

## CHAPTER VI.

SANTA BARBARA TAKEN.—LIEUT. TALBOT AND HIS TEN.—GAMBLING IN PRISON.—RECRUITS.—A FUNNY CULPRIT.—MOVEMENTS OF COM. STOCKTON.—BEAUTY AND THE GRAVE.—BATTLE ON THE SALINAS.—THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER.—STOLEN PISTOLS.—INDIAN BEHIND A TREE.—NUPTIALS IN CALIFORNIA.

MONDAY, Nov. 9. The guard of ten, commanded by Lieut. T. Talbot, and posted at Santa Barbara to maintain the American flag, arrived here last evening. When the insurrection broke out at the south, they were summoned by some two hundred Californians to surrender. They contrived, however, under cover of night, to effect their escape. Their first halt was in a thicket, to which they were pursued by some fifty of the enemy on horseback. They waited, like lions in their lair, till the foe was within good rifle shot, and then discharged their pieces with terrific effect. The surviving assailants left their dead, and rushed back for reinforcements: but in the mean time, the hardy ten had pushed their way several leagues to the east, and gained a new ambush. An Indian might perhaps have trailed them; but their pursuers had not this wild sagacity. They rode here and there, penetrating every thicket, but the right one, and to prevent their escape at night, set fire to the woods. But one ravine, overhung with green pines, covered them with its mantling shadows; through this they made their noiseless escape.

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*Thomas O. Larkin*

To avoid the Californians, who were coming down in great numbers from the north to join their comrades in the south, the party of ten held their course to the east. They spent several days in attempting to find the pass which leads through the first range of the Californian mountains to the valley of the San Joaquin; but being unacquainted with the topography of the country, their utmost efforts were baffled. During this time they suffered greatly from hunger and thirst: the rugged steeps, among which they were straying, yielded neither streams nor game. At last, they fell in with a Cholo, the Arab of California, who kindly offered to conduct them to the mountain pass, and surrendered the use of his horse to carry their knapsacks and blankets. The pass was gained; but their hospitable guide still continued with them till they reached a tribe of Indians on the opposite side. Here he took leave of them, declining all compensation for his pains, and started back for his wild mountain home.

The Indians received them kindly, gave them their best acorns to eat, and their purest water to drink. These are the Indians who were brought before me a few months since, charged with an attempt to steal a drove of horses from Carmel. There being no positive proof of guilt, they were kindly treated, and instead of being threatened with dungeons and death, were dismissed with many beautiful presents. These presents they still preserved, and exhibited them with evident gratification and pride to their new guests.

Lieut. Talbot and party, guided by these faithful Indians, now held their course through the valley of the San Joaquin. Their progress was delayed by the sickness of one of their companions, whom they were obliged to carry on a litter. They subsisted entirely on the wild game which they killed. They were all on foot; and after travelling nearly five hundred miles in this manner, reached Monterey, where they were welcomed to the camp of Col. Fremont with three hearty cheers.

TUESDAY, NOV. 10. The merchant ship Euphemia arrived to-day from the Sandwich Islands, bringing the intelligence that the Columbus, bearing the broad pennant of Com. Biddle, had sailed from Honolulu for Valparaiso. We shall not then see that noble ship on this coast; she is bound homeward round the Cape. Her eight hundred men, with Com. Biddle at their head, would have been a great accession to our strength. It is not, however, a naval force of which we stand in greatest need. The war in California can never be decided from the deck. We want some five hundred horsemen, thoroughly accustomed to the saddle and the rifle, and a few pieces of flying-artillery. Without these we shall have constant attempts at revolution. They will invariably end in the defeat of those who get them up, but will involve private property and the public tranquillity.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 11. I found one of our prison-

ers at work to-day without a shirt, and supposed at first that he was indulging in some whim; but ascertained, upon further inquiry, that he had gambled it away to a fellow-prisoner. They had no cards or dice, but had managed to substitute a bone, which they whirled into the air, and which decided the game by falling with this or that end into the ground. I made the winner give back the shirt, which he did with evident reluctance, as he had played his own against it, and would have been, had he lost, as naked as his neighbor. An Indian, and Californian too, will gamble to the skin of their teeth, and even part with their grinders were they articles of value to others. But a tooth is much like the principle of life, which avails no one save its owner.

THURSDAY, NOV. 12. Capt. Grigsby arrived to-day from Sonoma with thirty mounted riflemen and sixty horses, and joined Col. Fremont's encampment. Capt. Hastings is expected in every day from San José with sixty men, well mounted, and twice that number of horses. Every rider here, destined on an arduous expedition, must have one or two spare horses, especially at this season of the year, when no feed can be procured except the slender grass which has sprung up in the recent showers, and which contains very little sustenance. It is easier to procure provender for a thousand horses on a march in the United States than ten here. And yet the table-lands here are covered through the summer with wild oats.

But where are the reapers? On horseback, galloping about and carousing at this rancho and that. Their sickles are the rein, their sheaves a pack of cards, their flails a guitar.

"No cocks do them to rustic labor call,  
From village on to village sounding clear;  
To tardy swain no shrill-voiced matron's squall,  
Nor hammer's thump disturbs the vacant ear."

FRIDAY, NOV. 13. Two fellows of Mexican origin were brought before me to-day, charged with breaking open the money-chest of the eating-house where they had transiently stopped, and taking from it about five hundred dollars. The owner having immediate occasion to go to his chest, discovered his loss, and suspected at once the persons concerned in it. They were apprehended, and soon after the money was found in the back yard, where it had been hastily buried after having been tied up in a handkerchief, which was identified as the neck-cloth of one of the accused. One discovery led to another, till the evidences of guilt, involving both, were fully established.

One of them then said there was no use in trying to get rid of the business any longer, and he would now tell the whole story straight as an arrow. He said that he and Antonio had talked over the matter the night before, and that he then attempted to reach the chest, but that the person in whose room it lay, and who had been asleep, suddenly stopped snoring, and getting alarmed he ran down stairs. But this

morning, while Antonio was entertaining the rest, and treating them to cocktails, he slipped up to the chamber, broke the lock, and filled his pockets with the coin. He had no time, he said, to pick out the gold, which would have been a great convenience, but scraped up silver and gold as they came, leaving in the chest about as much as he took. It was very vexatious, he said, to leave so much, but his pockets would hold no more: he was really afraid they would fetch away with what they had got. But he buoyed them up with his hands, reached the back yard, where he delivered the money over to Antonio, who received it in his handkerchief and buried it; but buried it in exactly the wrong spot, for he went off into a corner instead of sinking it where everybody must step over it.

He told this story with a countenance which played between a tragic and comic expression. Antonio, who had been both diverted and alarmed by the narrative of his accomplice, when it came his turn to speak, said his companion was the funniest fellow alive; he believed he would joke on the scaffold, if he could shake a kink out of the rope, and get breathing time for it. They were both a strange compound of wit and villany. They were sentenced to the public works for three years.

SATURDAY, NOV. 14. The Savannah arrived here to-day from the leeward, and reports the Congress on her way to San Diego, where she had gone to reinforce the garrison. This important post had been

recaptured by the Americans, under the command of Capt. Merrit, an emigrant officer of undaunted courage. He had been obliged to evacuate it a few weeks before, and was fortunate in being able to get his men on board a whale ship lying in the offing at the time. But a portion of the force opposed to him having been withdrawn to support the Mexican flag at Los Angeles, he landed again in the night, and took the garrison by surprise. This being the most southern post in California, Com. Stockton deemed it of the first importance to make its possession secure. To effect this object, he was obliged to postpone his purpose of recapturing at once the capital of the province. The best way to fight the Californians is to hem them in. They never turn upon you as lions at bay. The possibility of an escape is an element in their courage. They never borrow resolution from despair. They are so accustomed to range at freedom, to make their homes wherever adventure or caprice may carry them, that the idea of being cooped up to one place has almost as much privation and misery in it as the slave-ship inflicts upon its captives.

They still might deem their scope too pent,  
Though each had leave to pitch his tent  
Where'er his wildest wish might urge,  
Within creation's utmost verge.

SUNDAY, NOV. 15. One of the most beautiful ladies in Monterey has this day been consigned to the silent

grave. She was in the bloom of life, and visions of happiness threw their enchantments along the vista of her future years. She had all that wealth and beauty can bestow. Her personal charms were rivalled only by those of her mind. Her heart trembled through every fibre of her frame.

“ Whene'er with soft serenity she smiled,  
Or caught the orient blush of quick surprise,  
How sweetly mutable, how brightly wild,  
The liquid lustre darted from her eyes!  
Each look, each motion, waked a new-born grace,  
That o'er her form a transient glory cast:  
Some lovelier wonder soon usurped the place,  
Chased by a charm still lovelier than the last.”

But she is gone! she has left us like the bird which carolled in the morn, and departed upon its slanting ray. But her virtues survive in a brighter sphere; her beauty is stamped with immortality; her hand strikes a harp that will pour its melodies when the groves and streams of earth are silent.

MONDAY, NOV. 16. A Delaware Indian, quite out of breath, entered Col. Fremont's camp this morning with the intelligence that an irregular engagement took place last evening between a party of forty Americans, and a hundred and fifty Californians, on the Salinas river, about fifteen miles from Monterey. The Americans were coming down from San Juan, and had with them three hundred fresh horses which

they had brought from the Sacramento. The intelligence of their approach had reached the Californians, who had mustered all their force in this quarter, more for the purpose of capturing the horses than their riders. But the Americans, who were sixty strong, anticipating the possibility of an attack in crossing the river, left their horses, except those they rode, in the rear with twenty of their number, while forty came ahead to engage the Californians. They were surprised at their numbers, but rushed at once into the encounter. Capt. Foster was killed in the first charge, and Capt. Burrows, who was wounded in the first, fell in leading the second. Two American privates were killed, and a number of Californians. The encounter took place near sunset, and the Americans remained in possession of the ground.

The Delaware Indian, when the firing had slackened, left the field to bring the intelligence to Col. Fremont; but having to turn the enemy's line, he was attacked by three Californians—one of whom he shot with his rifle, another he killed with his tomahawk, and the third fled. His horse broke down before he got in, and he ran the rest of the way on foot. He reports that Thomas O. Larkin, Esq., the American consul, had been captured the night before, while at a rancho between this and San Juan. He had left Monterey to visit a sick child at San Francisco, and stopped for the night, when he was suddenly pounced upon: nor wife nor child will in any probability see him soon again. He will be closely guard-

ed; his life will be considered good for that of several prominent Californian officers who have broken their parole; and not unlikely some half-dozen may, in the event of disaster, be redeemed through his liberation.

TUESDAY, NOV. 17. Col. Fremont, with his three hundred riflemen, took his departure from Monterey this morning. They presented a very formidable line as they wound around the bay and disappeared in the shadows of the hills.

Spur on my men; the bugle peals  
Its last and stern command,—  
A charge! a charge!—an ocean burst  
Upon a stormy strand.

The artillery is under the command of Capt. McLain, an officer of much private worth and professional merit. He has at present two beautiful brass-pieces, well mounted, and will have two more of the same description on leaving San Juan. With these he will be able to do good execution. Nothing alarms the Californians so much as a piece of flying-artillery. They had rather see the very Evil One come scraggling over the hills.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 18. The horses which the Californians were endeavoring to reach in their rencounter on the river, were all preserved. Their loss would have been irretrievable in this campaign. The twenty men with whom they were left, declared

they would perish to a man sooner than give them up. Rash as this resolution may seem, it would, had the emergency occurred, have been terribly realized. The American engaged in this war puts his life on the die. He must prevail or perish. If there shall be a general engagement between the forces now in the field, it will be one of the most frightful on record. The Americans are outnumbered three to one,—still they are determined to hazard the issue; and would, probably, were the odds much greater. As horsemen, the Californians excel them; but they are greatly their superiors in the use of the rifle and in maneuvering artillery. And these, after all, are the weapons and engines that must decide a hot engagement. Neither party has any veteran cuirassiers to hew their way to triumph through the cloven crests of the foe. The most terrific encounters on the field of Waterloo were between those who wielded the glaive. With them, at least,

“An earthquake might have passed unheededly away.”

THURSDAY, NOV. 19. How strangely the lights and shadows of life are blended! As I passed this evening the house of Capt. de la T——, a light strain of music came floating out from the corridor upon the silent air. It was the daughter of the captain whose hand swept the guitar which accompanied the modulations of her melodious voice. Her father and her uncle are both in the ranks of the Californians, lead-

ing a forlorn hope, after having broken their parole of honor, and forfeited their lives. And yet she is gay as if her father were only out hunting the gazelle. Just list the numbers as they break from her thoughtless heart:—

Fly not yet, 'tis just the hour  
When pleasure, like the midnight flower,  
That scorns the eye of vulgar light,  
Begins to bloom for sons of night,  
And maids who love the moon!

And yet that moon before it wanes may gleam upon her father's grave. But she knows it not. She thinks this war will end as other Californian wars—in smoke. But it is a tempest-cloud charged with bolted thunder.

FRIDAY, NOV. 20. A German complained to me this morning that one of the volunteers, a countryman of his, under Col. Fremont, had stolen from him a pair of valuable pistols. He strongly suspected the person who had taken them. I sent for him; he confessed the act, delivered up the pistols, and begged me, as this was his first offence, not to expose him. He was a youth of eighteen or so, slightly built, and with a fair and remarkably ingenuous countenance. I told him he must take heed, as one offence often paves the way to another; but as he was in the campaign, and might soon be on the field of peril and death, his error should rest in silence with his own conscience. The tears stood in his eyes.

SATURDAY, NOV. 21. Capt. Foster, it appears, was not shot in the heat of the engagement on the river. He had rushed forward in advance to reconnoiter, and was suddenly surrounded from an ambush, and fell, bravely fighting to the last. A Delaware Indian, who was hastening to his rescue, finding himself hot-pressed, jumped from his horse behind a tree, from which he shot three of his antagonists, and then effected his escape. His living breastwork now shows in its scathed rind, how well it served him. It looks as if the auger-worm had bored there for an age.

There is something about a tree, with an Indian behind it, armed with a rifle, pointing this way and that, which awkwardly tests a man's nerves. You seem to be shooting at the muzzle of his rifle instead of him; and that is not the worst of it, he is all the while shooting at you. If partial concealment lends a charm to beauty, it also lends terror to an Indian. We think of the brake as much as the serpent coiled in its shadows. Were lightning to fall without thunder, people would put conductors on their bean-poles; and yet the blazing bolt strikes and shivers while the lagging thunder is yet unheard.

SUNDAY, NOV. 22. As soon as it will be prudent to withdraw our men from their posts on the Sabbath, I intend to propose a religious service. We shall soon be able to gather fifty or more. Every house here has a ball-room where the gay may dance, and a Madonna to whom the afflicted may kneel;

but none have a chapel; and if they had, the forms of Protestant worship would be held a profanation. There is only one way to get to heaven here, and that is through the absolving power of the Papal See. Every other path leads to purgatorial pangs and penal fire.

MONDAY, NOV. 23. It is said the Californians are born on horseback; it may also be said they are married on horseback. The day the marriage contract is agreed on between the parties, the bridegroom's first care is to buy or borrow the best horse to be found in his vicinity. At the same time he has to get, by one of these means, a silver-mounted bridle, and a saddle with embroidered housings. This saddle must have, also, at its stern, a bridal pillion, with broad aprons flowing down the flanks of the horse. These aprons are also embroidered with silk of different colors, and with gold and silver thread. Around the margin runs a string of little steel plates, alternated with slight pendants of the same metal. These, as the horse moves, jingle like a thousand mimic bells.

The bride, also, comes in for her share in these nuptial preparations. The bridegroom must present her with at least six entire changes of raiment, nor forget, through any sentiment of delicacy, even the chemise. Such an oversight might frustrate all his hopes; as it would be construed into a personal indifference,—the last kind of indifference which a

California lady will forgive. He therefore hunts this article with as much solicitude as the Peri the gift that was to unlock Paradise. Having found six which are neither too full nor too slender, he packs them in rose-leaves which seem to flutter like his own heart, and sends them to the lady as his last bridal present. She might naturally expect him to come next.

The wedding-day having arrived, the two fine horses, procured for the occasion, are led to the door, saddled, bridled, and pillioned. The bridegroom takes up before him the godmother, and the godfather the bride, and thus they gallop away to church. The priest, in his richest robes, receives them at the altar, where they kneel, partake of the sacrament, and are married. This over, they start on their return,—but now the gentlemen change partners. The bridegroom, still on the pillion, takes up before him his bride. With his right arm he steadies her on the saddle, and in his left hand holds the reins. They return to the house of the parents of the bride, where they are generally received with a discharge of musketry. Two persons, stationed at some convenient place, now rush out and seize him by his legs, and, before he has time to dismount, deprive him of his spurs, which he is obliged to redeem with a bottle of brandy.

The married couple then enter the house, where the near relatives are all waiting in tears to receive them. They kneel down before the parents of the



lady, and crave a blessing, which is bestowed with patriarchal solemnity. On rising, the bridegroom makes a signal for the guests to come in, and another for the guitar and harp to strike up. Then commences the dancing, which continues often for three days, with only brief intervals for refreshment, but none for slumber: the wedded pair must be on their feet; their dilemma furnishes food for good-humored gibes and merriment. Thus commences married life in California. This stream, it is to be hoped, is much smoother than its fount.

TUESDAY, NOV. 24. Monterey has been for the last two days remarkably quiet. The excitement occasioned by the battle on the Salinas has sunk into a dead calm. They who fell have received Christian burial; and they who survived have departed, some to find graves elsewhere. The great tragedy of life here is so filled with incident that it requires no stage effect. It is the visionary sword which eluded the grasp of Macbeth, turned into flashing steel.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 25. A Californian in trouble, often disregards the suggestions of national pride and personal resentment, and seeks succor where it can best be had. One of them who had been dangerously wounded in the late engagement, came into Monterey this morning, and applied to our surgeon to have the ball extracted from his hip. He seemed to think that as he had been disabled by one Amer-

ican, it was only right and proper he should be restored by another. He will then probably be off to fight us again. Nor does this in him argue a want of gratitude. He seeks the field to encounter his foes, much on the same principle that you do the wood to hunt wild game. You level your rifle at the hawk, not because he has injured you, but partly to exercise your skill, and partly because he is a saucy fellow, screeching about and frightening the other birds. I never yet saw the little king-bird chase a hawk, or the sword-fish pursue a whale, without a sentiment of delight. Neither have harmed me; but I hate all tyrants, whether they are on wings, fins, or legs.

THURSDAY, NOV. 26. Some of the shopkeepers here have been so long in the habit of smuggling under the former high rate of duties, that now they hardly know how to give up the trick, though there is very little motive for pursuing it. I caught a Frenchman to-day endeavoring to evade the municipal duty on rum. He had a hundred subterfuges, and flew from one to another, like a frightened cat-bird in the bush. His words fell so thick and fast that they quite covered up his falsehoods; the leaves of a wind-shaken tree in autumn conceal the nuts which fall with them to the ground. It is idle to expect honesty in a man who resorts to it only in the failure of his craft and cunning. His integrity is like the religion of some sailors—breaking out in shipwreck.