

tion that we have had but two administrations, since the days of Washington, that were properly bold and independent as regards their foreign policy—those of the elder Adams and General Jackson. Politicians can take no umbrage at this remark, as I have mentioned two extremes when the general policy of the country is taken into consideration. One great fault, with too many of the administrations by which we have been governed, has been the resort to protracted arguments in matters where not a word of debate should have been allowed—a policy but too well understood by every government with which we have had dealings, and of which all, as a matter of course, have taken advantage. When the powers at Washington are convinced that they are in the right, upon any question of foreign policy at issue, what necessity for dispute? If it is evident that any little patch of territory, no matter how insignificant, belongs of right to us, why not plant, occupy, and, in firm but dignified language, say that we will *keep* it at any and all hazards? If it can be made to appear that an American citizen, under protection of that flag of which we so much boast, is insulted in a foreign land, why not demand and *obtain* full satisfaction at once? In many, too many instances, such has not been the case, and every fresh demonstration of inefficiency or inattention to these matters is but granting a fresh license for some foreign power to repeat its aggressions and its insults. In the case of Mr. Alvarez, our consul at Santa Fé, who, in 1841, was wantonly attacked and severely wounded in his own house, and directly under the “stars and stripes”—in his case what has been done? Nothing whatever. I might mention even greater outrages, but this is sufficient.

Had Mr. Ellis been authorized to try the virtue of

“blows and knocks,” as he undoubtedly would have been by General Jackson, he would have done so with promptness; but he seemed anxious in no way to transcend the limited instructions given him, and hence the long-protracted correspondence which took place in relation to the American prisoners.* Mr. E. might, and I believe should, have taken the responsibility, and made a positive demand, either for the prisoners or his passports, in which case, such was the state of feeling in the United States at the time, I am confident he would have been justified by nine tenths of the people; but, like too many others, he was a “strict constructionist,” and disposed to obey rigidly the very letter of his instructions.

On the other hand, had General Thompson been then our minister, he would have stretched the instructions given him to their utmost—nay, would have shaken off the trammels a weak point in our government appears to have thrown over her agents—and by so doing, let what would come of it, received the warm approval and universal thanks of his countrymen. He might not have effected more than did Mr. Ellis, yet I am constrained to believe that he would—that our immediate liberation would have followed close upon a positive demand.

Such I conceive to be the difference between the two ministers, or rather between the course adopted by Mr. Ellis and that which undoubtedly would have been pursued by his successor; and although suffering and im-

* Had General Jackson been President of the United States at the time, I do not believe that one of the American prisoners would have been in bondage twenty-four hours after the first despatch in relation to them had been received at Mexico from Washington. The Mexican diplomatists know perfectly well with whom they have to deal—there would have been no “putting off the previous question” had General J. been in power.

prisonment without cause for months may have wrought prejudice in my mind, I cannot but believe that the latter course would have been the better and the proper one. Nor can I even now divest myself of the idea that Santa Anna, to this day, laughs in his sleeve when he remembers upon what flimsy pretexts he retained several Americans in prison, without the shadow of cause, and despite the remonstrances of the representative of the United States.*

But to return to the actual. When Sully came in from the streets, on the evening of the day which had first introduced me to the irons, we ascertained that he had made partial arrangements with some of our guard to pass four of us out secretly in the course of a night or two, or at the first favourable opportunity. The plan was to be more fully matured the next day.

At dark, the heavy door of our room was locked, not to be opened again until morning, and in the meantime a regular guard was placed before it on the outside. The closing of the door was but the signal for all the prisoners to divest themselves of their chains. Such as could slip the irons over their ankles and feet

* The fact of my having a passport, although denied, was so abundantly proved, that the Mexican government hardly urged it as an excuse by which to detain me; but the Chihuahua letter, thoughtlessly written by an American gentleman since dead, and in which it was erroneously stated that I was sent forward as an *avant courier*, was used as a pretext to the very last. By a distortion of the sense of that letter peculiarly Mexican, I was implicated with the Santa Fé Expedition, and finding this a sufficient plea to continue me in prison, it was never lost sight of. I have little doubt, if the truth could be known, that the papers of which I was robbed by Armijo, passport and all, were quietly resting in the bureau of the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations during the whole time of the negotiations in relation to the release of the American prisoners. The story that Armijo destroyed the passport in my presence was certainly erroneous, and as he sent all the important papers found upon the Texans to the capital, I have little doubt that mine found their way there in the same package.

were at once free, while others produced files from their hiding-places, and the work of cutting down rivets was commenced, with an assiduity and zeal, which soon resulted in the Texans ridding themselves of all encumbrances upon their comfort and free locomotion. In certainly less than half an hour the ankles of nearly every prisoner were loosened from the shackles, and it was only from indolence that all did not free themselves. The chains were then carefully placed in positions where they could easily be put on again, should the ill-natured old commandante by any chance take it into his head to make us a night visit, and this little precaution over, the varied entertainments which usually beguiled the long evenings commenced.

There were some fifty of us in the room in which I was confined, and in one quarter of it would be seen a party engaged at whist, all-fours, uchre, or some other game a knowledge of which they had brought with them from Texas. In another part some prisoner would open the game of *monte*, an insight into which he had picked up from the Mexicans since his confinement, and around him would be gathered a small knot of betters staking small sums upon the turn of the cards, for all appeared to have more or less money. By the same candle, probably, some two or three of the Texans were reading such books as the foreigners had sent us. In still another quarter a small party would be seen, half reclining upon their blankets, while one of their number recited some story of other days and lands; and should the story chance to be humorous in its nature, the joyous and hearty laugh which followed its termination showed plainly enough that the listeners were thinking of anything but chains and imprisonment.

Songs, too, enlivened the scene, and served to beguile

the hours, while several musicians in the party had found means to procure instruments upon which some of them played exceedingly well. But of all the modes employed to while away the evenings, the most common, perhaps, was reading, and conspicuous among this class was my yoke-fellow in chains, the veteran Major Bennett, who might be seen busily poring over a Bible which had been given him by Mr. Elliott, the chaplain of the United States Exploring Expedition, when in Santiago on his way from the Pacific to Washington.

Thus with books and song, cards and stories, the hours slipped away pleasantly enough to all, and the reader may feel not a little astonishment when I say that the nightly soirées in the old Convent of Santiago were as productive of mirth as are many of those held within the gay saloons of any land. There is something in the Anglo-Saxon character which buoys and sustains the spirit under adversity, a quality which appears to be inherent; and it was continually a matter of surprise to our guard, from San Miguel even to the city of Mexico, to see not only the indifference we all manifested under our misfortunes, but the gayety and good-humour which at all times prevailed among the prisoners. And I doubt whether any of the Texans, when memory now carries them back, ever think, without shuddering, of scenes through which they then passed, but which at the time they thought little of, or cared not for. The anticipation of any impending danger or difficulty is invariably worse than the reality; and when the dreaded reality arrives, and the full measure of our fear breaks upon us, the imagination so busies itself in fancying still greater peril and suffering in perspective that the present is lightened of half its burden. The much-dreaded future is an *ignis fatuus*, leading the

mind to anticipate troubles and annoyances which, when encountered, are either not noticed, or only surprise us by their comparatively trifling importance.

When the morning of the 20th of April came, and the Mexican who had charge of the prisoners while at their work entered our apartment, I again expected that I should be ordered into the streets, and compelled to go through the form of labour; but I was once more fortunate enough to escape. The reason for thus *slighting* me may have been the circumstance that Major Bennett, my companion at the other end of the chain, was exempted from all outdoor work—partly on account of his age and rank as an officer, but principally because he was engaged a portion of his time in the cocina, attending to the cooking of our food.

In the course of the day several parties of foreigners visited Santiago. I told them all that I should attempt an escape, and that very night if a favourable opportunity offered. They advised me, by all means, to defer any attempt until after General Thompson was duly received as the accredited minister of the United States, and I partially consented to this course; yet had a door been left open, or the least chance of a successful escape offered, I should most certainly have bidden farewell to imprisonment, chains, and Santiago together.* The recollection of the many favourable opportunities to

* A Yankee friend of mine resident in Mexico—one of the old Bunker Hill stock—told me, while in San Lazaro, that he hoped I would “tough it out awhile”—I use his own words—in the expectation that our government might be driven into a “small skirmish”—his own words again—with Mexico. I know that one reason why many Americans were anxious that I should not escape through my own means was their desire for a war, and that they thought my farther detention would be just cause for one. The result of a war, they were confident, would place them upon an equality with the English and French residents—a position they said they were far from enjoying.

escape while in San Lazaro haunted and annoyed me excessively; and nothing short of a positive assurance of an honourable liberation within a week could have kept me twenty-four hours in Santiago, had there been a possibility of liberating myself.

At a late hour on the evening of the 20th two or three Americans called upon me a second time, and earnestly requested me to remain quiet another day—to hazard no attempt at an escape until I should hear farther from them. As the principal plan, adopted by myself and companions to effect our liberation, was still far from being matured, I consented to abide by the advice of the Americans, and with no little reluctance passed another night in Santiago.

Early the next morning there appeared to be unusual bustle and preparation among the prisoners—an excitement which I did not at first understand. On inquiry, I learned that it was the anniversary of the celebrated battle of San Jacinto—the great victory gained over Santa Anna—and that the Texans were determined upon celebrating it as brilliantly as possible. Some of the Americans then in Mexico, among them Mr. Coolidge, had sent the prisoners some half dozen turkeys, and other luxuries in the way of eating, besides a generous supply of wines and liquors of the choicest qualities. The Texans had also provided themselves, while in the streets the day before, with such little delicacies as they could purchase, determined upon having a grand dinner on the “glorious 21st,” if nothing else.

On ordinary occasions the prisoners were taken from Santiago at about eight o'clock in the morning, conducted some half or three quarters of a mile from the convent to a ditch, and then compelled to go through the forms of pumping and digging. By as close a

mathematical calculation as could be made, without instruments or figures, it was thought the water ran into the ditch they were clearing just as fast as they pumped it out—perhaps a trifle faster; but the economy of effecting much with little labour is but ill understood in Mexico, and the fact that the Texans made no progress in the job upon which they were engaged created but little difference with the Mexican overseers. At twelve o'clock, or near that hour, the prisoners were conducted back to the convent for their dinners, all in chains, and after occupying some hour and a half or two hours with this meal, they were again conducted to the ditch. Not one of them ever hurt or tired himself with work, but on the contrary it was said that they amused themselves by experimenting on the smallest possible amount of labour a man could perform when he set his wits to work and tried his best! I recollect a remark made by a facetious prisoner one evening—I think it was Jimmy Tweed—to the effect that he had *exerted* himself all day to ascertain how little he could do; and the result, in round numbers, was, that he had thrown one shovelful of mud from the ditch, but in so doing he had contrived to *tumble three back*!

The great object with the Texans, on the morning of the 21st of April, was to obtain the consent of the old commandante to their remaining in-doors during the afternoon—they were anxious enough to be taken out in the morning, as it would give them an opportunity to increase their supply of liquor and other materials for the feast. A committee, composed of such as could speak Spanish, was accordingly appointed, whose business it was to wait upon the Mexican officers and inform them that the 21st of April was the patron saint's day of Texas, and also, in language most respectful and

courteous, to ask permission to celebrate it in the afternoon with all becoming ceremony and rejoicing. In profound ignorance of the day, and the glorious battle the Texans wished to celebrate, the Mexican officers kindly gave their consent to every request made. By such stratagem the great object of the prisoners was accomplished, and they now set themselves about making every arrangement for the approaching festivities.*

Such of the prisoners as had any skill in drawing or painting feigned illness, and were not taken out in the morning with their comrades. They had obtained, by some means, a supply of red and white paint, and the result of their morning's work was the decoration of the walls of our room with Texan flags, and sea and land fights—the Texans of course triumphant, the Mexicans discomfited, and the "lone star" in the ascendant. An appropriate ode—full of patriotism, liberty, San Jacinto, love of country, detestation of tyrants, &c.—was written by some poet among the prisoners, and one of the Texan officers, known to be endowed with vocal powers, was appointed to sing it. A master of ceremonies, an orator of the day, toast-master—in fact all the requisite officers were appointed, and before the men came in from their morning's work, every necessary preparation had been made for a regular celebration.

The hour at which the dinner was to be served was three o'clock; but before that time a number of foreigners had arrived at Santiago for the purpose of taking

* It could not have been that the Mexicans were aware of the events which had transpired on the 21st of April. The younger officers of our guard were liberal and accommodating to a fault; yet they would not have dared grant the Texans permission to celebrate a victory which had lost their country one of its most valuable provinces, and this under the very nose of Santa Anna himself, who had been taken prisoner in that battle.

part in the celebration. One of them, who at this time was residing in the city of Mexico, was himself a member of the small but gallant band that achieved the great victory of San Jacinto, and related several interesting anecdotes of that desperate struggle—a struggle which resulted in the complete overthrow of the Mexican power in Texas. The dinner itself was excellent—I might almost say sumptuous. The "bill of fare" did not display that varied list of French inventions to be found at the noted St. Charles Hotel, in New-Orleans, or the Astor House, in New-York; but we had roast beef, turkey, and good appetites, and the whole affair went off with the greatest éclat.

After the "cloth was removed"—a performance which it took but about two minutes to execute, as there was nothing to do save to stow the bowls, plates, and spoons away in the corners—after this was done, the celebration of the great anniversary began in real earnest. The regular toasts were appropriate, the volunteers spirited, and the ode a very creditable piece, and given with much effect. An oration by Major Bonnell, one of the prisoners, followed, Dr. Brenham and several other gentlemen also making some very pertinent remarks. As the hours wore along, and the liquor circulated more freely, the hilarity and general good feeling increased. Some of the foreigners present placed the chains of the prisoners around their own ankles, and several fancy jigs and hornpipes were executed with jingling and clanking accompaniments. "Hail Columbia" and the "Star-spangled Banner," in addition to the Texan patriotic songs, were duly honoured by numerous voices, while the memory of Washington was drunk standing and uncovered. Even the younger Mexican officers took part in a celebration which to

them must have been strange, drinking several toasts which were highly complimentary to the Texans.

It was not until dark that the joyous festivities ceased, and even after the prisoners were locked in their room for the night, wild catches of song and uproarious merriment helped still farther to enliven the scene. While Santa Anna, at his palace in one part of the city, was doubtless brooding over his misfortunes on the fatal field of San Jacinto, a crowd of jovial Texan prisoners were celebrating that very victory in another part, and in chains.

CHAPTER XVI.

Intelligence of immediate Release.—Its Effect.—Close of the Celebration.—Night Visitors at Santiago.—Arrival of Mr. Ellis with an Order for our Release.—The old Blacksmith again.—His Services dispensed with.—Once more free from Chains.—Leave Santiago and Imprisonment.—Cheers of the Texans at our Departure.—Congratulations of the young Mexican Officers.—Another night Ride through Mexico.—Encounter with a religious Procession.—Arrival at the United States Legation.—The Gran Sociedad.—Comfortable Quarters.—Sleep impossible.—Change of Circumstances.—The Watchwords of Mexico.—Encounter with a Sentinel.—Early Morn in Mexico.—Strange Cries.—“Carbon.”—Appearance of the Streets.—Picture of morning Life in Mexico.—Change of Wardrobe.—Visit to a French Barber.—A Shearing and Shaving Operation.—Improvement in personal Appearance.—Beggars in front of a Church.—Description of the wretched Throng.—Return to the Gran Sociedad.—A sumptuous Breakfast.—Visit to the British Minister, Mr. Pakenham.—Once more in Santiago.—Mexican Girls.—Visit to our old Quarters at San Lazaro.—Bribing a Sentinel.—Meeting with the Texans and Lepers.—Call at the Dwelling of a Mexican Lady, an old Friend.—Her musical Attainments.—Anecdote of her Spirit and Patriotism.

In the very midst of the celebration, and while the rejoicing was at its height, Mr. Coolidge called upon me with the intelligence that I was to be liberated im-

mediately—in fact, that the order for my release was already given, and only awaited certain signatures to be carried into effect. This gentleman, in company with a number of Americans, had been at the palace of Santa Anna when Mr. Ellis took his leave and General Thompson presented his credentials and was duly received as the Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States. At this audience, Mr. Coolidge informed me, Santa Anna formally assured Mr. Ellis that he should give up to him young Howard, Sully, and myself, with four of the prisoners at Puebla who had claimed American protection. With a cunning characteristic of the Provisional President, he now saw that he had an opportunity to dispose of us without compromising his honour and dignity, and, placing our liberation in the light of a personal favour to Mr. Ellis, had consented to give us up to that gentleman. Santa Anna is never caught without some loop-hole through which to crawl when closely cornered.

The time had been when news that I was to be immediately released, coming in shape so authentic, would have filled me with sensations the most pleasing—now I received it with an indifference which even to myself appeared unaccountable. It may be that the numerous false hopes that had been held out to me partly induced this unconcern, for I should most certainly have received a present of a box of cigars with more pleasure; but the principal reason was, that I felt perfectly confident of making my escape within a few hours, or days at farthest. I say that I felt confident—I was *certain* of being free from chains and imprisonment immediately, and through my own individual exertions, and this certainly begat indifference to any other means. Another thing, which in some measure served to alloy the