

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

on the morning of the 29th. The weather was intensely hot. Not a breath of wind ruffled the smooth glassy surface of the Gulf, and during the three days occupied in the passage, the feverish invalids watched and panted in vain for the sea breeze which we had hoped would invigorate our wasted bodies. Thanks to the genius of Fulton, ours was a steam ship, and, heedless of the calm, glided in triumph over the slumbering sea. Many unfortunate companies, transported in sail vessels, were two weeks on the voyage. An officer of my acquaintance was becalmed ten days, in a filthy little schooner, in which, as he gravely informed us, "the passengers had to fight like terriers to keep the rats from the cabin table." He ever afterwards spoke of the voyage as the veritable purgatory between *heaven* (the United States) and *hell* (Mexico); commencing many a story or jest with the preface—"When I was in purgatory."

At dawn on the 29th, we hastened on deck to see the land which Spanish chivalry and more recently American courage had invested with charms that kindled the most romantic spirit of adventure. Next to the classic shores of the Mediterranean, those of Mexico and Central America, yet so rich in relics of ancient art, had long been most interesting to me. Who, perusing the brilliant pages of Prescott, does not desire to visit the grand and beautiful scenes, he so grandly and beautifully describes? To revel among the intoxicating perfumes and flowery plains of the *tierra caliente*; to wander among the verdant fields and fruits of the *tierra templada*; to gaze upon the magnificent scenery and wonderful exhibitions of Aztec civilization displayed in profusion throughout the

*tierra fria!* To conquer the descendants of the Spanish conquerors, and to plant the flag of our young republic upon the capital reared centuries ago above the ruins of Montezuma's palaces! What prospect more captivating to the youthful imagination?

Our first glimpse, however, of the hostile coast, was not particularly fascinating. The country before us, faintly revealed in the glimmering light of the morning, seemed to be but "a dreary waste, expanding to the sky." A narrow belt of sand, stretching northward as far as the eye could reach, lay between us and the main land. This was intersected by shallow channels, which formed *los brazos de San Iago*, the arms of St. James. On one of the Islands thus formed, was located our principal army depôt; and on the opposite side of the broad lagoon, which was spread out between the Island and the main, was Point Isabel.

A number of large transports lay around us, all full of troops, anxiously awaiting their turn to be disembarked. It was five miles from the anchorage to the Brazos, and though a busy fleet of little steamers and schooners was constantly plying between the ships and the landing, the business seemed to progress but slowly. Many hours elapsed before a lighter approached the Alabama, during which time we sat impatiently gazing upon the desolate picture of water and sand, for not a tree could be seen in the distant perspective. A strong breeze had sprung up with the morning, and when the lighter came alongside, there was such a heavy sea on, that it was no easy matter to transfer our troops and baggage to her deck. While all hands were engaged in the work,

that startling cry, "a man overboard," rang through the ship. An eccentric little Frenchman, by profession a cook, in the service of an officer of the Maryland volunteers, had thrown himself into the sea. It was supposed at the moment, that he had fallen from the gangway in attempting to reach the lighter, as the footing was very unsteady and unsafe for landsmen. Fortunately or unfortunately for the rash Gaul, his body would not sink, either in consequence of the spirits it contained, or because it was buoyed by the action of the tide under the two vessels, between which he had precipitated himself. He floated like some huge sea-frog upon the surface, but in imminent danger of being crushed between the ships, whose sides were occasionally grinding hard against each other. Before that, however, could happen, almost indeed before the alarm was given, the mate of the Alabama, seizing a rope, leaped overboard and rescued Monsieur le Cuisinier, much to his dissatisfaction and disgust evidently, and as he was hauled on deck, dangling and twisting at the end of the rope, he looked daggers at the stout and daring sailor who had so gallantly saved him from the sharks. When it was understood that he had attempted "that poor-soul'd piece of heroism, self-slaughter," the sympathy of the crowd was quickly checked, and many of the spectators kindly wished him "better luck in his next effort."

The scene at the landing was a lively and interesting one. Two or three months previous, the Island had been a wild and uninhabited ridge of sand, whose solitude was broken only by the melancholy dirge of the great waves that broke upon its shore. Now, it was alive with busy men; soldiers,

sailors, artizans and others, who were running to and fro like ants among the hillocks the winds had whirled up from its surface. Tradition relates that a flourishing village (flourishing after the Mexican fashion, I presume) formerly existed at Brazos Santiago; and that one morning, after a terrific storm had raged through the night, the amazed inhabitants of the main land looked out in vain for the hamlet that had so long stood firm amid the billows of the Gulf. The last sun had left it gleaming there like a beautiful shell on the shore; the next, shone upon a sea of foam that danced wildly o'er its walls. The tempest had come in darkness and wrath, and swallowed up the village and its people, not one of whom is said to have escaped. The island was not inhabited again, until General Taylor occupied it, as a favorable position from which to extend his military operations. The harbor is a very poor and unsafe one; yet perhaps there are not many better on the coast of Mexico, which, though often swept by destructive tornados, offers but few havens to the navigator.

The only house at the Brazos, was a small frame shed, built but a few yards from the water's edge, and which contained the offices of the quarter-master and commissary of the depôt. It was elevated about three feet from the ground, upon Palmetto logs, and beneath it lay more than a dozen volunteers, who, sorely stricken by disease, had sought its welcome shade. Around and near the building were piled great heaps of provisions and munitions of war. The labor of unloading the vessels and rolling barrels, boxes, etc., across the beach to the dry sand hills, was performed by a gang of swarthy Mexicans. These industrious gentlemen were by no

means overdressed, their wearing apparel consisting of a *sombrero* alone. Thus lightly attired, they could labor with impunity under the broiling suns of their native land; and, tempted by high wages, had abandoned for awhile the indolence in which they delight. Mechanics, too, were at work on all sides; and sutlers, with their merchandise displayed under awnings, were busily engaged in supplying, at California prices, the numerous wants of men so suddenly deprived of their ordinary comforts. Farther back from the shore, amid the deep hot sands, four or five lately arrived regiments were encamped, awaiting transportation to the less unpleasant banks of the Rio Grande, distant about eight miles from the island.

At that time, and indeed until a very late period in the campaign, there was a lamentable scarcity of wagons, and consequently our troops were long detained in the suffocating atmosphere of that sandy waste at the Brazos, before they could obtain the means of removing their sick and baggage to the more salubrious location selected for the volunteers in the vicinity of Burrita. Many a poor fellow, choked then with sand and parched with fever, will long remember the sufferings that he endured there. To heighten the misery of the soldiers, infectious diseases broke out amongst them. I was informed, that at the time of our arrival, one-fourth of an Indiana regiment was sick with the measles; and the only comfortable hospital at Point Isabel being filled with wounded regulars, these unfortunate volunteers lay at their miserable camp, half buried with the drifting sand. Before the termination

of the year, however, many convenient hospitals were established, ample means of transportation were provided, and the comforts of life were so multiplied at all our posts, that the volunteers of 1847 suffered but little in comparison with those of 1846. A government, pursuing the wise policy that distinguishes ours in its military establishments, cannot be expected to set an army in the field, or a navy on the sea, in a day; yet, if the Cabinet had regarded the words of wisdom contained in the somewhat famous letter of the Commander-in-chief, General Scott, our privations would have been comparatively few and trifling, while, at the same time, the true interests of the country would have been promoted. The troops would have been accompanied by all the necessary supplies and material of war, and hundreds of Americans rescued from inglorious graves upon the coast, to meet the enemy in battle.

I was detained at Brazos Santiago but a few hours, during most of which time I lay on the beach close to a pile of baggage and camp equipage, so arranged as to afford me some shelter from the sun's rays. Much to my surprise and satisfaction, I was enabled to procure some ice, sold from a Boston vessel at one dollar per pound, which costly and fleeting luxury allayed my fever very much. Having ascertained that my regiment was encamped on the left bank of the Rio Grande, about three leagues from "the mouth," and being as yet too feeble for the saddle, I reëmbarked in a small vessel, bound to the river for a cargo of fresh water. That article, by the way, is not to be found on the island; nor was the water brought from the Rio

Grande very fresh or palatable after standing in barrels. Of course, all kinds of liquor were at a premium in that thirsty place. This scarcity doubtless prompted to an amusing trick, whereby, as will be perceived, a tolerably shrewd Yankee got a "fire in the rear," which demolished his calculations for a small fortune. Jonathan had by some means obtained a barrel of cider, with which small stock he determined to "set up" business. To scrape together a few boards and odd bits of canvass, enough to build a small shed, was but the work of a brief hour; to set his barrel on a couple of skids in the back part of the tent, to tap it and to commence retailing the cider at two dimes a glass, occupied but a short time more. Customers flocked in by dozens, and our Yankee was making his "eternal fortin" at a stride. Some of his patrons complained, that two dimes a glass for cider was an outrageous price; but the times were hard as well as hot, whisky scarce, water bad, the retailer's conscience easy; he had all the cider in the market, and he "raley could not afford to sell any cheaper."

For several hours the Yankee was as popular as a paymaster, crowds filled his shanty, his cider went off rapidly, and the deep pockets of his short-legged pantaloons contained silver enough to start a free bank in Indiana. But the tide of fortune unfortunately began to ebb before the cider was half sold; his patrons gradually fell off, and by the middle of the afternoon, Jonathan was left alone with his barrel, to whittle and cogitate upon the mutability of trade; speculating it may be, too, as to the time required in that climate to convert apple juice into vinegar. Towards even-

ing, a customer appeared in the tent, and called for a glass of cider. The retailer hastened to draw the desired potation. The customer, after drinking, took out his purse and inquired the price.

"Two dimes," said the Yankee.

"Two what?" exclaimed the customer.

"Two dimes," coolly replied Jonathan.

"Two devils," snarled the customer; "why I can get just as good cider here for five cents a glass."

"No you can't," drawled the Yankee; "there aint a pint of cider 'cept what I've got in that are barril this side of Orleans, I'm darned if there is."

"I know better," indignantly retorted the purchaser; "I bought a glass not an hour ago, and only paid five cents for it."

"Pd like to know just where you effected that small transaction?" inquired the Yankee.

"Right round here," was the answer.

"I guess it was—*right round here*; right round *where*, I'd like to know?" continued the cider seller.

"Why, close by here somewhere, just back of your place:" rejoined the customer.

"I'll bet you tu drinks you did'nt," said the Yankee, "and we'll go right round and see."

"Done," responded the customer; and off they started.

Sure enough, "*right round there*" they found another establishment in full blast. A second Yankee had rigged an awning behind the first Yankee's shed, had tapped the rear end of the aforesaid cider barrel through a board, and was

retailing it at five cents a glass to a perfect rush of customers.

We had a short but rough passage from Brazos Santiago to the mouth of the Rio Grande; as the Gulf, long so calm, was then lashed into fury by the winds. In attempting to enter the river, our little vessel was driven upon the bar, and remained through the night in that dangerous position; the surf breaking, at intervals, completely over her. A schooner, which lay aground quite near us, was compelled to give the most valuable part of her cargo to the ravenous ocean, that, in truth, seems to be "at eternal war with man." Old Neptune was evidently propitiated by the gift, for soon afterwards, much to our joy, the wind abated, and with the flood tide of the morning we entered the celebrated Rio Bravo del Norte.

It is quite a narrow river at its mouth, not more than three or four hundred yards wide, but in the wet season disembogues an immense volume of water. On the right bank at that place, is a small collection of mud and reed huts, occupied by Mexican fishermen and herdsman. The latter pasture large herds of cattle in the marshes, which extend many miles back from the coast on both sides of the river. This miserable village was, I believe, called by the natives, Resguardo; but among our people it was known as the City of Bagdad. When we revisited it, on our return to the United States in the following year, it had been somewhat improved and Americanized. The few poor brown and bare-legged fishermen having been initiated into some of the mysteries of our elective system, were then engaged in an animated canvass for the high office of Alcalde. A Yankee, perhaps

the sharp cider dealer of Brazos Santiago, was the democratic candidate, and treated the sovereigns to bad liquor and worse stump speeches alternately. As we were told by those who listened to one of his harangues, that he took good care to represent himself as the only disinterested friend and obedient servant of the people; and denounced his opponent, who, by the way, was some poverty-stricken and ragged Mexican, as an aristocratic whig; in short, a despot in disguise; it is probable that Jonathan was triumphantly elected, and the country saved from the sword and chains of a tyrant.

We landed on the Texan bank of the river, opposite Bagdad, where was located another of our army depôts. At that place, which was known throughout the war as "the mouth," we beheld the same scenes of uproar, confusion, and bustle, that had been witnessed the previous day at the Brazos. Soldiers, sailors, and sutlers, clerks, cooks, and camp-followers—a motley multitude, all "full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard," were crowded along the shore among barrels, boxes, tents, wagons, and artillery. The naked Mexican laborers appeared to be the only people silent and really at work. At "the mouth" we met the army of "three months' volunteers," who had hastened to join General Taylor at the commencement of hostilities; and who were then, as one of their number jocosely remarked, *falling back on New Orleans*. It is a fact, which certain gasconaders, who engage in the poor business of estimating the amount of blood and sweat that each section of our Union expended in the war, will do well to bear in mind, that six regiments of Louisiana

volunteers, one of Texas (foot), a battalion of Alabama, and one of Missouri Infantry, retired from the frontier without firing a gun or even seeing the foe. Of all those mentioned, but one company (Captain Blanchard's, of Louisiana) remained. The residue, declining to extend their term of service to twelve months, were discharged by order of the War Department.

After a short detention, caused by the usual parley with the quarter-master of the post, we obtained transportation on a small river steamer to the village of Burrita, around which the volunteer army was encamped. The village is situated on the first inland elevation; and is but eight miles from the coast by the road, though fifteen by the river,—so crooked is the course of the stream, as it doubles through the intervening plain. It was the middle of the rainy season, and the swollen Grande poured along with such an impetuous current, that we were nearly four hours in reaching our destination. All of that time our boat was paddling to and fro across the marshes, with, as it appeared to me, one or the other broadside constantly turned toward the village and camp, which were in full view all the way. The appearance of Burrita, composed of a score of mud hovels, ludicrously recalled the glowing panegyrics with which some of our editors, a month previous, had announced the capture of that *stronghold* of the Mexican nation. "GLORIOUS NEWS FROM THE ARMY! ANOTHER TRIUMPH! BURRITA HAS FALLEN! THE ENTIRE CITY REDUCED TO ASHES!!" Such was the startling caption of the extras which the news-carriers thrust under the spectacles of

peaceable and nervous old gentlemen in our cities, and who, as they read, doubtless in imagination saw—

"High towers, fair temples, goodly theaters,  
Strong walls, rich porches, princely palaces,  
Fine streets, brave houses, sacred sepulchres,  
Sure gates, sweet gardens, stately galleries,  
All these (oh, pity!) now turn'd to dust."

My regiment had spread its canvas on the Texan bank of the Rio Grande, opposite Burrita, among some scrubby trees and bushes; which, however insignificant as specimens of the vegetable kingdom, relieved the eye, and afforded some protection from the clouds of scorching sand that, rising on the gulf shore, often rolled inland upon the breeze like pillars of fire. This location was called "Camp Belknap,"—the name of an officer of the General Staff, who had selected it. On entering the camp, and finding myself surrounded by so many familiar faces, I really felt like one who had just reached home after a long absence. From that hour my pertinacious fever began to succumb, though it was several weeks before it released me from its grasp. Many of our men, in their acclimation, suffered in a like manner—their fevers appearing to rise and go down with the sun, thus daily and gradually consuming the strength, and sapping the constitution of the most robust. Young troops, entering upon the duties and dangers of an active campaign, are not subject to ennui; and though during our stay at Camp Belknap much sickness prevailed, our life was one of cheerful excitement and bustle. The officers and men were attentive and industrious, and earnestly commenced upon a thorough system of instruction and discipline. On entering the field with the troops of other

States, a desirable *esprit du corps* had been awakened. A kindly feeling also existed between the officers and soldiers, which was strongly cemented by the common trials and triumphs of the campaign. There were some accomplished and agreeable officers in the First Ohio regiment, whose unassuming manners, united with happy social qualities, cheerful wit and humor, rendered them pleasant companions, and enlivened many a dreary scene. The legal profession was well represented among them, as indeed it was in every corps—so numerous as almost to verify Dryden's verse,

"Soldiers the lawyers, and the bar the field."

I have thought that a green bag would have been no inappropriate banner for the volunteer army.

The evening of my arrival at Camp Belknap, I received from our adjutant (who, if reports be correct, did not, on the occasion, place himself in the way of sharing very largely in the beatitude promised the peace-makers,) an amusing account of a difficulty that had occurred between our regiment and the Baltimore battalion, originating in *the larceny of a cat-fish* belonging to our colonel; and which trifling cause had nearly resulted in a disgraceful fight between the two regiments. At that time, Colonels M. and W., the commanders of the belligerent battalions were absent, having gone to head-quarters at Matamoros in consequence of the affair. Various accounts of the row reached the newspapers at home; and in the dearth of more interesting intelligence, their readers were regaled with some entertaining reports of the "cat-fish war." It is to be regretted that the ill-feeling aroused by this quarrel, was permitted, by one of the parties

concerned, to manifest itself at a subsequent interesting period.

Between Camp Belknap and the river was a swamp, about a mile in width, through which, from the want of wagons, the men were compelled to wade for all their provisions,—the tent of the commissary being pitched upon the banks of the Rio Grande. All our water, too, was brought from the river; for the ponds in the vicinity of our camp were salt, and the few wells that were dug were as bitter as the fountain of Marah. These supplies were carried in barrels, swung on poles, the ends of which rested upon the aching shoulders of the volunteers, and sinking them knee-deep in the mire. Much of the sickness that so thinned the ranks of the army on the coast was perhaps induced by the severity of these necessary labors. To their ignorance of the art of cooking, however, must be attributed many of the common and painful complaints with which the soldiers suffered, for at that time they had not penetrated far into the mysteries of the culinary science. After a few weeks' practice, when they had learned how best to prepare their food, that class of diseases disappeared. While we lay at Camp Belknap,—nearly two weeks—about one hundred of the eight hundred, rank and file, contained in our regiment, were daily reported on that melancholy catalogue, the surgeon's morning return. Many were at once disabled, and discharged from further service. Indeed I do not think we could have mustered more than six hundred bayonets at Camargo, and scarcely five hundred at Monterey, so rapidly did the climate, like a skillful anatomist, designate and discard all the unsound men. The great



number of lives lost by disease in Mexico has caused a very general belief among our people that the country is unfavorable to health. But it must be remembered, in this connection, that our army landed there at the very worst season, and, indeed, the only unpleasant one of the year. The low grounds were overflowed, and the whole country saturated with water, the exhalations from which were quickened by the heat of summer into pestilent malaria. For weeks (until September) it rained every day; not continuously, but at intervals, in sudden and drenching showers, each followed by a burst of melting sunshine. These deluging rains cooled the enthusiasm of a few modern paladins, who found but little romance in the privations and sober realities of the camp.

Among the little *désagrémens* attending our sojourn on the lower Rio Grande, not the least were caused by the venomous insects and reptiles that swarmed on those burning sands, and allowed us no repose. Our camp was infested by snakes, tarantulas, ants, centipedes, lizards, horned toads, scorpions, fleas, spiders,—*et id genus omne*. Of these, the ants were, I think, the most annoying. They not only found their way into our food, but attacked our persons boldly, crawling into our blankets or clothes, and stinging with remarkable severity. But the far-famed tarantula was most dreaded. Our assistant surgeon was bitten by one of them, and his was the only case of the kind in our regiment. The effect of the poison was immediate and alarming. So violent were his spasms, that the united strength of several men was required to confine him to his tent, from which he had deliriously rushed soon after receiving the wound.

The consecrated and still ensanguined fields of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, were not many leagues distant from Camp Belknap; and during our stay there, many of our people took occasion to visit them, in company sometimes with those who had witnessed, and could communicate many thrilling incidents of the battles. It was well ascertained that the enemy had at least five thousand fighting men at Palo Alto, while General Taylor's effective force did not much exceed two thousand. Many officers with whom I conversed on the subject united in attributing their success mainly to the artillery. In the action of the 8th of May, was first demonstrated, in the practical operations of war, the wonderful perfection of our light field-batteries. The prairie upon which the hostile forces met, was admirably adapted for their evolutions, and they made terrible havoc in the Mexican ranks. The distinguished *Guarda Costa* battalion of Tampico, is said to have been almost extinguished by the artillery, so boldly and brilliantly manœvered by Duncan and Ringgold. It is also affirmed that, by a single discharge of one of these batteries, an entire band of Mexican musicians was exterminated, while executing one of their grand martial bravuras.

It is not improbable that General Arista, perceiving at Palo Alto how a complete knowledge of the artillery arm equalized the strength of armies differing so greatly in numbers, was thereby induced to fall back on the morning of the 9th to the broken and covered ground at Resaca, where the bayonet and sabre should decide the combat. But there again his *quantity* yielded to what General Taylor calls in his offi-

cial report, "the superior *quality* of our officers and men;" and the Mexicans were completely routed, "horse and foot." Confused and panic-stricken, they fled to the Rio Grande, and hundreds escaped the wrath of the battle only to perish in its waves. A few days before, that scattered and flying army had crossed it elated with hope and assured of victory. Nothing can be more conclusive of the confidence which General Arista had in the result, than the fact that he, a soldier of considerable talent and experience, unprovided with pontoons, should decide to hazard a battle with a deep unbridged river in his rear; a position from which, in the event of defeat, would result the loss of his army, and open the northern frontier of his country to our victorious arms. The entire Mexican army had crossed to the Texan bank in two small boats, thus causing a delay of twenty-four hours, by which Arista had been prevented from attacking Taylor on his march from Fort Brown to Point Isabel, on the 2d of May, as he intended. Under the circumstances, it is not strange that the Mexican army, on reëntering Matamoros, should be diminished to one-fifth of its original strength; or that it should be wary of again offering battle in the open field. We shall see how strongly and judiciously it was posted in the next engagement of the war. The Mexican historians ascribe the loss of the battles of the Rio Grande to the distrust and jealousy which existed between Generals Arista and Ampudia. It was currently reported among the Mexicans that General Don Pedro de Ampudia was the first to abandon the field of Resaca; and from his conduct in subsequent bat-

ties, there arises a suspicion that Senor Pedro is duly impressed with the conviction that

"Timely running's no mean part  
Of conduct in the martial art."