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NARRATIVE

OF THE

FIRST TEXAN SANTA FÉ EXPEDITION.

CHAPTER I.

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WE remained at Fray Cristobal until near night, the snow, in the mean time, thawing away entirely under the influence of the sun. Salezar said aloud, on starting, that we were to be driven through the entire ninety miles without sleep or a morsel of food, and as there was no water on the route, he advised such of us as had gourds or canteens to fill them before setting out: an

exhibition of humanity truly considerate and unlooked for in him.

At a steady pace we journeyed onward till dark, the weather mild and pleasant for walking; but now a raw night wind sprang up, fresh and piercing, from the snow-clad mountains, and chilling our weak frames so thoroughly that the most violent exercise could not keep us warm. A water-gourd, holding some two quarts, which I had filled on starting, after taking a hearty draught at the river, slipped from my benumbed fingers, and was dashed to pieces on the frozen ground. The animals of our guard went begging for riders, for even their hardy owners were obliged to dismount and run on foot to prevent their limbs from freezing.

About nine o'clock at night we met a regiment of dragoons, under Colonel Muñoz, on their way from Durango to Santa Fé: troops that had been despatched by the Central Government to take part in any hostilities that might occur with the Texans. Being from a more southern and temperate climate, they suffered excessively from the cold, so much so that many of them were leading their horses and setting fire to every little tuft of palm or dry grass on either side of the road. Around these blazing tufts, and scattered along the road for miles, were to be seen knots of half-frozen dragoons, mingled with a large number of women, who always follow the Mexican soldiery on a march. How the latter, who were but half clad even in the warmest climate, could withstand the bitter cold of that dreary night, is to me incomprehensible.

Wild and picturesque was the scene presented by the train of roadside fires, each with a little bevy huddling and shivering around the red-glaring and fitful lights, the lengthened and flitting shadows coming and going,

and losing themselves in the sombre obscurity of night. There would be seen the officer, cloaked and blanketed, standing side by side with one of his men, the head of the latter covered with a clumsy, bearskin dragoon cap, while he would share his sky-blue military cloak with some woman who had followed him, mayhap, from the *tierra caliente*, or sunny south, and was now, for the first time, visiting the region of snow. As tuft after tuft would fall away at the touch of fire, the wild group would hurry on to others, soon kindle them, and as they in turn would suddenly flash up, blaze for a few moments, and then as suddenly expire, away they would hie to the next. Eldrich and spectre faces came and vanished on that barren moor, that did strongly remind me of the witch scenes in Macbeth. While standing around these fires some of the dragoons informed our men that they had met Colonel Cooke's party near Chihuahua, and that they were well treated on the road. There was consolation in this, for we had heard many rumours of the bad treatment we might expect on the other side of the Paso del Norte.

The sufferings, the horrors of that dreadful night upon the Dead Man's Journey cannot soon be effaced from the memory of those who endured them. Although my sore and blistered feet, and still lame ankle, pained me excessively, it was nothing to the biting cold and the helpless drowsiness which cold begets. No halt was called—had any of us fallen asleep by the roadside after midnight, it would have been the sleep of death. Towards daylight many of the prisoners were fairly walking in their sleep and staggering about, from one side of the road to the other, like so many drunken men. Completely chilled through, even their senses were benumbed, and they would sink by the roadside

and beg to be left behind, to sleep and to perish. A stupor, a perfect indifference for life, came over many of us, and the stronger found employment in rousing and assisting the weaker. Anxiously did we wait the coming of the sun, for that would at least bring warmth and animation to our paralyzed limbs and faculties.

Daylight came at last, and with it came a halt of an hour, to bring up the stragglers and count the prisoners. By the time the last of us were up the trumpet again sounded the advance, and once more we were upon the road. Towards noon we passed the Dead Man's Lake, or Lake of Death, its bed perfectly dry. The coolness of the weather, however, and the fact that we had nothing to eat, prevented that thirst which in a warmer temperature would have caused sufferings of a nature that cannot be described.

As the sun was about setting, those of us who were in front were startled by the report of two guns, following each other in quick succession. We turned to ascertain the cause, and soon found that a poor, unfortunate man, named Golpin, a merchant, who had joined the expedition with a small amount of goods, had been shot by the rear-guard for no other reason than that *he was too sick and weak to keep up!* He had made a bargain with one of the guard to ride his mule a short distance, for which he was to give him his only shirt! While in the act of taking it off, Salezar ordered a soldier to shoot him. The first ball only wounded the wretched man, but the second killed him instantly, and he fell, with his shirt still about his face. Golpin was a citizen of the United States, and reached Texas a short time before the departure of the expedition. He appeared to be a harmless, inoffensive man, of delicate constitution, and during a greater part of the time we

were upon the road, before the capture of the expedition, was obliged to ride in one of the wagons. The brutal Salezar, rather than be troubled with him any longer, took this method of ridding himself of an encumbrance! It may be difficult, for many of my readers, to believe that such an act of wanton barbarity could be perpetrated by a people pretending to be civilized—to be Christians! I should certainly be loath to hazard my reputation by telling the story were there not nearly two hundred witnesses of the scene.

In half an hour after the murder of Golpin, and before it was yet dark, we were ordered to halt for a short time, the horses and mules of our guard absolutely requiring a little rest after being constantly in motion for more than twenty-four hours. Had Salezar consulted only the feelings of the prisoners, no halt would have been called.

During the short rest now allowed us we were permitted to lie down, but sleep was impossible. Had we been granted rest during the day, when the warm sun was shining over us, we might have slept, and soundly, too: now, it was so cold we could but curl up close, one to another, in a state of discomfort that forbade sleep. At ten o'clock at night, or near that hour, we were again roused and ordered to resume the march. The short rest which had been granted was far from restoring us to strength, far from removing the soreness and stiffness from our bones: on the contrary, we were now more unfitted for the gloomy march than ever. We had travelled but a short half mile before we passed the two wagons in which the baggage and camp equipage of the Mexicans were carried. In one of these, stowed snugly under the cotton cover, were Salezar and his lieutenant, the redoubtable Don Jesus. They, at least, had made

themselves comfortable, and were snoring away, utterly regardless of the sufferings around them.

About midnight we reached a part of the desert where the high branches of palm had not been burned, the dragoons probably passing this section in the daytime. These dry tufts were at once set on fire by the Mexicans to warm their benumbed and half-frozen hands and feet. We, too, crowded around them, and as one would burn down to a level with the ground we rushed hurriedly to the next. Our line now extended nearly a mile along the road, and the blazing clumps, which flashed up like powder on being ignited, gave a wild and romantic appearance to the scene, more especially when the dark and swarthy faces of the Mexicans and the wild and haggard features of our men were seen congregated round the same fire.

The early hours of the morning were colder than any which had preceded them, as the biting winds from the mountains appeared to have a more open sweep across the desert plain. The sufferings, too, of the previous night were increased in proportion as we had less strength to endure them; and here it should be remembered that we had had no food given us from our commencement of the Dead Man's Journey, now thirty-six hours, and that we had been in active exercise nearly the whole time. How this dreary road across the waste ever obtained its congenial name is more than I could learn. It certainly deserves it, more especially since the murders committed along its line by Salezar.

That faint streak of lightish gray which heralds daylight had but just appeared in the eastern horizon when a man named Griffith, who had been wounded by the Indians before we were taken prisoners and had no

entirely recovered, gave out, and declared his inability to proceed any farther. He had ridden a mule until his faculties were nearly paralyzed by the cold, when he jumped off and again undertook to walk. Too weak, however, and too lame to travel, he sank to the ground. A soldier told him to rise, or he would obey the orders, given by Salezar, to put all to death who could not keep up. Griffith made one feeble but ineffectual attempt. The effort was too much: he cast an imploring look at the soldier, and while doing so the brutal miscreant *knocked his brains out with a musket!* His blanket was then stripped from him, as the reward of his murderer, his ears were cut off, and he was thrown by the roadside, another feast for the buzzards and prairie wolves!

And how, it will be asked, did we feel while acts like these—acts that leave barbarian deeds of cruelty and blood far behind—were enacted in our midst? The reader must understand that not one of us knew but that he might be called upon as the next victim; that we were completely worn and broken down, sick and dispirited. Callous, too, we had become; and although we could not look upon the horrible butchery of our comrades with indifference, we still knew that any interference on our part would bring certain death, without in any way aiding our unfortunate friends. Inly we prayed that a time might come when their death could be avenged—that the damnable crimes hourly enacted around us might be atoned for. There was the breast of many a hero in that sorry band; and in its pent-up chamber were recorded deep vows of vengeance *yet to be executed* upon Armijo and his congenial satellites.

It was not until about eight o'clock in the morning

that the waters of the Rio Grande, which in its course had swept around the bend, a distance of more than one hundred and sixty miles, were seen by those in the advance. With hurried and eager steps we all pressed forward, for we knew that now, at least, we were to have food, water, and sleep. To attempt a delineation of our men as they appeared at that time were a bootless task. We had now been forty hours on the road, without food or water; in this time, although we had travelled ninety miles, we had had scarcely four hours' rest; the scanty wardrobe which each man carried upon his back, and which was all he possessed, had not been changed since we were made prisoners, and was now filled with every species of vermin known in Mexico. Add to this the sunken, hollow cheeks, pale and haggard countenances of men who had been unshaved for a month, and the reader will have a faint idea of our miserable aspect.

Salezar here ordered another ox killed—one that had made the entire journey with us from Austin, that had escaped the stampedes and Indian perils, and had borne a due share of the labour of dragging our wagons across the immense prairies of the West. With his former masters he had suffered and been captured, and now that he, too, was lame and broken down, weak and unable to travel, like them he was ordered to the sacrifice. It did not seem right to make a meal of an old and tried companion; yet necessity knows no law, neither has it feelings, and in three quarters of an hour after the poor animal was killed he was cooked and devoured, and his quondam masters were lying about on the grass fast asleep. In the afternoon we were awakened and ordered to march some miles farther—to a place where the animals of the guard could obtain better picking

than at the camp where we were now lying. As we were about starting, a little incident occurred in which were strangely mixed the painful and the ludicrous. For some trifling cause Salezar drew his sword, and with the flat of it struck one of the prisoners a violent blow across the shoulders. The poor fellow had only learned one Spanish expression, *muchas gracias*—the common phrase employed in New Mexico to thank a person for any favour received. Thinking he must say something, and not knowing anything else to say, the unfortunate Texan ejaculated, "*Muchas gracias, Señor!*" Another terrible whack from the sword of Salezar was followed by a shrug of the shoulders and another "Many thanks, sir." The captain was now more infuriated than ever. To be thus publicly and openly thanked by a person upon whom he was inflicting a painful punishment, he looked upon as a defiance, and he accordingly redoubled his blows. How long this might have continued I am unable to say; had not some of the friends of the man told him to hold his tongue, Salezar might have continued his blows until exhausted by the very labour. It is astonishing with what facility many of our men picked up enough Spanish to hold conversation with our guard, however little advance the punished individual just spoken of had made. The oaths, in particular, they soon learned, and in return they gave the Mexicans an insight into the many imprecatory idioms with which the English abounds. It is singular how much more easily men learn to swear and blaspheme in any language than to pray in it.

Our march, on the day after we had finished the Dead Man's Journey, was one of unusual length and severity; numbers of the men giving out miles before we reached our camping-ground. Salezar, as fortune or-