

## CHAPTER IV.

*Soto la Marina occupied by Mina—General arrangements there—Action of Colonel Perry with Don Felipe La Garza—Continuation of events in Soto la Marina—Capture of the Cleopatra, by the Spanish frigate La Sabina—Dastardly conduct of the officers of that Expedition—Line of march taken up for the interior—A succession of events—Action at, and capture of the town of El Valle de Maiz—Occurrences at that place, and departure therefrom—Battle of Peotillos—Sanguinary decrees of the enemy—Conduct of the priest of Hideonda, and remarks thereon—Mina's progress—Attack and taking of Sierra de Pinos—Departure therefrom—Junction with the Patriots—Arrival at the Patriot fortress of Sombrero—Its description.*

THE mouth of the river Santander is very narrow, and has a bar across it, over which vessels drawing more than six feet of water cannot be carried. Near the beach the country is intersected by large bayous, and shallow ponds, extending a long way to the northward. After passing the bar, the river suddenly widens, but afterwards gradually contracts itself towards the

town of Soto la Marina. It is navigable, for such vessels as can pass the bar, to within a very short distance of the town, beyond which it is too shallow even for boats. The village (*pueblo*) of Soto la Marina stands upon an elevated situation, on the left or north bank of the river, and is distant from its mouth eighteen leagues.

On the morning of the 15th, the boats of the fleet were despatched, with a field-piece, some stores, and a detachment of artillery, to meet the division at the old settlement of Soto la Marina, which is but a short distance up the river, on the road to the present village; for which place the division, at the same time, took up its march. The boats, not finding the division at the old settlement, as was expected, proceeded to the town, where they found the troops had just arrived. The division had been three days on the march from the beach, owing to the ignorance of the guide, who had conducted it by a very circuitous route; and it had suffered much, from extreme heat and want of water.

In Mexico, five months of the year, commencing with May, are rainy; the other seven are perfectly dry. The expedition had landed at a period of the most parching heat and

drought, when every rivulet was dried up; so that a march in the middle of the day was almost insupportable. The least fatiguing method of conducting a march in Mexico, particularly in the low regions of its coasts and the internal provinces, is, to move forward at the first dawn of day, and advance until nine or ten o'clock; then to halt, and employ the interval in cooking, and refreshing the troops, until four in the afternoon, when the march should be resumed, and continued until a halt is made for the night. Thus, more ground can be gone over, and with less fatigue to the soldier, than by continuing the march through the middle of the day.

The advanced guard, composed of volunteers from the Guard of Honour, and the cavalry, with a detachment of the first regiment of the line, under Major Sardá, entered Soto la Marina, without any opposition; La Garza, with the garrison and some families, evacuating the town on its approach. The division was met, at the entrance of the village, by the curate, who welcomed the general with open arms. When La Garza announced to the inhabitants the landing of Mina, he represented him as accompanied by a band of heretics, who had come into the country to deal out destruction

on every side, and indiscriminately to put all to the sword. By these misrepresentations, and by coercive measures, he had compelled the most respectable part of the community to abandon the town; and it was with much astonishment and satisfaction, that the remaining inhabitants found themselves treated with respect.

On taking possession, the necessary proclamations were issued, offering protection to the persons and property of those who remained peaceably at their homes, recalling the inhabitants who had deserted the place, and threatening the confiscation of the property of those who did not return within a given time. Civil officers were also selected from among the inhabitants, and clothed with authority by the general. Colonel the Count de Ruuth, at this period, resigned his command, and returned on board of the commodore's vessel. The colonel was highly esteemed by the whole division; and his loss was much regretted. Captain Maylefer was promoted to the rank of major, and appointed to the command of the cavalry.

A printing-press was immediately established, under the direction of Doctor Infanté, a native of Havana; and the general's manifesto was published. It took a retrospect of his exertions

in the cause of liberty, and set forth the motives which had induced him to espouse that of the suffering colonies. This document soon reached the military commandants, many of whom, with their troops, would have joined the standard of Mina; but, as they had ascertained the strength of his division, they held back, conceiving his force too inconsiderable to effect any important object. Nevertheless, many of the inhabitants were not overawed by the royalists; and, in the first instance, countrymen, to the number of upwards of one hundred, united under his banners: they were well-formed, hardy fellows, and subsequently proved themselves faithful and brave. The division, at different periods, was joined by other recruits, the whole number amounting to above two hundred. Among those who joined it were two royalist officers—Lieutenant-Colonel Don Valentine Rubio, and his brother Lieutenant Rubio.

The attention of the general was constantly directed towards the equipment and regulation of his little band. By Colonel Rubio, as well as from other sources, he was furnished with horses; one hundred of the recruits were attached to the cavalry, and the others to the first regiment. Those who afterwards joined the

division, were enrolled either with the hussars, the dragoons, or the first regiment. The different corps were equipped as follows:—

*Guard of Honour (infantry)*—Officers, uniformed as such, armed with musquet and bayonet.

*Artillery*—Brown coats, faced with red; four field-pieces; two 6-inch howitzers, and two 11½ inch mortars.

*Cavalry, Hussars*—Scarlet hussar jackets, chacot and plume; armed with swords, light dragoon carabines, and pistols.

——, *Dragoons*—United States dragoon uniform; armed with sword, pistol, and lance.

*Regiment of the Union*—Uniform of the British 104th regiment of infantry.

*First regiment of the line*—United States rifle uniforms.

Mina, in furtherance of his plans, scoured the country in every direction; but, although these incursions were made by small parties, sometimes composed of not more than twenty men, yet La Garza, who was hovering in the vicinity of Soto la Marina, with upwards of three hundred men, never attacked them. The general

visited some of the towns and haciendas (plantations), and a detachment penetrated even to *Santander*, the capital of the province: but La Garza's threats obliged the respectable inhabitants to retire from their settlements, on the approach of Mina's parties; and, however ill inclined they might be to such removal, they were forced to comply with seeming alacrity.

During this period, a valuable prize was unluckily snatched from the grasp of the general. He received intelligence that Don Ramon de la Mora, owner of the hacienda of *Palo Alto*, seven leagues distant from Soto la Marina, who had been for some time amusing him with promises of supplies, had suddenly decamped, taking with him all his moveables, with his cash, amounting, as was said, to one hundred thousand dollars; and that he was encamped in a *rancho*,\* eleven leagues distant from the town. The general, with twenty dragoons, and eighty infantry,

\* *Rancho* signifies a farm, or place containing one or more peasant huts, having no church, and depending for spiritual assistance on the curate of an adjoining pueblo or hacienda. A church is necessary to constitute a pueblo; but a collection of houses, be their number great or small, if there be not a church, is called a rancho. Some of them are very extensive, while others contain only a single house. Some of the pueblos contain merely the church and the curate's house, while others have a dense population.

under Colonel Perry, marched, on the same night, to surprise him. While on their way, the general was informed, that De la Mora was escorted by a body of troops. Arrived within two leagues, Mina ordered Colonel Perry to continue his march to the rancho, while he, with the cavalry, took another road, that they might attack the enemy in front and rear. Having arrived near the rancho, and expecting to find the enemy unprepared, the general charged into the place; but, to his great surprise, he found neither the enemy nor his own infantry: the houses also were abandoned, but the lights which were burning evidently denoted that their inmates had recently fled. Unable to gain any intelligence, either of his infantry, or of the object of his march, he was obliged to return to Soto la Marina, highly mortified at the disappointment.

Perry, after separating from the cavalry, arrived at the rancho, where he learned that Don Ramon had proceeded onward; and, leaving information with the inhabitants for the general, he marched in pursuit of him. But, as soon as Perry had left the place, the people retired to the woods. Unexpectedly, in the morning, Colonel Perry came upon the object of his pursuit, encamped in a plain; and the property was captured. But it had not been long in his

possession, when La Garza, with three hundred and fifty men, who had been escorting the property, made his appearance. The colonel, finding himself opposed by such a superiority of force, and being unacquainted with the character of his enemy, deemed it prudent to occupy an advantageous position, there to act on the defensive, leaving a guard of six men with the property. La Garza advanced singly, and held a parley with an officer of Colonel Perry; during which he offered the royal clemency to the troops, if they would lay down their arms. This proposition put an end to the conference: La Garza returned to his troops, and prepared for the attack. In the mean time, Perry, who, whatever faults may be ascribed to him, was an heroic American, addressed his men in a short but enthusiastic harangue; reminding them, that the eyes of their country were fixed on their conduct, and that an opportunity now presented itself to prove that they were worthy of the cause they had espoused. At that moment, the enemy's cavalry charged, with its accustomed impetuosity; but were repulsed. They returned to the charge, and made several unsuccessful attempts to break Perry's infantry; but, finding all their endeavours fruitless, they at length retired in confusion, leaving nine dead. As the colonel had no

cavalry, with which to follow up his success, the enemy again formed, but manifested no disposition to renew the attack. Perry, after having gained this advantage, was reluctantly obliged to abandon the object of his expedition, being unable, from the want of cavalry, to withdraw the property. He fell back, unmolested, on Soto la Marina. In this affair, he lost one man killed, and two taken prisoners; they belonged to the guard placed over the property; but, in the ranks, no one was either killed or wounded. This advantage, although trivial as regards the injury done the enemy, had great weight with Mina's division; it inspired confidence, and created a belief in his little band, that they were able to contend against far superior numbers.

After Mina's disembarkation, a force of more than eight hundred royalists was stationed at Altamira, forty leagues south of Soto la Marina. The passive conduct of the enemy, in allowing Mina to remain so long unmolested, is a circumstance which can best be explained by the royal commanders. But the dispersed condition of the enemy's troops, who were scattered in small parties over the country, and the invasion of the kingdom at Soto la Marina being entirely unexpected, are, it is probable, the reasons

why Don Joaquin Arredondo, the commandant-general of the eastern internal provinces, was so long in making preparations, and so slow in moving from Monterey, his head-quarters.

The situation of that division of the kingdom, and indeed of the whole of Mexico, was at this time very critical. The great body of the troops were disaffected to the royal cause; Mina was adored by the European soldiers; and he had indubitable intelligence, that a large number of natives were ready to come down from the mountains to the sea-coast to join him, who were only prevented from so doing by the subsequent movement of the enemy. Had Mina landed with only five hundred troops, he might, with a sure confidence of success, have awaited the enemy in his entrenchments at Soto la Marina; and there can scarcely exist a doubt, that, in that case, a blow would have been struck against Arredondo, from which he could not have easily recovered. The intimate knowledge which we have acquired, since that period, respecting the royal troops—their known disaffection—the intrepidity and superior appointment of Mina's little band—and the distinguished ability, activity, and bravery of their commander,—all combine to warrant this assertion.

The general, by advices and spies, received

intelligence, at the commencement of the month of May, that Arredondo was concentrating all the disposable force of the *comandancia*. Knowing that the enemy would be too strong for his small force, he proposed to throw up a small work of defence at Soto la Marina, for the purpose of protecting the military stores, and holding out against a siege, should the royalists attempt to invest it; while, in the interim, he should, by rapid marches, penetrate into the interior, and form a junction with the patriots in that quarter; an enterprise which he conceived to be practicable, and from which he flattered himself he should be able to return with an augmented force, sufficient to defeat the enemy, and also to bring with him pecuniary supplies. In pursuance of these determinations, an eligible situation was selected, on the bank of the river, a little to the eastward of the village; and the construction of the fort was commenced, under the direction of Captain Rigal, of the engineers. The whole division laboured with alacrity, in the accomplishment of this work, in which they were assisted by the country people; the general himself setting the example, by sharing the labour with them. The little fortification was soon in a state of considerable forwardness; and, although it was only a mud

fort, yet it was hoped, that, when completed, it would be sufficient to bid defiance to the efforts of the enemy. As the river was here very narrow, it was intended to throw up a redoubt on the opposite bank, which should protect the rear of the fort, and cover the water.

Mina's conduct, on this occasion, was marked with the greatest firmness and intrepidity. Aware that Arredondo would put in motion an overwhelming force of two thousand men at least, he resolved to leave a garrison in the mud fort, and to cut his way, with the residue of his little band, into the interior of the Mexican empire. These dispositions appear stamped with temerity, or rather bear the features of knight-errantry; but the circumstances of his situation justified the measures that he adopted, and the sequel will shew, that untoward circumstances alone prevented the gallant general from succeeding in his object.

During this interval, Commodore Aury had departed in his schooner, having made an arrangement with the general for the purchase of his brig of war, the *Congreso Mexicano*, then in New Orleans.

The prize brigs had also sailed, and there remained at the bar, the *Cleopatra*, *Neptune*, and *Ellen Tooker*. The former had come

down as a transport, in ballast. The *Neptune* store-ship, being old, and a very heavy sailer, was run on shore at the mouth of the river, as soon as she was discharged, in order to be broken up, as her materials could be applied to various other purposes. Of her cargo, a considerable quantity had been carried up the river, though much, particularly of the powder, still remained at the landing-place. The officers and seamen of the ships, left to protect these stores, had pitched some tents on the beach, with the view of sheltering them from the weather; but they little expected that these very tents would have the effect, as was subsequently proved, of exciting alarm among the crews of a Spanish frigate and two schooners, so as to deter them from disembarking for the purpose of destroying the stores.

On the part of the sailors, matters went on very pleasantly till the morning of the 17th of May, when, at seven o'clock, the Spanish frigate *La Sabina*, and the schooners *La Belona* and *La Proserpina*, appeared in the offing, having been despatched from Vera Cruz with the most positive orders (as it afterwards appeared) not only to destroy the vessels, but also the stores that might be found on shore.

At sight of these unwelcome visitors, the