first favorable state of the surf for debarkation—there being no harbor at or near the city. Ignorant of President Santa Anna's desperate march over the desert, upon Major-General Taylor, we did not doubt meeting at our landing the most formidable struggle of the war. No precaution therefore was neglected.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIEGE AND CAPTURE OF VERA CRUZ AND THE CASTLE OF SAN JUAN DE ULLOA.

SUCCESSFUL as was every prediction, plan, siege, battle, and skirmish of mine in the Mexican war, I have here paused many weeks to overcome the repugnance I feel to an entrance on the narrative of the campaign it was my fortune—I had almost said—*misfortune*—to conduct, with half means, beginning at Vera Cruz, March 9, and terminating in the capital of the country, September 14, 1847, six months and five days. This feeling is occasioned by the lively recollection of: 1. The perfidy of Mr. Polk; 2. The senseless and ungrateful clamor of Taylor, which, like his other prejudices, abided with him to the end;

3. The machinations of an ex-aide-de-camp—who owed his public *status* mainly to my helping hand; a vain man, of weak principles, and most inordinate ambition. The change commenced on learning that I had fallen under the ban at Washington; 4. The machinations of a Tennessee major-general, the special friend and partisan of Mr. Polk;—an anomaly,—without the least malignity in his nature—amiable, and possessed of some acuteness, but the only person I have ever known who was wholly indifferent in the choice between truth and falsehood, honesty and dishonesty;—ever as ready to attain an end by the one as the other, and habitually boastful of acts of cleverness at the total sacrifice of moral character. Procuring the nomination of Mr. Polk for the Presidency, he justly considered his greatest triumph in that way. These conspirators—for they soon coalesced—were joined by like characters—the first in time and malignity, a smart captain of artillery, whom they got brevetted, on brevet, more for the smoke of his guns than their shots, and to whom Mr. Polk, near the end of his term, gave the substantial reward of colonel and inspector-general,—an office that happened to fall vacant just then. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib."

And alas, poor human nature! Even the brave Colonel Riley, the hero of Contreras (for which he was made a brigadier afterward), got the brevet of major-general and the command in California, by yielding to the same weakness. (See his testimony in the Pillow investigation.) These appointments proved an estate to Riley. The certainty of such fat benefits, freely promised by the conspirators, called into activity the sordid passions of other bribe-worthy officers. Hence the party of miscreants became quite respectable in numbers after the conquest. Those were not the only disgusts. The master outrage soon followed.

The offences of the two anonymous generals becoming a little too *prononcé*, I arrested both, and asked that a court might be ordered by the President for their trial. A court was ordered. I was relieved in the command, and the wronged and the wrong-doers, with stern impartiality! placed before the tribunal!! If I had lost the campaign it would have been difficult to heap upon me greater vexations and mortification.

May I add, that while I was before the court appointed by President Jackson, at Frederick, Maryland, Santa Anna passed by, and paid me, though I did not see him, an extravagant compliment? When he heard

in exile, that I was before a court at Mexico, he said to an American: "I thank President Polk—I am revenged!"

And why refer the appointment of a court to Washington? In 1830, Adjutant-General R. Jones was, on some slight occasion, arrested by the General-in-Chief, Macomb. The former had many friends in Congress, who ran a bill through the two Houses enacting that, when a commanding general arrests an officer or becomes the prosecutor of one, the court for the trial of the case shall be appointed by the President, etc. This provision being general, has caused a rent in the Administration of justice in the army, and ought to have been entitled *An Act to cripple generals commanding distant expeditions, and to unhinge the discipline* (subordination) *of armies.* Repeal is the only cure; but this error, it is feared, like universal suffrage, is a bourn from which there is no return. That it placed me, with such a President and such soldier demagogues, between the upper and nether millstones, must be perceived by all readers!

March 9—the precise day when I had been thirty years a general officer—the sun dawned propitiously on the expedition. There was but little surf on the beach

—a necessary condition—as we had to effect a landing from the open sea. Every detail, providing for all contingencies, had been discussed and arranged with my staff, and published in orders. The whole fleet of transports—some eighty vessels, in the presence of many foreign ships of war, stood up the coast, flanked by two naval steamers and five gunboats to cover the movement. Passing through them in the large propeller, the Massachusetts, the shouts and cheers from every deck gave me assurance of victory, whatever might be the force prepared to receive us.

We anchored opposite to a point a little beyond the range of the guns of the city and castle, when some fifty-five hundred men instantly filled up the sixty-seven surf boats I had caused to be built for this special occasion—each holding from seventy to eighty men—besides a few cutters belonging to the larger war vessels. Commodore Conner also supplied steerers (officers) and sailors as oarsmen. The whole, again cheering, as they passed my ship wearing the broad pennant, pulled away right for the shore, landed in the exact order prescribed, about half past five P. M., without the loss of a boat or a man, and, to the astonishment of all, without opposition other than a few

whizzing shells that did no harm. Another trip or two enabled the row-boats to put ashore the whole force, rather less than twelve thousand men, though I had been promised double the number—my *minimum;* but I never had, at any one time in the campaign, more than thirteen thousand five hundred, until the fighting was over, when I was encumbered with the troops that Taylor found at last he could not use.

An article from the New Orleans *Bulletin*, of March 27, 1847, written by an intelligent pen, respecting the landing of troops, is here inserted:

"The landing of the American army at Vera Cruz has been accomplished in a manner that reflects the highest credit on all concerned; and the regularity, precision, and promptness with which it was effected, has probably not been surpassed, if it has been equalled, in modern warfare.

"The removal of a large body of troops from numerous transports into boats in an open sea—their subsequent disembarkation on the sea-beach, on an enemy's coast, through a surf, with all their arms and accoutrements, without a single error or accident, requires great exertion, skill, and sound judgment.

"The French expedition against Algiers, in 1830, was said to be the most complete armament, in every respect, that ever left Europe; it had been prepared with labor, attention, and experience, and nothing had been omitted to insure success, and particularly in the means and facilities for landing the troops. This disembarkation took place in a wide bay, which was more favorable than an open beach directly on the ocean, and (as in the present instance) without any resistance on the part of the enemy—yet, only nine thousand men were landed the first day, and from thirty to forty lives were lost by accidents, or upsetting of boats; whereas, on the present occasion, twelve thousand men were landed in one day, without, so far as we have heard, the slightest accident, or the loss of a single life."

The city of Vera Cruz, and its castle, San Juan de Ulloa, were both strongly garrisoned. Santa Anna, relying upon them to hold out till the *vomito* (yellow fever) became rife, had returned to his capital, and was busy in collecting additional troops, mostly old, from every quarter of the republic, in order to crush the invasion, should it advance, at the first formidable pass in the interior.

The walls and forts of Vera Cruz, in 1847, were in good condition. Subsequent to its capture by the French under Admiral Baudin and Prince de Joinville, in 1838, the castle had been greatly extended—almost rebuilt, and its armament about doubled. Besides, the French were allowed to reconnoitre the city and castle, and choose their positions of attack without the least resistance—the Mexicans deprecating war with that nation, and hence ordered not to fire the first gun. Of that injunction the French were aware. When we approached, in 1847, the castle had the capacity to sink the entire American navy.

Immediately after landing, I made, with Colonel (soon after Brigadier-General) Totten, and other staff officers, a reconnoissance of the land side of the city, having previously reconnoitred the water front. This was at once followed by a close investment, so that there could be no communication between the garrisons and the interior. The blockade, by Commodore Conner, had long before been complete. Grave deliberations followed. From the first my hope had been to capture the castle under the shelter of, and through the city. This plan I had never submitted to discussion. Several Generals and Colonels—among them

Major-General Patterson—an excellent second in command, notwithstanding his failure as chief on the Shenandoah in 1861—solicited the privilege of leading storming parties. The applicants were thanked and applauded; but I forebore saying to them more. In my little cabinet, however, consisting of Colonel Totten, Chief Engineer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hitchcock, acting Inspector-General, Captain R. E. Lee, Engineer, and (yet) First Lieutenant Henry L. Scott, acting Adjutant-General—I entered fully into the question of storming parties and regular siege approaches. A death-bed discussion could hardly have been more solemn. Thus powerfully impressed—feeling Mr. Polk's halter around my neck, as I expressed myself at the time—I opened the subject substantially as follows:

"We, of course, gentlemen, must take the city and castle before the return of the *vomito*—if not by head-work, the slow, scientific process, by storming—and then escape, by pushing the conquest into the healthy interior. I am strongly inclined to attempt the former unless you can convince me that the other is preferable. Since our thorough reconnoissance, I think the

suggestion practicable with a very moderate loss on our part.

"The second method, would, no doubt, be equally successful, but at the cost of an immense slaughter to both sides, including non-combatants—Mexican men, women, and children—because assaults must be made in the dark, and the assailants dare not lose time in taking and guarding prisoners without incurring the certainty of becoming captives themselves, till all the strongholds of the place are occupied. The horrors of such slaughter, with the usual terrible accompaniments, are most revolting. Besides these objections, it is necessary to take into the account the probable loss of some two thousand, perhaps, three thousand of our best men in an assault, and I have received but half the numbers promised me. How then could we hope to penetrate the interior?" "For these reasons," I added, quoting literally—"although I know our countrymen will hardly acknowledge a victory unaccompanied by a long butcher's bill (report of killed and wounded) I am strongly inclined—policy concurring with humanity—to 'forego their loud applause and aves vehement,' and take the city with the least possible loss of life. In this determination I know,

as Dogberry says truly of himself, I 'write me down an ass.'"*

My decided bias in favor of proceeding by siege, far from being combated, was fully concurred in. Accordingly Colonel Totten, the able chief engineer, and his accomplished assistants, proceeded to open the trenches and establish the batteries deemed necessary, after, by a general sweep, every post and sentry of the enemy had been driven in.

* When the victory of Buena Vista reached Major-General Brooke (a noble old soldier) commanding at New Orleans, and a friend of Major-General Taylor, he rushed, with the report in hand, through the streets to the Exchange, and threw the whole city into a frenzy of joy. By and by, came the news that the Stars and Stripes waved over Vera Cruz and its castle, and Brooke, also a friend of mine, was again eager to spread the report. Somebody in the crowd early called out: "How many men has Scott lost?" Brooke was delighted to reply—"Less than a hundred." "That won't do," was promptly rejoined. "Taylor always loses thousands. He is the man for my money." Only a few faint cheers were heard for Vera Cruz. The long butcher's bill was wanted. When I received friend Brooke's letter giving these details, I own that my poor human nature was *piqued* for a moment; and I said: "Never mind. Taylor is a Louisianian. We shall, in due time, hear the voice of the Middle, the Northern, and Eastern States. They will estimate victories on different principles." But I was mistaken. The keynote raised in New Orleans was taken up all over the land. Mortifications are profitable to sufferers, and I record mine to teach aspirants to fame to cultivate humility; for blessed is the man who expects little, and can gracefully submit to less.

All sieges are much alike, and as this is not a treatise on engineering, scientific details are here omitted. We took care, in our approaches to keep the city as a shield between us and the terrible fire of the castle; but the forts in the walls of the city were formidable spitfires. They were rarely out of blast. Yet the approaches were so adroitly conducted, that our losses in them were surprisingly small, and no serious sortie was hazarded by the garrison.

The arming of the advanced batteries had been retarded by a very protracted gale (*norther*) which cut off all communication with our vessels in the offing. Ground was, however, broken on the 18th, and by the 22d, heavy ordnance enough for a beginning being in position, the governor of the city, who was also governor of the castle, was duly summoned to surrender. The refusal was no sooner received than a fire on the walls and forts was opened. In the attempt to batter in breach, and to silence the forts, a portion of our shots and shells, in the course of the siege, unavoidably penetrated the city and set fire to many houses. By the 24th, the landing of additional heavy guns and mortars gave us all the battering power needed, and the next day, as I reported to Washington, the whole was

in "awful activity." The same day there came a memorial from the foreign consuls in Vera Cruz, asking for a truce to enable them, and the women and children of the inhabitants, to withdraw in safety. They had in time been duly warned of the impending danger, and allowed to the 22d to retire, which they had sullenly neglected, and the consuls had also declined the written *safe-guards* I had pressed upon them. The season had advanced, and I was aware of several cases of yellow fever in the city and neighborhood. Detachments of the enemy too were accumulating behind us, and rumors spread, by them, that a formidable army would soon approach to raise the siege. Tenderness therefore for the women and children—in the form of delay—might, in its consequences, have led to the loss of the campaign, and, indeed to the loss of the army—two thirds by pestilence, and the remainder by surrender. Hence I promptly replied to the consuls that no truce could be allowed except on the application of the governor (General Morales), and *that* with a view to surrender. Accordingly, the next morning General Landero, who had been put in the supreme command for that purpose, offered to entertain the question of submission. Commissioners were appointed on both

sides, and on the 27th terms of surrender, including both the city and castle of Ulloa, agreed upon, signed and exchanged. The garrisons marched out, laying down their arms, and were sent home prisoners of war on parole.

This was better for the consuls, women, and children, as well as for the United States, than the *temporary* truce that I rejected—notwithstanding the ignorant censure cast on my conduct, on that occasion, by Mr. William Jay, in his book—*Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War*, pp. 202–4.

The surrender of the castle of San Juan de Ulloa, was necessarily involved in the fate of the city, because the enemy, until a late moment, had expected the former would be the first object of attack, and relying upon its impregnable strength, had neglected to lay in a supply of fresh water and provisions—as these could be sent over daily from the city. The capture of the latter, therefore, placed the castle entirely at our mercy.

The economy of life, by means of head-work, to which, as has been seen, Americans were quite indifferent, was never more conspicuous than on this occasion. The city and castle; the republic's principal port of

foreign commerce; five thousand prisoners, with a greater number of small arms; four hundred pieces of ordnance and large stores of ammunition, were the great results of the first twenty days after our landing, and all at the very small loss, in numbers, of sixty-four officers and men killed or wounded. Among the slain were two captains, J. R. Vinton and W. Alburtis, both of high merit—Vinton, perhaps, the most accomplished officer in the army. The enemy's loss in killed and wounded was not considerable, and of other persons—citizens—not three were slain—all being in stone houses, and most of the inhabitants taking refuge in basements.

The official report of those extraordinary successes, in which due praise was bestowed on corps and officers by name, as well as on the coöperation of the navy, was taken to Washington by Colonel Totten, of the Engineers, who was duly brevetted a brigadier-general for his great services in the siege.