

of grass and flowers; instead of the stately oaks and chestnuts, one must imagine, scattered about in the most picturesque confusion, the popinac, a species of acacia (now in full bloom, and scenting the air with its perfume), the ebony, whose leaves are of the darkest, richest green imaginable, and the graceful mesquite; if to these you add glimpses of beautiful prairies, an unclouded sky, and the sweetest, softest breeze, some idea may be formed of our camp at Palo Alto, eight miles from Matamoras.

CHAPTER IX.

MARCH 28th. A day not easily forgotten. About eight A.M. we started for Matamoras, or, rather, the Rio Grande. Many believed that before we reached the river we would have a fight. I was, and have been, an unbeliever; however, we were all prepared, and I can not say but some would have liked a "brush" for exercise. The country passed over was really beautiful; such grazing was never seen before. The ground appeared alive with quail, and every water-hole turned out its flock of ducks. As you approach the river the chaparral increases in density. The soil is very rich. If they intended to attack us, numerous points could have been selected where they could have forced us into a bloody fight. Within a mile of the river we came to some settlements; large fields were inclosed by driving in posts and filling up the spaces with brush. The country is a perfect level, and the roads are in capital order. As we approached the bank we passed through a long line of Mexican huts:

stopped at one, and there was a regular rush for *eggs and chickens*; salt grub for a few days gave us an appetite for "*chicken fixins*." The floor of the house was paved with bricks, and covered with beds. Not a dark-eyed lassie made her appearance. On one of the beds a small goat was sleeping, and under every one, and in every corner, a game-cock was tied by the legs. The domestic animals appeared to have "*carte-blanche*" to occupy the parlor with their mistresses. The poor devils at their cottage doors appeared pleased at our arrival, and saluted us as we passed.

We reached the river at 11 o'clock. The far-famed and much-talked-about waters rolled beneath us, and the city of Matamoras rose like a fairy vision before our enraptured eyes. I was so agreeably disappointed, I was inclined to grant it more beauty than it probably possessed. When we arrived some two hundred persons were on the opposite bank. The Mexican colors were flying from the quarters of the commander, General Mejia; from the Place d'Artillerie; and from the quarters of the Sappers and Miners. Those were the prominent places pointed out to us upon our arrival. Two of the advanced guard of the Dragoons, being some distance from the main body, were pounced upon by a body of Mexicans and carried off prisoners to Matamoras; a little bugler-boy was dismounted and his horse taken from him. This seizure caused no little excitement, and we were all ready to take the city at any risk.

General Worth was deputed by General Taylor to open communication with the commander of the Mexican forces, and bear to him an answer to the deputation which visited General T. at Point Isabel. Some time elapsed before the Mexicans would send a boat

over. At last one came with an officer, to whom General Worth expressed his desire to see the commanding officer of the troops at Matamoras. The officer returned to General Mejia, who sent an answer to the effect that he would neither receive General Worth, nor the communication of General Taylor. He sent his second in command, General La Vega, to meet General Worth; the latter crossed the river, and the interview took place on the opposite side. General La Vega spoke of our arrival as an act of invasion; that the Mexican government looked upon it as such; and asked the question, "What would we have done if we had been served so?" Of course, no reply could be given, except that we would have fought like lions for what we deemed our possessions. They are decidedly inimical to us. General Worth did not touch upon the capture of the Dragoons, leaving that subject until a friendly intercourse could be established.

Two hours after our arrival a flag-staff was erected, under the superintendence of Colonel Belknap, and soon the flag of our country, a virgin one, was seen floating upon the banks of the Rio Grande, proclaiming in a silent but impressive manner that the "area of freedom" was again extended. As it was hoisted the band of the 8th Infantry played the "Star-spangled Banner," and the field music "Yankee Doodle." There was not ceremony enough in raising it. The troops should have been paraded under arms, the banner of our country should have been hoisted with patriotic strains of music, and a national salute should have proclaimed, in tones of thunder, that "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable," had advanced to the banks of the Rio Grande. Simultaneous with the appearance of the "Stars and Stripes," the cross of St.

George, and the French and Spanish colors, were run up from the different consulates. We looked in vain for ours: either our consul is confined, or else he dare not raise it. We have had no communication with him.

The main body of the city is half a mile from the river; scattering houses near the bank. From our position we can discover several strong-holds, and it looks as if it was well defended. It is reported the different forts are well supplied with ammunition, and ordnance of heavy caliber. At this point the river runs nearly east and west, and is one hundred and seventy-five yards wide. The city is on the south side, and situated in an alluvial bottom. The soil is very rich, and of a similar character to that on the Mississippi. If the climate is not too dry, it must be immensely valuable. The river reminds one a good deal of the Arkansas, and the water is capital for drinking. The Mexicans expected we would have struck the river higher up, opposite their main ferry, where they are reported to be actively engaged in throwing up a work. I am convinced, if it becomes necessary for us to take the city, we can do it, although we have no siege artillery. They could not withstand such an onset as would come from us. General La Vega spoke to General Worth about raising our flag; he did not like it. I presume it looked like taking possession in earnest; one from which there will be no retreat. General Worth told him "it was a matter of taste, but that no sight was so glorious to him as that of the flag of his country floating in the breeze."

In the evening I walked down to the bank, and found it lined with citizens, attracted, no doubt, by the arrival of so many strangers. Strolling along, and seeing some genteel-looking young ladies upon the bank, I

took off my hat and saluted them with "Buena noche, señoritas." They laughed most heartily, and appeared very much inclined to enter into conversation. The river at this point was so narrow that I could have thrown a stone across it. As our troops approached, the windows and house-tops were filled with citizens, anxious to see what we intended doing. Their troops kicked up a little dust by marching about some infantry and cavalry, of whom we caught glimpses through the trees; and, to finish the incidents of the day, a rooster, brought from Corpus Christi by Colonel T., the moment the wagon arrived upon the bank flapped his wings and crowed defiance. Our camp was in a corn-field, the corn some six inches high. General Taylor sent for the owner, and told him he would pay him what he thought was the value of the crop. Rumor estimates the force of the Mexicans at one thousand five hundred.

March 29th. The enemy, during the night, mounted a heavy gun in a battery made of sand-bags, and this morning we had the pleasure of reflecting that no little damage might be done us, if they should amuse themselves by firing it. They are missing a great deal of delightful society by behaving in so churlish a manner. It is rather provoking being in sight of so much comfort and luxury, without permission to enjoy it. Fight or no fight, the general has made up his mind not to budge from here, and has ordered Major Mansfield, of the Engineers, to make surveys, with a view of throwing up a work.

March 30th. Last evening we had quite an alarm. At tattoo it was reported that, "from information received, there was a strong probability of a night attack." Some Mexicans had reported the crossing of

a large body of the enemy's cavalry above our camp, and it was thought their object was to attack "Point Isabel," and at the same time open their batteries upon us. I was among the unbelievers; yet it was impossible to divest one's self of the thoughts of what *might* be the result, if the premises were granted. The watch-word was given out, and the men ordered to sleep upon their arms. Captain May, with a squadron of the 2d Dragoons, was ordered to march to Point Isabel, a distance of *twenty-seven* miles, in *four* hours, to re-enforce the garrison and put them on their guard. With that officer's usual energy and promptness, he accomplished the distance in the stated time, and somewhat *stirred up* the gentlemen with an idea of an attack. Morning dawned, however; no gun was fired, no attack was made upon the depôt at the Point. I then felt more satisfied that no contingency could happen that would produce a fight. They had permitted two golden opportunities to pass: the passage of the Colorado, and the night of our arrival. Had they fired upon us the night of the alarm, there is no computing the damage which would have ensued. The train was placed in the center of the camp, and if the firing had commenced, there would have been a "stampede" of some six hundred animals; they would have carried death and destruction with them. The return of killed and wounded by *mules* would have exceeded the number by Mexicans. A death by a *stampede* would have been a glorious finale for officer or man! I lay awake contriving how I should escape them, but my imagination could present no means, unless to "lie down and take it;" relying upon the faint hope that Mr. Mule would be military enough, considering his late education, to "*pass obstacle*."

The enemy were hard at work all day, throwing up traverses to the sand-bag battery. Groups of well-dressed officers were lounging in front of it, and guards were passing to and fro. Their soldiers are in full uniform, and all have the Mexican blanket to protect them from the inclemency of the weather. Our situation is truly extraordinary: right in the enemy's country (to all appearance), actually occupying their corn and cotton fields, the people of the soil leaving their homes, and we, with a small handful of men, marching with colors flying and drums beating, right under the very guns of one of their principal cities, displaying the star-spangled banner, as if in defiance, under their very nose; and they, with an army twice our size *at least*, sit quietly down and make no resistance, not the first effort to drive us off.

March 31st. It is reported that the families of gentility are leaving the city. The weather is extremely disagreeable, and the Mexicans say we bring it with us. Walked up to the upper ferry to examine the work the enemy are constructing. It is called Fort Paredes, and is erected to command the passage of the river. At the landing we saw crowds of both sexes; the men were actively at work on the fort, and many of the women were washing. Nearly all the latter have well-developed, magnificent figures: they dress with as little clothing as can well be fancied, and appear as happy and contented as the day is long. They talked to me across the river, and asked "how we all were." I told them "well," and "hoped we were all friends." They replied, "yes." I do not doubt it; and if these poor devils could decide the matter, it would all be settled. Two men swam the river and deserted.

April 1st. General Taylor having demanded the

release of the captured Dragoons, they were returned to-day, with nearly all their equipments. This was another evidence of no very *actively* hostile feeling, but, as General Mejia, in his note, termed it, "one of great magnanimity." The whole city turned out to see the Dragoons when they were carried over the river prisoners, and the captors were looked upon as noble fellows, who had performed a deed of signal bravery. They were imprisoned, but treated with kindness. When the order for their return was given, there was a great deal of difficulty in finding their effects: it appears they were divided among their captors, and were to be kept as trophies. No doubt they gave them up with regret, as any article captured from the "barbarians of the North" must be of inestimable value in their eyes.

April 2d. Order received settling the much-vexed question of brevet rank. General Worth, considering himself aggrieved by it, resigned. The enemy are still at work on a line of defenses; details from our men getting fascines and hurdles for our proposed work. Quite a military display among the enemy—seemed to have had a review. They have excellent music; there is one singularity, however, in it; at times, conspicuous above all sounds, you hear an everlasting bugle, deafening the ear with the same monotonous notes. Daily reports are received of their intention to give us battle: all agree that when General Ampudia (rendered notorious by boiling Santamanat's head in oil) arrives, then we shall "see sights," and nothing can hold him back from a fight. His proclamation, which has preceded him, styling us "barbarians of the North," &c., would cause the world to believe he intended to *eat us right up*, and make of us some delicate *man's*

head soup. Our men appear to be very anxious for his arrival; a fight appears to be all they want, and I verily believe it is their nightly prayer.

April 3d. Broke ground for a battery, to be erected in advance of the main field-work. Several of the men have deserted; grand military display among the enemy. One of their regiments showed themselves, and looked very well. They have been actively employed every day in throwing up defensive works. The extreme work below the town was finished to-day, and a priest was seen consecrating it by sprinkling holy water over it.

April 4th. This afternoon a rapid discharge of musketry was heard below the camp, on the river bank. The first impression was, the enemy had made an attack. The long roll was beaten and the regiments promptly formed: the 1st Brigade, which was near the river, with a yell rushed to their arms. It was soon discovered the firing proceeded from our picket guard, and that it was at a man who attempted to desert by swimming the river. He was shot and sank. The Mexicans scampered from the bank, and thought we had commenced upon them. The whole affair was one of some little excitement, and proved with what alacrity our men would fly to their arms.

April 5th. Last evening the camp was again disturbed by the report of fire-arms. Another attempt at desertion, and another death. Four eighteen pounders arrived to-day.

April 6th. More of our men deserted last night. This morning our guns were placed in battery.

April 7th. Little or nothing done; the number of the enemy increasing.

April 8th. Broke ground upon the field-work. All

the men off duty will be constantly employed until it is finished. Captain Mansfield has the direction of it. Some four or five of the deserters have been drowned in crossing the river. One man to-day succeeded in reaching the opposite shore, and as he crawled out the sentinel fired, and he fell dead. The Mexicans immediately covered him with a sheet and buried him. It was a capital shot for a musket, being about two hundred yards, and must give them no contemptible idea of our shooting. Three slaves of officers have run away. Of course every inducement is offered by the enemy. Major R.'s boy returned, and said he was treated with "the most distinguished consideration;" "had the first seat at the table, and the best bed in the house."

April 9th. We hear to-day Mr. Slidell has left Mexico. After repeated attempts to open negotiations, he at last gave up all hope, and sailed for the United States the latter part of March, 1846.

April 10th. Colonel Cross left camp this morning, and, not returning in the evening, great fears are entertained for his safety: parties have been sent in every direction in search of him; and thinking he might be lost, General Taylor directed some cannon to be fired, to guide him to camp. I fear he is either a prisoner, or has been murdered.

April 11th. "Ampudia is coming!" "Ampudia is coming!" has been the daily cry. This morning a salute of twenty guns was fired, the church bells rang, the bands played, the troops paraded; and, true enough, Ampudia came. Nothing from Colonel Cross. Colonel Hitchcock, much to the regret of the army, from his wretched health, was forced to leave for the States.

A translation of an article from the *Matamoras Gazette*.
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zette has afforded us no little amusement. It goes on to say, "There have been forty-three men desertions from the 'barbarians,' six slaves, and they expect momentarily *old Taylor, body and soul*." When they do get him they will have a bitter pill to swallow.

April 12th. A dismal day; raining and very cold. The field-work vigorously pushed toward completion. About 2 P.M. a parley was sounded from the opposite side, and two Mexican officers crossed, and were escorted by Captain Bliss to General Taylor's tent. They remained but a few minutes, and returned. As Captain Bliss rode by a knot of us, warming ourselves by a small fire, he said, "Well, you may get ready; it's coming." Of course, we knew something serious had transpired, and that the impression at headquarters was, the long-expected fight was to come off—the ball to be opened. The officers bore a communication to General Taylor from General Ampudia. The general was told that "he must leave his position in *twenty-four hours*, retire to the Nueces, and there await the settlement of this question by negotiation: in default of which, Mexico would look upon his position as a declaration of war." He added, "The war should be carried on agreeably to the usages of the most civilized nations by him, and he hoped it would be so by us." Every disposition was made immediately to resist the threatened attack. Some believed that all the grace we were to have was "the twenty-four hours," and that at its expiration we must look out for shot. The 1st Brigade was immediately moved to the right, out of range. The general sent word to Ampudia that he did not require twenty-four hours, but would reply at 10 o'clock A.M. to-morrow. It certainly looks as if hard knocks were approaching. We have every confi-

dence in the courage and patriotism of our general, and believe he will fight to the last.

April 13th. Early in the morning the 2d Brigade was moved to the left of the line, out of range of shot. General Twiggs, with the Dragoons and Ringgold's battery, occupied the center, and the 3d Brigade was moved into the interior of the field-work, together with Bragg's and Duncan's batteries. In this position the 3d Brigade were defiladed from the fires of the enemy, and the remainder formed a line so strong that the camp was considered impregnable. At 10 A.M. General Taylor's reply was sent over. It was mild, dignified, concise, and firm—perfectly characteristic of the man. He told General Ampudia, "He was sent here by order of his government, in a peaceable attitude, and *intended to remain*; and then warned him against the responsibility of firing the first gun." No guns were fired: the completion of the work was pressed forward.

Various rumors reached us this morning of the enemy having crossed in large numbers below. It is definitely understood that some have crossed. That is all we ask of them: cross and fight us, and we will exterminate them. The general is in capital spirits, and feels confident in the strength of his position. The 4th Infantry, 1st company of Dragoons, and Ringgold's battery, were ordered to march immediately to meet the train coming from Point Isabel. It is thought those of the enemy who have crossed intend attacking it. We have heard nothing more of Colonel Cross: those most sanguine of his safety have given him up. He has undoubtedly been murdered by some of the bands of assassins who are roaming about the country. His unaccountable disappearance, and probable horrible