

CHAPTER IV.

CAMP scenes at Camargo.—General Worth.—The review.—The regular troops sent forward to Cerralvo.—Great sickness and mortality in the volunteer regiments.—Character and conduct of the natives.—Our treatment of them.—The Proclamation.—The Army and Church of Mexico.—Their influence on the government.—Eager and enthusiastic spirit of the Volunteers.—The Rangers.—Brigades organized for the field.—Limited means of transportation.—The Mexican jockeys and our Horse Market.—Something of a shower.—General Hamer's brigade crosses the San Juan preparatory to marching for Monterey.

A STROLL through the encampment, on the morning after our arrival at Camargo, afforded me,—a raw volunteer,—much pleasure and instruction. It was the first of any magnitude, and by far the most beautiful one I had ever beheld. Never before, indeed, had I seen a battalion of our regular troops, either in camp or garrison. But there, in the same field, were horse, foot and artillery; not in great force, it is true, but perfect in all their appointments and discipline. Four light batteries, of six guns each, a few squadrons of dragoons, and four brigades of infantry, (comprising the divisions of Twiggs and Worth,) in all about three thousand men, comprised the regular army of General Taylor. The tent of every officer and private was pitched in its proper place, so that knowing a man's rank and company, his quarters could be almost as easily found as any number in the streets of our principal cities. In front of the camp was a vast and well smoothed parade-ground; along the edge of

which was a row of fading fires, at which breakfast had just been prepared. The long lines of white canvas and stacks of burnished arms, interspersed with umbrageous rose-wood and mesquite trees; troops of splendid horses, standing with the calm dignity of veterans at their pickets; batteries of artillery, their bright muzzles gleaming from beneath tarpaulins like watch-dogs peering from their kennels; these assisted in forming one of those impressive martial spectacles that swell the veins and give fresh vigor to the step. Militia camps and parades I had often witnessed, but though every man wore the lace, and feathers, and gaudy trappings of a Field Marshal, they presented but a sorry mimicry of war. Here, however, was Mars himself; in repose, yet armed *cap-a-pie* and ready for action. The very calmness and order that pervaded the camp would have told plainly enough that it was no holiday affair, even if many of the quiet men around us had not exhibited upon their persons and bronzed faces the marks of recent battle. It was one of those scenes that sent the mind wandering back through many a bright old page of history, until it dwelt again with all the delight of boyhood, upon those vivid and magnificent camp and battle-pieces with which the Prince of Poets has adorned his Iliad. And I am inclined to think, that the appearance of Achilles himself, brandishing in triumph his bloody spear, and dragging behind his chariot the body of some vanquished enemy, would not, at the moment, have in the least astonished me.

At the quarters of the 3d infantry, I was courteously received by an officer to whom I had brought a letter from a

mutual friend, and through whom I at once became acquainted with other gentlemen of that gallant corps. He politely proposed accompanying me to the quarters of General Worth, to whom I had been prevented by sickness from reporting in person, on the previous evening. We paused in our walk to witness the morning drill of Captain Bragg's excellent company of artillery. The horses, as well as men, seemed to understand their business perfectly; and being of "fine bone and blood," they whirled the guns and caissons over the plain with wonderful rapidity and ease. These light field batteries, in which the canoneers ride upon the gun carriages, ready for action at any moment, are very efficient for quick work; and with sufficient horse-power, are certainly the most formidable auxiliaries that science has ever given to war. Captain Bragg, a skillful and courageous officer, is, I understand, distinguished for his attention to the minutiae of his profession; a merit to be esteemed no less than heroic daring, when it is remembered what disasters may result in critical moments from the most trifling casualties, such, for example, as the loss of a horse-shoe or linchpin.* He was in Fort Brown during its long bombardment. There, his light pieces were of little service as battering guns. So at Monterey. But in the open field of Buena Vista, our horse-artillery exhibited its terrible power. There, in fact, (as General Taylor states, in his report of the battle) *it saved the day*. "Moving rapidly over the roughest ground, it was

* Cæsar, whose great sagacity and conduct put success as much out of the power of accident as human reason could well do, remarks in the third book of his Commentaries: "*Fortuna quæ plurimum potest, cum in aliis rebus, tum precipue in bello in parvis momentis magnas rerum mutationes efficit.*"

always in action at the right place and the right time; and its well-directed fire dealt destruction in the masses of the enemy."

We found General Worth, in this, my first and only interview with him, pacing his tent with much the air of a caged lion. He had that morning received orders to hold his division in readiness for a movement in the direction of Monterey; and was most anxious to hasten events. He informed us that he would march on the 19th, and was to establish himself at Cerralvo until the arrival of the other divisions at that place. Colonel Duncan had just returned from a reconnoissance to Puntaguada, and reported that the roads, which it was supposed had been made nearly impassable by the summer rains, were in good condition, and that water was not so scarce as on the route between Matamoros and Camargo. This was cheering intelligence, and the ambitious and chivalrous spirit of Worth, chafed at missing the glories of Palo Alto and Resaca, now burned to press forward and pluck from the heights of Monterey a laurel as fresh and green as that which crowned his rival.

It will be recollected by the reader that, in consequence of a disagreement with General Twiggs concerning rank, (Twiggs being the senior colonel, and Worth a general by brevet) he had resigned his commission and returned to the United States before the battles on the Rio Grande were fought. When the unexpected and startling news of those actions reached him at Washington, he withdrew his resignation and immediately repaired to Mexico, where he added greatly to his reputation as a soldier, by the brilliant manner

in which he fought his division throughout the war. The blow upon his fame,—from which he was then evidently suffering,—like that of Achilles, had been self-inflicted by his voluntary retirement from the camp. And like the Grecian hero, he was destined to learn that “those wounds heal ill, that men do give themselves.” The countenance, address and manners of this distinguished General, were exceedingly prepossessing. His features were strikingly handsome, and his face possessed that bright, healthy hue which contrasts so well with the gray locks of age. His appearance and bearing were imposing and knightly; his person and gait erect and military; his voice clear and pleasing; his utterance very rapid yet distinct. His manners were at times, perhaps a little ostentatious; and in that regard as well as in other respects, he differed greatly from the commanding general. Most soldiers in comparing these two generals, (whose characters Death has already given over to the impartial pen of History) would probably have concluded that, while no one,—not even Murat or Macdonald—could lead troops in a charge more fiercely than the fiery and enthusiastic Worth; yet that upon the deliberate courage, unbroken composure and unconquerable will of Taylor, it would be safer to rely for success in all the varying chances of a campaign. Worth, with all his ardor, united great military skill and judgment; but though a more brilliant soldier, of acknowledged talents and courage, he never inspired the volunteer army, at least, with the same confidence and admiration as did Taylor. Yet was he an extraordinary man, and his untimely death has caused a blank in the American army which will not soon be filled.

I was much pleased with the visit, and felt gratified, proud indeed, that my country possessed such a general. Before leaving his tent, he courteously invited the officers of my battalion to attend a review of the regular troops, which was to take place that afternoon.

I have ever regarded myself as very fortunate in reaching Camargo in time to behold that review, which was decidedly the most imposing of the campaign. That man is little to be envied whose heart would not swell with gratitude and patriotism, in contemplating such an army; whose valor and firmness had recently saved the periled honor of his country. Though there were hardly three thousand troops in the line, the display was admirable and gratifying. The men were in excellent condition and looked invincible. The officers, young, brave and intelligent, were (it may be safely asserted) superior to any Europe can boast, in professional skill.*

Soon after the formation of the line, the generals, attended by a brilliant staff, rode down from right to left. Taylor

* In common with every candid observer of events in Mexico, I would cheerfully testify to the incalculable benefits derived by our country from its Military Academy. Not only did it give to the regular army nearly all its efficiency, but its advantages were realized to a considerable extent, in every volunteer corps connected with the war. To the thorough military training and knowledge which it imparts, the nation is much indebted for a series of splendid victories; any one of which would more than compensate it for all the expenditures at West Point. That will be an unfortunate day for the Republic, when Congress, influenced either by motives of fancied economy or the vile appeals of the demagogue, shall consent to abandon an institution which has already done much to establish the reputation and extend the borders of the country; and which is constantly spreading among us that intelligence and skill by which *the people*—in their freedom from the burden of a large standing army—may at any time be converted into the grandest host of soldiers that ever battled in any cause or clime.

clad in plain undress, was conspicuous in the glittering group. Every eye was fixed upon him as he passed from corps to corps, acknowledging the salute of each. After he had taken a favorable position in the field, the line was wheeled into column of companies, and then with a grand and inspiring burst of music from the bands, that glorious little army passed in review, moving as one man across the reverberating plain. Floating high o'er the column was that splendid "standard of the stars," to which Drake has ascribed so poetical and beautiful an origin, and which he has described too, in lines that few Americans can read without feeling their hearts beat within them as at the sound of a trumpet. Ah! the imperial eagles of Rome and France were not more secure in the midst of the immortal "Tenth Legion" and the unyielding "Old Guard," than is that heaven-born banner there!

"Flag of the brave! thy folds shall fly,
The sign of hope and triumph high!
When speaks the signal trumpet tone,
And the long line comes gleaming on,
Ere yet the life-blood, warm and wet,
Has dimmed the glistening bayonet,
Each soldier's eye shall brightly turn,
To where thy meteor glories burn,
And as his springing steps advance,
Catch war and vengeance from the glance!"

It was indeed a soul-stirring scene, and we earnestly wished that every volunteer in the army could witness and would emulate the soldiery it exhibited. A distinguished officer of the 3d infantry, who shortly afterward expired under the walls of Monterey, pointed to us, during the review, the various battalions and commanders in the field; and related some

interesting incidents connected with the history of many of them. In reply to a remark of mine concerning the troops, he said—"Yes, this is very fine, certainly; but our boys always look better in a blaze. You will soon see what stuff is beneath those blue jackets."

The day after the review, (August 19th) General Worth marched with his division for Cerralvo,—a town about midway between Camargo and Monterey. No serious opposition was anticipated short of the last named city. Bold and strong indeed must that Mexican force have been, which could have dared to face that splendid van-guard, led by the keenly excited genius and angry courage of Worth. The remaining brigades of the regular army soon afterward passed to the left bank of the San Juan, and were pushed forward in rapid succession. Meanwhile detachments of volunteers were being daily brought up by the boats, but it was not until a week after our arrival that the marching column (composed, as the reader has seen, of six companies from each regiment) reached Camargo. General Twiggs, who, marching rapidly up from Matamoros with the Dragoons and Flying Artillery, had passed the column on the road, reported, with his usual sportive and mirth-provoking humor, that the volunteers were in exceeding bad plight, that their patriotism was oozing out at their toes, and that their officers were compelled to encourage them forward by stirring speeches, at least thrice a day. At the commencement of the campaign it was a standing joke among the regulars, that the officers of volunteers found it necessary to enforce every trifling order with a stump speech; and that therefore

the discipline of each regiment depended pretty much upon the eloquence of its colonel. At this jest, and its accompanying illustrative anecdotes, we have laughed as heartily as our good-natured brethren of the old line; and, indeed, considering the character of our people, there may have been some room for such innocent raillery. It certainly was calculated to do more good than any severe and unkind professional criticism; which would have engendered much ill-feeling between the old and new troops. None knew better than the regular officers, that the volunteer regiments contained the best material in the world, from which to mold an efficient army; but it required time, tact, and much forbearance, to accustom those independent spirits to the yoke of military discipline. The volunteers, unlike the mass of the regular army, had always been their own masters, and it could scarcely be expected that they should abandon at once all their habits of free thought and free action, and become passive and obedient instruments in the hands of others. Their good sense, however, aided by a little experience, and the example of all who valued the reputation of their regiments, and the honor of their states, soon rendered most of the volunteers quite equal to the regulars, in the prompt, cheerful, and full discharge of every duty.

On the 23d of August, our regiment was again concentrated by the arrival of the six companies which had marched from Camp Belknap under Lieutenant Colonel Weller. The journey, performed under midsummer suns, and through a country but scantily supplied with water, was a severe and trying one to our unripe troops. Several of the wagons

came in laden with sick and dying men, among whom we were pained to find Lieutenant S., of Company B, (Dayton volunteers,) one of the most energetic, reliable, and useful officers of the 1st Ohio regiment. His death, which occurred on the morning of the 26th, was, to many of his comrades, one of the most distressing events of the campaign. Lieut. S. had already displayed an activity, and tractable disposition, that won him the confidence and esteem of his superior officers, while his cheerfulness, and the good humor with which he bore every privation, had made him a favorite with all. He possessed, too, all those sterling qualities of the soldier, which, had fate permitted, would have gained him an enviable reputation.

The mortality in our camp at Camargo was appalling. The dead march was ever wailing in our ears, and even at this distant period, I can scarcely look back to our brief stay there without a shudder. At almost every hour of the day, funeral escorts of various regiments might be seen following the bodies of departed comrades to that vast and common cemetery, the chaparral, where officers and men, "in dust, without distinction lie." The large hospital-tents were constantly full—the dead being removed at sunrise and sunset, but to make room for the dying. The groans and lamentations of the poor sufferers during those sickly, sultry nights were heart-rending. Upon our arrival at Camargo, we had been informed by the natives that it was the most sickly place in the valley, but the appearance of the country did not indicate it, nor have I ever heard it attributed to any satisfactory cause. An examination of the circumjacent country might perhaps, have led to the discovery of some

swamps or pools of stagnant water, left from the overflow of the San Juan.

General Taylor, though busied with the many important arrangements upon which his subsequent success would depend, yet frequently found time to visit the hospitals, and cheer their inmates with kind and sympathizing words. In a communication to the adjutant general, dated Camargo, Sept. 3d, 1846, he says, "I have used every effort to extend the hospital accommodations and the medical force, but the service is suffering greatly in this latter particular. There has been great sickness and mortality in some of the volunteer regiments. Great numbers are taken into the several general hospitals, and no exertion is spared to ameliorate their condition." The deficiency of medical officers here alluded to, was seriously felt in many regiments. But "the laws of the land," said the surgeon general, in reply to General Taylor's complaint of the scarcity of surgeons, "awarded two medical officers to a full regiment of 750 men," and as there were more than that number serving with the Army of Occupation, *ergo*, the complaint was groundless, and the surgeons in the field were censurable for not performing their duty. Our regiment was fortunate in securing at the onset two skillful surgeons, and in being generally concentrated. But there were others, which, being divided and sub-divided for garrison and escort duty, often suffered sadly, in consequence of what the surgeon general asserted to be "military propriety, and the customs of the service."* It

* "I have given all in the way of medical aid which military propriety, and the customs of the services in like cases, and the wants of the army seem to require ;

is due to the chiefs of the various staff departments of the army, to remark that they did all, and often more than "the regulations" required from them ; but they should have been neither disappointed nor dissatisfied when gently reminded by the general commanding in the field, that the very nice calculations made at Washington, did not altogether meet the exigencies of every climate and service.

At Camargo we were tolerably well supplied by the Mexicans with fresh provisions, for which they took care to exact exorbitant prices. These native hucksters were a morose and knavish set. Taught to hate all foreigners, and especially "*los Yankees*," they looked—even when pocketing our dollars—as sour as their own bitter oranges when the green rinds have received the first tinge of sickly yellow. As they were allowed to enter the camp at all hours, they of course kept their friends at Monterey well advised of our condition and movements ; while, in their dealings with us, they were close-mouthed and professedly ignorant beyond example. Nothing scarcely could be extracted from them save the price of the articles they offered for sale, and which they uttered glibly enough. To every question touching their roads, country, towns, troops, etc., even when put in the purest Castilian, the usual reply was, "*no entende, Senor*," (don't understand you, sir.) It appears that General Taylor, up to this time, had failed to obtain any very reliable information con-

but if they desire more medical officers, they shall have them—with myself to boot, if acceptable—and I am borne out in the measure by the government. Far be it from me to withhold aught that will contribute to the comfort of one of those gallant souls who so valiantly fought and so signally triumphed on the battle-fields of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma."—*From the Letter of the Surgeon General to the Adjutant General.*

cerning the designs of the enemy, or even of the country beyond the points to which he had pushed his reconnoitering parties. On the eve of marching for Camargo, and but two weeks before he fought the battle of Monterey, he remarked in a letter to the government, "We have no very recent intelligence from the interior, nor have I yet satisfactory means of judging whether our occupation of Monterey and Saltillo will be disputed."

Such indeed had been the barbarian policy of the Mexican government, and the plundering habits of the Mexican people, that travelers and traders had been discouraged from visiting the country; and but few of our citizens knew more of its interior than what could be seen along the great thoroughfare between Vera Cruz and the city of Mexico. Though lying immediately upon the borders of the most enterprising and inquisitive nation under the sun, Mexico had remained, up to the commencement of the war, almost a *terra incognita*. The great wall of China could not have offered a more effectual barrier to Tartarean invasion, than Mexican legislation, insolence, and intolerance have presented to American industry and genius. The reader, therefore, will not perhaps be surprised to find the quarter-master general (who, like the surgeon general, found it necessary to vindicate his official conduct,) writing as follows, in reply to one of General Taylor's letters: "As to the complaint in regard to the want of land transportation, it is proper to remark, that there was no information at Washington, so far as I was informed, to enable me or the War Department to determine whether wagons could be used in Mexico."

Soon after the beginning of the war, our government had announced its intention of conducting it in a spirit of liberality and forbearance; and it may be safely asserted that no people were ever more kindly treated by an invading army. Rarely indeed, in time of peace, have the Mexicans extended to Americans the same respectful consideration. It appears that the Cabinet at Washington entertained a hope that the mass of the natives might be propitiated, and, in some measure, convinced, that, "the war was waged not against them, but a faithless government of military despots, who had both deprived them of their liberty, and wronged and insulted us." To that end, the government had furnished General Taylor with a proclamation to the inhabitants of Northern Mexico, (a copy of which is subjoined) indicating the policy it intended to pursue in prosecuting hostilities, and which many persons in our army, in view of the characteristic treachery and deep-rooted enmity of the Mexican race, roundly condemned at the time.* Even if the statesmen of the United

*A PROCLAMATION.

BY THE GENERAL COMMANDING THE ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.
To the people of Mexico:

"After many years of patient endurance, the United States are at length constrained to acknowledge that a war now exists between our government and the government of Mexico. For many years our citizens have been subjected to repeated insults and injuries; our vessels and cargoes have been seized and confiscated; our merchants have been plundered, maimed, imprisoned, without cause and without reparation. At length your government acknowledged the justice of our claims, and agreed, by treaty, to make satisfaction by payment of several millions of dollars; but this treaty has been violated by your rulers, and the stipulated payments have been withheld. Our late effort to terminate all difficulties by peaceful negotiation, has been rejected by the Dictator, Paredes, and our minister of peace, whom your rulers had agreed to receive, has been refused a hearing. He has been treated with indignity and insult, and Paredes has announced that war exists between us. This war, thus first proclaimed by him, has been acknowledged as an existing fact by

States had interpreted the character of the enemy aright, they yet greatly over-estimated the influence of the people of the *republic!* of Mexico, if they supposed that their wishes would be in the least regarded by the central government. Arms and religion govern Mexico. The soldier and the priest control her destinies. The priesthood—perhaps foreseeing disastrous results for their church, in the conquest of their country by the free-thinking Yankees—promptly brought to the aid of the Dictator all their potent, pecuniary, and spiritual resources. Though quite shrewd enough to know that it but little concerned our government whether Christian, Jew, Turk, or Infidel possessed the land, yet these holy gentlemen,

our President and Congress, with perfect unanimity, and will be prosecuted with vigor and energy against your army and rulers; but those of the Mexican people who remain neutral will not be molested.

“Your government is in the hands of tyrants and usurpers. They have abolished your State governments, they have overthrown your federal constitution, they have deprived you of the right of suffrage, destroyed the liberty of the press, despoiled you of your arms, and reduced you to a state of absolute dependence upon the power of a military dictator. Your army and rulers extort from the people, by grievous taxation, by forced loans and military seizures, the very money which sustains the usurpers in power. Being disarmed, you are left defenseless, an easy prey to the savage Camanches, who not only destroy your lives and property, but drive into a captivity, more horrible than death itself, your wives and children. It is your military rulers who have reduced you to this deplorable condition. It is these tyrants and their corrupt and cruel satellites, gorged with the people’s treasure, by whom you are thus oppressed and impoverished; some of whom have boldly advocated a monarchical government, and would place an European prince on the throne of Mexico. We come to obtain reparation for repeated wrongs and injuries; we come to obtain indemnity for the past, and security for the future; we come to overthrow the tyrants who have destroyed your liberties; but we come to make no war upon the people of Mexico, nor upon any form of free government they may choose to select for themselves. It is our wish to see you liberated from despots, to drive back the savage Camanches, to prevent the renewal of their assaults, and to compel them to restore to you, from captivity, your long-lost wives and children. Your religion, your altars and churches, the property of your churches and citizens, the emblems of your faith and its ministers, shall be protected, and remain inviolate. Hundreds of our army, and hundreds of thousands of our people, are members of the Catholic church. In every State, and in nearly every city and village of our Union, Catholic

pretending to believe all the clap-trap uttered in the United States, about the wealth of the country and the mint value of certain “golden images” and “silver candelabras,” aroused the people with stories of our avarice, and avowed that the sacred and dearly-prized emblems of their religion had been offered as a bounty to American volunteers. Thus did the priests forestall our proclamation. If there was any disaffection in the land, it added but little strength to our cause. The people generally placed no confidence in the amicable intentions we published among them, and with the exception of the small spy company of Dominguez, which

churches exist; and the priest performs his holy functions in peace and security, under the sacred guaranty of our constitution. We come among the Mexican people as friends and republican brethren, and all who receive us as such shall be protected; while all who are seduced into the army of your dictator, shall be treated as enemies. We shall want from you nothing but food for our army, and for this you shall always be paid, in cash, the full value. It is the settled policy of your tyrants to deceive you in regard to the policy and character of our government and people. These tyrants fear the example of our free institutions, and constantly endeavor to misrepresent our purposes, and inspire you with hatred for your republican brethren of the American Union. Give us but the opportunity to undeceive you, and you will soon learn that all the representations of Paredes were false, and were only made to induce you to consent to the establishment of a despotic government.

In your struggle for liberty with the Spanish monarchy, thousands of our countrymen risked their lives and shed their blood in your defense. Our own Commodore, the gallant Porter, maintained in triumph your flag upon the ocean, and our government was the first to acknowledge your independence. With pride and pleasure we enrolled your name on the list of independent republics, and sincerely desired that you might, in peace and prosperity, enjoy all the blessings of a free government. Success on the part of your tyrants, against the army of the Union, is impossible; but if they could succeed, it would only be to enable them to fill your towns with their soldiers, eating out your substance, and harrassing you with still more grievous taxation. Already they have abolished the liberty of the press, as the first step toward the introduction of that monarchy which it is their real purpose to proclaim and establish.

“Mexicans! we must treat as enemies and overthrow the tyrants, who, while they have wronged and insulted us, have deprived you of your liberties; but the Mexican people who remain neutral during the contest, shall be protected against their military despots by the republican army of the Union.”