr. Herbert E. Bolton, its director.—The Editor.

when Solano was on a business trip there he stole me. My father, together with many of the Sotiyomi, pursued him, but he could not overcome him. My father's tribe lived near Cash Creek; I do not know the name of the county to which it belongs today, for I have forgotten it.

I drink a great deal of liquor. I do this [to drown my sorrow] because I no longer have many horses and cows, of which the fair-haired men robbed me; they left nothing for poor Isidora.

After Solano died I was married again to a man named Bill, a man with a small

heart. I had no children by him, but by Solano I had eight; all are dead except a son named Joaquin, who works for a living and gives me a monthly allowance of twenty dollars. Vallejo allows me a house free, with ground.

When Solano went out to fight he armed his men with daggers made of flint, and lances and arrows pointed with flints, all dipped in poisonous herbs. I don't know whether they mixed anything else with the herbs or not. Solano's warriors did not wear coat, shirt, shoes, trousers, or hat; they were not foolish enough to have anything on the body by which a white man or another Indian could take hold, but went entirely naked, with only a bunch of feathers on the head. The Indians who carried the food wore gray feathers pulled out of wild fowl. The fighting men carried lances and arrows, with white duck feathers on their heads, except the captain, who wore black feathers. In the beginning Solano wore feathers on his head, but when all the Indians were required to dress like the whites he carried good arms, given to him by Vallejo, and the missionaries also gave him hat and boots.

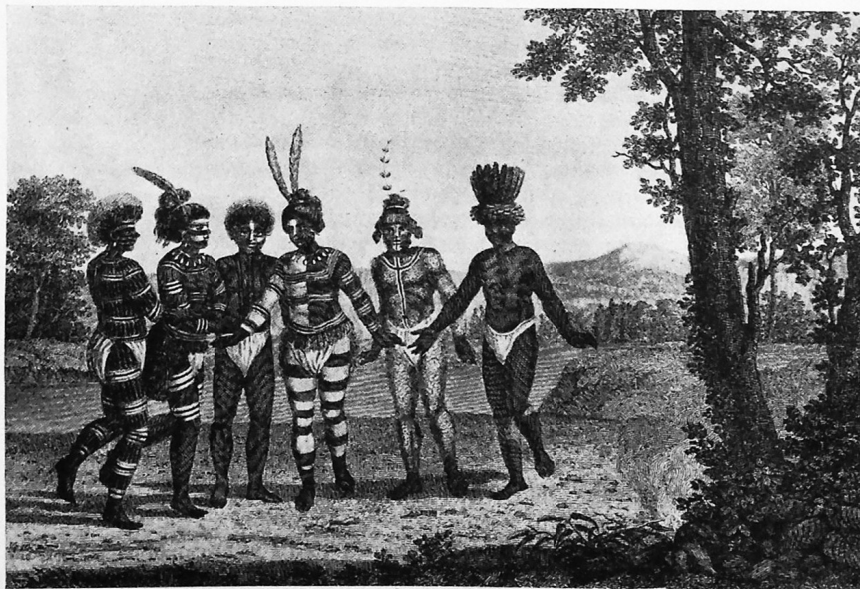
We Indians made use of our fingers in counting, and in this way we counted up to ten; from ten upwards, since there were now not enough fingers, we made piles of little sticks, and by means of them could count as high as one hundred.

Before the arrival of the whites at Socol we had plenty of very good food, without much work in obtaining it. There was

an abundance of game, and wild onions growing in the fields. We called these wild onions *ur*. We also had a wild soap, which we called *amoles*, and which still abounds near San Rafael, where I sometimes send Bill to look for it. This soap does better washing than any kind made by man. It takes out every spot, and does not burn the body or irritate the skin.

In my country all of my race had a skin like mine, that is to say, very red. All the women were very tall. I was perhaps one of the smallest. Many of us live much beyond a hundred years. The

(Continued on Page 52)



"Dance of the Indians at the Mission St. Joseph in New California" is the title of this engaging illustration from Lansdorff's "Voyages and Travels in various parts of the World," published in 1813

My Years with Chief Solano

(Continued from Page 39)

women's hair does not turn white, but the men's does. We Indians have not large feet and hands like the fair Germans and Americans, for although we are tall in body our feet and hands are small. We always went barefoot.

My tribe, and many others, lived largely on fish. There were many kinds of fish in our rivers, but the most abundant was the kind called salmon. We did not always catch them with nets, but sometimes, when the river was low, we planted sticks in the middle of the river, and in that way caught a large amount of fish. Part of it was eaten fresh, the other part dried and kept for winter.

Before the white man came liquor was not known among us, but Sut-

ter sent Joaquinero Indians to trade liquor for hides and dried fish. Sutter had an Indian wife, not a Californian, but a Kanaka woman who came with him in a ship. I am not very fond of the whites because they are liars and thieves. My *compadre*, Peralta, and my friend, Bernales, had a great many cattle, but Sutter cheated them out of them; with him it was all "take" and no "pay."

We used to have a great many pretty dances, men dancing with men and women with women. The men danced naked, but the women had a skirt after the white men came. Formerly, when there were only Indians here, the women wore only a collar for the neck, a crown of feathers on the head, a string of

beads, which we call *abalarjos*, wrapped around the body from the breast up as far as the neck. There was a belt of shells around the waist, while from the ears hung earrings made of feathers and beaks of geese and ducks. These were suspended from the ears by means of a duck bone, well polished and made thin by scraping it with a flint. Some of the Suisun women wore a belt of feathers; many wore nothing but a skin, not around the waist but hanging in front. The Churucto Indians painted their bodies with charcoal and red ochre which was not a permanent paint.

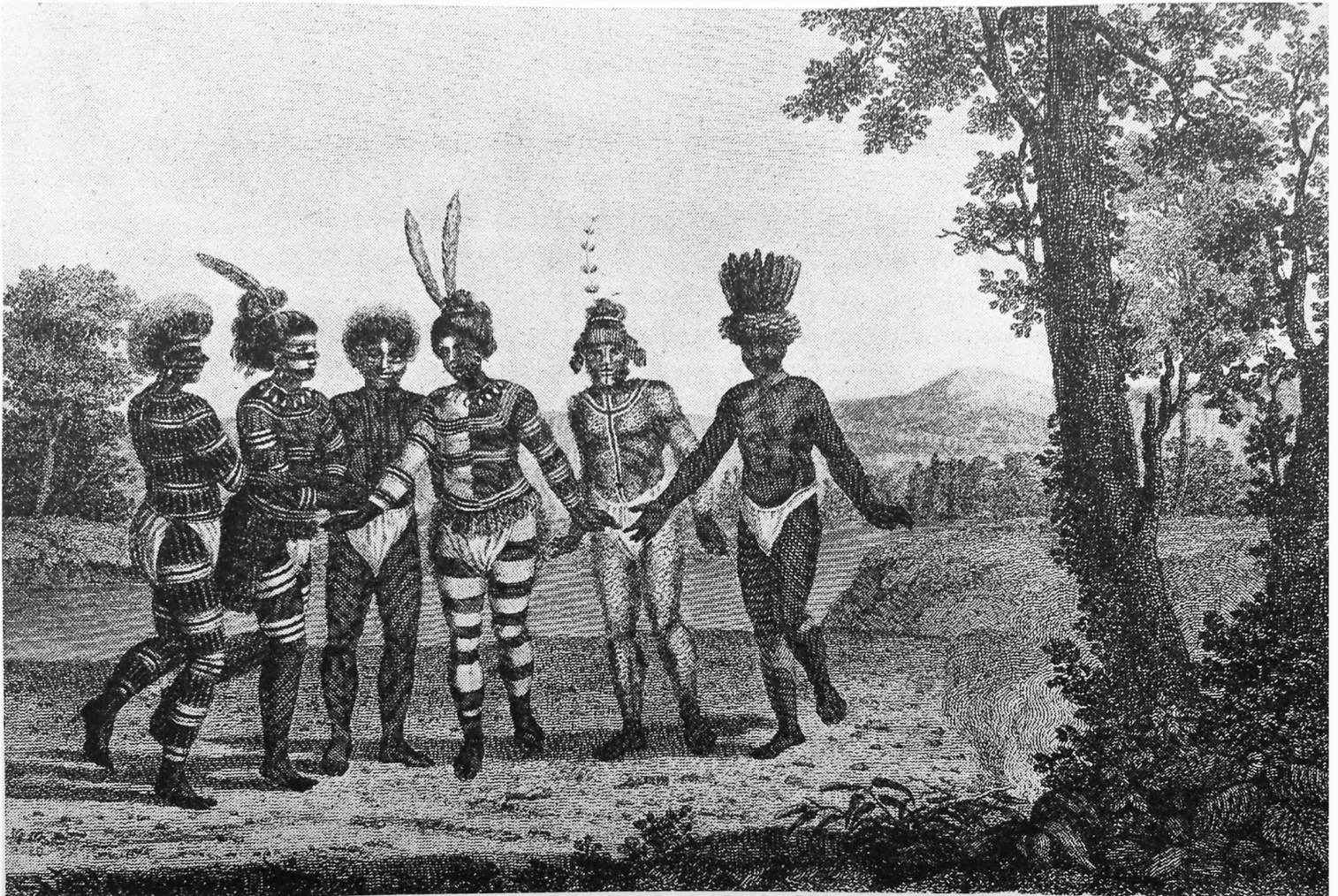
We had houses of tule, in which we lived comfortably. We are very fond of bathing, because cleanliness

gives strength. The small boys are taught to hunt, and the girls to prepare the food and tend children.

Solano had good medicine men, who knew all about herbs and knew how to cure sickness, as well as to mend broken arms and legs. My people always had white teeth, which they cleaned with a stick called *fresno* [ash].

We do not understand the Sotoyomi language, for every Indian village has a different language.

I am not ashamed of getting drunk, because the white men taught it to me. The Kanaka woman and her husband of the great *hacienda* on the Sacramento River always get drunk when the wine is made, as well as the Joaquinero Indians.



"Dance of the Indians at the Mission St. Joseph in New California" is the title of this engaging illustration from Lansdorff's "Voyages and Travels in various parts of the World," published in 1813