

swim along with you, and find themselves caught before they know it. A sergeant of my company hooked such a monster that he could not budge him; the fish darted between him and a comrade standing by his side; as he passed they laid violent hands upon him, unhooked him, and started for shore. They had not proceeded ten paces, when he flapped his tail and threw them both on their backs, and escaped.

The hunting here is unsurpassed. Deer abound. If you are in *want of meat*, you have but to station yourself behind some of the innumerable sand-hills, near ponds of fresh water. Here may be seen the deer for half a mile, when feeding or coming to water. There you can quietly sit, and the deer will walk within thirty yards of you; or, if you prefer it, mount your horse, dash over the island, and you can have the excitement of shooting them under full run. An officer of our regiment jumped on a horse, rode to the shooting-grounds, and in twenty minutes from the time of dismounting killed three fine, fat fellows. Teal and mallard duck were found in the ponds with their young; also jack-snipe. This is somewhat astonishing, as it is the general impression they migrate to the north to breed.

The soil of the island is peculiarly adapted to the cultivation of sea-island cotton. Potatoes and melons flourish luxuriantly. It is a light soil, quite sandy, mixed with a great deal of shell; and no matter how much time elapses between rains, the moisture from the soil (water being found so near the surface), combined with the heavy dews, affords sufficient nourishment for the plant.

The landing of the troops' supplies was effected with great difficulty. On the 29th, two companies of

the 3d, one of which was mine, embarked on the steamer Undine for Corpus Christi. Aransas and Corpus Christi Bays are separated by a long flat of land. It was discovered that the Undine drew too much water to pass over it. We were forced to leave the steamboat, and cross the bay, *a very rough one*, in small boats. We landed on the main shore on the 31st of July. On the 14th of July Captain Tompkins's company of the 3d Artillery sailed from New York in the United States store-ship Lexington, for the mouth of the Columbia River. He carried with him a battery of artillery, besides heavy guns, and every material requisite for the erection of a permanent fortification.

### CHAPTER III.

THE village of Corpus Christi, or "*Kinney's Ranch*," as it is generally called, is situated on the western shore of Corpus Christi Bay. The town consists of some twenty or thirty houses, partly situated on a shelf of land, elevated some six or eight feet above the water, about two hundred yards broad, and on a bluff which rises from the plain to the height of one hundred feet. The bay at this point is in the shape of a crescent, extending in a southeast direction to Padre Island, and northwest to the mouth of the Nueces. The bluff presents a beautiful aspect, the rise being sufficiently gentle to deprive it of all appearance of abruptness, clad with the mesquite-grass, and evergreen bushes scattered in clumps hither and yon in graceful confusion, looking, in its gentle undulations, as if its pleasing irregularities had been fashioned by the hand of man.



The bluff and the plain presented, early on the morning after our arrival, quite a pastoral appearance. First came a large drove of cattle, driven by two Mexicans, mounted upon their mustang ponies; then followed at least five hundred goats and sheep, which, dispersing themselves in groups over hill and plain, added much to the beauty of the scene. The shepherd and his trusty dog accompanied them; Fancy placed in his hands the crook, and brought vividly to mind the poetic descriptions of his life. From the top of the bluff the view that burst upon us was magnificent in the extreme. Far off to the east the scene was bounded by the white-caps of the beautiful bay; to the southeast Flower Bluffs stood out in bold relief; in the northeast the distant highlands of Maglone's Bluff were dimly visible; to the northwest, the land near the mouth of the Nueces; in the west, one unlimited plain presented itself, extending to the mountains, the home of the mustang and buffalo, the hunting-ground of the bold Comanche and the fierce Lipan. The scene was charming, and the soft, refreshing sea-breeze, cooling the atmosphere to the temperature of an October's day, made one exclaim, in the enthusiasm of the moment, "It is God's favored land—the Eden of America." When the enthusiasm subsided, it was not exactly *that*, but it certainly is very beautiful. The atmosphere is tempered by a constant breeze, and you hardly feel the heat.

This place was first settled by Colonel H. L. Kinney, in 1838, who, in conjunction with his partner, Mr. Aubrey, established a trading-post, to meet the immense traffic carried on by the Mexicans. It was the extreme frontier settlement. The incursions of the Indians were so frequent, and attended with so much

danger, that he was forced to keep a regular company of men, at his own expense, to defend his "ranch." Its proximity to the Rio Grande made it the most convenient point for the contraband trade. This trade is carried on by Mexicans, who bring in immense droves of horses and mules, saddles and bridles, Mexican blankets and silver, and in return take back the common unbleached domestics and tobacco. From the great extent of frontier on the Rio Grande, they are enabled to escape the custom, and realize immense profits upon their goods. Colonel Kinney's life has been a romance from his first entrance into the country; and those accustomed to the luxuries of cities, and unacquainted with border life, can hardly realize, much less credit, some of the astonishing adventures in which he has been a prominent actor. His ready wit, generosity, indomitable courage, and perseverance have relieved him from many perplexing situations.

As the concentration of our army at this point has rendered it notorious, I can not refrain, even at the expense of being considered prosy, from relating a few anecdotes connected with *the place and its spirited proprietor*. For the suppression of this illicit trade, the government of Mexico kept constantly stationed on the Rio Grande a species of troops called "comisiones." They were usually commanded by some worthless vagabond, who was ready in a moment to sacrifice his duty for a bribe. The government, looking with a jealous eye at the increasing trade of "Kinney's Ranch," dispatched an officer of the "comisiones," with two hundred men, to destroy his contraband goods and take him prisoner. At this time Kinney had with him a company of forty men. Receiving information of the intended expedition, he hurried to "Live-



oak Point," a neighboring settlement east of the Nueces, to obtain all the assistance they could spare. On his return he found that his valiant company had not only deserted him, but stolen many of his goods. The "Ranch" was, in itself, a pretty strong work, being surrounded by a wall pierced for infantry, and having two pieces of artillery mounted for its defense. The commanding officer of the detachment halted his men within three miles of the Ranch, and dispatched a messenger to Colonel Kinney, telling him if he would give up his goods peaceably, he would not molest his person. The colonel's force consisted, all told, of eight trusty adherents. While the messenger was delivering the mandate of his superior, they were employed, by order of the colonel, digging holes in which to place some bomb-shells, the "Ranch" being well supplied with the various materiel of war. Observing that the proceedings of his men had attracted the attention of the messenger, the colonel said to him, "Go back to your captain; tell him I'll neither surrender my goods nor myself; I'll fight him to the last, and will lay his bones and those of his command to bleach at my door." This reply being reported to the worthy commander, he exclaimed, "Why, what has got into this d—d American? he must have been sure of whipping me, or he would never have sent so fierce an answer." The affair, thus savagely commenced, ended in a conference. A few insinuating gold pieces, placed most unostentatiously in the hands of the worthy and valiant defender of his country's laws, sent him back to the Rio Grande, to report to his government that the conduct of the colonel was unexceptionable. So much for a little ingenious bravery, and a happy application of the *lever of the world*.

The settlement was almost entirely at the mercy of the numerous bands of Indians. So daring were they in their fierce incursions, that it became necessary to make every house a castle. The colonel's Indian adventures were numberless. I have only space to relate some of the details of one in which he was concerned with a party of Camanches. They are the most war-like tribe of Indians on this continent; neither ask nor give quarter; being mostly armed with the bow and arrow, they have acquired a skill in its use that is perfectly wonderful. The party with whom he had the combat was headed by Santa Anna, a noted chief, and numbered seventeen. The party which Colonel Kinney commanded numbered eleven. Santa Anna had been in the "Ranch," committing depredations. Being mounted on fleet horses, the colonel and his party soon overtook the illustrious chief. The two parties dismounted and approached each other, skirmishing, to within fifty yards. Each shot from the unerring rifle of the border men told with terrible effect. The Indians fought with desperate valor; no signs of flinching. Presently Santa Anna, with his raw-hide shield before him, dashed to the front, and ran along the line of his opponents. Each fired as he passed them, but with no effect. You could hear the balls rattle harmlessly on his shield. Just as the colonel fired at his legs, the object of this bold manœuvre of the wily chief flashed across his mind. It was to draw their fire, and rush upon them while their pieces were discharged. He cried to his men to mount, and vaulted upon his noble steed. His men, objecting to mount before they loaded, were dashed upon by the enemy. Now they were all mingled in a hand-to-hand conflict. The man who first objected to mounting his



horse was immediately speared and killed. Another was speared and shot in several places with arrows. Colonel Kinney's clerk, a young Mexican, was speared, had his horse shot under him, and fell. The colonel seized him, and placed him on his horse. An Indian rushed at and speared the poor fellow again, the spear cutting Kinney in the back. Another Indian rushed at him; he met and parried the spear, which pierced his buckskin hunting-shirt through both sleeves. At this critical moment the *Mexican bit* saved his life. By its great power he was enabled to stop his horse, and, by turning him suddenly round, succeeded in tearing the spear from his sleeves. The poor clerk all this time had him clasped around the throat. Another savage rushed at him, but fell dead in his tracks by the unerring aim of an arm which grows stronger as death stares him in the face. Another rushed from behind, and speared the boy through the kidneys. The poor clerk relaxed his hold, told Colonel Kinney to keep cool, and he would be saved, and fell to rise no more. While the colonel's arms were yet unloaded, he was again set upon by a fierce devil; he dashed his pistol into his face, and again disarmed the savage of his spear. By this time Santa Anna, as well as the colonel and his party, were satisfied with this desperate conflict, and retired from the field. Of the colonel's party three men and nine horses were killed, and all wounded. Santa Anna lost seven men. One of Kinney's men came to him with *five arrows* sticking in him, besides being speared in two places. The arrows were pulled out, and, incredible as it seems, *he survived*. Tell me where, in the romance of history, you ever read of a more desperate, gallant, and bloody fight! and yet many such have taken place between

the Indians and those brave pioneers of civilization, the recital of which almost makes the blood chill in one's heart, and of which *the world* remains totally ignorant.

To give an idea of the obstinate courage of the Camanche, I must cite *one* instance of desperate resistance in a chief. A party of them had been for some time annoying the settlements in the vicinity of San Antonio. A large force had been collected to pursue them. A battle ensued near the town; many were killed, and some taken prisoners. One chief and his squaw shut themselves up in an old Spanish house, resolutely refusing to surrender. The command was drawn up around the house, and he must have seen that every avenue of escape, as well as all hope of success, was cut off. Wishing to spare him, they sent the prophet of his band to use his influence to prevail upon him to surrender. He scorned their proposals, and for an answer sent an arrow among the troops, which killed one of their men. His position was so favorable that he killed seven. To get him out, they made holes in the roof and threw composition balls into the house. Suddenly he opened the doors, and with desperate energy rushed forth, and nearly succeeded in making his escape. He dealt death-blows to the last, killing three more before he was shot down. One can hardly realize such desperate resistance from one man. His squaw was killed during the attack. He had buried her. She was found in her simple grave, with the warrior's saddle as her tomb-stone.



## CHAPTER IV.

FRIDAY, August 1st. After enjoying the delightful view from the bluff, a party of us strolled over the beautiful plain, on the borders of which many Mexican families reside. Their residences are primitive enough; nothing more than sheds, partially inclosed with the crooked mesquite-wood, and their roofs thatched with a long grass which grows in the marshes, called "tula." A dam thrown across a deep ravine furnishes the people with a plentiful supply of rain-water, not only for themselves, but for the stock, and for the immense droves of horses and mules brought in by the Mexicans. A very capital mustang can be purchased for fifteen dollars, or from that to twenty-five, depending upon the manner in which he is broken. On the side of the pond, under a grove of beautiful live-oaks, was encamped a company of Texas Rangers. It was under the command of Colonel Bell, an officer who had greatly distinguished himself in this border warfare. They were paid by the government of Texas, and were stationed at this point for the protection of the inhabitants.

The men have been busily employed all day digging wells. The *best* of the water is *slightly brackish*. The ground will admit of an extensive encampment, immediately along the shores of the bay. Another company arrived to-day. The whole command will thus be brought up by detachments. Our means of transportation are too limited, and one can not but reflect how completely we would be at the mercy of an active and energetic enemy.

General Taylor is still at St. Joseph's Island, with his usual energy pushing forward his troops and supplies, with the contemptible means he has at command.

22d. For the first time had the pleasure of riding a mustang, with complete, though rude Mexican rigging. The animal was lively and frisky enough, but a mere rat compared with our northern horses. The ride was delightful; the atmosphere as cool as an autumn day. The face of the country was a rolling, gently-undulating plain, covered with the most luxuriant grass, and interspersed with "*mots*" (islands) of timber, looking as though they were planted to ornament some gentleman's country-seat. Your imagination would lead you to assert you saw the elegant mansion corresponding with such noble grounds. For the first time saw the *mesquite-tree*; it resembles very much the wild locust, and bears a bean having a delightfully-sweet taste, very nutritious for animals, and eaten by many persons. The wood of the mesquite is unsurpassed for fuel, giving an intense heat, and the best coal for cooking that ever gladdened the eye of a professor of that delicate science.

August 3d. Details from the command were kept in the water from morning until night, unloading the vessels. Hearing there was to be Catholic service at one of the houses in the Ranch, a friend and myself decided to attend. The service had not commenced when we arrived. There were about a dozen females collected, the majority of them Mexicans. I can not say much for their beauty. There was one, the Señora Leonora, a Mexican widow, who looked quite sweetly. To delicate features, good figure, and blood-like Castilian carriage, were added the softest, deepest-fringed black eyes I ever saw. Beauty in that organ is common to



them all. There is a softness, an abiding confidence in its expression; one so full of the gentler feelings which constitute the poetry of woman's character, that you can not fail to admire them. Their dress is very simple, consisting of a skirt, generally of a gay color, with the graceful *rebosa*, which completely conceals the nudity of the bust. The service was performed at the house of an Irishman, whose lady was a fair specimen of the Emerald Isle. Her husband came grunting out of the room, complaining in most audible terms of a pain in his back. Lest the company might be impressed with the belief that it arose from a belaboring he *might* have received from his more muscular better half, he explained to them that wind in his intestines, by a sudden exertion, had been driven to his kidneys, and pained him powerfully. It may well be imagined, if there was *not* a regular burst of laughter, there *was* a most decided smile. The priest soon made his appearance. His name is Esten , a native of Old Spain, who, filled with the enthusiasm of the Gospel, has become a traveling savior of souls. He resides on the San Antonio River, and makes his periodical visits to villages in a circumference of four hundred miles. He gave us an excellent sermon in Spanish and English.

There is a singular state of affairs existing between the Texans and Mexicans, at least at this point. When you reflect how long they have been in a state of war, and how great an antipathy must exist between them for the numerous acts of savage barbarity committed during the Texas struggle, one would suppose there would be complete non-intercourse. On the contrary, the most friendly relations exist between them, no doubt occasioned by the profitable contraband trade.

We here meet with the *chaparral*, which, strictly,

signifies a "plantation of evergreen oaks," but which here means an almost impenetrable thicket of small bushes, so interlaced with a thick undergrowth, covered with thorns, that a passage through it is next to impossible. Every tree and bush has its thorn. The deep black-green of the foliage is almost inconceivable. The temperature is delightful; in the shade you do not feel the heat of the sun; and the never-ceasing trade-winds at times occasion the chilly sensation belonging to a fall day.

August 5th. We all feel under obligations to Mr. B., the governor of Kinney's Ranch during the absence of its gentlemanly proprietor. In truth, I have never met a community who have so universally extended to us unlooked-for civilities. This afternoon, at Mrs. B.'s, I ate a Mexican preparation called *themales*. It is made of corn-meal, chopped meat, and Cayenne pepper, nicely wrapped in a piece of corn-husk, and boiled. I know of nothing more palatable.

August 6th. We hear that Commodore Connor is coming round with the whole Gulf Squadron. Troops still arriving by small detachments. General issued his first order, dated "Headquarters, Army of Occupation;" no longer Observation. The men catch quantities of fine fish with a seine.

August 8th. The wind has blown a perfect hurricane, and it was with great difficulty our tents could be kept standing. Heard from the Dragoons; they had reached the Trinity River. Our camp-ground is infested with rattle-snakes; as many as two at a time have been found in the tents of the officers.

August 9th. Two Mexicans arrived from the Rio Grande. They report only five hundred men at Matamoros, and Arista still at Monterey, no movements



being made. That, however, is no sign; the government is despotic, and no movements are made public. The Undine succeeded in getting over the flats, and will now ply between them and the camp. Two companies of the 4th Infantry came in her. That regiment arrived safely at the island several days since. Drills are the order of the day, and every exertion is made to prepare the command for any emergency. Great attention is paid to the target practice; we may have use for sharp shooting. Nothing of any moment transpired until the 12th, when we received information that the Mexican troops were in motion; that Arista had left Monterey with one thousand infantry and five hundred cavalry for Matamoras. War had not yet been declared, but the people were daily in expectation of it. It is reported that General Arista is deficient in funds to pay his army. The great majority of us are of opinion there will be no fighting, although Mexico may declare war, if only to save her pride. She is incapable, in her present distracted state, in the utterly prostrated condition of her treasury, to sustain a war. The information of Arista's movements was brought to us by a Mexican called Chapita, the favorite and confidential spy of Colonel Kinney. He is a man in the prime of life, middling height, broad shoulders, muscles like whip-cords, a dark, piercing eye, prominent forehead, and bushy eye-brows; having that determined expression of countenance common to one who follows so dangerous an occupation. He is devotedly attached to Colonel Kinney, and assisted him in his escape from the prison at Matamoras, in which he had been confined by the military commandant. He always travels alone through the desolate and dreary wilderness extending to the Rio Grande, and

has ridden from that river to Corpus Christi (one hundred and fifty miles) in a day and night. His favorite horse is a Mexican, about thirteen hands high, and so thin you would hardly think him fit for the crows. The report gave us some little excitement, and we could not help laughing at our situation. With no dragoons nor artillery, and our force scattered between St. Joseph's and this place, we would not have been in a position to withstand a vigorous assault of five thousand men.

August 14th. The schooner Swallow, with baggage and stores for the troops, went on the bar, and was wrecked. An immense mail was thoroughly soaked. Among the last things found was a paper containing the Mexican minister's proclamation to the commanders of departments, urging upon them the necessity of increased energy in recruiting the army. This begins to look rather more serious. The reception of this letter, combined with the different reports we have received, has created no little excitement. Our lieutenant-colonel, E. A. Hitchcock, commanding officer, deemed it prudent to throw up a line of defense, which was commenced on the 15th, under the superintendence of Captain Larned, 4th Infantry. In case of an attack, we have only six hundred and ninety-nine men with whom to oppose the enemy. The policy of the government is niggardly in the extreme. If the object in sending us here was political effect, that might have been attained by simply publishing a bulletin on this side of the Sabine; if to take and hold possession of the country against an enemy, it is entirely inadequate. It is on a par, however, with all the *first* military operations of a republic. We may consider ourselves a mere bait for the enemy. Bait as we are, under it



they would find a hook, though small, yet, if skilfully managed, would hold and *land* them. That we could conquer Arista to-morrow, none doubts; but it would be after a bloody battle and great loss of life. Not many historians would be left to tell the tale.

General Taylor arrived from St. Joseph's Island on the 15th of August. The 7th Infantry is ordered to join us.

This land of Texas is celebrated for many things; in fact, for almost every thing but the refinements of society. Among those characters who have gained a reputation that can only die with the history of horse-thieves and abominable rascals, the name of Garner stands conspicuous. He was one of the most notorious rascals in the country. He held at one time the honorable station of high private in the army of Texas. Feeling discontented with his position, and believing his light was hidden under a bushel, or that he would become rusty in the art of horse-stealing, he deserted. Apprehension, trial, and condemnation followed. He was sentenced to be shot. On the day appointed for his execution General Houston was present. The prisoner knelt with perfect composure upon his coffin, before which was the grave. He requested permission not to have his eyes blinded; that he was not afraid to look death in the face. The ceremony proceeded, the command, "ready! aim!" was given, when General Houston reprieved him. Garner rose from his coffin, and, with perfect effrontery and sang-froid, approached the general, and exclaimed, "*Fun's fun, general, but I'll be — if this is not carrying a joke a little too far;*" and then added, "If you had shot me you would have lost the best man in your army!"

## CHAPTER V

Nothing of great importance occurred between the 16th and 25th of August. The traders drove a brisk business in mustang horse-flesh; many of the officers supplied themselves, but at prices nearly fifty per cent. higher than the usual rate. As regards color and gait, nearly all could be suited. The best look as if they had lost all the fire they possessed in a state of nature. Their look is one of regret, as if they were dwelling upon the glories of untrammelled motion on the boundless plains. The entrenchments were pushed on vigorously. Some cannon were borrowed from Colonel Kinney, and placed in position, to give us a more *terrific* appearance. I question whether they were not more dangerous to ourselves than the enemy. The general ordered all operations to cease upon it, feeling convinced, from the position, it could afford us very little protection. The work has been of some service, as it has given us a practical knowledge of the manner of hastily throwing up a temporary defense. The steamer Undine was discharged, and a poor, miserable wreck of a boat, called the Dayton, took its place. The Dragoons have been heard from at San Antonio, and were to leave for San Patricio on the 21st. Had a visit from two Lipan chiefs. They were magnificent specimens of the Indian race; tall, huge frames, with muscles well developed, and with open, fearless countenances, they appeared, in every particular, warriors of the desert. Their usual array is very simple and curious. Their saddle is a simple tree, primitive enough in its construction, from which it would be very diffi-