

## CHAPTER X.

BEARERS of dispatches from head-quarters arrive.—We prepare to escort them to Camargo.—A train tacked on.—Description of the convoy.—Appearance of the country and villages.—The Massacre near Ramas.—The affair with the Mexican cavalry at Cerralvo.—General Urrea retreats to Tamáulipas.—Friendly reception by the citizens of Cerralvo.—Pronunciamento of the 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.

THE long suspension of communication between Head-Quarters and the coast, caused much apprehension in the United States for the safety of General Taylor's army. Reports of the capture of the Arkansas and Kentucky scouting parties in the vicinity of Encarnacion, the advance of Santa Anna's host, and the assembling of the rancheros with Urrea's corps in the lower country, had spread through the Union and awakened the most painful solicitude, which in those days of *mail-coaches* and *pony-expresses*, was not dispelled for many weeks. Colonel Curtis of the 3d Ohio regiment, being the senior officer on the Rio Grande, considering the perilous position of our troops, thought it advisable in the emergency to call upon the adjacent states for volunteers. Each anxious day deepened the gloom that rested upon the public mind. But thanks to an all-wise Providence who guided and guarded our arms, the sun of victory arose at last, and with a radiance the more brilliant and dazzling from the preceding darkness.

On the 3d of March, Mr. Crittenden, volunteer aide-camp, and Major Coffee of the pay department, arrived at Monterey on their way to Washington. They were the bearers of those dispatches from Buena Vista, which, while they excited the admiration and called forth the gratitude of the nation, carried desolation and mourning to many a home and heart. That night, an order was received by the Major commanding the 1st Ohio regiment, to march on the following day to Camargo, with five companies of infantry and two light pieces, as an escort to the bearers of dispatches. Wearied by inaction and the monotony of garrison life, that officer had long desired such an opportunity for employing his men; and for that and other reasons, he prepared to execute his commission with no ordinary zeal and pleasure. Knowing that his march would be opposed by General Urrea—perhaps daily harassed by the attacks of the light squadrons of the enemy—and that much would depend on celerity of movement, he had determined not to encumber his troops with more than their blankets, and provisions barely sufficient for the journey. With this compact little escort, he felt assured that the merely mounted force of the Mexicans, could not compel him even to halt or change the order in which he proposed to march. The companies—who had all now acquired the discipline and weather-beaten aspect of veterans—burned for another fight before their term of service should expire, and pleasantly contended with each other for places in the expedition. But as two companies of our regiment had been detailed for the previous enterprise under Major Shepherd, the Kentucky regiment reasonably claimed

that two of theirs should be attached to this command. The detachment therefore was organized as follows: three companies of the 1st Ohio regiment under Captains Bradley, Armstrong, and Keneally; two companies of the 1st Kentucky regiment under Captains Howe and Fuller; and two gun-squads, each with a four-pounder, commanded by Lieutenant McCarter and Sergeant William Howell of the 1st Ohio regiment, both of whom were skilled in the exercise of artillery. Our assistant surgeon, Dr. Heighway, also accompanied the party, which comprised in all, about two hundred and fifty fighting men, whose strength was augmented by the resolute spirit with which they sought the hazardous service. It was a well-appointed escort; and its commander,—knowing his men and confidently relying upon their endurance and courage,—had assured Messrs. Crittenden and Coffee that they would reach Camargo in five days. But unfortunately, just as we were about to start from Monterey on the 4th of March, an immense number of wagons were descried approaching the city on the Saltillo road. It proved to be a train, made up chiefly of wagons which had accompanied General Wool's column in its long march from San Antonio,—now going to the rear for supplies. Much to our dissatisfaction, the escort was immediately ordered to delay its march until the following day in order to convoy the train. This at once changed the aspect of affairs, and gave a different character to the detachment. Its commanding officer, though impressed with the belief that his force was entirely inadequate for the protection of so large a train, was not disposed to avoid the additional responsibility so unexpectedly thrust upon him;

and contented himself with replying that this new arrangement would probably result in the detention of important dispatches on the route, longer than was expected, and that he hoped his force would not be held accountable for the safety of the entire train. It was supposed however, by the officer commanding at Monterey, that General Urrea, learning the result of the battle of Buena Vista had withdrawn from the line; or that remaining, he would not be tempted by empty wagons to make an attack which promised more blows than booty. The number of the detachment therefore, was not increased,—except by the addition of a dozen Arkansas horsemen under Lieutenant Thompson. But the companies composing the escort or *convoy*, were made up of men who would stand by their officers to the death; and we left Monterey with the determination, that, though some public property might be lost on the way, honor should be saved, and if possible, some glory won.

In surveying the apparently interminable string of wagons which, on the 5th of March, followed us from the city and stretched for miles over the plain, I must confess that, much as General Taylor had complained of their scarcity, I heartily wished them all with Pharaoh's chariots,—at the bottom of the Red Sea. It was the largest train that ever passed over the road; and consisted of at least one hundred and fifty wagons, with perhaps seven hundred animals in harness,—many of them wild and stubborn Mexican mules. The ordinary difficulties attending the movement of such a train, even through a friendly country and under the most favorable circumstances, would vex a Job-like temper and patience.

But when it is remembered that there were more than a thousand active enemies upon the route; that the train when extended and in motion, must be nearly or quite two miles in length; that there was no military organization and but little subordination among the drivers; that the road for much of the distance was closely hedged in by dense thickets, most suitable and convenient for ambuscading, while it was only at rare and distant intervals in the chaparral that the wagons could be parked; the disadvantages under which the escort labored will be apparent. With the prospect of an action with a strong cavalry force, to have scattered a small body of infantry around so large a mass would have endangered the whole. The detachment was therefore divided into but two parties;—three companies marching in front and two in the rear of the train, each having a piece of artillery, which, had the country been more open, would have afforded prompt and efficient protection to the flanks. It was evident however, that a vigorous assault on judiciously selected ground, by an enemy numerically so superior would result in the destruction of some portion of the train. The drivers who had escaped the massacre at Ramas, had already by their accounts of it, so terrified their fellows, that most of them were prepared to desert their teams at the first sign of danger. A number of clerks, camp-followers, and other Americans not connected with the army, alarmed at the threatening aspect of affairs in Mexico, availed themselves of the protection of our escort to leave the country. These being poorly armed and undisciplined would have embarrassed, rather than have aided the detachment, had not Mr.

Crittenden undertaken the difficult task of making them march at least, in some order. He so far succeeded, that an enemy reconnoitering us from afar, would perhaps have supposed them to be a formidable body of Rangers. Among those who solicited permission to accompany the train was a Mr. R\*\*\*, a genuine Yankee, who had long resided at Durango, where he had been engaged in some manufacturing enterprise. His party consisted of his wife, two or three children, and a friend who had been employed in the same business with himself. It was represented to him that the Mexican troops were on the road, and would probably fight a small force; and that he had better remain until the line was re-opened. But as he had been detained at Saltillo during the battle of Buena Vista,—much to the terror of his family,—he was determined not to make another halt south of “the little town of Bosting;” and accepting the risk, concluded to march with us.

A poor account of the poor country between Monterey and Camargo has been given in a previous chapter. Its appearance was now rather less attractive, if possible, from the absence of water. During the six months that had elapsed since we first marched over it, scarcely a cloud had floated in the sky. Parched by the hot suns, the shrub-covered hills and plains had assumed a brown and fading hue, the gaudy flowers of the cactus and variegated convolvuli had disappeared from the valleys, and many of the streams which at the period of our upward march had been both broad and deep, were now “consumed out of their places.” But unlike “the troops of Tema” and “the companies of Sheba,” we

neither looked nor waited for "the deceitful brooks;" and sometimes traveled an entire day without water.

In consequence of the usual delays in starting from Monterey, it was late on the 5th when we reached Agua Frio, where we established ourselves for the night. The train was securely parked in the bend of a deep *barranca* or ravine; and every arrangement made to guard against any meditated surprise or sudden assault, from which alone any serious danger was apprehended. The wagons, when halted around our camp, instead of requiring protection rather afforded it to us, while, at the same time, they were in a position to be effectually sheltered by our arms. It was only when in motion and winding its slow length over the rough hilly road, and but a small part of the train could be seen from any one point of view, that it invited attack. The village of Agua Frio was deserted by its inhabitants; and we were somewhat surprised to find in one of the vacant houses, four mustangs, bridled and saddled for the road; and which probably belonged to some of Urrea's spies lurking in the neighborhood.

Many articles, of but little value however, plundered from Lieutenant Barbour's train, were discovered in the hamlet; which circumstance, some persons with the detachment (not soldiers) would have made the pretext for the commission of excesses, but being promptly arrested they were careful not to betray any lawless designs during the remainder of the march. With our own men, the commander, had every reason to be satisfied. They were obedient, patient and courageous; and too deeply impressed with the responsibility and

dangers of the expedition, to indulge in the usual levities and petty maraudings.

The second day, notwithstanding the many breakings of harness and wagons, and indeed many of the villainous mules had to be broken afresh every morning, we traveled with uncommon swiftness, and passing through Marin and Ramas, at nightfall bivouacked at Papagallos. Towns and ranchos were all deserted, and not a Mexican was seen in the course of the day's march. A suspicious silence reigned over the whole country; and but few now doubted that the enemy was prepared at some point to dispute our progress. The complete abandonment of the villages was partly explained by the shocking spectacle that met our gaze as we descended into a deep and narrow valley near Ramas. It was the scene of the massacre ten days previous, (24th of February,) and the inhabitants of that region had doubtless fled from the retribution which they feared it would provoke. The ground for the attack on Lieutenant Barbour's little command, had been well selected by the enemy. The valley is inclosed by lofty ridges, over which, on either side, the road passes by a rough and abrupt ascent. It is so intersected by ravines, cut by the rains in their passage from the hills, as to make the progress of a train through it slow and difficult. The unfortunate party had been permitted to enter the valley, and when involved among the ravines and thickets, were suddenly and furiously assailed by the Mexicans who had been stationed in ambush. The startled escort, taken by surprise, was almost immediately surrounded by ten times its number and forced to capitulate without firing a shot. But no quar-

ter had been given to the drivers,—the bodies of more than fifty of whom still lay festering there; naked, bloated and blackened by sun and fire. Some of them, after being smeared with tar, had been burnt to a crisp upon the wagons. Others, frightfully mangled with wounds, had been placed in an erect position with pieces of their own flesh thrust into their mouths. The hearts of some had been torn from their breasts, and suspended upon the bushes or left to roast upon the rocks, reminding us of the revolting sacrifices of the Aztecs to the Sun. Indeed such barbarous atrocities could only have been perpetrated by the progeny of those cannibals and the cruel torturers of Gautemozin.\* The effluvia arising

\* It has been supposed by many persons that these barbarities were committed by the semi-savage rancheros of Canales alone. In the Mexican "Notes of the War,"—a work to which I have often heretofore referred,—a chapter is devoted to the guerrilla operations both on the lines of Scott and Taylor; from which I quote the subjoined extract to show that officers of rank and troops of the line were present at, if not actual participators in this merciless butchery. Let it be remembered that the enemy commenced this sort of warfare. Their historian does not deny it; but after remarking that,—“this kind of hostilities the Americans called barbarous,”—he hastens lamely to justify them by adding,—“but they soon established the same on their side.” General Urrea was undoubtedly the commander-in-chief of all the Mexican troops north of the Sierra Madre at the time. He, I believe, is generally known as the executioner of Fanning's Texans. The Iturbide mentioned in the following extract is a son of the ill-star'd Emperor of that name, and is also well known in the cities of the United States. It is believed that the name of Lambert is a misprint, and should be “Langberg;” at least it is so written by that officer himself in a certain *considerate and modest billet* now in my possession. He is probably a German, and takes pains to announce himself “a foreign officer,” in the note which will be given to the reader on a subsequent page of these Memoirs. After describing the guerrillas on the Vera Cruz line, under the famous Padre Jaurauta and Robolledo, the Mexican historian writes as follows:—

“The guerillas of Tamaulipas were recruited from the rancheros of the villas and were commanded by Canales; along with the squadrons of Guanajuato, of Allende and Fieles de Guanajuato, commanded by Generals Urrea and Romaro. They had under them likewise, several officers of the army of the line, such as Emeljo Lambert, Augustin Ricoy, Augustin Iturbide, Pantaleon Gutierrez, and

from the mass of putrefaction tainted the atmosphere to the summits of the hills bordering the valley. The road was marked for a considerable distance with the dead bodies of men, the carcasses of mules and pieces of the wagons, which had been broken up and partly burned to avoid detection and recovery. The fugitives had evidently been hotly pursued and some of them were slain far from the train. At one place even beyond the valley, I saw the half of a human head, which had been cleft from the crown downward, lying in the road at a great distance from any corpse. The face was upturned to the sun, and the shrunken and ghastly features, caused some stanch old horses of the passing escort to snort and tremble with fright.

Altogether the scene was one of the wildest savagery; and the terrible bloodshed it provoked, of which the reader will be informed at the close of this chapter, may perhaps, to some minds, “prove but a jest,” when “exampled by this heinous spectacle.”

It has been stated that we bivouacked the second night of the march at Papagallos. As at Agua Frio, the ground was carefully selected, and the camp a strong one,—the wagons being parked around a low but steep conical hill, to the commanding summit of which the artillery was dragged by hand.

others. They passed from Tula to the State of New Leon, making marches and countermarches to surprise detachments of the enemy. On the 24th of February, 1847, they attacked a convoy and captured 121 wagons loaded with clothes and provisions; and 137 mules also loaded with clothes, besides leaving many killed, wounded, dispersed and prisoners taken; breaking up the force that accompanied the train which exceeded 300 men. War made systematically by guerrillas, appears to us would in the long run have ruined the enemy and given success to the Republic.”

The dreadful objects passed during the day, and the prospect of a conflict before reaching Camargo, afforded topics for conversation to the men who sat around their fires cooking, or cleaning the dust from their arms. It was late in the night before silence stole over the camp; and toward dawn it was again broken by the clatter of hoofs on the road in advance of our position; which sounds, the officer of the guard reasonably supposed, proceeded from a scouting party of the enemy. These increasing signs of danger, caused uneasiness for the safety of the wagons alone. The troops were abundantly able to protect themselves from many times their number of Mexican cavalry; but the experience and observation of the two past days had convinced us that the train when in motion, was never in any other than a bad position and only perfectly safe when closed in mass. But the interminable thickets which skirted the road,—while they were intersected by many paths and little glades favorable to the operations of an attacking party,—presented but few openings spacious enough to contain our wagons. Especially is this the case between Papagallos and Cerralvo, a distance of twenty-eight miles, which we marched on the third day, 7th of March. The solitary rivulet with which nature occasionally gladdens the first twenty miles of that journey, was dried up. But at the "Robbers' Rancho,"—eight miles from Cerralvo,—which we reached early in the afternoon, a supply of water was obtained. The scorching heat and rough road had so jaded both men and animals, that the commanding officer had concluded to encamp there; but on learning from the wagon-masters that they were short of forage, he deter-

mined to push forward to Cerralvo. The "Robbers' Rancho" was also deserted, but, as it was Sunday, an officer of the detachment sportively remarked that "the forty thieves had probably gone to church." Some new brogans, several packs of playing cards and other sutler's goods were found in that *very respectable establishment*.

After leaving the Rancho, the teams began to lag, as usual toward the end of a day's march. When the head of the train was about a mile from Cerralvo, a small party of horsemen who had been kept in advance galloped back with the information that, just as they were cautiously entering the suburbs of the town, the Mexican troops began to pour out, through many streets, upon the plain. So sudden indeed was the appearance of the enemy that one of our people, being poorly mounted, was overtaken and killed in the retreat. Before hearing this report, the long array of Lancers, then rapidly approaching, had admonished us to prepare for action. Fortunately there was a slight elevation in the plain, rather bare of chaparral, about 200 yards in front of the spot we occupied when first advised of the enemy's presence. This, the commander of the escort determined to gain as a favorable position for his artillery, while the open ground about it would afford ample space to park the train, for which orders were immediately given. Our four-pounder and the three companies of infantry were at once rushed forward to the desired position; and formed upon it just as the leading squadrons of Lancers had arrived within good range for canister shot, with which they were promptly greeted. They continued to advance, but in a slower pace and evidently

much confused and disconcerted by their unexpected reception. Before our cannon was re-loaded, we were enabled to open a lively fire of musketry upon their line; at which they broke and fled in disorder, many of them throwing themselves upon the necks of their horses the better to avoid our balls. A rapid glance from the point we occupied had revealed a heavy force between us and the town; and large bodies of men, moving rapidly through the chaparral upon our flanks and rear. There seemed to be quite enough of them to overwhelm us by the mere weight of numbers. At the moment of the attack, the rear-guard,—composed of Howe's and Keneally's companies with Lieutenant McCarter's gun-guard, was more than two miles behind us; while the wagons were strung out in the intervening road, which was for the most part hemmed in by thickets. The sudden volleys and shouts of the combatants, conveyed to those in the rear, the first intimation of the affair on hand. Captain Howe then marched his company to the front, leaving Keneally's (Company A, 1st Ohio regiment) alone in the rear; which unaccountable movement,—had the latter company been composed of less resolute material,—might have seriously endangered the whole command. But the commander of the escort, was not apprehensive that the rear-gun would be captured so long as one gallant Irish heart was left to bleed in its defense.\* At the sound of the first shot, the drivers in the center of the train abandoned their teams

\* Captain Keneally's company was composed of Irishmen; and was for many years well known in Cincinnati as—"the Montgomery Guards." The gallant Captain lost his life on the Vera Cruz line, a few months after the events here narrated.

and ran either to the advance or rear-guard. But few of those men deserve censure, for the road was so narrow that the stopping of a single wagon necessarily detained all others behind it. And even at those rare places where the track was wide enough to admit of passing, many of the brainless native mules, being accustomed only to *follow*, refused to pass those halted in advance of them; thus, by their provoking obstinacy, defeating the efforts of the most diligent and courageous drivers to bring up their wagons. To remain with such brutes was certain death; and indeed, so sudden was the onset of the cavalry at all points, that more than a dozen of the teamsters were lanced in their saddles; while others, unable to join either division of our force escaped in the chaparral, and wandered off toward Monterey or Camargo.

Meantime the wagons were being gathered as rapidly as possible around the advance and rear-guards, and by prompt and unceasing exertions,—in which some of the wagon-masters and drivers fearlessly discharged their duty,—we succeeded in saving about one hundred and twenty of them. The remainder, probably forty in number, were lost chiefly by the mules taking fright, and dashing through the openings of the thickets into the enemy's hands. Had we fifty or a hundred good dragoons, even those should have been recovered. The ranchero portion of Urrea's force, under General Canales, after unhitching the animals immediately set fire to the wagons. Among those burned was our ammunition wagon, which, though placed in charge of two drivers recommended as trusty men, had been lost in the first

alarm. They excused themselves by asserting that their horses became unmanageable at the noise of the affray, and that they did not leave their saddles until in danger of being carried over to the enemy. The sad story of its loss was first communicated to us by the sound of its explosion, which was followed by an unearthly yell of pain. It seemed that a party of Mexicans, perhaps engaged in wrangling for the horses, an unusual and much coveted booty, were assembled around it while it was burning; when, as we afterward learned from one of the sufferers who was captured, three of the number were instantly killed and several wounded by an explosion that shattered the wagon to fragments. This unlucky event, a more persevering foe than General Urrea would have turned to good account, assured as he must have been by the slackening of our fire, that we had no cartridges to waste upon a distant mark. It was no easy matter to prevent the loss from having a depressing effect upon our troops; but the circumstances of our position when fully understood, strengthened every heart and arm.

The enemy, foiled in his first and most serious attack in front, after re-forming, continued to menace us with a charge; but was as often driven back by the unflinching steadiness of our men, and a few round shot from the piece of artillery under Sergeant Howell, some of whose balls rebounded into the town, creating no little consternation among the citizens. Our first object being to collect and park the wagons, the men were directed to husband their ammunition, and content themselves with keeping the enemy at a respectful distance. While engaged in these skirmishes, altogether defensive on

our part, we could not refrain from again lamenting that it had not been our fortune to march from Monterey with the escort alone, as at first designed. Arrested in our progress more by the train in our rear, than by the foe in front, we could, if unembarrassed with the former, have thrown the latter from our path as easily as a buoyant ship casts the billows from her prow. Encouraged by our apparent inactivity, a party of the enemy dismounted, approached under cover of the chaparral and opened a rattling fire of escopetts upon our left flank. Their balls pattered among the mass of wagons then collected, but beside wounding a few mules did no damage. Our four-pounder was moved in that direction, and with a few raking discharges swept the skulking gentry from the bushes. While the fight was in progress, a gamecock, that courageous and vigilant bird, which the ancients, with their nice perception of the fitness of such things, dedicated to Mars, belonging to a soldier, flew upon a bow of the wagon in which he had been confined, and crowed in a style that would have caused the whole tribe of overgrown and loutish Shanghaes to hide their diminished heads. His clarion notes were greeted by the men with cheers and shouts of applause.

Among the laughable little incidents was the following, to which my attention was called by a gentleman near me. In one of the foremost wagons of the park was a beardless youngster,—perhaps a clerk,—whose only weapon was a little brass pocket-pistol. But he fought with that, as if victory depended upon his single efforts; discharging it with the most astonishing rapidity,—now disappearing in the