

teamsters. Arrival of Colonel Curtis' command. We resume our march to Camargo. Fortifications of that town. Another march to Monterey. Mustang Gray. Wholesale slaughter of Rancheros near Marin. - - - p. 296

CHAPTER XI.

Condition of General Taylor's army after the battle of Buena Vista. Tranquility restored in Northern Mexico. Courts established. Glance at General Scott's campaign. The homeward march. - - - - - p. 337

ERRATUM.

On page 273, line 22, read "skirting the road."

SKETCHES

OF THE

CAMPAIGN IN NORTHERN MEXICO.

CHAPTER I.

THE Annexation of Texas—Our Army encamps opposite Matamoros—The Mexican Troops cross the Rio Grande and commence hostilities—General Taylor calls for reinforcements—The War recognized by the Congress and people of the United States—Requisition upon Ohio for three Regiments of Volunteers—They are immediately raised and rendezvous at Camp Washington—Organization of the Ohio Brigade—Embarkation of the First Regiment—The Fourth of July—General Hamer's speech.

At the commencement of President Polk's Administration, our country was involved in two very serious disputes with foreign powers: one with England, the other with Mexico; the subject of the former, the boundary of Oregon; of the latter, that of Texas. Although "Fifty-four Forty or Fight" had been the *shibboleth* of the government party in the national election just passed, the Cabinet at Washington did not seem to think it altogether politic to prosecute both of these quarrels with arms. The Oregon question was, therefore, unraveled by negotiation; that of Texas, cut with the sword. Whether the latter could also have been peaceably adjusted, is one of the questions connected with the origin of

the war which it is not my purpose to discuss. *Non nostrum tantas componere lites.*

Pending the settlement of the interesting ante-nuptial contracts between "Uncle Sam" (who, besides being a sad old Mormon in his polygamous tendencies, has a decided *penchant* for the dark-eyed daughters of the South) and Texas, and which resulted in their union; the troops of the former were sent to occupy a convenient position in the territory of the latter, with a view of meeting promptly any presumptuous Mexican knights who might approach to forbid the bans. The command of this "Army of Occupation" was entrusted to General Z. Taylor, whose prudence and firmness eminently qualified him for a task of such importance and delicacy. From August, 1845, to March, 1846, he remained encamped at Corpus Christi, a healthful and convenient location on the coast of Texas. Many years had elapsed since so large a portion of our army had been concentrated in the field, and the general commanding availed himself of the opportunity to establish a system of instruction and discipline, which contributed greatly to its subsequent success.

Meanwhile the annexation of Texas—the *casus belli*—was consummated. The "lone star" was added to our glorious banner, and the President announced the event as a bloodless achievement.

But he, and all of us, learned ere long that

"Those who in quarrels interpose,
Must often wipe a bloody nose."

Our government, believing that the limits of the new state extended to the Rio Bravo del Norte, instructed General Tay-

lor to break up his camp at Corpus Christi, and march to the left bank of that river. If, as many have supposed, the design of this movement was simply to quicken the tardy pace of Mexican diplomacy, an unfortunate mistake was evidently committed in estimating the means necessary to accomplish that object. The little army of three thousand men, which General Taylor displayed upon the frontier, rather invited than averted the threatened war. In the presence of a larger force, it is by no means certain that Paredes, the Dictator of "the magnanimous Mexican nation," would have ventured to authorize those bold and offensive operations which led so suddenly to the first shock of arms.

On the 11th of March, General Taylor marched from Corpus Christi. In the latter part of the same month, after establishing a *depôt* at Point Isabel, he encamped opposite Matamoros; the garrison of which town was soon afterwards reinforced by a strong division of troops from the interior, under General Arista. From that camp, which the Americans hastened to fortify, "the flag of the stars" was unfurled; and the Mexican authorities were informed that the United States claimed all the territory north of the Rio Grande. There, and then, too, was begun that military correspondence in which the American general proved himself an accomplished master, and by which, no less than by his valor and humanity, he won the admiration of his countrymen.

In the following month (April, 1846) were shed the first red drops of the long impending storm, which, it was even then hoped, would pass away like an April cloud. The Mexican cavalry, having crossed the river, succeeded in killing

and capturing some officers and small detachments of our army. Encouraged by the good fortune attending these skirmishes, and the comparatively small number of the opposing camp, General Arista, on the 1st of May, passed his army to the Texan bank of the Rio Grande, and displayed there, for the last time, the banner of his arrogant and vain-glorious country. Learning the hostile attitude of the Mexican general, the American commander immediately called upon the States of Louisiana and Texas for troops. In the meantime, he determined to keep open the communication between his depôt at Point Isabel and his camp opposite Matamoros, both of which were now seriously menaced,—Arista having taken an intermediate position at Palo Alto, with the design of forcing a battle. Notwithstanding the disparity of numbers, Taylor did not decline the combat; but in a characteristic despatch from Point Isabel, May 7th, he informed his government that he should march that day for Matamoros, and adds, “if the enemy oppose my march, in whatever force, I shall fight him.”

The Federal government, meanwhile, informed of the critical position of its army, was seized with apprehension for its safety and success; and, on the 11th of May, the President sent a message to Congress communicating the startling intelligence that war existed with Mexico, and this almost before the announcement that annexation was a “bloodless achievement” had ceased to echo through the halls of the Capitol. On the following day, a bill was passed, by large majorities in both branches of the National Legislature, recognizing the war; appropriating ten millions of dollars, and

authorizing the President to accept the services of fifty thousand volunteers for its prosecution. It is, perhaps, to be regretted that there was not perfect unanimity in favor of that important measure; and, indeed, for an earnest and energetic pursuit of the war throughout,—all opposition to which should then have been silenced by humanity, if not by policy and patriotism. To abandon or denounce the government in such an alarming crisis, would only serve to prolong the contest. Peace once broken with such a people—ignorant of our power, and boastful of their own—could only be conquered, and that most effectively and speedily, by united councils at home, and resolute and vigorous action in the field. An accomplished historian (Macaulay) has well remarked, that “if there be any truth established by the universal experience of nations, it is this: that to carry the spirit of peace into war, is a weak and cruel policy. The time of negotiation is the time for deliberation and delay. But when an extreme case calls for that remedy, which is in its own nature most violent, and which, in such cases, is a remedy only because it is violent, it is idle to think of mitigating and diluting. Languid war can do nothing which negotiation or submission will not do better; and to act on any other principle is not to save blood and money, but to squander them.”

But I have no quarrel with the opponents of the Mexican war bills. According to the venerable Senator from Michigan, they have not been singular in their sentiment of hostility to the cause of their country.* If, however, they, or any

*“I have seen a great deal of this political perversity,—this unpatriotic predisposition, which prompts many men always to take part against their country, what-

who may come after us, shall perchance, in their efforts to arrest the progress of this Republic, either in peace or war, be run over and crippled by that new and powerful American engine celerped,—“manifest destiny,”—let them not complain if the popular decision should be as usual, “no blame is attached to the company.” But a decided majority of the people, as well as of the Congress, of the United States, were far from being averse to a war with Mexico, whose wrongs and insults to American citizens had been greater for a series of years than those inflicted by all other nations combined. Hence, when it was known that American blood had been shed, and that “the question had reached a point where words must give place to acts,” the alacrity with which the people tendered their services to the government. Hence the general enthusiasm, the many public meetings, and the generous con-

ever be the position in which she is placed. I do not recollect a single controversy in which we have been involved with a foreign power, since I have been on the stage of action, when the whole sentiment of the country was united in the cause of the country. I doubt if there is another people on the face of the globe whose history presents so many instances of this want of true national pride—patriotism rather—as our own. Whether it results from any peculiar political idiosyncrasy, I know not; or whether our party feelings are so strong that we are blinded by them, and led, in their vehemence, to think that all is wrong our opponents do; or, it may be, at any rate so far as England is concerned, that some of the old colonial leaven remains, which leavens much of the lump. Be it one or the other, or whatever else, the deplorable consequence is certain; and the sentiment of Decatur, not less noble than just,—“Our country, right or wrong”—which, being truly understood,—felt rather—means that when embarked in a controversy with a foreign nation, it becomes every true citizen, after the course of his country has been decided by the constitutional authority, to submit to that authority, and to support her cause, and not the cause of her foes. This noble sentiment finds many who repudiate it,—many who possess the character, without possessing the feelings, of American citizens.”—*Extract from a speech delivered by General Cass, in the Senate, January 15th, 1853, on the resolution reaffirming the Monroe doctrine, concerning the Colonization of this Continent.*

tributions for the support of the families of those whose poverty would otherwise have prevented their enlistment.

It was determined by the War Department to call into immediate service but twenty thousand of the fifty thousand men which the President was authorized to employ. Most of these troops were furnished by the Western States,—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee—as indeed was the largest portion of those subsequently raised. These five States sent twenty-six regiments of volunteers to the field, besides a very considerable number of recruits for both the old and new regiments of the regular army. A requisition for thirty companies (three regiments) was the first made upon Ohio; and Governor Bartley, on the 20th of May, issued a proclamation appealing to the courage and patriotism of the State to render promptly the required aid. Soon afterwards, Samuel R. Curtis, Adjutant General of the State, established a general rendezvous at Camp Washington, near Cincinnati, to which companies were ordered to repair as soon as organized. In less than two weeks after the requisition of the War Department was received in Ohio, three thousand of her people, having gladly responded to their country's call, were marching towards the rendezvous; and before the middle of June, the tents of forty companies were pitched at Camp Washington. I recall with pleasure, and record with pride, the zeal and enthusiasm with which the “young giant of the West” rushed to the conflict, standing, as it does, in favorable contrast with the conduct of other States, whose chivalry and patriotism it is the fashion to applaud.

During the month of June, companies were assembled at

Camp Washington from all quarters of the State. They were chiefly from the rural districts, where the volunteers had followed those manly and laborious avocations that trained them admirably for the fatigues of war. But every trade and profession was represented in the ranks, so that it was no difficult matter, throughout the campaign, to obtain, upon call, a corps of skillful laborers in any branch of industry. There were workers in metal, wood and leather,—men who could make clothes, harness, wagons, mills, bridges, forts, laws, and pills; all of whom, of course, knew how to make a *charge*. Several more companies than were necessary to fill the requisition, came to the rendezvous, and those last to arrive were sent home; not, however, without much clamor and dissatisfaction. But in the following year (1847) some new battalions were raised in Ohio, thus affording the disappointed fire-eaters the desired opportunity of “seeing the elephant,” or of “reveling in the Halls of the Montezumas,” as the phrase went.

Governor Bartley having divided the thirty companies retained at the camp into three regiments, the officers immediately set about completing their organization by the election of field-officers. Though they were naturally desirous of promoting some of their own numbers, yet two of the regiments very disinterestedly conferred their colonelcy upon gentlemen who had not been connected with the volunteers, with a view of securing the benefits of their previous military experience. And here it may be remarked, that the company officers—who were the electors of the regimental officers—had themselves been previously chosen from the ranks, after having been sworn in as privates. Such, at least,

was the just and honorable practice, so far as my observation extended. The three regiments organized at Camp Washington, were composed and commanded as follows:

First Regiment, Colonel A. M. Mitchell; comprising companies from Cincinnati, Dayton, Hamilton, Portsmouth, Georgetown, and Sandusky.

Second Regiment, Colonel G. W. Morgan; composed of companies from Athens, Columbus, Mount Vernon, Newark, Logan, Lancaster, Circleville, Chillicothe, and Hillsborough.

Third Regiment, Colonel S. R. Curtis; of companies from Mansfield, Massilon, Wooster, Norwalk, Steubenville, St. Clairsville, Coshocton, Zanesville, and Seneca.

This Buckeye brigade was soon afterwards reviewed by Gen. Wool, (who was then en route to take command of the column assembling in Texas for the reduction of Chihuahua,) and mustered into the service of the United States for one year. Though within the influence of the many allurements of a populous city, but few of the thousands assembled at the camp failed to apply themselves diligently to the task of learning their new profession. The garb and vocation of the citizen were abandoned together; and with his uniform the volunteer assumed the duties of a soldier. Crowds of citizens from all parts of Ohio, attracted by various motives, were in daily attendance at Camp Washington. Among them were many eminent clergymen, who distributed Bibles and frequently addressed the troops. The sermons of those gentlemen were, as a volunteer remarked, “the only rations of religion issued during the campaign;” for in the army there are no Sabbaths, no days of rest and worship, as they who read these pages will not fail to observe.

Contrary to expectation, but little sickness prevailed in the encampment; and there was only one death during the month we remained at the rendezvous. Toward the end of June, our regiment, (the 1st,) having obtained its outfit of clothing and camp equipage, struck its tents, and entered that shining path which leads "to glory and the grave." The streets of Cincinnati through which we marched, to embark upon "*La Belle Riviere*," were filled with a dense multitude of spectators. There were mothers, wives, sweethearts, fathers, brothers, friends, who eagerly scanned the passing ranks for some familiar face; to which, when recognized, they ran to add another blessing and a last adieu. The friendly volleys of artillery that announced our departure from the wharf, shook stout hearts that afterwards remained unmoved, when "death spoke in every booming shot that knelled upon the ear." Many there were in that band of citizen soldiers, who gazed for the last time upon the beautiful "Queen City of the West," then arrayed in the brilliant robes of summer; on her shoulders, a mantle of the richest green; in her hair, fruitful vines and fragrant flowers; her imperial head tiaraed with gems of rural architecture that sparkled brightly in the morning sun.

The Fourth of July found us afloat on the Mississippi, and still many hundreds of miles above New Orleans. The soldiers, who had not then ceased to be sovereigns, were not disposed to let the birth-day of Independence pass by without the usual amount of jollity and speechifying. With a familiarity, and in terms that would doubtless have shocked the martinets of the regular army, several officers were "called

out," and addressed the troops. The last, and of course the best speaker, was General Hamer, who possessed an extended and enviable reputation as an orator, but whom it had never been my good fortune to hear until that day; and never before or since have I listened to a more witching speech. His manner was natural; his gestures, graceful; his words well selected from an abundant store; his figures, beautiful and striking; and his voice, clear and musical as a trumpet. As a few of the men had previously evinced a mutinous disposition, he seized the occasion to denounce a spirit so dangerous to the happiness of the soldier and the success of the regiment. He illustrated the importance of subordination and discipline by examples from history; he dwelt upon the privations and sufferings of the men of the Revolution; teaching his hearers that glory was the sweet fruit of toil and danger, not of idleness and pleasure.

"For sluggard's brow the laurel never grows,
Renown is not the child of indolent repose."

Such a speech was not without its influence, and proved again the superior efficacy of words wisely wielded, in the conquest of human passions. Hamer was indeed a perfect master of that eloquence which, either in sprightly conversation or grave discourse, went directly to the soldiers' hearts.

Early in July we arrived at New Orleans, whence the regiment immediately sailed for Brazos Santiago, leaving the writer, who had been attacked by fever on the Mississippi, to mend or end his humble existence in that city, not remarkable for its salubrity in the dog days. Two long weeks of solitude and pain there passed heavily by, during which time the sound

of artillery and the hurrahs of the crowds that thronged the streets, daily penetrated to his chamber, announcing the arrival of troops from the North, and their departure for the hostile shores of Mexico.

The governors of Louisiana and Texas, upon whom, it will be remembered, General Taylor had called for reinforcements, had long previously complied with his requisition; but their troops, though raised almost as quickly as the fabled battalions of Cadmus, and transported with the speed of steam, arrived too late to share the first harvest of laurels. The battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma had been fought and won by our gallant little army. The nation, that had awaited the shock with breathless anxiety, was dazzled by the radiance of those brilliant victories. From that hour, "Old Rough and Ready" became the first of living men in the hearts of his countrymen; and as the gloom of war deepened, the glittering galaxy of his manly virtues shone out with that enduring lustre, which no subsequent calumny could obscure. The battles on the Rio Grande opened a campaign, which, terminating with the perilous conflict on the heights of Buena Vista, need not shrink from a comparison with any in our history; and whatever may be the verdict of posterity concerning the justice of the war, it must ever be conceded that it was conducted on our part with great humanity, and waged to a successful issue with a skill and prowess never surpassed in any quarter of the globe.

CHAPTER II.

Departure from New Orleans—Brazos Santiago—"A man overboard."—Scenes on the Island—A fire in the rear—The mouth of the Rio Grande—Volunteers "falling back on New Orleans"—Burrita—Camp Belknap—The cat-fish war—Sickness and trials of the troops—The battle fields of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma.

Despairing of convalescence in the atmosphere of New Orleans, and being anxious to join our regiment before the contemplated invasion of Mexico should be set on foot, a brother officer, also an invalid, and myself, concerted arrangements to decamp. Our medical attendant offered no serious objections, either because he thought our chance of recovery as good in one place as another, or agreed with us in believing that the voyage across the Gulf would dissipate the slow, burning fever which his potions had failed to extinguish. We therefore caused ourselves to be conveyed on board the steamer "Alabama," then about to start for Brazos Santiago. In her cabin were assembled forty or fifty officers, and on her decks a crowd of volunteers; many of whom, like ourselves, were feeble and emaciated from recent sickness, and not very redoubtable looking soldiers certainly. But all were filled with the ardor and ambition of youth, and were hastening with joyful anticipations to range themselves under the standard of the gallant General from whom they were to receive their first lessons in the art of war. We left New Orleans on the 26th of July, 1846, and anchored off the Brazos before daylight