

TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES

IN MEXICO.

CHAPTER I.

Proceed to Brazos Santiago with the Kentucky Volunteer Regiment.
—Occurrences there.—Remove to Burrita.—Appearance of the
Country.—Soil.—Heavy Rains.—Occupations.—Alarms.—Death
of an Officer.—Remove to Camargo.—Soil, and state of Agriculture.
—Advantages of Camargo.—Troops concentrate there.—Depart
for Monterey.—Wooden Crosses.—Changed Appearance of the
Country.—Silver Mine.—Canales.—Mariné.—First Firing.—Incidents
at the Battle of Monterey.

At the commencement of the Mexican war I was at Louisville, Kentucky, when orders were received to raise in that state a regiment of volunteers, to proceed at once to the scene of action. Having many friends who had volunteered, I was by them easily persuaded to do the same; and in the short space of one week we were on the way to New Orleans, whence we shipped for Brazos Santiago in two vessels, which were towed by a steamer into the Gulf. When we were at a sufficient distance from the land to catch a breeze, the steamer left us, and we arrived at the Brazos in four days. The other vessel had arrived the day before, and we hastened to join our comrades.

The only buildings were one belonging to the quarter-master's or commissary department, and an occasional shanty for a sutler, or some other adventurer who acted on his own account. The island is low and very level, and so destitute of soil that no grass or weeds grow on it. On the side next the Gulf are several very high sand-hills, which have been blown up by the heavy winds from the sea. There were no wells, but for water we dug little holes in the sand, from three to six feet deep. Into these would run sufficient water to enable us to take it up with a cup. It was brackish, but we used it, for want of any other. The sea furnished us with oysters and fish, and it required only a slight exertion to obtain a plentiful supply.

We drilled two hours every day, and soon became tolerable proficient in the use of arms. Reports were in circulation that the Mexicans intended to make a descent on the island; and picket-guards were stationed at a distance from the camp. One night the officers, being desirous of testing the capabilities of the men, determined to create an alarm. Accordingly, when the night was far advanced, and all were buried in profound sleep, the long roll was heard to beat. Instantly all was life and confusion: loud cries of "*Turn out! turn out!*" were heard in every direction. We formed at once into a line on the parade ground; and by the light of the moon we could distinctly see the St. Louis regiment (which was there also) formed in battle array. Our officers rode up and down the line, exhorting us to keep cool, and not be excited, as the Mexicans did not come. There

was no excuse for keeping us waiting any longer, so we were dismissed, the officers telling us to be ready to turn out at a moment's warning. We turned into our tents to take another sleep, and no sooner had all sunk into forgetfulness than another alarm was given. We were instantly on our feet, and fell into line as before. But we were kept only a few minutes, when they dismissed us, and permitted us to sleep quietly until morning. It was said that these alarms were the result of bets between the officers of the two regiments, regarding the alacrity with which their respective commands would form into line; but I do not certainly know that such was the case. However, as our life was so monotonous here, it was well to spice it with a little variety.

The weather was very hot, and sickness prevailed to a considerable extent in the camp; but arrangements could not be made for removing till we received orders from General Taylor. During the interval, some jovial youths entertained their comrades by playing practical jokes on some sutler or rum-seller, such as the following. One day, some men belonging to the St. Louis regiment, assisted by some from ours, went to the rear of a rum shanty, and made an opening in the board partition till they got access to a brandy barrel, whence they retailed it at sixpence a glass. After some time, one of the young men went in and asked the sutler how he sold brandy. On being told "a shilling a glass," he replied that others sold it for sixpence. "Where?" said the sutler. The young man told him to follow, and he would show him. He followed to the rear of his own build-

ing, and saw them selling from his own brandy barrel. Whereupon he began to swear, curse, and rave; but this only made them sell more brandy; and those who had no money got it gratis. At last, when the sutler found that neither curses nor threats produced any effect, he bought them off by treating all hands.

While lying here, the rainy season commenced. The days were usually clear, and after dark it commenced raining, accompanied with vivid flashes of lightning and terrific peals of thunder, which frequently ended by giving us a thorough drenching. But the warm sunny days amply repaid us for these little inconveniences.

We remained here three weeks, when orders were received to remove up the Rio Grande to a place called Burrita, distant fourteen miles. As soon as all were ready, the right wing moved on as far as the mouth of the river, and the day following, the left wing having reached them, we put our baggage on a steam-boat to convey it up the river. After resting a while we crossed over to the other side, and for the first time put our feet on Mexican ground.

As soon as all were over we commenced our line of march. The country, as far as the eye could reach, was level; and that portion of it next the river was so low as to be entirely buried under water, and there being no way to avoid it, we were forced to march through it. This continued for near one fourth of the way, after which we had a good road. There were no houses on the way, but an occasional cultivated field. The land was rich and easy of cultiva-

tion, and would, by proper tillage, yield the farmer a rich return for his labor; but it seems as though all its occupants wished for in this world was enough to eat from day to day, never thinking of providing for the future. About sunset we arrived at the place destined for our encampment. This was a high bank from twenty to thirty rods wide, and some miles in length. The ground having been assigned off to the companies, we went down to the boat, brought up our tents and other baggage, while some of our comrades were collecting wood with which to cook our supper; after which, being excessively fatigued with our hard march, we lay down to sleep. The weather by this time had become very cloudy, and a heavy rain was expected. During the night it came down in a manner that was never seen before by any of us. Our tents were soon wet through, and in a short time it became as bad inside as outside; still, we endured all the inconveniences arising from this state of the weather with great resignation.

In the morning it became clear for a few moments, but it soon commenced raining with increased violence. Many had succeeded in building a fire to cook their breakfast, but the rain came on so soon that it drove them all into their quarters and put out their fire; others, in the mean time, had been out and gathered weeds and bushes to place on the bottom of their tents to keep their blankets out of the mud—an excellent precaution, as it afterward proved to be of great service. It continued to rain six days without intermission, during which time we scarcely saw the sun, and, as no cooking could be done out of

doors, we made a fire in the tent and boiled our coffee, fried our meat, &c. In the mean while our bread had given out; and so hard was it raining, that none could be issued. At length it slackened sufficient for them to serve out rations. For a few days our situation was truly unpleasant—our clothes were all wet, and there were no dry ones in our knapsacks; our blankets and fire-arms also were wet, and the latter rusty. The camp ground was something like a bed of mortar. As soon as the sun came out warm, however, every thing was made right; clothes were dried, fire-arms were put in order, our quarters were cleaned out, and soon every thing assumed quite a respectable appearance. We were encamped a little above the village of Burrita, where there was a regiment of Louisiana volunteers, and above us, further up the river, was another regiment from the same state. The village above alluded to was a small town, or rather rancho; the houses were miserably-built hovels, not capable of protecting the inmates from the pelting rain. On the land that was cultivated there were very fine crops of cotton, which the soil will produce in great abundance, likewise corn, wheat, and various tropical fruits.

On one side of the camp was a chaparral which afforded us wood for a long time; and our water was taken from the river, very muddy, but when settled it was good and sweet. Steam-boats were constantly plying on the river between Camargo and its mouth, carrying provisions to that point, as General Taylor was concentrating all his force there preparatory to moving on Monterey. Occasionally we received pa-

pers from Louisville, by which means we had some little knowledge of their doings at home; and as reading matter was very scarce in the regiment, every paper was eagerly sought after by all the boys. A portion of every day was spent in drilling, in which exercise we in time became tolerably proficient.

We lay here some time, nothing occurring to disturb the even tenor of our life but an occasional report that peace was made or about to be made. This all rejoiced at, as we had become heartily tired of this inactive state, and a change of any kind was greatly desired; but a homeward-bound course would have been more acceptable to us than all others. At length it became evident to our officers that another camping-ground was necessary, as we had cut all the wood that was near us, and for our daily supply were forced to carry it a great distance. However, a circumstance occurred before we left that deserves notice. On the opposite side of the marsh that was in the rear of our camp was another high range of hills; across this marsh it was not more than two miles to this ridge. One day a lieutenant of one of the companies was looking over on these hills through a glass, and discovered what was supposed to be a large body of horsemen drilling. The alarm was instantly given, and that night a detail of thirty men was made from the rifle company to go thither and make what discoveries it could. The whole of that night was spent in preparing cartridges for the expedition, and early the next morning they started. They were forced to take a circuitous route, to avoid as much as

possible the deep waters of the marsh. They took a supply of provisions, expecting to be gone two days. During this time great excitement prevailed in the camp, in anticipation of an attack from this supposed enemy. Toward evening of the second day they returned, and reported that they saw nothing but a drove of wild horses that were prancing about at leisure, and thus passed away this danger; but there was another circumstance that occurred at or near this time that filled the regiment with gloom. Captain B., of the ninth company, went to Matamoras on business connected with the regiment; he was expected to be gone only a few days; a week passed, and he did not return. Then fears for his safety were entertained; and, as he proceeded there by land, it was not known whether he fell at the hands of the rancheros, or received his death from some of the gamblers that infested that city. A search was made for the body afterward, but it never was found.

At length we began to make preparations to move up to Camargo; a few companies, with the sick, went up on a boat, the balance by land. By water the distance was near four hundred miles; by land, about one hundred. We had been at that place eight weeks, and right glad were we to leave. We put our camp-baggage on board, at least all that was going by the boat, went on board, and soon we were wending our way nearer the scene of bloodshed.

The scenery on the banks of the river is beautifully diversified. There are low bottoms, with a soil unequalled in the world for fertility. The timber was not very large, but beautiful in its diminutiveness.

The climate is so even and regular that two crops can be raised in a year, one succeeding the other; but, notwithstanding all these advantages, no more is produced than is indispensably necessary to support life. The reason of this state of things will hereafter be stated. At length we arrived at Matamoras, where we lay all night. From our position we could see but little of the city, but we frequently saw some marks of violence that was done by the balls during the bombardment of Fort Brown.

We lay a short distance above the city, and next morning we made a start up the river. We could not proceed fast because of the rapidity of the current. There was frequently a rancho seen, with a small cultivated piece of ground around it. At these ranchoes we stopped for wood, for which government paid from two and a half to three dollars per cord; by this means many of the Mexicans who were poor now have their pockets lined with money. In four days we reached the mouth of the San Juan, a large stream emptying into the Rio Grande. About six miles from its mouth, on a high bank, is Camargo, once a large town and a place of good business, but now in ruins, having been swept away by the overflowing of the river. At present only a few houses remain, and all of them are in a dilapidated condition. The place is well situated for trade, as all the merchandise that is bound for Monterey, Saltillo, and other towns of similar importance, would come through here. The river is very wide, and sufficiently deep to admit the largest class of steam-boats, even during low water. With these advantages Camargo

would, in the hands of an industrious and enterprising people, soon become a great commercial city. The surrounding country is healthy, and the soil fertile. From the Gulf upward the land gradually rises, and is mostly free from hills. At the time of our arrival there were several regiments of regulars here, which had been here some time, and likewise some of the famous Texan Rangers. All the boats that were on the river were busily engaged in bringing up soldiers and provisions. This was in August. Every few days troops were arriving, and our available force soon amounted to about seven thousand men. We here were again cheered with the hopes of peace being soon made; but, as before, it proved illusory.

At length we were mustered, and received our clothing-money, being the first we had hitherto received. All those regiments which had been ordered on to Monterey had been moved over the river. At length, every thing being ready, the army moved on amid the cheers of those who were left behind. The country still continued rising, but was regular and gradual in its ascent. There was more and heavier timber than on the portions we had left. One thing surprised us much: there were wooden crosses placed by the road side at frequent intervals; for these we could not account. At first we supposed that they were land-marks denoting distances; but then we saw as many as four or five in one place, and this destroyed that supposition. Afterward, as I became more acquainted with the manners and customs of the inhabitants, this was explained; and in my travels through this country, I saw that it was a thing of very com-

mon occurrence. It is a custom of this people to place a wooden cross over a body that has been found dead, wherever it may be, whether in the field or the road; and as murders are of frequent occurrence, these monuments of cruelty and crime are to be seen in every highway and in every city; and frequently as many as four, five, or six, and sometimes more, were to be found within the space of one rod.

It was some forty leagues to Monterey, the place of our destination. In two days we passed Mier, a small place, but beautiful and regularly built, and is capable of being made very strong with little exertion. We encamped here one night, and then proceeded to Seralvo, which was just half way to Monterey. Before reaching this place, the high blue mountains of the Sierra Madre appeared in sight. Seralvo is situated near the foot of these mountains. Through the town flows a fine, clear, and beautiful stream, which empties its waters into the Rio Grande. It is said that near here, in one of these towering hills, is a silver mine of great value, that was once worked by a company from the United States; but they were forced to desist on account of a revolution in the country. For a long time it lay idle; at last another company attempted to reopen and work it. Their attempt proved fruitless; and, after spending several thousand dollars, they abandoned it to prosecute their enterprise elsewhere. It is on this road that Canales, the noted robber, commits his depredations. He had been outlawed by the Mexican government, and afterward received into its pay several times. He is a man of doubtful courage, but possesses good talents. It is

said that he was educated for the profession of the law; but, unfortunately, taking part on the wrong side in a revolution, he became outlawed; and since then he has been in command of an army as a bandit. The latter was his character at the time of which I am speaking; and on this march it is said that he came into the American camp, and went to the general's quarters, made himself known, and offered his services and those of his men in the approaching conflict. But the commander rejected his offer, saying that, sooner than receive his services, he would treat him as a highwayman. This story was in circulation in the camp, but I can not vouch for its truth. I was afterward told, however, while a prisoner, that at this time Canales was in the American camp several times, and was anxious to join the Americans, as were most of his men, but never did.

We stayed at this place one night. From hence most of our way lay through a rough and rocky road; the mountains on each side rising with towering tops, one vying with the other in its dizzy height. This was characteristic of the first day's march; the second was more even, but still rough, uneven, and uninhabited. The third day the road became level, and the soil very fertile. This day we passed through Mariné, the scene of a bloody massacre, as I shall hereafter relate. The fourth day we encamped within ten miles of Monterey. Next morning we made an early start: we had no sooner begun to move than the thundering roar of the cannon greeted our ears. The Texan Rangers were in the advance, and at this time in sight of the enemy, who commenced firing

on them at once. All was impatience and anxiety through the army to reach the scene of action as soon as possible, to participate in its dangers and its glories, the roaring of the cannon sounding more like martial music than the knell of death. We encamped that night about five miles from Monterey, by the side of some fine springs, and a most beautiful piece of wood, the only timber of the kind that can be seen in the valley. The next morning an attack was regularly commenced, the general dispositions of the battle were soon made, and each commander took his respective command, Brigadier-general Hemar, of Ohio, taking command of the brigade composed of the first regiments of the Kentucky and Ohio volunteers. The Kentucky regiment was detailed to guard a mortar, commanded by Captain Ramsay, and a better or more thorough-bred soldier could not be found.

The town appeared to be very strongly fortified. In front was a large fort, commonly called "*The Black Fort*," which name was given to it by its hoisting the black flag during the battle. At the west end of the town, on a very high hill, is the bishop's castle, another strongly-fortified point. Beyond that, on another hill, was placed a battery of two guns. At the east end of the town were several smaller fortifications, all of which were heavily mounted and well manned. Besides these, every street leading into the city was defended by a breast-work and two guns. Of this fact no one was aware until the town had been penetrated. General Worth was ordered to make an attempt on the bishop's castle. He took three thousand men, and, taking a circuitous

route, he was concealed by the chapparal and the corn-fields, and in a few hours appeared in the rear, at the foot of this hill. In the mean time, the attack on the lower end of the town had been commenced. This was done more to draw their attention from General Worth than with a view of bringing on a regular engagement; but so impetuous was the onset of these volunteers, that it was found impossible to stop or recall them. They were the Mississippians and Tennesseans. The Ohio regiment was likewise with them. All these were but a short time out, and had had very little time to become acquainted with military tactics, and none of them had before seen an engagement. The battle raged with great fury; the roaring of the cannon was terrific. Captain Ramsay would occasionally throw a shell into them, doing terrible execution; and soon we saw their cavalry forming, preparing to charge on this mortar. They started, and had come some distance, when a shell was thrown into their midst, killing great numbers and throwing them into confusion, which forced them to return. They made one or two more attempts, but met with the same reception, after which they kept themselves quiet. This day's fight resulted in the capture of two forts by the Mississippians and Tennesseans. During this time it rained in torrents.

Toward night of the second day, the left wing of our regiment, under the command of Major Sheppard, was ordered into town to take charge of these forts and relieve those that then occupied it. We were all cheered at this time by seeing the American colors flying on the castle. This occurred about twelve

o'clock. One loud shout rang in the air through our lines, so loud as to drown the thundering roar of the cannon. This was the first information that we had of the doings of General Worth. At last we proceeded to the fort of which we were to take charge; our road was greatly exposed; a cross fire was continually pouring into us, though fortunately doing little injury. But there were plenty of evidences to show that the work of death had been terrible at this point, as the ground was literally strewn with dead bodies. In a short time we reached our destination, where we were protected from the shots of the enemy. The fort, owing to the rain and the constant tramping, had become very muddy; but we were forced to make this our camping-place for the night, notwithstanding the shower of shot that was poured into us from forts adjacent, and by our neighborly friends the Mexicans. After dark a picket-guard was sent to a tanyard, which was some fifteen rods from the fort.

During the night, rockets were fired by the enemy to discover this guard. They did not succeed until toward morning, when they immediately fired into the building, and wounded a man belonging to the tenth company. On this they came back to where the rest of us were. Soon daylight appeared, when the action commenced, which resulted in the capitulation of the town, after which the American flag proudly waved over the walls of Monterey. I was afterward told that Ampudia was tried by a court-martial; and why he was not cashiered is a wonder, for a greater coward never commanded an army. I was told this while at San Luis Potosi.