

CHAPTER X.

Entrance of the American Army into Puebla.—Mexican Account.—American Officers.—Conduct of the Army.—Situation of Puebla.—Character of the Country.—The ancient Cholula.—Strength of the Army.—Scott's Proclamation.—Humanity of the Army.—Mission of Trist.—Reasons for remaining in Puebla.—Drilling of the Army.—Raising new Regiments.—New Volunteers.—Attack on the Train of M'Intosh.—Advance of Pierce.—Concentration of the Army.

In a morning of the beautiful month of May, and within the tropical zone, the American army of the north entered the "City of the Angels;" in the Spanish tongue, *Puebla de los Angelos*. They came with the renown, sounding far in advance, of San Juan de UHua captured, and the heights of Cerro Gordo victoriously stormed. They had landed on the shores of the Mexican Gulf, intrenched themselves in the wind-driven sands, battered the defences of Vera Cruz, received the surrender of the castle, and marched two hundred miles into the land of the Spanish-Aztec Americans. The National Bridge had been passed, Jalapa had surrendered, Perote made no resistance, and now the bold invaders of Mexico approached a city surrounded by the monuments of ancient civilization, and deemed fit, in the warm imagination of southern climes, for celestial residents. It was natural that such an army, the heralds too of a new and extraordinary republic, should be received by the inhabitants with mingled feelings of fear, surprise, and curiosity.

Accordingly, the citizens of Puebla crowded the street and filled the balconies on the line with spectators. Near noon the division of Worth entered the city, the artillery and infantry forming in the square, and the train of wagons extending from the street of Mercadores to the bridge of Nocte Buena.¹ The troops were fatigued with their march, and needed both rest and refreshment. This weary aspect, the fact that many of them had been ill, the common gray undress uniform, and the plain truth that they were neither giants nor centaurs, disappointed the vivid imaginations of the Mexicans of Puebla, who had supposed that the conquerors of Cerro Gordo were something marvellous in appearance or superhuman in power. The spectators turned from the scene with surprise, and asked themselves, How have these men become the conquerors of Mexico?

One of the most intelligent of the Mexican citizens, writing from Puebla two days after the entrance of the American army, thus expresses his disappointment at the appearance of that army, and endeavors to solve the problem proposed by its achievements:—

"Nor does their armament seem to me any thing extraordinary. In a word, except the draught-horses, which are very good, I assure you, without exaggeration, that these men bring nothing that we have not seen a thousand times. Even the immense number of their wagons is not a proof of large stores. The wagons are all empty, and I understood their principal use to be for the transport of troops. How, then, have they done what they

¹ Letter from a native of Puebla, dated May 16th, and published in the London Times.

have? How have they continually beaten our army, which not only surpasses them in appearance—for that is unquestionable—but in my opinion has real and positive advantages over them? Every one asks this question, to which there is but one reply. Their leaders, and particularly the colonels of regiments, are old gray-haired men. Their gray hairs explain the phenomenon. This makes me still rely on our soldiers, and gives me for the future some hopes, which we require more than ever."¹

This solution of the problem was at least partially correct. The officers of the American army have experience, skill, and science. Many of them served in the campaigns of 1813, 1814, and 1815, against the veteran soldiers of Great Britain; many of them were bred at the military school at West Point—the equal, and in some things the superior, of any school of military instruction in the world. All of them have been accustomed to the discipline of their profession, and are perfectly acquainted with the superior energies which the republican habits and intellectual vivacity of their countrymen have developed in war. The army of the United States is not intrusted to weak or ill-instructed hands; but to officers skilled in the science and experience of the duties of the military art—a fact as honorable to the legislative sagacity of the republic, as its achievements in arms have proved illustrious in history.

The soldiers piled their arms in the public square, and although surrounded by thousands of a hostile population, lay down to sleep, in perfect confidence that the enemy could not and dare not disturb them. No higher

¹ Letter of the native of Puebla.

evidence could be given of that sense of absolute superiority and of resistless energy, which is uniformly felt by American troops—the sense that they are predestined to victory, no matter by whom, in what numbers, or in what manner opposed. On the following day they took possession of the hills of Loreto and Guadalupe, and artillery was sent to the hill of San Juan. General Worth paid the compliment of a visit to the Bishop of Puebla, and the bishop, in returning it, was received at the quarters of Worth with the honors paid to a general. Affably and respectfully did the American officers mingle with the people; and for a time the stern countenance of war seemed to be lighted up with the smiles of beneficence, and its fearful strifes deferred to a peaceful harmony.

The city of PUEBLA is situated on that vast plain which, in its height above the sea and the character of its productions, is the most singular portion of the earth.

This plain is seven thousand feet high, and although wholly within the *torrid zone*, is called the *tierras frias*, or the cold grounds. The climate of a country depends as much upon altitude as latitude, and hence these lofty plains are called cold, and really produce the grains and fruits of the most temperate climes.¹ Wheat of the finest quality, our Indian corn, barley, and fruits peculiar to this region, constitute the staple productions and elementary food of the inhabitants. Within this tropical but really temperate zone of lofty plains, and encircled by the sublime range of the Cordilleras, lies the province of Puebla. Its soil is scattered over with and partly composed of

¹ Humboldt's Travels in New Spain.

the volcanic remains of ancient convulsions.¹ The lava is strewn over the ground in different varieties, bearing a resemblance to the cinders of an iron-furnace. On the tops of the highest and most magnificent mountains may be found the craters whence in ages past have streamed out these rich but dangerous ingredients of the soil. Yet, with all this, the earth is there garnished with but little of that beauty of foliage and that abundance of vegetable production which so distinguishes the great alluvials of the United States of the north. The *cactus*, that discriminating inhabitant of barren lands, is still frequent, and, except within a few miles of Puebla, the whole road from Vera Cruz to that city presents but a few scrubby bushes, some palms, and this unproductive cactus, called in this country the prickly-pear.² In the neighborhood of Puebla, cultivated fields and waving grain indicate that husbandry has resumed its occupation, and that man, a resident of cities, has higher demands for food and luxury than the natural fruits or natural grasses can supply. He is still, however, the man of two thousand years ago. Time, which has revolutionized empires and established the supremacy of science in other lands, has left the Spanish Aztec, the unchanged image of his ancient fathers, in the indolence of his life and the fixedness of his habits. In vain has invention created arts, and genius startled a world with its wonderful achievements. He uses the plough of two thousand years since, employs oxen instead of horses, folds his arms in contemptuous pride, and sees the world, and its exhibitions of power

¹ Waddy Thompson's Recollections of Mexico, page 17.

² *Ibid.*

and wonder in science, pass by him, with the frigidity of indolence and the indifference of contempt! In this state was once one of the most numerous populations of the ancient Mexicans, yet it now scarcely contains fifty to a square mile—a number large compared with most of the provinces of Mexico, yet small compared with the populous nations which inhabited here in the time of Cortez.¹ It was then the seat of the Tlascalans and Cholulans—people who had advanced far in the arts, and whose monuments were among the greatest of the earth. Six miles from the present city of Puebla was the great city of Cholula, which once contained two hundred thousand inhabitants, and where Cortez beheld the towers of four hundred idol temples! Of this great city not a vestige remains! Not a brick nor a stone stands upon another! One monument stands in gloomy and solitary grandeur amidst the vast plain which surrounded it.² This is the great pyramid, truncated at top, and supposed to have been dedicated to the worship of the gods of the Aztecs. This pyramid is one of the most remarkable among the ruins of ancient nations. It is 1440 feet on the side, at the base, 177 feet in height, and 45,210 square feet on the summit.³

In the midst of these ruins of ancient empires, surrounded by these mountains, upon this high plain, looking out upon these lava-covered fields, and through the clear, vivid, brilliant atmosphere of tropical highlands, is the city of Puebla. It now contains about eighty thousand

¹ Cortez and Bernal Diaz.

² Waddy Thompson's Recollections of Mexico.

³ Description of Humboldt.

inhabitants. It is a beautiful city, well built, with lofty houses, broad streets, and fine public buildings.¹ Here, at two hundred miles from the city of Vera Cruz on the Gulf of Mexico, and ninety from Mexico, the heart of the Aztec empire, the small but brave and glorious army of Scott arrived on the 15th of May, 1847. With complexions sallow, and disabled by the unwholesome climate of Vera Cruz—in the gray undress uniform of the United States, and wearied with many miles of tedious march, the army entered this Mexican city, to surprise its inhabitants as much by the inferiority of its appearance as it had done by the greatness of its deeds. Were these indeed to be the conquerors of Mexico? Where were the far-famed heroes of Cerro Gordo? Time, however, was to convince the Pueblans, in a yet more startling manner, that the energy of the American soldier could be revived to greater actions, and the glory of former battles be obscured by the brightness of those to come.

The army, as it entered Puebla, was stated by a Mexican eye-witness to have numbered four thousand two hundred and ninety effective men, with thirteen pieces of artillery.² This was the *marching force* at that point. On that day and at that place the number given was very nearly correct. Scott's force at that time capable of marching on Mexico did not exceed *four thousand five hundred men*. A slight review of the preceding events and circumstances will explain this fact, and show that such was a necessary consequence of the measures taken by the government, and the losses necessarily sus-

¹ Letter from a native of Puebla.

² *Ibid*

tained in a distant campaign in a foreign land. In May, 1846, Congress had authorized the President to call out fifty thousand volunteers. Twenty-three regiments had been called out in May and June. The time for which they were called out was but twelve months, and expired in May, 1847. Several of these regiments were in the army of Scott, and had been discharged on the way to Puebla. Sickness also had been rife among the troops. The camp dysentery, so common and so fatal among armies, had disabled many and destroyed others. At Vera Cruz, at Cerro Gordo, and in other engagements and skirmishes, not a few of the brave men who landed in Mexico had fallen a sacrifice to the bloody rites of war.

The army, when concentrated at the Island of Lobos, had numbered fourteen thousand men; but thus reduced by sickness, by discharges, and by death, in addition to the garrisons required, not more than five thousand (exclusive of the garrison of Jalapa) capable of moving in arms could be assembled to march against the capital of Mexico. What were they to do? Were the laurels of many battles and the glory of victorious campaigns to be risked, in the heart of a hostile nation, with so small a band? Already had complaints of delay been made and repeated by the unthinking friends of the administration. They seemed to imagine that armies had nothing to do but march and fight, and that these should be done, by Americans, with a speed which surpassed all human experience; that they neither required sleep nor bread, baggage nor transportation; but that, heedless of supplies and regardless of opposition, they should hurry on to the end, rivalling the winds and trusting in a predestined victory! Such a compliment was not unde-

served by the skilful commander and heroic soldiers of the army of Mexico; but even they ought not to have been expected to perform such unprecedented achievements. With this small array, however, impelled by the natural ardor of a successful general, and in reliance upon the invincible energies of the American soldier, would Scott have proceeded at once to the city of Mexico, but for other and unexpected interferences.

The cabinet at Washington had from the commencement of the war professed an anxious desire to terminate the controversy with Mexico, in any way honorable to the United States. General Scott, animated by the same desire, and conscious that no useful end was to be gained by carrying the terrors of martial law among the people of Mexico, beyond that of securing a permanent peace, had already addressed from Jalapa, a humane and reasoning proclamation to the Mexican people, stating to them the plain facts in their own condition, the events of the war, the unskilfulness of their leaders, the burdens imposed upon them, and the already foreshadowed results of this drama of conquest. This document¹ is one of the finest specimens of military literature, both for the matter it contains and the manner of its composition. Having recited the civil and military events which preceded the battle of Cerro Gordo, the commander of the army proceeds to say—

Finally, the bloody event of Cerro Gordo has shown the Mexican nation what it may reasonably expect if it longer continues blind to the true situation in which it has been

¹ Scott's Proclamation, dated Jalapa, May 11, 1847.

placed by some generals, whom it has most distinguished and in whom it has most confided.

The hardest heart would be moved to grief in contemplating the battle-fields of Mexico a moment after the last struggle. Those generals whom the nation has, without service rendered, paid for so many years, with some honorable exceptions, have in the day of need betrayed it by their example or unskilfulness. On that field, among the dead and dying, are seen no proofs of military honor, for they are reduced to the sad fate of the soldier—the same on every occasion, from Palo Alto to Cerro Gordo—the dead to remain unburied, and the wounded abandoned to the charity and clemency of the conqueror. Soldiers who go to fight expecting such a recompense, deserve to be classed among the best in the world, since they are stimulated by no hope of ephemeral glory, of regret, of remembrance, or even of a grave.

Again, Mexicans of honorable pride—contemplate the lot of peaceful and laborious citizens in all classes of your society. The possessions of the Church menaced and held out as an incitement to revolution and anarchy; the fortune of the rich proprietors pointed out for plunder to the ill-disposed; the merchant and the artisan, the laborer and the manufacturer, burdened with contributions, excises, monopolies, taxes upon consumption, surrounded with restrictions and charged with odious internal customs; the man of letters and the statesman, the man of liberal knowledge who dares to speak, persecuted without trial by some factions or by the rulers who abuse their power; criminals unpunished and set at liberty, as were those of Perote—is this, then, Mexicans, the liberty which you enjoy?

I will not believe that the Mexicans of the present day are wanting in courage to confess errors which do not dishonor

them, and to adopt a system of true liberty, of peace, and union with their brethren and neighbors of the north; neither will I believe that they are ignorant of the falsity of the calumnies of the press, intended to excite hostility. No! public sentiment is not to be created or animated by falsehood. We have not profaned your temples, nor abused your women, nor seized your property, as they would have you believe.

We say this with pride, and we confirm it by your own bishops, and by the clergy of Tampico, Tuspan, Matamoras, Monterey, Vera Cruz, and Jalapa, and by all the authorities civil and religious, and the inhabitants of every town we have occupied. We adore the same God, and a large portion of our army, as well as of the population of the United States, are Catholics, like yourselves. We punish crime wherever we find it, and reward merit and virtue.

The army of the United States respects, and will always respect, private property of every description, and the property of the Mexican church.

Mexicans! the past cannot be remedied, but the future may be provided for. Repeatedly have I shown you that the government and people of the United States desire peace, desire your sincere friendship.

Abandon, then, rancorous prejudices, cease to be the sport of individual ambition, and conduct yourselves like a great American nation; leave off at once colonial habits, and learn to be truly free, truly republican, and you will become prosperous and happy, for you possess all the elements to be so. Remember that you are Americans, and that your happiness is not to come from Europe.

I desire, in conclusion, to declare, and with equal frankness, that, if necessary, an army of one hundred thousand could promptly be brought, and that the United States would

not terminate their differences with Mexico (if compelled to do so by force of arms) in any manner uncertain, precarious, or dishonoring to yourselves. I should insult the intelligent of this country if I had any doubt of their acquaintance with this truth.

The order to form guerilla parties to attack us, I assure you can procure nothing but evil to your country, and no evil to our army, which will know how to proceed against them; and if, so far from conciliating, you succeed in irritating, you will impose upon us the hard necessity of retaliation, and then you cannot blame us for the consequences which will fall upon yourselves.

I am marching with my army upon Puebla and Mexico—I do not conceal it; from those capitals I shall again address you. I desire peace, friendship, and union—it is for you to select whether you prefer war; under any circumstances, be assured I shall not fail my word.

WINFIELD SCOTT.

This proclamation contains one of the best and most correct pictures of the conduct of the Mexican army, and the real operations of its government, anywhere to be found. It is true that it was (with a few honorable exceptions) the Mexican officers and not the soldiers who had been wanting in skill, energy, or courage. The battle-fields, as here depicted, were strewed with the dead soldiers of the Mexican army; but in some instances the officers had retreated in haste, in some they were unwilling to fight, and in all they had shown a deficiency in military education, utterly incompetent to meet in successful contest the superior skill and the wonderfully developed power of modern military science. It was true, also, that the government of Mexico was one of une-

qual burdens and of unstable power. It depended rather upon the will of military chiefs than the affections of the people. It imposed burdens by caprice rather than principle. It fettered trade by restrictions alike unjust and unnecessary. It was true, and as honorable as true, that the army of Scott had signalized the humanity of modern warfare by a forbearance of all the barbarities of conquest. It had seized no individual property, destroyed no church structures, violated no private rights, and imposed no contributions upon a prostrate population. The armies of Mexico were indeed swept from its paths with the fearful might of destruction, but they were swept away only in pursuance of the acknowledged rights of war, and left behind no mournful evidences of a vindictive malice. It was war and not barbarism which bore over the fields of Mexico the unfolded banner of the North American republic.

Such was the professed disposition of the United States government towards Mexico, such the address of General Scott, and such the humane manner in which the war had been carried on, when an agent of the cabinet in Washington arrived in Mexico to negotiate peace. This person was Mr. Nicholas P. Trist, chief clerk in the department of state. From the hostile attitude of the two governments towards each other, he could not come in the character of a regularly appointed envoy—a character only consistent with a state of peace. He did come, however, with certain letters from the cabinet at Washington to persons in Mexico, and with powers, on certain terms, as a commissioner to conclude a treaty of peace.¹ Mr.

¹ Mr. Polk's official commission to Trist.

Trist arrived at Jalapa just before Scott's departure for Puebla, and immediately intimated a desire to transmit certain papers to the Mexican government. If the propositions they contained were acceptable to the authorities in Mexico, they necessarily implied a cessation of hostilities while the negotiations proceeded. Such was the condition of affairs at Puebla in the beginning of June. With the government commissioner anxious for peace, and actually seeking opportunities of negotiation, on the one hand, and with an army diminished (including all its disposable force) in effective men to less than five thousand, Scott, anxious to go forward, and looking with hope to the consummation of the campaign in the city of Mexico, was yet compelled, by considerations both civil and military, to remain in Puebla.

The *military reasons* why the army should remain at Puebla till reinforced, were of the strongest kind, and demanded the serious attention of the boldest commander, even if convinced of the entire infallibility of his troops. The event proved their force and the superior sagacity of the general, who, hopeful of the highest glory, and anticipating only victory, sacrificed this ardor of action to high prudential considerations. These reasons were: *1st.* If the entire five thousand men then at Puebla could be placed at once in the city of Mexico, they were barely sufficient to constitute a common garrison, impotent to move in any direction, or to overawe the Mexican government by any demonstrative movement. *2d.* In this defensive, shut-up position, they must remain for months, before reinforcements could arrive¹ sufficiently strong to

¹ The brigade of Pierce did not arrive at Puebla till the 5th of August. —See Scott's official despatch, (No. 34,) dated September 18th.

authorize any offensive movement. 3d. The main body of the army of Santa Anna was yet unbroken, and at this period it would have been his policy to leave the American army to shut itself up in Mexico, while he fell, in succession, on the advancing bodies of new troops marching to reinforce Scott. In this, he would either have defeated them or have prevented their junction. 4th. Alvarez, with a division of four thousand men, was within striking distance of Puebla,¹ and on the advance of Scott to Mexico would have taken possession of the post he left, and cut off all communication with his rear.² In fine, it is only remarkable that the commander or his officers should have at all entertained the idea of advancing with so small a force. That persons in the United States should have thought their delay singular, only proved that they were very little acquainted with military affairs, and that they believed, that by some extraordinary decree of Heaven the army was rendered invulnerable to misfortune, and predestined to inevitable victory. It has, indeed, realized such a destiny; but only by science the most accomplished, by sagacity the most penetrating, and by valor the most indomitable. The children of destiny are first made such by the energy of their own character, and the superiority of their own minds.

Such was the *necessity*, both civil and military, which constrained General Scott to restrain his desire to advance, and maintain the army at Puebla. Nor was it

¹ Mr. Kendall's letter, dated October 15th, 1847.

² Let the reader recollect, that notwithstanding all the reinforcements which arrived between May and September, General Scott's communications with Vera Cruz were cut off during the whole period for want of troops to keep them open!

unemployed or useless delay. Whatever gives an army discipline gives it strength. More than thirty years previous, Scott had, in the camp at Buffalo, availed himself of such an opportunity to drill and discipline the men whose valor and firmness had withstood the veteran troops of Great Britain on the fields of Chippewa and Niagara. Such experience was not lost. The divisions of Worth, Twiggs, and Quitman, were drawn out and constantly drilled on the plains bordering Puebla, till their discipline was complete.¹ Thus was perfected the only remaining element which was necessary to give an unexampled success to the arms of the United States in the republic of Mexico.

In the mean while, the cabinet at Washington had become awakened to the necessity of reinforcing the army of Scott, left alone in the midst of hostile millions. Congress had authorized the enlistment of ten new regiments, and the business of recruiting was rapidly carried on. Recruiting-stations were established in the principal interior towns of the United States, and the spirit of adventure, the high pay, and the bounty lands so liberally offered by the government, were rapidly filling the exhausted ranks of the army. New volunteer regiments were called out; but this resource was not taken till too late to supply the places of the levy of 1846, whose time expired in May. General Scott had been obliged to discharge the portion of these connected with his army, at Jalapa. The want of foresight in not preparing for this event was the real reason why the army of Scott was,

¹ Kendall's letter, of October 15th, 1847.

numerically, too small to advance, without hazard, at once from Puebla.

Soon after Scott arrived at that place the garrison of Jalapa was broken up, the army not being strong enough to spare such a detachment. Perote was made a *dépôt*, and the line of communication was left without defence—one of the few examples of a general trusting to the innate energies of his army, leaving it alone in an enemy's country, without any provision for retreat. This measure was, however, one of necessity; for, taking the received maxims of war as the rule, the garrisons alone necessary to keep open the line, would have consumed the entire army!

On the 5th of May a large train, under the command of Colonel M'Intosh, left Vera Cruz for the army. It consisted of one hundred and thirty-two wagons, six hundred pack-mules, and about eight hundred men. This corps was attacked by a strong body of guerillas at Passo de Ovejas. The guerillas were partially successful, although the detachment made good its defence. The Americans lost thirty men, killed and wounded, thirty-five wagons, and two hundred mules. This was a serious check; but was soon remedied by new reinforcements. On the 10th of May General Cadwallader marched to the aid of M'Intosh with six hundred men, from Vera Cruz, composed chiefly of the new regiment of *voltigeurs*, accompanied with six howitzers. A junction was made, and the detachment, now fourteen hundred strong, with its train, moved on, to join as soon as possible the main army.

On the 17th of May General Pillow left Vera Cruz with another detachment of about one thousand men.

At a subsequent period General Pierce was also sent forward, with about two thousand five hundred. Thus, by successive additions of new recruits, the government was able, after two months' delay, to increase the army of General Scott to a number short of eleven thousand available men. With this number, in the early part of August, the army moved to the conquest of Mexico—the capital of the Spanish Aztec nation! Its progress, its victories, its heroic conduct, and its wonderful achievements, we must now pursue, record, and, as far as possible, spread out, for the admiration of all true lovers of the great and heroic in martial achievement.