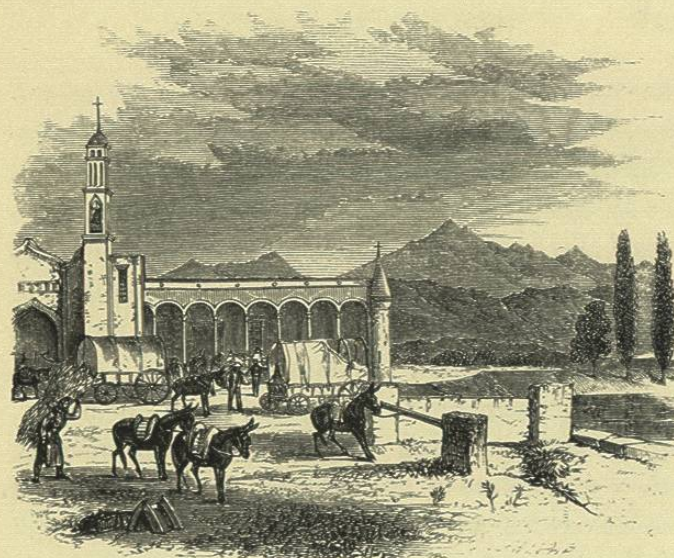


tions were generally supposed to be in favour of at any rate not giving up the empire without making one more strong effort to keep the power in his hands.



MEXICAN RECRUIT.



HACIENDA OF SOLIS.

CHAPTER XIII.

HARD MARCHING.

WE had a long spell of St. Luis Potosi, for it was the 14th of October before a move was made.

During this period, the position of affairs had not undergone any very important changes. All the north, as far as Matehuala, was of course lost to the empire and in the hands of the Liberals, who, report said, were busily engaged in organizing their forces, and purchasing guns and munitions of war from across the Rio Grande, paying for them with the money they succeeded in screwing out of

the various towns now in their power, by prestamos, or forced loans. These are called loans, on the "lucus à non lucendo" principle, for no one dreams for an instant that they will ever be repaid, come what may. In the course of a short time, the chief under whose orders they have been levied, has either been shot, hanged, or is a thousand miles off in another direction, and the sufferers dare not complain to any other man in power, for in that case they would in all probability be mulcted for double the original fine imposed, and treated as enemies of the "Cause of Freedom." Hence it comes to pass that the rich man accepts with outward tranquillity the first loss, as the least evil that can happen to him—the poor man frequently being shot or hanged for "contumacy"—a refusal to pay being sufficient proof that he is a "mocho," or Imperialist.

The communications between the outpost towns, Venado, Matehuala, and St. Luis, were scarcely interrupted until after the 12th or 13th of October, —not that the enemy were idle all that time, for Treviño, Naranco, and other Gefes de Bandes had established themselves at Vanegas and Cedral. Bustamente had returned with his followers to the hacienda of Salado, and Escobedo with his *corps de réserve*, declared himself ready to march from Saltillo southwards.

As long as they kept quietly at Cedral, and contented themselves by waiting for events, although only six leagues from Matehuala, De la Hayrie, whose force was certainly not strong enough to act on the offensive, left them alone, but gradually gaining courage from this inaction and exasperated at the long delays in the evacuation of the French, they at last began a system of small annoyances. Their principal amusement was to dam up the spring at Ojo del Agua (a small village about a league and a half from the suburbs on the Cedral road) cutting off all supply of water from the town, and although punished pretty severely by several sorties and never succeeding in depriving the garrison for longer than a day, still, daily increasing in numbers, they became bolder; and eventually hardly a night passed without an exchange of shots between the outpost sentries. Very frequently, early in the morning, they would appear in considerable force on a hill a short distance from the suburbs, called El Cerito, and hiding their cavalry behind it, endeavour to induce an attack in the open. But this stratagem did not succeed. The first time it was employed, the French sent out a small force, and succeeded after putting their infantry to flight in keeping the enemy's horse at bay and making good their retreat, with hardly any loss, along the road, the flanks of which being

protected by a wall and ditch were consequently safe from cavalry. Still the experiment, although successful, was too dangerous a one to be repeated, and by the beginning of October De la Hayrie found himself unable to do more than prevent the supply of water being cut, by constantly patrolling between the town and Ojo del Agua. At last his communications with Venado were intercepted, and no more dispatches were received except *en pape-lito*. When even this mode of sending intelligence became unsafe, it manifestly was necessary to send to his relief.

We had passed by no means a stupid time of it at St. Luis Potosi, for we were exceedingly well received by the inhabitants, who are great *mochos*, and an English firm, Messrs. Davis and Co., opened their house to the French staff in the most hospitable manner. Then there were bull-fights every week, and crowds of carriages and people each Sunday evening at the alameda; besides, the bands of the Foreign Legion and the 12th Chasseurs played after dusk on the plaza, and there one could smoke an after-dinner cigar very agreeably, being sure of meeting everybody in the place.

We were not very sorry, nevertheless, on the evening of the 12th, when De Pierres interrupted us, in the middle of a rubber of whist at Davis's, with the welcome news that the General had de-

cided to march towards Matchuala on the morning of the 14th, in consequence of the last news received from De la Hayrie, and the fact of the communications being seriously threatened by the assembly of a large force at or near Cedral.

It was a drizzling, damp morning when we turned out of bed on the 14th, and assembled on the Plaza de San Juan de Dios, but every one concerned was very cheery. Those who were left behind to garrison the city contented themselves with the conviction that we should only have very long and tedious marching, and never get a chance at the enemy, chaffing us unmercifully on our prospects when they wished us good-bye on the banks of the river. I was really sorry for De Montholon, whose bad luck and turn of duty kept him from coming with the head-quarters of the division, and left him as staff officer at St. Luis; for he was one of the few who seemed to have an idea that this time our labour would not be in vain.

We had work before us, without a doubt, as far as marching was concerned, for we commenced the first day with eleven leagues to Las Bocas, only halting at Garrabatillas for breakfast. Luckily, the General's column was composed of only cavalry and artillery, so we got over the ground pretty quickly, and between half-past three and four reached the hacienda. Here we met the column of the Com-

mandant Saussier,—500 men of the Legion, four guns, and a detachment of *génie*,—who had left St. Luis the evening before.

The last half of the road was very hot, so as soon as we had found out our billets De Colbert and several of us started for the lake. After the dust and sun-drying of the midday, a swim was decidedly an appetizer,—better than any sherry and bitters,—and we were as hungry as horses by the time dinner was ready, not sitting very long after the meal was over, for I think two pipes saw all the camp to bed that night.

At half-past five in the morning our backs were already turned on Las Bocas, and we had a cold, wet travel of eight leagues to Hedionda, where we halted an hour or so, and then were off again to Venado, five leagues more, arriving on the plaza just before dark.

Here we expected to find news from Matehuala, but there was none; the only piece of information we gleaned being the fact that the column of Colonel De Tucé was before us at Solis, as well as that of Colonel D'Ornano, and awaiting our arrival.

These two forces were mainly composed of the garrison of Venado, so General Douay left some of the Commandant Saussier's men, who had made the same march as the cavalry from Las Bocas, to take their place,—the Commandant Dormont being

given the command, with orders to strengthen the fortifications. This made us think that Matehuala would probably be evacuated, and Venado become the outpost; and we were not very far wrong in our calculations in the end.

There was not much rest for us, for we had ten leagues to travel the next day to Laguna Secca. Just before arriving there we came upon a mule carriage, containing two Mexican ladies and a couple of men, one of them a Yankee. The ladies were recognized by an officer as residents of Saltillo and known Liberals. Accordingly the whole party were conducted back to the hacienda, and their baggage searched. Nothing of any importance turned up, although the *vivandières* of the Chasseurs, after a private interview with the lady travellers, discovered some letters from Treviño hid under their petticoats! They proved to be written to his mistress at St. Luis Potosi, and only stated his conviction that the French would soon be out of the country, and he at her feet certainly within a week or two. He had to wait for some little time, nevertheless. The Yankee was imperturbable, and very difficult to get anything out of. Still, it appeared he had left Saltillo a few days previously, and remained sick with fever at Cedral, unable to pass the lines of the Liberals to Matehuala until he met the people he was now with, who brought him by a

long *détour* again on to the main road without going near the French. At Cedral he fancied there were about 500 men, most of them cavalry and apparently fairly armed, but without artillery, and under the orders of Zapeda, a notorious Gefe de Bande; that they stated they were awaiting Escobedo with his guns, and had a good many more troops near Vanegas. A band had actually stopped them that morning on the road, but, after questioning them, let them proceed unmolested.

After a delay of about half an hour, not being able to get any more information out of the travellers, they were allowed to go their way, and uncommonly pleased the three Mexicans appeared to be. As to the Yankee, I don't think he cared a straw for the whole business; he had already lit a short pipe, and "fixed" himself in a warm corner for the night, so that when he found that he was allowed to "make tracks" he was, if anything, rather annoyed.

We were quartered here in a small house, the owner of which, an exceedingly repulsive old woman, with a vast number of children of all ages around her, was a perfect devil as far as temper went. She refused to give us the room allotted to us, and bringing in her whole family, girls and boys, dared us to undress in it! Of course it was a very one-sided engagement, and we were obliged to

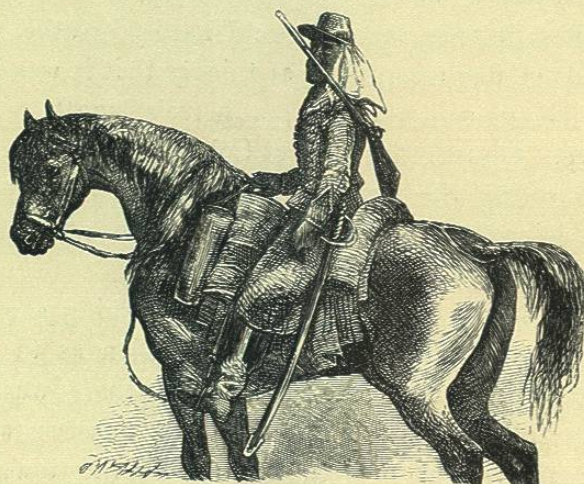
come to a compromise, sleeping that night in the only apartment she would let us have, a store-room, smelling horribly of cheese, dozens being stored on the rafters, and the floor alive with fleas. As it poured with rain, we were forced to stop in it, but had very little sleep between the rats and the vermin, and uncommonly glad we were to hear the *réveil* at six o'clock, and get out of the place, far more tired than we were before going to bed, and in infinitely worse tempers.

The hacienda of Solis, where we made the *grande halte*, looked a paradise, with its clean buildings and large sheet of clear water, after our nocturnal experiences at Laguna Secca; but the latter half of our nine leagues' march was ankle-deep in sand, and the heat intense, for one could hardly breathe, the clouds of fine dust rising so thickly that it was impossible to see more than a horse's length in advance. On arriving we met Colonel De Tucé, who, after seeing the General, went on with his column and joined that of Colonel D'Ornano at Punta, about two leagues ahead of us.

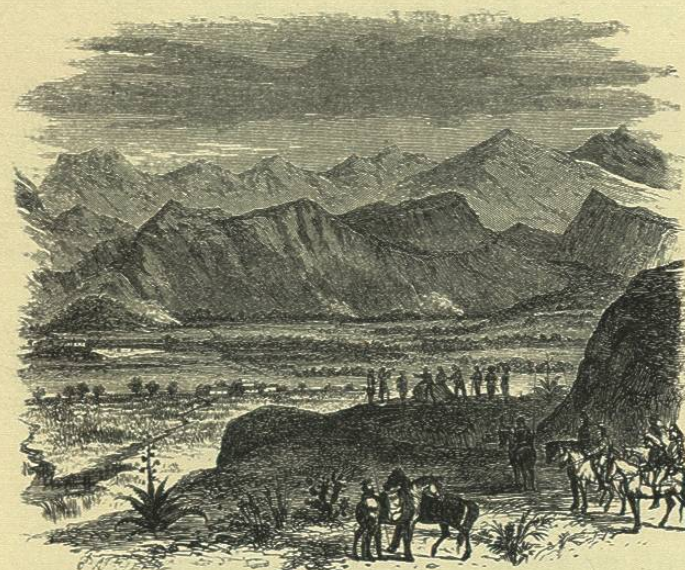
Late in the evening we had a refreshing shower of rain, and a good deal of speculation as to the turn affairs would take; for as yet there was no news from Matehuala, and it was a question whether we should proceed straight to the town or halt halfway at Las Presas, simply reinforcing De

la Hayrie's position by the fact of our being so near at hand. At last a courier arrived, and all uncertainty was soon at an end. The enemy had advanced to Ojo del Agua for the purpose of cutting off the water, and in consequence we kept on to Matchuala, getting in late in the afternoon.

We had marched fifty-three leagues from St. Luis in five days,—pretty hard for our horses, and wonderfully good going for the infantry of the Commandant Saussier, whose column was in the town by nightfall. Still our work was not quite at an end, for the orders were issued for two columns to be ready to march the following morning at 5.30.



12TH CHASSEUR; MARCHING ORDER.



VALLEY OF MIEMBRES.

CHAPTER XIV.

VALLE DE MIEMBRES.

THE aspect of Matchuala had undergone an entire change during our absence, and it really was a difficult matter to find one's way about the streets, for nearly all of them were blocked up, either at one end or the other, by mud walls or deep trenches, and the baggage-waggons had to puzzle out of a perfect succession of labyrinths before they could bring up on the plaza. There were also evident signs of the proximity of the Liberals; half the shops had been closed, and very few Mexicans