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## NARRATIVE

OF THE

## FIRST TEXAN SANTA FÉ EXPEDITION.

## CHAPTER I.

Objects of the first Texan Santa Fé Expedition.—Determination to accompany it.—The Western Limits of Texas.—Her Claim to the Rio Grande.—Colonel Butler's contemplated Expedition to Santa Fé.—Causes of its Failure.—Preparations for joining the Texans.—Departure from New-Orleans.—Steam-ship New-York.—Captain Wright's Specific against Thirst.—Arrival at Galveston.—Frank Combs.—City of Houston.—Stories of old Hunters and Campaigners.—Houston Horse Jockeys.—Choice of an Animal.—Leave Houston for Austin.—Ladies on Horseback.—Race with a Thunder-shower.—Incidents upon the Road.—Arrival at Austin.—Mr. Falconer.—English Travellers.—Party to San Antonio made up.—Jim the Butcher sent to the Stable.—Mexican Mountain Pony.—His Mustaches, and Powers of Endurance.

"WHAT were the objects of the Santa Fé Expedition?" and "What induced *you* to accompany it?" are questions which have been so often asked me, that I cannot carry my reader a single mile upon the long journey before us until they are answered. Without preamble or preface, then, I will to the task.

In the early part of April, 1841, I determined upon making a tour of some kind upon the great Western Prairies, induced by the hope of correcting a derangement of health, and by a strong desire to visit regions inhabited only by the roaming Indian, to find new subjects upon which to write, as well as to participate in

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the wild excitement of buffalo-hunting, and other sports of the border and prairie life.

The determination to take an excursion of this kind once made, my next object was to fix upon the route. The prairies west of St. Louis, the hunting-grounds of the Pawnees and other savage tribes, had been explored by Charles Augustus Murray, and described by his graphic pen; here was no new opening. Again, M. C. Field, one of my assistants in the "Picayune," had made the journey to Santa Fé by way of Independence, Missouri, and a series of articles written by him, upon the subject of his adventures, had found favour in the eyes of the public, being much copied into other journals. Here was another beaten and well-known road; yet I determined to traverse it if no other offered.

About the first of May of the same year, a number of young gentlemen of my acquaintance set on foot the project of an excursion to the prairies and buffalo-grounds, taking either Fort Towson or Fort Gibson in the route, and roaming through the Osage country and over a part of that section visited by Washington Irving in his foray upon the prairies. While canvassing the chances and merits of a trip of this kind, I met with Major George T. Howard, then in New-Orleans purchasing goods for the Texan Santa Fé Expedition.

Of the character of this enterprise I at once made inquiry. Major Howard informed me that it was commercial in its intentions, the policy of the then President of Texas, General Mirabeau B. Lamar, being to open a direct trade with Santa Fé by a route known to be much nearer than the great Missouri trail. To divert this trade was certainly the primary and ostensible object; but that General Lamar had an ulterior intention—that of bringing so much of the province of New

Mexico as lies upon the eastern or Texan side of the Rio Grande under the protection of his government—I did not know until I was upon the march to Santa Fé. He was led to conceive this project by a well-founded belief that nine tenths of the inhabitants were discontented under the Mexican yoke, and anxious to come under the protection of that flag to which they really owed fealty. I say a well-founded belief; the causes which influenced him were assurances from New Mexico—positive assurances—that the people would hail the coming of an expedition with gladness, and at once declare allegiance to the Texan government.

With the proofs General Lamar had, that such a feeling existed in New Mexico, he could not act otherwise than he did—could not do other than give the people of Eastern New Mexico an opportunity to throw off the galling yoke under which they had long groaned. Texas claimed, as her western boundary, the Rio Grande; the inhabitants within that boundary claimed protection of Texas. Was it anything but a duty, then, for the chief magistrate of the latter to afford all its citizens such assistance as was in his power?

Texas claims, as I have just stated, the Rio Grande as her western boundary; yet, so isolated were Santa Fé, and such of the settled portions of New Mexico as were situated on the eastern side of that stream, that the new Republic had never been able to exercise jurisdiction over a people really within her limits.\* The time had now arrived, so thought the rulers of Texas, when rule should be exercised over the length and breadth of her domain—when the citizens of her farthest borders should be brought into the common fold—

\* Santa Fé is situated some fourteen miles east of the Rio Grande, on a small branch of that stream.



and with the full belief in their readiness and willingness for the movement, the Texan Santa Fé Expedition was originated. On its arrival at the destined point, should the inhabitants really manifest a disposition to declare their full allegiance to Texas, the flag of the single-star Republic would have been raised on the Government House at Santa Fé; but if not, the Texan commissioners were merely to make such arrangements with the authorities as would best tend to the opening of a trade, and then retire. The idea, which has obtained credence to some extent in the United States, that the first Texan Santa Fé pioneers were but a company of marauders, sent to burn, slay and destroy in a foreign and hostile country, is so absurd as not to require contradiction; the attempt to conquer a province, numbering some one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants within its borders, was a shade too Quixotical to find favour in the eyes of the three hundred and twenty odd pioneers who left Texas, encumbered with wagons, merchandise, and the implements of their different trades and callings. The expedition was unfortunate, and, as a natural consequence, the censorious world has said that it was conceived in unwise policy. In the progress of my narrative, it will be seen that its failure arose from causes purely fortuitous; in a word, that the enterprise had failed and been broken up long before those engaged in it had reached the confines of New Mexico.

The expedition was to leave Austin, the capital of Texas, about the last of May or first of June. The route to be taken had not been determined upon when Major Howard was in New-Orleans, but it was thought that the pioneers would follow up the San Saba road, from San Antonio to Santa Fé; a route extending in

nearly a northwest, and, as was then thought, a direct line. Fearing that there might be a scarcity of water on this trace, the direction was afterward changed.

That an enterprise, so purely commercial in its aspect, was intended for a hostile invasion of Mexico, did not, as I have already stated, enter the mind of any one at the time—at least not in Texas, where the inhabitants should be best able to judge. That a military force of some three hundred men accompanied the expedition is well known, and it is equally well known that the route across the prairies, whether by the San Saba or the Red River, would lead directly through the very heart of the Comanche and Caygüa country—inhabited by Indians who are foes alike to both Mexicans and Texans. It cannot be considered very strange, then, that in a country so infested with hostile savages as Texas is, where a man hardly dares go out to catch his horse without a rifle and pair of pistols about him, a military force accompanied this expedition. The number of men was really not larger than that which accompanied the earlier Missouri enterprises; and large as it was, it did not prove sufficient for the purposes intended, many valuable lives being taken, and a large number of horses stolen, by the Indians we encountered on the route. These remarks I have made to counteract assertions put forth by the ignorant few, that the very fact of a military force being sent with the expedition was proof sufficient of its original hostile intentions. They would have had us, forsooth, start off with walking-sticks and umbrellas, and been scalped to a man in order to prove our object pacific. Perhaps their knowledge of the barbarians, through whose territory we were to pass, was of a piece with that of a very worthy agent sent to Texas, some years ago, by the French government. This



gentleman planned an excursion after buffalo, directly into the hunting-grounds of the Camanches, to be accompanied only by two of his friends with servants. On being told of the certainty that he would be killed, he confidently remarked that he should carry the flag of France with him—the *Camanches would never dare insult that!*

It was while making inquiries, as to the nature and objects of the Texan expedition, that I first heard of an enterprise somewhat similar, then in contemplation in the United States. A company, under the command of Colonel Pierce M. Butler, formerly governor of South Carolina, and well known as an efficient and gallant officer, was to leave a point high up on Red River for Santa Fé, having for escort a body of United States dragoons. What was the object of this enterprise, whether to counteract the Texans in their attempt to divert the New Mexican trade or otherwise, I am unable to say. It was abandoned, at all events, for the reason that Colonel Butler could not make all his preparations in season to ensure a sufficiency of grass and water upon the prairies; but had it started, I should have made one of the party.

Thus foiled, I finally resolved upon accompanying the Texans. My intentions were, on joining this expedition, to leave it before it should reach Santa Fé, so as in no way to commit myself, and then to make the entire tour of Mexico—visiting the cities of Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi, Guanajuato, and others on the road to the capital. These intentions I made known to all my friends in New-Orleans, not one of whom thought I should in any way compromise myself as an American citizen, or forfeit my right to protection, by the route I proposed pursuing. By a law of

Mexico—a law of which I must confess myself at the time ignorant—a foreigner is prohibited from entering that country through the territory of Texas; but the only punishment for this offence is being ordered out of Mexico by the nearest road, a penalty which would have been very willingly submitted to by me at any moment while I was in that country.

Having made every other preparation for my tour through Texas and Mexico, I went, on the morning of the 15th of May, 1841, in company with James H. Brewer, Esq., to the office of the then Mexican vice-consul at New-Orleans, and obtained from him a passport, which gave me permission to enter, as an American citizen, any place in the so-called Republic of Mexico. Thus fortified, and with intentions the most pacific towards both the countries through which I was to pass, on the 17th of May I sailed from my native land, in the steam-ship New-York, Captain Wright, for Galveston. On bidding adieu to my friends, I anticipated an exciting and interesting tour of some four months' duration, and expected to meet with the usual dangers and participate in the usual sports to be met with on the borders and prairies—nothing more.

Our voyage from New-Orleans to Galveston was characterized by little worthy of remark. Some of the passengers were seasick, and all such were laughed at; some of them asserted, very positively, that if they could once set foot upon shore, they never would be seen out of sight of it, while others said they cared but little whether they ever saw land again. One circumstance I well remember: our captain told me that a piece of raw hide, placed in the mouth while suffering thirst, would impart much moisture, and consequent relief; and months afterward, when in a situation to try the



experiment, I found that there was much truth in the recipe of our experienced skipper.

Early on the morning of the 19th of May we reached Galveston. This, in a commercial point of view, is the most important place in Texas; yet no vessel larger than an ordinary sloop of war can cross the bar at the highest tide. The harbour is considered far from safe; yet it is one of the best on the entire coast, from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the Sabine, and must be the point from which a large portion of the cotton and other products of Texas will always be shipped.

At Galveston I found every one talking of the proposed Santa Fé Expedition. It was looked upon as nothing more than a pleasant hunting excursion, through a large section of country, much of which was unknown to the white man. Such portions of the route as had been previously explored were known to abound with buffalo, bear, elk, antelope, and every species of game, besides fish and wild honey. The climate was also known to be dry and salubrious; in short, until a point high up on Red River should be gained, the trip promised to be one of continued interest and pleasure. But beyond that point the country was a perfect *terra incognita*, untrodden save by wild and wandering Indians, and all were eager to partake of the excitement of being among the first to explore it.

At Galveston I became acquainted with young Frank Combs, son of General Leslie Combs, of Kentucky. He had partially made up his mind to accompany the expedition, in the hope of recovering his hearing, which had been for some time defective; on learning that I intended to start that evening for Houston, on my way to Austin, he made hurried preparations to set off in my company on board a steamer. The next morning we were landed safely at Houston.

Here all was bustle and preparation. A company of volunteers, comprising some of the most enterprising young men residing in and about Houston, had been formed, and all were busy in making arrangements for their departure for Austin, the point whence the expedition was to take the line of march for Santa Fé. Every gunsmith in the place was occupied, night and day, in repairing guns and pistols; every saddler was at work manufacturing bullet-pouches, and mending the saddles and bridles of the volunteers—all was hurry, preparation, and excitement.

To give some idea of the opinions entertained at Houston, of the objects of the expedition to Santa Fé, I will here describe the general tone of conversation. Hardly a word was said of any hostile collision with the inhabitants of New Mexico; on the contrary, a chase after buffalo or a brush with the Camanches or some of the hostile tribes known to be wandering about the immense Western prairies, was the principal topic upon every tongue. Old campaigners and hunters were among the speakers, and the wild stories they told of their forays upon the borders and beyond the borders of civilization, of their hair-breadth 'scapes and encounters with bears, rattlesnakes, Camanches, buffaloes, and other inhabitants of the boundless prairies, with the thousand and one tales of the marvellous these frontier Leather Stockings always have at their command—either ready made or easy of construction at the time of need—all served to render those who had already made up their minds to join the party more eager than ever, and induced the lukewarm to "pack up" and follow their example.

I remained at Houston some three or four days, in which I made additional arrangements for the tour.



Determined to be in no way connected with the expedition, farther than travelling with it at my own pleasure, and for such time as might suit my own interest and convenience, I had scrupulously avoided involving the Texan government in the least expense in providing the minutest article of my outfit. My rifle—short, but heavy barrelled, and throwing a ball,\* with great strength and precision, a long distance—I had purchased of the well-known Dickson, of Louisville, Ky., and a most excellent rifle it was. My pistols, powder and lead, bowie and other knives, blankets, accoutrements for my horse, and other implements and articles necessary for a prairie tour, I had picked up here and there—some having been given me by my kind friends in New-Orleans, while others I had purchased before leaving that city. My necessities now required little save a horse, and as this was one of the most important points in an efficient “fit out,” I determined to take my time and obtain a good one.

Any one who has entered the Houston horse-market with the intention of purchasing, is well aware that it is easy enough to buy a nag, but not so easy to procure one of the right sort.

When it became known that I wished to operate a little in horseflesh as a purchaser, all sorts of nags were “trotted out” by the different dealers and proprietors. There was the heavy American horse, whose owner had probably entered Texas by the inland or Red River route, and wishing to return by way of New-Orleans, had no farther use for him; then there were the wiry-looking Indian pony, doubtless broken down and short-winded from hard usage; the light but game Mexican; and last, the recently caught, restless, and apparently

\* Twenty-four to the pound.

vicious *mustang*, or wild horse of the prairie: all these different samples were offered for my inspection, with the usual catalogues of their many merits, particularly their great powers of endurance. From so large an assortment I found not a little difficulty in making a selection. I looked, with an eye of fondness and craving, upon a beautiful nag, half Spanish, half wild, of fine action and most delicate points. I thought of the “show off” I could make upon a horse of this peculiar description, for he had an ambling and a proud gait, but just at this moment prudence suggested the idea of the long journey I had before me, and I purchased a heavy and powerful American horse for four times the sum with which I could have bought the spotted and sprightly Spanish pony. He was far from being “a good horse to look at,” but was “an excellent one to go,” and never was money better invested. Bravely, and without once flagging, did he carry me my long journey through, ever ready to start off on a buffalo or other chase, and enduring to the last. “Jim the Butcher”—not a very romantic or euphonious name, but so he was called by the man of whom I purchased him—is now in the hands of the Mexicans, and sincerely do I hope they have treated him with more kindness and consideration than they did his master. Would that I had him now. Want should never overtake him until it had first conquered me.

With the purchase of my horse ended my immediate wants. I was now fully armed, mounted, and equipped for the prosecution of my journey. I cannot take leave of Houston, however, without tendering my thanks to the many kind friends I found there. To Captain Radcliff Hudson, and Lieutenants Lubbock and Ostrander, in particular, I was under many obligations. They