

Ahead of the Army

William O. Stoddard



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ENTHUSIASM

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(See page 277)

AHEAD *of the* ARMY

B y W . O . S T O D D A R D

AUTHOR OF
"THE ERRAND BOY OF ANDREW JACKSON,"
"JACK MORGAN," "THE NOANK'S LOG," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
C. CHASE EMERSON

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P R E F A C E

Lest any one should suspect exaggeration in the pictures of Mexican affairs in the old time, which are presented by Señor Carfora, it may be well to offer a few facts by way of explanation. During sixty-three years of the national life of the Republic of Mexico, from the establishment of its independence in 1821 to the year 1884, nearly all of its successive changes of government were accompanied by more or less violence and bloodshed. There have been fifty-five Mexican Presidents; at one revolutionary period, four within three months, and to this list must be added two emperors and one regency. Both of the emperors were shot, so were several of the Presidents, and nearly all of the others incurred the penalty of banishment. How this came to be so will possibly be better understood by the young Americans who will kindly travel with Señor Carfora and his generals and his two armies, commanded for him by General Scott and General Santa Anna. It is the wish of the author that all his young friends may cultivate a deeper and kinder interest in the wonderful land of Anahuac and its people. The now peaceful and rapidly improving republic of the South is, in fact, only a kind of younger brother of the United States. Mexico has no more sincere well-wisher than

William O. Stoddard.

CONTENTS

FAR-AWAY GUNS	11
THE RACE OF THE GOSHAWK	22
THE FORTUNE OF WAR	47
COMPLETELY STRANDED	69
THE WORK OF THE NORTHER	84
FORWARD, MARCH	99
THE LAND OF THE MONTEZUMAS	119
OUT OF THE TIERRA CALIENTE	136
LEAVING THE HACIENDA	157
PICTURES OF THE PAST	167
NED'S NEWS	181
A STORM COMING	193
THE REVOLUTION	207
THE DESPATCH-BEARER	221
UNDER FIRE	240
GENERAL SCOTT AND HIS ARMY	254
THE MOUNTAIN PASSES	267
SEÑOR CARFORA TRAPPED	281
THE STARS AND STRIPES IN TENOCHTITLAN	294

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>It Was Severe Work, but it Was Done with Eager Enthusiasm</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>"Do You See That? What Does it Mean?"</i>	30
<i>"We have Orders to Take Care of You"</i>	114
<i>Ned Saw a Long, Bright Blade of a Lance Pointed At His Bosom</i>	286

AHEAD *of* the ARMY

CHAPTER I.

FAR-AWAY GUNS

“Boom! Boom! Boom!”

The long surges of the Gulf of Mexico were beating heavily upon the sandy beach of Point Isabel, but the dull and boding sounds were not the roar of the surf. There came a long silence, and then another boom. Each in succession entered the white tents of the American army on the upland, carrying with it a message of especial importance to all who were within. It was also of more importance to the whole world than any man who heard it could then have imagined. It spoke to the sentries at their posts, and compelled them to turn and listen. It halted all patrolling and scouting parties, making them stand still to utter sudden exclamations. More than one mounted officer reined in his horse to hear, and then wheeled to spur away toward the tent of General Zachary Taylor, commanding the forces of the United States upon the Rio Grande.

In one small tent, in the camp of the Seventh Infantry, the first boom stirred up a young man who had been sleeping, and he may have been dreaming of home. He was in the uniform of a second lieutenant, and in one respect he was exactly like all the other younger officers and most of the men of that army, for never before had they heard the sound of a hostile cannon. War was new to them, and they were not aware how many of them were now entering a preparatory school in which they were to be trained for service in a war of vastly greater proportions and for the command of its contending armies, on either side.

Up sprang the young lieutenant and stepped to the door of his tent. He was short, strongly built, and his alert, vigorous movements indicated unusual nerve, vitality, and muscular strength.

“Grant, my boy,” he muttered to himself, “that comes from the fort! The Mexicans are attacking! It’s more than twenty miles away. I didn’t know you could hear guns as far as that, but the wind’s in the right direction. Hurrah! The war has begun!”

He was only half right. The war had been begun long years before by aggressive

American settlers in the Spanish-Mexican State of Texas. Now, at last, the United States had taken up the same old conflict, and only about half of the American people at all approved of it.

Grant did not linger in front of his tent. He walked rapidly away to where stood a group of officers, hardly any of them older than himself.

“Meade,” he demanded of one of them, “what do you think of that?”

“I think I don’t know how long that half-finished fort can hold out,” responded Lieutenant Meade, and half a dozen other voices instantly agreed with him as to the perils surrounding the small besieged garrison.

It was hardly possible, they said, that it could hold out until the arrival of the main army. This, too, would have to fight all the way against superior numbers, but that was a thing which it could do, and they were all wild with eagerness to be on the march, in answer to the summons of those far-away guns.

There were no railroads to speak of, and only the first small beginnings of telegraphs in the year 1846. The news of the first fighting would therefore be slow in reaching the President and Congress at Washington, so that they might lawfully make what is called a formal declaration of war. Much had already been taken for granted, but the American government was at that hour anxiously leaning southward and listening for the expected roar of Mexican cannon. It came, as rapidly as General Taylor could send it. A swift despatch-boat, with all her canvas up, went speeding across the gulf to New Orleans. Thence, in the hands of special couriers, it would gallop all the remaining distance. Meantime, the struggle at the Rio Grande frontier would continue, just as if all the legal arrangements had been made, but it would be weeks before Europe could be advised of what was going on. All this, too, when this fight over the annexation of Texas was about to lift the Republic into a foremost place among the nations. It was to give her all the Pacific coast which she now has, except Oregon and Alaska, with the gold of California and the silver of the mountains. Among its consequences were to be the terrible Civil War, the abolition of slavery, the acquisition of the Sandwich Islands, and many another vast change in the history of our country and in that of these very European nations which were then ignorantly sitting still and thinking little about it, because they had no ocean cable telegraphs to outrun the swift clipper ships.

There were couriers racing inland in all directions to tell the people of Mexico, also, that war had come, but the despatches of the general commanding their forces on the Texas border were carried by a swift schooner from Matamoras, on

the coast, directly to Vera Cruz. A messenger from that port had before him a gallop of only two hundred and sixty miles to the city of Mexico. President Paredes, therefore, had full information of the attack on the American fort sooner than did President Polk by a number of very important days.

These were bright May days, and during all of them there were other things going on which had a direct relation to the cannon-firing and the siege. For instance, all the commerce between Mexico and the rest of the world was deeply interested, and so were all the warships of the United States, which were prepared to interfere with that commerce pretty soon, and shut it off. There were merchant vessels at sea to whose captains and owners it was a serious question whether or not cruisers carrying the Stars and Stripes would permit them to reach their intended port and deliver their cargoes. Whatever may have been the case with all the rest of these vessels, one of them in particular appeared to be rushing along in a great hurry at the very hour when Lieutenant Grant woke up so suddenly and walked out of his tent.

She carried an American flag, somewhat tattered, and she was spreading quite as much canvas as a prudent skipper might have considered safe under the strong gale that was blowing. She was bark-rigged, of about four hundred tons burden, and was headed westward in the Nicholas Channel, off the northerly coast of the Island of Cuba. There was a high sea running, but the ship stood up well, and the few men who were on deck could get about easily. Even a boy of apparently not over seventeen, who came to a halt near the mainmast, managed to keep his balance with some help from a rope. That he did so was a credit to him, and it helped to give him a sailor-like and jaunty air. So did his blue trousers, blue flannel shirt with a wide collar, and the sidewise pitch of his tarpaulin hat. He might as well have remarked aloud that he was one of those boys who are up to almost anything, and who think small potatoes of a mere storm at sea. Near him, however, stood a pair of men, either of whom might have felt as much at home under another flag than the one which was now fluttering its damaged bunting above them. The shorter of the two was a very dark-faced gentleman of perhaps forty, with piercing black eyes. In spite of his civilian dress, he wore an expression that was decidedly warlike, or soldierly.

“Captain Kemp,” he said to his companion, “will you be good enough to tell me why we are in the Nicholas Channel?”

“No, Señor Zuroaga,” growled the large-framed, roughly rigged and grim-looking sailor. “I’m cap’n o’ this ship, and I don’t give explanations. We’ve had gales on gales since we left port. One course is as good as another, if you’re not

losing distance. We'll reach Vera Cruz now three or four days sooner than we reckoned. All those war insurance risks were paid for for nothing."

"I'm not so sure of that," was slowly and thoughtfully responded. "Not if one of Uncle Sam's officers should get a look into the hold of this ship."

"You're a Mexican, anyhow," said Captain Kemp, surlily. "You know enough to keep your mouth shut. You don't really have to know anything about the cargo. Besides, it was peace when we sailed. We shall make a safe landing,—if nothing happens on the way."

"Captain," said the Mexican, "it does not take long to make a declaration of war when both sides are determined to have one."

"You're wrong there, Señor Zuroaga," replied the captain, emphatically. "Mexico doesn't want a brush with the States. She isn't strong enough. The Yankees can whip her out of Texas any day."

"That is not the point at all," replied Zuroaga, sadly. "The fact is, the Texan Yankees want a war for revenge, and the American party in power would like to annex a great deal more than Texas. President Paredes needs a war to keep himself in power and help him put on a crown. Old Santa Anna wants a war to give him a chance to return from exile and get control of the army. If we ever do reach Vera Cruz, we shall hear of fighting when we get there."

"Perhaps," said the captain, "but it will be only a short war, and at the end of it the United States will have stolen Texas."

"No, señor," said Zuroaga, with a fierce flash in his eyes. "All educated Mexicans believe that Texas or any other of the old Spanish provinces has a right to set up for itself. Almost every State has actually tried it. We have had revolution after revolution."

"Anarchy after anarchy!" growled the captain. "Such a nation as that needs a king of some kind, or else the strong hand of either England or France or the United States."

"Mexico! A nation!" exclaimed Señor Zuroaga, after a moment of silence. "We are not a nation yet. Within our boundaries there are several millions of ignorant Indians, peons, rancheros and the like, that are owned rather than ruled by a few scores of rich landholders who represent the old Spanish military grants. Just now President Paredes is able to overawe as many of these chiefs as he and others have not murdered. So he is President, or whatever else he may choose to call himself. The mere title is nothing, for the people do not know the difference

between one and another. Now, Captain Kemp, one sure thing is that the Yankees have taken Texas and mean to keep it. They will fight for it. One other sure thing is that General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna will come back if he can, to carry on that war and supersede Paredes. If he does so, there is danger ahead for some men. He will settle with all his old enemies, and he loves bloodshed for its own sake. When he cannot be killing men, he will sit in a cockpit all day, just for the pleasure of seeing the birds slaughtering one another. I believe he had my own father shot quite as much for love of murder as for the opportunity it gave him for confiscating our family estates in Oaxaca.”

“You seem to have enough to hate him for, anyhow, and I don’t blame you,” replied the captain, as he turned away to give some orders to the sailors, and all the while the boy who stood near them had been listening.

“Well, Ned Crawford,” he muttered to himself, “that’s it, is it? Father didn’t seem to believe there would be any war. He said there would be plenty of time, anyhow, for this old *Goshawk* bark to make the round trip to New York by way of Vera Cruz.”

A great lurch of the ship nearly swung him off his feet just then, and he was holding on very firmly to his rope when he added:

“He said I’d learn a great deal all the way, and I shouldn’t wonder if I’m learning something new just now. What do they mean by that dangerous cargo in the hold, and our being captured by American ships of war? That’s a thing father didn’t know anything about. I guess I can see how it is, though. Captain Kemp isn’t an American, and he’d do almost anything to make money. Anything honest, I mean. How it does blow! Well, let her blow! Father said he was putting me into a first-rate commercial school, and here I am right in the middle of it.”

Ned was indeed at school, and he seemed likely to have unexpected teachers, but so is every other wide-awake young fellow, just like Ulysses Grant and his crowd of young associates in their hot weather war school over there on the Texas border.

Señor Zuroaga also had now walked away, and Ned was left to hold by his rope, looking out upon the tossing sea and wondering more and more what sort of adventures he and the *Goshawk* might be so swiftly racing on into.



CHAPTER II.

THE RACE OF THE GOSHAWK

A long day had passed and a dark night had come. The air of it was hot and sultry over all the regions around the Gulf of Mexico. Something appeared to be weighing it down, as if it might be loaded with the great events which were about to come.

It was gloomy enough at and around the besieged American fort on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, but every now and then the darkness and the silence were broken by the flashes and thunders of the Mexican artillery, and the responses of the cannon of the bravely defended fortress. This was already partly in ruins, and the besiegers had good reasons for their expectation that in due season they were to see the Stars and Stripes come down from the shattered rampart. It did not seem to them at all possible that the small force under General Taylor, twenty miles away at the seaside, could cut through overwhelming numbers to the relief of the garrison.

It was just as dark in the American camp on the coast, but there were many campfires burning, and by the light of these and numberless lanterns there were busy preparations making for the forward march, which was to begin in the morning. There was an immense amount of anxiety in the minds of all the Americans who were getting ready, but it was only on account of the fort and garrison, for that little army had a remarkable degree of confidence in its own fighting capacity.

It is never as dark on the land, apparently, as it is at sea, where even the lights hung out by a ship seem to make all things darker, except the white crests of the billows. One ship's lantern, however, was so hung that it threw down a dim light upon a pair who were sitting on the deck near the stern.

"Señor Zuroaga," said one of them, "I wish it was daylight."

"So do I," responded his companion, with hardly a trace of foreign accent. "The storm's nearly over, but I had so much on my mind that I could not sleep. The fact is, I came up to try and make up my mind where we are. I must reach Vera

Cruz before Santa Anna does, if I can. If I do not, I may be shot after landing. I shall be safer, too, after President Paredes has marched with his army for the Rio Grande. So I hope for war. Anyhow, the commander at Vera Cruz is a friend of mine.”

“I guess I understand,” said Ned. “I heard what you said about the way things are going. But what did you mean about our being in the Nicholas Channel? What has that got to do with it?”

“Talk Spanish!” replied the señor, with whom the boy appeared to be upon good terms. “I do not want any of those sailors to understand me, though I’m very glad that you can. How did that happen?”

“Well,” said Ned, “father’s been all his life in the Cuban and Mexican trade, and I’m to grow up into it. I can’t remember just when they began to teach me Spanish. I was thinking about the war, though. If it’s coming, I want to see some of the fighting.”

“You may see more than you will like,” said his friend in his own tongue. “Now, as to where we are, remember your geography.”

“I can remember every map in it,” said Ned, confidently.

“Good!” said the señor. “Now! You know that the Gulf Stream runs along the coast of Florida. Our road from Liverpool to the gulf was to have taken us by that way. Instead of that, we came around below the Bahama Islands, and here we are off the north coast of Cuba. Captain Kemp’s reason is that there might be too many American cruisers along the Florida coast, and he does not care to be stopped by one of them, if the war has already begun. We would not be allowed to go any further.”

“I see,” said Ned. “Of course not. They would stop us, to keep us from being captured by the Mexicans when we got to Vera Cruz.”

“Not exactly,” said the señor, half laughing, “but it might cost your father and his partners their ship and cargo. That is the secret the sailors are not to know. Away up northward there, a hundred miles or so, are the Florida Keys, and among them is the United States naval station at Key West. There are ships of war there, and Captain Kemp will not sail any nearer to them than he can help. Ned, did you have any idea that you were sitting over a Mexican powder-magazine?”

“No!” exclaimed Ned. “What on earth do you mean?”

“I think I had better tell you,” said the señor. “I half suspected it before we

sailed, and I learned the whole truth afterward. The New York and Liverpool firm that your father belongs to sent on board an honest and peaceable cargo, but there was a good deal of room left in the hold, and the captain filled it up with cannon-balls, musket-bullets, and gunpowder from the English agents of no less a man than General Santa Anna himself. It is all for his army, whenever he gets one, but it goes first to the castle of San Juan de Ulua, at Vera Cruz. If war has been declared, or if it has in any way begun, the whole thing is what they call contraband of war, and the *Goshawk* is liable to be captured and confiscated."

"Phew!" whistled Ned. "Wonder how father'd like that! Anyhow, we don't know there's any war."

"We'd be in trouble anyhow," said the señor. "But we are all in the dark about it. We have been over three weeks on the way, and all the war news we had when we started was nearly a month old. We can only guess what has been going on. Here we are, though, in a storm that is driving us along first-rate into the Gulf of Mexico. We may be four days' sail from Vera Cruz in a bee-line, and the *Goshawk* is a racer, but we may not be able to make a straight course. Well, well, the captain will keep on all the canvas that's safe, and we may get there. Hullo! the day is beginning to dawn. Now our real danger begins."

He said no more, and Ned walked forward with something altogether new on his mind. An American boy, crammed full of patriotism, and wishing that he were in General Taylor's army, he was, nevertheless, by no fault of his own, one of the crew of a ship which was carrying ammunition to the enemy. He almost felt as if he were fighting his own country, and it made him sick. He had an idea, moreover, that Señor Zuroaga was only half willing to help his old enemy Santa Anna.

"I don't care if Captain Kemp is an Englishman," he said to himself, "he had no business to run father and his partners into such a scrape."

That might be so, and perhaps neither Kemp, nor Zuroaga, nor even Ned himself, knew all about the laws of war which govern such cases, but just then there flashed across his mind a very dismal suggestion, as he stared down at the deck he stood on.

"What," he asked himself, "if any accident should touch off those barrels of powder down there? Why, we'd all be blown sky-high and nobody'd ever know what had become of us. There'd be nothing but chips left."

He tried not to think about that, and went below to get his breakfast, while Captain Kemp ordered his sailors to send up another sail, remarking to Señor

Zuroaga:

“We must make the most we can of this wind. Every hour counts now. I’ll take the *Goshawk* to Vera Cruz, or I’ll run her under water.”

“Have you any idea where we are just now?” asked the señor.

“Well on into the gulf,” said the captain, cheerfully. “We made a splendid run in the night, thanks to the gale. I hope it will blow on, and I think there is no danger of our being overhauled until we are off the Mexican coast. I wish, though, that I knew whether or not the war has actually been declared.”

“The declaration isn’t everything,” replied the señor. “If there has been any fighting at all, American cruisers have a right, after that, to question ships bound for a hostile port, and to stop and seize all contraband of war. After goods are once seized, it isn’t easy to get them back again.”

“Sail ho!” came down from aloft at that moment.

“Where away?” called back the captain.

“Northerly, sir. Looks like a shark, sir.”

“Can you make out her flag?” was inquired, almost anxiously.

The man on the lookout plied his telescope a full half-minute before he responded:

“Stars and Stripes, sir. Sloop-o’-war, sir. She’s changin’ her course, and she’s makin’ for us, I reckon.”

“Let her head!” growled the captain. “This bark’ll bear more sail. Hoist away there, men. Let her have it! Señor, there’s one thing I’ll do right off. It may be our best chance if she should overhaul us.”

He did not explain his meaning just then, but another sail went up and something else came down. In a few minutes more, when Ned came on deck again, he suddenly felt worse than ever. Not long before, when the sun was rising, he had been on an American ship, with the flag of his country flying above him, but now his first glance aloft drew from him a loud exclamation, for he found that while below he had apparently been turned into an Englishman, and away up yonder the gale was playing with the Red Cross banner of the British Empire. He stared at it for a moment, and then he made an excited rush for Señor Zuroaga. He might have reached him sooner, but for a lurch of the *Goshawk*, which sent him sprawling full length upon the deck. It did not hurt him much, however, and

as soon as he was on his feet, he blurted out, angrily:

“Señor! I say! Do you see that? What does it mean?”

The Mexican laughed aloud, but not only Ned Crawford but several of the sailors were eyeing that unexpected bunting with red and angry faces. They also were Americans, and they had national prejudices.

“You don’t like the British flag, eh?” he said. “I do, then, just now. An American cruiser would not fire a shot at that flag half so quick as it would at your own.”

“Why wouldn’t she?” asked Ned.

"DO YOU SEE THAT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"

"DO YOU SEE THAT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"

“Because,” said the señor, a little dryly, “the American skipper hasn’t any British navy behind him, ready to take the matter up. It’s a protection in case we can’t outrun that sloop-of-war. The men won’t care a cent, as soon as they know it’s only a sea dodge to get into port with.”

Sailor-like, they were indeed easily satisfied with whatever the captain chose to tell them, and on went the *Goshawk* as a British craft, but she was nevertheless carrying supplies to the Mexican army.

Señor Zuroaga had brought up a double spy-glass of his own, and, after studying the stranger through it, he handed it to Ned, remarking:

“Take a look at her. She’s a beauty. She is drawing nearer on this tack, but nobody knows yet whether she can outrun us or not.”

Ned took the glass with an unexpected feeling growing within him that he hoped she could not do so. He did not wish to be caught on board a British vessel taking powder and shot to kill Americans with. As he put the glass to his eyes, however, the sloop-of-war appeared to have suddenly come nearer. It was as if the *Goshawk* were already within reach of her guns, and she became a dangerous thing to look at. She was not, as yet, under any great press of canvas, for her commander may not have imagined that any merchant vessel would try to get away from him. There were two things, however, about which nobody on board the *Goshawk* was thinking. The first was that, while the American ship-of-war captain had not heard the firing at the fort on the Rio Grande, he was under a strong impression that war had been declared. The other thing came out in a remark which he made to a junior officer standing by him.

“It won’t do!” he declared, emphatically. “I don’t at all like that change of flags.

It means mischief. There is something suspicious about that craft. We must bring her to, and find out what's the matter with her."

The distance between the two vessels was still too great for anything but a few signals, to which Captain Kemp responded with others which may have been of his own invention, for the signal officer on board the Yankee cruiser could make nothing of them. The *Goshawk*, moreover, did not shorten sail, and her steersman kept her away several points more southerly, instead of bringing her course nearer to that of the cruiser.

"I see!" said her captain, as he watched the change. "She means to get away from us. It won't do. As soon as we are within range, I'll give her a gun. She may be a Mexican privateer, for all I know."

At all events, under the circumstances, as he thought, the change of flags had made it his duty to inquire into her character, and he decided to do so, even if, as he said, he should have to send one shot ahead of her and then a dozen into her.

There is something wonderfully exciting about a race of any kind. Men will make use of anything, from a donkey to a steamboat, to engineer a trial of speed and endurance. Then they will stand around and watch the running, as if the future welfare of the human race depended upon the result. Even the *Goshawk* sailors, who had previously grumbled at the British flag above them, were entirely reconciled to the situation, now that it included the interesting question whether or not their swift bark could show her heels to the cruiser. They were very much in doubt about it, for the ships of the American navy had a high and well-earned reputation as chasers. They might have been somewhat encouraged if they had known that the *Portsmouth*, sloop-of-war, had been at sea a long time without going into any dock to have her bottom scraped clean of its accumulated barnacles. She was by no means in the best of training for a marine race-course.

An hour went by and then another. The two vessels were now running on almost parallel lines, so that any attempt of the sloop to draw nearer cost her just so much of chasing distance. It might be that they were, in fact, nearly matched, now that the wind had lulled a little, and both of them were able to send up more canvas without too much risk of having their sticks blown out of them. It looked like it, but the Yankee captain had yet another idea in his sagacious head.

"Let her keep on," he said. "The old *Kennebec* is out there, somewhere westerly, not far away. That vagabond may find himself under heavier guns than ours before sunset. Lieutenant, give him a gun."

"Ay, ay, sir!" came back, and in a moment more there was a flash and a report at

the bow of the *Portsmouth*.

Both range and distance had been well calculated, for an iron messenger, ordering the *Goshawk* to heave to, fell into the water within a hundred yards of her stern.

“That’s near enough for the present,” said the American commander, but Captain Kemp exclaimed, in astonishment:

“They are firing on the British flag, are they? Then there is something up that we don’t know anything about. We must get away at all risks.”

They were not doing so just now, although another change of course and a strong puff of the gale carried the *Goshawk* further out of range. The fact was that her pursuer did not feel quite ready to land shot on board of her, believing that he was doing well enough and that his prize would surely be taken sooner or later. Besides, if she were, indeed, to become a prize, no sound-minded sea-captain could be willing to shoot away her selling value or that of her cargo.

Noon came, and there did not appear to be any important change in the relative positions of the two ships. At times, indeed, the *Goshawk* had gained a quarter-mile or so, but only to lose it again, as is apt to be the case in ocean races. She was not at all tired, however, and both of the contestants had all the wind they needed.

Two hours more went slowly by, and Captain Kemp began to exhibit signs of uneasiness at the unexpected persistence with which he was followed.

“What on earth can be the matter?” he remarked, aloud. “I’d have thought she’d get tired of it before this—”

“Captain!” sharply interrupted Zuroaga, standing at his elbow, glass in hand. “Another sail! Off there, southerly. Seems to be a full-rigged ship. What are we to do now?”

“Keep on!” roared the captain, and then he turned to respond to a similar piece of unpleasant information which came down from the lookout.

“We’ll soon know what she is,” he remarked, but not as if he very much wished to do so. “What I’d like to do would be to sail on into the darkest kind of a rainy night. That’s our chance, if we can get it.”

It might be, but at that very moment the commander of the *Portsmouth* was asserting to his first lieutenant:

“There comes the *Kennebec*, my boy. We’ll have this fellow now. We’ll teach him not to play tricks with national flags and man-o’-war signals.”

The race across the Gulf of Mexico was now putting on new and interesting features, but Ned Crawford, posted well forward to watch the course of events and what might have been called the race-course, sagely remarked:

“I don’t know that two horses can run any faster than one can. We are as far ahead as ever we were.”

That would have been of more importance if the newcomer had not been so much to the southward and westward, rather than behind them. She was, of course, several miles nearer to the *Goshawk* than she was to the *Portsmouth*, and neither of these had as yet been able to make out her flag with certainty. That she was a full-rigged ship was sure enough, and if Ned had been upon her deck instead of upon his own, he would have discovered that she was heavily armed and in apple-pie order. At this very moment a burly officer upon her quarter-deck was roaring, angrily, in response to some information which had been given him:

“What’s that? A British ship chased by a Yankee cruiser? Lieutenant, I think the *Falcon*’ll take a look at that. These Yankees are getting too bumptious altogether. It’s as if they thought they owned the gulf! Put her head two points north’ard. Humph! It’s about time they had a lesson.”

There had been some temporary trouble with the flag of the *Falcon*, but it had now been cleared of its tangle, and was swinging out free. It was of larger size than the British bunting displayed by the *Goshawk*. It was only a few minutes, therefore, before Captain Kemp had a fresh trouble on his mind, for his telescope had told him the meaning of that flag.

“Worse than ever!” he exclaimed. “She’d make us heave to and show our papers. Then she’d hand us right over, and no help for it. No, sir! Our only way is to scud from both of them. Some of our English frigates are slow goers, and this may be one of that kind.”

He was in less immediate peril, perhaps, because of the determination of the angry British captain to speak to the Yankee first, and demand an explanation of this extraordinary affair. This it was his plain duty to do, and the attempt to do it would shortly put him and all his guns between the *Portsmouth* and the *Goshawk*. This operation was going on at the end of another hour, when Captain Kemp’s lookout shouted down to him:

“Sail ho, sir! ’Bout a mile ahead o’ the British frigate. Can’t quite make her out

yet, sir.”

“I declare!” groaned the captain. “This ’ere’s getting kind o’ thick!”

The weather also was getting thicker, and all three of the racers were shortly under a prudent necessity for reducing their excessive spreads of canvas. The first mate of the *Goshawk* had even been compelled to expostulate with his overexcited skipper.

“Some of it’s got to come down, sir,” he asserted. “If we was to lose a spar, we’re gone, sure as guns!”

“In with it, then,” said the captain. “I wish both of ’em ’d knock out a stick or two. It’d be a good thing for us.”

At all events, a lame horse is not likely to win a race, and the *Goshawk* was doing as well as were either of the others.

Under such circumstances, it was not long before the *Falcon* and the *Portsmouth* were within speaking-trumpet distance of each other, both of them losing half a mile to the *Goshawk* while they were getting together. Rapid and loud-voiced indeed were the explanations which passed between the two commanders. At the end of them, the wrath of the Englishman was turned entirely against the culprit bark, which had trifled with his flag.

“We must take her, sir!” he shouted. “She’s a loose fish o’ some kind.”

It was while this conversation was going on that Señor Zuroaga, after long and careful observations, reported to Captain Kemp concerning the far-away stranger to the westward.

“She is a Frenchman, beyond a doubt. Are all the nations making a naval rendezvous in the Gulf of Mexico?”

“Nothing extraordinary,” said the captain. “But they’re all more’n usually on the watch, on account o’ the war, if it’s coming.”

It was precisely so. War surely brings disturbance and losses to others besides those who are directly engaged in it, and all the nations having commercial relations with Mexico were expecting their cruisers in the gulf to act as a kind of sea police. Moreover, a larger force than usual would probably be on hand and wide awake.

The day was going fast, and the weather promised to shorten it. Ned was now wearing an oilskin, for he would not have allowed any amount of rain to have

driven him below. He and all the rest on board the *Goshawk* were aware that their pursuers were again beginning to gain on them perceptibly. It was a slow process, but it was likely to be a sure one, for the men-of-war could do better sailing in a heavy sea and under shortened canvas than could a loaded vessel like the saucy merchant bark.

“I’m afraid they’ll catch us!” groaned Ned. “I s’pose they could make us all prisoners of war,—if there is any war. Oh, I wish all that powder and shot had been thrown overboard!”

It did not look, just now, as if the Mexican army would ever get any benefit from it, for even the French stranger to leeward seemed to be putting on an air of having evil intentions. Captain Kemp had made her out to be a corvette of moderate size, perhaps a sixteen-gun ship, and she would be quite likely to co-operate with the police boats of England and America in arresting any suspicious wanderer in those troubled waters.

Darker grew the gloom and a light mist came sweeping over the sea. Both pursuers and pursued began to swing out lights, and before long the mate of the *Goshawk* came to Captain Kemp to inquire, in a puzzled way:

“I say, Cap’n, what on earth do you do that for? It’ll help ’em to foller us, and lose us all the benefit o’ the dark.”

“No, it won’t,” growled the captain. “You wait and see. I’ve sighted one more light, off there ahead of us, and I’m going to make it do something for the *Goshawk*. Those other chaps can’t see it yet.”

“What in all the world can he be up to?” thought Ned, as he listened, but the cunning skipper of the bark had all his wits about him.

The lookouts of the men-of-war had indeed been taking note thus far of only their own lanterns and the glimmer on their intended prize. They may even have wondered, as did her own mate, why she should aid them in keeping track of her. At all events, they had little doubt of having her under their guns before morning. Señor Zuroaga himself sat curled up under his waterproof well aft, and now and then he appeared to be chuckling, as if he knew something which amused him. Half an hour later, when all the lights of the *Goshawk* suddenly went out, he actually broke into a ringing laugh. Her course was changed to almost due north at that very moment. This would bring her across the track of the *Portsmouth* and within a mile of that dangerous cruiser’s bow guns. They might not be quite so dangerous, however, if her gunners should be unable to see a mark at that distance through the mist. The fifth light, dead ahead, now became

itself only the fourth, and it was immediately the sole attraction for the watchers in the rigging of the several war police-boats. This stranger was going westwardly, at a fair rate of speed, and its light was exceptionally brilliant. In fact, it grew more and more so during an anxious thirty minutes that followed, but it was the French corvette which first came within hailing distance, to receive an answer in angry Portuguese, which the French officers could not make head or tail of. Even after receiving further communications in broken Portuguese-Spanish, all they could do was to compel the Brazilian schooner, *Gonzaga*, laden with honest coffee from Rio for New Orleans, to heave to as best she might until the next arrival came within hail. This proved to be the British frigate, and her disappointed captain at once pretty sharply explained to the Frenchmen the difference between a two-master from Rio and a British-Yankee runaway bark from nobody knew where. Then came sweeping along the gallant *Portsmouth*, and there was need for additional conversation all around. Some of it was of an exceedingly discontented character, although the several captains were doing their best to be polite to each other, whatever derogatory remarks they might feel disposed to make concerning the craft which was carrying Ned Crawford and his badly wounded patriotism.

Far away to the northwest, hidden by the darkness, the *Goshawk* was all this while flying along, getting into greater safety with every knot she was making, and Captain Kemp remarked to Ned:

“My boy, your father won’t lose a cent, after all—not unless we find Vera Cruz blockaded. But our danger isn’t all over yet, and it’s well for us that we’ve slipped out of this part of it.”

“Captain Kemp!” exclaimed Ned, “I believe father’d be willing to lose something, rather than have the Mexicans get that ammunition.”

“Very likely he would,” laughed the captain, “but I’m an Englishman, and I don’t care. What’s more, I’m like a great many Americans. Millions of them believe that the Mexicans are in the right in this matter.”

That was a thing which nobody could deny, and Ned was silenced so far as the captain’s sense of national duty was concerned.

Hundreds of miles to the westward, at that early hour of the evening, far beyond the path of the storm which had been sweeping the eastern and southern waters of the gulf, the American army, under General Taylor, lay bivouacked. It was several miles nearer the besieged fort than it had been in the morning, for this was the 8th of May. There had been sharp fighting at intervals since the middle

of the forenoon, beginning at a place called Palo Alto, or “The Tall Trees,” and the Mexicans had been driven back with loss. Any cannonading at the fort could be heard more plainly now, and it was certain that it had not yet surrendered.

Near the centre of the lines occupied by the Seventh Regiment, a young officer sat upon the grass. He held in one hand a piece of army bread, from which he now and then took a bite, but he was evidently absorbed in thought. He took off his hat at last and stared out into the gloom.

“The Mexican army is out there somewhere,” he remarked, slowly. “We are likely to have another brush with them to-morrow. Well! this is real war. I’ve seen my first battle, and I know just how a fellow feels under fire. I wasn’t at all sure how it would be, but I know now. He doesn’t feel first-rate, by any means. Those fellows that say they like it are all humbugs. I’ve seen my first man killed by a cannon-ball. Poor Page! Poor Ringgold! More of us are to go down to-morrow. Who will it be?”

Very possibly, the list of American slain would contain the announcement that a mere second lieutenant, named Ulysses S. Grant, had been struck by a chance shot from one of the Mexican batteries.



CHAPTER III.

THE FORTUNE OF WAR

The morning of the 9th of May dawned brightly on the ocean and on the shore. There was a heavy sea running on the Gulf of Mexico, but the wind that was blowing was little more than a ten-knot breeze. Before this, at distances of a few miles from each other, a trio of armed vessels, representing three of the great powers of the world, were dashing along under full sail, as if they were in a hurry. They were so, for they all were searching hungrily after a double-flagged bark, which they had caught the day before, but which had managed to escape from them in the night. She had done it mysteriously and impudently. Instead of her, there now toiled along, away behind them, a dingy-looking Brazilian coffee schooner, the skipper of which did not conceal his satisfaction over the idea that he had unintentionally aided some other sailor—he did not care who—to get away from all those war-sharks. Well to the westward, with every sail spread that she could carry, the *Goshawk* sped along in apparent safety, but she was once more carrying the American flag, and Ned Crawford, busy below at his breakfast, felt a great deal easier in his patriotic mind. He could almost forget, for the moment, that he was taking a cargo of the worst kind of contraband of war goods to the armies of the enemies of his country. He was shortly on deck again, to be heartily greeted by Captain Kemp with:

“Hullo, my boy, where are all your ships of war?”

Ned took a long, sweeping glance around the horizon, and replied:

“It looks as if we’d lost ’em.”

“We’ve done it!” chuckled the captain. “I think we’ll not see any more of that lot. We made a fine run in the night, and we may be within three days’ sail of Vera Cruz. But that depends a great deal on the wind and on our luck in keeping out of difficulties.”

The captain turned away to his duties, and Ned went forward among the sailors. He could always manage to have good chats with them, and they were especially ready just now to discuss the war and their chances for running against more

cruisers. Ned did not count as one of them exactly, but he was not to be looked down upon as a mere passenger. His father had sent him out as a kind of honorary supercargo, or ship's clerk, in the hope that he might learn something which would be of use to him when he should grow up into a full-sized merchant. Perhaps he had already found out a number of things upon which his father had not calculated when he said good-by to him. He was about to learn some other things which were not upon the ship's books, for he had reached the heel of the bowsprit, where Señor Zuroaga was standing, gazing dreamily westward.

"Good morning, señor!" said Ned. "We did get away."

"I don't know how good a morning it is for me," replied the dark-faced Mexican, wearily. "I may have only three or four days to wait before I shall know whether or not I am to be shot at Vera Cruz by order of his Excellency, President Paredes. My best chance is that he cannot know that I am coming. After I get ashore, my life may very soon depend upon his being beaten out of power by the armies of the United States."

"It couldn't be so in any other country," said Ned. "What have you ever done against him?"

"I won't say just now," replied the señor, "but he knows that I am his enemy. So I am of Santa Anna, if he is to get back. He murdered my father and confiscated our property in Oaxaca. Do you know where that is?"

"No," said Ned; "I don't know anything about the States of Mexico. It's hard enough to keep track of the United States. They make a new one every few weeks. They may have let in half a dozen while we've been at sea."

"No," said Zuroaga, "but they've tightened their grip on Texas, and I hope they'll hold on hard, if only to keep Paredes and Santa Anna from murdering all the best men in it. Well, Oaxaca lies due south of the State of Vera Cruz, and I can escape into it if I have half a chance. I'd be safe then, for I have plenty of friends there. We have owned huge tracts of land in Oaxaca ever since the Spaniards conquered Mexico."

"How did your folks get so much of it?" inquired Ned.

"I'll tell you," said the señor, proudly, and with a fiery flash in his coal-black eyes. "A man by the name of Hernando Cortes really conquered Mexico, without much help from the King of Spain. The king made a great deal of him for it, at first. He made him a marquis, which was a great thing in those days, whatever it

is now. He also gave him a royal grant of some of the land he had won for Spain. This land was the valley of the Tehuantepec River, that empties into the Pacific Ocean near the eastern boundary of Oaxaca. So his title was Marquis del Valle, and his descendants hold a great deal of that land to this day. I am one of them,—one of the Marquisanas, as they call us. I am a direct descendant of Hernando Cortes, and that isn't all. One of my ancestors married an Aztec princess, and so I am also descended from the Montezumas, who were emperors of Mexico before the Spaniards came. I'm an Indian on one side, and I've more than one good reason for hating a Spaniard and a tyrant."

Ned Crawford had read the story of the conquest of Mexico, like a great many other American boys. That is, he had read it as if it had been a tip-top novel rather than a reality. He had admired Hernando Cortes, as a hero of fiction, but here he was, now, actually talking with one of the hero's great-great-grandchildren, who was also, after a fashion, one of the Montezumas. It was like a short chapter out of some other novel, with the night race of the *Goshawk* thrown in by way of variation. He was thinking about it, however, rather than asking questions, and the señor went on:

"It's a rich, beautiful country, all that eastern part of Oaxaca. There are splendid mountains and great forests of mahogany, rosewood, and pine. Through it runs the Coatzacoalcos River, northerly, to the gulf. Along the rivers and through the mountain passes, there is an old road that Cortes himself made to lead his little army across to the Pacific."

"I'd like to go over on it!" exclaimed Ned. "I guess I will, some day. I want to know all about Mexico."

He made up his mind, from what his companion went on to tell him, that there would be a great deal worth seeing, but at that time nobody was dreaming how many Americans, older and younger, were soon to travel over the old Cortes road. California was to be annexed, as well as Texas, and before Ned Crawford would be old enough to cast his first vote, there was to be a great tide of eager gold hunters pouring along what was called the Tehuantepec route to the placers and diggings.

The days of California gold mining had not yet come, and while Ned and the señor talked on about the terrible history of Mexico, with its factions, its bloody revenges, its pronunciamientos, and its fruitless revolutions, the *Goshawk* sailed swiftly along toward Vera Cruz and the powder-needing garrison of the castle of San Juan de Ulua.

Whether or not the war had actually begun was still a puzzling question in the mind of Captain Kemp, but he would have had no doubt whatever if he had been with General Taylor and his remarkable gathering of young students of the art of war. They all obtained several important lessons that day. One of these was that it is both difficult and dangerous for an advancing army to push on through dense bushes and high grass in hot weather, with Mexican lancers ready to pounce upon them among the lanes of the chaparral. It was found, not only before but after the short, sharp collision with the Mexican forces at Resaca de la Palma that a number of valuable lives had been lost in the bushy wilderness.

The American army moved slowly forward, and before nightfall the long lines of its blue uniforms went over the prairie rolls in full sight of the fort. The Stars and Stripes were still flying above the badly damaged ramparts, and cheer after cheer went up from thousands of throats, including those of the rescued garrison. They had not really lost many men, killed or wounded, but among the killed was their commander, Major Brown, after whom the fort was now named. In later years, a town grew up around the site of the frontier fortress, and it is called Brownsville. General Taylor's men had triumphantly cut their way through the difficult twenty miles from the sea to the siege, but perhaps any individual hero among them might have safely quoted the wise remark of Lieutenant Grant, as he looked at the fort and recalled his exploits of the day.

"Well, after all," he said to himself, "I don't know but what the battle of Resaca de la Palma would have been won just as well if I had not been there."

Long years afterward, it was to be said of a number of other battles that they would not have been won just as well if he had not been there to win them, and the same would be equally true of several of his young companions, as inexperienced as himself, and as ignorant of the great things before them in the far future.

Their army went into camp near the fort; and the Mexican forces, for the greater part, were believed to have retreated across the Rio Grande.

It is said that after every storm there comes a calm, but it was not a pleasant calm in the neighborhood of the American camp. There were all the while strong parties of Mexican lancers hovering around in all directions, on the lookout for imprudent stragglers, and a sharp watch had to be kept to guard against sudden dashes at the outposts, for the "rancheros," as the Mexican horsemen were called, were both well-mounted and enterprising. There was yet another kind of calm of a curious character. General Taylor absolutely did not know what to do

next, and he could not know until after he should hear from the President what the statesmen in Congress had decided. Beyond a doubt, war was going on right here, but there was a dispute as to the nature of it and as to what was to be done with it. The Mexican geographers claimed that the southern boundary of Texas, even if it had been legally annexed to the United States, was at the Nueces River, and that all their country south of that line was still their own. According to them, therefore, General Taylor's army was not in Texas at all, but in Mexico. On the other hand, the American geographers placed the boundary at the Rio Grande, many miles south of the Nueces, and claimed that the forces defeated by General Taylor had invaded the United States. If both parties were right, then it might have been said that all that land between the rivers did not belong to anybody until the title to it should be settled by a military court and gunpowder arguments. That was really the way in which it was finally settled, and there is now no more dispute about it. History tells us that so have all the great national land titles of the world been argued and determined.

There was what some people call a waiting spell, and all things on sea or land might be spoken of as feverishly quiet for a day or two. In the afternoon of the third day, however, there was a sort of change in the weather at one spot away out on the gulf. There was not a cloud in the sky, indeed, and the *Goshawk* was skimming along under full sail so steadily that part of her crew had nothing better to do than to lie around on the deck, and feel satisfied that the breeze was so very good. In the same manner, the American soldiers in the neighborhood of Fort Brown were lying around in and out of their tents, and wishing that they had more shade to protect them from the hot sun of Texas or Mexico, whichever it might be. At that hour, however, there arrived upon the *Goshawk* a bit of unexpected news which awakened everybody, for the man at the lookout announced, excitedly:

"Schooner under Mexican flag, sir! Well away to loo'ard. Looks as if she might come pretty nigh us."

"Just the thing I wanted!" shouted Captain Kemp, springing to his feet. "We'll bear away for her. Up with the British flag, too. She'd shy the Stars and Stripes. They wouldn't tell us what the news is, either."

Once more, therefore, the *Goshawk* became an Englishman, and her chase after the latest news did not have to be a long one. Not many minutes later, the two vessels were within hailing distance, and the stranger spoke first, in a tone of evident anxiety:

“What ship is that?”

“*Goshawk*, from Liverpool to Vera Cruz, with supplies for the Castle of San Juan de Ulua. What ship is that?”

“Schooner *Tampico*, from Havana to Matamoras, with supplies for General Ampudia,” came much more cheerfully back. “We had to run away from Matamoras in ballast to escape the gringos. Their cruisers are around like hawks. You won’t get to Vera Cruz if they can help it.”

Captain Kemp already knew something about the reckless ways of men-of-war, but he did not say so. He merely responded:

“Is that so? How about the war? We’ve no news at all.”

“War?” shouted the Mexican skipper, triumphantly. “Why, there have been three great battles already. We have whipped the Americans! General Taylor is surrounded, and will have to surrender. So will the fort on the Rio Grande. We shall drive the gringos out of Texas. I did not know until now that you British were going to help us.”

There could be no further conversation, for the *Goshawk* was sweeping on out of hearing, but Ned Crawford exclaimed, indignantly:

“Our army defeated? How can that be? I don’t believe it!”

Everybody on deck could hear the captain when he laughingly responded:

“The victories were won in that fellow’s head, most likely. He was on board his schooner at Matamoras, and he didn’t see it done. All he knows is that the war is really begun. It takes a long time, men, to make either an American or a British army think of surrendering. We shall hear a good deal more about those battles one of these days. I’d like to read the newspaper reports, though, on both sides.”

“They would be good fun,” dryly remarked Señor Zuroaga. “There is nobody on earth that can win victories like a newspaper editor.”

“Hullo!” suddenly exclaimed Ned. “Something’s the matter with the captain! Did you hear that?”

There was quite enough to hear. A long, loud hail that came down from the rigging was followed by almost a yell from Captain Kemp.

“We’re chased again!” he said. “Thank God, she’s astern! Men, we’re in for it! Now for Vera Cruz or a prison! I’m ready!”

Rapid orders went out, but hardly anything more could be done to increase the

speed of the ship. In fact, the lookout must almost have taken it for granted that the strange sail away off yonder belonged to a United States cruiser. Very likely it did, but it would have to draw a good deal nearer before there could be any absolute certainty. In the meantime, all on board the *Goshawk* might attend to whatever duties they had, and discuss the remarkable tidings brought by the Mexican schooner. While doing so, they could hardly have guessed correctly what was doing and saying on board the other vessel which had caused their anxiety. She was, indeed, a man-of-war, and she had received from a returning army transport ship a whole lot of fresh news from General Taylor's army, by way of Point Isabel on the coast, where he had been encamped. Something like this had been shouted across the water by an enthusiastic officer of the transport:

"Awful fightin'! Half a dozen battles! Taylor's whipped the Greasers into smithereens! He's goin' to march right on into Mexico. I don't keer if Uncle Sam annexes the hull half-Spanish outfit. I'm goin' in for one o' them there big silver mines, if we do. Hurrah for Ginerall Taylor!"

A chorus of ringing cheers had answered that, but here, also, there were men of experience ready to question the entire accuracy of such tremendous war news. The one thing, however, which was brought out clearly to the mind of a naval commander was his greatly increased duty of watchfulness to prevent any kind of munitions of war from reaching the Mexican ports. That was the reason why he was now following at his best speed what might after all prove to be an entirely innocent trader. He even went below to consider the matter, and it was a full hour later when the officer in charge of the deck came hastily down to tell him:

"Same fellow we chased before, sir. I've made him out. He's under British colors again. Are we to chase?"

"Chase, sir?" roared the captain. "Of course we must chase! We know what it means now. The old *Portsmouth* must catch that rascal this time. I'll come on deck."

Just as good glasses as those on board of her had been watching her during that hour of swift sailing, and Captain Kemp was even now lowering his telescope with what sounded like a sigh of relief.

"Mate," he said, "it's the same sloop that followed us before. It makes me feel better. We know what's about the best she can do. If this wind holds, I think we can fetch Vera Cruz at nightfall. No one Yankee'd dare to follow us under the guns of San Juan de Ulua."

“I reckon not,” slowly responded the mate of the *Goshawk*, “but we don’t need to get under that chap’s bow-chasers, either.”

“No,” said Captain Kemp, “but I’ll risk a shot or two.”

Ned Crawford heard him, for he had been following him pretty closely, to know what was coming.

“I don’t know,” he was thinking, “how far one o’ those cannon of hers’ll carry. I don’t believe, either, that they can hit a mark that is plunging along as we are. It’d be worse than shooting at a bird on the wing. Still, it’s kind of awful to be shot at by our own people.”

The sailors of the *Goshawk* were also thinking, and they were beginning to look at one another very doubtfully. Not only were they Americans, most of them, but they had not shipped for any such business as this, and they did not fancy the idea of being killed for nothing. Moreover, Ned himself heard one of them muttering:

“There’s an ugly look to this thing. If a shot from that cruiser were to strike us amidships, we’d all be blown into the air.”

Decidedly that was not a pleasant thing to think of. Neither was there any great amount of comfort in a suggestion made by another of the men:

“Well, we’d never know what hurt us. We must keep out o’ range.”

Not long afterward there was a flash at one of the bow-ports of the cruiser. The report which followed was a peremptory order to heave to, under penalty of consequences. The gun was shotted, and a great many eyes watched anxiously for the dipping of that well-aimed ball of iron. It skipped from crest to crest of several waves before it sank, and then Captain Kemp shouted:

“All right, men! Half a mile short! We shall get there. The coast’s in full sight now, and we’ve less than five miles to run.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” came back from them, half cheerfully, but one voice was heard to grumble:

“It’s all right, is it? Well, if it wasn’t for that half-mile o’ shortage, there’d be a mutinee-e on board o’ this ship. I’d start it. I ain’t a-goin’ to get myself knocked on the head by Uncle Sam’s own men.”

There would very likely have been a mutiny, even as it was, if there had now been time for it to take shape. Thus far, the excitement of the chase had been in

the captain's favor, but the seamen would have been legally justified in resisting him and bringing the ship to. His authority would have ceased, for he had no right to compel them to break the law or to run the risk of a broadside from a man-of-war.

Nearer, nearer, nearer, came both the dim outline of the Mexican coast and the white sails of the pursuing *Portsmouth*. Louder and more ominous grew the but half-suppressed murmurs of the sailors, but Captain Kemp's face was now wearing a hard, set look, and he was known to be a dangerous man to deal with. Something, which looked like the handle of a pistol, stuck out of one of his side pockets, and his fingers wandered to it now and then, as if he might be turning over in his mind the possibility of soon having to shoot a mutineer. Ned was staring anxiously back at the Yankee cruiser at the moment when his shoulder was gripped hard, and Señor Zuroaga almost whirled him around, exclaiming:

"Look! Look yonder! That's the Castle of San Juan de Ulua! Oh, but don't I wish it were a half-mile nearer! Hear that firing?"

The guns of the *Portsmouth* were indeed sounding at regular intervals, and she was evidently almost within range. She was also, however, well within the prescribed distance line which a hostile cruiser may not pass without being regarded as making the attack herself. Beyond a doubt, too, there must have been observers at the fort, who were already watching the operations of the two approaching vessels. Minutes passed, which were counted by Ned with a heart that beat so he almost thought he could hear it.

"I think we are safe now," began the señor, but he had been looking at the fort, and there was one important fact of which he was not aware.

Only a couple of minutes earlier, the captain of the *Portsmouth* had shouted angrily to his first lieutenant:

"No, sir! I will not let her get away. I will take her or sink her! Out with that starboard battery, and let them have it!"

Around swung the sloop, like the perfect naval machine that she was, and there quickly followed the reports of several guns at once. It was not a full broadside, but there was enough of it to have sunk the *Goshawk*, if the iron thrown had struck her at or near the water-line. None of it did so, but the next exclamation of Señor Zuroaga was one of utter dismay, for the foremast of the bark had been cut off at the cap and there was a vast rent in her mainsail. Down tumbled a mass of spars and rigging, forward, and the ship could no longer obey her helm.

“All hands cut away wreckage!” shouted Captain Kemp. “We’re all right. She won’t dare come any nearer. Hurrah!”

It was a deep, thunderous roar from the castle which had called out that apparently untimely hurrah. It was the voice of a 64-pounder gun from the nearest rampart, and the shot it sent fell within ten feet of the *Portsmouth*’s bows.

“Hullo!” exclaimed her captain, more angrily than ever. “We’ve run in almost to pointblank range of those heavy guns. About! About! Lieutenant, we must get out of this.”

“All right, sir,” was anxiously responded. “It isn’t worth while to risk any more shot of that size—not for all there’s likely to be under the hatches of that wretched bark. I think we barked her, anyhow.”

He may have meant that for a kind of small joke, but she had been worse hurt than he could know, for one 32-pounder shot had shattered her stern, barely missing her sternpost and rudder gearing, and she was no longer the trim and seaworthy vessel that she had been. One more heavy gun had sounded from the seaward battery of the castle, but her garrison had been in a genuinely Mexican condition of unreadiness, and it was several minutes before they could bring up more ammunition and make further use of their really excellent artillery. During those minutes, the *Portsmouth* had ample opportunity given her to swing around and sweep swiftly out of danger. She had barely escaped paying dearly for her pursuit of the *Goshawk*. Her satisfaction, however, consisted only in part of the damage she had done to the bark, for, in getting around, she had let drive her entire larboard broadside. It was a waste of ammunition, certainly, but no Yankee man-of-war commander would ever have forgiven himself if he had failed to make a good reply to a shot from the Castle of San Juan de Ulua. Moreover, the sloop’s gunners were ready to swear solemnly that every ball they had sent had hit the fort.

The excitement on board the *Goshawk* had been at fever heat, but it was now diminishing rapidly, for she did not contain a man who was not well pleased to see the *Portsmouth* give the matter up. All signs of mutiny disappeared, of course, for there was no more duty of a military character to be required of the men. The bark was soon set free of her wreckage, and prepared to make her way in still further, under the protection of the fort batteries. Captain Kemp was too busy for any kind of conversation, and Señor Zuroaga came aft, to where Ned was curiously studying the work of the 32-pound shot at the stern. The señor leaned over the side and did the same for a long moment before he remarked:

“We have had a narrow escape. A few feet lower, and that shot would have let the water in. Fifty feet forward, and it would have touched off the gunpowder. As it is, our voyage is ended, and I shall know, in an hour or two, whether or not I am to be shot in the morning.”



CHAPTER IV.

COMPLETELY STRANDED

“There don’t seem to be any Mexican warships in the harbor,” said Ned to the señor, as they looked landward from the deck of their badly mauled bark. “There isn’t one in sight to come out after that sloop.”

“There are two good reasons for it,” growled the señor, gloomily. “One is that there isn’t any harbor here. Nothing but an open roadstead, exposed to all the storms that come, so that to anchor off Vera Cruz is to run a fair chance of being wrecked. The other is that my unfortunate country has no navy. There isn’t a Mexican vessel afloat that would care to go out after a Yankee man-of-war. We are not yet a nation, and I’m half-afraid we never will be. This war may do something for us. There they come! I shall know very soon now.”

As he spoke, he pointed at several boats which were pulling out toward the *Goshawk*. Some of them appeared to come from the wharves of the city, but one, which was nearer, was evidently from the castle, and it was in this that the señor took the deepest interest. Besides its half-dozen of oarsmen, it contained a tall man in a gorgeous uniform, and it was only a minute or so before Zuroaga exclaimed:

“Yes, that is Colonel Guerra himself. I am glad he is all alone!”

The bark was now drifting pretty rapidly landward, under such canvas as she had left, and the *Portsmouth* was safely out of range of the Mexican guns, which were throwing away an occasional shot at her. She had not been touched by one of them, and she had the honor of being the first United States ship to try her batteries upon the renowned old Spanish fortress. It was, indeed, a well-built fortification, and it carried many guns, most of which had been brought over long ago from the foundries of old Spain. It did not stand upon the main shore, but on an island about half a mile out, and it therefore seemed unassailable, except from the sea or by heavy siege-guns on the shore. It had been one of the last places surrendered when the Spanish government reluctantly gave up Mexico. From that day onward, in each of the successive revolutions, it had been

a first object with each new tyrant of the nominal republic or empire to get control of the fortress, which dominated nearly all of the commerce of Mexico with the outer world. At the present time, it was commanded by an officer whom President Paredes believed that he could trust—or he would have shot him. This, of course, was the main reason for the dark doubts of Señor Zuroaga. On the other hand, it might be taken into account that any prominent Mexican officer, like Colonel Guerra, would be willing to strengthen himself for such political changes as were entirely likely to come. For the sake of old friendship and family ties, for instance, he might be even desirous of binding to his own interests a man who was known to have a large number of personal adherents in the important State of Oaxaca.

That very man stood aft upon the deck of the *Goshawk* when the boat of Colonel Guerra touched her side, but he did not at once come forward to extend a greeting. That ceremony was performed sufficiently well by Captain Kemp, and the responses of the castle commander were to the last degree enthusiastic. According to him, indeed, the fort could not have held out against a siege for a week without the powder in the hold of the bark. Therefore, it might be that not much of it was likely to be distributed among the other forces of Mexico. The captain had many things to say, but before long Colonel Guerra walked slowly aft without anybody following him. He may have merely desired to look over the side and examine the injuries inflicted by the shot of the *Portsmouth*, for that was the first thing he did, without so much as appearing to recognize any human being in the neighborhood. One of the two persons who were there, however, drew slowly near him, and, as he did so, he heard the colonel mutter, in a very low tone:

“My dear friend, you have done well to bring me the powder. Thank you for your devotion to me and to Santa Anna, but you are in deadly peril. The orders of Paredes are out against you. General Morales, whom Paredes trusts, will soon be here to supersede me, but he will really come to hold this place for our general when he returns from exile. Consider that I do not know that you are here, for my next in command is a spy on me. This ship will never put to sea again. The captain and crew will be cared for, but that gringo boy is not safe, now that there has been bloodshed on the Rio Grande. Take him with you to the house of your cousin, Colonel Tassara, in the lower part of the city. Then get away to Oaxaca as soon as you can. President Paredes is still in the city of Mexico, and he will not go to take command of the army in the north for some time. You and I believe, of course, that he is really gathering it to have it led by our one-legged hero, Santa Anna. Paredes, however, suspects that a revolution is

springing up under him, and he is watching for it. Of course, for that reason, he would shoot you at once as a returned conspirator against him. As for that matter, be careful how you land, for there are many spies. No doubt you can go where you please, after you get back among your own people. Farewell, but do not speak to me.”

He turned and strolled carelessly away, and the señor bowed his head for a moment, as if in deep thought, while Ned Crawford was aware of an entirely new idea, which had crept into his mind as he had listened to the warning utterances of Colonel Guerra.

“I declare!” he said to himself, “he believes that Señor Zuroaga brought the powder, and he didn’t. He believes that the señor is going in for old Santa Anna, and he isn’t. He believes that the señor and I are enemies of Paredes, and so we are. I am! I hope that he’ll be beaten out of his boots by General Taylor, and then upset by the new revolution. I guess he’s right, though, about this ship, and I must find out how I can send a letter home. I want father and mother to know all about this business. Go ashore and hide? I’m ready for that, but I’d like to get a good look at the old city somehow.”

Ned had been laboring under many perplexities and a great deal of depression of spirits during several days, but now he felt a kind of exhilarating fever creeping all over him, and at first he did not know exactly what it might be. When his father had taken him with him across the Atlantic,—it seemed so long ago now,—he had gone eagerly enough, and he had had a grand time looking at Liverpool and London. It had been a rare treat for a youngster who had but recently passed up from a grammar school into the counting-room of a New York shipping-house. After that, when he had been sent on this trip, to make his voyage home by way of Mexico, he had considered himself exceedingly lucky. But what was all that in comparison with this in the way of strange and wild adventure? Why, he had sailed through a naval engagement, cannonading and all, and right on out of that into a full-grown war and a half-grown revolution. The thrill which went over him was, therefore, the adventure fever. Something like this fever, in the veins of all sorts of men, young and old, has made the world what it is, discovering its new countries, its new sciences, its new institutions, and leading it forward and upward out of its old-time dullness and barbarism. So Ned stood straighter and felt older and had a pair of very brave, bright eyes when he walked forward to try and have a few words with Captain Kemp.

“Captain,” he asked, “when can I go ashore?”

“Not quite yet,” said the captain. “Don’t bother me now. Of course, the ammunition for the castle goes out first. Then all the rest of the cargo must go ashore as fast as it can, and you are bound to attend to that. I’m glad that all of it is apparently on English account, and not for the American part of the concern. That makes all things easy. I hardly know what to do with the ship, though. We can’t repair her here.”

That was evidently the disadvantage of having a vessel get out of order in a place where there were no good dockyards. As for the unlading, there were already “lighter” barges on their way from the fort, and others, no doubt, would soon be on hand from the city. Haste was the main object, under the circumstances, and the entire work would be rapidly accomplished.

Zuroaga went below, and Ned followed him, for there was nothing more that he could do on deck just then.

“Señor,” he asked, as soon as they were in the cabin, “how can I send a letter home? I don’t know exactly what to say, either.”

“Say anything you please,” replied the señor. “Your letter will go by the mail of the English consul, and the mails for England will not be meddled with by the Mexican authorities.”

“I’ll sit right down and begin one,” said Ned, but the señor interrupted him very soberly with:

“One word before you begin, please. I know you overheard what Colonel Guerra said to me. You and I must get on shore as soon as we can, and it will not do for either of us to remain in Vera Cruz. I have decided that I must take you with me to Oaxaca.”

“Well,” hesitated Ned, “I understand that you must go, but what am I in danger of if I should stay here?”

“Edward, my dear fellow,” said the señor, “I will tell you, and you had better put it into your letter. First, you just wait and see what becomes of the *Goshawk*. She will never sail out of the Gulf of Mexico again. The captain and crew will get away as best they can, and I can’t tell how long it will be before they can do it. Meantime, you would be around on shore, and you would be known for a Yankee, a gringo. That might mean danger for you from any evil-minded Mexican. Some of this coast population are worse than savages, and they all carry knives. You’d never know who hurt you.”

“That’s awful!” exclaimed Ned. “I never thought of that.”

“There is another reason,” calmly continued the señor, “for your not lingering down here in the *tierra caliente*—the hot country—any later in the season. It is the yellow fever, and that is pretty sure to show itself before long. It takes people from the north quicker, a good deal, than it does those who were born here. I have even heard that there is a rumor of some cases occurring already. Your father is an old friend of mine, and he would never forgive me if I were to permit you to be exposed to it, when you can so easily get away into the uplands, where it is never heard of. Be a good clerk now, and attend to your cargo, and be glad that it hasn’t been sent to the bottom of the gulf.”

Ned had been thinking of that pretty seriously, and he sat down to write his home letter, well pleased that he had nothing to do with the unloading of the contraband of war part of the cargo. With reference to that, moreover, he had learned from Zuroaga that a Mexican post-commander of the rank of Colonel Guerra was a kind of local military dictator. Only so much of the ammunition as he might see fit to send would ever find its way into any other hands than his own. The señor had added that it was almost the same with whatever customs duties were collected by the civil officers of the port, with the one drawback that a dishonest army collector, if discovered, might possibly get himself shot as a kind of supposable revolutionist, stealing the profits of the others.

The lighter barges were now swarming around the bark, and a hundred busy workmen were doing their best, quite patriotically, for the guns and gunners of the castle. It was easy to see that the American sailors did not fancy that job, and were willing to keep out of it. So they sauntered around, attending to a few ship’s duties here and there, while now and then one or another of them might have been heard to grumble his unwillingness to ever again go to sea under an English captain. The truth was that they had excellent reasons for discontent concerning the scrape into which they had been led, and they were well aware that they had not yet by any means seen the end of it. Almost the best they could hope for was that they were to be sent back to some country of Europe, on some ship or other which had not yet arrived at Vera Cruz, and which might not sail away with them on board for a number of weeks to come. Any man among them was now almost willing to have had the *Portsmouth* sink the *Goshawk*.

Heavy shot may be craned over into boats, and kegs or barrels of gunpowder may be let down tenderly, gently, as well by moonlight and lantern-light as by any other. Therefore, the coming on of night did not interfere with the landing processes. Moreover, any amount of sleep may be performed by a healthy boy in a battered ship lying safely at anchor. So Ned made up, more or less, for the

sleep he had lost during the long race of the *Goshawk*, and it was not early when he came on deck the next morning. When he did so, he found his duties as nominal supercargo cut out for him, and Captain Kemp appeared to be especially anxious that a son of one of the owners should supervise whatever was to be done with the peaceable part of his cargo. He even explained to Ned that he might yet be called upon in some law court to testify to the honest accuracy of all the papers he was now to sign.

“It’ll take about two days more,” he told him, “and you mustn’t go ashore till the ship’s empty. The American consul hasn’t taken his passports yet, but he expects to get away soon, somehow or other. Most likely, he’ll be taken off by a ship of war. So, perhaps, will other Americans. You might wait and get away then, if you think best, but you can’t hope to ever go on this ship.”

Ned had an increasingly strong feeling that he did not now care to go on that or any other craft of war or peace. He would much rather go to Oaxaca than to New York, and he felt more sure than ever that his father would not wish him to run any risk of the dreadful yellow fever. So he worked on industriously, learning a great deal concerning the processes required in getting a cargo out of a ship. During several hours, he was so occupied that he almost forgot the existence of his Mexican friend, but he was dimly aware that a small rowboat had come to the off-shore side of the ship, and had shortly pulled away without any interference on the part of the officials, military or civil. Perhaps she was understood to have come there by order of Colonel Guerra. Toward nightfall, however, that boat came again, as she did before, not running in among the barges, but seeming to avoid them. There were five men in her, and one of them stood up to say to a sailor at the rail:

“I wish to see young Señor Carfora. Is he on board?”

“Hullo!” thought Ned. “That’s the Spanish name Señor Zuroaga told me I was to go by.” Then he sang out aloud, as he hurried across the deck, “Here I am. What do you want of me?”

“Lean over and talk low,” responded the man in the boat, but the one sailor near them did not understand a word of Spanish, and he might suppose, if he wished to do so, that it was something about the cargo. Ned himself listened eagerly, while the speaker went on: “I am Colonel Tassara. Señor Zuroaga must not come to the ship again. I will be here to-morrow evening. May I be assured that you will then be ready to come to my house?”

“Tell him of course you will!” said a voice behind Ned, peremptorily, and it was

Captain Kemp who had come over for a few words with Tassara.

“I’ll be ready, colonel,” said Ned, when his turn came to speak, and the boat pulled away, leaving him and the captain by themselves.

“It’s a good arrangement for you, my boy,” said the captain. “Unless I am mistaken, though, there are signs of the worst kind of a northeasterly storm. This is a dangerous anchorage for that sort of thing. I don’t think I shall risk having too many men on board when the norther gets here. The cargo will be all out, and the ship’s well insured. The American consul doesn’t know a thing about the ammunition or the running away from the cruisers. He has enough else on his hands just now.”

Ned did not care a great deal about that, but he was more than ever in a hurry to see the end of his supercargo business. The fact was that an air of something like mystery appeared to be gathering around him, and there is a tremendous fascination in anything mysterious. What if he were now getting right in behind the war, after a fashion, and at the same time into the darkest kind of revolution or rebellion against the power of President Paredes, in company with that wonderful adventurer, General Santa Anna, and all the desperate characters of Mexico?



CHAPTER V.

THE WORK OF THE NORTHER

During the rest of that day and the earlier part of the next the weather continued fairly good, and the unloading went steadily on. In the many intervals of his duties, Ned tried hard to drive his mental fever away, and amused himself as best he might. The city itself was worth looking at, with its tiers of streets rising one above another from the shore. He saw several churches, and some of them were large, with massive towers and steeples.

“The Mexicans must have been richer than they are now,” he said to himself, “when those things were built. They cost piles of money.”

He had no idea how rich a country it is, or how much richer it might be, if its wonderful natural resources were to be made the most of. As for the city, he had heard that Vera Cruz contained about seven or eight thousand people, besides its military garrison, its foreigners, and a continually varying mob of transient visitors from the interior. Zuroaga had told him, moreover, that it was from the latter that any gringo like himself would be in danger of violence. They were a vindictive, bloodthirsty class of men, most of them, for they retained undiminished the peculiar characteristics of their Indian ancestors.

“I don’t care to run against any of them,” thought Ned. “I don’t like this *tierra caliente* country, anyhow. It’s too hot to live in.”

Then he thought a great deal of the wonderful land of forests and mountains which lay beyond the fever-haunted lowlands, and he longed more and more for a good look at the empire which Hernando Cortes won from the old Montezumas and their bloody war-god, Huitzilopochtli.

In the afternoon of the second day the sky was manifestly putting on a threatening aspect. The wind began to rise and the sea began to roughen. The men discharging the cargo hastened their work, and it was evident that the last of the lighter barges would soon be setting out for the shore. Ned was staring at them and recalling all the yarns he had heard concerning the destructive power of a gulf “norther,” when Captain Kemp came walking slowly toward him, with

a face which appeared to express no sort of unusual concern for anything in the world. Nevertheless, he said:

“Get ready now, Ned, as sharp as you can. There comes your boat. I shall send some papers by the colonel. Señor Zuroaga’s luggage all went on shore yesterday. I think some other men will have to be looking out for themselves before long. If the *Goshawk* should drag her anchors and go ashore, I hope there won’t be too much sea running for good boats to live in.”

“I’m all ready now!” exclaimed Ned, as he sprang away, but he went with a curious question rising in his mind: “What if a cable were more’n half cut through? Wouldn’t it be likely to break and let go of an anchor, if it were pulled at too hard by a gale of wind? I don’t really know anything about it, but Señor Zuroaga thinks that Captain Kemp is a curious man to deal with. Father thinks that he is a good sailor, too.”

All the wardrobe that Ned had on board was easily contained in a waterproof satchel of moderate size, and he was half-glad now that there was no more of it, it went so quickly over into the large yawl that was waiting alongside when he returned on deck. It was a four-oared boat, and Colonel Tassara, at the stern, beckoned to him without speaking, as if he might have reasons for silence as well as haste.

“In with you, Ned,” said Captain Kemp. “I’ll try to see you within a day or two. Take good care of yourself. Good day, colonel.”

The Mexican officer only bowed, and in a moment more the yawl was fighting her difficult way over the rapidly increasing waves, for the first strength of the norther had really come, and there might soon be a great deal more of it,—for the benefit of the *Goshawk*.

“There!” muttered Captain Kemp, as he saw them depart, “I haven’t more than a good boat’s crew left on board. We’ll take to the life-boat as soon as the cable parts. There isn’t any use in trying to save this bark under all the circumstances. I’ve done my duty. I couldn’t have calculated on heavy shot first, and then for a whole gang of cruisers watching for me off the coast. This ’ere norther, too! Well, I didn’t make the war, and I don’t see that I ought to lose any money by it. I won’t, either.”

Whatever was his exact meaning, the mate and four other men who remained evidently agreed with him, from what they were shortly saying to one another. It might also have been taken note of by a careful observer that the mate was a Scotchman, and that the four others were all from Liverpool. Whoever had put

so much contraband of war on board the *Goshawk* had not entrusted it entirely to the eccentricities of a lot of out-and-out American sailors, with peculiar notions concerning their flag.

On went Colonel Tassara's yawl, and it was not likely to meet any other boat that evening. As the rollers increased in size momentarily, Ned began to have doubts as to whether such a boat had any reasonable hope of reaching the shore. It was now pitch-dark also, and he could but feel that his adventures in Mexico were beginning in a remarkably unpleasant manner. The landing could not have been made at any place along the beach, where the surf was breaking so dangerously, and it looked almost as perilous to approach the piers and wharves.

"How on earth are we to do it?" exclaimed Ned, in English, but no answer came from the hard-breathing rowers.

Colonel Tassara seemed now to be steering a southerly course, instead of directly landward, and Ned calculated that this would carry them past all of the usual landing-places. It also gave them narrow escapes from rolling over and over in the troughs between several high waves. On the whole, therefore, it was a pretty rough boating excursion, but it was not a long one. It did take them almost past the city front, and at last Ned thought he saw a long, black shadow reaching out at the boat. It was better than a shadow, for it was a long wooden pier, old enough to have been built by Cortes himself. The waves were breaking clean over it, but, at the same time, it was breaking them, so that around in the lee of it the water was less boisterous, and the yawl might reach the beach in safety. There was no wharf, but all Ned cared for was that he saw no surf, and he felt better than he had at any moment since leaving the *Goshawk*. It was the same, for they said so, emphatically, with the boatmen and Colonel Tassara.

"One of the men will take your bag," said the colonel to Ned, as soon as they were out on shore. "We will go right along to my house, and we shall hardly meet anybody just now. I'm glad of that. Santa Maria, how dark it is getting! This will be the worst kind of norther."

A couple of lanterns had been taken from the boat. They had previously been lighted by the colonel with much difficulty, and without them it would have been impossible to follow the stony, grassy pathway by which Ned Crawford made his first invasion of the Mexican territory. He did not now feel like annexing any of it, although Mexican patriots asserted that their title to Vera Cruz or the city of Mexico itself was no better than their right to Texas. His gloomy march was a short one, and only a few shadowy, unrecognized human beings passed him on

the way.

The party came to a halt before a one-story stone dwelling, with a long piazza in front of it, close to the weedy sidewalk of a crooked and straggling street. It was apparent that this was not in the aristocratic quarter of the city, if it had one. A door in the middle of the house swung open as they arrived, and the boatman who carried Ned's bag put it down on the threshold. The lanterns went away with him and his fellow rowers, but other lights made their appearance quickly,—after the door had closed behind Ned and Colonel Tassara. Not one of the boat's crew had obtained a peep into the house, or had seen any of its occupants. Ned was now aware that he had entered a broad hall-like passageway, which appeared to run through the house, and to have several doors on each side. One of these doors had opened to let the new light in, and through it also came Señor Zuroaga, two other men, and a young girl, who at once threw her arms around the neck of Colonel Tassara.

“O father!” she exclaimed, “I am so glad! Mother and I were so frightened! We were afraid you would be drowned.”

“My dear little daughter,” he responded, sadly, “I fear there will be more than one lot of poor fellows drowned to-night. This storm is fearful!”

It seemed, in fact, to be getting worse every minute, and Ned was thinking of the *Goshawk* and the state of her cable, even while he was being introduced to the pretty Señorita Felicia Tassara, and then to her mother, a stately woman, who came to meet her husband without condescending to say how badly she had been alarmed on his account.

“She's just about the proudest-looking woman I ever saw,” thought Ned, for, although she welcomed him politely, she at once made him aware that she did not consider him of any importance whatever. He was only a young gringo, from nobody knew where, and she was a Mexican lady of high rank, who hated Americans of all sorts.

Ned's only really hearty greeting came from Señor Zuroaga, who seemed to him, under the circumstances, like an old friend.

“Carfora, my dear fellow,” he said, “you and the colonel must come in to your supper——”

“Why, señor,” expostulated Ned, “I'm wet through, and so is he.”

“I declare!” exclaimed Zuroaga. “What's in my head that I should overlook that? You must change your rig. Come this way with me.”

Ned followed him, bag in hand, through a narrow passage which opened at the right, and they went on almost to the end of it. The room which they then entered was only seven feet wide, but it was three times as long, and it was oddly furnished. Instead of a bedstead, a handsome hammock, with blankets, sheets, and a pillow in it, hung at one side, and the high window was provided with mosquito nettings. There was no carpet on the floor, but this was clean, and a good enough dressing-bureau stood at the further end of the room. Before the mirror of this, the señor set down the lamp he had been carrying, and said to Ned:

“My dear Carfora, I have explained to the haughty señora that you are the son of an American merchant, and of a good family, so that she will not really treat you like a common person. She is descended from the oldest families of Spain, and there is no republicanism in her. The sooner you are ready, the better. I will be back in five minutes.”

Open came the bag, but the best Ned could do in the way of style was a very neat blue suit. What he would have called the swallow-tails, which Señora Tassara might have expected as the dinner dress of a more important guest, could hardly be required of a young fellow just escaped from a norther. As soon as he felt that he had done his best, he turned toward the door, but it opened to let in Señor Zuroaga in full regulation dinner costume. How he could have put it on so quickly puzzled Ned, but he asked no questions. It was quite possible, however, that even the descendant of Cortes and the Montezumas was a little bit in awe of the matronly descendant of the ancient Spanish grandees. She might be a powerful personage in more ways than one. At all events, Ned was led out to the central hall and across it, to where an uncommonly wide door stood open, letting out a flood of illumination.

“Walk in, señors,” said Colonel Tassara, from just inside this portal, and the next moment Ned was altogether astonished.

He had been impressed, on reaching this house, that it was an old and even dingy affair, of no considerable size, but he did not yet know that the older Spanish mansions were often built with only one story and around a central courtyard. Moreover, at least in Mexico, they were apt to show few windows in front, and to be well calculated for use as a kind of small forts, if revolutionary or similar occasions should ask for thick walls, with embrasures for musketry. One glance around Señora Tassara’s dining-room was enough to work a revolution in Ned’s ideas relating to that establishment. It was large, high-ceilinged, and its carpetless floor was of polished mahogany. The walls and ceiling were of

brilliant white stucco. Upon the former were hung several trophies of weapons and antlers of deer. In the centre, at the right, in a kind of ornamental shrine, was an ivory and ebony crucifix, which was itself a priceless work of art. The long dining-table had no cloth to conceal the fact that it was of the richest mahogany, dark with age and polished like a mirror. On the table was an abundance of fine china ware, none of it of modern manufacture, but all the more valuable for that reason. At the end nearest Ned stood a massive silver coffee-urn, beautifully molded, and it was not wonderful that he stood still a moment to stare at it, for it had taken him altogether by surprise.

Almost instantly a change came over the dark, handsome features of Señora Tassara. She smiled brightly, for Ned's undisguised admiration of that mass of silver had touched her upon a tender spot, and she now spoke to him with at least four times as much cordiality as she had shown him in the hall.

"Ah, my young friend," she said, turning gracefully toward him, "so you are pleased with my coffee-urn? No table in your city of New York can show anything like it. It is of the oldest Seville workmanship, and there are not many such remaining in all the world. It is an heirloom."

"Señor Carfora," at that moment interrupted Colonel Tassara, "I will show you something else that is worth more than any kind of silver ware. Take a good look at this!"

He stepped to a trophy of arms which hung upon the wall near him, and took from it a long, heavy sword, with a worn-looking but deeply chased gold hilt. He drew it from the sheath, gazing with evident pride at its curving blade of dull blue steel.

"I think you have never before seen a sword like that," he said. "It may have been made at Toledo, for all I know, but it is centuries old. It was won from a Moor by an ancestor of mine, at the taking of Granada, when the Moorish power was broken forever by the heroes of Spain. Who can tell? It may have come down from the days of the Cid Campeador himself."

Whoever that military gentleman may have been, Ned had no idea, but he determined to find out some day, and just now he was glad to grasp the golden hilt, and remember all that he had ever heard about the Moors. He had not at all expected to hear of them again, just after escaping from a norther in the Gulf of Mexico, but, without being aware of it, he was learning a great deal about the old Spanish-Mexican aristocracy, and why it could not easily become truly republican, even in the New World, which is beginning to grow old on its own

account.

Dinner was now ready, and Ned voted it a prime good one, for it consisted mainly of chicken, with capital corn-cakes and coffee. It was a tremendous improvement upon the dinners he had been eating at sea, cooked in the peculiar style of the caboose of the *Goshawk*.

One large idea was becoming firmly fixed in the acute mind of the young adventurer, and it tended to make him both watchful and silent. Not only was he in a country which was at war with his own, but he was in a land where men were apt to be more or less suspicious of each other. It was also quite the correct thing in good manners for him to say but little, and he was the better able to hear what the others were saying. Therefore, he could hardly help taking note that none of the party at the dinner-table said anything about the powder on the *Goshawk*, or concerning a possible trip to be made to Oaxaca by any one there. They all appeared ready, on the other hand, to praise the patriotism, statesmanship, and military genius of that truly great man, President Paredes. They made no mention whatever of General Santa Anna, but they spoke confidently of the certainty with which Generals Ampudia and Arista were about to crush the invading gringos at the north, under Taylor. They also were sure that these first victories were to be followed by greater ones, which would be gained by the President himself, as soon as he should be able to take command of the Mexican armies in person. If any friend of his, a servant, for instance, of the Tassara family, had been listening, he would have had nothing to report which would have made any other man suppose that the rulers of Mexico had bitter, revengeful foes under that hospitable roof.

The dinner ended, and Ned was once more in his room, glad enough to get into his hammock and go to sleep. If the norther did any howling around that house, he did not hear it, but he may have missed the swing motion which a hammock obtains on board a ship at sea. His eyes closed just as he was thinking:

“This is great, but I wonder what on earth is going to happen to me to-morrow.”

CHAPTER VI.

FORWARD, MARCH

The sun of the next morning arose upon a great deal of doubt and uncertainty in many places. Some of the soldiers of General Taylor's army were altogether uncertain into what bushes of the neighboring chaparral the norther had blown their tents, and they went out in search of their missing cotton duck shelters. The entire force encamped at the Rio Grande border was in the dark as to what it might next be ordered to do, and all sorts of rumors went around from regiment to regiment, as if the rumor manufacturer had gone crazy. General Taylor himself was sure of at least the one point, that he had no right to cross the muddy river in front of him and make a raid into Mexico until he should hear again from the government at Washington, and be officially informed that the war, which he was carrying on so well, had really begun. He and all his army believed that it was already going on, and they grumbled discontentedly that they were compelled to remain in camp, and watch for ranchero lancers on Texan soil, if it was legally Texan at all, until permission arrived to strike their tents and march forward.

The news of the fighting and of what were described as the great battles on the Mexican border had reached New Orleans and Key West. It was travelling northward at full speed, but it had not yet been heard by the government or by the people of the North and West. None of these had as yet so much as imagined what a telegraphic news-bringer might be, and so they could not even wish that they had one, or they would surely have done so. The uncertainties of that morning, therefore, hampered all the councils of the nation. Almost everybody believed that there would soon be a war, although a great many men were strongly opposed to the idea of having one. Taking the war for granted, however, there were doubts and differences of opinion among both military and unmilitary men as to how it was to be carried on. Some were opposed to anything more than a defence of the Rio Grande boundary-line, but these moderate persons were hooted at by the out-and-out war party, whom nothing promised to satisfy but an invasion which intended the capture of the city of Mexico. Nothing less

than this, they said, would obtain the objects of the war, and secure a permanent peace at the end of it. Then, supposing such an invasion to be decided on, an important question arose as to how and where the Mexican territory might best be entered by a conquering army. Many declared that General Taylor's forces were already at the right place for pushing ahead, but the commander-in-chief, General Winfield Scott, by all odds the best general the country possessed, responded that the march proposed for Taylor was too long, too difficult, and that it was likely to result in disaster. The shorter and only practicable route, he asserted, was by way of the sea and Vera Cruz. He was also known to be politically opposed to any war whatever. Thereupon, a number of prominent men, who disagreed with him, set themselves at work to have him removed or put aside, that a commander might take his place who was not so absurdly under the influence of military science, common sense, and of the troubles which might be encountered in marching seven hundred miles or more through an enemy's country. There were, it was said, eloquent politicians, who did not know how to drill an "awkward squad," but who felt sure of their ability to beat Old Scott in such an agreeable affair as a military picnic party to the city of Mexico.

The young military scholars in the camp near Fort Brown were ignorant of all this. They were satisfied with their present commander, as well they might be, for he was a good one. They were satisfied with themselves, and were enthusiastically ready to fight anything which should be put in front of them. They were dreadfully dissatisfied with camp life, however, and especially with the fact that they and all the other raw troops of that army were forced to undergo a great deal of drill and discipline in hot weather. Perhaps, if this had not been given them, they would hardly have rendered so good an account of themselves in the severe tests of soldiership which they underwent a few months later.

The first doubt that came to Ned Crawford that morning, as his eyes opened and he began to get about half-awake, related to his hammock and to how on earth he happened to be in it. Swift memories followed then of the norther, the perilous pull ashore, the arrival at the Tassara place, and the people he had met there. He recalled also something about silver coffee-urns and Moorish warriors, but the next thing, he was out upon the floor, and his head seemed to buzz like a beehive with inquiries concerning his immediate future.

"Here I am," he said aloud. "I'm in Mexico; in Vera Cruz; at this house with Señor Zuroaga; and I don't know yet what's become of the *Goshawk*. I don't really ever expect to see her again, but I hope that Captain Kemp and the sailors

didn't get themselves drowned. I must see about that, first thing. Then I suppose I must see the American consul, write another letter home, see the merchants our goods were delivered to,—and what I'm to do after that I don't know."

There was a loud rap at his door just then, and in a moment more he was almost repeating that speech to Señor Zuroaga.

"Please say very little to Colonel Tassara or anybody else in this house," replied the señor, emphatically. "Get used, as soon as you can, to being called Carfora. We must make you look like a young Mexican right away. I've bought a rig which will fit you. It is well that you are so dark-complexioned. A red-haired fellow would never pass as you will. All the American residents of Vera Cruz are already under military protection, and I am glad there are so few of them, for there are said to have been two or three assassinations. Part of the mountain men who are loafing in town just now are wild Indians, as reckless and cruel as any of your Sioux warriors on a war-path. Come along to breakfast. You won't meet the ladies this time, but I believe the señora and señorita like you a little, because you had the good taste to admire their silver and china."

"Oh, that old coffee-urn!" said Ned. "Well, it's as fine as anything I ever saw, even in a jewelry window."

"Yes," laughed the señor, "but the señora wants to have the American consul killed because he told her she had better have that thing melted and made over into one of the modern patterns. She will never forgive him. Tell her again, when you have a chance, that the old-time Seville silversmiths could beat anything we have nowadays, and she will love you. I do not really believe myself that we are getting much ahead of those ancient artists. They were wonderful designers."

Ned was willing to believe that they were, and he made up his mind to praise Señora Tassara's pet urn to the best of his ability.

He was not to have an opportunity for doing so immediately. Their breakfast was ready for them in the dining-room, but they were allowed to eat it by themselves. It seemed to Ned a very good one, but several times he found himself turning away from it to stare at the silver marvel and at the weapons on the walls. There was no apparent reason for haste, but neither of them cared to linger, and before long they were out on the piazza in front, Zuroaga with his hat pulled down to his eyes and his coat collar up. Ned was at once confirmed in his previous idea that the house was anything but new, and to that he added the conviction that it was much larger than it had appeared to be in the night. He believed, too, that it must have cost a deal of money to build it long ago. He had only a moment for

that calculation, however, for his next glance went out toward the gulf, and he came near to being astonished. The path which he had followed in coming up from the shore had been a steep one, and he was now standing at a place from which he had a pretty good view of the tossing water between the mainland and the castle of San Juan de Ulua. The old fortress was there, unharmed by the norther, but not in any direction, as far as his eyes could reach, was there any sign of a ship, at anchor or otherwise.

“Señor!” he exclaimed. “What has become of them? They are all gone! Do you suppose they have been wrecked?”

“Not all of them, by any means,” replied the señor, but he also was searching the sea with a serious face. “As many as could lift their anchors in time to make a good offing before the norther came were sure to do so. If there were any that did not succeed, I can’t say where they may have gone to just now.”

“The *Goshawk*—” began Ned, but the señor gripped his arm hard, while he raised his right hand and pointed up the road.

“Silence!” he commanded, in a sharp whisper. “Look! there he comes. Don’t even call him by his name. Wait and hear what he has to say. He can tell us what has become of the bark. They are a used-up lot of men.”

So they were, the five who now came walking slowly along from somewhere or other on the coast upon which the disastrous storm had blown.

“Captain Kemp and the crew of his life-boat,” thought Ned, but he obeyed the señor at first, and was silent until the haggard-looking party arrived and came to a halt in front of him. Then, however, he lost his prudence for a moment, and anxiously inquired:

“Were any of you drowned?”

“Not any of us that are here,” responded the captain, grimly. “No, nor any other of the *Goshawk* men, but there are more wrecks in sight below, and I don’t know how many from them got ashore. Our bark stranded this side of them, and she’s gone all to pieces. We took to the life-boat in time, but we’ve had a hard pull of it. We went ashore through the breakers, about six miles below this, and here we are, but I don’t want to ever pass such another night. I’m going on down to the consul’s now, to report, and Ned had better be there as soon as he can. Then, the sooner he’s out o’ Vera Cruz, the better for him and all of us.”

“I think so myself,” said Señor Zuroaga. “Don’t even stay here for breakfast. Nobody from here must come to the consul’s with Señor Carfora.”

“Of course not,” said the captain, wearily, and away he went, although Ned felt as if he were full to bursting with the most interesting kind of questions concerning the captain’s night in the life-boat and the sad fate of the swift and beautiful *Goshawk*.

“Come into the house,” said the señor, “and put on your Mexican rig. I have a message from Colonel Guerra that we must get away to-night. I must not bring any peril upon the Tassara family. Up to this hour no enemy knows that I was a passenger on the powder-boat, as they call it.”

“All right,” said Ned. “I’ll write one more letter home. I couldn’t get out of the city in any other way just now, and I want to see Mexico.”

That idea was growing upon him rapidly, but his next errand was to the señor’s own room, to put on what he called his disguise. He followed his friend to a large, handsome chamber in the further end of the house, and, as he entered it, his first thought was:

“Hullo! are they getting ready for a fight?”

In the corners of the room and leaning against the walls here and there were weapons enough to have armed half a company of militia, if the soldiers did not care what kinds of weapons they were to carry, for the guns and swords and pistols were of all patterns except those of the present day. Ned saw at least one rusty firelock, which put him in mind of pictures he had seen of the curious affairs the New England fathers carried when they went to meeting on Sunday. He had no time to examine them, however, for here were his new clothes, and he must be in them without delay. He admired each piece, as he put it on, and then one look into the señor’s mirror convinced him that he was completely disguised. He had been turned into a somewhat stylish young Mexican, from his broad-brimmed straw hat to his Vera Cruz made shoes. He still wore a blue jacket, but this one was short, round-cornered, and had bright silver buttons. His new trousers were wide at the bottoms, with silver-buttoned slashes on the outsides below the knees. He had not worn suspenders on shipboard, but now his belt was of yellow leather and needlessly wide, with a bright buckle and a sword-catch on the left side. As to this matter, the señor showed him a short, straight, wide-bladed sort of cutlas, which he called a machete.

“That is to be yours,” he said. “You need not carry it in town, but you will as soon as we get away. You will have pistols, too, and a gun. It won’t do to go up the road to Oaxaca unarmed. Now you may make the best of your way to the consul’s, and I’ll stay here to finish getting ready.”

He appeared to be laboring under a good deal of excitement, and so, to tell the truth, was the disguised young American. Out he went into the hall, trying hard to be entirely collected and self-possessed, but it was only to be suddenly halted. Before him stood the stately Señora Tassara, and clinging to her was the very pretty Señorita Felicia, both of them staring, open-eyed, at the change in his uniform. The señorita was of about fourteen, somewhat pale, with large, brilliant black eyes, and she was a very frank, truthful girl, for she exclaimed:

“Oh, mother, do look at him! But it does not make a Mexican of him. He’s a gringo, and he would fight us if he had a chance. I want them all to be killed!”

“No, my dear,” said the señora, with a pleasant laugh. “Señor Carfora will not fight us. He and his ship brought powder for Colonel Guerra and the army. I am sorry he must leave us. You must shake hands with him.”

“Oh, no!” said the wilful Felicia, spitefully. “I don’t want to shake hands with him. He is one of our enemies.”

“No, I’m not!” stammered Ned. “But did you know that our ship was wrecked in the norther? If you had been on board of her when she went ashore, you would have been drowned. The men in the life-boat had a hard time in getting ashore. I’m glad you were at home.”

“There, dear,” said her mother. “That is polite. You heard what Señor Zuroaga said about the wrecks. They were terrible! Can you not say that you are glad Señor Carfora was not drowned?”

“No, mother,” persisted Felicia. “I’ll say I wish he had been drowned, if—if he could have swum ashore afterward. Good enough for him.”

Señora Tassara laughed merrily, as she responded:

“You are a dreadfully obstinate young patriot, my darling. But you must be a little more gracious. The gringo armies will never come to Vera Cruz. They are away up north on the Rio Grande.”

“Well, mother, I will a little,” said the señorita, proudly. “Señor Carfora, your generals will be beaten all to pieces. You wait till you see our soldiers. You haven’t anything like them. They are as brave as lions. My father is a soldier, and he is to command a regiment. I wish I were a man to go and fight.”

Her eyes were flashing and she looked very warlike, but the only thing that poor Ned could think of to say just then was:

“Señora Tassara, if you are not careful, somebody will get in some day and steal

your beautiful coffee-urn.”

“Ah me!” sighed the señora. “This has been attempted, my young friend. Thieves have been killed, too, in trying to carry off the Tassara plate. There would be more like it, in some places, if so much had not been made plunder of and melted up in our dreadful revolutions. Some of them were only great robberies. I understand that you must go to your business now, but we shall see you again this evening.”

“Good morning, Señora Tassara,” said Ned, as he bowed and tried to walk backward toward the outer door. “Good morning, Señorita Tassara. You would feel very badly this morning if you had been drowned last night.”

The last thing he heard, as he reached the piazza, was a ringing peal of laughter from the señora, but he believed that he had answered politely.

He knew his way to the office of the American consul, and the distance was not great in so small a town, but as he drew near it, he saw that there was a strong guard of soldiers in front of the building. They were handsomely uniformed regulars from the garrison of San Juan de Ulua, and there was cause enough for their being on duty. All up and down the street were scattered groups of sullen-looking men, talking and gesticulating. None of them carried guns, but every man of them had a knife at his belt, and not a few of them were also armed with machetes of one form or another. They would have made a decidedly dangerous mob against anything but the well-drilled and fine-looking guards who were protecting the consulate. Ned remembered what Felicia had said about her soldiers, and he did not know how very different were these disciplined regulars from the great mass of the levies which were to be encountered by the troops of the United States. He was admiring them and he was thinking of battles and generals, when one of the most ferocious-looking members of the mob came jauntily sauntering along beside him. He was a powerfully built man, almost black with natural color and sunburn. He was not exactly ragged, but he was barefooted, and his broad-brimmed sombrero was by no means new. A heavy machete hung from his belt, and he appeared to be altogether an undesirable new acquaintance. Ned looked up at him almost nervously, for he did not at all like the aspect of affairs in that street. He was thinking:

“I guess they were right about the excitement of the people. This isn’t any place for fellows like me. I must get out of Vera Cruz as soon as I can. It’s a good thing that I’m disguised. I must play Mexican.”

At that moment a good-natured smile spread across the gloomy face of his

unexpected companion, and he said, in a low tone of voice:

“Say nothing, Señor Carfora. Walk on into the consulate. I belong to General Zuroaga. There are four more of his men here. We have orders to take care of you. You are the young Englishman that brought us the powder. There was not a pound to be bought in Vera Cruz, but some of those fellows would knife you for a gringo.”

"WE HAVE ORDERS TO TAKE CARE OF YOU"

"WE HAVE ORDERS TO TAKE CARE OF YOU"

Quite a useless number of queer Spanish oaths were sprinkled in among his remarks, but Ned did not mind them. He only nodded and strictly obeyed the injunction against talking, even while he was asking himself how on earth his friend, the señor, ever became a general. He concluded, for the moment, that it might be a kind of militia title, such as he had heard of in the United States. However that might be, he and his guide soon reached the door of the consulate, and he himself was promptly admitted, as if the keeper of the door had been expecting to see him. There were guards inside the house as well as in the street, and they motioned Ned on through a narrow entry-way, at the end of which was an open room. He passed on into this, and the next moment he was exclaiming:

“Hullo, Captain Kemp! I’m so glad you are here! What am I to do next?”

“Almost nothing at all,” said the captain, quietly. “Just sign your papers and get away. The consul himself has gone to the city of Mexico, with United States government despatches for President Paredes, and we shall finish our business as easy as rolling off a log. You have nothing to do with the wrecking of the *Goshawk*, for you weren’t on board when she parted her cable. But just look at those people!”

Ned did so, for the room, a large and well-furnished office, was almost crowded with Americans of all sorts, mostly men, whose faces wore varied expressions of deep anxiety.

“What are they all here for?” asked Ned.

“Safety!” growled the captain. “And to inquire how and when they can find their way out of this city of robbers. I hear that a whole regiment is to be on guard duty to-night, and that the mob is to be put down. If I ever see your father again, I’ll explain to him why I sent you away.”

Before Ned could make any further remarks, he was introduced to the vice-consul, a dapper, smiling little man, who did not appear to be in the least

disturbed by his unpleasant surroundings. Almost a score of papers, larger and smaller, required the signature of the young supercargo of the unfortunate *Goshawk*. They were speedily signed, although without any clear idea in Ned's mind as to what they all were for, and then Captain Kemp took him by the arm and led him away into a corner of the room.

"Ned, my boy," he said, "you see how it is. You must keep away from the seacoast for awhile. After things are more settled, you can come back and get away on a British, or French, or Dutch vessel, if the port isn't too closely blockaded. Whether I shall get out alive or not, I don't know. You haven't enough money. I'll let you have a couple of hundred dollars more in Mexican gold. You'd better not let anybody suspect that you carry so much with you. This country contains too many patriots who would cut their own President's throat for a gold piece. Don't ever show more than one shiner at a time, or you may lose it all."

Ned took the two little bags that were so cautiously delivered to him, and while he was putting them away in the inner pockets of his jacket, his mind was giving him vivid pictures of the knives and machetes and their bearers, whom he had seen in the street.

"Captain," he said, "those fellows out there wouldn't wait for any gold. A silver dollar would buy one of them."

"Half a dollar," replied the captain. "Not one of them is worth a shilling. They ought all to be shot. But look here. I mustn't come to Colonel Tassara's place again. I find that he is under some kind of suspicion already, and President Paredes makes short work of men whom he suspects of plotting against him. Go! Get home!"

"That's just about what I'd like to do," said Ned to himself, as he hurried out of the consulate, but the next moment his courage began to come back to him, for here was Señor Zuroaga's ferocious-looking follower, and with him were four others, who might have been his cousins or his brothers, from their looks, for they all were Oaxaca Indians, of unmixed descent. Their tribe had faithfully served the children and grandchildren of Hernando Cortes, the Conquistador, from the day when he and his brave adventurers cut their way into the Tehuantepec valley.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAND OF THE MONTEZUMAS

“Father Crawford, do read that newspaper! The war has begun! They are fighting great battles on the Rio Grande! Oh, how I wish you hadn’t sent Ned to Mexico! He may get killed!”

She was a woman of middle age, tall, fine-looking, and she was evidently much excited. She was standing at one end of a well-set breakfast table, and was holding out a printed sheet to a gentleman who had been looking down at his plate, as if he were asking serious questions of it.

“My dear,” he said, as he took the paper, “I knew it was coming, but I didn’t think it would come so soon as this. I don’t really see that Ned is in any danger. Captain Kemp will take care of him.”

“But,” she said, “the *Goshawk* may be captured.”

“No,” replied Mr. Crawford, confidently. “She hasn’t sailed across prairie to the Rio Grande. There won’t be any fighting at Vera Cruz for ever so long. There can’t be any on the sea, for Mexico has no navy. The *Goshawk* is entirely safe, and so is Ned. It’ll be a grand experience for him.”

“I don’t want him to have so much experience at his age,” she said, anxiously. “I’d rather he’d be at home,—if there’s going to be a war.”

“I’ve often wished that I could see a war,” replied her husband, as he glanced over the black-typed headings of the newspaper columns. “I’ve travelled a good deal in Mexico, and I wanted Ned to learn all he could of that country. He will hardly have any chance to do so now.”

“He might see too much of it if he were taken prisoner,” she exclaimed. “I can’t bear to think of it! Oh, how I wish he were at home!”

Mr. Crawford was silent, and again he appeared to be thinking deeply. He was not a pale-faced man at any time, but now his color was visibly increasing. His face was also changing its expression, and it wore a strong reminder of the look

which had come into his son Ned's countenance when the fever of Mexican exploration took hold of him. People say "like father, like son," and it may be that Ned's readiness for a trip into the interior belonged to something which had descended to him from a father who had been willing to educate his son for the southern trade by sending him to sea with Captain Kemp. The United States has had a great many commercial men of that stamp, and there was a time when almost all the navy the nation possessed was provided by the merchant patriots, who armed and sent out, or themselves commanded, its fleets of privateers. Very likely the Crawfords and a number of other American families could point back to as adventurous an ancestry as could any Spaniard whose forefathers had fought Moors or won estates for themselves in Mexico or Peru. As for Mrs. Crawford, she was hardly able to drink her coffee that morning, after reading the newspaper, and she might have been even more willing to have Ned come home if she had known what had become of the *Goshawk*, and in what company he was a couple of hours after she arose from her table.

Company? That was it. He was now walking along one of the streets of Vera Cruz with a squad of men of whom she would have decidedly disapproved, but whose character her husband would have understood at sight. Ned's first acquaintance, Pablo, as he called himself, with his four comrades, made up so thoroughly Mexican a party at all points that it was in no danger of being interfered with by the mob. Every member of this had seen, often enough, the son of some wealthy landholder from the upland country attended by a sufficient number of his own retainers to keep him from being plundered, and it was well enough to let him alone. On they went, but it was by a circuitous route and a back street that they reached the Tassara place. Even then, they did not enter it by the front door, but by a path which led down to the stables in the rear of the house. No outsider would afterward be able to say that he saw that party of men march into the courtyard to be welcomed by Colonel Tassara and the mysterious personage whom Ned was trying to think of as General Zuroaga.

"He may be of more importance than I had any idea of," said Ned to himself, "and I wish I knew what was coming next."

He was not to find out immediately, for Zuroaga motioned him to go on into the house, while he himself and Tassara remained to talk with Pablo and the other machete-bearers.

Hardly was Ned three steps inside of the dwelling, when he was met by Señora Tassara, apparently in a state of much mental agitation.

“My dear young friend!” she exclaimed, “I am so glad you have escaped from them! Come in. We shall have no regular dinner to-day. You will eat your luncheon now, however. We are all busy packing up. We must set out for the country as soon as it is dark. The colonel’s enemies are following him like so many wolves! Felicia, my dear, you will see that Señor Carfora is properly attended to.”

The saucy señorita was standing a little behind her mother, and she now beckoned to Ned, as if she had no hostility for him whatever.

“Come right along in,” she said, peremptorily. “I must eat my luncheon, too. I want to hear where you have been, and what you have been doing. Is there any more news from the war? Have your gringo generals been beaten again? Tell me all you know!”

She was evidently in the habit of being obeyed by those around her, and Ned felt decidedly obedient, but this was his first intimation that it was fully noon. Time had passed more rapidly than he had been aware of, for his mind had been too busy to take note of it. He was hungrily ready to obey, however, especially concerning the luncheon, and his first bit of news appeared to please his little hostess exceedingly.

“Not another ship is in,” he told her, “and I don’t believe there is going to be any war, anyhow, but I saw some of your soldiers. They were guarding the American consulate from the mob. They were splendid-looking fellows. Is your father’s regiment of that kind of men?”

“Father’s regiment?” she said, angrily. “That’s just the difficulty now. He hasn’t any soldiers. Those that he had were taken away from him. So he must go and gather some more, or President Paredes will say that he is not patriotic. They took his old regiment away from him after he had made it a real good one. Tell me about your gringo soldiers. Are there a great many of them? Do they know how to fight? I don’t believe they do.”

She was all on fire about the war and her father’s enemies, and Ned was ready to tell her all he knew of the American army, if not a little more. At least, he described to her the elegant uniforms which were worn on parade occasions by the New York City militia regiments, feathers, flags, brass bands, and all, rather than the external appearance of any martial array that General Taylor was likely to take with him when he invaded Mexico. Felicia was especially interested in those magnificent brass bands and wished that she could have some of them taken prisoners to come and play in front of her house, but all the while they

were talking he was glancing furtively around the room. This had undergone a remarkable change during his brief absence. The trophies of arms were all gone, and the wonderful Seville coffee-urn had disappeared. Perhaps it had walked away, beyond the reach of possible thieves, and with it may have gone the other silverware of the Tassara family. Señorita Felicia's quick eyes had followed his own, for she was watching him.

"Yes, Señor Carfora," she said, "it's all gone. The china is all stored away in the deep cellar. I don't believe they could find it, and if they did they could not carry it away to melt it up and make dollars of it. That's what they did with all the silver one of my aunts had, except some spoons that were hid in the stable, under the hay. One of the robbers went into the stable to hunt, too, and a good mule kicked him dead. If anybody comes to rob this house while we are gone, I wish he might be kicked by one of our mules at the hacienda. He would not steal any more."

Ned had other things to tell her, about the United States forts, troops, and ships of war, and she had stories to tell with excited vivacity that set forth sadly enough the wretchedly unsettled condition of her country, which she appeared to love so well, after all. Troubled as it was, it was her own land, and she hated its enemies.

It was a hot, oppressive day, with a promise of greater heat soon to come, and the weather itself might be a good enough reason why any family should be in a hurry to get out of the *tierra caliente*. As for the removal of valuable property, Ned had already learned that Vera Cruz was haunted not only by bad characters from the interior, but by desperadoes from up and down the coast and from the West India Islands. He was not near enough to hear, however, when Zuroaga remarked to his friend Tassara:

"You are right, my dear colonel. The Americans will hold the Texan border with a strong hand, but if Paredes does not promptly come to terms with them, we shall see a fleet and army at Vera Cruz before long. This is the weak point of our unhappy republic."

"I think not," replied Tassara, gloomily. "I wish it were a solid nation, as strong as the castle out yonder. Our weak point is that we are cut up into factions, and cannot make use of the strength that we really have undeveloped. As for anything else, one case of yellow fever was reported yesterday, and I am informed that his Excellency, President Paredes, talks of coming here shortly to confer with Colonel Guerra. That may mean trouble for him, and neither you nor

I would wish to be brought before any such council of war as might be called together.”

“It might not consist altogether of our friends,” said Zuroaga. “In my case, if not in yours, it might be followed quickly by an order for a file of soldiers and a volley of musketry. I should not look for mercy from a tiger.”

“On the other hand,” responded the colonel, “it would be well for him to be careful just now. He will need all the strength he can obtain.”

“Humph!” exclaimed Zuroaga. “He will try to leave no living, or, at least, no unimprisoned enemies behind him when he marches for the border.”

It was plain that they were not to be numbered among their President’s friends, whether or not they were altogether just to him. Bloody severity in putting down sedition was the long-established custom in Mexico, and one man might not be more to blame for it than another. It had been handed down from the old days of Spanish rule, and the record which had been made is not by any means pleasant reading.

When the luncheon was over, the señorita left Ned to himself, appearing to feel somewhat more friendly than at first, but still considering him as a gringo and a foreigner. She said she had some things to pack up, and he went to look after his own. These did not require much packing, and before long he had again found his way out to the courtyard and the stables. These were indeed the most interesting spots about the place, for they contained all the men, the horses, and the mules. Ned shortly concluded that here were also gathered most of the firearms and at least a dozen of the wildest kind of Mexican Indians, all ragged and all barefooted. Preparations for a journey were going forward under Señora Tassara’s direction, and Ned pretty quickly understood that the men were a great deal more afraid of her than they were of her husband. He felt so himself, and he instantly got out of her way, as she told him to do, when he unwisely undertook to help her with her packing.

The horses were of several sorts and sizes, and more like them were shortly brought in. One large spring wagon and a covered carryall carriage were in good order. Both were of American manufacture, and so was the harness of the teams which were to draw them. Ned was feeling a certain degree of curiosity as to what kind of carriage was to carry him, when Señor Zuroaga beckoned him to one side and said:

“We shall be with Colonel Tassara’s party only the first day. But I have been thinking. When we were on the *Goshawk*, you told me that you had never ridden

a horse in your life——”

“Why, I’m a city boy,” interrupted Ned. “There isn’t any horseback riding done there. I’d rather go on wheels.”

“Of course you would,” laughed Zuroaga. “But there won’t be any use for wheels on some of the roads I am to follow. I’ve picked you out a pony that you can manage, though, and you will soon learn. You will have to be a horseman if you are to travel in Mexico.”

“So father used to tell me,” said Ned. “He can ride anything. Which of these is my horse? They all look skittish——”

“Neither of these would do for you,” replied the señor. “But listen to me sharply. Twice you have called me general. Don’t do it again until we are beyond the mountains. I’m only a plain señor in all this region of the country. I only hope that some men in Vera Cruz do not already know that I am here. If they did, I am afraid I should not get out so easily. This is your horse. He is a good one.”

Hitched to a post near the wall was a fat, undersized animal, black as jet, and with more mane and tail than was at all reasonable. He carried a Mexican saddle with wooden stirrups and a tremendous curb-bit bridle. In front of the saddle were pistol holsters, and behind it hung an ammunition case, as if Ned were about to become a trooper. He went to examine the holsters, and found that each of them contained a large horse-pistol with a flintlock. He also found powder and bullets in the case, and he wondered whether or not he would ever be able to shoot anybody with one of those heavy, long-barrelled things without having something to rest it on.

“I practised for an hour once in a pistol-gallery,” he remarked, “but it wasn’t with anything like that.”

“You didn’t hit centre even then, eh?” laughed the señor. “Well, not many men can do much with them, but they are better than nothing. They are too heavy for a hand like yours. Here is your machete. Put it on.”

Ned felt a queer tingle all over him, as he took the weapon and hitched it at his belt. Then he drew it from the sheath and looked at it, swinging it up and down to feel its weight. It was a straight, one-edged blade, with a sharp point, and a brass basket hilt, and he remarked:

“Señor Zuroaga, I could hit with that, I guess.”

His face had flushed fiery red, and it could be seen, from his handling of the

machete, that his muscles were unusually strong for his size and age. The señor nodded his approbation, as he remarked:

“I think you will do. There is fight in you, but I hope we shall have no fighting to do just now. I shall try to find a safe road home.”

“A fellow could cut down bushes with this thing,” said Ned.

“That’s exactly what our rancheros use them for,” replied the señor. “They will do almost anything with a machete. They will cut their way through thick chaparral, kill and cut up beef cattle, split wood, fight men or animals, and on the whole it’s about the most useful tool there is in a Mexican camp or hacienda.”

“What’s that?” asked Ned.

“Any kind of farm with a house on it,” said the señor. “You may have to learn all about haciendas before you get home.”

“Just what I’d like to do,” said Ned. “I’ll learn how to ride, too. How soon are we to set out?”

“Not till after dark,” said the señor. “But you need not be in any hurry to get into the saddle. You will have quite enough of it before you get out of it again. There is a long ride before us to-night.”

“I’m ready,” replied Ned, but nevertheless he looked at that Mexican saddle with doubtful eyes, as if he were thinking that it might possibly prove to be a place of trial for a beginner.

At that very hour there were several gentlemen in uniform closeted with Colonel Guerra in one of the rooms of the Castle of San Juan de Ulua. The colonel appeared to have been giving them a detailed report of the condition of the fortress and of its means for defence, whether or not he had stated exactly the amount of the ammunition brought him by the ill-fated *Goshawk*. Other subjects of conversation must now have come up, however, for one of them arose with great dignity of manner, remarking:

“My dear colonel, I am glad that I shall be able to make so encouraging a report to his Excellency. As for Colonel Tassara, we shall serve our warrant upon him some time to-morrow. We are informed that, beyond a doubt, the traitor Zuroaga intends to return from Europe shortly. As sure as he does, he will be engaged in dangerous intrigues against the existing order of things, and the good of the country requires that he shall be brought to justice before he can put any of his

nefarious plans in operation. At the same time, we are assured that the invaders upon the Rio Grande will soon be defeated yet more thoroughly.”

All the rest had arisen while he was speaking, and one of them, a fat, short man in a brilliant uniform, added, enthusiastically:

“We feel that we can rely upon you, Colonel Guerra. We pity the gringos if they should attempt to beleaguer this impregnable fortress. For my own part, I believe that Colonel Tassara’s court martial can have but one result. His disobedience must be paid for with his life. All conspirators like Zuroaga should be shot as soon as they are captured. This is not a time, my friends, for undue leniency.”

“Gentlemen,” responded Colonel Guerra with graceful courtesy, “I bid you all a brief farewell with sincere regret. Your visit has given me unmixed satisfaction. Do not forget that all of you are to dine with me to-morrow. From my very heart I can echo your noble sentiments of valor and patriotism and of devotion to our beloved commander-in-chief, his heroic Excellency, President Paredes.”

Then followed smiles and handshakings of mutual confidence all around, and the visiting officers took their departure. Hardly had the door closed behind them, however, before Colonel Guerra again sat down, hoarsely muttering between his set teeth:

“The snake-hearted villains! What they really hoped for was to find the fort and garrison in bad condition and unprovided, so that they might ruin me. They want my disgrace and removal, to make room for one of them. I don’t believe they will catch either Tassara or Zuroaga this time. The colonel will soon raise his new regiment, and my old friend will be down in Oaxaca in safety, waiting for the hour that is to come. Paredes would give something to see my last letter from Santa Anna.”

So there were many plots and counterplots, and the politest men might not be always what they seemed.



CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE TIERRA CALIENTE

Those were days of great commotion in the Congress of the United States. The whole nation, South as well as North, was divided in opinion as to the righteousness and expediency of the war with Mexico. There were two great parties, both of which have long since passed away, for the question of the annexation of Texas is no longer before the people, and all this was more than half a century ago. One of the parties called itself "Whig," but its enemies described its members as "Coons," in the habit of roosting up a tree out of reach. The other party called itself "Democratic," while its opponents lampooned its members as "Loco-focos," comparing them to the blue-headed sulphur matches of that name, which were largely manufactured and did not burn very well. Party feeling ran high, and the debates in Congress were red-hot. The Democratic President, James K. Polk, was a man of far greater ability and statesmanship than his party enemies were willing to give him credit for, and he was supported by a brilliant array of politicians. On the other hand, the Whig party contained a number of our most distinguished statesmen, and, curiously enough, most of the generals of the army, including Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor, were well-known Whigs. It was not altogether unnatural, therefore, that the Democratic party in power should wish to put the command of any army preparing for the invasion of Mexico into the hands of officers who were in favor of the war which they were to carry on. Questions like this, and some others relating to the unprepared condition of the American army for so tremendous an undertaking, were responsible for the fact that there was a long delay in all military operations, even after the hard and successful fighting done by General Taylor's forces at the Rio Grande.

American cruisers were tacking to and fro over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, without any especial errand of which their commanders were aware. Regiments of eager volunteers were forming in several of the States, and were trying hard to discover officers who knew how to drill and handle them. The politicians were everywhere calling each other harder and harder

names. Not one soul in all the United States, however, knew anything of a party of mounted men, a carriage, and a spring-wagon, which quietly made its way out of the city of Vera Cruz, not long after sunset, one sultry and lazy evening. At the head of this cavalcade rode two men, who sat upon their spirited horses as if they were at home in the saddle. At their right, however, was a young fellow on a black pony who was entirely satisfied with the fact that the beast under him did not seem to have any spirit at all. He was at that moment steadying his feet in the stirrups, and remarking to himself:

“I’m glad none of them saw me mount him. I got upon a high box first, and even then my machete was tangled with my legs, and I all but fell over him. I’ll get the señor to show me how, or I’ll be laughed at by the men.”

He was doing fairly well at present, for the road went up a hill, and the night was not one for foolishly fast travelling. He could listen all the better, and one of his companions was saying to the other:

“My dear Zuroaga, we have gained four miles. Every one of them is worth something handsome to you and me. In my opinion, we did not get away a moment too soon to save our necks.”

“Not one minute!” replied the other, with strong emphasis. “Not even if Guerra can succeed in gaining for us the best part of another day, as he believed he could. Perhaps our best chance, after all, is that he has only one company of lancers, and that any officer sent with it might have instructions which would take him by another road than this.”

“The inspector-general had with him an escort of his own,” said Tassara. “If he should send those fellows, they would be likely to know how to find us. They are not under the orders of Guerra.”

“If,” exclaimed Zuroaga, fiercely, “they do not overtake us until after the middle of our second day out, I believe they would be unlucky to try to arrest us. I hope they will be wise, and not tire out their horses with too much haste. I feel as if I could shoot pretty straight if I should see them coming within range.”

“So could I,” replied Tassara.

The road which they were then following ran between cultivated lands on either side. It was not tree-shadowed, and, as Ned looked back, the moonlight showed him something that made him think rapidly. Additional horsemen had joined them after they had left the city behind them, and it occurred to him that arrangements had been made beforehand for something like a small war. There

were not less than twenty armed men, besides himself and the pair who were with him. For some reason or other, moreover, the wagon, which was drawn by four mules, and the carriage, drawn by a pair of fine animals of the same sort, were driven on well in advance. It appeared, therefore, as if no danger was expected to meet them from the opposite direction, and that Señora Tassara and her daughter were fairly well protected from any peril which might come after them along the road from Vera Cruz. The next thing that struck Ned, little as he knew about war, was that these horsemen were riding two and two, not in a straggling procession, but in as perfect order as if they had been trained cavalry. If he had known a little more, he would have declared:

“That is just what they are.”

He might not also have known that all but six of them were from the Tassara estates, and that the odd half-dozen were lifelong servants of the proscribed descendant of Hernando Cortes. If he could have understood those men, he might also have comprehended one important feature of the tangled politics of Mexico, and why ambitious military men were every now and then able to set up for themselves, and defy the central government until it could manage to capture them, and have them shot as rebels. Wiser men than he, looking at the matter from the outside, might also have understood how greatly it was to the credit of President Paredes that he was making so good a stand against the power of the United States while hampered by so many difficulties. Ned was no politician at all, and it was a mere impulse, or a tired feeling, which led him to pull in his pony and let the men catch up with him, so that he might chat with them, one after another, and get acquainted. He found that they were under no orders not to talk. On the contrary, every man of them seemed to know that Ned had come home from the school which he had been attending in England, and that he had been instrumental in procuring powder and bullets for them and for the Mexican army. They were full of patriotism of a peculiar kind. It would have made them fight gringos or any other foreigners to-day, and to-morrow to fight as readily in any causeless revolution which their local leaders might see fit to set going. They were eager for all the news Ned could give them, and he was soon on good terms with them, for he took pains not to let them know how uncomfortable he felt in that saddle. They surely would have despised any young Mexican who had forgotten how to ride while he was travelling in Europe.

Hour after hour went by, and on every level stretch of road the wheeled vehicles were driven at a moderate trot. The horses of what Ned called the cavalry also trotted occasionally, but it was well for him that his pony did not seem to know

how. Whenever he was asked to go faster, he struck into a rocking canter, which was as easy and about as lazy as a cradle, so that his rider received hardly any shaking, and was able to keep both his seat and his stirrups. Brief halts for rest were made now and then. Bridges were crossed which Ned understood were over small branches of the Blanco River, but they were still in the lowlands when, at about midnight, the little column wheeled out of the road and went on for a hundred yards or more into a magnificent forest, where the moonlight came down among the trees to show how old and large they were.

“Halt! Dismount!” came sharply from Colonel Tassara. “It is twelve o’clock. We have made over twenty miles. We will camp here until daylight. Pablo, put up the tents.”

Every rider but Ned was down on his feet in a twinkling, but he remained upon his pony’s back as still as a statue. He saw a white tent leave the top of the baggage in the wagon and set itself up, as if by magic. Another and another followed, and he said to himself:

“They are little picnic tents. One is for the señora and Felicia; one for the colonel; and one for Señor Zuroaga. Not any for me or for the men. Oh, dear! How shall I ever get down? I can’t move my legs. If I can’t, I shall have to go to sleep in the saddle!”

That was just what he might have done if it had not been for his kind and thoughtful friend, the general,—if he was one,—for Zuroaga now came to the side of the pony to inquire, with a merry laugh:

“How are you now, my boy? I knew how it would be. Tired out? Stiff with so long a ride? Lean over this way and I’ll help you down. Come!”

Ned leaned over and tried to pull his feet out of the stirrups. They did come out somehow, and then he made an extra effort not to fall asleep with his head on the general’s shoulder.

“Used up completely!” exclaimed Zuroaga. “Can you walk? Stretch your legs. Kick. It’s your first long ride? You’ll soon get used to it. There! Now I’ll put you into my tent, but we must be on the march again by six o’clock in the morning. You can sleep till breakfast.”

“I can walk, thank you,” responded poor Ned, and he did so, after a lame and awkward fashion, but he was glad to reach the tent. “It’s big enough for two,” he said, as he crawled in.

“Is it?” said the general. “Bah! I do not use one half the time. I am a soldier and

a hunter, and I prefer to bivouac in such weather as this. I must be on the lookout, too, to-night. Crawl in and go to sleep.”

Ned was already in. Down he went upon a blanket, without even unbuckling his machete, and that was the last that he knew that night of the camp or of anybody in it. Probably, nothing less than the report of a cannon fired over that tent would have aroused him to go for his horse-pistols or draw his Mexican sabre.

Señora Tassara and her daughter had disappeared immediately, and they, also, must have been wearied with their long, hot journey, but all the rest of the party were old campaigners, and they were ready to take care of the horses and eat cold rations, for no fires were kindled.

A few minutes later, if Ned had been awake instead of sleeping so soundly, he might have heard what two men were saying, in half-whispers, close to the door of his tent.

“Colonel,” said Zuroaga, “we are well-hidden in here. The bushes are very thick along the edge of the road.”

“Hark!” interrupted Tassara. “Do you hear that? There they are!”

“I hear them,” replied the general. “It may be so. If it is, they have followed us well. But there cannot be more than half a dozen of them. It is not any mere squad like that that we need be afraid of.”

“This may be only an advance party, I think,” said his friend, thoughtfully. “A larger force may be on our trail before to-morrow night. But they must not take us. They might merely arrest me, to have me shot at Vera Cruz, but they would cut down you and poor young Carfora at once. He is an American, and they would show him no mercy.”

There had been a sound of horse hoofs on the road, and it had gone by, but before Zuroaga could make any response to so gloomy a prophecy, his own man, Pablo, stood before him. Pablo had been running fast, but he had breath enough left to say, quite coolly and not loudly:

“Lancers, general. Officer and four men. They have been running their horses, and they won’t travel far to-morrow. I was in the bushes.”

“All right, Pablo,” said Zuroaga. “It was kind of Colonel Guerra to order them to use up their horses. We shall not hear of that squad again. Put Andrea on watch, and go to sleep. Our first danger is over.”

Pablo bowed and turned away without another word, and Zuroaga resumed his

conference with Tassara, for those two were brave men, and were well-accustomed to the peril-haunted lives they were leading.

“Colonel,” he said, “it is evident that my young friend Carfora must go with you. He is not fit for a swift ride of three hundred miles. Besides, he must have any chance which may happen to turn up for getting home. Will you take care of him? He is a fine young fellow, but he cannot ride.”

Therefore the pony and that saddle had done something good for Ned, and Colonel Tassara cheerfully responded:

“With great pleasure, my dear general. I shall be glad to make American friends. I may need them. He will be safe enough with me, but I fear it will be a long time before he can get out of Mexico. As for me, I shall meet more than a hundred of my own men at Orizaba, ready to escort me across the sierra into my own State of Puebla. After that, my reputation for loyalty will soon be reestablished by raising my new regiment. I think, however, that it will not march into the city of Mexico until his Excellency President Paredes has set out for the Rio Grande, or as far north as the luck of this war will permit him to travel. Very possibly, he may be hindered by the gringos before he reaches the border. Carfora will remain with me until then. You are right. He would not be safe anywhere else. As for yourself, you must push on.”

“I think,” said Zuroaga, “that I shall be almost safe after I am a few miles beyond Teotitlan. I may have a fight or two on the way. Carfora must not be killed in any skirmish of that kind. You will not see me again, dead or alive, until a week or two after the Americans have taken the city of Mexico, as in my opinion they surely will. I shall be there then, with five hundred lancers, to uphold the new government which will take the place of the bloody dictatorship of Paredes, unless the new affair is to be Santa Anna. In any event, I shall be able to help you, and I will.”

“You are a gloomy prophet,” responded Tassara, “but you are an old student of military operations. Do you really think the Americans will capture our capital? It will be well defended.”

“Bravely enough, but not well,” replied Zuroaga. “We have not one scientific, thoroughly educated engineer officer fit to take charge of the defences against, for instance, General Scott. Not even Santa Anna himself, with all his ability, is a general capable of checking the invaders after they have taken Vera Cruz, and that they will do. He is a scheming politician rather than a military genius. He and Paredes and some others whom you and I could name must be whipped out

of power before we can put up an entirely new government, better than any we have ever had yet. What do you think about it?"

"Think?" exclaimed Tassara, angrily. "I think it will be after you and I are dead and buried before this miserable half-republic, half-oligarchy, will be blessed with a solid government like that of the United States."

"And that, too, might get into hot water," muttered his friend, but neither of the two political prophets appeared to have much more to say. They separated, as if each might have something else to employ him, and shortly all the night camp in the grand old forest seemed to be asleep.

The remaining hours of darkness passed silently, and the sun arose with a promise of another hot day. Small fires were kindled for coffee-making, but the preparations for breakfast were hurried. Before six o'clock the mules were harnessed, the horses were saddled, and all things were made ready for a diligent push southward. It had been a difficult business to get Ned Crawford out of his tent, but here he was, trying his best to move his legs as if they belonged to him. His coffee and corn-cakes did a great deal for him, and he made out to pretend to help Pablo in getting the fat pony ready for the road. Then, however, he was willing to see Pablo walk away, and he bravely led the pony to the side of what may have been an old and apparently abandoned ant-hill.

"I can get on board," he said, as if his patient quadruped had been the *Goshawk*. "I saw how some of them mounted. You put your left foot into the stirrup, and then you make a kind of spring into the saddle. If my knees will bend for me, I can do it without anybody's help."

It was the ant-hill that helped him, for he did not make any spring. After his foot was in the stirrup, he made a tremendous effort, and he arose slowly, painfully to the level of the pony's back. Then his right leg went over, and he was actually there, hunting a little nervously for the other stirrup, with his machete away around behind him.

"Glad you have done it!" exclaimed a decidedly humorous voice near the pony's head. "We are all ready to be off now. Before long, you will be able to mount as the rancheros do, without touching the stirrup. But then, I believe that most of them were born on horseback."

They also appeared to be able to do pretty well without much sleep, for Ned could not see that they showed any signs of fatigue. The camping-place was speedily left behind them, but it was no longer a night journey. Ned was almost astonished, now that the darkness was gone, to discover that this was by no

means a wild, unsettled country. Not only were there many farms, with more or less well-built houses, but the cavalcade began to meet other wayfarers,—men and women,—on foot and on horseback, and hardly any of them were willing to be passed without obtaining the latest news from Vera Cruz and from the war.

“I guess they need it,” thought Ned. “The general says there are no newspapers taken down here, and that, if there were, not one person in five could read them. They seem a real good-natured lot, though.”

So they were, as much so as any other people in the world, and they were as capable of being developed and educated to better things. As to this being a new country, it came slowly back into Ned’s mind that there had been a great and populous empire here at a time when the island upon which the city of New York was afterward built was a bushy wilderness, occupied by half-naked savages, who were ready to sell it for a few dollars’ worth of kettles and beads.

“I guess I’m beginning to wake up,” thought Ned. “When the *Goshawk* was lying in the Bay of Vera Cruz, I was too busy to see anything. No, I wasn’t. I did stare at the Orizaba mountain peak, and they told me it is over seventeen thousand feet high. First mountain I ever saw that could keep on snow and ice in such weather as this. I don’t want to live up there in winter. Well! Now I’ve seen some of the biggest trees I ever did see. I wonder if any of them were here when the Spaniards came in. I guess they were, some of them.”

He was really beginning to see something of Mexico, and it almost made him forget the hardness of that unpleasant saddle. At the end of another mile, he was saying to himself:

“That field yonder is tobacco, is it? The one we just passed was sugar-cane, and Pablo said the plantation across the road was almost all coffee. He says that further on he will show me orange groves, bananas, and that sort of thing. But what on earth are grenaditas and mangoes? They’ll be something new to me, and I want to find out how they taste.”

Nothing at all of a military or otherwise of an apparently dangerous character had been encountered by the fugitive travellers when, at about the middle of the forenoon, they came to a parting of the ways. A seemingly well-travelled road went off to the left, or southward, while the one they were on turned more to the right and climbed a hill, as if it were making a further effort to get out of the *tierra caliente*. A great many things had been explained to Ned, as they rode along, and he was not surprised, therefore, when Señor Zuroaga said to him:

“My young friend, this is the place I told you of. We must part here. You and

your pony will go on with Colonel Tassara, and I will take my chances for reaching my place of refuge in Oaxaca. It is not a very good chance, but I must make the best of it that I can. Take good care of yourself. I have already said good-by to the señora and the señorita. I think they will soon be out of danger.”

Ned was really grateful, and he tried to say so, but all he could think of just then was:

“General Zuroaga, I do hope you’ll get through all right. I hope I shall see you again safe and sound.”

“You never will,” said Zuroaga, as he wheeled his horse, “unless I get out of this Cordoba road. It is a kind of military highway, and I might meet my enemies at any minute—too many of them.”

“Good-by!” shouted Ned, and the general, who was still a great mystery to him, dashed away at a gallop, followed by Pablo and the wild riders from the Oaxaca ranches.

The cavalcade had hardly paused, and it now went on up the long, steep slope to the right. Not many minutes later, it was on high enough ground to look down upon the road which had been taken by Zuroaga. Ned was not looking in that direction, but at some snow-capped mountains in the distance, northward, and he was saying to himself:

“So that is the Sierra Madre, is it? This country has more and higher mountains in it—Hullo! What’s that? Is she hurt?”

His change of utterance into an anxious exclamation was produced by a piercing scream from the carriage, and that was followed by the excited voice of Señora Tassara calling out:

“Husband! The general is attacked! Look! Hear the firing!”

“O father! Can we not help him?” gasped Señorita Felicia.

Her mother was holding to her eyes with trembling hands what Ned took for an opera-glass, and he wished that he had one, although he could make out that something like a skirmish was taking place on the other road. It was too far to more than barely catch the dull reports of what seemed to be a number of rapidly fired pistol-shots.

“They are fighting!” he exclaimed. “I wish I was there to help him! He may need more men. I could shoot!”

Whether he could or not, he was almost unconsciously unbuckling the holster of one of his horse-pistols, when the señora spoke again.

“Santa Maria!” she exclaimed. “The dear general! They are too many for him. Madre de Dios! Our good friend will be killed!”

“Give me the glass, my dear,” said her husband. “Your hands are not steady enough. I will tell you how it is.”

“Oh, do!” she whispered, hoarsely, as she handed it to him. “They are lancers in uniform. Oh, me! This is dreadful! And they may follow us, too.”

Colonel Tassara took the glass with apparently perfect coolness, and Ned took note that it did not tremble at all, as he aimed it at the distant skirmish. It was a number of seconds, however, before he reported:

“Hurrah! The general rides on, and he rides well. I feel sure that he is not badly wounded, if at all. He has now but three men with him. There are riderless horses. There are men on the ground. There are four only that are riding back toward the Cordoba road. Thank God! The general has made good his escape from that party of unlucky lancers. He is a fighter!”

Then he lowered the glass to turn and shout fiercely to his own men:

“Forward! We must reach Orizaba before the news of this skirmish gets there, if we kill all our horses doing it. Push on!”



CHAPTER IX.

LEAVING THE HACIENDA

It was near the close of a bright summer day, and a deeply interested company had gathered in the dining-room of the Crawford home in New York. Dinner was on the table, but nobody had yet sat down. The number of young persons present suggested that Ned must have older brothers and sisters.

“Father Crawford,” exclaimed one of the grown-up young men, “what is this about another letter from Edward? I came over to hear the news.”

“Letter?” said Mr. Crawford. “I should say so! I guess I’d better read it aloud. It was a long time getting out and coming around by way of England. There are all sorts of delays in war-time. It is the last of three that he wrote before escaping into the interior of Mexico with his new friends. I am glad that he did go with them, though, and there must be other letters on the way. We shall hear from him again pretty soon.”

They all were silent then, and he read the letter through, with now and then a few words of explanation, but Mrs. Crawford had evidently read it before, and all she could say now was:

“Oh, dear! I don’t like it! I wish he had come home!”

“It’s all right, mother,” said Mr. Crawford, “for I have something more to tell. Captain Kemp is here, and, from what he says, it is plain that it would not have done for Ned to have remained anywhere on the coast. He will be safe where he is, and he will learn a great deal. I would not have him miss it for anything. What’s pretty good, too, we have been paid all our insurance money for the loss of the *Goshawk*, and our firm has been given a contract to furnish supplies for the army. I shall be down on the gulf before long myself, in charge of a supply ship, and I can make inquiries about Ned. He will turn up all right.”

Everybody appeared to be encouraged except Ned’s mother, and it was a pity she could not have seen how well he was looking at that very time. If, for instance, she had possessed a telescope which would have reached so far, she might have

seen a fine, large bay horse reined in to a standstill in front of a modern-appearing country-house, well built of a nearly white kind of limestone. Around this residence was a wide-spreading lawn, with vines, shrubbery, flowers, and other evidences of wealth and refinement. The rider of the horse appeared to sit him easily, and he was a picture of health and high spirits, but for an expression of discontent that was upon his sunburned face.

“This is all very beautiful,” he said, as he glanced around him, “but I wish I were out of it. I want to hear from home. They must have my letters by this time, but they couldn’t guess where I am now.”

He was silent for a moment, and the horse curveted gracefully under him, as if in doubt whether to gallop away again, or to ask his rider to get off.

“Well!” said Ned, with a pull on the rein. “It seems like a long, wonderful dream since I saw General Zuroaga ride away from us at the cross-roads. What a skirmish that was! Then we made our way through the mountains, and came here, and hasn’t it been a curious kind of life ever since? I’ve learned how to ride like a Mexican. I’ve seen all there is to see for miles and miles around this place. I’ve seen lots of old ruins, all that’s left of ancient houses and temples and altars. I believe the señora likes nothing better than to tell me yarns about the Montezuma times and about her ancestors in Spain. That’s a great country. I think I’ll go over there, some day, and see Granada and the Alhambra and the old castles and the Spanish people. I like the Mexicans first-rate, all that I have seen of them. They will be a splendid nation one of these days, but they’re awfully ignorant now. Why, every one in these parts believes that our army is all the while being whipped all to pieces by theirs, and I can’t exactly swallow that. I’d like to know just what is really going on. I’m all in the dark.”

“Señor Carfora!” called out a clear, ringing voice.

He turned in the saddle, from seeming to gaze at the distant forest, and there, in the piazza which ran all along the front of the house, stood Señorita Felicia, her usually pale face flushed with excitement.

“We have a letter from father!” she shouted. “He has completed his regiment, and he is to command it. President Paredes is going north, to drive the gringos out of Mexico, and father may have to go with him. He says it is time for us to move to the city of Mexico. We are to live with my aunt, Mercedes Paez, and you are to come with us. Is it not grand?”

“It is just what I was wishing for!” exclaimed Ned. “I’d give almost anything to see that city, after what your mother has told me.”

“Oh,” said Felicia, “she was born there, and she’ll make you see all there is of it. But we were all ready, you know, and we are to set out early to-morrow morning.”

“Hurrah!” responded Ned. “But I’d like to hear from General Zuroaga. I wish I knew whether or not he was much hurt in that fight in the road.”

“Father does not believe he was,” said Felicia. “Sometimes I almost think he knows all about it. But there are some things he won’t speak of, and General Zuroaga is one of them.”

Ned sprang to the ground, and a barefooted “peon” servant took charge of his horse. It was not at all the kind of dismounting he had performed at the camp in the woods on the road from Vera Cruz. Neither did he now have any machete dangling from his belt, to entangle himself with, and there were no pistol holsters in front of the saddle. He went on into the house with the señorita, and in a moment more he was hearing additional news from her mother. Señora Tassara was as stately as ever, but it was apparent that she had taken a liking to her young American guest, whether it was on account of his deep interest in her old stories, or otherwise. It may have been, in part, that company was a good thing to have in a somewhat lonely country-house, for she could not have thought of associating with Mexican neighbors of a social rank lower than her own. Was she not descended from Spanish grandees, and were they not, for the greater part, representatives of the mere Aztecs and Toltecs, whom her forefathers had conquered? It was that very feeling, however, which in the minds of such men as Paredes and similar leaders was standing in the way of every effort to construct a genuine republic out of the people of the half-civilized States of Mexico.

Ned’s next questions related to the war, and he inquired how many more great battles Colonel Tassara had reported.

“Battles?” exclaimed Señora Tassara. “Why, there has not been one fought since Resaca de la Palma. But he says that General Ampudia sends word that the American army is about to advance upon him. They will attack him at the city of Monterey, and they never can take so strong a place as that is. He is ready for them, but President Paredes believes that it is time for him to take command of the army in person.”

It certainly was so. The Mexican President was a cunning politician, and he had been by no means an unsuccessful general. He was well aware that it would not be wise for him to now allow too many victories to be won by any other

Mexican. It might interfere with his own popularity. On the other hand, if General Ampudia should be defeated, as he was quite likely to be, then it was good policy for the commander-in-chief, the President, to be promptly on hand with a larger force, to overwhelm the invaders who had ruined Ampudia. Therefore, it might be said that the Americans had the tangled factions and corrupt politics of Mexico working for them very effectively.

Ned Crawford already knew much about the condition of military and political affairs, but he was not thinking of them that evening. It was a great deal pleasanter to sit and talk with Señorita Felicia about the city of Mexico and others of the historical places of the ancient land of Anahuac. She still could remind him, now and then, that she hated all kinds of gringos, but at all events she was willing to treat one of them fairly well. He, on his part, had formed a favorable opinion of some Mexicans, but he was as firm as ever in his belief that their army could never drive the Americans out of Texas.

There was one place which was even busier and more full of the excitement of getting ready for a new movement than was the Tassara hacienda. It was among the scattered camps of General Taylor's army, near Matamoras, at the mouth of the Rio Grande. Reinforcements had made the army more than double its former size, but it was understood that it was still of only half the numbers of the force it was soon to meet, under General Ampudia. It was a curious fact, however, that all of General Taylor's military scholars were entirely satisfied with that computation, and considered that any other arrangement would have been unfair, as they really outnumbered their opponents when these were only two to one. What was more, they were willing to give them the advantage of fighting behind strong fortifications, for they knew that they were soon to attack the mountain city of Monterey. Part of what was now genuinely an invading army was to go up the river in boats for some distance. The other part was to go overland, and it was an open question which of them would suffer the more from the hot summer sun. It was to be anything but a picnic, for here were nearly seven thousand Americans of all sorts, who were obtaining their first experiences of what war might really be, if made in any manner whatever in the sultriest kind of southern weather. Much more agreeable for them might have been a march across the central table-lands beyond, at an elevation of four thousand feet above the sea level and the *tierra caliente*.

That was precisely the kind of pleasant journey that was performed by Ned Crawford and the imposing Tassara cavalcade on the morrow and during a couple of wonderful days which followed. There being no railway, whatever the

señora wished to take with her had to be conveyed in wagons or on pack-mules, and the ladies themselves now preferred the saddle to any kind of carriage. In fact, Ned shortly discovered that Señorita Felicia was more at home on horseback than he was, and he more than once congratulated himself that she had never witnessed his first performances in mounting his fat pony.

“How she would have laughed at me!” he thought. “But at that time there wasn’t another spare saddle-horse, and she and her mother didn’t care a cent whether I could ride or not. They were thinking of Guerra’s lancers.”

The scenery was exceedingly beautiful as well as peaceful. There was nothing whatever to suggest that a dreadful war was going on. There were houses of friends to stop at, instead of hotels. There were towns and villages of some importance to be rapidly investigated by a tourist like Ned, from New York by way of England, and now a good young Mexican for the time being. Then there was an exciting evening, when all who were on horseback rode ahead of the wagons and on into the city, which occupies the site of the wonderful Tenochtitlan, which was captured by Hernando Cortes and his daring adventurers ever so long ago. From that time onward, during a number of busy days, Ned became better and better satisfied with the fact that his father had sent him across the sea to learn all that he could of Mexico and the Mexicans.



CHAPTER X.

PICTURES OF THE PAST

“Oh, how I wish we had some news from the war!” exclaimed Ned.

“Well,” said Señorita Felicia, doubtfully, “there isn’t much, but I suppose there is some almost ready to come.”

“I’m tired of waiting for it,” replied Ned, “and if there isn’t to be any war news, I wish I had some books!”

The thought that was in Ned Crawford’s mind had broken out suddenly, as he sat at the dinner-table of Señora Mercedes Paez, at the end of those first days after his arrival in the city of Mexico. There were a number of persons at the table, and at the head of it was Señora Paez herself. She was shorter and stouter, but she was every ounce as stately and imposing as was even Señora Tassara. In front of her sat one affair which had, from the beginning of his visit in that house, made him feel more at home than he might otherwise have done. He had become used to it, and it seemed like an old friend. That Seville coffee-urn had ornamented the table in the house at Vera Cruz, his first refuge after he came ashore out of the destructive norther. It had winked at him from a similar post of honor in the country-house out in Puebla, and Señora Tassara had affectionately brought it with her to the residence of her city cousin. She had said that she thought it would be safer here, even if the city should be captured by those terrible robbers, the Americans. They could not be intending to steal and melt up all the old silver in Mexico.

“Why, Señor Carfora!” exclaimed Señorita Felicia, indignantly. “Did you not know? Aunt Paez has piles and piles of books. They are up in the library. If you wish to read them, she will let you go there. I had forgotten that you know how to read. He may do it, may he not, Aunt Mercedes?”

“Of course he may,” replied the señora, “but it is a curious idea for a boy of his age.”

“Oh, thank you!” exclaimed Ned. “But what I’d like to have are some books that

tell about old Mexico and about the city of Tenochtitlan, that stood here before the Spaniards came. I've been all around everywhere. I've seen the swamps and the lakes and the walls and forts and everything. The great cathedral—"

"That," interposed Señora Tassara, "stands on the very spot where an old temple of the Aztec war-god stood. There were altars in it, where they used to kill and burn hundreds and thousands of human sacrifices to Huitzilopochtli, and there were altars to other gods."

"I can't exactly speak that name," said Ned, "but I want to know all about him and the sacrifices. I want to learn, too, just how Cortes and his men took the old city. I suppose that when the Americans come, it will be a different kind of fight—more cannon."

"They won't get here at all," quietly remarked a military-looking old gentleman sitting near the other end of the table. "It is a long road from the Rio Grande, and President Paredes is to march, in a few days, to crush our enemies with an army of twenty thousand men. They have not so much as taken Monterey yet. You are right, though. If they should ever get here, they will find the city harder to take than Cortes did. They will all die before the walls."

He spoke with a great deal of patriotic enthusiasm, and Ned knew that it was his turn to keep still, for the old gentleman had no idea that he was talking to a wicked young gringo. Señora Paez, however, calmly replied:

"Ah, Colonel Rodriguez, my dear friend, the President himself has said that, after he has beaten them at the northern border, as he surely will, the Americans are sure to make another attempt by way of Vera Cruz. That, too, was the opinion of our brave friend, Colonel Guerra, and he is making every preparation for a siege. It is part of our grateful hospitality to our guest, Señor Carfora, that his friends have supplied the Castle of San Juan de Ulua with the ammunition which will be needed. He came over on the ship which brought it, and he has remained with us ever since."

Just then Ned Crawford knew what it was to feel very mean indeed. He felt as if he himself were telling a large lie, and his cheeks flushed red-hot. He was aware, nevertheless, that even Señora Tassara had not been told everything, and that Señora Paez was reasonably honest in what she had been saying. There was no necessity for enlightening Colonel Rodriguez. Hardly, therefore, had the old gentleman vehemently exclaimed, "They never can take San Juan de Ulua!" than Ned went hastily back to his first subject of the ancient history.

"That's it," he said. "I want to find out how Cortes got ashore, and how he

fought his way from the coast to this place. He must have had to cross the mountains, through the passes, just as our party did when we came.”

“Yes,” said the colonel. “He had to climb seven thousand and five hundred feet up out of the *tierra caliente*, and, if any gringos ever try that path, they will find all the passes full of fighting Mexicans and good artillery well posted. Hernando Cortes had all the gunpowder there was in America when he tried that road.”

“My dear young friend,” said Señora Paez, “you will find plenty of the books you wish for. My husband was fond of collecting them. After dinner, the señorita will show you the library, and you may read anything there.”

Ned was silent once more, for he was still feeling mean, and was asking himself whether he were not, after all, a kind of spy in the Mexican camp, going around in disguise, and all the while wishing that he could help the American army to capture the city.

“Anyhow,” he thought, “I can’t help myself just now, and when the city is taken, everything in the Paez house will be entirely safe. I shouldn’t wonder if that old coffee-urn will be safer from thieves than it is now. There have been half a dozen burglaries since we came, and I’ve seen hundreds of the wildest-looking kinds of fellows from the mountains. Every man of them looked as if he’d like to steal some silver.”

While he was thinking, he was also listening, with a great deal of interest, to a description which the old officer was giving of the defences of Monterey, and of the reasons why the American troops would surely be defeated. It appeared that he had at one time been the commander of the garrison of the fortress known as the Black Fort, just outside of the walls of Monterey, on the north, and he evidently believed it to be impregnable. Ned was no soldier, and it did not occur to him to ask, as General Taylor might have done, whether or not it was possible to take the town without wasting time in taking the fort first.

“Come, Señor Carfora,” said Felicia, as they all arose from the table, “I will show you the library. You can’t do much reading there to-night, though, for the lamps have all been taken away. I do not wish to go there, anyhow, except in the daytime. It is a pokerish kind of place. Do you believe in ghosts? I do not, but, if I were a ghost, I would pick out that library for a good place to hide in. Come along. You are a foreigner, and any kind of good Mexican ghost won’t like you.”

Whether she herself did so or not, she led the way, and no lamp was as yet needed, although the day was nearly over and the shadows were coming. Upstairs they went and through a short passageway in the second story of the Paez

mansion, and they were almost in the dark when she said to him:

“Here we are. Hardly any one ever comes here, and it will be dreadfully dusty. Books are dusty old things anyhow.”

She turned the big brass knob in the dusky door before them, and shoved against it with all her might, but Ned had to help her with his shoulder, or the massive mahogany portal would not have yielded an inch. It did go slowly in, upon its ancient-looking bronze hinges, and then they were in a room which was worth looking at. It was not so very large, only about fifteen feet by twenty, but it was unusually high, and it had but one tall, narrow slit of a window. Close by this, however, were a finely carved reading chair and table, ready to receive all the light which the window might choose to let in. Ned was staring eagerly around the room, when his pretty guide remarked:

“You had better see all you can before it gets any darker. Take down as many books as you want. I don’t care much for those fusty-musty old histories. I must go away now—”

“Hullo, señorita!” exclaimed Ned. “There is a lamp on the table. I have some matches—”

“I don’t believe you can make it burn,” she said, “but you can try. It has not been lighted for this ever so long, and the oil may have dried up.”

Around she whirled and away she went, leaving Ned to his own devices. His next thought was almost impolite, after all, for he was more than half glad that she did go, so that he might have the library all to himself to rummage in. He did not instantly examine the lamp, for he had never before been in just this kind of room, and it fascinated him. All its sides were occupied by high bookcases, every one of them crammed full of volumes of all sorts and sizes. He thought that he had never seen larger books than were some of the fat folios on the lower shelves. There were great, flat, atlas-looking concerns leaning against them, and out on the floor stood several upright racks of maps. Old Señor Paez may have been what is called a book-worm. At all events, Ned had understood that he was a very learned man, with a strong enthusiasm for American history.

“Heavens and earth!” suddenly exclaimed Ned. “What is that?”

He darted forward to a further corner of the room, as if he were in a great hurry to meet somebody who had unexpectedly come in. It certainly was something almost in human shape, but it had been standing there a long while, and the hand which it appeared to hold out to him was of steel, for it was nothing in the wide

world but a complete suit of ancient armor. It was so set up in that corner, however, that it almost seemed alive, with its right hand extended, and its left holding a long, pennoned lance. Its helmet had a barred vizor, so that if there had been any face behind that, it would have been hidden. Ned went and stood silently before it for a moment, staring at that vizor.

“I say,” he muttered, as if he did not care to speak any louder. “I don’t believe General Taylor’s men would care to march far with as much iron as that on them—not in hot weather. But the old Aztecs didn’t have anything that would go through that kind of uniform. If Cortes and his men wore it, there is no wonder that they went on killing the Indians without being much hurt themselves.”

In fact, not all of them had been dressed up in precisely such a manner, although they did wear armor.

Ned examined the whole affair, piece by piece, from head to foot, and then he turned away from his inspection, for the room behind him was getting dim and it was time for him to look at his lamp. He took out a match as he went toward the table at the window, and in a moment more he was busy with a wick which seemed to be determined not to burn for him.

“It’s an old whale-oil lamp,” he remarked. “Mother had one, once. I remember seeing her try to light it and it would sputter for ever so long. There! It’s beginning to kindle, but it’s too big for me to carry around and hunt for books with. I wish I had a smaller one. Hullo! Here’s one of the biggest of those old concerns, right here on the table.”

It was a folio bound in vellum, and when he opened it a great deal of dust arose from the cover which banged down. Then Ned uttered a loud exclamation, and was glad he had succeeded in lighting the lamp, for there before his eyes was a vividly colored picture of a most extraordinary description. Moreover, it unfolded, so that it was almost twice the size, length, and width of the book pages.

“They are all in Spanish,” he said, “but I guess I can read them. They’re more than a hundred years old. People don’t print such books, nowadays. Nobody would have time enough to read them, I suppose, and they couldn’t sell ’em cheap enough. This is wonderful! It’s a picture of the old Mexican god, Huitzilopochtli.”

There was an explanatory inscription, and the artist had pictured the terrible deity sitting upon a throne of state, gorgeously arrayed in gold and jewels, and watching with a smile of serene satisfaction the sacrifice of some unfortunate

human victims on the altar in the foreground at the right. One of the priests attending at the altar had just cut open the bosom of a tall man lying before him, and was tossing a bleeding heart upon the smoking fire, where other similar offerings were already burning.

“That must have been a horrible kind of religion,” thought Ned. “I’m glad that Cortes and his men in armor came to put an end to it. Señora Paez told me that in only a few years before he came, and her great-grandfather and his father with him, those priests cut up more than twenty thousand men, women, and children. He’s a curious kind of god, I should say, to sit there and grin while it was going on.”

He could not linger too long over one picture, however, for he had discovered that there were others in that volume which were as brilliantly colored and as interesting. On the whole, it was not necessary to hunt for anything better than this the first evening, and it appeared as if he were asking a useless question of the steel-clad warrior in the corner, when at last he turned to him to say:

“Did you ever see anything like this before? I never did. Were you there, in any of these battles? This is the way that Cortes and his cavalry scared the Indians, is it? They were awfully afraid of horses. You can buy horses for almost nothing, nowadays, anywhere in Mexico. I’ve learned how to ride ’em, too, but didn’t I get pitched off by some of those ponies! It would have scared mother half to death. I wish I could see her to-night, and show her some of these pictures. I’d like to see Bob and the girls, too. They never saw a book like this.”

He had examined a number of the pictures, and the lamp was burning fairly well, but a long time had elapsed since he came into that room, and he was not at all aware of it.

“Señor Carfora?” called out a voice in the doorway. “Oh, you are here. You did light the lamp. I was almost afraid you were in the dark.”

“No, I’m not,” said Ned. “I made it burn, and I’ve been looking at all sorts of things. These pictures are just wonderful.”

“Oh!” she said, “I would not be in this room in the dark for anything! I know all those things in that book, though. They are hideous! But they say that that suit of armor has the worst kind of ghost in it.”

“Maybe it has,” said Ned. “I don’t believe he can get out, anyhow. He’s just stuck in it. I’d rather wear the clothes I have on.”

“Well,” she replied, “mother sent me to find if you were here, and it is dreadfully

late—”

“Oh, yes!” interrupted Ned. “I suppose it is time for me to go to bed. I’ll go, but I mean to see all there is in this library, señorita. I won’t try to read it all. I don’t care for ghosts, but I’d like to see one.”

“I do not care for them in the daytime, either,” she told him. “But old Margarita, the Tlascalan, says that they come at night and sit here and tell stories of all the Mexican idol gods. All of them hate us, too, because we turned them out of their temples, and I hate them.”

“I’m glad they are gone, anyhow,” said Ned, but it was really time to go, and he carried some of the most brilliant of those illustrations into some of his dreams that night.



CHAPTER XI.

NED'S NEWS

“Hullo, young man! I’ve been looking for you. How are you?”

“Captain Kemp!” shouted Ned, in astonishment. “Where did you come from? Who dreamed of seeing you here?”

“Nobody, I hope,” said the captain; “but here I am, and I’ve brought you half a dozen letters. They are among my baggage. First thing, though, tell me all about yourself. Where have you been?”

They were standing in the grand plaza, not many paces from the front of the cathedral, and Ned had come there for another look at the building which had taken the place of the old-time temple of the murderous Mexican god of war. He was wildly excited for a moment, and he began to ask questions, rather than to tell anything about himself.

“Keep cool, now, my boy,” said the captain. “We don’t know who’s watching us. I didn’t have much trouble in running the Yankee blockade at Vera Cruz. I brought a cargo from New York, just as if it had been sent from Liverpool, but I’ve had to prove that I’m not an American ever since I came ashore. Spin us your yarn as we walk along.”

Ned was now ready to do so, and the captain listened to him with the most intense interest, putting in remarks every now and then.

“All this,” he said, “is precisely what your father wishes you to do, if you can do it. The way of it is this. He knows, and we all know, that this war can’t be a long one. As soon as it’s over, his concern means to go into the Mexican trade heavier than they ever did before. They think it will be worth more, and I mean to be in it myself. So it just suits him to have you here, making friends and learning all about the country you are to deal with. He says you are in the best kind of business school. There will be a fortune in it for you some day.”

“I don’t exactly see how,” remarked Ned, doubtfully.

“Well,” replied the captain, “not many young American business men know ten cents’ worth about Mexico. You’d better go right on and learn all there is to know. Keep shy of all politics, though. This war is going to break Paredes and a lot of others. After they are out of power, your own friends, like Tassara, Zuroaga, and the rest of them, may be in office, and you will be in clover. It’s a wonderfully rich country, if it were only in the right hands and had a good government. I’ll give you the letters when we get to my lodgings. Then I must make my way back to Vera Cruz, but I had to come all this distance to get my pay from the authorities. I obtained it, even now, only by promising to bring over another cargo of British gunpowder, to fight the Yankees with.”

That was a thing which Ned did not like, but he could not do anything to prevent it. He could not expect an Englishman to be an American, and it was all a matter of trade to Captain Kemp, aside from his personal friendship for Ned and his father. There was more talk of all sorts, and Ned obtained a great deal of information concerning the war and what the United States were likely to do. After he had received his precious letters, however, and had said good-by to Captain Kemp, he almost ran against people in his haste to reach the Paez mansion. He did not pause to speak to anybody on arriving, but darted up-stairs and made his way to the library. It was lighter now in the wonderful book-room, and the man in armor did not say anything as Ned came in. In a moment he was in the chair by the window, and he appeared to himself to be almost talking with the dear ones at home, from whom he had so long been separated.

“Stay where you are,” he read from his father’s long letter, and at that hour he felt as if he did not wish to stay. He dropped the letter on the table, and leaned back in his chair and looked around him. Pretty soon, however, a little slowly to begin with, but then faster and faster, the strong and fascinating spirit of adventure came once more upon him. His very blood tingled, and he sprang to his feet to all but shout to his mailed acquaintance in the corner:

“Yes, sir, I’ll stay! I’ll do anything but become a Mexican. Tell you what, before the war’s over, I mean to be in the American army, somehow. I don’t exactly see how I’m to do it, though.”

It was time to go down-stairs and report to his faithful friends, for he knew it would be very mean not to do so, and the first person he met was Señora Tassara herself.

“I have letters from home!” he exclaimed, bluntly—“newspapers, too!” and she held up both hands in astonishment, as she responded:

“Letters from the United States? How on earth did they come through the blockade, and how did they know where you are?”

“I guess they didn’t,” said Ned. “The English captain that used to command the *Goshawk* brought them. I met him at the plaza, hunting for me. He was a friend of General Zuroaga, and besides, the British consul at Vera Cruz knew I was with Colonel Tassara’s family. So, if I hadn’t met him, he would have tried to find you. My father writes that I am to stay in Mexico, and learn all about it.”

“I am glad of that,” she said. “Why, you could not get out at all just now without danger to yourself and getting all of us into trouble.”

“I wouldn’t do that for anything!” exclaimed Ned, and then he went on with his tremendous budget of miscellaneous news.

It was an exceedingly interesting heap of information, for the captain had given him both English and American journals, which were a rare treat at that time in the interior of the beleaguered Mexican republic. Señora Tassara was busy with these, when Ned and all the other news-bringers were pounced upon by a yet more eager inquirer.

“Señor Carfora!” exclaimed Felicia, her black eyes flashing curiously at him. “Where did you get them? I never before saw such big newspapers. They won’t tell us about our army, though.”

“Yes, they will,” he said, and, while she was searching the broad-faced prints for army information, he repeated for her benefit all that he had previously told her mother. Poor Señorita Felicia! She did not obtain at all what she wanted, for there were no accounts of brilliant Mexican victories. All of these must have been meanly omitted by the editors, and at last she angrily threw down a newspaper to say to him:

“Señor Carfora, I am glad you are to stay here, but you will never be anything better than a gringo, no matter how much you learn. I was up in the library this morning, and I pulled out six more books for you. You may read them all, if they will do you any good. One of them is about Spain, too. What I want to do is to travel all over Spain. It must be the most beautiful country in the world.”

Ned had noticed long ago that her eyes always grew dreamy whenever her thoughts were turned toward the peninsula which has had so wonderful a history, but he did not know that his own longings for foreign travel were very like her own in their origin when he replied:

“Well, I’d like to see Spain. I mean to some day, but I want to see England first,

and Scotland and Ireland. One of my ancestors was an Irishman, and the Crawfords were from Scotland. It isn't as hot a country as Spain is. You are a Mexican, not a Spaniard."

"So I am," she said, "and most of the Mexicans are Indians. We ought to have more Spaniards, but we can't get them. Anyhow, we don't want too many gringos to come in. They are all heretics, too."

Ned knew what she meant, and he hastened to tell her that his country contained more church people of her religion than Mexico did, and he added, to her great disgust:

"And our priests are a hundred times better than yours are. General Zuroaga says so, and so does your father. I don't like your Mexican priests. The general says he wishes they were all dead, and their places filled by good, live men from Europe and the United States."

"Felicia," interrupted her mother, "you must not talk with Señor Carfora about such things. What I wish is that we had the American common schools all over our poor, ignorant country. Oh, dear! What if this horrible war should prove to be really a blessing to us? As things look now, we are to have another revolution within a year. More men will be shot, just as they have been before, and nobody can see what the end is to be."

It was now time for the noonday luncheon, and they went to the dining-room, where Señora Paez herself was glad to see the foreign journals and to know that Ned had letters from home.

Many things appeared to be settled, as far as he was concerned. At all events, his mind was no longer to busy itself with wild plans for squirming out from among the Aztecs and finding his way to the United States. After luncheon he went up to the library again. At first it was only to read his letters over and over, and then it was a kind of relief to go to his books and try to forget everything else in going on with his queer schooling. It was unlike any that his old schoolmates at the North were having, and he caught himself wondering what kind of man it might make of him. He could not tell, but he was to have yet another lesson that day, and with it came a promise of a strange kind of vacation.

It came to him in the evening, when he was so tired of books that he preferred the company of Señorita Felicia, no matter what saucy or overpatriotic things she might see fit to say to him. They were sitting near one of the drawing-room windows, when Señora Paez came quietly behind him and touched him on the shoulder.

“Come with me,” she said. “There is a man up in Señora Tassara’s room who wishes to see you.”

“O Señor Carfora!” whispered Felicia. “Don’t say a word! I know who it is. Go right along. He is an old friend of yours.”

Up jumped Ned, and he and the señorita followed Señora Paez eagerly. Half a minute later, he felt as if he had never been so astonished before in all his life, for his hand was heartily grasped, and the voice of General Zuroaga said to him:

“Here I am, Señor Carfora. How are you?”

“Oh, but I’m glad to see you!” exclaimed Ned. “I’m all right, but isn’t it awfully dangerous for you to be here?”

“It would be, if some men knew it,” replied Zuroaga, “or if I were unwise enough to remain too long. The fact is that I can give you only a few minutes, anyhow, this evening. I must be out of the city before daylight, if I can, but I will return at the end of a week or so. Then I shall take you with me to the valley of the Tehuantepec. You must see all that region. After that I shall have a tour to make on political affairs, through several States, and you will have a chance to see two thirds of the republic before winter.”

“That is just what my father would wish me to do,” said Ned, and he proceeded to tell the general the contents of his letters and all the news he had heard from Captain Kemp.

“Very good!” said Zuroaga, at last. “I would have been glad to have seen the captain. He is a rough sort of fellow, but he can be depended on. It is evident that your father’s firm trusts him, but I believe they do not know exactly all that he has been doing. He is quite willing to make a few dollars for himself while he is working for others.”

The general was in good spirits, but more than once he spoke of the necessity he was under of keeping out of the reach of his old enemies, and among these he appeared to consider the absent Santa Anna even more dangerous, in the long run, than President Paredes himself. Señora Tassara had now joined them, but she seemed disposed to be silent, and most of the conversation was in the hands of Señora Paez. It was noticeable that she appeared to have a remarkably good knowledge of the politics of her country. Perhaps, if Ned had been a few years older and the least bit of a politician, he might have suspected the truth, that she was one of the most subtle plotters in the whole country. If she was also a deadly enemy of President Paredes, it was because she was a sister of a revolutionary

leader whom he had caused to be shot, years ago, without the formality of a court-martial. Ned saw her eyes flash and her bosom heave when she spoke of him, and after that he somehow felt safer than ever under her roof. He also saw that she and General Zuroaga were the best of friends, and that they had a long private conference of their own.

“I guess he feels at home here,” thought Ned, as he went down-stairs with Felicia and Señora Tassara, and his confidence in that state of affairs grew stronger as he walked along the central hall of the house.

“Pablo!” he exclaimed, to a man who lay sprawled out upon the floor, but the general’s Oaxaca follower made him no reply. He and three more like him, who lay near him, were sound asleep, and there was no good cause for stirring them up just then.

“They are all well armed,” said Ned to himself. “The general will be protected when he rides away in the morning. But this is the biggest kind of thing to come to me. The best *I* can do will be to take to my books till he gets back. Oh, but won’t it be grand fun to make a complete tour of the mountains and of all the Pacific coast of Mexico? He says I shall see the tallest peaks of the Cordilleras and that I may visit some of the great silver mines.”

With all that exciting expectation running through his head, it was not easy for him to get to sleep that night. When he arose in the morning, his friend, the mysterious general, had already departed.



CHAPTER XII.

A STORM COMING

“A monarchy! a monarchy! nothing but the one-man power will ever do anything for this miserable multitude of Indians, negroes, and rebellion-making Spanish aristocrats. Royalty is our only resource, and I am nearly ready to strike the required blow. I think that Don Maria Paredes would make as good an emperor as Augustin de Yturbe, and he will wear the crown of Mexico somewhat longer. But I must look out for Santa Anna. If he were to return from Cuba too soon, there would be nothing left for me but to have him shot as soon as he came ashore. Or else he might have me shot not many days afterward. His emissaries and spies are all the while working against me, but I shall catch some of them. Oh, how I would like to get hold of that venomous conspirator, Zuroaga!”

The President and practically the dictator of the nominal republic of Mexico was standing in his own luxurious chamber of the government palace in the city of Mexico. He was in the full uniform of a general officer, for he was preparing to ride out and attend a review of a division of the really large army which he had gathered to move against the American invaders at the north. He deemed himself favored by fortune, for all things had thus far appeared to operate in the direction of his high ambition. He was in possession of undisputed power, and his time for making his supremacy permanent had arrived. It was the morning of the 4th of August, 1846, and it promised to be a splendid day for a parade. He had eloquently appealed to all the patriotism in the land, and he had used his last dollar in raising the troops who were to win his victories and place him firmly upon the throne of Anahuac, the lost throne of the Montezumas. A large part of his forces had already marched, and he was now to follow with the remainder. It was high time that he should do so, for General Taylor's army was daily drawing nearer the Mexican lines at the city of Monterey. Not many minutes later, he rode away from the palace, attended by a brilliant staff, through crowded streets, where every hat went off and all the voices shouted “Viva Paredes” with every appearance of enthusiasm.

That morning Ned Crawford had not felt like going out of the city to see any review. Days had passed since the departure of General Zuroaga, but Ned's head was full of what his friend had said to him, and he did not care much in what direction his feet might take him. So, having all that responsibility to themselves, they carried him on across the city until, when he looked around him, he saw that he had almost reached the front gate of the out-of-date fort, which was known as "the citadel." It always contained a large garrison, not by any means for the defence of the capital from external foes, but for the protection of whatever might be the "government" for the time being from any sudden tumult or attempted revolution. There were officers and a squad of soldiers standing a few paces out in front of the wide-open military portal, and they all were gazing intently in the same direction. Ned also turned to look, but all that he could see was a solitary rider, upon what seemed to be an all but exhausted horse, urging the panting animal toward the citadel.

"Colonel Guerra!" exclaimed Ned. "What has brought him all the way from Vera Cruz? Has our army come? Is the city taken?"

Nothing of that kind had yet occurred, but there was a reason for the arrival of the trusted commander of the important fortress on the sea. Ned was very near him when the horse fell, and his rider sprang to the earth, covered with dust and evidently in great excitement. The officers at the gate rushed forward toward him, and one of them loudly demanded:

"Colonel Guerra! What is it? Has he come? All is ready here!"

Guerra himself had not fallen with his horse. Off came his hat and his sword flashed from the sheath, while his voice rang out clearly, fiercely:

"Viva Santa Anna! The entire force at Vera Cruz and the garrison of San Juan de Ulua have pronounced for him. He is now on his way home from Havana. We shall soon have with us the one hero who can save us from the American invaders and from the tyranny of King Paredes!"

Possibly, this had been the day calculated upon for the arrival of precisely such tidings. It might even have been that all these officers and soldiers were gathered there, prepared both to hear and to act, while President Paredes should be temporarily absent from the city. At all events, they were swinging their hats, drawing their swords, and their enthusiastic acclamations for the returning general were at once followed by a rush back into the citadel and a hasty closing of its gates. When that was done, and when the rest of the garrison had joined in "pronouncing" for Santa Anna, the military control of the Mexican capital had

passed out of the hands of President Paredes.

It was startling news, therefore, which was brought out to him by a friendly messenger, as he rode so proudly on in front of his shouting soldiery, believing that they were all his own and ready to do his bidding. The grand review ended instantaneously, and he came galloping back in all haste to look out for his tumbling crown. He came with his brilliant staff and a mixed crowd of friends and unfriends, only to discover that crown and throne and scepter had disappeared like the changing figures in a kaleidoscope. He could not even order anybody to be arrested and shot, for the Vice-President, General Bravo, and all the members of the national Congress, then in session, were thoughtfully saying to themselves, if not to each other:

“Santa Anna is coming! The seacoast forces are already his. He will be right here in a few days. We must be careful what we say or do just now. We do not even know what these new troops will say to this thing.”

They were not to remain long in ignorance upon that point. As the news went out from regiment to regiment that afternoon, the undisciplined, ragged mobs of raw recruits began to shout for Santa Anna. Perhaps many of them had previously served under the one-legged veteran of the old French and Texan wars and at least half a dozen revolutions.

Ned Crawford turned and hurried homeward, as soon as he felt sure that his head was still upon his shoulders and that he had heard his remarkable news correctly. His eyes were busy, too, and he heard what men were saying to each other. Excited shouts were carrying the errand of Colonel Guerra swiftly over the city, and everywhere it was discovering hearers as ready for it as had been the officers at the gate. He may have been looking a little pale when he entered the parlor of the Paez mansion, for Señora Paez at once arose and came to meet him, inquiring, anxiously:

“Señor Carfora, what is the matter? Has anything happened?”

“Santa Anna—” began Ned, but she stepped quickly forward and put her hand upon his mouth, whispering sharply:

“Speak lower! we do not know who may hear you. What is it?”

She took away her hand, and Ned also whispered, as he hurriedly told her what he had seen and heard at the citadel. As he did so, her face and that of Señora Tassara, standing by her, grew much paler than his own.

“My dear Mercedes,” said Señora Tassara to her cousin, “this is all as my

husband and General Zuroaga predicted. But the tiger is not here yet, and by the time he arrives they will be beyond his reach. It takes some days to travel from Vera Cruz to the city of Mexico. Señor Carfora, you are in no danger. Neither are we.”

“No!” angrily exclaimed Señora Paez. “Not for to-day nor to-morrow, perhaps, but down goes the Paredes monarchy! Ah, me! There is a terrible time coming for poor Mexico. Who shall tell what the end of it all will be!”

“Nobody!” said Señora Tassara, sadly, but Felicia whispered to Ned:

“Señor Carfora, the gringos could not do us much harm if their army had a revolution springing up behind it at home. I wish they had one.”

“I don’t,” replied Ned. “If we did have one, though, it would be bigger than this is. I don’t believe we have any Santa Annas to make one, anyhow. There isn’t a man in all America that would think of being king. I guess that if we found one we’d hang him.”

“Well,” said Felicia, “President Paredes would like to hang a great many people, or shoot them, but I hope he can’t. What are you going to do?”

“He does not know, dear,” interposed her mother. “We must stop talking about this thing now. Some of our friends are coming in. It is better to let them tell us what has happened, just as if we had not heard it at all. Be very careful what you say.”

Perhaps everybody in the Paez mansion was accustomed to that kind of caution, and when a number of excited women neighbors poured into the parlor to bring the great tidings and discuss the situation, they found no one in it who was to be surprised into saying a word which might not have been heard without offence by the friends of either Paredes or Santa Anna.

Great changes in public affairs may produce changes in the plans of individuals, and it was not remarkable if General Zuroaga’s intended week of absence should be somewhat shortened. It may have ended at the moment when the garrison of the citadel “pronounced” in favor of the tyrant in exile and against the tyrant in nominal power. Ned, however, had a small surprise waiting for him. It actually arrived not a great while after luncheon, when he was feeling as if he would like to sit down by himself and think over this very curious piece of political business. He went up into the library, as the safest kind of thinking-place, and, hardly had he opened the door, before he discovered that it had another tenant besides the man in armor in the corner.

“General Zuroaga!” he exclaimed, in astonishment.

“Not quite so loud, please,” quietly responded the general. “Yes, Carfora, here I am. Here I must hide, too, for a few hours. The camp is no longer a safe place for me, even in the disguise I was wearing. There is really nothing more to keep me there now. I do not need to run any further risks on account of Paredes and his tin monarchy. He is already utterly ruined. I must get out of the reach of Santa Anna’s lieutenants, however, if I do not wish to be locked up. You and I can slip away all the more easily while this tumult is going on, and by noon tomorrow we may be well out on the road to Oaxaca. Will you be ready?”

“It’s just what I was wishing for!” exclaimed Ned. “I know enough to see that it isn’t a good thing for Señora Paez to have me in the house. She has troubles enough of her own. So has Señora Tassara. If an enemy of theirs found that they had a gringo here, it would make things worse for them. They’ve been real good to me, but I want to go with you.”

“Right!” said the general. “And there will be sharp eyes on the watch while Santa Anna’s friends are getting ready for his arrival. He may appear to come peaceably, but do I not know him? He never yet forgot or forgave an enemy. He will come back to settle up all old accounts.”

“Well,” said Ned, “we need not be here to be shot at. I packed up, all ready, days ago. But, general, I guess I can ride better than I did the other time. I don’t need to have so fat a pony.”

“My dear fellow,” replied the general, soberly, “you will be mounted on a horse that can make a swift run, if necessary. I am glad that you will know what to do with him.”

In other things than horsemanship, Ned had made wonderful advances since he came ashore out of the norther, in the Bay of Vera Cruz. It was as if he had grown a number of years older in becoming so much more experienced. Moreover, he knew so much already about the plots and counterplots which were going on that it was of little use to keep some things from him. He was, in fact, almost full-grown as a Mexican conspirator, and he was sure to do whatever he could against either a monarchy under Paredes or a dictatorship under Santa Anna. It was a full hour later when they were joined by Señora Paez. She came on a special errand, for almost her first remark was:

“General, there will be danger from robbers of all sorts. I shall not dare to keep a great deal of money in the house. I have not much, either, that I can spare for yourself, but you must take this and spend it to beat them. What’s more, I want

you to take my jewels with you and hide them somewhere in the mountains. Señora Tassara's are already in a safe place. I hope Señor Carfora has enough."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Ned. "I have hardly spent anything, and Captain Kemp gave me another hundred, from father. I almost wish it were all in bank-bills, though, for gold and silver are heavy things to carry."

"Well, as to that," laughed the general, "I do not know what kind of paper money we could make in Mexico, just now. That sort of thing will do only under a pretty solid government. But then, a dollar will go further in this country than it will in the United States. It looks as if horses were worth only five dollars a head, and men about half as much. There are too many that seem ready to sell themselves for nothing."

He said that wearily and sadly, for he was at heart a true patriot and he believed himself to be doing his best to bring a better state of things out of all this anarchy and confusion.

Señora Paez left the room. Ned and the general lay down on the floor to sleep for awhile, and it was just when the first dim light of dawn was beginning to creep in at the narrow window that Pablo came to awaken them. He put his finger on his lip as he did so, and they understood that there might be danger close at hand. It was not until they were out of the house, however, leaving it silently by way of the back door, that he ventured to whisper:

"General, there is a guard already stationed in front. President Paredes is making his last effort to stop his downfall, and he has heard that you are in the city. All your friends will be closely watched, to-day."

"I wanted to say good-by to them," began Ned, but here they were.

"General, this is the jewel case," said Señora Paez, as she handed him a small rosewood box. "Here is the money. Now, Señor Carfora, be a brave fellow. Learn all you can of our poor country. I hope to see you again."

Señora Tassara was saying something in a very low voice to Zuroaga, when Felicia turned to Ned and said to him:

"You are a wicked gringo, but I like you pretty well and I do hope you will get away safely. Take good care of yourself."

"Well, señorita," replied Ned, "I will do that, and so must you. I'd rather be out among the mountains than here in the city. You'd be safer there, too. Anyhow, you are not a Mexican. You are a Spaniard and you would rather be in Spain."

“Maybe I would, just now,” she told him with a very melancholy look in her brilliant black eyes. “But I do love Mexico, and I do know enough to wish we were not to have any more revolutions. That is, not any more after Paredes and Santa Anna and some other men have been killed.”

“That is the way they all feel about each other,” broke in the general. “Come, Carfora. We have horses waiting for us on one of the back streets.”

There were a few hasty good-bys then. The three fugitives passed out of sight among the shadows of the buildings, and the women returned to the house to wait for the downfall of King or Emperor Paredes.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE REVOLUTION

There had been a curious impression upon the minds of some American statesmen that General Santa Anna would return to his native country with a purpose of making peace. It was for that reason that he was permitted to pass unhindered through the blockading fleet in the Gulf, but he had no such idea in his cunning and ambitious head. His real objects in returning were to take vengeance upon his enemies, to restore himself to the supreme power which he had lost by the revolution of 1840, and, for that purpose, to prosecute the war with the United States with all possible vigor. His personal feeling in that matter might have been understood by recalling the fact that his downfall had resulted from his severe defeat in attempting to conquer the earlier American settlers in Texas. On his arrival in Vera Cruz, on the 16th of August, a proclamation which he at once issued, denouncing alike the monarchical ambition of President Paredes and the wicked invasion of Mexico by the armies of the northern republic, opened the eyes of all concerned. When, however, with all the troops at his disposal, he slowly approached the city of Mexico, he put on a cloak of patriotic moderation. The existing government, consisting of Vice-President Bravo and the Congress, had succeeded in imprisoning and then in banishing their would-be emperor, Paredes. They now, as the returning exile drew near the capital, offered him a temporary dictatorship of the disordered national affairs, but he modestly replied that he did not desire so much. He had returned, he said, as a pure and unselfish patriot, only to serve his country. All that he would be willing to accept would be the absolute control of the army, as if any power worth speaking of might be supposed to remain outside of his bayonets and lances. This small request was readily granted, and from that hour onward he was, for the time being, more completely the dictator of Mexico than he or any other man had ever been before. He entered the city and assumed command on the 15th of September. Only a week later, on the 22d and 23d, the fall and surrender of Monterey strengthened his hold upon the people, for it made them feel more keenly than ever their need of a good general. He certainly did act with great energy, for, as early as the 8th of October, he had advanced with his army

as far north as San Luis Potosi, and was straining every possible resource to prepare for his coming conflict with General Taylor. It is said that he even mortgaged his private property to obtain the money required for his military supplies.

During all these weeks and months there had been stormy times in the Congress of the United States, and the war of the politicians was by no means ended. General Winfield Scott, however, had been left at the head of the army, with authority to invade Mexico in any manner he might choose, but with about half as many troops as he declared to be necessary for such an undertaking. It was late in December, 1846, when General Scott in person arrived at the mouth of the Rio Grande and assumed the direction of military operations. As he did not propose any considerable further advance into Mexico, except by way of Vera Cruz, he decided to take his best troops with him to that field of the coming campaign. This meant that General Taylor was to lose nearly all his regular army men and officers, their places being filled, as to numbers, by new regiments of exceedingly brave but untried volunteers. He was therefore left to face, with raw troops, any intended onslaught of Santa Anna, who would bring with him several times as large a force, of all sorts, most of it composed of recent levies, imperfectly organized and disciplined. It remained to be seen which of the two kinds of men, the Mexican Indian or the American rifleman, could be the more rapidly changed into a trained soldier, fitted for a hard day's fight.

Throughout all the interior of Mexico there was a fair degree of peace and order, although robber bands were reported here and there. No signs of a coming revolution appear to have been discovered, for nearly all the great leaders who might have set one on foot were either banished or shot, or were serving in Santa Anna's army, half hoping for his defeat and destruction that he might be taken out of the way of their ambitions.

There came one cloudless day near the end of February, when a kind of cool and beautiful summer seemed to rule over all the fair land of Anahuac, except among the snow-clad Cordilleras. There were roses in bloom in many gardens of the city of Mexico, and all things in and about the national capital wore an exceedingly peaceful air. The very guards at the citadel were pacing listlessly up and down, as if they were lazily aware that all evil-minded gringos and other foes of their comfort were several hundreds of miles away. At the city gates there were no sentries of any kind, and a young fellow who rode in on a spirited pony, at an hour or so after noon, was not questioned by anybody as to where he came from or what he was doing there. He cast sharp glances in all directions as he

rode onward, but he seemed to have no need for inquiring his way. He went steadily, moreover, as if he might have business rather than pleasure on his hands, and he did not pull in his pony until he had reached the front of the Paez mansion. There was no one on the piazza but a short, fat old woman, in a blazing red cotton gown, who sprang to her feet almost as if he had frightened her, exclaiming:

“Señor Carfora!”

“Dola!” he responded, sharply. “Don’t say another loud word! Are either of the señoras at home? I must see them right away.”

“Oh, yes!” she said, turning to run into the house. “I will tell them. They are in the parlor, and the señorita.”

Down sprang Ned and hitched his pony to a post, but then he hurried through the front door as quickly as Dola herself had done. Perhaps it was well that he should get in without being recognized by too many eyes. He did not have to actually get into the parlor before he was welcomed, for a light form sprang out into the hall, and Felicia herself shouted, eagerly:

“Oh, Señor Carfora! Are you here? This is wonderful!”

“Señorita,” he interrupted her, “I have letters for your mother and Señora Paez. Where are they?”

“They are right here,” she said, “but we have letters, too. All the flags in the city are out and they are firing salutes of rejoicing.”

“I saw the flags,” he said, “and I heard some firing, but what on earth are they rejoicing over? Is there any news?”

The two grown-up women were standing behind her, with faces in which there was no joy whatever when Felicia exultingly told him:

“Why, have not you heard? General Santa Anna has beaten your gringo army all to pieces. The United States fleet is coming to Vera Cruz with another army, and the American soldiers will not dare to come on shore. All they can do will be to sit there in their ships and look at the city.”

“Come in, Señor Carfora,” said Señora Paez. “I cannot tell you how glad we are to see you. Yes, we have very important letters. I may suppose that yours are from the general. Please let me have them.”

“Do, Señor Carfora!” said Señora Tassara. “I cannot wait a moment. We will

retire to read them, and, while we are gone, Felicia may tell you all the news from the great battle at the north.”

“Yes, so I will,” she exclaimed. “And I want him to tell me all about the places he has been in, and what he has been doing.”

In a moment more they two were alone in the parlor, and she was repeating to him the substance of Santa Anna’s report of the manner in which, at the hard-fought battle of Angostura, or Buena Vista, on the 22d of February, he had shattered the American army under General Taylor. He had, he said, effectively prevented its further advance into Mexico, and there was really a strong appearance of truth in his way of presenting the consequences of the battle, for the American army seemed to have retreated. Horse after horse had been ridden to death in taking such great tidings to the city of Mexico, and, for the hour, at least, the great Mexican commander was more firmly fixed in supreme power than ever.

Of course, the triumphant bulletin did not make any mention of the fact that General Taylor had had no intention of advancing any further, being under express orders from General Scott not to do so, and that Santa Anna’s well-planned and at first nearly successful attempt to crush the northern invaders had really proved a failure. Ned Crawford listened to Felicia’s enthusiastic account of the battle with a curious question in his mind which he was too polite to utter.

“Why,” he thought, “if Santa Anna was so completely victorious, did he not make General Taylor surrender?”

There was no one to inform Ned that the Mexican commander had invited General Taylor to do so before the fight was half over, and that the stubborn old American had unkindly refused the invitation. At this moment, however, the señorita’s tongue began to busy itself with quite another matter. The United States fleet, under Commodore Connor, had, indeed, begun to arrive in front of Vera Cruz on the 18th of February, with a vast convoy of transport ships under its protection, having on board the army of General Scott. Neither Ned nor the señorita was aware, however, how many important questions have to be answered before so many military passengers might undertake to land, with all their baggage, within possible reach of the artillery of an enemy. Felicia, for her part, was positive that they all were too badly scared by the Castle of San Juan de Ulua and by the bad news from Buena Vista to so much as try to make a landing.

“General Santa Anna himself is now marching down to meet them,” she told

him, "with his whole victorious army, and he will crush them as fast as they can get out of their ships."

Owing to the grand reports from their army, this was precisely the idea which was forming in the minds of all the people of Mexico.

"Oh, Señorita Felicia!" said Ned, as if he were quite willing to change the subject. "I've had a wonderful time. I've been travelling, travelling, travelling, everywhere with the general."

"Tell me all about it!" she commanded him. "I want to know. It seems to me as if I had been shut up here and had not seen anybody."

"Well, I can't tell it all just now," he said, "but when we left here we hurried all the way to Oaxaca. Then we stayed there awhile, among his own people, and nobody gave us any trouble. No, I mustn't forget one thing, though. A band of those mountain robbers came one night, and we had an awful fight with them—"

"Did you kill any of them?" she asked, hastily. "They all ought to be killed. They are ready to murder anybody else."

"Well," said Ned, "we beat them, and ten of them were shot. I was firing away all the while, but I don't know if I hit any of them. It was too dark to tell. The rest of them got away. But I've hunted deer, and I killed a good many of them. I shot a lynx, too, and a lot of other game. There's the best kind of fishing on the general's estates. I like fishing. Then we went south, to the Yucatan line, and I saw some queer old ruins. After that, the general's business took him away up north of Oaxaca, and I went with him, and I saw half the States of Mexico before we finished the trip. I've seen the silver mines and Popocatepetl and Istaccihuatl, and I don't care to ever see any higher mountains than they are."

"I have seen Popocatepetl," she said, "and it almost made me have the headache. They say it is full of sulphur, to make gunpowder with."

Before she could tell anything more about the possible uses of the tall, old volcano, her mother reëntered the parlor.

"Señor Carfora," she said, "Felicia will have to give you up. Here are some letters for you that came while you were absent. You had better read them now, for I cannot say how long it will be best for you to remain here. Step this way a moment, if you will."

Ned followed her, all in a sudden whirl of excitement at the unexpected prospect of hearing from his far-away home, but she still held his promised envelopes in

her own hand, while she said to him:

“My dear young friend, you know that Colonel Tassara is with his regiment. He was in the thickest of the fight at Angostura. He was wounded, but he hopes to recover soon, and we have not told Felicia. He writes me that it was really a lost battle, and that the fall of Santa Anna is surely coming, but that nobody can foretell what course he will take, cruel or otherwise, when he and his army return to fight with General Scott, on the road from the sea to this city. Go and read your letters, and then I will see you again.”

Felicia had to give him up, and away he went. The best place to read home letters seemed to him to be the library, and when he entered the dim old room, he half imagined that the man in armor nodded at him, and tried to say how d’ye do. After that, Ned almost forgot that he was in Mexico, while he devoured the news from home. It was a grand thing to learn, too, that the letters which he had feared would never get to New York had all been carefully delivered under the kindly care of the British consular system. He had never before felt quite so high an admiration for the British Empire as he acquired just then.

“I’ll do something good for the next Englishman I get hold of!” he declared, with energy, and then he sat still and stared around the room.

“It was just as well,” he said, “that I did not stay here and try to read all those books. I read enough about the ancient times, too. What father wanted me to know about is Mexico as it is now, and I’ve seen a great deal of it. What I want to see next is our army, and I’m going to find my way to Vera Cruz. Then I’ll get on board an American ship, somehow or other. I wonder if the Mexican officers will manage to arrest me between this and the seacoast.”

That was a point worth thinking of, for General Zuroaga had told him very plainly that some ignorant or overhasty patriot might easily find an excuse for calling him a spy, and having him shot at a moment’s notice. He did not have a long time to consider that matter, however, for the door opened, and the two señoras walked in, with clouded faces.

“Señor Carfora,” said Señora Tassara, “you will have no time to lose. General Zuroaga is right, and his letter must go at once to his friend, General Morales, who is now in command at Vera Cruz. So must one from my own husband. It is important, for the best interest of Mexico, that Morales should know the whole truth. That is, he must be informed that he cannot expect any help from Santa Anna’s beaten army. Are you too tired to set out immediately? I can give you a fresh horse.”

“I’ll go!” exclaimed Ned. “My pony isn’t tired. He is a first-rate traveller. I want something to eat, though, and I wish I knew whether or not the army patrols will stop me on the way.”

“I can take care of that,” said Señora Paez. “I have had to send special messengers before this. You will be able to show a government pass.”

As she spoke, she held out to him a sealed envelope. Where or how she had obtained such a thing, she did not explain, but it was an official envelope, and on it was a printed lettering which might have been translated: “Government Business. From the Headquarters of the Army. Despatches from His Excellency, General Bravo.” In her own handwriting was added, moreover: “To His Excellency, General Morales, Vera Cruz.”

“There!” she said. “If it becomes necessary, show that, and any man hindering you will be promptly punished. Do not show it if you can help it, however, for there are many kinds of army officers nowadays.”

“I have seen some of them,” said Ned, but what he was really thinking about most seriously, at that moment, was the supper he had asked for, and he was well pleased to be led down into the dining-room.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE DESPATCH-BEARER

There are hills to climb, on the crooked highway from the city of Mexico to the sea, but the greater part of the distance is down, down, down, for its highest point is over seven thousand feet above tidewater. It was in a pass leading over this ridge that Ned Crawford looked around him, up and down and ahead, and exclaimed, as well as his chattering teeth would let him:

“Well, I’m glad there are no snow-drifts in my way. I suppose the army men look out for that. But don’t I wish I had an overcoat and some furs! Old Mount Orizaba can get up a first-class winter on his own account.”

It looked like it, and this part of his experiences had not been at all provided for. The Cordillera was very white, and its garment of snow and ice went down nearer to its feet than when Ned had first seen it. Moreover, the pony which had travelled so well when he cantered away from the Paez mansion, some days before, was showing signs of exhaustion, and it was manifestly well for him that he was now going down instead of climbing. So it was for Ned, and his uppermost wish was to hurry down into a more summery climate. He was still doing so, to the best of his shivering ability, two hours later, when a loud summons to halt sounded in the road before him.

“Whoop!” shouted Ned, and the soldier, who had presented his bayonet so sternly, was greeted as if he had been an old friend. Rapid explanations followed, in Spanish, but before they were completed an officer had made his appearance from a small but comfortable guard-house at the side of the road. He was only a lieutenant, and he appeared to gaze with more than a little awe upon the superscription of Ned’s precious government envelope. He turned it over and over, and almost smelled of it.

“Señor Carfora!” he exclaimed. “This must not be delayed for a moment! You must ride on, if it kills you. Come in and get a dinner. We will give you a fresh mount. Tell us the news while you are eating.”

“I will do so,” replied Ned, with a tremendous effort to stop shivering and look

important. "But I will say that I was told that any man interfering with that despatch would be shot in one hour."

"Beyond a doubt!" declared the lieutenant, with emphasis. "It would serve him right, too. This is no time for trifling with orders."

A hearty dinner by a blazing log fire made the despatch-bearer feel a great deal better, but at the end of it no mercy was shown him. His fresh pony was ready, and he was ordered to mount and ride. He did so without offering any objections, and he carried with him the lieutenant's written pass, for possible use further down the mountain. It was a good thing to have, but he was called upon to present it only twice, receiving in each instance positive instructions to push onward if it killed him and his new pony.

"I can't stand this much longer!" he exclaimed, as the sun was setting. "I'm almost beyond the snow-line. I think I'll disobey the guards a little, but I'll keep on obeying Señora Paez. She told me on no account to try to sleep in a large town or village. They are all military posts, and too many questions might be asked. I'll try a hacienda, just as I did on the other side of the mountains. Everybody wants to hear the news."

Everybody in that region was also genuinely hospitable, and it was barely dusk when Ned rode in at the gate of a substantial farmhouse, to be welcomed with the utmost cordiality. Men, women, and children crowded eagerly around him, to hear all he could tell them of the great battle and victory of Angostura, and of the current doings in the capital city. A warm bed was given him, and after a long sleep he awoke somewhat better fitted for whatever else might be before him. Once more he pushed on, but before noon of that day all signs of winter were far behind him. He had passed through more than one considerable village, but so had other travellers, coming or going, who bore about them no appearance of being worth the attention of the military authorities. Another and another night in wayside farmhouses compelled him to admire more than ever the simple ways and the sincere patriotism of the Mexican farmers. All the while, however, his anxieties concerning the result of his perilous errand were growing upon him, and he was obediently using up his army pony. It was the forenoon of the third day before he was aroused from his other thoughts into anything like enthusiasm for the exceeding beauty of the luxuriant vegetation on either side of the road.

"Leaves! flowers! grass!" he exclaimed. "Oh, how beautiful they all are! Summer here, and winter only a few miles away. Hurrah for the *tierra caliente*! It's a bully place at this time o' year."

At all events, it was a pleasanter place to be in than any icy pass among the Mexican sierras, and his thoughts were at liberty to come back to his present situation. He was not now upon the Cordoba road, by which he had left the gulf coast ever so long ago. This was the highway from the city of Jalapa. He was cantering along only a short distance from the seashore, and he was within a few miles of the gates of Vera Cruz.

“I remember them,” he was thinking. “I never had a good chance for a look at the walls, but I suppose I shall have one pretty soon. I wonder if they are thick enough to stop a cannon-ball. Captain Kemp told me they were built all around the city, but he didn’t say how high they are.”

Walls there were, indeed, but their masonry was not the next thing that was to be of especial interest to Ned. There is no kind of stonework which can compare, under certain circumstances, with the point of a lance or the edge of a machete, and the bearers of a number of such weapons were to be seen coming toward him at a gallop.

“It looks like a whole company of lancers!” exclaimed the anxious despatch-carrier. “Now I’m in for it! Everybody I met on the way was civil enough, but these may be a different kind of fellows.”

Whether they were or not, the whole force under General Morales was in a state of unusual excitement that day, for the report was going around that the American army brought by Commodore Connor’s fleet was rapidly coming ashore near Sacrificios Island, only three miles south of Vera Cruz. If Ned himself had been aware of it, he might have changed his plans and ridden right in among his own friends. As it was, however, in less than three minutes he had cantered in among a swarm of angry Mexicans and glittering spear-points. Their state of discipline was witnessed to by the fact that the captain in nominal command of them had some difficulty in obtaining from them permission to ask his own questions of this newcomer. When at last he succeeded in doing so, without first having his captive run through by a lance, it shortly looked as if Ned had been learning diplomacy, if not strategy also, during his varied and wonderful Mexican experiences.

“Señor Captain,” he said, quite coolly, pulling out his official envelope, “I am ordered to deliver this to General Morales in person. I am commanded to answer no questions. Any man daring to hinder the delivery of my despatches will be shot. They are important.”

“Where are you from?” came savagely back.

Ned only pointed at the envelope and shut his mouth hard.

“What is your errand to General Morales?”

Ned’s brain was working with tremendous rapidity just then, and one of his swift thoughts got away from him.

“Captain,” he said, “you had better ask that question of his Excellency, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.”

The officer’s swarthy face turned pale for a moment, and all the men who had heard Ned’s reply broke out into loud vivas for their great commander-in-chief, the illustrious victor of the bloody field of Angostura. The entire company became at once the zealous guardians of that sacred envelope, which so few of them could have read, and the captain was forced to restrain his curiosity, and allow Ned to continue, keeping his mouth closed. For all that, however, the despatch-bearer was still a prisoner, and was to be conducted as such to the presence of General Morales. The lancers turned their horses toward the city, and the gates were reached as quickly as Ned’s tired pony could carry him. At this barrier, of course, there were other guards and officers of higher rank, and there might have been further delay, or even danger, if Ned had not promptly exhibited the magical envelope, while the captain himself repeated his own words for him, and curtly added:

“His Excellency, General Bravo! Viva Morales! Viva Santa Anna!”

That last word sealed the matter. The envelope was returned to its bearer, and he was conducted onward under the care of two colonels, several other officials, and a half-dozen of watchful lancers.

Ned shortly understood that General Morales had returned from the Castle of San Juan de Ulua to go out for a telescopic inspection of the American landing, and was now at his headquarters in the city.

“I guess I shall feel better after I get to him,” thought Ned, as he and his excited party halted before the headquarters building. “I may get stuck with a machete yet, if I have to wait long out here.”

He was neither to be delayed nor slaughtered, and in a few minutes more he was ushered into a handsomely furnished chamber, where the general was sitting, apparently entirely calm and self-possessed, surrounded by his staff and a throng of other important men, soldiers and civilians. He did not say a word while a colonel of the escort was delivering his report concerning this messenger, but he was all the while sharply scrutinizing Ned from head to foot.

“Gentlemen,” he then said to those around him, “this may be something of extraordinary importance. Come with me, Carfora!”

He arose from his chair, and Ned silently followed him into another room. As soon as they were shut in here by themselves, he turned fiercely upon the young despatch-bearer and demanded:

“Have you said anything to those men? Have you told a living soul what you know about these tidings?”

“No, general, not one word to anybody,” replied Ned, bravely, but there was a strange thrill at his heart, for he saw that he was in deadly peril.

Morales tore open the envelope, and found in it several official-looking papers which it did not take him long to read; but now Ned took out from an inner pocket three others which were much smaller. The general’s face flushed fiery red, and his eyes were flashing with excitement while he swiftly examined them.

“Carfora,” he exclaimed, “you are too young to have been sent on such an errand as this. General Bravo! Colonel Tassara! Señora Paez! General Zuroaga! Ah, Santa Maria! And our brave army was shattered at Angostura, after all. This is dreadful news! You shall die before I will allow you to spread it among my men!”

“I shall not do so,” said Ned, with his heart in his throat “But may I not tell them that General Santa Anna has checked the invasion at the north? Ought I not to say that he is now marching down to defend the capital, and that he is going to strengthen your army at Vera Cruz? Why, general, that is just what he is going to do.”

The general was silent for a moment, and appeared to be lost in thought.

“No, not now!” he then whispered between his set teeth, but Ned heard him. “If I shot him, it would make enemies of Zuroaga and the Tassaras and Señora Paez. Bravo would not care. Carfora,” he added, aloud, “you may go. You may talk as you have said, but you must not leave the city, and, if you say one word about our being defeated at Buena Vista, I will have you shot. There are too many desertions already, and I can’t afford to have my whole army stampeded by bad news.”

There was, therefore, an imperative military reason for keeping secret the truth concerning Santa Anna’s great victory, and Ned responded:

“General Morales, everybody will be asking me questions. I guess I know

exactly what you wish me to tell. I was ordered to keep my mouth shut.”

“See that you do!” growled the general. “Or a musket-ball will shut it for you. Go out now. If I want you, I shall be able to find you.”

They walked out of the inner room together, and they found the main office crowded, as if many more had hurried in to hear the expected news.

“Gentlemen! Fellow citizens!” shouted the general, enthusiastically, as he waved his packet of despatches over his head. “This is glorious! Our illustrious commander-in-chief, after having given such a severe lesson to our barbarous invaders at the north, is marching with his entire force to our own assistance. He will soon crush our assailants on the seacoast as he has the gringo mob under Taylor!”

A storm of cheers responded, and the entire crowd seemed disposed to exchange hugs and handshakes, while he turned to an officer at a table.

“By the Way, major,” he said, “write an order for quarters and rations for General Bravo’s messenger, Carfora. I may need him again in a few days. Keep track of him. He is a civilian, but he is a trusted agent of certain parties whom you may know.”

The major began to write something, and, as he did so, Ned believed that he heard him muttering words which sounded like: “Humph! Messenger of his Excellency, Santa Anna! We will take good care of him!”

Then the general carelessly signed the paper, which the major prepared for him, and Ned walked quietly out into the open air. Once there, however, he took a hasty look at his “order for rations,” and discovered that with it he had now in his possession a full headquarters army pass, which permitted him to come and go anywhere, through the gates and all the lines, without hindrance from anybody. He was established as an accepted and even honored confidential despatch-bearer of the commander-in-chief of all the armies of Mexico. He was not now to get entirely away without difficulty, however, for the whole building had been full of men who were eager for all the news he could give them, and they had followed him. They seized upon him as if he had been the last edition of an evening newspaper, containing the reports of all the past and with, probably, the news for to-morrow morning also somewhere inside of him. He did not get away from them for some time, and when he did so, at last, he was sure of being recognized by a considerable number of patriotic Mexicans, if they ever should meet him again. That might make him safer, although he was no longer in any immediate danger. Moreover, although he was not in uniform, the cut and

quality of his clothing informed every person he met that he belonged to the higher orders, while the machete at his side and the pistols in his belt appeared to indicate that he was in some way connected with the army.

“I know what I want to do next,” he was thinking. “My pony and my satchel are at the headquarters stables. I can get them whenever I want them. I must go to the Tassara place. I can find it. Then I must manage to put them there, so that I won’t have to show myself at the headquarters unless I’m sent for.”

He had no difficulty in finding the Tassara homestead, and there was no observer anywhere near him when he stood in front of the dwelling which had been his first hospitable refuge in Mexico. It had now, of course, a lonely and shut-up look, and there was no getting in at the front door, for much knocking failed to bring a door-keeper. Giving that up, therefore, he made his way around to the rear, through the unoccupied stables.

“There is hay enough here for my pony,” he remarked, “but I had half expected that the house would be turned into quarters for troops.”

He may have overlooked the fact that the Tassaras were friends of General Morales, and that their house was under his protection. If it were supposed to be so, nevertheless, he had cause to forget it again when he came to the back door, for it stood wide open, with an appearance of having been unlocked with a hammer.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed. “I wonder if there is anybody in there now?”

The thought somehow made him draw his machete, and he went on into the house as if he were looking for a fight. The dining-room was entered first, and it was utterly empty. Not so much as a chair was left, although its owners had certainly not taken any furniture away with them in their hasty escape by night, with Ned and Zuroaga. It looked a little queer, to say the least, and, as he went on from room to room, he found precisely such a state of things everywhere else.

“I declare!” said Ned. “Either their friends or some robbers have cleaned this place of all there was in it that was worth stealing. Not so much as a bed left. I’ll go and take a look at my old room. It was a cubby-hole of a place, but it would do first-rate for me now.”

Perhaps it was so small and so out of the way that Ned had an agreeable surprise ready for him when he reached it, for there still hung his hammock, and nothing else in the room had been molested.

“Hurrah!” he shouted. “I’ve looked into every other room in the house, and this

is the only one they didn't finish. I guess I'll camp here to-night, after I've been out to get something to eat."

It was true that he had orders for army rations, if he had known where to find them, but he was also able to purchase whatever he might need, and he preferred to do so. At the same time, he had a clear understanding that, if he expected to ever see the United States again, he had better not show a great deal of cash in the city of Vera Cruz just now.

"There are plenty of fellows here," he remarked, "who would cut my throat for a silver dollar, let alone a gold piece."

He sheathed his machete peaceably, and went out by the back door, determining to let as few people as possible suspect that the Tassara mansion contained a boarder,—or it was more nearly correct to say lodger. This was a wise decision to make, but he was not to hunt far for his supplies that evening. Hardly had he gone a hundred paces from the Tassara place before he was unceremoniously halted, and it was not by a lancer this time. Before him, blocking his way, stood a very fat and apparently much astonished woman.

"Madre de Dios!" she loudly exclaimed. "Señor Carfora! Santa Maria! Santa Catarina! San Jago! Diablos! Where did you come from?"

Ned had never before heard himself called by all those pet names, but he knew at a glance that this was no other than Anita, formerly the cook of Señora Tassara, and believed to be a devoted friend of the family.

"Anita!" he exclaimed. "I'll tell you!" and he proceeded to do so, to her great gratification, for she was as hungry for news as he was for his rations.

"You come to my house," she said, "and I will give you something fit to eat, and that is a good deal to say in Vera Cruz in these days. Santa Maria! How these ragged banditti do devour everything. We are to be devoured by the accursed gringos, too, and we must eat while we can."

Her idea, as a good cook, appeared to be that, if several thousands of people were about to be shut up and starved to death, they ought all to feed themselves as liberally as possible before the actual process of starvation should begin. Ned felt a strong sympathy with that notion, as he walked along with her, and he was ready to tell her anything but the perilous truth concerning the lost battle at the north. As to that, it was quite enough to assure her and half a dozen other patriotic Mexican women, who were at her humble home when he went in, that the great and successful General Santa Anna was hastening to rescue them from

the American barbarians who were at this hour getting ashore with a great deal of difficulty through the surf, which was wetting every uniform among them. If anything at all resembling a “norther” had been blowing, the landing would necessarily have been postponed until it had blown over. Among other things, however, Ned told Anita of his visit to the house, and when the very good supper was ended, she led him to a room which must have contained at least a third of all the space under her roof. It was anything but hollow space now, for it was heaped to the ceiling with furniture, beds, bedding, and a miscellaneous collection of other household goods.

“There, Señor Carfora!” she said, exultingly. “The Puebla robbers did get some things, but we saved all these. They were not ready to carry off heavy stuff, and when they came again, with a cart, at night, it had all been cared for. The señora has not lost so much, after all.”

“You are a faithful woman!” said Ned, admiringly. “I’m glad, too, that they could not steal the house, for I want to sleep there.”

“It’s the best place you can find,” she told him. “But you had better always bar the door at night, and sleep with your machete and pistols where you can reach them.”



CHAPTER XV.

UNDER FIRE

“Where am I?” exclaimed Ned, as his eyes came lazily open the next morning, and in a moment more they were open very widely.

He knew the room he was in, and his thoughts came swiftly back to him. There hung his sheathed machete at the head of the hammock, and his pistols lay at his side. There was as yet only just enough light to see them by, but he sprang out and began to get ready for his first day in a besieged city. His satchel and pony, he remarked, would be safe enough at headquarters, and he could go after them whenever he might need them.

“I’ll go to Anita’s for breakfast,” he added. “I can pay her for it, too. Then I want to see the American fleet, if I can. Oh, but am I not glad that General Zuroaga gave me that old telescope? I’ve seen lots of mountains with it, and now I’ll make it show me the ships and the army. Oh, my soul and body! I’m part of the garrison of Vera Cruz.”

That was stretching the facts of the case a little, but he certainly was serving under the wrong flag that morning. He felt queer and lonely in that empty, robber-haunted house, and he was glad to get out of it without being seen. Anita welcomed him enthusiastically, for he had brought to her and her neighbors the good news of the coming of Santa Anna’s victorious army, and he was a young Mexican patriot for whom she was glad to cook a good breakfast for a fair price. After that was eaten, however, Ned’s perplexities began, for the first Mexican officer whom he met, on leaving Anita’s house, curtly demanded a look at his papers. He was altogether too well dressed a fellow to be allowed to pass by unnoticed. With almost a fainting heart, Ned produced the pass given him by the major at headquarters, but the next moment the brave soldier’s arms were around him, and he was hugged as a true comrade who had ridden hard and far to bring good tidings.

“I will show you the gates myself!” exclaimed the lieutenant, for such he was. “I shall be in command of a patrol that is going out toward Sacrificios for a look at

the gringos. Come on with me.”

This was precisely what Ned was wishing for, and, as they hurried along, he was pumped for all the news he had and a good deal more. In fact, he found it a task of some difficulty to obey the stern commands of General Morales and still keep within the truth.

A gate was reached and passed, the officer at the gate receiving a kind of pay in news, and then Ned drew a long breath, for he suddenly remembered that he had left the city, contrary to orders.

“Never mind,” he said to himself, “I’m inside the Mexican army lines.”

In a moment more, he had forgotten everything but his spy-glass, a pretty good one, for he and the squad of patrollers were at the summit of a low sand-hill, and there before them, only two miles away, the boats of the ships of war and the transport ships were coming and going through the surf with loads of American soldiers. With them, and on all the vessels in the offing, Ned saw something which had never before seemed to shine so splendidly, and it brought the hot blood fiercely from his heart to his cheeks, because he could not just then break out into a hurrah for the Stars and Stripes. The hurrah did get up into his throat, but there it had to stop, and it almost choked him. His prudence got the better of it, somehow, and his next thought was:

“Oh, but won’t they have a tough time getting their cannon ashore!”

He was not so far wrong, for that was a problem which was troubling General Scott and his engineers, but there was one thing more which Ned did not so much as dream of. In one of those boats a tall man, who was not in uniform, was leaning forward and gazing earnestly at the shore.

“Mexico!” he muttered. “Ned is in there somewhere. I must have a hunt for him as soon as I can. I wonder if I did right to ever let him go. Even after we take Vera Cruz, there will be a long campaign and any amount of hard fighting. O Ned, my son, where are you?”

Ned was there, indeed, very near and yet very far, and he was wondering, as were many American officers and soldiers, why the Mexicans did not cannonade the invading army while it was coming ashore. They might have done so effectively, and in a day or two they did put a few guns in position to send an occasional shot, but all the harm they did was to kill one man.

The patrol party had now performed its duty, and it marched back again, but in that morning adventure Ned had discovered that he was really free to come and

go. Perhaps the Mexican commander had forgotten him in the pressure of his other affairs. Even when Ned went to the headquarters for his pony and baggage, he was treated by everybody as a young fellow of no importance whatever, and at dinnertime he was able to tell Anita all about the terrible ships and the swarms of invading gringos on the shore.

That night the lonely room in the Tassara house was almost too lonely. Ned lay awake in his hammock through long hours, and was glad that he had two armies to think of, so that he might keep from listening for possible footsteps outside of his little chamber, or for an attempt by some marauder to force open his door. He had barred that, and he had fastened his window firmly, but he could not feel entirely secure, and he got up twice to go to the door and listen.

Day after day went by from that time in very much the same manner, and Ned believed that he was learning a great deal about war, whether or not it would ever do him any good in business affairs after the war had come to an end. The entire American army, guns and all, reached the shore in safety, and all the while Santa Anna and his army were reported as coming, coming, but they did not come, and the hearts of the besieged garrison and the terror-stricken people began to die within them.

"They will be too late now," thought Ned, but he did not dare to say as much to any of his Mexican friends.

From time to time he had been out to ply his telescope upon the fleet and upon the army. He knew that all the American camps had been established beyond the reach of any guns in the city fortifications, and he had watched with intense interest the slow, sure processes of a regular siege, conducted by a rarely capable general. He had seen the erection of battery after battery, of which General Scott's artillerymen were as yet making hardly any apparent use. He did not quite understand that, in merely being there, more and more of them, those batteries were already capturing the city. They were sending so few shots at the walls, or even at the grim Castle of San Juan de Ulua, because the American general wished to take Vera Cruz without bloodshed, if he could, and he came very near to the accomplishment of his humane purpose. Undoubtedly, he would have succeeded in starving out the city, if he, too, had not received daily notice of the nearer approach of Santa Anna and all the forces which he could gather. Nobody but that general himself and his confidential officers knew how really few they were, or how unfit to assail the Americans in their fortified camps on the shore of the sea. So, a final day came when the surrender of Vera Cruz was formally demanded, under the awful penalty of a general bombardment by the

American fleet and army in case of a refusal. Resistance, it was declared, was now hopeless, and there was no military necessity for killing anybody. General Morales sent back a positive rejection, for he still entertained a faint hope of the timely arrival of assistance, and he did not inform General Scott how sadly he had failed in all his attempts to obtain supplies for the inhabitants and his army. Famine was already beginning to threaten all of the poorer classes who had neglected their opportunities to leave the city, or who had been unable to do so. As for Ned Crawford's provisions, he had continued to board with Anita, or with any mess of military men among whom he might happen to be. He had made many acquaintances, and he had found the ragged, unpaid, illiterate Mexican soldiers a genuinely hospitable lot of patriotic fellows. He came to his supper somewhat late on the evening of March 21st, and that night, after going to care for his pony, he came back and slept on a blanket on the floor of Anita's kitchen. On the morning of the 22d, he had but just walked out into the street when suddenly all the air around him seemed to be full of thunder. Roar followed roar, and peal followed peal, and then he heard affrighted shrieks in all directions. The bombardment had begun!

"O Madre de Dios!" moaned the voice of poor Anita behind him. "O Señor Carfora! We shall all be killed! What shall we do? Oh, the wicked gringos! What did they come here for? I never did them any harm."

That was a terrible war question which was troubling Ned himself. Whatever might have been the evil doings of either of the two governments, or of all the scheming, ambitious politicians, the helpless people of Mexico were in no manner to blame. Why, then, he asked himself, should any of them, like Anita, for instance, be killed by cannon-shot or torn in pieces by bursting shells? He could not settle the matter in his mind just then, but he said to her, encouragingly:

"Don't be so badly scared. Up here in this northern part of the town, we are as far away from the shooting as we could be. I'll go over to the southern side of the city and see what is going on. As soon as I find out, I'll come back and tell you."

"Oh, do!" she said, "but do not get killed. Come back and get some dinner. I will cook you a real good one, if you will."

That was something of a promise, for he knew that she was one of the prudent folk who had looked out for their supplies in time, but he walked away toward the southerly wall and the forts with a strong feeling that he must be in the

middle of a kind of dreadful dream. He reached the line of antiquated and defective defences, which had been good enough long ago, but which were not constructed to resist modern artillery. Old as it might be, the wall was in the way of his intended sightseeing, but he saw a ladder leaning against the masonry, and up he went without asking permission of anybody. He was now standing upon the broad parapet, with his glass at his eye, and he was obtaining a first-rate view of the bombardment. On the land, stretching away to the west and south, were the long lines of the American batteries, within a not very long range of him, and from each of them at intervals the red sheets of fire burst forth, while over them the black clouds of powder smoke arose to be carried away by the brisk March wind that was blowing. Far away to his right, or seaward, all at anchor in the positions assigned them, lay the United States ships of war, of all kinds and sizes, and these, too, were getting at work, although they were as yet by no means putting forth their whole destructive power. It was as if they were but studying this siege business, getting the ranges correctly, and were preparing to do worse things than this in the days which were to come. Ned was gazing intently at a great 44-gun ship, which appeared to be sending her missiles at the castle, when a heavy shot from one of the batteries struck the wall within a few yards of him. It seemed to go deeply in, and the entire top of the parapet was torn away for a width of several feet. Ned hurried at once to get a good look down into the chasm, for it was the first time that he had seen anything of the kind.

“I wonder if our shot are doing this kind of thing for their batteries yonder,” he said aloud, in the Spanish which was now habitual with him, but at that moment a not unfriendly hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a quiet, firm voice said to him:

“What are you doing here, Señor Carfora? You seem to have no fear.”

“General Morales!” exclaimed Ned, in astonishment. “No, your Excellency. I was not thinking of that, but of this big hole. I was wondering if the walls of the castle are not stronger than these. If they are not—”

“They are much stronger, my brave fellow,” interrupted the general. “I am going over now to see how they are standing it. The Americans are very accurate gunners. Now, sir, you must not expose yourself in this manner. You are not a soldier. Go back into the city!”

“General,” said Ned, pointing in the direction of the cathedral, “do, please, look! Some of their shot go over the wall and strike away inside. I am safer here than I

would be in yonder. What I am afraid of is that a great many of the women and children may be killed. I think, sir, that you ought not to be here, either. You are the general.”

“My boy,” said Morales, sadly, “I was thinking of the non-combatants myself. This firing of the Yankees at the city is hideous. But it is war, and it cannot be helped. Ah, me! Feeling as I do this morning, I would ask nothing better than that one of these accursed shot or shell should come for me. I would a hundred times rather die than be compelled to surrender Vera Cruz.”

He again motioned Ned toward the ladder, and no disobedience was possible. He himself followed, for his solitary reconnoissance was ended, and he had been practically assured that his walls were of small value against heavy siege-guns. When he reached the ground, several subordinate officers came to join him, and Ned heard him say to them:

“That reckless young scamp, Carfora, has the nerves of an old soldier. He will make a good one by and by. We need more like him, for some of our artillerymen left their guns under the American fire.”

There was never any lack of courage among men of his kind, a Spaniard descended from the old conquistadors, while some of the officers around him were Indians fit to have led their tribes for Montezuma against the men of Hernando Cortes.

As Ned walked homeward, he halted several times to tell some of his army acquaintances what he had seen from the wall, and how he had talked about it with General Morales. No doubt they esteemed him more highly than ever for his patriotism and high social standing, but he spoke also of the danger to the people, and they were sure that his heart was with them. Truth to tell, so it was, for the bombardment shortly became to him more horrible than ever. Something he could not see passed over his head, with a hiss that was almost like a human screech. Then followed a loud explosion, and there before him, on the bloody pavement, he saw the mangled corpses of a Mexican mother and two small children, who had been killed while they were hurrying away to a place of safety.

“Oh, the poor things!” sobbed Ned, as he burst out into tears. “What had they to do with the war!”

He could not bear to take a second look at them, and he hurried on, but when he reached the house he did not say anything about them to Anita. He told her about the batteries and the ships, and about the brave general on the parapet, and then

she and her friends who were with her went away back into the kitchen, to be as safe as possible from flying shot and shell. It was not, they appeared to think, at all likely that any wicked gringo gunner would take aim at that kitchen.

As for Ned, he had only come in to go out again, for keeping indoors, with all that cannonading going on, was altogether out of the question.



CHAPTER XVI.

GENERAL SCOTT AND HIS ARMY

“There they come! They are going to march right in! But what I want, most of all, is to see the general himself. There he is!”

Telescope in hand, Ned Crawford was standing on the parapet, near one of the southerly gates of Vera Cruz, watching the triumphant entrance of the American army. He could hardly have told whether he was more glad to see them come, or because the siege and the bombardment were over. He was already familiar with the various troops of Mexico, and he knew that some of them, but not many, could perform their military evolutions in pretty good style. The one thing which struck him most forcibly now, however, as his glass was aimed here and there over the approaching columns and lines, was that at no point was there a flaw or a defect in the orderly movements of the American soldiers. With admirable drill and under perfect management, they swung forward across the broad level between their earthwork batteries and the badly shattered wall of the captured city. Compared with them, the garrison which had surrendered was, for the greater part, only a little better than an ill-provided, half-armed, undisciplined mob. Wealth, arms, civilization, scientific generalship, had all been on the side of the great republic of the North, and there had been no doubt, from the beginning, as to what the result must be. The one important seaport of Mexico, with all its foreign commerce, was now under the control of the United States, and could not be taken from them.

Ned saw one of the advancing lines melt beautifully into the shape of a long column, and file through the gate near him. Then followed a section of field artillery and a small detachment of cavalry. All these were to be admired, of course, but his eyes watched them only for a moment, for just behind the horsemen came an exceedingly brilliant cavalcade, in front of which rode the remarkable man whom Ned was most anxious to see.

Beyond a doubt, General Winfield Scott had many severe critics and not a few personal enemies. By these, he was said to be arrogant, blunt in manners, opinionated, and also a military martinet with terribly unvolunteer ideas relating

to the rigid discipline required for success in war. He had seen, however, a deal of hard service in the war of 1812 and otherwise, and his military record was without a flaw. There were good judges, both in America and Europe, who believed and declared that for the management of a difficult campaign he had no superior among the generals then living. He was now actually called upon to prove that he could perform apparent impossibilities under very trying circumstances and with somewhat limited resources. Physically, he was a large, fine-looking man, and he was even excessively particular concerning the fit and elegance of his parade uniform. He was therefore looking his best when he rode in to take possession of Vera Cruz.

Ned went down a ladder as soon as he could, after breathlessly staring at the great commander, but he did not succeed in witnessing the formalities of the surrender, whatever they were. The crowds in his way were too much for him, but not long after General Scott and his staff disappeared through the portal of the building which had been the headquarters of poor General Morales, Ned worked his way through a throng of downcast Mexicans toward a young officer who appeared to be in command of about a half company of infantry. From the excitement of the moment and from a good many months of daily custom, he spoke to the lieutenant in Mexican Spanish, in a recklessly eager manner and without touching his hat.

“What on earth do you want?” was the curt and gruff reply. “I’m only Lieutenant Grant. You’ll have to see somebody else, whatever it is. You had better go and speak to one of the staff.”

If Ned had really been a young Mexican, speaking no tongue but his own, he might not have understood that perfectly. As it was, however, he at once broke out with energy into a language to which he had for some time been unaccustomed. Even now, nevertheless, he forgot to touch his hat.

“Well, Mr. Grant,” he said, “I’ve been all over the country. I’ve been in the city of Mexico and among their troops, and I believe I know a lot of things that I ought to report to General Scott, or somebody.”

It was a patriotic idea which had been growing in his mind all that morning, and it had driven out of him every ounce of bashfulness.

“You have, have you?” said Grant. “I declare. Seems to me you speak English pretty well for a greaser—almost like a born American. I guess the general’s willing to hear almost anything. But you will have to see some member of the staff. Hulló! I say! Captain Lee! Here’s a kind of spy. I think you’d better hear

him. I can't leave my post."

"Spy?" exclaimed Ned. "No, I'm not any such thing, but my name is Edward Crawford, and I'm from New York. I got stuck in Mexico and I couldn't get out. I've been all around everywhere. Things are mixed—"

"Grant," said Captain Lee, "he may have something worth while. I'll take him in to see Schuyler Hamilton. Let the captain pump him."

Captain Robert E. Lee was not exactly off duty at that hour, for he and other engineer officers had been ordered to make a survey of the fortifications, but he was there to receive instructions and he could take Ned in with him. He was a taller, handsomer fellow than Grant, and he was all of three times as polite in his treatment of Ned. Perhaps, however, Grant's first manners had been damaged by being addressed in such a style, in Spanish, by an excited young Mexican.

In went Ned and Lee, and there was no difficulty in obtaining an interview with Captain Hamilton. Ned had never heard of him before, but he was now aware, from Captain Lee, that he was a descendant of General Philip Schuyler and General Alexander Hamilton of the Revolutionary War. Ned thought of Señora Tassara's great ancestors for a moment, and then he did not really care a cent for pedigree. He even startled Hamilton himself by the energy and rapidity with which he told what he knew of the condition of things throughout the country, the movements of Santa Anna, and the political plots and conspiracies. Hamilton was a slender, graceful young man, handsomer than even Lee, and with piercing black eyes.

"Lee," he said, "the cub is a genuine curiosity. I can't imagine how on earth he learned so much. He isn't a fool, by any means. General Scott will be at liberty in a few minutes, and Crawford must see him."

"All right," said Lee. "I have my instructions now, and I'll leave him with you. They say the old castle's badly knocked in pieces."

If, as Lee intimated, the fortress of San Juan de Ulua was just then in bad condition, so was Ned when he heard what they were going to do with him. He had supposed that his errand had been completely done to the sharp-eyed staff officer, but now they threatened to bring him before the general, whom he considered the most tremendous man on the earth. It was a little too much, but he drew a long breath and stood as straight as a ramrod, looking very red indeed. In three minutes more he was brought face to face with the commander-in-chief of the armies of the United States, and he felt as if he had been surrounded and compelled to surrender. Captain Hamilton reported the matter in the fewest

words possible, but all the while the general had been watching Ned, looking right through him, and in a moment Ned found himself feeling perfectly easy. If General Scott had been his uncle, he could not have spoken to him in a kinder or more carelessly familiar way. He questioned him about all his experiences, and an acute listener might have gathered that he paid more attention to Ned's political information than to anything of a strictly military nature.

"Hamilton," he slowly remarked, at last, "General Taylor did an exceedingly good thing for us down here, after all. The battle of Buena Vista was our own battle. Santa Anna will not be able to raise another army like the one that was so roughly handled up there. If it had been here, in good shape, we would have had ten times as much trouble in taking Vera Cruz. Santa Anna's power is already half broken."

"Perhaps a little more," suggested Hamilton.

"Perhaps," said the general, "but our patriotic young friend here has made a valuable report. Ah, McClellan! You and Beauregard are to make the inspection of the castle with Captain Lee. Take Crawford back to Grant, as you go. He may serve with the Seventh as an unenlisted man. Let him have his orders, Hamilton. He is a brave fellow."

Out went Ned with a pair of as yet undistinguished officers, both of whom were to be heard of again in after time, and it did not occur to the very much elated "scout," as he now considered himself, to correct General Scott's apparent idea that Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant was a particular friend and guardian of his.

"Now, if this isn't bully!" he thought. "I've been on the Mexican side all the while till now. I've been kind of part of the garrison of Vera Cruz, but I've been praised by General Scott, for all that. I wonder what our folks at home would say to it!"

It was a grand thing to think of, and Ned felt as proud as if he had been promoted for storming an enemy's entrenchments.

There was another experience of an entirely unexpected character just before him, however. Hardly had McClellan and Beauregard turned him over to Grant, and while the latter was inspecting the order written by Captain Hamilton, Ned was suddenly shaken from head to foot. Not that anybody, Mexican or American, was actually handling him roughly, but that a hoarse, eager voice at his right ear exclaimed:

"Edward! My son! Is this you? Are you a prisoner?"

“No, Mister,” responded Grant, before Ned could gather his wits to utter a word. “He isn’t a prisoner, but I’m ordered to stick him into the outside of the Seventh somewhere. Is he your son?”

“He is, lieutenant,” said Mr. Crawford. “And, oh, how glad I am!”

“Father!” Ned had shouted, as a pair of strong arms went around him. “How did you happen to be here?”

“I came on one of our own supply-ships,” said Mr. Crawford. “I’ll tell you all about it by and by. I had all but given up hearing anything of you, and we sail for New York to-morrow. Lieutenant, I haven’t seen him for more’n a year. I want a good long talk.”

“Of course you do!” said Grant, heartily. “Take him along, and let him report at the camp of the Seventh to-morrow morning. You may go now, my young greaser, but you’d better get on another rig than that before you come.”

“He will do that,” said Mr. Crawford. “Come along, Ned. Let’s go where we can be by ourselves. I want to hear your whole yarn, from beginning to end, and I’ve all sorts of things to tell you.”

“Father,” said Ned, “I know just the place. We’ll go and get supper at old Anita’s, and we can talk all the way. Hurrah! How’s mother?”

All the most important home news followed quickly after that, and Ned felt that the capture of Vera Cruz was more important than ever.

“I am going to let you stay here, though,” said his father. “You can learn more than in any other way that I know of.”

“That’s what I want,” said Ned. “And now I shall be in our army.”

The father and son were not walking very fast, but they could talk rapidly, and they had a great many things to say. They had some things to see, as well, for everywhere, as they went, they encountered detachments of United States soldiers patrolling the city, restoring order and setting things to rights. That they were doing so appeared to be a tremendous surprise to large numbers of the inhabitants, who had almost been expecting to be ruthlessly plundered, if not murdered outright, by these cruel barbarians from the awful republic of the North. Not all of them were panic-stricken in this way, however, for when the house of old Anita was reached, she was standing in the doorway, and she greeted them loudly with:

“O Señor Carfora! I knew all the while that you were a gringo. I am so glad that

we have surrendered! Santa Maria Gloriosa! Praise all the saints! We shall have no more cannonading! We shall have plenty to eat!”

“That is just what we want, Anita,” replied Ned. “This is my father. He has come to see me, and you must give him some dinner. Then I will tell you all about General Scott and the American soldiers.”

She had neighbors with her, as usual, and some of them had become accustomed to regarding Ned as a kind of newsboy. They were now also prepared to thank a large number of religious personages that he was a genuine gringo, and on good terms with the conquering invaders, who were henceforth to have the control of affairs in Vera Cruz.

It was late that night when Ned said good-by to his father, and it was like pulling teeth to let him go, but there was no help for it, as the sailing of the supply-ship could not be delayed. Ned was once more alone in Mexico, and it took all his enthusiasm for his expected army life to reconcile him to the situation. Perhaps there was not a great deal of sound sleeping done, in the hammock that swung in the little room in the Tassara mansion, but at an early hour next morning he was on his way to hunt up the camp of the Seventh Infantry and the tent of Lieutenant Grant. This was accomplished without much difficulty, and almost immediately Ned made a discovery. His probable coming had, of course, been reported to the colonel commanding the regiment, and that officer’s common-sense remark was:

“Unenlisted orderly, eh? Yankee boy that can speak Spanish, and that knows every corner of this miserable city? Just what we want. I’m glad old Fuss and Feathers sent him to us. He is the greatest general in the world. Send your scout right here to me. I’ve errands for him.”

Therefore, the next chapter in Ned’s Mexican experiences was that he found himself sent out, soldierlike, upon a long list of duties, for which he was peculiarly well prepared by knowing where to find streets and houses which were as yet unknown to the rank and file of the gallant Seventh. The men, on their part, soon came to regard him as a soldier boy, like themselves, and he had a fine opportunity for learning, from day to day, the processes by which General Scott was organizing his force for his intended march across the sierra, on the road he had selected for reaching the city of Mexico. It was soon to be plainly understood that, whenever that army should march, it would do so as a sort of human machine, ready to perform any military work which its commander might require of it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MOUNTAIN PASSES

“Grant,” said Captain Lee, “what did Crawford say to you about that Cerro Gordo road? I want to know all I can.”

“Well, Captain Lee,” replied Grant, “here he is, to speak for himself. He says he came down that trail in midwinter. He studied it, too, because his friend, General Zuroaga, told him it was built by a Spanish fellow by the name of Cortes.”

“Good!” said Lee. “Seems to me I’ve heard of him somewhere, but who is Zuroaga? Tell me about him, Crawford. Does he know anything?”

By this time, Ned had become pretty well acquainted with Lee and a number of other officers, and with their free, open-hearted way of dealing with each other. He could tell, therefore, without any restraint or bashfulness, all that was necessary concerning his distinguished Mexican friend and benefactor.

“I see,” said the captain. “He is one of their many revolutions. All right. But I wish old man Cortes hadn’t left his road so narrow and steep as they say it is. Tell me all you saw, Crawford. I have other accounts, but I want yours. Look at this map and answer my questions.”

He held in his hand what purported to be a very rough sketch of the highway from the city of Jalapa to the city of Mexico. It also pretended to give a fair idea of the section of that road which crossed the mountain spur known as Cerro Gordo.

“From there to there,” said Lee, “how is it?”

“Crooked as a rail fence,” replied Ned. “It isn’t like that at all. It’s a zigzag, with rocks on one side and ravines on the other.”

“Just as I supposed,” said Lee. “Now, mark the zigzags on this other paper, as well as you can remember them.”

They were sitting in Grant’s tent, in the camp of the Seventh Regiment, and the entire advance-guard of the army was encamped in like manner, waiting for

orders from General Scott to climb the mountains before them. Ned took the crayon handed him, and he really appeared to do pretty well with it, but he explained that the rough weather and the condition of his pony had compelled him to dismount and come part of the way down the mountain on foot, so that he had more time for making observations.

“If they put cannon on a breastwork on that road,” he said, “they can blow anything in front of them all to pieces.”

“Grant,” said Lee, “that’s just what they can do. Santa Anna has posted his artillery at Crawford’s zigzags, and that Cerro Gordo position cannot be carried in front. It is perfectly unassailable.”

“What on earth are we to do, then?” said Grant. “Our only road to Mexico seems to be shut and bolted.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Lee. “There are others, if we chose to try them. But the general has ordered me, with an engineer party, to go out and find if there is not some way for getting around Santa Anna’s obstructions. I want you to let Crawford go with me.”

“O Lieutenant Grant!” eagerly exclaimed Ned, “General Zuroaga told me there was another place as good for a road as that is.”

“Go along, of course,” said Grant. “I’d give a month’s pay to go with you. Anything but this sleepy camp.”

Ned was ready in a minute, but he found that he was not expected to carry with him any other weapon than his machete.

“Take that,” said Captain Lee. “It will do to cut bushes with. I believe I’ll carry one myself. We shall have a few riflemen, but we must be careful not to do any firing. We must scout like so many red Indians.”

Ned had formerly been on the wrong side of the army lines. During all the long months of what he sometimes thought of as his captivity among the Mexicans, he had been occasionally worried by a feeling of disgrace. He had felt it worst when he was a member of the garrison of Vera Cruz, and on such remarkably good terms with the rest of the garrison and its commander. So he had been exceedingly rejoiced when General Scott battered down his walls and compelled him to surrender. It had been a grand restoration of his self-respect when he found himself running errands for the officers of the Seventh, but now he suddenly felt that he had shot up into full-grown manhood, for, with a bush-cutting sword at his side, he was to accompany one of the best officers in the

American army upon an expedition of great importance and much danger.

It was still early in the day when Captain Lee's party, all on foot, passed through the outer lines of the American advance, at the base of the mountain. All of them were young men, as yet without any military fame, and there was no one there who could tell them that their little band of roadhunters contained one commander-in-chief and one lieutenant-general of the armies of the Southern Confederacy, and one commander-in-chief and four major-generals, or corps commanders, of the armies of the United States. It was not by such subordinates as these that General Santa Anna was assisted in his engineering or other military operations. That day, however, and for a few days more, he felt perfectly sure of his really well-chosen position among the rocks and chasms of the Cerro Gordo.

The engineering party was well aware that its movements might possibly be observed from the heights beyond, as long as it remained in the open, therefore it wheeled out into the fields as it went onward, and was soon lost to view among woodlands.

"Now, Crawford," said Captain Lee, "recall and tell me, as well as you can, all that Zuroaga told you about his proposed new road."

Ned proceeded to do so, but, at the end of his recollections, he added:

"Well, the general said it would cost a pot of money to do it, now, and that Cortes had no gunpowder to throw away. He could not have done any rock-blasting."

"Our difficulty about that is as bad as his was," replied the captain. "We can have all the gunpowder we need, but we can't use any of it, for fear of letting his Excellency, General Santa Anna, know what we are up to. As for the cost of a new road, there is no government in Mexico that will think of undertaking it. It would cost as much, almost, as a brand-new revolution."

There was a great deal of hard work done after that, searching, climbing, and bush-cutting, and Ned wondered at the ready decisions made here and there, by the engineers. It seemed to him, too, that Captain Lee and other officers paid a great deal of deference to a young lieutenant by the name of McClellan. A small force of riflemen was with them and a party of sappers and miners, but there had not been a sign of military opposition to the work which they were trying to do. Nevertheless, it began to dawn upon Ned's mind that sometimes picks and spades and crowbars may be as important war weapons as even cannon. That is, there may be circumstances in which guns of any kind are of little use until after

the other tools have been made to clear the way for them.

Night came, and the entire reconnoitring party camped among the cliffs of Cerro Gordo, but at about the middle of the next forenoon all the officers gathered for a kind of council. They were not yet ready to send in a full and final report, but they had formed important conclusions, and at the end of the council Ned was called for.

“Crawford,” said Captain Lee, “take that despatch to Captain Schuyler Hamilton, or whoever else is on duty at General Scott’s headquarters. In my opinion, this Zuroaga road will do, after we shall have made it, and we can climb around into the rear of the Mexican army. If so, all their batteries in the old road are but so many cannon thrown away.”

Ned’s heart gave a great thump of pride as he took that carefully folded and sealed up paper. To carry it was a tremendous honor, and he was not half sure that it did not make him, for the time being, a regular member of General Scott’s corps of military engineers. He hastened back to the Jalapa highway, and the first advanced post that he came to furnished him with a pony. Then he galloped on to the camps and to the general’s headquarters, as if he had been undergoing no fatigue whatever. He seemed to himself, however, to have seen hardly anything or anybody until he stood before Captain Hamilton, and held out that vitally important despatch. Even then he did not quite understand that it was almost as important as had been the surrender of Vera Cruz. But for that surrender, the American expedition would have been stopped at the seashore. But for this feat of the engineers, it would have been disastrously halted at the foot of the Cerro Gordo pass. One minute later, Ned’s heart jumped again, for he heard the deep voice of the general himself commanding:

“Hamilton, bring Crawford in. He seems to know something.”

Whether he did or not, he could answer questions quite bravely, and he could tell a great many things which had not been set forth in the brief report of the engineers. Probably they had not felt ready to say or assert too much until they had done and learned more, but Ned was under no such restriction, and he thoroughly believed in what he still regarded as General Zuroaga’s road. That is, if somebody like Cortes, for instance, could and would afford the necessary amount of gunpowder to blast away the rocks which he had seen were in the way.

“That will do,” said the general, at last. “You may go, Crawford. Captain Hamilton, we have beaten Santa Anna!”

There may have been a slightly arrogant sound in that confident assertion, but it was altogether in accord with the positive and self-reliant character of General Winfield Scott. He had unbounded faith in his own mental resources, and, at the same time, he had perfect confidence in the men and officers of his army. It was, therefore, less to be wondered at that they on their part entertained an almost absurd respect for their martinet commander.

Orders went out immediately for putting all the force which could be employed upon the construction of the mountain road. Much of the work would have to be performed at night, to keep it secret, and the Mexicans, behind their impassable entrenchments on the old Cerro Gordo pass, had no idea of the hidden plans of their enemies. Santa Anna himself may have believed that his antagonist had given up the hope of ever reaching the city of Mexico by that route. The new one, by which he did intend to reach it, grew rapidly to completion, and Ned Crawford obtained from his friend Grant repeated permissions to go and see if Captain Lee wanted him, and then to come back and report progress to his own camp.

“Lieutenant Grant’s a man that hardly ever says anything,” said Ned to himself, “but he’s a prime good fellow, and I like him. He says he isn’t much of an engineer, though, and he couldn’t build that road.”

Such a road it was, too, with bridges over chasms, where the builders had to climb up and down like so many cats. Even after it was said to be complete, it was fit for men only, for not even the most sure-footed mule could have passed over it. It was finished on the 17th of April, and on the following day General Scott issued his orders for all the various parts of the coming battle of Cerro Gordo. Strong bodies of infantry were to engage the Mexican front, and keep Santa Anna’s army occupied, while the engineers piloted another and stronger column to the real war business of the day. Ned had managed to get himself tangled up with this climbing force, if only to see what use was to be made of his and Zuroaga’s new road. The morning came, and even before the sun was up some of the troops were moving.

“I guess it’ll be an all-day’s job,” thought Ned, as he and one of the engineer officers reached the first steep declivity. “Hullo! they are unhitching those artillery horses. What’s that for?”

He was soon to know, for strong men took the places of the animals, and the guns were hauled up and over the mountain by human hands. It was severe work, but it was done with eager enthusiasm, and a few hours later Ned was able

to shout:

“Hurrah! Here we are, right in behind them. Hurrah for General Scott!”

Anything else that he might have felt like saying was drowned in the wild cheering which arose from thousands of soldiers, for there was no longer any need for silence or secrecy. That part of the Mexican army which had been posted beyond the head of the pass was taken utterly by surprise. Its commanders were for the moment unable to imagine whence had come this numerous body of United States infantry, which appeared so suddenly upon their unprotected flank. They therefore retreated, and the Mexican army was cut in two, so that all of it which had been stationed in the pass itself was caught as in a trap, and compelled to surrender. These trapped prisoners were about three thousand in number, and Ned kindly remarked concerning them:

“Oh, but ain’t I glad we didn’t have to kill ’em! We didn’t catch old Santa Anna himself, though. They say the Mexicans made him President for the battle of Angostura. I guess they wouldn’t have done it if they had waited till now.”

Whether or not he was correct in that calculation, the road to the city of Mexico seemed now to be open, unless the unfortunate republic could provide its President with another army. As for the American commander, his troops had more faith in him than ever, and with better reasons for it. It was afterward said that General Scott’s written orders for the battle of Cerro Gordo, and for others which followed, would answer very well for full reports of them after they were won.

The whole American army, except the garrison of Vera Cruz and small parties posted here and there along the road, had now escaped from the *tierra caliente* and the yellow fever. Immediately after the battle of Cerro Gordo, it marched on to the old city of Jalapa, among the mountains, where its quarters were cool and comfortable. Not many miles beyond Jalapa begins the great central tableland of Anahuac, and it was needful that the road leading into it should be taken possession of before the remnant of Santa Anna’s army should rally and construct barriers at positions from which it might prove difficult to drive them.

“If they do,” thought Ned, when he heard that matter under discussion by the soldiers, “I hope General Scott’ll send for me and the other engineers. I’d like to trap some more prisoners.”

He was not to have any such chance as that, but he was not to be idle altogether,—he and his engineers and his army. The division to which he and the Seventh Regiment belonged, under the command of General Worth, was shortly ordered

on in the advance, to take and hold a strong position, known as the town and castle of Perote, and here there was indeed a long delay which was not engineered by the military forces of Mexico. The politicians and particularly the Congress of the United States had interfered very effectively on behalf of President Santa Anna. They had spent so much time in debates upon the legislation required for the gathering of fresh troops that the terms of enlistment of about half of the soldiers under Scott were expiring. It was of no use for him to move forward with a steadily vanishing army, and he was compelled to wait for months at and about Perote, until the new men could arrive and take the places of those who were going home.

“I guess I won’t enlist,” thought Ned, as that idea came again and again into his mind. “Neither mother nor father would wish me to do so. But I’m getting to be an old soldier, after all, and I won’t leave the Seventh till it gets into the city of Mexico.”

Whether it ever was to accomplish that feat was only to be determined by hard fighting, and there came a day, the 7th of August, 1847, when the division of General Worth, then encamped at Puebla, received orders to go forward. The entire army was to move, and General Scott had about as many soldiers with him as when he had landed at Vera Cruz in the spring.

“Hurrah for the city!” shouted Ned, when the news reached him. “I want to make a morning call at the Paez house.”



CHAPTER XVIII.

SEÑOR CARFORA TRAPPED

“I never saw anything finer than this,” said Ned, aloud, as he slowly turned his telescope from one point to another. “It is the old battle-ground of Cortes, when he and his Spaniards and Tlascalans took the city of Mexico. It was called Tenochtitlan, then.”

He was standing upon a granite ledge, on the slope of the mountains south of the city, and below him the nearest objects of interest were the white tents of the American army, encamped there while negotiations for peace were going forward between the United States government and Santa Anna. These were not progressing well, for the invaders were demanding more than any Mexican government could be ready to grant. Not only was Texas itself demanded, but with it also all the vast Territories of California, New Mexico, and Arizona.

“Here we are,” said Ned again, “but it has taken us two weeks of awful fighting to get here. There isn’t any use in disputing the pluck of the Mexicans. Away yonder is Churubusco, and over there is Contreras. Didn’t they fight us there! General Scott and his engineers laid out the battles, but I was with the Seventh everywhere it went. I’ll have loads of yarns to spin when I get home, if I ever do.”

Battle after battle had been fought, and the Americans had paid dearly for the long delay in the arrival of their reinforcements. All that time had been employed by the Mexican President, with really splendid energy, in raising a new army and in fortifying the approaches to the city. It was almost pitiful to see with what patriotism and self-sacrifice the Mexican people rallied for their last hopeless struggle with superior power. It was not, however, that they were to contend with superior numbers, for the forces under Santa Anna were at least three times those under General Scott. The difference was that the latter was a perfect army led by a great general, while the former were not an army at all and had very few capable officers.

Ned had apparently gazed long enough, and he now made his way down the

rugged slope. He did not halt until he reached the door of his own tent, and there he was met by his friend and supervisor somewhat tartly.

“Well! You are back, at last, are you? I didn’t know but what you’d run away. You may come along with me to-night. You may try and see your friends. The provision train I am to take in will get out again about daylight. You may stay there one day, and come away with a train that will run in to-morrow night, but you’d better wear your Mexican rig, if you don’t mean to have your throat cut.”

“All right, sir,” said Ned. “I’ll run the risk.”

“I might not let you,” said Grant, “if you were an enlisted man, but you may learn something of value to them and to us, too. Get ready!”

The fact was that Ned and his army, commanded for him by General Scott, were in a somewhat peculiar position. An armistice had been declared while the negotiations were going on, and while, at the same time, the power of Santa Anna was crumbling to pieces under him. It had been agreed, on both sides, that all military operations should temporarily cease, and that American army-trains of wagons might come into the city, with armed escorts, to obtain supplies. After some unpleasant experiences with the angry mob of the city, it had been deemed best that the trains should come and go in the night, when the unruly Mexican soldiers were in their quarters, and the too patriotic citizens were in their beds. Ned had several times asked permission to accompany a train, and it had been refused, but it was now explained that this train would like to have one more man with it who could talk Spanish. When, however, an hour or so later, he reported for duty, Lieutenant Grant remarked to him:

“Well, yes, you can talk it and you can look it, but you can’t walk it. Don’t step off so lively, if you mean to pass for a Mexican.”

“Hold on, Grant,” said another officer, standing near them. “Don’t you think the Mexicans have been lively enough since we left Perote? I’ve had to step around a good deal myself on their account.”

“Just so,” said Grant. “But that’s while they’re fighting. When they’re at anything like work, though, it’s a different kind of movement. Don’t walk fast, Ned, or they’ll shoot you for a gringo.”

It was nearly midnight when the supply-train, commanded by Lieutenant Grant, entered the city, and an hour was consumed in obtaining the supplies and getting them into the wagons, for not a pound of anything had been made ready for delivery. No true-hearted Mexican really wished to sell provisions to the enemies

of his country.

“Lieutenant, may I go now?” asked Ned, as the last wagon prepared to move away. “There isn’t a patrol in sight, and the Paez place is within a few squares from this.”

Grant replied only by a wave of the hand, for at that moment he had become engaged in a sharp controversy with the one Mexican officer who was present on duty for his own side. He had been fairly polite, but he had not pretended to be pleased to see gringos in Mexico. Therefore, it was almost without express permission that Ned slipped away from his train and his escort upon his exceedingly perilous errand.

The streets were dark and deserted, for the heavy-hearted people had nothing to call them out of their houses at that hour. Nevertheless, Ned was feverishly on the alert, and, almost without his knowing it, his machete had jumped out of its sheath, ready for whatever might turn up.

“Halt!” suddenly came from a deep voice at his right, as he stealthily turned a street corner, and a tall form stepped out of the near shadows to stand in front of him.

Ned saw the long, bright blade of a lance pointed at his bosom, and there seemed but one thing left for him to do. The holder of the lance was beyond his reach, even if he had wished to strike him, but the lance itself was not. All the strength he had in him seemed to go into the sudden blow with which he severed the wooden shaft, an inch or so behind its fitting of sharp steel.

“Diablos!” exclaimed the astonished Mexican, as he struck back a heavy blow with the cudgel which remained in his hand.

Ned parried as well as he could with his machete, but there was some force left in the stick when it reached his head, and down he went. He had made a discovery at that very moment, however.

“Pablo!” he exclaimed, just as a second Mexican sprang toward him with a long knife in his hand.

“Señor Carfora!” loudly responded Pablo. “Hold back your knife, Manuelo! It is one of our own men. O Santos! My lance! I have no other weapon. I told them it was of the soft wood. How are you here, señor?”

NED SAW A LONG, BRIGHT BLADE OF A LANCE POINTED AT HIS
BOSOM

NED SAW A LONG, BRIGHT BLADE

“To see Señora Paez and General Zuroaga,” said Ned. “Is he in the city?”

“Hush! Be careful, Señor Carfora!” said Pablo, as Manuelo almost reluctantly sheathed his too ready long knife. “We were waiting here for him. He has been to the palace, to meet General Bravo. Our regiment has already joined the army, but he is not yet sure about Santa Anna and some other men. It is a dark time, señor!”

“Now, Pablo,” said Ned, “there isn’t much to tell about me. I was captured when Vera Cruz surrendered. I was with General Morales. I got in to-night, and I have a great deal to say to the general and Señora Paez and the Tassarar.”

“Zuroaga is here now,” said a low, cautiously speaking voice behind him. “Put up your sword, Carfora, and come along with me. I want to see you more than you do me. I must know the latest news from General Scott’s army. Pablo, it was of no use. Santa Anna would make no terms with me, but his day is nearly over. Bravo’s government has rejected the treaty offered by the United States, and we are to fight it out to the bitter end. The gates have been shut, and there will be no more sending out of supplies. I think the war will begin again to-morrow.”

“Oh, dear me!” thought Ned. “There goes all my chance for getting out again until after our army has captured the city. How my head does ache!”

The rap from Pablo’s lance-staff had not really injured him, however, and all three of them walked on till they reached the Paez place without saying another word. Here it was at once evident that they, or, at least, the general and Pablo, were waited for. The front door opened to admit them, and shut quickly behind them as they passed in.

“Señora Paez,” said Zuroaga to a shadow in the unlighted hall, “the armistice is ended, but I shall command my Oaxaca regiment in the fighting which is now sure to come. Let us all meet in the parlor and hear from Señor Carfora the American account of these lost battles.”

“Carfora?” she exclaimed. “Is he here? Oh, how I do wish to hear him! I believe we have been told altogether too many lies. Our troops do not half know how badly they have been beaten, nor what is the real strength of the American army.”

They walked on into the parlor, and here there were lights burning, but Ned was not thinking of them. He was gazing at the pale face of a man in uniform and on crutches, who came slowly forward between a woman and a young girl, with a

mournful smile upon his face.

“Colonel Tassara!” exclaimed Ned. “I knew you were wounded, but are you not getting well?”

“Señor Carfora!” quickly interrupted Señorita Felicia. “He was hit in the leg by a bullet at Angostura. He had a bayonet wound, too, and they thought he would die, but they made him a general—”

“I am getting better, Carfora,” said General Tassara, courageously, “but I can do no more fighting just now. I sincerely wish that there might not be any. The plans of Santa Anna—”

“Tassara!” exclaimed Zuroaga. “What we heard is true. He is utterly ruined. But the peace terms are rejected by all the government we have left, and our city defences must soon go down as did those at Cerro Gordo, Contreras, and Churubusco. We are to hear more about those affairs from Señor Carfora. He was an eye witness of them.”

“Oh, my dear young friend,” said Señora Tassara, “were you with the American army in all those battles?”

“No, not exactly,” said Ned. “I was with General Morales at Vera Cruz. Then I came on with General Scott all the way from the seacoast to this place. He has troops enough now, and he will fight his way in. I’m real sorry about it, too, for no more men need to be killed.”

“I think the gringos are just terrible,” said Felicia, as she came over and sat down by Ned. “I want to hear about them. I do hope they won’t be defeated now, though, for if they are nobody can guess who will be Emperor of Mexico when they are driven away.”

“She is not so far wrong,” said Tassara, sadly. “The future of our country is all in the dark. Please let us hear your report.”

Pablo, of course, had not followed his superiors into the parlor, and all who were there were free to discuss the situation. The morning sun was looking in at the windows when all of the talk was finished. Ned had learned that only the family and a few trusted servants remained in the house, but he would have eaten his breakfast with even a more complete sense of security from any emissaries of the military authorities if he had known how much they had upon their hands that day, the 4th of September, 1847. There had already been a sharp correspondence between the commanders of the two armies, and now General Scott himself declared the armistice at an end. All the angry patriotism of the

Mexican people arose to meet the emergency, and every possible preparation was rapidly made for the last desperate struggle in defence of their capital. It was as if the idea prevailed that, if this American force now here could be defeated, the United States would give the matter up, instead of sending more troops to the assistance of their first insufficient battalions.

“Señor Carfora,” said Senorita Felicia, “you must not go out of the house. I do not want you to be killed.”

“That is so,” added her father. “As the affair stands now, they would surely regard you as a spy. You would be shot without a trial. All is confusion. I fear that even General Zuroaga is safe from arrest only among his own men. The army is the government. This nation needs a change.”

“General Tassara,” said Ned, “isn’t our army bringing one?”

“The war is promising a great deal,” replied Tassara, gloomily. “It has already delivered us from King Paredes and Santa Anna and from half a dozen other military usurpers. Moreover, all the lands which the United States propose to take away will be rescued from any future anarchy and will be made some use of. They will be lost to Mexico forever within one week from to-day, for we cannot hold the city.”

General Zuroaga had quietly disappeared. Very soon, the Tassara family went to their own room. Then not even the servants could tell what had become of Señora Paez. Ned Crawford did not at all know what to do with himself. He walked around the rooms below; then he went out to the stables and back again, but he was all alone, for Pablo and the Oaxaca men had gone to their regiment. He went up to the library and had a one-sided talk with the man in armor, but it did not do him any good, and he did not care a cent for all the books on the shelves. They could tell only of old wars, fought long ago, and here was a real war right on hand, that seemed to be wandering all around the house.

During all the long, hot days of the armistice, a kind of dull quiet had appeared to brood over the city and its forts and over the camps and entrenchments of the besiegers. It had been something like a thundercloud, which was all the while growing blacker and hanging lower, and before the end of the first day of renewed hostilities the anxious watchers in the city houses could hear something which sounded like distant thunder. It was the occasional roar of a gun from one or another of the batteries on either side, as a warning of the more terrible things which were about to come, and more than once Ned groaned to himself:

“Oh, how I wish I were out there, with Lieutenant Grant and the Seventh. This is

worse than being shut up in Vera Cruz. I didn't have any regiment of my own, then, but now I belong in General Scott's army."

Evening came at last, and all of the family was gathered behind the lattices of the parlor windows, to watch the detachments of soldiers march past, and to wonder where they were going. General Zuroaga was not there, but there had been a message from him that there would be a great battle in the morning, for the Americans were moving forward.

"We are in greater numbers than they are," muttered General Tassara. "But we have no General Scott, and we have no officers like his. Almost all that we really have is courage and gunpowder, and these are not enough to defeat such an attack as he will make. The city is lost already!"



CHAPTER XIX.

THE STARS AND STRIPES IN TENOCHTITLAN

“What a roar it is! And so very near! I hope General Scott will not bombard this city, as he did Vera Cruz. It would be awful to see bombshells falling among these crowds of people!”

The American commander had not the slightest idea of doing anything of the kind, but there had been almost continuous fighting in the days following the termination of the armistice. Perhaps the hardest of it had been at Molino del Rey, and the defences there had been carried by the assailants. There appeared now to be but the one barrier of the Chapultepec hill between them and a final victory.

A hand was on Ned’s shoulder, and a trembling voice said to him:

“Oh, Señor Carfora! Where have you been? I’m so frightened! Are those cannon coming right on into the city?”

“No,” said Ned, “but I have been out all day. I went almost everywhere, and it seems as if the city were full of wounded men. The soldiers are crowding in. Oh, how I wish I knew how things are going!”

There was a sound of sobbing behind them, and in a moment more the arms of Señora Paez were around Felicia.

“My darling! My dear little girl!” she exclaimed. “Señor Carfora, too! The end has come. The Americans have stormed Chapultepec, and the city is at their mercy. Alas, for me! General Bravo was taken prisoner, and my beloved old friend, Zuroaga, was killed at the head of his regiment. We shall never see him again!”

Ned felt as if somebody had struck him a heavy blow. He could not say a word for a moment, and then he whispered:

“Poor General Zuroaga! Why, I had no idea that he would be killed!”

That is always so after a battle. Those who read the lists of the killed and

wounded expect to find the names of other people's friends there, and not the names of those from whom they were hoping to hear an account of the victory.

"Felicia," said the señora, "your father and mother are in their room. Do not go there just now. You must not go out again, Señor Carfora. You have been running too many risks. Talk with me for awhile."

Whether or not he had been in any danger, it had been impossible for Ned to remain in the house during an entire week of military thunder storm, and he had ventured out almost recklessly. There had, indeed, been so much confusion that little attention had generally been paid to him, and he had even gone out through the gates to use his telescope upon the distant clouds of smoke and the movements of marching men. He had seen, therefore, the steady, irresistible advances of the American troops, and he had almost understood that to General Scott the capture of the city was merely a matter of mathematical calculation, like an example in arithmetic.

He went into the parlor with Señora Paez and Felicia, and there they sat, almost in silence, until long after their usual bedtime, but the sound of guns had ceased, for the siege of Mexico was ended.

It was during that night that General Santa Anna, with nearly all that was left of his army, marched silently out of the city, and the last remnants of his political power passed from him as the American troops began to march in, the next morning. Of all the negotiations between the remaining Mexican authorities and General Scott, Ned Crawford knew nothing, but there was disorder everywhere, and it would have been more perilous than ever for a fellow like him to have been caught in the streets by any of the reckless, angry men who swarmed among them. On the evening of the 14th of September, nevertheless, he was standing in the Paez piazza with Señorita Felicia, and he saw a column of soldiers coming up the street.

"Señorita!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Look! Our flag! Our men! Hurrah! Those are the colors of the Seventh! It is my own regiment, and if there isn't Lieutenant Grant himself!"

"Do not go!" she said. "Do not leave me!" but she was too late, for he had darted away, and in a moment more he was greeted with:

"Hullo, Ned! I'm glad you didn't make out to get killed. I knew you couldn't get out, and I'd about given you up. Is that where you live?"

"It's the house I told you of," said Ned. "They are the best kind of people—"

“Go back there, then,” commanded the lieutenant. “Your father is out among the hospitals just now, taking care of the wounded, but I want to know where to send him. I’ll see you again. I must go on to my post.”

Back he ran to the piazza, and even Felicia was compelled to admit that her friend Señor Carfora’s own regiment was splendid, as its close ranks swung away in such perfect order.

“But,” she said, “you might have been killed, if you had been with them, and I am glad you did not have to kill any of our people.”

“So am I,” said Ned, “now that it is all over. I guess this is the end of the war. But how I shall miss poor General Zuroaga!”

Rapidly and prudently, General Scott was occupying the city and restoring order. With such wisdom and moderation did he perform his duties as military governor that almost immediately the previously distressed inhabitants began to regard the arrival of the United States army as a positive blessing. At the same time, it was obvious to everybody that months might be required for the necessary peace negotiations. A new and firm Mexican government would have to be established, and much difficult legislation would be called for on the part of the Congress of the United States, since that body was to appropriate large sums of money in payment for the territory to be acquired from Mexico.

During three whole days, Ned went from camp to camp and from hospital to hospital, in search of his father, but Mr. Crawford had heard tidings of his son which satisfied him, and he stuck to his wounded soldiers. It was not, therefore, until the afternoon of the third day that Ned found a grand reception prepared for him in the parlor of the Paez mansion.

“Father!” he shouted, as he hurried in, after Felicia, at the door, had warned him of what was before him. “Hurrah! Here I am!”

What happened or was said next, he did not know until he felt himself somewhat roughly shaken by somebody, and was forced to exclaim:

“Hullo, Captain Kemp! Are you here, too? I declare!”

“Here I am,” said the captain, “and I’m going to take you and your father back to New York on the ship that brought us. You have been in Mexico long enough.”

Ned did not so much as have time to hurrah again before Señora Tassara came forward to say to him:

“That is not all, Señor Carfora. For the sake of my husband’s health, and for

other reasons, he and I and Felicia and Señora Paez are intending to spend our next winter in the United States. We have accepted your father's invitation to be passengers with you. What do you think of that?"

Ned could hardly say what he thought, but he tried to, and perhaps his best effort was made when he said to Felicia:

"Isn't it tip-top! I'll show you all over the city,—but I'm afraid you will get awfully seasick on the way. I did at first."

"She will have to run the risk of that," laughed her mother, but after Ned's long conference with his father was ended, she and Ned spent the rest of the evening in a discussion of the sights which were to be seen in the great city of the Americans.

"There would be no use in your remaining here now," Mr. Crawford had said to Ned. "My business with the army will run right along for a time, but nothing else can be done until all things are quiet and settled. Then we may try and find out what good your Mexican experience has done you."

Mr. Crawford went away at a late hour, but Ned was out of the house early enough the next morning. He had a strong notion in his head, and it led him to the grand plaza, to stand in front of the government building which had been the headquarters of so many different kinds of governments of Mexico. It was really a fine and costly affair, but the Mexican national banner was no longer floating from its tall flagstaff. Instead of it was a broad and beautiful Stars and Stripes, and it had never before appeared to Ned so very beautiful.

He was gazing up at that evidence that the city was in the hands of General Scott and his army, when a voice that he knew hailed him with:

"Hullo, youngster! That's our flag. Where's your friend Grant? Have you seen him?"

"Captain Lee!" exclaimed Ned. "Yes, I've seen him. He's all right."

"So I hear," said Lee. "And they say he distinguished himself at Molino del Rey. His regiment lost a number of men, too."

"Well," said Ned, "I wasn't with my regiment in these battles here, but I'm glad that my army has taken Mexico. Grant's a splendid fellow."

"My regiment! My army!" laughed Captain Lee. "All right; that's the way every American boy ought to feel. I guess you are right about Grant, too. He may be heard of again some day."

“Tell you what,” said Ned. “When I get to New York, I mean to join one of our city regiments as soon as I can. Then, if there ever is another war, I’m going to join him. I’d like to serve under him.”

“Good!” said Lee. “And then I may hear of Colonel Crawford, of Grant’s Division, United States Volunteers. Good-by. Take care of yourself.”

THE END

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