

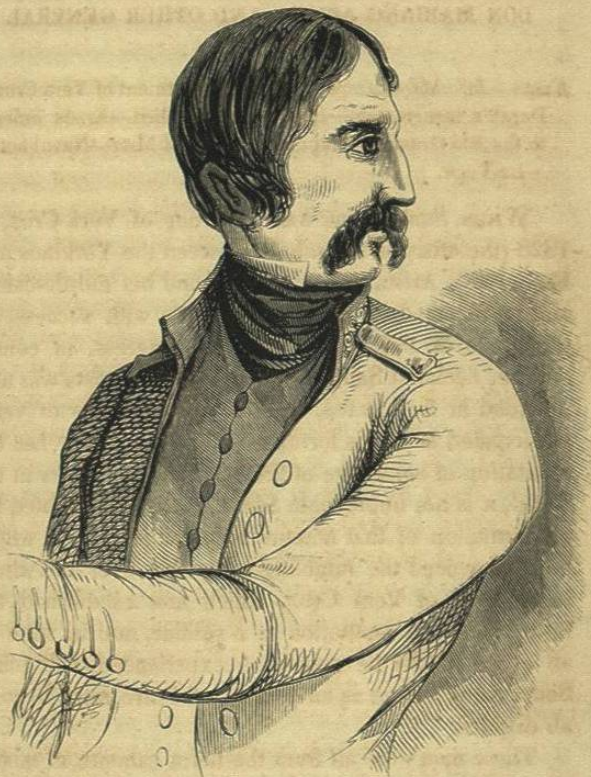
## CHAPTER X.

### DON MARIANO ARISTA AND OTHER GENERAL OFFICERS.

Arista—*Jarocho*s—Campaign in the department of Vera Cruz—Duran's insurrection—Insurrection quelled—Arista ordered to the Rio Grande—Ampudia—Battle of Mier—Naval action—La Vega.

WHEN Santa Anna was governor of Vera Cruz, in 1828 (the crisis of the cabals between the Yorkinos and Escoceses), Arista was a colonel and his aid-de-camp, and participated in the attempt made with success, on the castle of Perote. When the congress, in consequence, declared Santa Anna an outlaw, Arista was also included in the decree, and for a long series of years participated in all his fortunes. To Arista, who has the reputation of being one of the best cavalry officers in the world, it is not improbable Santa Anna was indebted for the formation of that famous corps of men, with whom he commenced the rambling campaign over the whole department of Vera Cruz, which first established the future dictator's reputation as a soldier, and in spite of all other checks he may have experienced, will place Santa Anna's fame as an officer and brave man, beyond all dispute.

These men were all from the tierra caliente, of mixed Spanish, Aztec, and negro blood, as we have said before, proof against weather and fever, very Arabs in constitution, while, from their vicinity to the mountains of the tierra templada, they are enabled to acquire the agility of the chamois hunters of the alps. Their horses



DON MARIANO ARISTA.



were like them, wild looking and small, but hardy as their riders. Their arms were the lance and carbine, and their food, whatever they could find. The head of this corps, which, in emergencies, could always be increased indefinitely by all the rancheros or herdsmen of the district it chanced to occupy, was Arista. Emphatically a *hombre de caballo*, or horseman he was, it is said, able to perform feats of horsemanship amid the battle when squadrons were charging around him, that one of Franconi's pupils, with the readiest eye and boldest seat, would scarcely attempt in the arena.

The result of this campaign we have already described, and we will only say here, that though the forces of Santa Anna were finally driven into Oaxaca, and almost destroyed, yet he had distracted the attention of Pedraza's government so long that Guerrero was ultimately enabled to triumph. When Santa Anna became secretary of war under Guerrero, Arista was not neglected, and was made use of to keep up his influence in the tierra caliente, until Santa Anna thought proper to instal Pedraza again.

In the expedition against the last Spanish invaders, Arista also figured, and received a large portion of the rewards of the success. When Bustamente was deposed, Arista was yet the main-spring of all the plots of the period, though apparently occupied solely with the discharge of his duties as brigadier and commander of a department. In this movement Arista also figured as chief of the *Jorochos*, or men from the tierra caliente, who exalted Santa Anna to power in 1832. Towards the end of 1833 happened one of those ridiculous scenes, which, like the ecclesiastical *nolo episcopari*, or Cæsar's refusal of the crown, have occurred in every country. General Duran, who commanded in Valli-



dolid or Morelia, having commenced an insurrection for the purpose of proclaiming Santa Anna dictator, the latter patriotic and self-sacrificing individual was stirred with the greatest indignation, and as the depository of law and power, immediately marched to give the world an example of that superhuman virtue which made old Rome so illustrious. He was of course accompanied by his *fidus Achates*, General Arista. The latter, however, was no Roman, but a genuine Mexican, and immediately proposed to the president to let General Duran have his way, and to accept the greatness thrust upon him. Santa Anna was indignant, and told Arista that an acquaintance of so many years' standing should have taught him to appreciate his public virtue, and ordered him to be silent for ever on the subject. Arista immediately declared that he would not obey him; that his first duty was to his country, and that if Santa Anna would not consent to be the savior of Mexico willingly, he would make him serve her.

Arista immediately joined Duran with a large body of troops, many of whom, strangely enough, were *Jarochos*, or men from the tierra caliente, to whom we have previously referred as being so devoted to Santa Anna. In the course of this contest, in which there were many manœuvres and no men killed but a few known to adhere to the republican vice-president, Gomez Farias, Santa Anna was made prisoner and returned to Mexico, whither the revolt of Duran had extended, the garrison of the citadel and the city having given their adhesion to it. Farias opposed it; but the honor of suppressing it was reserved for Santa Anna. This *bene merito* of the country then marched against Arista and Duran, whom he forced to capitulate (need we say the terms were not severe), and retired to Mango de

Clavo, intrusting the administration to Farias until new events occurred.

We here lose sight of Arista for a long time, during which he was at Cincinnati, in the United States, in exile. In connexion with this period of his life, an interesting anecdote is told. Having been disappointed in the receipt of funds, he was in great distress, and worked for some time as a journeyman tinman, until circumstances relieved him from necessity. When the French landed at Vera Cruz, Arista, the story goes, was found in Santa Anna's house, and surrendered to the Prince de Joinville, who is, by the French authorities, said to have headed the party directed especially against Santa Anna. In the rest of the career of the dictator until his exile, Arista remained with him; and when war became imminent, having been assigned to the command of the army of Mexico on the north, was ordered with reinforcements to the Rio Grande, where Ampudia commanded. The two acted in concert, and contrived to lose battle after battle in the most unprecedented manner, and to march and countermarch between Monterey and the Rio Grande without opposing even a momentary check to the American general. This circumstance gives us the clue to the character of Arista. He had not, in all his early career, exercised any important command, and his master-mind, Santa Anna, being absent, he was altogether inadequate to the emergency of his situation. The quarrel between Arista and Ampudia consequent on the battle of La Resaca, might explain these events to the advantage of the former and to the Mexican people. This, however, is a task incumbent on a Mexican, and cannot be done satisfactorily till the war shall have ended.



Don PEDRO DE AMPUDIA has very long been an officer of the Mexican army, and became a general after Santa Anna had deposed Bustamente in 1840. He participated in many of the events of the Mexican expeditions against Texas. His first prominent service was in 1842, when a Mexican foray, headed by General Wohl, was made against the frontier of Texas, and many citizens were imprisoned and carried off. It has been said that this expedition was never authorized by the Mexican government, but was composed entirely of rancheros, who were collected by the hope of plunder. Houston, the president of Texas, immediately ordered out eight hundred volunteers to rendezvous at San Antonio, on the 27th of October, to oppose the force of Wohl, which consisted of thirteen hundred men. The command of this expedition belonged to General Summerville, who, however, on his arrival at San Antonio, found many persons willing to dispute the command with him. The troops, however, finally obeyed him, and he marched to the Rio Grande and took possession of the town of Laredo. Before reaching this place, many symptoms of mutiny occurred, and after he had left it, two hundred Texans, in open defiance of his authority, marched back and pillaged the inhabitants of everything worth being carried off. This occurrence, so very disgraceful, and which would have placed Texas and her people on a level with the brigands of Wohl, had it been approved of, determined General Summerville to retrograde, which was certainly the course otherwise dictated by policy, as it was obvious that the people of the Rio Grande were too poor to support his forces, and he had not men enough to make any permanent impression on Mexico.

At this juncture the excitement became universal, and the men so clamorous, that a council of officers was

convened to decide on the course of the expedition, the result of which was, that a few already disgusted by what had occurred, returned home, but the majority continued their march. It is much to be regretted that Summerville did not accompany those who returned. He, however, continued as far as Guerrero, with no other intention than plunder. This was a miserable village where the people are poor and starving, without mines, agricultural wealth, or any other inducement, yet it was besieged. This circumstance so terrified the people that they sought by presents to propitiate the officers of the expedition, to prevent the recurrence of such a scene as had taken place at Laredo. There was much dissatisfaction among the men, who, however, resolved to continue on to Mier, a town of considerable importance.

Here, General Summerville became disgusted; and, as ammunition had begun to fail, did what he should have done long before, called on his men to return. One hundred obeyed him; and the rest, under another commander, resolved to attack Mier. The force which remained consisted of about two hundred and seventy men; and it is a mystery how they contrived to keep together, as their ideas of military obedience were of the rudest kind. Who really commanded is even now uncertain. A message was sent to the alcalde, calling for a contribution of five thousand dollars; and, when informed that all the money that could or would be extorted was one hundred and seventy-three dollars, the officers determined to attack the town, though aware that Don Pedro de Ampudia was within it, at the head of a large force.

On Christmas day, the town was attacked; and, when night came on, the Texan force, under a heavy fire, was slowly forcing its way into the streets. It



cannot be denied, unholy as the object of the expedition was become, the mass of its members being attracted by the desire of plundering the Mexican churches, and by the lawless pleasures of a partisan war, the officers and men fought with that courage and perseverance which have been conspicuous through the whole war of Texan independence. They at last reached a house where they were protected from the ordnance of Ampudia, and the contest was suspended until the next morning.

The Mexicans then advanced to the attack, and assault after assault failed, the officers being conspicuous by their insignia, and falling, one after the other, before the deadly aim of the Texan rifle. Ampudia at last sent an officer with a white flag to offer terms, which, after much deliberation, were accepted. The terms were, that they were to be surrendered as prisoners of war. The loss of Ampudia in this action is said to have exceeded five hundred men; a thing likely enough, as he acknowledged to have lost two hundred. The Texans had twelve men killed and eighteen wounded; and the survivors no sooner were in his power, than they were chained two together, and every stipulation of the surrender, except that which secured their lives, violated.

The events of this expedition have been the subject of much comment. The captured Texans were taken to various prisons, and a large party were long employed in laboring on the streets of Tacubaya. While on their march to the city of Mexico, they, on one occasion, overpowered the guard, and seized its arms, a circumstance of which advantage was taken by Santa Anna, to order them all to be shot. This sentence was afterwards relaxed, and every tenth man was made an example of.

Ampudia was, for his conduct on this occasion, much applauded; and we almost lose sight of him until the army of the United States approached the Rio Grande, when he was placed in command of the district around Matamoras, in which were Laredo and Mier, the scenes of his former triumphs.

Ampudia has, however, made himself infamous by an act of brutality, unequalled for many centuries in a civilized country. In the summer of 1844, the Mexican General Sentmanat, exiled by Santa Anna, made a rash attempt on the town of Tobasco, at the head of but fifty men, so confident was he of being supported by the population. The vessel which bore them was taken by a Mexican man-of-war, and this forlorn hope was surrendered to Ampudia. The unfortunate general was, with fourteen of his companions, shot; and their heads, the monster Ampudia states in his despatch, he caused to be *boiled in oil*, and hung in iron cages to the walls of the town.

General Sentmanat had lived long in New Orleans, where he married, and had many friends; and the news of his death was received with a burst of indignation, which may account for the prejudice entertained in the United States against Ampudia more than against any other Mexican general.

Immediately after the battle of Mier, which took place in December 1842, General Ampudia assumed command of the army, more than ten thousand strong, which had been for two months besieging the city of Campeche, (Yucatan), which port was also blockaded by the entire naval force of Mexico, consisting of three steamers, two brigs, and two schooners, under the command of Admiral Lopez. Campeche held out nobly, and on the following April, 1843, that port was relieved by the arrival



of Commodore E. W. Moore, of the Texan navy, who had been detained in New Orleans for the want of means to fit out; which, although they had been appropriated by the Texan congress in July, 1842, were most unaccountably withheld by President Houston at that time, who controlled the destiny of Texas.

The government of Yucatan furnished Commodore Moore with means to get to sea, with which and the aid of friends in New Orleans, he sailed from that port on the 15th of April, 1843, in command of the sloop-of-war *Austin*, mounting *eighteen* (medium) twenty-four-pounders, and two *eighteens*, accompanied by the brig *Wharton*, Captain Lothrop, mounting sixteen (medium) eighteen-pounders. With these two vessels, which were well manned and thoroughly equipped, Commodore Moore sailed for Campeche, where he arrived on the 30th of April, and attacked the whole Mexican fleet, which after an action of over an hour, hauled off—but renewed the fight again during the interim of calm between the land and sea breeze; their steam giving them great advantage, besides their great superiority in weight of metal. Commodore Moore had in the meantime been joined by four gun-boats, which came out from Campeche; the action this time lasted but little over half an hour, when the Mexicans again hauled off. On the 16th of May another engagement took place, which lasted more than four hours, the particulars of which would exhibit, in the Texan naval forces, the existence of the gallantry which has ever characterized the same arm of the public service of the United States.

Commodore Moore made repeated efforts to engage the enemy prior to the last action, (May 16th), which was fought by Commodore Don Thomas Marine, Admiral Lopez having been arrested and sent to Vera Cruz

for trial, for not capturing the two Texan vessels. Commodore Moore had one-fourth of his force killed and wounded, but he made repeated efforts to bring on another battle, which Commodore Marine, the Mexican commander, avoided, his steam enabling him to do so whenever he chose.

On the night of the 26th of June, the Mexican army embarked on board of their vessels of war and a few transports (it having been reduced full one-half by the vomito and desertions), and fell back to Tobasco, where General Ampudia remained until the summer of 1844; whence he was transferred after his barbarous course towards the gallant Sentmanat.

The following was the force of the Mexican navy:

Steamer *Montezuma*, two sixty-eights and six forty-twos, Paixhan guns.

Steamer *Guadalupe*, two sixty-eight Paixhans and two long thirty-twos.

Steamer *Rejenerador*, one long thirty-two and two long nines.

Schooner *Eagle*, one long thirty-two and six eighteens, all Paixhans.

Brig *Yucateco*, one long eighteen and sixteen eighteen-pound carronades.

Brig *Yman*, one long twelve and eight six-pounders.

Schooner *Campecheano*, one long nine and two six-pounders.

This is the first time that steam and sail vessels had ever come in contact, and Commodore Moore beat these three steamers (two of them armed with heavy Paixhan guns), they having a sail force co-operating with them, fully equal to the force of the two Texan vessels. It was also the first time that Paixhan guns had been used in a naval combat.



The reason why Commodore Moore ventured on such an unequal contest, was to save Galveston, the principal port of Texas, from an attack as soon as Yucatan had surrendered, which she was on the eve of doing, the preliminaries having been agreed on between General Ampudia and Governor Meredez, of Yucatan, who was in command of the troops at Campeche, and the articles of compromise were to have been signed the *very* day, April 30th, 1843, that Commodore Moore arrived off Campeche, and defeated the Mexican squadron.

Comment is useless upon the value that the little navy of Texas was to that republic, in her struggle for independence, by keeping her ports open, and the entire coast clear of all Mexican cruisers, from the year 1839 to the treaty of annexation, when the Texas navy was laid up in ordinary, (protection having been then guaranteed by the government of the United States.) Although *two* proclamations of blockade of the ports of Texas were published by the Mexican authorities, one in 1839 and the other in 1840, the Mexican vessels of war were kept in their own ports, and many of their merchant vessels were captured by the Texan cruisers under Commodore Moore, who was all the while off the Mexican coast with some of the vessels under his command, up to the summer of 1842. At this time he went into New Orleans to refit, which he was prevented from doing by the extraordinary course of President Houston, already mentioned, who withheld the appropriations of congress for that purpose, and left Commodore Moore to keep up the navy with his own means and resources, which he did for upwards of nine months, and finally fitted them out for a cruise without a dollar from his government. He was proclaimed a traitor and pirate by the presi-

dent of Texas for this course, but nobly sustained by the people and congress of the republic.

This proclamation of Houston's was published in Texas the same day that Commodore Moore fought the overwhelming force of the enemy for more than four hours, and chased them, as Commissioner Morgan says in his testimony before the court martial ordered by the congress of Texas at the urgent request of Commodore Moore, "so far to sea that he could not see us from the top of the house he was on in Campeche."

The resolutions of the people of Matagorda and Galveston counties contain some interesting statements and show the feelings of the people. Meetings were also held in many of the other counties of the republic, and the disapprobation of the people expressed in strong terms, of the course pursued by President Houston towards the commodore of the little navy of Texas.

The conduct of Ampudia since the war, has been much censured by his countrymen, and in the United States many have been found willing to decry him. He has had, undeniably, great difficulties to contend with, and has scarcely had an opportunity to act otherwise than he has done. He was in command of men prepared to be conquered, who had a great disinclination to meet the American army, and who had, it will be remembered by all, mutinied at San Luis, when first ordered to the frontier. He appears, in spite of all *evidence*, to have done his duty as long as any of his brethren. He has since been arrested, and though released, now occupies no prominent position.

DON ROMULO DE LA VEGA is a soldier by profession, and when the war broke out only occupied the rank of colonel of infantry, with the title or brevet of general of brigade. He has won much reputation in this



country since the war, having previously been entirely unknown. He has been stationed for many years on the northern frontier of Mexico, and was for a long time *jefe militar* of the department in which Monclova is situated. At the battle of the 9th of May he was taken prisoner while fighting, and having been exchanged, was again captured at Cerro Gordo during the present campaign. It has been stated that General La Vega has not made the return which might have been expected from so brave a man, for the hospitality and consideration extended to him, and that on his return to Mexico he suffered American officers who had been captured to continue in prisons not fit receptacles for military men. It may be doubted, however, if he has ever had the power to change their situation. He is, it will be remembered, only a brigadier, with many superiors, and with little influence. His gallantry has, it seems, been appreciated in Mexico, where he has since his return received promotion, and had confided to him an important command, a rare compliment to be bestowed on an unfortunate soldier. Whether he deserves this applause, may be doubted; for many have always been disposed to think, that when victory is hopeless, the bravest soldier may be permitted to think of himself.

General La Vega is young and handsome, with an appearance altogether prepossessing, and manners that won at once the sympathy and friendship of the officers of the army of the United States, into the society of whom he was cast. The last advices from Mexico represent him as a prisoner at Jalapa, where, however, he is not, and probably will not be subjected to restraint, unless a guerilla war should force upon the

government of the United States a course of reprisals, and a more severe system than has hitherto been adopted by them towards prisoners of war. General La Vega, it is said, while in the United States, became engaged to be married to a lady of New Orleans, to whom on the termination of the war he will be united. He no doubt devoutly prays for this consummation of his wishes.