Mexico makes plank almost impossible to obtain, it was therefore necessary to provide for a table in other than the usual manner. A piece of ground was accordingly marked out, sufficiently long and wide for the "hospitable board," on each side of which a trench was dug fifteen inches wide, and sufficiently deep to afford a comfortable seat. Upon the "prëemption" appropriated for the table were laid matting and the "flags" of tents, and then the eatables and drinkables that were to be consumed in this novel and patriotic dinner. Precisely at noon, a national salute was again fired from the head-quarters of each regiment, on both sides of the river, when the officers of the regular and volunteer divisions of the army took their seats at the table.

The city of Matamoros presented a strange spectacle: all was bustle and confusion; advertisements on the fronts of the different houses announced "fourth of July dinners," and *fandangos* in "honour of the day." A company of mountebanks paraded the streets, and cut their fantastic tricks in the *Plaza*. After passing "their hat" around for remuneration, they struck up their rude music, which consisted of a bass drum and primitive clarionet. Decked in their feathers and gew-gaws, and headed by a little girl who stood upon the bare back of a mule, bearing a little flag on which was emblazoned *Compania del Norte*, they would for awhile thread the principal streets previous to another "grand performance."

At noon, to the surprise of the Americans, the cathedral bell commenced ringing, and the "sacred cannon" belonging to the church gave a salute; this was looked upon as a most cordial joining in of the natives, in the festivities of the day, as had previously been noticed in the universally gay attire of the citizens of the town, and the festival preparations in the grand plaza; but, upon inquiry, it was learned that the 4th of July was some "saint-day" in the Mexican calendar, that required these demonstrations.

CHAPTER II.

Movement of the Seventh Regiment—Paredes—Catholic clergymen arrive at Matamoros—Romance of the country—La Gran Quevira—Capt. Thornton's defence—Camargo—Amusing incident—Indians—Capt. Vinton—Mier—Description of it—Mier prisoners—The battle of the Texians—Evidences of the contest.

The river was now slowly retiring within its banks, and the summer heat became unusually oppressive for the season, which bore heavily upon our soldiers.

On the 6th of July, the Seventh regiment, under command of Capt. Miles, left the walls of Fort Brown, which it had so long and so gallantly defended, and started for Camargo, *via* Reyonoso.

The news of the election of Paredes to the Presidency of Mexico on the 12th of June, reached Matamoros. His address to Congress and the people of Mexico, and his asking leave to head the army against the "invaders of the North," revived the idea that the Mexicans would make a decided resistance. The war excitement began to prevail anew, and Monterey was looked forward to with increasing interest, because it was understood that there the enemy would probably make their first great demonstration in hostile array.

On the 8th day of July, two clergymen, the Rev. Messrs. McElroy and Rey, of the Roman Catholic church, appointed chaplains to the U. S. Army, for the soldiers belonging to that church, arrived in Matamoros.

A curious story was repeated along the Rio Grande about this time, which was remarkable for its romantic novelty, and for its evident intent, viz.: the invasion of the country. It was reported that in the interior there was buried treasure of immense amount. The idlers and hangers-on about the camps caught up the idea of seeking for it, and the prospect for a time was, that a party of as wild adventurers as the world ever saw, would be banded to-

gether for the visionary purpose of "money-hunting." The tradition ran as follows:—

LA GRAN QUEVIRA.

Years ago, in the centre of "the first ridge" of the Rocky Mountains, and not two hundred miles from the Rio Grande, where the great road crosses at *El paso del Norte*, there was a great and flourishing city. It was remarkable for its massive buildings, industrious population, and great wealth. In the suburbs of this city were mines where the gold and silver lay in almost unadulterated heaps. Removing the thin soil that covered the hills, exposed untold treasure; in this way the inhabitants waxed great and revelled in every luxury.

Twenty miles from this city there gushed out of the side of the mountain an abundant spring of water, which was brought to *La Gran Quevira* by means of a beautiful aqueduct made of stone and costly cement. From the main reservoir there ran through the streets constant streams, refreshing the air with their coolness, and forcing vegetation, until the city became a fairy land. A splendid church was erected from the money paid by the citizens for the privilege of using the pure water from this aqueduct; it was, in fact, a religious observance to pay liberally for its blessings. The church towered far above the surrounding country; its spires of burnished gold pierced the heavens. The natives of the region looked upon it with awe, and almost worshipped the people of *La Gran Quevira*.

In an evil hour the inhabitants of this favored city roused the vengeance of a chief who had a commanding influence among the aboriginal population, and had, by his intercourse with the whites, become acquainted with the value of gold. He resented the impressment of his people to work as slaves among the mines. He excited envy and jealousy against their task-masters in the hordes with which he was surrounded. And, at a time when the citizens were making great preparations to export the treasure gathered for years, the Indians suddenly appeared, bearing aloft *black* flags, and swearing death to their oppressors. *La Gran Quevira* was

well fortified by nature, and the invaders for awhile were kept at a distance. But consternation had seized upon the people, and they buried their silver, gold, and precious stones, to the amount of untold millions, because they looked upon this as the cause of their present misery, and they also wished to secrete their wealth to be removed at a future time. The Indians, after several unsuccessful attempts to carry the city by storm, finally thought of a desperate expedient, and destroyed the great aqueduct that watered the city; from that time the inhabitants despaired, and, upon a grim night, broke out in a mass, endeavoring to escape to their friends south of the mountains, but in this they were unsuccessful; they were fallen upon and massacred, but two persons escaping to tell the tale.

The victors now entered the city; to their surprise they found little gold or silver, and no food; half famished and enraged, they put the torch to *La Gran Quevira*, and left it at night by the light of the conflagration. A large number of the houses were destroyed, but the grand church remained almost unharmed, towering over the ruins with its blackened walls, a worthy monument of the event that made it isolated amid a desert.

Of those who escaped, one of the two reached New Orleans, then under the Spanish dominion. A great number of men were raised by him, who started for New Mexico, and crossed the Sabine, but from that time they were never heard of. Quite recently, it had been stated, that a party of Americans and a Frenchman, having been lost in Mexico, came unexpectedly upon the ruins of a great city; they were led to it by following an aqueduct, leading from a spring near which they had encamped. To their surprise, this extraordinary work led to the ruins of a remarkable church, and in the neighborhood were openings in the mountains, evidently of mines. Knowing nothing of the story of *La Gran Quevira*, they paid little attention to what they saw, and when they found the way to a part of the country with which they were familiar, they could not themselves locate exactly the whereabouts of the deserted city, but their story repeated on the Rio Grande revived the slum-

bering tradition, and there was not wanting, at the time we write of, daring spirits ready to undertake the search.

On the 11th of July, a general court-martial, by order of the President, assembled at Matamoros, Gen. Worth being president; Capt. Thornton, among others, was tried. The events that led to this gallant officer's being before the court, from the peculiar circumstances attending the capture of his command, created great interest in the United States. Capt. Barbour, Third Infantry, and Lieut. Bragg, Third Artillery, assisted Capt. Thornton in the court. On Wednesday the 14th, Lieut. Bragg presented the written defence.*

Capt. Thornton commenced by stating that a long established principle of his profession, and a stern sense of duty on the part of his accusers, had brought him before the court in his present position. Success, he was aware, was with military men often the test of merit; yet he hoped to be able to show, even if he was not successful in his expedition, his failure was not owing to the omission of necessary precaution.

On the night of the 24th of April, with a command of three commissioned officers and fifty rank and file, he was ordered to reconnoitre a country some twenty-seven miles in extent, and to bring information whether the enemy had crossed the Rio Bravo, his numbers, and his position; and he had also further vested orders from the commanding general, to ascertain, if possible, whether he had crossed his artillery, and to report by the next day at 12 o'clock. He referred to the testimony of Capt. Hardee and Lieut. Kane, for the manner in which he executed these instructions. He regretted that he could not lay before the court the testimony of Lieut. Mason, but regarded his loss as nothing, compared with that of the friends and relations of the gallant young officer, who fell, as he had lived, in the discharge of his duty.

From the recapitulation of the testimony of Capt. Hardee and Lieut. Kane, in the defence, it appears that every precaution was

* The epitome of the defence given is from the "Matamoros Flag."

used to guard against surprise—that an advance guard was thrown out, that flankers were impossible, for the most part, from the nature of the country, it being a perfect defile, admitting at times a single horseman with difficulty; that when Capt. Thornton halted his squadron to rest his men and horses, which was extremely necessary, a sentinel was placed at both ends of the road, so that no one could approach without his knowledge. About daylight next morning the command proceeded towards the river, and to the constant inquiries made of every one that was met, "whether the enemy had crossed," the reply was, "he had," but all spoke from rumor—this Capt. Thornton believed to be unreliable authority, upon which he could not base a report, and he referred, as an evidence of this, to the numerous false rumors with which the American camp had abounded for a month previous. Capt. Thornton alluded to the suspicious conduct of his guide, which induced him to doubt his fidelity, and subsequent events, he thought, proved that he was employed, in connection with other spies, to lead him into a position from which retreat was impossible. Subsequent information, upon which he could rely, satisfied him that his return to camp had been cut off; that the enemy was in his rear with a force of five hundred cavalry and a party of Indians. Upon the receipt of this information, he redoubled his precautions—he increased his advance guard, and placed it under the command of Lieut. Mason, with minute instructions to keep ahead and be vigilant, but not to fire upon the enemy, unless forced to do so. From this time Capt. Thornton proceeded without a guide, Capito having deserted him. Capt. Thornton here argued; and we think conclusively proved, that an attempt to return would have been more disastrous than his move forward; he also contended that a rear guard, with such a small force, would have been untactical, and, in his opinion, unnecessary; and further, that it was not prescribed. The rear was assigned to Capt. Hardee, and he never left it without being ordered back by Capt. Thornton. He went on further to state, that if the command had obeyed his instructions, they would not have entered the field in which they were afterwards captured;

but he remarked, "no precaution from myself, or any one else, could have altered the result; our fate was sealed long before entering that field."

Capt. Thornton here summed up the facts of the case, as shown by the testimony, from which it appears he had two responsible and somewhat variant duties to perform, that of commander of the squadron, and reconnoitering officer; for a guide, a Mexican of doubtful fidelity; a country of twenty-seven miles in extent, with which he was totally unacquainted, and fifteen hours, and *eight* of them in the night, to perform his duty in. In the opinion of his officers, his rear could have gained by *day* without his being able to know it. Spies were upon his actions from the time of his leaving the army, until his capture. Ordered to keep an attitude of peace, until the first blow should be struck. The following portion of this manly and soldier-like defence struck us so forcibly, that we believe we can repeat it verbatim:—"It was my misfortune," said Capt. Thornton, "to secure that first blow upon my devoted head, but it had to be secured, and why not by me?" Capt. Thornton here continued that the information he obtained was important; that by means of capture Gen. Taylor was able to understand his real position; that he was no longer on debated ground, and as an evidence of this, referred to the immediate call for reinforcements, the industry in the completing of Fort Brown, and the march to Point Isabel for provisions. But for the loss of his squadron, probably, the thanks of a grateful people would not now be showered upon the heroes of the battles of the Rio Grande, but, instead, the tears of widows and orphans might have been met with the usual indifference by the national legislature. Capt. Thornton reminded, that to prevent this he would be willing again to hide in his bosom the only bleeding heart amid the rejoicings of a victorious army. Capt. Thornton here remarked, that if he neglected any of the usual precautions, it was from want of knowledge, and begged the court to acquit him of neglect, and to find a verdict, if necessary, against him for incapacity. He then referred to his services in

Florida, and thought the manner in which he discharged his duties there, well known to some of the court, would enable him to defy such an imputation. Capt. Thornton concluded by saying, that his honor and military reputation were in the hands of the court; that the country had found her's safe in their hands, and with confidence he submitted his to them.

Capt. Thornton was honorably acquitted by the court, of the charges brought against him.

Camargo was taken possession of, on the 14th of July, no resistance being made. It was ordered that a party of Texan Rangers should enter the town in the rear, while the small party of regulars detailed for the purpose should approach from the front. The steamer which conveyed the regulars was groping its way along at night, but a little south of Camargo, as ignorant of the bearings of the river as the officer of the expedition was as to the character of his reception in the town. When, in the midst of those difficulties and doubts, a light was seen glimmering on shore—the pilot neared it, and, with stentorian lungs, demanded, in round Spanish, "*De Quien es ese Rancho?*"

"It's my Rancho," answered a good Yankee voice, from out of the chaparral. "It's my Rancho, and who has any claims against it?"

"If you are an American, come on board," was the authoritative return.

"I will at once, soldier," said a stalwart-looking man, as he stepped on the deck of the steamer. "I hail you in these parts, for I have been sleeping out some dozen nights, afraid of the treachery of the Mexicans; not that I fear them in a fair fight of a dozen or more at me at once, but I could not stand five hundred."

Here was an enterprising American citizen, full of patriotism, on "the search for town sites on the Rio Grande;" he knew the people well; and ere the day had fairly dawned, he had completed all the preliminaries of the surrender of Camargo, and at the head or heel of our troops, as suited his humor best, he entered the city.

Camargo is on the south side of the San Juan, three miles from its entrance into the Rio Grande. It was, years ago, a town of considerable importance, and contained, probably, four thousand inhabitants; but civil commotions, war, and lastly, the remarkable rise of the river, caused it to be comparatively deserted before our troops took possession of it.

The material, of which its houses were built, being in most cases *adobes*, or sun-dried bricks, the moment the insidious water reached the foundations, they literally dissolved away, until a large portion of the city was in ruins. The church and main plaza escaped the general destruction, but more than six hundred private dwellings were either destroyed or rendered tenantless. This great misfortune fell upon the inhabitants at a time when they were least able to bear it, having already suffered immensely in the vicissitudes of war; as a last resort, they were obliged to seek for new homes among the hills, and begin the world again.

The moment our troops took possession of Camargo, it became a place of business in the most extended sense of the term. Steamboats constantly arrived with troops and "government stores;" the latter, in barrels, boxes, and bales, were piled up, mountain high, upon the river banks. A flag was erected in the plaza, under the folds of which were heard the lively strains of familiar music, and were seen the interminable marchings and countermarchings of military manœuvres.

The Camanche Indians, as it would seem, taking advantage of the times, extended their predatory excursions even to the vicinity of Camargo. Rumors were constantly in circulation that great numbers of them were about murdering the inhabitants and stealing horses. It seemed incredible that such should be the case, when it was recollected how densely settled the country was; but it was the custom of the country to suffer without resistance, or flee, rather than contend with their Indian foes.

Rumors from Monterey were, that several pieces of cannon had been mounted on some of the fortifications building, and that the department of New Leon had been called upon for a large requisition of troops.

Capt. J. R. Vinton with one company of Third Artillery, and eight Texan Rangers, on the last day of July, 1846, marched quietly into Mier, and stacked arms in the plaza. While passing through the streets, the inhabitants, probably numbering three or four thousand, presented themselves as curious spectators. The change from the low ground and dilapidated houses of Camargo, was most favorable, for Mier was found to be pleasant and cleanly; built upon a high hill which overlooked the country, on the clear running stream of the same name, that coursed along some three miles distant, and emptied into the Rio Grande. Mier, in the history of the Texan struggle, is remarkable for the battle in 1842, between the Mexicans under Gen. Ampudia, and a force under Col. Fisher, who, after killing more than twice his own number of men, was compelled to surrender. The marks of this sanguine conflict were still visible on the houses.

In 1842, a Mexican foray was made against the town of San Antonia, Texas, by one thousand three hundred Mexicans under Gen. Woll. The expedition was unauthorized by government, and was made up of desperadoes, whose only object was plunder. Gen. Houston, President of Texas, ordered eight hundred volunteers to meet at San Antonio, on the 27th of October, to chastise these Mexican invaders. The command was intrusted to Brig. Gen. Summerville. Disorganization, growing out of want of proper military power to enforce discipline, and other causes peculiar to the character of the men and the times, destroyed, to a great degree, the intentions of the expedition. One or two small Mexican towns on the Rio Grande were seized and made to pay heavy contributions. Gen. Summerville, disliking the course that events were taking, and deeming it imprudent to attack the immense force that was hourly approaching him, determined on retreating to the Texas frontier. Dissatisfaction here was openly expressed, and the command resolved itself into a popular assembly. The result was, that Gen. Summerville with about one hundred men took up his line of march for San Antonio; two hundred and seventy men remained behind, who were destined to become known to history as the "Mier prisoners."

Col. W. S. Fisher was chosen commander of this little band, which immediately marched to Mier, a city containing near five thousand inhabitants, and then holding within its strong walls Gen. Ampudia, with three thousand regular troops! A contribution was levied of five thousand dollars; upon the refusal of the payment, it was decided to attack the city, although the odds against them had no parallel in the history of war.

The battle began on the night of the 25th of December. It was exceedingly dark and rainy when this forlorn hope penetrated the streets, under a sweeping fire of heavy artillery, until they had secured a lodgement in the buildings they had selected for that purpose. The Texians, once under cover, reserved their fire until morning; the contest was then sanguinary beyond description and precedent. At early dawn, the Mexicans brought their artillery to bear upon the building in which the Texians were posted, and brought up their infantry in solid columns to the attack; but they were mowed down by the deadly rifle, and the streets, which were somewhat precipitous, ran streams of blood. The artillerists were shot down at their pieces so constantly that they were often for several minutes silenced, and were finally *lariated* and dragged away. The action continued until over six hundred Mexicans were killed or mortally wounded, while, on the Texan side, there were but twelve killed and eighteen wounded. Ampudia at this time sent a white flag to the Texians, offering favorable terms of capitulation, which were acceded to by the Texians, only because their ammunition was almost expended. The terms of the surrender were violated by both Ampudia and Santa Anna, in every particular, and the prisoners were compelled to undergo sufferings as unparalleled in history as was their achievement in arms before they surrendered.

The ruined wall, the bent window bars, the signs of freshly laid masonry, still attested the severe conflict, and formed subjects of curious thought to those who witnessed them; and called forth a tear for the brave men, who suffered in the terrible attack that left such fearful evidences of the deadly strife.

The cathedral of Mier and many of the public buildings are

massive and imposing, and the people of a much superior character to those seen lower down on the Rio Grande. The grave-yard of the city, as is characteristic of all Catholic communities, was carefully kept, and ornamented at its entrance with a beautiful gateway; and within were many imposing tombs, that made up the city of the dead.