

The rough and travel-worn appearance of our men was in strong contrast with the fresh looks of the uniformed officers and men in their clean sailor dress. But our men were in fine condition and looked serviceable as well as service-worn. The town now presented a different face from that which it wore when I visited it in January under a Mexican passport to ask permission to recruit my party on the San Joaquin. Three nations now were represented in those quiet streets, and our men made a strong impression as they rode through the crowd on the way to their encampment.

Lieutenant Minor, of the frigate *Savannah*, was on shore when we entered Monterey. In giving his testimony before the Committee of Military Affairs of the Senate when the California war claims were being examined, he took occasion to say "that the appearance of this body of men and the well-known character of its commander not only made a strong impression upon the British admiral and officers, but an equally impressive and more happy one upon those of the American Navy then in Monterey." For himself, he said, "that, after he had seen Captain Frémont's command, all his doubts regarding the conquest of California were removed."

The following extract is from "FOUR YEARS IN THE PACIFIC in Her Majesty's ship *Collingwood*, from 1844 to 1848, by Lieutenant the Hon. Fred. Walpole, R.N."

"During our stay in Monterey," says Lieutenant Walpole, "Captain Frémont and his party arrived. They naturally excited curiosity. Here were true trappers, the class that produced the heroes of Fenimore Cooper's best works. The men had passed years in the wilds, living upon their own resources; they were a curious set. A vast cloud of dust appeared first, and thence in long file emerged this wildest wild party. Frémont rode ahead, a spare, active-looking man." . . . "He was dressed in a blouse and leggings, and wore a felt hat. After him came five Delaware Indians, who were his body-guard, and have been with him through all his wanderings; they had charge of two baggage-horses. The rest, many of them blacker than the Indians, rode two and two, the rifle held by one hand across the pommel of the saddle. His original men are principally backwoodsmen, from the State of Tennessee and the banks of the upper waters of the Missouri. He has one or two with him who enjoy a high reputation in the prairies. Kit Carson is as well known there as the duke is in Europe. The dress of these men was principally a long loose coat of deer-skin, tied with thongs in front; trowsers of the same, of their own manufacture. They are allowed no liquor, tea and sugar only; this, no doubt, has much to do with their good conduct; and the discipline, too, is very strict. They were marched up to an open space on the hills near the town, under some long firs, and there took up their quarters, in messes of six or seven, in the open air. The Indians lay beside their leader. In justice to

the Americans I must say, they seemed to treat the natives well, and their authority extended every protection to them. The butts of the trappers' rifles resemble a Turkish musket, therefore fit light to the shoulder; they are very long and very heavy, carry ball about thirty-eight to the pound."

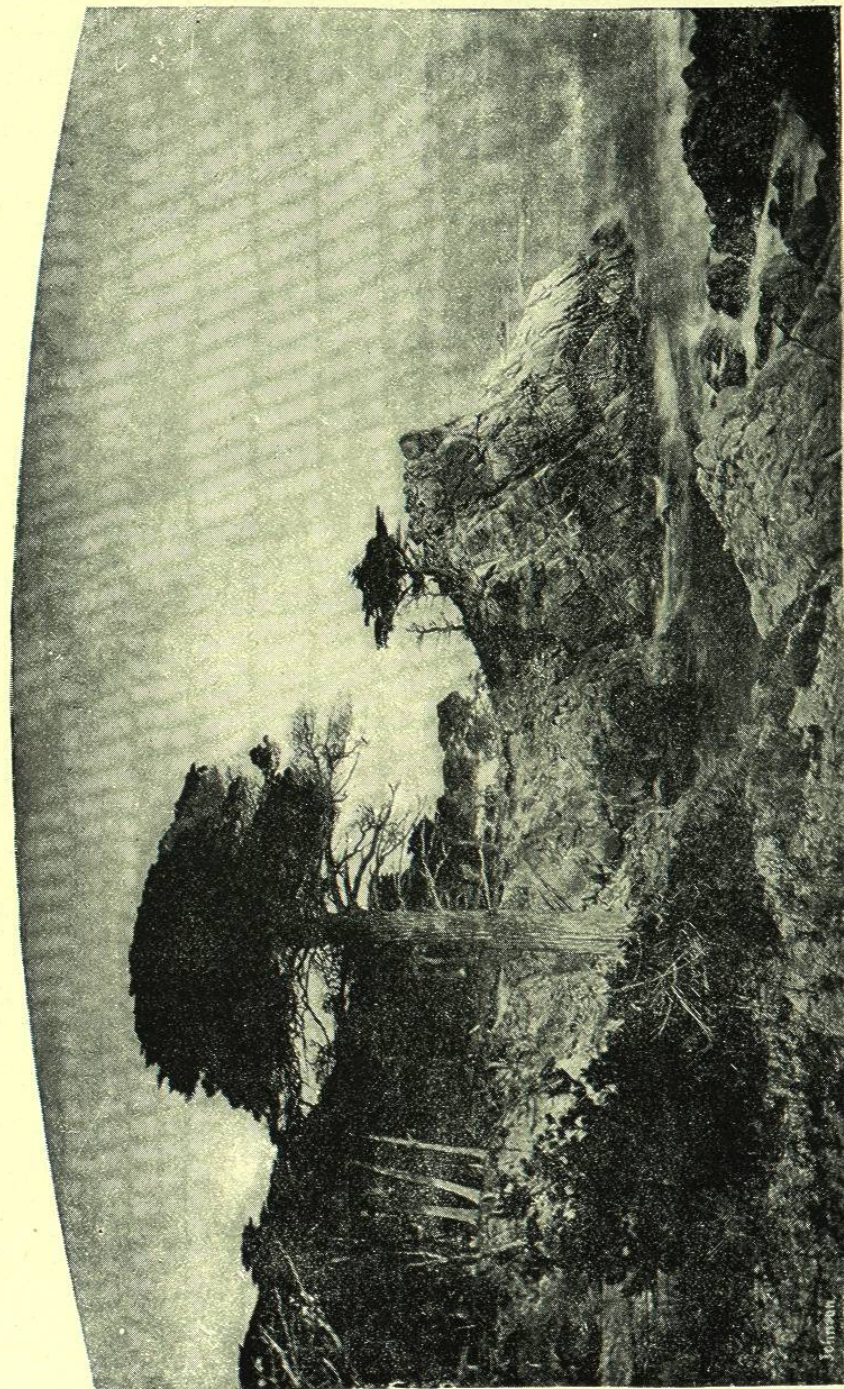
I went into camp beyond the town, near the sea, on a flat among firs and pines towards the top of the ridge fronting the bay. This was a delightful spot. Before us, to the right, was the town of Monterey with its red-tiled roofs and large gardens enclosed by high adobe walls, capped with red tiles; to the left the view was over the ships in the bay and on over the ocean, where the July sun made the sea-breeze and the shade of the pine trees grateful.

The camp was frequently visited by the officers and men of both the *Collingwood* and the American squadron, to whom our men and their rough camp life were objects of curiosity. All, especially the English officers, were interested in the shooting of the Delawares and the men of the exploring party. Consequently there was much shooting at marks put up against pine trees.

Immediately after my arrival I went on board the frigate *Savannah* and waited upon Commodore Sloat. I was accompanied by Lieutenant Gillespie. Commodore Sloat was glad to see me. He seemed excited over the gravity of the situation in which he was the chief figure; and now, wholly responsible for its consequences. After a few words to introduce the subject he informed me that he had applied to Lieutenant Gillespie, whom he knew to be an agent of the Government, for his authority. But he had declined to give it. He then asked to know under what instructions I had acted in taking up arms against the Mexican authorities. "I do not know by what authority you are acting. I can do nothing. Mr. Gillespie has told me nothing; he came to Mazatlan, and I sent him to Monterey, but I know nothing. I want to know by what authority you are acting."

I informed him that I had acted solely on my own responsibility, and without any expressed authority from the Government to justify hostilities. He appeared much disturbed by this information, and gave me distinctly to understand, that in raising the flag at Monterey he had acted upon the faith of our operations in the north.

Commodore Sloat was so discouraged that the interview terminated abruptly and was without sequence. He did not ask me for another interview. He had expected to find that I had been acting under such *written* authority as would support his action in raising the flag. Disappointed in this expectation his mind closed against anything short of the written paper; the full information that I might have given should, in my judgment, have been sufficient to satisfy him that the taking possession of California, as had been done, would exactly meet the wishes of the Government. I should have been glad to do so. But for this he made no occasion, and, as a much younger officer, it did not become me to urge upon one of his rank and



POINT OF PINES

present command, to change his course of action; especially as I felt there was an atmosphere of resistance that I could not penetrate.

Naturally I was surprised by the result of the interview. Aware of what would be the general nature of the instructions to our officers on the Pacific coast, I could not have supposed that the officer commanding the squadron was relying upon me to justify his actions. And the situation now had something in it so grand that hesitation was incomprehensible.

I had returned into the California valley two months before with my mind full of one purpose. I was so inspired with watchful excitement that the nights were almost as wakeful as the day. I saw the lovely country which had charmed my senses with admiration for its beauty dangerously near to becoming the appanage of a foreign power. I knew that the men who understood the future of our country, and who at this time ruled its destinies and were the government, regarded the California coast as the boundary fixed by nature to round off our national domain. From Mexico it was naturally separated, and events were pointing to its sure and near political separation from that power.

I had left Washington with full knowledge of their wishes, and also of their purposes so far as these could be settled in the existing circumstances; and I was relied upon to do what should be in my power in the event of opportunity to further their designs. And now that the opportunity came I had entered among the surrounding circumstances with great joy and a resolution to give to my own country the benefit of every chance as these circumstances changed. And, as I have just said, with great joy, for to what their sagacity of statesmen had brought them, I brought the enthusiasm which the wonderful value and beauty of California had created in me.

Now two months had wrought the change, and my work, too, was done. With the sight of our flag floating over the town when I entered it all my excitement subsided, and care and responsibility fell together from me.

Returning to the shore from my visit to the *Savannah*, I walked out towards the Point of Pines, which juts into the sea. No matter how untoward this interview had been I felt that the die was cast, and as trifles float into a mind at ease I pleased myself with thinking it a good augury that as Savannah was my birthplace, the birth of this new child of our country should have been presided over by this *Savannah* of the seas.

Sitting here by the sea and resting and gathering about me these dreams which had become realities, I thought over the long way from Washington to this spot and what little repose of body or mind I had found, less of the last. But now I was having an ideal rest.

Looking out over the bay, the dark hulls of the war-vessels and the slumbering cannon still looked ominous and threatening. But the Cross of St. George hung idly down from the peak of the great ship, the breeze

occasionally spreading out against the sky the small red patch which represented centuries of glory. There lay the pieces on the great chess-board before me with which the game for an empire had been played. At its close we had, to be sure, four pieces to one, but that one was a Queen. I was but a pawn, and like a pawn I had been pushed forward to the front at the opening of the game.

The actual situation is best explained by a knowledge of Commodore Sloat's condition of mind when he left Mazatlan on the 8th of June for Monterey. On the 6th he had written to the Secretary of the Navy that he had resolved that he would not take possession of any part of California or undertake any hostile measure against Mexico until either Mexico or the United States had declared war; notwithstanding the fact that our consul, Mr. Parrott, by an express, had informed him that the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma had been fought. This resolution he had communicated to the Secretary of the Navy by his letter of June 6th, in which he expresses his deep regret that the orders given him should have been of such a nature as to compel him to this humiliating decision while it appeared to the world that we were actually at war on the other coast.

The reply of the Secretary taking a widely different view of the situation did not reach him until he had returned to the East.

It was in this frame of mind that Commodore Sloat reached Monterey on the 2d of July.

To make the situation distinct I give here the two letters:

No. 51.

FLAG-SHIP SAVANNAH, June 6, 1846.

SIR: Since my No. 50, of the 31st May, I have, upon more mature reflection, come to the conclusion that your instructions of the 24th June last, and every subsequent order, will not justify my taking possession of any part of California, or any hostile measure against Mexico (notwithstanding their attack upon our troops), as neither *party have declared war*. I shall, therefore, in conformity with those instructions, be careful to avoid any act of aggression until I [am] certain one or the other party have done so, or until I find that our squadron in the Gulf have commenced *offensive* operations, presuming that, as they are in daily communication with the Department, their proceedings are authorized.

The want of communication with, and information from, the Department and our consul, render my situation anything but pleasant; indeed it is humiliating and mortifying in the extreme, as by my orders I cannot act, while it appears to the world that we are actually at war on the other coast.

Three of the sloops are on the coast of California, where I shall proceed, leaving the *Warren* here to bring intelligence. The *Shark* is at Columbia River.

Most respectfully, I am your obedient servant,

J. D. SLOAT, Commodore.

To the Honorable Secretary of the Navy, Washington.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, January 11, 1848.

The foregoing is a translation of a letter received at this Department in cipher.

J. Y. MASON.

(Duplicate.)

U. S. NAVY DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, August 13, 1846.

COMMODORE: The Department has received your letter No. 51, of June 6th, from which it appears that while you were aware of the existence of "actual war" between the United States and Mexico, you remained in a state of inactivity and did not carry out the instructions of June 24, 1845, framed to be executed even in the event of the mere declaration of war, much more in the event of actual hostilities. Those instructions you were ordered to carry out "at once."

In my letter of August 5, 1845, the receipt of which you acknowledged on the 28th January, 1846, referring to them, I said, "In the event of war, you will obey the instructions recently addressed to you via Panama."

In my letter of October 17, 1845, of which you acknowledge the receipt on the 17th of March, 1846, referring to these instructions once more, I said further, "In the event of actual hostilities between the Mexican Government and our own, you will so dispose of your whole force as to carry out most effectually the objects specified in the instructions forwarded to you from the Department in view of such a contingency." And surely there is no ambiguity in this language.

And in my letter of 23d February last, sent through Mexico, I remarked, "This letter is sent to you overland, enclosed as you suggest, to Messrs. Mott, Talbot & Co., Mazatlan, and you will readily understand the reserve with which it is written."

The Department on August 5, 1845, had also told you that "your force should not be weakened, while hostilities are threatened by Mexico." Your course was particularly approved in detaining the frigate *Constitution*. The Department will hope that a more urgent necessity than as yet appears existed for the otherwise premature return of that vessel.

The Department ~~does not charge you with disobedience of orders.~~ It* willingly believes in the purity of your intentions. But your anxiety not to do wrong has led you into a most unfortunate and unwarranted inactivity.

Very respectfully yours,

(Signed)

GEORGE BANCROFT.

Commodore John D. Sloat, Commanding U. S. Naval Forces
in the Pacific Ocean.

When Commodore Sloat on the 2d of July entered the port of Monterey he sent an officer on shore with a tender of the usual civilities, by an offer to salute the Mexican flag; but the offer was declined on the pretext that there was no powder with which to return it.

"It was a matter of great surprise on the part of many officers of the squadron that the Commodore should have tendered these civilities, knowing as we all did that the Mexican Government had already commenced offensive operations against our army on the Rio Grande, and that the squadron of the United States was blockading the coast of Mexico on the Gulf."†

Rumors of hostilities which had reached us many days previously through Indian sources were confirmed on the arrival of Commodore Sloat. In sparsely settled and grazing countries, especially where there are Indians, news travels with great rapidity from village to village and from rancho to rancho. In the country between Monterey and the Rio Grande horses are abundant and the Indians and ranchmen spend a good part of their lives in the saddle. The friendly custom was to change horses at every rancho, so

* This is the original letter received by Commodore Sloat.

† Sworn testimony of Midshipman Wilson.

that news really went by courier and posting; and now with extraordinary swiftness in this situation, when events on the Rio Grande were anxiously watched by all the Mexican people.

That battles had taken place all knew. But as will be seen by this interview Commodore Sloat did not intend to move farther and had gone back to the position taken in his letter to the Secretary of the 6th of June.

In his letter of the 6th to Commander Montgomery he directs that officer to hoist the flag if he has sufficient force, "or if Frémont will join you," and expresses his great anxiety that I should join him.

In the following letter to me of July the 9th, informing me of his operations and of his force in the harbor of Monterey, he tells me that he is extremely anxious to see me at my earliest convenience and that it is of the utmost importance that I be present in the event that General Castro should consent to a capitulation. And in the event of my being delayed for a day or two, he requests me to send in a mounted force of 100 men and to bring in any Mexican government horses that I may find on the road.

FLAG-SHIP SAVANNAH, BAY OF MONTEREY, July 12, 1846.

SIR: I have one hundred marines and two hundred men on shore, well armed, and also two 18-pounder carronades, mounted for field-pieces, and can land the remainder of my force in a few minutes, if necessary. By the best information I can obtain, Frémont was at the Pueblo (of St. Joseph) the day before yesterday, and probably at St. Johns yesterday. I sent a letter to him two days since, by express, and yesterday a message by an American who was on his way to Yerba Buena, who promised to see him; he has also a message for you; therefore I am in momentary expectation of hearing from him. Castro buried two field-pieces, with their shot, at St. Johns, and is flying before Frémont.

I have information from the Pueblo (of St. Joseph) that yesterday forty foreigners in that town wanted to hoist our flag, but had no bunting. I shall send them some the first opportunity, and shall direct them to organize themselves into a company of cavalry, choose their own officers, for the protection of their own property against marauders and the Indians, and then report to me. When organized and reported they will be mustered into service and receive instructions from me.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN D. SLOAT,

Commander-in-Chief, etc.

*Commandant J. B. Montgomery, U. S. Ship Portsmouth,
Bay of San Francisco.*

Before Commodore Sloat knew that I was not acting under written orders he was, as will be seen by his letters, "extremely anxious" that I should co-operate with him. Now his activity seemed paralyzed, and what he said at our interview seemed true, "that he could do nothing." And he did nothing.

The story of the night preceding the raising of the flag is best told in the words of Ex-Governor Rodman Price of New Jersey, who was at that time an officer in the squadron under Commodore Sloat, and who had a deciding



GOV. RODMAN M. PRICE, OF NEW JERSEY.