

town had not suffered in the bombardment, owing to its distance from Fort Brown, and the small calibre of our guns. At the American hotel, in the *calle de Terran*, we were shown some balls which had been thrown by Bragg's battery into the adjacent garden. Such souvenirs of those perilous days in May were interesting to us, who had yet to hear

"The death-shot hissing from afar—
The shock, the shout, the groan of war."

In our stroll through the streets, we saw many *senoritas*, sitting at the windows—a favorite position—chatting and smoking; for all the women, even of the most polished circles, use the fragrant weed. They are all alike, too, in having large dark eyes and black glossy hair; the last, it is intimated, is not unseldom frequented by those "ugly, sprawlin, crowlin ferlies," which the Ayrshire poet once observed upon a lady's bonnet, and so humorously addressed. In this, as in many other respects, did some of our young and adventurous soldiers, in whose minds romance and poetry had painted glowing pictures of Spanish beauty and grandeur, suffer a disagreeable disenchantment 'n the city of Matamoros.

Of course, the foregoing remarks will not be understood as referring to the *upper tendom* of Matamoros. But the women of Mexico,—superior in all classes to the men—even of the best society, do not contrast very favorably with their sex in our country, either in their mental or personal charms. True, their tresses may be like the raven's wing; their eyes may "shame a night of starlight gleams;" but among them is rarely seen

"That purity and modesty of mien,
The mind, the music breathing from the face,"

which so enhances loveliness in woman, and stamps her—angel. Give me the blue eyes, fair locks, and snowy hands, of our northern clime.

During our stay at Matamoros we visited the market plaza, where we saw a goodly quantity and variety of fruits and vegetables,—some of them quite new to us. But little space was devoted to butchers' stalls, from which, and subsequent observation, I inferred that the people consumed much less meat than we carnivorous Americans. The crowd of men and women assembled there, citizens and rustics, were all smoking. The towns people were generally pretty well dressed; but the costume of the countrymen was plain, and peculiar enough to be interesting. Scandals of thick hide, coarse cotton trowsers, the unsightly national *sombrero*, with the indispensable blanket, comprise their raiment. Some wear jerkins and pants of leather, both ornamented with jingling bell-buttons, which, with their huge iron spurs, cause a great rattle and clatter at every movement. To the Rancheros, who wear this economical apparel,—so suitable to their occupation in the thorny chaparral—the Texans have given the expressive name of Greasers. One has but to see them clad in their leather armor, shining from grease and long usage, to be satisfied of its propriety.

In one corner of the market square, were some stacks of fresh grass and fodder, which, as they seemed to possess the power of locomotion, attracted the attention of my companions. Great was the merriment when, on approaching one of them to penetrate the mystery, the half smothered bray of an ass broke upon our ears. The immense and well-packed

burden, sweeping the ground on every side, so completely concealed the patient little donkey, that, like his brother of the fable who assumed the lion's skin and regal dignity, he might have preserved a successful *incog* but for his foolish and betraying bray.

Among other places, we visited the office of "The American Flag," a spirited little tri-weekly paper, the publication of which was commenced soon after the capture of the town. Its editors, Fleeson, Peoples & Co., kindly offered us late files of New Orleans papers. There was a great number of patriotic typos in the volunteer army; and newspapers were established in the course of the war, at every important point occupied by our troops. Thus, in addition to the "Flag," we had subsequently in Northern Mexico, the "Pioneer," at Monterey, and the "Picket-Guard," at Saltillo. The native population of the town is said to be about three thousand, but at that time the place was full of soldiers, and adventurers of every description. For the consideration of some of these last, the following polite and pointed advertisement (which is copied from the "American Flag" of that date—Sunday, August 9th, 1846) was probably intended:

TO GENTLEMEN OUT OF EMPLOYMENT.

"I wish to hire two industrious gentlemen to work in my stable. Those who have no business of their own, that can work without getting drunk, and obey instructions, can obtain immediate employment and good pay by applying in time to
ISRAEL B. BIGELOW."

That particular calmness which distinguishes the Sabbath in all God-abiding communities, and by which the holy day is intuitively recognized under all circumstances, did not appear "to brood with dove-like wings" over Matamoros. Stores and drinking-houses were open in every street; and it was evident, from the angry shouts and sound of breaking glass that issued from some of the latter, that they were doing a *smashing business*. In consequence of the disorders arising from intoxication, General Taylor, before starting for Camargo, had enacted a stringent anti-liquor law, to take effect as soon as the stock on hand should be exhausted; but it is probable that the adroit smugglers never permitted that event to occur.*

A theater had also been opened by an enterprising histrionic company from New Orleans, whose bill for that evening

* Orders }
No. 94. } *Head-Quarters, Army of Occupation,*
Matamoros, August 2, 1846.

No spirituous liquors will be permitted to enter the river or the city of Matamoros, for the purposes of barter or traffic, on account of any person whatever, whether sutlers in the army, or private dealers. Any liquors found in violation of this order, will be confiscated and sent to the Quarter-Master in New Orleans, to be sold: one-half of the proceeds for the benefit of the informant, the other half to be applied to the support of the hospital department. The merchants in Matamoros will be permitted to vend the liquors they may have on hand, but to receive no new supplies.

The Commanding General issues this order under the sanction of the General Government, and calls upon all officers to give their aid in executing its provisions. The Quarter-Master's Department, and Colonel Clarke, will take the necessary measures to have it communicated to the persons interested, particularly to the dealers in Matamoros, and the masters of all public transports, or other vessels, in the river: Any steamboat captains, or other hired persons, that are found violating it, will be at once discharged from the service.

By order of Major General TAYLOR:

W. W. S. BLISS.
Assistant Adjutant General.

was quite in keeping with the place, if not with the day. The manager posted the public that, "On Sunday evening, August 9th, will be presented for the first time, 'The Dumb Girl of Genoa,' and 'The Forest Rose,' together with a great variety of singing; the whole to conclude with a dance in wooden shoes, that will be a caution to corns and cockroaches."

At Matamoros, our men first tasted that inebriating beverage, *pulque*, the whisky of Mexico. Whether in consequence of their indulgence in it, or some other cause, some of them were reported as "absent without leave," when we left the town on the 10th of August; and, by their disobedience, were compelled to measure with fatiguing steps the land route to Camargo.

The next village of any importance above Matamoros, is Reynosa. There we found a small garrison of regular troops. It is very prettily situated on a commanding elevation, about a mile from the right bank of the Rio Grande, and contains some substantial stone houses; but its general appearance, like that of almost everything else in the country, indicates dilapidation and decay. A short distance below the landing, we passed a number of women bathing in the river; the length of their hair and tongues disclosing their sex. In the course of our voyage, we encountered several parties of natives washing themselves in the discolored stream, many of whom were as destitute of modesty as of clothing. From the custom, not uncommon among the lowest class, of wearing pantaloons only, their tawny bodies have been dyed by the sun and air, many shades darker than their legs. Hence the droll

mistake of one of our volunteers, who gravely insisted with his comrades that these swimmers were dressed in "yallar buckskin tights."

Some of these borderers were quite friendly, and often hailed our boat, desiring to sell chickens, eggs, melons, and milk. With the view of obtaining supplies of these rare delicacies, we generally stopped at dark in the vicinity of a rancho; though, sometimes, we were compelled to "tie up" at places where, apparently, the foot of man had never trod. Near one of the landing places between Matamoros and Reynosa, our soldiers had an opportunity of witnessing that novel scene of revelry—a *fandango*. Such social assemblies are of frequent occurrence, and afford the common people their chief amusement. A smooth, well-beaten circle in the open air is generally the *salle de danse* on these festive occasions. This is illuminated with torches, and surrounded by tables for gaming, to which the Mexicans seem passionately addicted. There are tables also for the sale of the vile liquors, and other products of the country, which are pleasantly termed *refreshments*. A swarthy and sweating crowd, of both sexes, engaged in waltzing, gambling, smoking, drinking, etc., I understand to be a *fandango*.

One night our boat was moored near a solitary hut, in which dwelt an old Mexican fiddler. As soon as the musical talents of its occupant were discovered, the men sought permission to spend the evening ashore, for the purpose of enjoying, what is termed in our western parlance, "a stag dance." Accordingly, the whole detachment landed—except the sick, and a few elderly men who had no taste for such

boisterous mirth—and soon the fun grew “fast and furious.” It was a singular spectacle, as revealed to us by the light of a huge fire on the bank, at which some hungry soldiers were roasting a goat; and the ruddy glow emitted by the smoldering furnaces of the steamer, as she lay with bows inclined to the shore. Those who heard that “brisk awakening viol,” or witnessed that “gay fantastic round,” certainly were not inclined to think, that

“They saw in Tempe’s vale her native maids,

Amidst the festal sounding shades,

To some unwearied minstrel dancing.”

In front of the cottage of the musical shepherd, sat one of our fifers and the new-found son of Apollo. Though they could communicate with each other only through those *dulcet* symphonies,—compared with which “*language* is said to be faint and weak,”—yet they formed an amiable orchestra; and, aided by the hoarse blasts of steam which were occasionally suffered to escape from the boat, succeeded admirably in “making the night hideous with discordant sounds.” One would have supposed, from the energy and evident delight of the two artists, thus strangely brought together, that they, at least, imagined themselves possessed by the spirits of Pan and Paganini. The dancing, too, it must be admitted, was eminently suited to the music, and became stronger in proportion as the wild strains grew louder. As the performers trod the measure not upon “the light fantastic toe” alone, but with their whole *soles*, the clatter of their heavy shoes, like the sound of many cymbals, united to swell the din. The soldiers, glad to be released from the crowded quarters to

which they had long been confined, vied with each other in the extent and singularity of their saltations. They danced in couples, but without much regard to time or order; and at intervals the whole party indulged in a promenade or rather *gallopade* of two or three *heats* around the hut. A heavy rain terminated the sport at a seasonable hour, and the men returned to the boat much amused and refreshed by their exercise.

We suffered much while cribbed upon the narrow decks of the steamboat, from the great heat of the weather, and the mosquitos that nightly environed us like a legion of foul fiends. To the sick (and there were many on board) those roasting days and restless nights were particularly trying. We lost but one man during the trip,—one of the Dayton volunteers, Co. B. His death had a very depressing effect upon the invalids who were stretched around him on the cabin floor, and who seemed not to have anticipated the sudden invasion of the King of Terrors. Late in the afternoon of the day of his decease, we landed to perform the sad funeral rites of poor Dix,—for such was his name. “No useless coffin inclosed his breast,” but wrapped in his blanket, the dead volunteer was borne in the arms of his comrades to a grave which had been prepared in the chaparral, close by the shore, and where the last honors were performed by a corporal’s guard. Attracted by the volleys of the funeral escort, and understanding their import, a very respectable old Mexican, whose *hacienda* was near by, came down to the boat. He was accompanied by his wife, a fine specimen of the Spanish matron, in manners and appearance. They were

closely followed by a timid female slave, who carried in her arms a neatly dressed child. Pleased with the superior air and bearing of this family group, and gratified by the confidence they exhibited, we invited them to the cabin, where we passed a pleasant half hour in conversation with them. The old gentleman was well informed on the topics of the times; and far better acquainted than most of his countrymen with the power and resources of the hostile republics. He confessed that he saw but little prospect of success for Mexico in the pending struggle; acknowledged that his country was badly governed; and that he did not care much how the war terminated. These remarks were received with some *grains of salt*. His wife—a handsome woman, with pleasing manners, and quite *fair* as well as *fat* and *forty*—seemed pleased with the visit, and gracefully acknowledged the respectful attentions of our people and their kindly notices of her child.

As our boat-captain was anxious to clean out the boilers, in which much mud had accumulated, we determined to remain all night at the place; and informed Senor —, when he arose to depart, that we would take pleasure in returning his visit after supper. We did so at the time appointed. On arriving at the house, or *houses*, (for there were several small tenements clustered around the principal building,—the former occupied by the *peons*,) we were politely received by our host, and offered cigaritas and seats in the open air. The Mexicans generally are skillful fabricators of *cigaritas*; little cigars made of fine cut tobacco, with wrappers of thin corn-husk or paper. These materials they always carry about their persons,—the tobacco frequently tied up in the corner

of the pocket-handkerchief, and the husk in the *sombrero*. Our host was a capital cigar-maker, and while engaged in earnest conversation, manufactured the pleasant little *rolls* as fast as three or four persons could consume them. He was a man of considerable substance, and in addition to his *casa de campo* (country house) owned, as he informed us, a dwelling in the town of Reynosa. On his large estate, which extended for many leagues along the river, were grazing a great number of mustangs, mules, cattle, sheep and goats; the tithe of which, he said, were sometimes stolen by the Camanches, at one fell swoop. Fifty of his best pack-mules had recently been hired to the American quartermaster at Camargo; and he informed us that many others were being sent there by the Mexicans, to be employed in transporting our baggage and supplies to Monterey. In the course of conversation, Senor — asked us, how many *voluntarios* were coming to Mexico? He was told in reply, that we did not know what number had been ordered to the Rio Grande; but certainly enough for present purposes; and that nearly every man in the United States capable of bearing arms was ready, if required, to join Taylor's army. From the incredulous air with which the latter part of this response was received, it was evident that the old man knew more of the opposition to the war at home, than had been supposed. Possibly he may have been *enlightened* by some of the "Stars" and "Torchlights," or other equally luminous and rabid anti-war prints published in Ohio; whose editors, no content with opposing the cause of their country, engaged in the pitiful business of abusing those who dared not only to differ from them, but to take part in the strife.

The road from Matamoros to Camargo was not far from the river at that point; and we were informed that a column of American infantry had been seen passing up that day. From the vague and incoherent description given of it by one of the *peons*, we were led to suppose that it was composed in part of the remaining battalion of our regiment. In this, however, we were mistaken; although, as the distance between the two places is more than twice as great by the sinuous Rio Grande as by the road, it would have been possible for active and healthy troops to march it in less time than our slow boat could steam it,—traveling as we did only during daylight. Before our departure from the *hacienda*, we were invited to enter and partake of some goat's milk; which—upon observing a fold near the house containing some hundreds of “the bearded people”—we had expressed a desire to taste. The patriarchal beverage was delicious. An unusual number of weapons were hanging upon the walls of the apartment; and which, the old gentleman remarked, were used by his household against the Indians, who, since the commencement of the war had become very bold and troublesome; that but the week previous a large and daring band of Camanches had invaded the neighborhood, and driven off a number of horses and fat cattle, besides killing three Mexicans in the foray.

It was night when we returned to the boat, for in that latitude the twilight is so brief as to be scarcely perceptible. The sun disappears, and darkness almost immediately “broods over the still and pulseless world.” But those southern nights are enchantingly beautiful. Nothing arrested

my attention more, during the many weary vigils of the campaign, than those glittering hosts, which at set of sun, were ever seen in regular and stately march through that pure, unclouded firmament. No where else have “the lights that rule the night” appeared so brilliant or lovely. On reaching the steamer, we mounted to the hurricane deck to enjoy the night breeze, that laded with fragrance stole across from the Texas bank. The scene around us that night, forms one of those interesting pictures of the campaign which the memory has retained more faithfully than the pen can delineate. On one side of us, the restless and turbid stream, rolled moaning to its ocean-bed; on the other a vast expanse of prairie and chaparral, o'er which comes the howl of wolves and the answering bark of watch-dogs at the ranche. The silent sentinels pace with ghost-like tread upon the shore, as if fearing to disturb the last long sleep of their departed comrade, over whose fresh grave the thick bushes bending mournfully in the breeze, weep their dewy tears. Stretched in slumber on the decks are whole ranks of men, many of them with their greasy haversacks drawn over their faces, to protect them from the mosquitos that swarm out from the shore. But even these are not secure from the insidious assaults of the pigmy enemy. For see how often they start and wake,—how they shake their suffocating masks as impatiently as hungry cavalry horses toss their empty nose-bags,—how they smack right and left at the gray-coated gallinippers, “then swear a prayer or two, and sleep again.” While these are “dreaming of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,” a party of officers in the cabin are drinking

healths, five fathom deep. And still below them on the boiler deck, a number of soldiers are making merry over a certain fatted calf, found *couchant* near the landing; and whose peaceful ruminations have been interrupted by a single well-directed bayonet thrust.

Long before dawn of the following day, the steam was hissing like an angry serpent through the cleansed boilers and pipes; and with the first light we were again upon our winding way to Camargo, which place we reached at noon on Sunday, August 16th. The town is situated on the right bank of the San Juan, about a league above its confluence with the Rio Grande. As all our men were wearied, and many indeed sickened, by a long confinement on the comfortless steamer, it was with unusual satisfaction that we beheld our boat gliding, at an unexpected moment, into the mouth of that beautiful little stream. Its limpid waves flowing between high banks (for draining a country of comparatively limited extent, its flood had subsided) formed an agreeable contrast to the dark, swelling tide of the Rio Grande. The water of the latter is, however, more palatable and more healthful, when its 20 per centum (literally as well as *figuratively*) of mud is precipitated. The American camp, with its right resting on Camargo, extended for a considerable distance along the river. The soldiers who loitered on the shore filling their camp-kettles, or stood knee deep in the water, washing their shirts, engaged in the usual skirmish of wit with our men, as we passed slowly up. On reaching the village, we pushed our prow into the landing where a company of Texas Rangers, with all the boisterous merriment of

undisciplined troops, were engaged in cleaning their horses. Just above them, a party of the village women were coming to the stream for water, with the most primitive-looking earthen jars upon their heads.

Having sent an officer to the quarter-master's office, in quest of wagons with which to transport our equipage to the camp, we set out to report at head-quarters the arrival of our detachment. In our walk thither, we were overtaken by an officer wearing the uniform of a brigadier general, who, after exchanging salutations, informed us that he was General —, of the State of —. Learning our destination and object, he politely offered to accompany us to head-quarters and introduce us to General Taylor. Passing on through some narrow streets and lanes, and between gardens surrounded by mud walls, on the top of which grew many varieties of the luxuriant cactus plant, we arrived in a few minutes at a little grassy lot just without the town, in the center of which were pitched three soiled and ragged tents. A small guard of dragoons was posted near by. The spot was remarkably quiet, being removed from the noise and bustle of both the camp and village. Under an awning in front of the tents, sat a solitary man, dressed in linen coat and trowsers, twirling a straw hat between his fingers, and apparently conversing with or dictating to some one within. The first glance assured us that it was the old hero, with whose name and fame the country was then ringing; and as we approached, we recognized the mahogany complexion, piercing eye, iron-grey hair, and stout frame, which we had been told distinguished the commanding general. As he arose to

greet us, I was struck with the benevolent expression of his face, and the affability of his manner. He was invested with no silly pomp or ceremony. There was no ice to break in approaching him; but the natural grace and kindness of his reception at once placed us at ease, and during the time he gave us audience, our respect and admiration for the sturdy old republican general momentarily increased. His first question was concerning the health of the men, about which he seemed extremely solicitous; and he expressed his anxiety to hasten his army forward into a more salubrious region. He conversed with a stammering voice. But if slow of speech, no man could be more prompt in action than *Old Rough and Ready*. On arising to take leave, which we did at the earliest suitable moment, he desired us to report to General Worth, who, he said, was in command at the camp.

Returning to the boat, we had the satisfaction of finding the wagons already laden with our sick and baggage. The road to camp led us through the town,—if piles of crumbling clay and straw might be so called. A short time previous to its occupation by our troops, Camargo had been inundated, and many of the houses being built of soft sun-dried bricks, had partially dissolved. The roofs of some of them were yet clinging mournfully to one tottering wall. The little church and a few buildings around the Plaza, were in tolerable preservation. These were occupied as store-houses by our quarter-masters and commissaries. But few Mexicans remained in the town, the population of which could at no period

have exceeded one or two thousand.* A brisk march of half an hour brought us to the left wing of the encampment, where we pitched our tents and patiently awaited the arrival of the remaining battalion of our regiment.

*The village of Camargo probably derives its name from Diego Munos Camargo, a native, and the historian of the celebrated Haskalian tribe, which was associated with the Spaniards in the conquest of the city of Mexico. Camargo lived in the latter half of the sixteenth century, was educated in the Catholic faith, and composed his "*Historia de Hascala*" in the Castilian language.