

CHAPTER XVII.

SHORTLY after the declaration of war the president decided upon organizing a column to concentrate in Texas, and move thence directly upon the city of Chihuahua, the capital of the state of that name. Brigadier-general J. E. Wool was assigned to the command of this force. San Antonio de Bexar was the point selected for concentration. It was the last of August, 1846, before the various corps arrived. The general's column, which he denominated the "Central Division Army of Mexico," was composed of the following regiments: 1st Illinois, Colonel Hardin; 2d Illinois, Colonel Bissell; six companies of Arkansas mounted men, Colonel Yell; one company of Kentucky Volunteers, commanded by Captain Williams; two companies of the 1st Dragoons, Captain Steen; two companies of the 2d Dragoons, Major Beall; three companies of the 6th Infantry, Major Bonneville; and Captain Washington's company of Horse Artillery, making an aggregate of two thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine men.

From the moment of their arrival at San Antonio every exertion was made to push forward the military instructions of the volunteers, to prepare them to take the field. The army moved from San Antonio in two columns: the first under the command of Colonel Harney, 2d Dragoons, on the 26th of September; the second under Colonel Churchill, on the 14th of October. General Wool, with his staff, left on the 29th of September. On the 8th of October the advanced column reached the Rio Grande, and crossed at the Presidio. This is

a small, dilapidated town, of probably a thousand inhabitants, remarkable more for their *uncleanliness* and rascality than any other propensities. The two columns uniting, the advance left on the 15th, and was followed by the remainder on the 16th of October. Their march was one of extreme interest, although of great fatigue and annoyance. The country passed over was, at times, beautifully romantic; bold and magnificent ranges of mountains ever gladdened the eye; and the happy, smiling valleys, teeming with rich harvests, their fields irrigated by the dashing mountain streams, formed a picture that deprived fatigue of some of its pains.

The towns passed through are described as very interesting, all being built after the old Spanish fashion. The commands were treated kindly at every point, and were enabled to obtain every thing the country afforded at moderate prices. To their credit be it said, no act of violence or robbery was committed. The towns of San Fernando de Rosas and Santa Rosa are particularly spoken of. The latter lies at the foot of one of the most beautiful mountain ranges in the world. It is especially noted for the richness of its silver mines. In consequence of the unsettled state of the government, they have not been worked for many years. General Wool was received with marked civility by the alcalde of the place, and all seemed to look upon the arrival of his force with a favorable eye. The soil in the valleys is rich, and produces noble crops of corn, wheat, and barley.

The command arrived at Monclova on the 29th of October, and took possession of it without any resistance. It is situated in a valley celebrated for its great production of grain: oranges, figs, lemons, &c., are found

in great abundance. It is quite an old town, and in rather a dilapidated condition. A small hill, dividing it into two parts, commands a beautiful view of the city; the back ground of mountain ridges produces a striking effect. General Wool decided at this point not to prosecute his march upon Chihuahua.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DECEMBER 13th. General Twiggs, with his division, started at sunrise for Victoria. It was a prompt movement—the first day rather a late start is expected. I had the felicity of being on rear guard with my company. Of all duties to perform, it is the most disagreeable for the first day's march. All the drunkards must be taken care of, and I had my hands full. The infantry marched direct to the village of Guadalupe; the artillery and baggage train went through Monterey. The sunrise was magnificent, and every thing appeared combined to leave a pleasing impression of the old camp.

Before arriving at the village, we passed some farms under excellent cultivation, and crossed the Arroyo Topo. It is a clear, swift-running stream, pebbly bottom, whose bluff banks were lined with the willow, interspersed with the tall, graceful palm-leaf cane. The village is situated directly at the foot of the Saddle Mountain, and contains some five hundred inhabitants. It is well laid out, has a neat little Cathedral, lots of pretty women, and men enough loitering about, with their shovel-crowned hats and graceful ponchos, to whip a small army. While the train was arriving and

passing, I stopped at a house, where they kindly offered me a seat in the shade. I tried to make friends with the children, but, in spite of the pa's "bueno Americano," and the ma's "Americano amigo," and my offer of an insinuating "bit," they kept at a respectful distance. I presume the little things are taught to fear us. Our course from the village was slightly to the north of east, over a good road and limestone country. Our road runs near the base of the Sierra Madre. After a march of ten miles, we encamped on the Topo.

December 14th. Marched at daybreak. Every one was fresh for a good pull, and a pull, indeed, they made of it. The heat was intense, almost equal to mid-summer; the grass all dried up, not having had a drop of rain for three months, and the road either ankle-deep in dust, or filled with small sharp stones, which materially assisted not only in wearing out your shoes, but blistering your feet. Our route, until we reached Cadereta, was over a magnificent table of land, being the dividing ridge between the Topo and San Juan. Our course is still to the north of east, with an extensive range of mountains to the west, and in the eastern horizon the mountains of Ceralvo. The country has lost much of its beauty, the great drought having burned up every thing. Occasionally we would catch glimpses of the rich alluvial plantations upon the Topo, which materially deprived the picture of much monotony—monotony, save in those glorious mountains, which are ever charming, yet seem never to vary their proximity. This country is *the country of deceptive distances*. One can hardly credit it: mountains, miles distant, appear within a short ride; yet travel for days, and there they are, apparently at the same distance.

We have marched thirty-two miles from Monterey, and we are just realizing we are bidding farewell to our old friend the Saddle Mountain. This evening it appears to rise higher and higher, and come forward again to greet us. There are no less than three distinct ranges in the mountain chain along which our road runs, each rising in a succession of conical peaks, with singularly distinct wedge-like sides, until the last is often lost in the clouds. We stopped to "noon" six miles from Cadereta. Great bargains were driven for eggs and chickens. Just before reaching Cadereta, you suddenly descend from the dividing ridge, and the beautiful city lies at your feet, with her white houses imbedded in orange groves, situated in a richly-cultivated valley, on a slightly elevated bluff on the right bank of the Topo, surrounded by gardens, with the dashing stream stealing away in the midst of a wilderness of sugar-cane and corn. Our approach caused the good people to turn out. I was full of agreeable expectations, having formed no ordinary idea of the fairy city. Women in crowds were on the bank above the crossing-place, attracted, as they *are* and *should be*, by the button. A woe-begone looking set they must have taken us for, covered with dust, and no particular show of *any extra abundance of clothing*.

Crossing the river, we continued our route through the city. I presumed we were to encamp on the opposite side, but imagine my disappointment, and that of all, to find we were to proceed, and have no opportunity to examine the place. I was utterly disgusted, but delighted with the little I saw. The same Spanish style of building, large yards with high walls, orange and other evergreen groves in profusion. The houses were well built, some two stories high, and

painted with bright and cheerful colors; their quaint old wooden doors, with massive bolts and fantastic knockers, gave them quite an aristocratic appearance. As we passed along, the men in crowds gathered at the corners of the streets, and the bright eyes of pretty women were occasionally peeping at us through the grated windows. I saw more well-dressed men, who looked like gentlemen of easy circumstances, than I had met previously; the females looked tidy, and their complexions were lighter. Just as we entered the Plaza the Cathedral bell tolled for 12 o'clock. It had a rich, deep tone. The Cathedral was commenced on a magnificent scale, but for some reason remains unfinished, imparting to it the appearance of a ruin. In the center of the Plaza is a Corinthian column, about forty feet high, erected in honor of the declaration of their independence. The streets are well paved, and cleanliness itself; there is a happy air about the place.

Marching from Cadereta to our encampment on the right bank of the Topo Grande (one of the branches of the San Juan) was excessively fatiguing, and the dust actually choked us. For the last mile we had to march in a narrow lane, on each side a high brush fence, not a particle of air, and the dust so thick it could be cut. I could not help thinking the "white kid-glove gentry" were earning their per diem this day. The Valley of the Topo Grande is under rich cultivation with sugar and corn. Many of the men *gave out*, from the excessive heat and length of the march. Twenty-two miles to a recruit is no joke. Just as we reached camp we passed a squad of men resting. One of my company was whistling with the greatest glee the Cachucha. One of the squad, who was completely used up, exclaimed, "What would I

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not give to be able to whistle like that man?" Poor fellow! whistling carried to him the idea of freshness and freedom from fatigue. Give me your singing, whistling fellows; they are always contented. If you have to decide between two men, take the fellow who whistles and sings; you may be sure he is equally honest, and much more willing.

December 15th. Started at 8 A.M.; heat excessive. Our course has been southeast since leaving Cadereta, over a succession of rocky ridges and rich bottoms. Nearly all the low lands are under cultivation. No matter how rich the soil is, if it can not be irrigated it is of much less value. It rains so seldom there would be no certainty of making a crop upon the high tablelands. Our road was well watered.

An immense quantity of sugar-cane is grown in these valleys. Their mode of manufacturing it is primitive enough: when the time for grinding the cane arrives, the whole family leave their house, and go to the sugar-shed and take up their quarters. There, for a mill, you see a plain cylinder, with cogs; a regular old-fashioned cider-mill, with a long arm turned by a yoke of oxen. A man stands by and feeds the mill with strips of cane two feet long. The juice runs from a gutter into a trough. A furnace is obtained by digging a hole in the ground, into which is placed, leaving room for the fire below, an immense copper kettle for a boiler. When that and the trough are filled, the operation of grinding ceases until that amount of juice is boiled down. Under the shed is collected the whole family; the aged grandparents, their children, and their grandchildren, all either drinking the juice or chewing the cane. Chewing cane takes up half their time, and a very lucrative trade is driven by its sale. Nowhere can such

fat, dirty-faced children be found as at the mill; it is a pleasure to see them enjoy it. The juice, when sufficiently boiled, is run into molds in the shape of truncated cones. In this shape, wrapped around with strips of the cane from which the juice is expressed, it is exposed for sale, and called *pilonci*. The taste of their sugar is any thing but pleasant—too much of the cane. While at Monterey, they were very anxious for us to visit their mills, and treated us to as much juice as we wanted, and never let us depart without forcing upon us two or three cakes of *pilonci*. A drink made of the juice and the green orange is delightful.

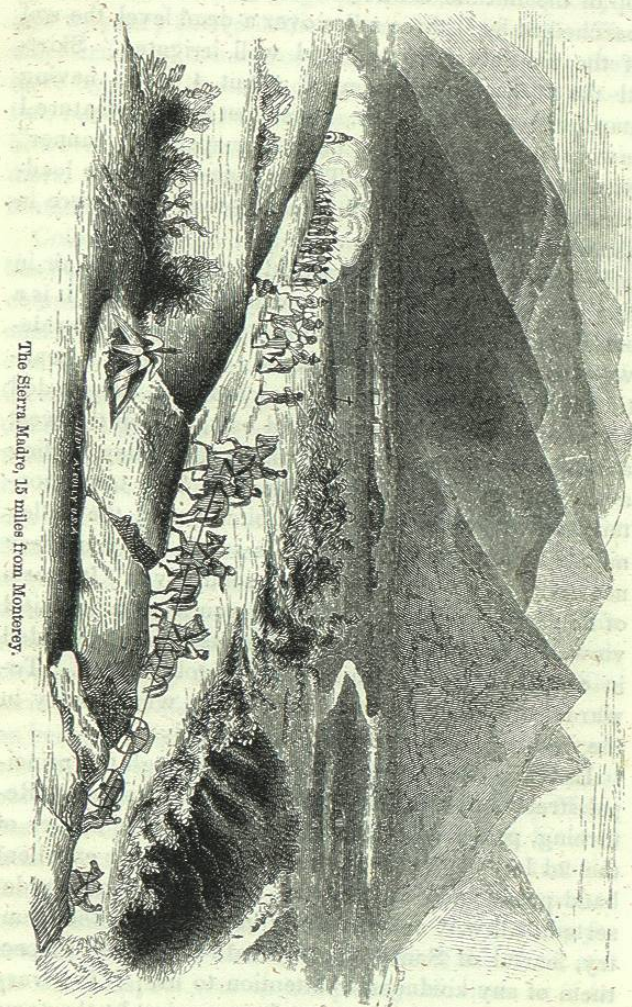
We encamped this evening on the right bank of the Ramos. It is a beautiful stream, and, where we crossed, appeared to issue directly from the mountains. Its banks were lined with cypress, willow, sycamore, and ebony. Our camp-fires were made of *ebony*. Think what extravagant dogs we were! Marched thirteen miles.

December 16th. Started at daybreak. The atmosphere was much cooler, and a brisk north wind braced us up. We passed over a lovely country; it was a succession of stony ridges, and basins of the richest kind of soil. We marched along rapidly, and before noon had passed over twelve miles, when we reached a hill which forbade any chance of our wagons ascending without the assistance of the men. I christened it "Disappointment Hill;" for we were very anxious to reach Montemorelos, and we saw our march delayed for some time within sight of the place. We ascended, stacked arms, and marched down again to assist the teams. The artillery got along admirably by hitching twelve horses to a piece; but when the mule-teams came, it was entirely another thing. The ascent must

have been at least forty-five degrees; certainly one of the steepest hills I ever saw wagons ascend.

General Twiggs assumed the management of the passage in person. Those who know the general can not but recollect his peculiarities, and his faculty of getting more work out of men in a given time than any other officer in the army. A quarter-master stood no chance; his stentorian lungs drowned every one's voice; and his tone of command did not admit of any question. "Bring on that team, there!" Along comes the team, with a company of men hold of its wheels, and every available point. Quarter-master—"Drive slowly, a little way at a time, and let your mules blow." Team commences the ascent; all steam is cracked on, and the quarter-master cries "Stop." "Stop! the devil!" cries the general; "who ever heard of such a thing! Crack ahead! speak to your mules, sir, and keep them going as long as they will!" And away goes the team, amid cracking of whips and cheering of men. The men would pile on about six feet deep behind, pushing each other along. "General, those men are certainly doing no good." "You are mistaken, sir; they are keeping the man next the wagon from holding on going up hill." The last to cross was the quarter-master's forge. "Well," exclaimed the general, "do you think you can get up, 'lasty asty,' without any men?" "Oh, yes, general." "Well, on with you!" By the time "lasty" had ascended twenty feet the mules commenced backing. "Great God! teamster, which way are you going? That's not the way up the hill." And, amid peals of laughter, a company went to the assistance of "lasty."

With any number of jokes, the general succeeded in crossing the train in an hour and a half. From the



The Sierra Madre, 15 miles from Monterey.

top of the hill the town was visible. Descending, we marched at least three miles over a dead level, the soil of the richest character, and well irrigated. Skirted the town, and encamped about 4 P.M., having marched seventeen miles. The most striking feature I saw in passing by was the "star-spangled banner" waving from the Plaza. The orange-trees were loaded with ripe oranges, and fig and peach trees were in abundance.

December 17th. A very cold night and keen air in the morning. After breakfast, walked to the city. It is a small place, of the usual Spanish appearance; the sidewalks and the streets well paved; situated in a beautiful and extensive plain of the richest soil, surrounded by hills on the north, south, and east, and on the west a lofty range of mountains incloses the valley, adding a striking feature to the landscape. The town contains about two thousand inhabitants, and the valley nine thousand. Its Cathedral is small, the altar very neat, and most of the ornaments solid silver. It boasts of four bells, and from the belfry you have a beautiful view. The town lies at your feet, its houses imbedded in orange-groves, laden with their golden fruit. Toward the east the small River Pilon winds away in the distance, running over a blue pebbly bed.

Leaving the Cathedral, I passed through the principal streets, in which are several excellent stores. Returning, passed the funeral procession of a soldier of the 2d Infantry; the solemn music of their excellent band produced a sad effect. The town is nearly deserted; all who can get away have gone to the country, fearful of Santa Anna's wrath should he suspect them of any kindness or attention to us. It is a very old town, and takes its name from a priest by the name

of Morelos, who held large possessions in the vicinity, and was very active in their struggle for liberty. The chief article of commerce in this valley is sugar; they have been in the habit of supplying the mines about two hundred miles from here with pilonci; this year, however, the demand has been so great from our soldiers, the trade has been diverted to Camargo and Matamoras. The miners will be rather the sufferers.

Colonel Riley, with five companies of his regiment, has been stationed here for several weeks. Four more companies of that regiment and the 2d Tennessee, Colonel Haskell, arrived from Camargo this morning. General Taylor and suite arrived to-day; as also General Quitman, with his brigade. Met with and was introduced to a gentleman by the name of Thompson. He is a doctor, and has been in this country for nineteen years; he looks *for all the world* like a Mexican, although he is a native of Connecticut. He told me he had been at San Luis Potosi since the collection of Santa Anna's army, and says he has thirty thousand men, fourteen thousand of whom are regulars, well armed, and the remainder a rabble, armed with knives and whatever they can lay their hands on. The road from Victoria to San Luis is impassable for wagons, mules often being precipitated with their loads from the narrow and dangerous path, and crushed to pieces. One of our officers, conversing with a regular-looking Mexican, and finding some difficulty in expressing himself, was informed he need not put himself to any trouble, for the man could speak English. He turns out to be a Pennsylvanian, and has been in this country for several years; his skin has partaken of the olive, and his whole aspect was as completely Mexican as if he were "to the manor born."

For the two last days of our march the men were forced to eat corn-bread. Corn-mills were in requisition, and grinding was going on all night. As a general rule, the men do not like corn-bread. "Fool who with your corn bread." "*Pain de maize*" has got to be as much of a by-word as "*Lancers*" after the battle. Some companies made it better than others; and some were quite on the *softky* order. One of the men attacked another, exclaiming, "Halloo, Jim, you've got your haversack full of *mush*; take care you don't fall, or *you'll stick*."

This evening we are all in a grand state of excitement. After dark an express arrived from General Worth reporting the advance of Santa Anna upon Saltillo, and of his having invited General Wool to join him with his command. Orders were immediately issued for the return of the regulars. We march tomorrow at daybreak, and expect some of the tallest marching. General Quitman, with his brigade and Thomas's battery, are to prosecute their march to Victoria. The majority think the report is a false alarm, but feel assured Worth can hold the enemy in check until we arrive. It is certainly a proper move for Santa Anna. His only chance is to attack us after we are well scattered over a large section of country, beyond supporting distance.

December 18th. Started at daybreak upon our return march. All were in good spirits, and willing to shove ahead to meet the "Napoleon of Mexico." The door-ways of all the ranches were filled with people looking at our return. They would have thought we were retreating if General Quitman had not continued the march. Since our arrival at Montemorelos we have observed signal-fires in the mountains. If Santa

Anna is really advancing, it corresponds with the reports of the citizens at Monterey. A month ago they commenced leaving the city, giving as a reason there would certainly be another battle, as Santa Anna had promised to eat his *Christmas dinner* at their city. The 2d Infantry joined us shortly after leaving the town. We marched at a cracking pace, making twenty miles by 4 P.M. General Taylor went on to Cadereta, and, with his usual energy and endurance of fatigue, will push forward with his escort of dragoons under Colonel May.

December 19th. Off at daybreak, and made twenty-one miles by 4 P.M. It is quite cold this evening. It was reported at Cadereta that Santa Anna left San Luis on the 6th instant; if so, he will reach Saltillo before us.

December 20th. Encamped at Guadalupe, four miles from Monterey, at 1 P.M. We there heard General Taylor had gone on, and left orders for us to proceed. General Butler repaired to Saltillo with a brigade of volunteers, 1st Kentucky and 1st Ohio regiments. No news from Saltillo. The impression at Monterey is that Worth was unnecessarily alarmed, and that there is no probability of a fight. Late in the evening an express arrived from General Taylor, who is on his way back, ordering us not to proceed, but to repair to our old camp at the Walnut Springs. All this excitement turns out to be a grand humbug.

December 21st. Reached our old camp at 10 A.M. Expected to remain some time. Before evening the order for our return was out. We shall make another attempt to reach Victoria on the 23d. It is to be hoped there will be no more false alarms, to make us march one hundred and twenty miles for nothing.

Colonel Harney is relieved from the command of his brigade. Brevet Colonel Riley is assigned to it. Colonel Harney repairs to Saltillo to take command of his regiment. General Butler remains at Saltillo in command.

December 22d. In the morning visited the city, to take one more look at it, as well as to supply some few vacancies in the mess-chest, occasioned by the return march. I was struck, upon entering, with the number of persons leaving the city. A perfect *stampede* is in operation; they are frightened out of their senses, and can not account for all these marches and counter-marches. A report has been circulated among them that we are forced to retreat from Saltillo; that Santa Anna, with a large army, is after us; and that another battle will soon be fought at Monterey. They openly declare they are not afraid of *us*, but of the brutality of their *own soldiers*. A handsome compliment to their army!

The city looks deserted. Every one is leaving, the rich and the poor. I saw several carriages containing delicate, genteel females and little children, hurrying off, with but few necessities, hastily thrown into the vehicle; they are probably destined to some ranch in the vicinity. The poor were packing out all they could upon donkeys, and many poor creatures have gone to seek shelter in the mountains, with a second meal for their sustenance. Their sufferings will be very great, and from my heart I pity them. It was impossible to convince them there was no danger. The bustle and confusion in the city, teams dashing about for supplies, officers hurrying about hither and yon, making purchases for the march, I have no doubt tended to keep up their alarm. The hospitals are filled

with the sick: there are between two and three hundred. Chills and fevers prevail to an alarming extent.

The 2d Regiment of Kentucky Volunteers made a very prompt movement from Camargo upon hearing of the expected advance of Santa Anna. They arrived this evening, and came with the most limited supply of transportation. They deserve great credit. Colonel Marshall's regiment of Kentucky horse is arriving. If all these movements have not the tendency to puzzle Santa Anna, I am very much mistaken. We have had a drizzling rain during the afternoon and evening. Nothing could be happier for us, provided there is not too much of it; it will lay the dust, and render our return march quite pleasant: it is the first rain we have had for more than three months.

December 23d. Reveille beat at 4 A.M., but before it was over an order came putting it off an hour and a half, on account of the rain. Before I heard of the order, my hasty toilet was performed, and of course I was not a little provoked. At daybreak had my tent struck and wagon packed, when an order came stating we would not march to-day! Had my wagon unpacked and tents pitched again. Then an order came stating we would leave after breakfast! Well, after breakfast we really got off. The day was *decidedly moist*; the roads muddy and heavy, but far preferable to the dust. We reached our first camp at the Topo at 1 P.M.

December 24th. Started at sunrise. The day bade fair to be cloudy, but before noon the sun was out in all its beauty. The sunrise was surpassingly brilliant. The whole heavens were covered with rain clouds, and the mountains were overhung by a thick mist. Suddenly, the Sierra, directly behind Monterey, the