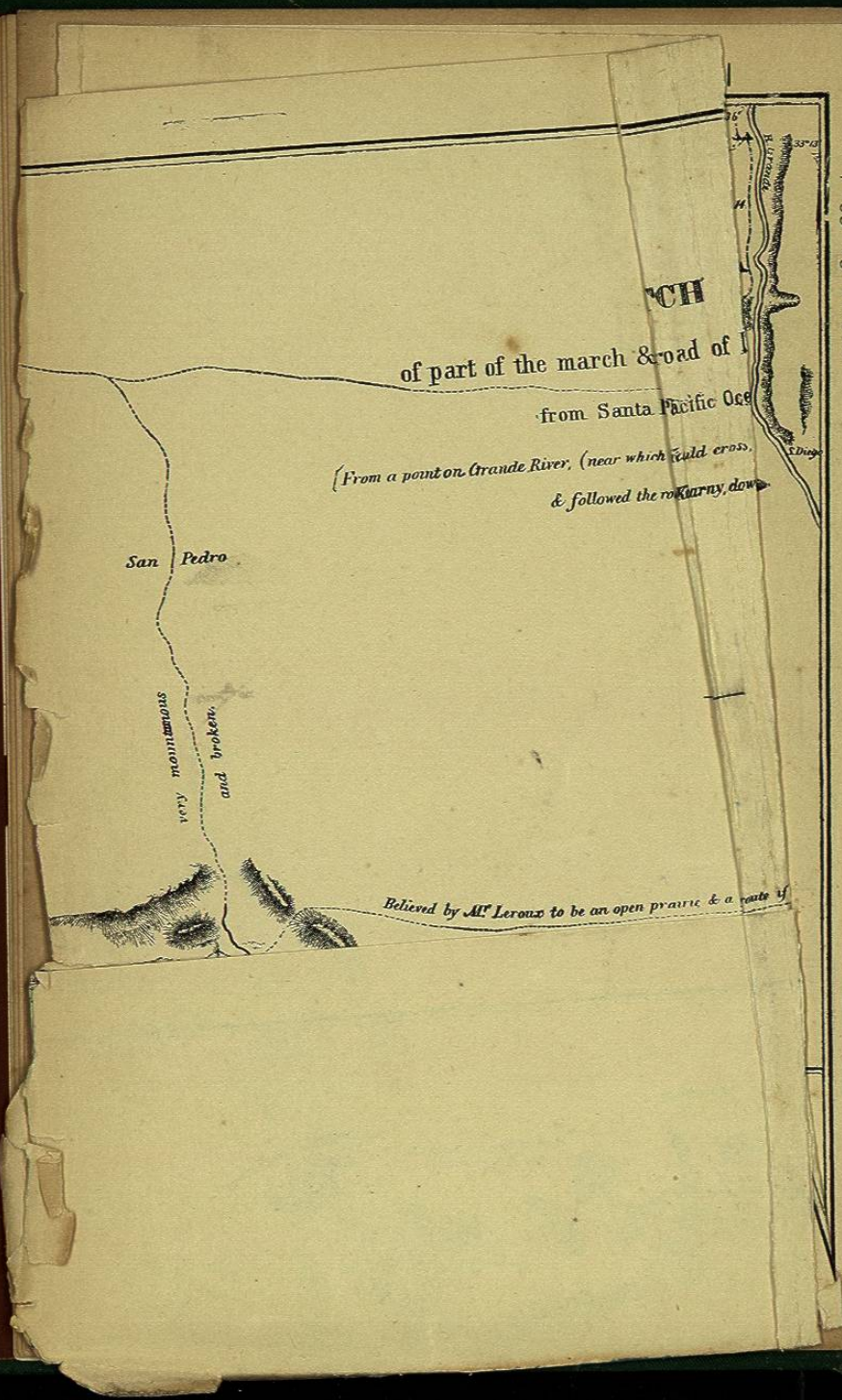

THE CONQUEST OF NEW MEXICO AND CALIFORNIA.

I.

NEW MEXICO.

NOTWITHSTANDING the country by the policy and measures of the executive branch of the government had for many months been surely drifting toward war with Mexico, the public was electrified by the news of a collision of arms and brilliant victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, May 8th and 9th, 1846. Thus was terminated,—"By the act of the Republic of Mexico," Congress declared on the 13th of May—our peace with all the world, which had continued so long that we had begun to look upon war as a chimera.

The first plans of the government were promptly developed: General Taylor crossed the Rio Grande and advanced with his army of "occupation" on

SKETCH

of part of the march & wagon road of Lt. Colonel COOKE,

from Santa Fe to the Pacific Ocean 1846-7

[From a point on Grande River, (near which the road should cross,) to the Pimo Villages, where he fell into, & followed the route of Gen. Kearny, down the Gila River.]

107° 36′ W. Long.

133° 13′ N. Lat.

Point 22 m. below Santa Fe

R. Grande

Drag.ns Trail

S. Diego

Foster's Hole

R. Gila

Apaches.

Copper mines

Road to Yanos

Hembra

proposed Road

Water Sinks

Ojo de Vaca

Sinks

Prairie
no mountains visible

Water by digging

no water

Water for 50 animals

Dry lake or Las Playas

Lost in Sand

Sierra de los Animos

no mountains visible in these directions

Yanos Road

R Huaqui

Yanos

Except in the spots & directions indicated, the traveller is continually surrounded by isolated Mountains & short ridges

San Pedro

very mountainous and broken.

Believed by Mr Leroux to be an open prairie & a good route if water is found sufficient.

Cañon San Pedro

Ball Ruin.

Cañon

Deserted Rancho.

herds of wild Cattle from
Pimo to the point where the
river is left.

San Pedro River

Coyotero Trail

no water

to be good road

Black water creek

Coyotero trails for plundered Cattle & mules

Santa Cruz mountain

Fronteras

San Bernadino

Distances from Indepence Mrs. to Pacific.		
To Santa Fe	775 miles.	775 ms.
Rio Grande left	258 "	1033 "
Tucson	363 "	1396 "
Pimo Villages	81 "	1477 "
Crossing of Colorado	205 "	1682 "
First Wells	13 "	1695 "
2nd Wells	23 "	1718 "
3rd Wells	25 "	1743 "
Cariza (Stream	28 "	1771 "
1st Settlements	47 "	1818 "
San Diego	52 "	1870 "

G. P. Putnam's Sons, New Y

the long line toward the city of Mexico; General Wool formed a column at San Antonio, Texas, for the invasion of Chihuahua; and Colonel Kearny, First Dragoons, organized a small force at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for the conquest of New Mexico, and ultimately of California. He marched June 30th.

Company F. Third Artillery sailed July 14th, from New York for California; and in September a regiment of New York Infantry Volunteers, Colonel Stevenson, also embarked for that destination; (They all arrived the following year).

Later a regiment of Missouri mounted volunteers, Colonel Price, was organized and marched early in the fall for Santa Fè.

Colonel Kearny had sent Captain James Allen, First Dragoons, to meet near Council Bluffs, Iowa, the migration westward of the Mormon community, which had shortly before been expelled from Nauvoo, Illinois; he was instructed to enroll a battalion of five hundred, to be organized under him as Lieutenant Colonel, at Fort Leavenworth; and to follow the army to Santa Fè. And, finally, Colonel Kearny had "demanded" two additional

troops of first dragoons, on the Upper Mississippi, which had been ordered to the seat of war at the South, should follow and report to him. And accordingly on reaching St. Louis together, they encountered an order to that effect.

Their captains were E. V. Sumner and the writer; and they were inexpressibly disappointed. New Mexico was then supposed to be the only objective of this column.

We embarked for Fort Leavenworth, and marched from there July 6th.

I find the following in my diary for July 21st. "The howls of wolves, in which I ever took a singular pleasure, swelling upon the night breeze, set my pen in motion. This has been a jolly day for Mark Tapleys—a very hot and still day with swarms of horse flies. I came ahead to hunt, (a solitary heron was all I saw larger than a fly,) and I was forced to stop, dismount and brush my horse vigorously for a half hour, until the column came up to make the fight more equal. Then a slight air from behind brought with us a cloud of dust. We turned off, near a mile, over rough ground it happened, to 'noon' at the bank of the Arkansas (it is a horrid

practice). After that a storm threatened, and the wind shifted right ahead, which for dust was nearly as bad; and finally it came with a great blast from the North, which fairly blew us, for a moment, out of the road!

"Now the thunders are rolling and promise a wet night, to which we are well nigh hardened. A week ago we had very severe hail, which stampeded the horses, and one was lost. Writing back, I may mention that one day we passed through vast multitudes of buffaloes; the next day there were many, and since very few. A horse and some mules, allowed to run loose on the march, effectually knocked up, we thought, took, very late in life, a fancy for freedom, and ran off with a herd of buffalo; they were with difficulty recovered after a chase of six miles!"

July 28th.—Rain or shine, we have averaged 28 miles! Another dull week, but why not mention that our prairie and muddy river monotony was relieved by not unpleasant reminiscences to me, as we passed at 100° W. Lon. near, but on the south side, that rare feature, a small grove to which the writer three years ago, had, of right, given a name—

Jackson's Grove, for there in emulation of that great soldier's *decision* he had crossed a force through the flooded Arkansas into doubtful territory of unsurveyed boundaries, to attack and disarm two hundred men, the "Army of Texas," who lay in wait to capture large Mexican caravans, as soon as they should pass the river above, from under his escort. Citizens of a territory on which he now marched with military impartiality, to make war in their turn!

And forty or fifty miles on, we passed by "Chouteau's Island" where, when quite a youth, he made first acquaintance with those savage Scythians, the Comanches, and had the fortune, detached with thirty veteran infantry, to face and break the charge of full five hundred, while a six-pounder sent round shot above his head.

July 31st.—Most pleasant it was to-day to come in sight of the white tents of the army, spread out in the green meadows of the river; a multitude of animals grazing; the life and stir of preparation; mounted orderlies in motion; old friends flocking out with smiles of welcome."

August 1st.—'The army of the West' consists of a regiment of cavalry, two batteries of horse

artillery, two companies of infantry—all raw volunteers,—and six troops of First Dragoons, U. S. A.; about seventeen hundred rank and file.

The march is ordered for to-morrow. Our camp is about nine miles below "Bent's Fort," a trading post which has become more familiar by name than any national forts; and is in reality the only *fort* at the West.

About noon I was sent for, and the general greatly surprised me by a proposition that I should set out in advance, with a flag of truce to Santa Fè, some three hundred miles.

In our conversation, he assured me that he attached much importance to it—that he had *waited* for me; and otherwise would have sent his chief of staff; that if there should be fighting, I would undoubtedly return and meet him before it began.

I go to-morrow, with twelve picked men of my troop. Mr. James Magoffin of Kentucky and Señor Gonzales of Chihuahua have permission to accompany me—both merchants of caravans, which rather singularly, are now journeying to New Mexico, and beyond.

August 2d.—I set out at the same hour the army marched, and fell in with the general at its head; and so rode with him to Bent's Fort. My mission was not soothing to the regret at being turned aside from the stirring war scenes at the south; it was in fact a pacific one. The general had just issued a proclamation of annexation of all the territory *east of the Rio Grande*; the government thus adopting the old claim of Texas; and thus, manifestly, in a statesman's view, a bloodless process would lead to its confirmation in the treaty of peace; and the population would be saved from the bitterness of passing *sub jugum*. The difficulty of a half measure remains; it cuts the isolated province in two! there must be an influential Micawber in the Cabinet.

At a plaintive compliment, that I went to plant the olive, which he would reap a laurel, the general endeavored to gloss the barren field of toil, to which his subordinates at least, were devoted; and rather unsuccessful, he then revealed his ulterior instructions for the conquest of California. He had been promised the grade of brigadier general, to date with the march for that territory. A regiment or two would follow us to New Mexico.

New deserts to conquer! That was giving to our monotonous toils a grandeur of scale that tinctured them with adventure and excitement.

At the Fort I stopped to procure a pack mule. I found it excessively crowded; a focus of business and curiosity: it is the land of Scythian Comanches, the audacious Cheyennes, here were many races and colors,—a confusion of tongues, of rank and condition, and of cross purposes. Meanwhile the long column of horse continually passed, fording the river; but officers were collecting stragglers, and straggling themselves.

My business completed, I found Don Santiago, as the Mexicans call Mr. Magoffin, had been promised a stirrup cup, if any private nook was found possible. A long hot desert ride was in prospect; and Mr. Bent had an ice house; our patience was strengthened. At last vigilant eyes recognized a signal from a flat house top. With unconscious mien, we wound our way through the thirsty and curious crowd, up a winding stair, and, dexterously we thought, into a sentry box of a room, and lo! a long necked straggler—*genus* Pike—slipped in with us! We gave him a chilling stare; he took it comfortably. A pitcher covered with a dew of promise, caught our eyes; it brimmed with broken ice, and there was a suggestive aroma which softened our hearts. We fraternized, and soon finished the glorious punch.

At last we were ready; but my new pack mule instantly dashed in full and clattering charge through scattering stragglers; away flew cups and pans,—and away started skittish nags with vociferous riders. Juan and Jose charged after, through the loud laughing crowd; I laughed, myself, despite my luckless mess kit. The foolish mule, so resentful of an unwonted crupper, soon succumbed to the more familiar virtues of Juan's lazo; order was restored, and we followed the long procession fording the Arkansas River.

All attempt to pass this wonderfully mobile army was found to be vain; and so, with my handful of troopers I was content to follow, for many hours; amused at times by the humors of my companions, Magoffin and Gonzales, who drove somewhat in advance. As we passed in the vicinity of several corrals and camps of the caravan merchants—who were required to await the motions of the army—I

could see Juan gallop off, bottle in hand; for his master, whose provision of wine defied all human exigencies, had failed in the rare article of brandy, which he also appreciated. "Won't they say," he cried out, "what a clever fellow that is in the black carretilla to send us down a bottle of brandy;" but Juan returned light handed from each visit.

Señor M. now and then gave his fine horses a short gallop; then Gonzales would with violent efforts, force his shabby mules to keep close up,—only to be checked, very suddenly, to a walk. No American would have risked such looking mules for a day's journey; but the Mexicans, not learned nor wise, are masters in the science of mules! Although in this case there was no secret, there *is* a mystery about it; Jose, while G. drove, rode by the side of the team, almost incessantly and laboriously whipping!

A hot dusty ride we had through the flat wilderness; the army made that day, a march of thirty-seven miles. That fact was enough to indicate that it had an extraordinary leader, and that it might successfully defy all rule and precedent.

At last, as the sun was setting, I saw the troops leaving the road to camp; and although there was

no indication of water beyond, I kept on; and after I had entirely passed, came in sight of some tents, and directed there my course; I found it the camp of the small battalion of infantry who had marched the previous day.

We were hospitably welcomed; but there was scant grass for the few animals, and the water of the little stream, the Timpe, was a weak but decided solution of Epsom salts. Variety in diet is pleasing; but extremes not always. Capt. Angney, the commander, had procured at the fort, some molasses,—for the consideration of a dollar the pint—and that, with strong thirst, helped down the tepid Timpe. After all its effects were moderate.

Next morning we were off betimes with the infantry; the scenery all day was wild, and strange to us; bare of trees or grass,—save on the ridges where cedars and pines were to be seen; our information indicated no water short of a very long march.

But by taking a horse trail, and passing along a ridge, near noon, a good spring was found, and there we passed several hours under the shade of piñon trees, indulging in lunch, with claret wine and piñon nuts for dessert.

In the afternoon, the road being very difficult, I got far ahead of the carriages; near sundown I overtook numerous infantry stragglers, suffering from extreme thirst. Just at dark, I saw the battalion camp fires, but beyond a rocky and deep ravine which we could not cross. We managed, however, to get water, and bivouacked above under the little cedar trees. I heard my sergeant discussing with his party, that extraordinary infantry, which, with our fine horses, we could not pass; but he said, "if regulars were to straggle so, they would be considered as *mutinizing*.

August 4th.—We pushed on, over more bad ground, twenty miles to the next water, a mere muddy pond, where we found antelope and elk. After a short nooning, we saw the battalion coming, and Don Santiago expressing great apprehension of being "run over by that long legged infantry," we hastened to depart. We stopped late, on the Las Animas, also called the Purgatory, at the foot of the Raton Mountain. It is a fine, bold stream, which mouths fifteen miles below Bent's Fort. It has a well known cañon; its high precipices protect groves and grass; and, besides the warm shelter for

animals, there is said to be good grazing the year round.

Next morning we followed the difficult road up the Raton; this mountain is seventy-five hundred feet high, and is well covered with lofty pines, oaks, etc.; it has been dreaded for the baggage train.

There is a shorter route to Santa Fè which passes no mountain, or very bad road; but this one by Bent's Fort was selected as better meeting the needs of the expedition. The other, the "Cimarone Route," is much more deficient in fuel, and has a dreaded *jornada;* while that by Bent's Fort has in the fort on the frontier a *quasi* base.

I followed a small stream nearly to the top of the mountain, the carriages far behind. There I stopped for nooning, on an inviting green slope, very near the streamlet, and in the shadow of some grand old pines.

Fatigued as I was, there was much that was delightful in this solitary repose, besides the fresh mountain air. Lowlanders never see such pure blue skies; and now snow-white clouds drifting over, intensified the blue above, and by their shadowings, added life and beauty to the landscape

pictures below; and there was a gentle breeze, just enough to give that spirit-like music of the pine leaves, and in harmony with the purl of the mountain brook.

Here were varying and very perfect sensuous enjoyments, which were elevating too; their effects on me were so joyous and abstracting, that two fawns came down the opposite slope and drank ten paces off, without arousing the destructive hunter's instinct, or at all reminding me of the rifle at my side.

At last, with sounds of wheels and whips, came the carriages; Magoffin humorous with affected anger at the hard chase I had led him.

He was in the vein to-day; reclining on the grass, after lunch, he made a long speech to Gonzales, in the most sonorous Spanish, about liberty and equality, and the thousand advantages of being conquered by our arms. Then, chuckling, he swore the old rascal would get himself in the calaboose as soon as he got to Chihuahua. He then held up, and addressed a pocket cork-screw, which, he said he had carried eight years. "You have cost me a thousand—five thousand dollars; but

what do I care for except a bottle of wine every day; I work this way on purpose to keep you; what is money good for? I would not say to a bottle of champagne, 'I won't, I cannot use you,' for a million of dollars. I travel this way every year over deserts just to be able to have my wine and educate my children. I will educate them as long as they can stand it; give them all sorts of teachers, to teach them all they can pound into them; and when they say 'we have beaten into their heads all that we *possibly* can,' then I will be satisfied; that is all I want to do for them." But no idea can be given of the embellishment which his droll manner adds to his eccentric humor.

The view from the top of the mountain is very extensive—very fine; it embraces not only the Spanish Peaks, but Pike's Peak, above one hundred miles to their north.

The descent was long and rough; and my foolish mule made another scamper, scattering my humble but very important mess kit. The carretillas did not come up, and I slept without shelter on the flat and barren bank of an upper stream of "Red River"—the Canadian of the maps. Next

day it was the same, and I bivouacked at a water pool. The third day they overtook me, at noon, at the Riado. Don Santiago's claret was very welcome again; he had broken his carriage pole, descending the mountain, but declared it was now much stronger than before.

In the afternoon we separated again, passing strange wild scenery. We suffered want of water—passing at sunset a wide shallow pond saturated with some vile salts. The road ascended then, to what seemed a great inclined shelf of the mountain.

We rode very late, hoping for water. The light of even a full moon gave an imperfect idea of the strange scenery, but seemed to excite vague imaginings. On the soft road we did not disturb the profound and lifeless silence. Imagine then our wonder, to hear unwarned, several rapid explosions, identical in sound to near cannon shots. Only then we saw coming over the near horizon of a mountain ridge, the rapid invasion of our serene sky by a thunder cloud in black points which were not unlike the column heads of an attacking army. And then we were in a shower, with moonlight all around;

and very soon passed on this phantom cloud, leaving all serene as if it had not been.

But it is very vain to attempt to describe it all—to excite sympathetic appreciation; it is the mere chance of a wanderer's lifetime to witness such a spectacle, with all its attendant and weird surroundings.

I observed for some time a singular dark streak to our left; and at last, partly in curiosity, discovered it to be a chasm, a precipitous ravine, with a little stream of water; and so there we spent the rest of the night.

Next day, August 8th, we passed along the very singular valley, where Fort Union was afterward built, and a ride of twenty-eight miles brought us to the Mora, a bright stream which here breaks out of the high table land, a kind of base to the high Rocky Mountain ridge which had long been on our right. Here we first saw houses, two or three, and cattle and sheep. This settlement was not an outgrowth of the Territory, but an approach of civilization; the proprietors being an Englishman and an American; a very doubtful civilization, too, adulterated by wilderness habits and Indian intercourse.

Next day sixteen miles over a prairie table-land brought us to its steep road-limit, from whence we overlooked a valley with a stream; we saw corn-fields and herds; but where was Los Vegas, which should be there? I saw, I thought, a great clay bank, a singular one indeed, but I thought it must be an extensive brick-yard and kilns. In fact it was Vegas; the dwellings being in low square blocks, sides and tops of sun-dried yellow bricks or adobes; the streets, and a large square, being of the same color.

Then we saw the people running and riding about in excitement and apparent confusion; mounting in hot haste, driving in herds of ponies, cattle, goats. I hardly believed the appearance, on the bluff, of my party of horse to be the occasion of it all; and as I drew nearer I doubted more and more, for a large party came galloping in my direction.

This hostile demonstration was too doubtful, in my view, for momentary solution; if it occurred to me to display a flag of truce, I was unprepared to do so, and could only continue my advance in the best order to meet the worst. All doubt was soon solved by these eccentric cavaliers, formidable at

least in appearance, passing at the gallop to our left. I marched on with increasing astonishment, tinged with a shade of mortification. I soon learned that this very characteristic introduction to New Mexican life, was caused by the wild Indians having killed a shepherd or two, at a distance of two leagues, and driven off their flock. And such was the measure of New Mexican efficiency—to gallop off in confusion, and without provision, to a pursuit, in which, if the robbers were overtaken, it would be at the moment when their own horses were quite blown, or exhausted.

I rode with Mr. M. to the home of the alcalde, who was his old acquaintance: quite a number of his neighbors visited us and expressed pleasure at their prospects, and some whiskey was handed round in an earthen cup.

There is some mixture of stone in the structure of the houses; that material being here very convenient and suitable; but the village, with its small fields, scarcely fenced, differed little from those of our Pawnees in appearance; these dwellings are smaller and square instead of round; fine mountain streams are near, and are conducted—as