REID MAYNE

THE RIFLE RANGERS

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
The Land of Anahuac

Away over the dark, wild waves of the rolling Atlantic – away beyond the summer islands of the Western Ind – lies a lovely land. Its surface-aspect carries the hue of the emerald; its sky is sapphire; its sun is a globe of gold. It is the land of Anahuac!

The tourist turns his face to the Orient – the poet sings the gone glories of Greece – the painter elaborates the hackneyed pictures of Apennine and Alp – the novelist turns the skulking thief of Italy into a picturesque bandit, or, Don Quixote-like, betaking himself into the misty middle age, entertains the romantic miss and milliner's apprentice with stories of raven steeds, of plumed and impossible heroes. All – painter, poet, tourist, and novelist – in search of the bright and beautiful, the poetic and the picturesque – turn their backs upon this lovely land.

Shall we? No! Westward, like the Genoese, we boldly venture – over the dark wild waves of the rolling Atlantic; through among the sunny islands of Ind – westward to the land of Anahuac. Let

us debark upon its shores; let us pierce the secret depths of its forests; let us climb its mighty mountains, and traverse its table-plains.

Go with us, tourist! Fear not. You shall look upon scenes grand and gloomy, bright and beautiful. Poet! you shall find themes for poesy worthy its loftiest strains. Painter! for you there are pictures fresh from the hand of God. Writer! there are stories still untold by the author-artist – legends of love and hate, of gratitude and revenge, of falsehood and devotion, of noble virtue and ignoble crime – legends redolent of romance, rich in reality.

Thither we steer, over the dark wild waves of the rolling Atlantic; through the summer islands of the Western Ind; onward – onward to the shores of Anahuac!

Varied is the aspect of that picture-land, abounding in scenes that change like the tints of the opal. Varied is the surface which these pictures adorn. Valleys that open deep into the earth; mountains that lead the eye far up into heaven; plains that stretch to the horizon's verge, until the rim of the blue canopy seems to rest upon their limitless level; "rolling" landscapes, whose softly-turned ridges remind one of the wavy billows of the ocean.

Alas! word-painting can give but a faint idea of these scenes. The pen can but feebly portray the grand and sublime effect produced upon the mind of him who gazes down into the deep valleys, or glances upward to the mighty mountains of Mexico.

Though feeble be the effort, I shall attempt a series of sketches from memory. They are the panoramic views that

present themselves during a single "Jornada."

I stand upon the shores of the Mexican Gulf. The waves lip gently up to my feet upon a beach of silvery sand. The water is pure and translucent, of azure blue, here and there crested with the pearly froth of coral breakers. I look to the eastward, and behold a summer sea that seems to invite navigation. But where are the messengers of commerce with their white wings? The solitary skiff of the savage "pescador" is making its way through the surf; a lone "polacca" beats up the coast with its half-smuggler crew; a "piragua" swings at anchor in a neighbouring cove: this is all! Far as eye or glass can reach, no other sail is in sight. The beautiful sea before me is almost unfurrowed by the keels of commerce.

From this I draw ideas of the land and its inhabitants – unfavourable ideas of their moral and material condition. No commerce – no industry – no prosperity. Stay! What see I yonder? Perhaps I have been wronging them. A dark, tower-like object looms up against the horizon. It is the smoke of a steamer – sign of advanced civilisation – emblem of active life. She nears the shore. Ha! a foreign flag – the flag of another land trails over her taffrail; a foreign flag floats at her peak; foreign faces appear above her bulwarks, and foreign words issue from the lips of her commander. She is not of the land. My first conjecture was right.

She makes for the principal port. She lands a small parcel of letters and papers, a few bales of merchandise, half a dozen slightly-formed cadaverous men; and then, putting about, a gun

is fired, and she is off again. She soon disappears away upon the wide ocean; and the waves once more roll silently in – their glistening surface broken only by the flapping of the albatross or the plunge of the osprey.

I direct my eyes northward. I behold a belt of white sand skirting the blue water. I turn towards the south, and in this direction perceive a similar belt. To both points it extends beyond the reach of vision – hundreds of miles beyond – forming, like a ribbon of silver, the selvage of the Mexican Sea. It separates the turquoise blue of the water from the emerald green of the forest, contrasting with each by its dazzling whiteness. Its surface is far from being level, as is usual with the ocean-strand. On the contrary, its millions of sparkling atoms, rendered light by the burning sun of the tropic, have been lifted on the wings of the wind, and thrown into hills and ridges hundreds of feet in height, and trending in every direction like the wreaths of a great snow-drift. I advance with difficulty over these naked ridges, where no vegetation finds nourishment in the inorganic heap. I drag myself wearily along, sinking deeply at every step. I climb sand-hills of strange and fantastic shapes, cones, and domes, and roof-like ridges, where the sportive wind seems to have played with the plastic mass, as children with potter's clay. I encounter huge basins like the craters of volcanoes, formed by the circling swirl; deep chasms and valleys, whose sides are walls of sand, steep, often vertical, and not unfrequently impending with comb-like escarpments.

All these features may be changed in a single night, by the magical breath of the "norther". The hill to-day may become the valley to-morrow, and the elevated ridge have given place to the sunken chasm.

Upon the summits of these sand-heights I am fanned by the cool breeze from the Gulf. I descend into the sheltered gorges, and am burned by a tropic sun, whose beams, reflected from a thousand crystals, torture my eyes and brain. In these parts the traveller is often the victim of the *coup-de-soleil*.

Yonder comes the "*norte*" Along the northern horizon the sky suddenly changes from light blue to a dark lead colour. Sometimes rumbling thunder with arrowy lightning portends the change; but if neither seen nor heard, it is soon felt. The hot atmosphere, that, but a moment before, encased me in its glowing embrace, is suddenly pierced by a chill breeze, that causes my skin to creep and my frame to shiver. In its icy breath there is fever – there is death; for it carries on its wings the dreaded "vomito". The breeze becomes a strong wind – a tempest. The sand is lifted upwards, and floats through the air in dun clouds, here settling down, and there rising up again. I dare not face it, any more than I would the blast of the simoom. I should be blinded if I did, or blistered by the "scud" of the angular atoms. The "norther" continues for hours, sometimes for days. It departs as suddenly as it came, carrying its baneful influence to lands farther south.

It is past, and the sand-hills have assumed a different shape.

The ridges trend differently. Some have disappeared, and valleys yawn open where they stood!

Such are the shores of Anahuac – the shores of the Mexican Sea. Without commerce – almost harbourless – a waste of sand; but a waste of striking appearance and picturesque beauty.

To horse and inwards! Adieu to the bright blue waters of the Gulf!

We have crossed the sand-ridges of the coast, and are riding through the shadowy aisles of the forest. It is a tropical forest. The outlines of the leaves, their breadth, their glowing colours all reveal this. The eye roams with delight over a frondage that partakes equally of the gold and the green. It revels along waxen leaves, as those of the magnolia, the plantain, and the banana. It is led upward by the rounded trunks of the palms, that like columns appear to support the leafy canopy above. It penetrates the network of vines, or follows the diagonal direction of gigantic llianas, that creep like monster serpents from tree to tree. It gazes with pleased wonder upon the huge bamboo-briars and tree-ferns. Wherever it turns, flowers open their corollas to meet its delighted glance – tropical tree-flowers, blossoms of the scarlet vine, and trumpet-shaped tubes of the bignonia.

I turn my eyes to every side, and gaze upon a flora to me strange and interesting. I behold the tall stems of the *palma real*, rising one hundred feet without leaf or branch, and supporting a parachute of feathery fronds that wave to the slightest impulse of the breeze. Beside it I see its constant companion, the

Indian cane – a small palm-tree, whose slender trunk and low stature contrast oddly with the colossal proportions of its lordly protector. I behold the *corozo*– of the same genus with the *palma real*– its light feathery frondage streaming outwards and bending downwards, as if to protect from the hot sun the globe-shaped nuts that hang in grape-like clusters beneath. I see the *abanico*, with its enormous fan-shaped leaves; the wax-palm distilling its resinous gum; and the *acrocomia*, with its thorny trunk and enormous racemes of golden fruits. By the side of the stream I guide my horse among the columnar stems of the noble *coeva*, which has been enthusiastically but appropriately termed the "bread of life" (*pan de vida*).

I gaze with wonder upon the ferns, those strange creatures of the vegetable world, that upon the hillsides of my own far island-home scarce reach the knee in height. Here they are arborescent – tree-ferns – rivalling their cousins the palms in stature, and like them, with their tall, straight stems and lobed leaves, contributing to the picturesqueness of the landscape. I admire the beautiful mammey with its great oval fruit and saffron pulp. I ride under the spreading limbs of the mahogany-tree, marking its oval pinnate leaves, and the egg-like seed capsules that hang from its branches; thinking as well of the brilliant surfaces that lie concealed within its dark and knotty trunk. Onward I ride, through glistening foliage and glowing flowers, that, under the beams of a tropic sun, present the varying hues of the rainbow.

There is no wind – scarcely a breath stirring; yet here and there the leaves are in motion. The wings of bright birds flash before the eye, passing from tree to tree. The gaudy tanagers, that cannot be tamed – the noisy lories, the resplendent trogons, the toucans with their huge clumsy bills, and the tiny bee-birds (the *trochili* and *colibri*) – all glance through the sunny vistas.

The carpenter-bird – the great woodpecker – hangs against the decayed trunk of some dead tree, beating the hollow bark, and now and then sounding his clarion note, which is heard to the distance of a mile. Out of the underwood springs the crested curassow; or, basking in the sun-lit glades, with outspread wings gleaming with metallic lustre, may be seen the beautiful turkey of Honduras.

The graceful roe (*Gervus Mexicanus*) bounds forward, startled by the tread of the advancing horse. The caiman crawls lazily along the bank, or hides his hideous body under the water of a sluggish stream, and the not less hideous form of the iguana, recognised by its serrated crest, is seen crawling up the tree-trunk or lying along the slope of a lliana. The green lizard scuttles along the path – the basilisk looks with glistening eyes from the dark interstices of some corrugated vine – the biting peckotin glides among the dry leaves in pursuit of its insect prey – and the chameleon advances sluggishly along the branches, while it assumes their colour to deceive its victims.

Serpent forms present themselves: now and then the huge boa and the macaurel, twining the trees. The great tiger-snake

is seen with its head raised half a yard from the surface; the cascabel, too, coiled like a cable; and the coral-snake with his red and ringed body stretched at full length along the ground. The two last, though inferior in size to the boas, are more to be dreaded; and my horse springs back when he sees the one glistening through the grass, or hears the "skir-r-r-r" of the other threatening to strike.

Quadrupeds and quadrumana appear. The red monkey (*Mono Colorado*) runs at the traveller's approach, and, flinging himself from limb to limb, hides among the vines and *Tillandsia* on the high tree-tops; and the tiny ouistiti, with its pretty, child-like countenance, peers innocently through the leaves; while the ferocious zambo fills the woods with its hideous, half-human voice.

The jaguar is not far distant, "laired" in the secret depths of the impenetrable jungle. His activity is nocturnal, and his beautiful spotted body may not be seen except by the silver light of the moon. Roused by accident, or pressed by the dogs of the hunter, he may cross my path. So, too, may the ocelot and the lynx; or, as I ride silently on, I may chance to view the long, tawny form of the Mexican lion, crouched upon a horizontal limb, and watching for the timid stag that must pass beneath. I turn prudently aside, and leave him to his hungry vigil.

Night brings a change. The beautiful birds – the parrots, the toucans, and the trogons – all go to rest at an early hour; and other winged creatures take possession of the air. Some need

not fear the darkness, for their very life is light. Such are the "cocuyos", whose brilliant lamps of green and gold and flame, gleam through the aisles of the forest, until the air seems on fire. Such, too, are the "gusanitos", the female of which – a wingless insect, like a glow-worm – lies along the leaf, while her mate whirrs gaily around, shedding his most captivating gleams as he woos her upon the wing. But, though light is the life of these beautiful creatures, it is often the cause of their death. It guides their enemies – the night-hawk and the "whip-poor-will", the bat, and the owl. Of these last, the hideous vampire may be seen flapping his broad dark wings in quick, irregular turnings, and the great "lechuza" (*Strix Mexicana*), issuing from his dark tree-cave, utters his fearful notes, that resemble the moanings of one who is being hanged. Now may be heard the scream of the cougar, and the hoarser voice of the Mexican tiger. Now may be heard the wild, disagreeable cries of the howling monkeys (*alouattes*), and the barking of the dog-wolf; and, blending with these, the croaking of the tree-toads and the shrill tinkling of the bell-frog. Perhaps the air is no longer, as in the daytime, filled with sweet perfumes. The aroma of a thousand flowers has yielded to the fetid odour of the skunk (*Mephitis chinga*) – for that singular creature is abroad, and, having quarrelled with one of the forest denizens, has caused all of them to feel the power of its resentment.

Such are some of the features of the tropical forest that lies between the Gulf and the Mexican mountains. But the aspect

of this region is not all wild. There are cultivated districts – settlements, though far apart.

The forest opens, and the scene suddenly changes. Before me is a plantation – the hacienda of a "rico". There are wide fields tilled by peon serfs, who labour and sing; but their song is sad. Its music is melancholy. It is the voice of a conquered race.

Yet the scene around them is gay and joyful. All but the people appears to prosper. Vegetation luxuriates in its fullest growth. Both fruit and flower exhibit the hues of a perfect development. Man alone seems stunted in his outlines.

There is a beautiful stream meandering through the open fields. Its waters are clear and cool. They are the melted snows of Orizava. Upon its banks grow clumps of the cocoa-palm and the majestic plantain. There are gardens upon its banks, and orchards filled with the fruit-trees of the tropics. I see the orange with its golden globes, the sweet lime, the shaddock, and the guava-tree. I ride under the shade of the aguacate (*Laurus Persea*), and pluck the luscious fruits of the cherimolla. The breeze blowing over fields carries on its wings the aroma of the coffee-tree, the indigo-plant, the vanilla bean, or the wholesome cacao (*Theobroma Cacao*); and, far as the eye can reach, I see glancing gaily in the sun the green spears and golden tassels of the sugar-cane.

Interesting is the aspect of the tropical forest. Not less so is that of the tropical *field*.

I ride onward and inward into the land. I am gradually

ascending from the sea-level. I no longer travel upon horizontal paths, but over hills and steep ridges, across deep valleys and ravines. The hoof of my horse no longer sinks in light sand or dark alluvion. It rings upon rocks of amygdaloid and porphyry. The soil is changed; the scenery has undergone a change, and even the atmosphere that surrounds me. The last is perceptibly cooler, but not yet cold. I am still in the *piedmont* lands – the *tierras calientes*. The *templadas* are yet far higher. I am only a thousand yards or so above sea-level. I am in the "foot-hills" of the Northern Andes.

How sudden is this change! It is less than an hour since I parted from the plains below, and yet the surface-aspect around me is like that of another land. I halt in a wild spot, and survey it with eyes that wander and wonder. The leaf is less broad, the foliage less dense, the jungle more open. There are ridges whose sides are nearly naked of tree-timber. The palms have disappeared, but in their place grow kindred forms that in many respects resemble them. They are, in fact, the palms of the mountains. I behold the great palmetto (*Chamcerops*), with its fan-like fronds standing out upon long petioles from its lofty summit; the yuccas, with their bayonet-shaped leaves, ungraceful, but picturesque, with ponderous clusters of green and pulpy capsules. I behold the *pita* aloe, with its tall flower-stalk and thorny sun-scorched leaves. I behold strange forms of the cactus, with their glorious wax-like blossoms; the cochineal, the tuna, the opuntias – the great tree-cactus "Foconoztle" (*Opuntia arborescens*), and the

tall "pitahaya" (*Cereus giganteus*), with columnar shafts and straight upright arms, like the branches of gigantic candelabra; the echino-cacti, too – those huge mammals of the vegetable world, resting their globular or egg-shaped forms, without trunk or stalk, upon the surface of the earth.

There, too, I behold gigantic thistles (*cardonales*) and mimosas, both shrubby and arborescent – the tree-mimosa, and the sensitive-plant (*Mimosa frutescens*), that shrinks at my approach, and closes its delicate leaflets until I have passed out of sight. This is the favourite land of the acacia; and immense tracts, covered with its various species, form impenetrable thickets (*chapparals*). I distinguish in these thickets the honey-locust, with its long purple legumes, the "algarobo" (carob-tree), and the thorny "mezquite"; and, rising over all the rest, I descry the tall, slender stem of the *Fouquiera splendens*, with panicles of cube-shaped crimson flowers.

There is less of animal life here; but even these wild ridges have their denizens. The cochineal insect crawls upon the cactus leaf, and huge winged ants build their clay nests upon the branches of the acacia-tree. The ant-bear squats upon the ground, and projects his glutinous tongue over the beaten highway, where the busy insects rob the mimosse of their aromatic leaves. The armadillo, with his bands and rhomboidal scales, takes refuge in the dry recesses of the rocks, or, clewing himself up, rolls over the cliff to escape his pursuer. Herds of cattle, half wild, roam through the glassy glades or over the tufted ridges, lowing for

water; and black vultures (zopilotes) sail through the cloudless heavens, waiting for some scene of death to be enacted in the thickets below.

Here, too, I pass through scenes of cultivation. Here is the hut of the peon and the rancho of the small proprietor; but they are structures of a more substantial kind than in the region of the palm. They are of stone. Here, too, is the hacienda, with its low white walls and prison-like windows; and the pueblita, with its church and cross and gaily-painted steeple. Here the Indian corn takes the place of the sugarcane, and I ride through wide fields of the broad-leafed tobacco-plant. Here grow the jalap and the guaiacum, the sweet-scented sassafras and the sanitary copaiba.

I ride onward, climbing steep ridges and descending into chasms (*barrancas*) that yawn deeply and gloomily. Many of these are thousands of feet in depth; and the road that enables me to reach their bottoms is often no more than a narrow ledge of the impending cliff, running terrace-like over a foaming torrent.

Still onward and upward I go, until the "foot-hills" are passed, and I enter a defile of the mountains themselves – a pass of the Mexican Andes.

I ride through, under the shadow of dark forests and rocks of blue porphyry. I emerge upon the other side of the sierra. A new scene opens before my eyes – a scene of such soft loveliness that I suddenly rein up my horse, and gaze upon it with mingled feelings of admiration and astonishment. I am looking upon one of the "valles" of Mexico, those great table-plains that lie within

the Cordilleras of the Andes, thousands of feet above ocean-level, and, along with these mountains, stretching from the tropic almost to the shores of the Arctic Sea.

The plain before me is level, as though its surface were liquid. I see mountains bounding it on all sides; but there are passes through them that lead into other plains (*valus*). These mountains have no foot-hills. They *stand up* directly from the plain itself, sometimes with sloping conical sides – sometimes in precipitous cliffs.

I ride into the plain and survey its features. There is no resemblance to the land I have left – the *tierra caliente*. I am now in the *tierra templada*. New objects present themselves – a new aspect is before, a new atmosphere around me. The air is colder, but it is only the temperature of spring. To me it feels chilly, coming so lately from the hot lands below; and I fold my cloak closely around me, and ride on.

The view is open, for the *valu* is almost treeless. The scene is no longer wild. The earth has a cultivated aspect – an aspect of civilisation: for these high plateaux – the *tierras templadas*– are the seat of Mexican civilisation. Here are the towns – the great cities, with their rich cathedrals and convents – here dwells the bulk of the population. Here the rancho is built of unburnt bricks (*adobe's*) – a mud cabin, often inclosed by hedges of the columnar cactus. Here are whole villages of such huts, inhabited by the dark-skinned descendants of the ancient Aztecs.

Fertile fields are around me. I behold the maguey of culture

(*Agave Americana*), in all its giant proportions. The lance-like blades of the zea maize wave with a rich rustling in the breeze, for here that beautiful plant grows in its greatest luxuriance. Immense plains are covered with wheat, with capsicum, and the Spanish bean (*frijoles*). My eyes are gladdened by the sight of roses climbing along the wall or twining the portal. Here, too, the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) flourishes in its native soil; the pear and the pomegranate, the quince and the apple, are seen in the orchard; and the cereals of the temperate zone grow side by side with the *Cucurbitacece* of the tropics.

I pass from one *valu* into another, by crossing a low ridge of the dividing mountains. Mark the change! A surface of green is before me, reaching on all sides to the mountain foot; and upon this roam countless herds, tended by mounted "vaqueros" (herdsmen).

I pass another ridge, and another *valid* stretches before me. Again a change! A desert of sand, over the surface of which move tall dun columns of swirling dust, like the gigantic phantoms of some spirit-world. I look into another *valle*, and behold shining waters – lakes like inland seas – with sedgy shores and surrounded by green savannas, and vast swamps covered with reeds and "tulares" (bulrush).

Still another plain, black with lava and the scoriae of extinct volcanoes – black, treeless, and herbless – with not an atom of organic matter upon its desolate surface.

Such are the features of the plateau-land – varied, and vast,

and full of wild interest.

I leave it and climb higher – nearer to the sky – up the steep sides of the Cordilleras – up to the *tierra fria*.

I stand ten thousand feet above the level of the ocean. I am under the deep shadows of a forest. Huge trunks grow around me, hindering a distant view. Where am I? Not in the tropic, surely, for these trees are of a northern *sylva*. I recognise the gnarled limbs and lobed leaves of the oak, the silvery branches of the mountain-ash, the cones and needles of the pine. The wind, as it swirls among the dead leaves, causes me to shiver; and high up among the twigs there is the music of winter in its moaning. Yet I am in the torrid zone; and the same sun that now glances coldly through the boughs of the oak, but a few hours before scorched me as it glistened from the fronds of the palm-tree.

The forest opens, and I behold hills under culture – fields of hemp and flax, and the hardy cereals of the frigid zone. The rancho of the husbandman is a log cabin, with shingled roof and long projecting eaves, unlike the dwellings either of the great *valus* or the *tierras calientes*. I pass the smoking pits of the "carbonero", and I meet the "arriero" with his "atajo" of mules heavily laden with ice of the glaciers. They are passing with their cargoes, to cool the wine-cups in the great cities of the plains.

Upward and upward! The oak is left behind, and the pine grows stunted and dwarfish. The wind blows colder and colder. A wintry aspect is around me.

Upward still. The pine disappears. No vegetable form is seen

save the mosses and lichens that cling to the rocks, as within the Arctic Circle. I am on the selvage of the snow – the eternal snow. I walk upon glaciers, and through their translucent mass I behold the lichens growing beneath.

The scene is bleak and desolate, and I am chilled to the marrow of my bones.

Excelsior! excelsior! The highest point is not yet reached. Through drifts of snow and over fields of ice, up steep ledges, along the slippery escarpment that overhangs the giddy abysm, with wearied knees, and panting breath, and frozen fingers, onward and upward I go. Ha! I have won the goal. I am on the summit!

I stand on the "cumbre" of Orizava – the mountain of the "burning star" – more than three miles above the ocean level. My face is turned to the east, and I look downward. The snow, the cincture of lichens and naked rocks, the dark belt of pines, the lighter foliage of the oaks, the fields of barley, the waving maize, the thickets of yucca and acacia trees, the palm forest, the shore, the sea itself with its azure waves – all these at a single vision! From the summit of Orizava to the shores of the Mexican Sea, I glance through every gradation of the thermal line. I am looking, as it were, from the pole to the equator!

I am alone. My brain is giddy. My pulse vibrates irregularly, and my heart beats with an audible distinctness. I am oppressed with a sense of my own nothingness – an atom, almost invisible, upon the breast of the mighty earth.

I gaze and listen. I see, but I hear not. Here is sight, but no sound. Around me reigns an awful stillness – the sublime silence of the Omnipotent, who alone is here.

Hark! the silence is broken! Was it the rumbling of thunder? No. It was the crash of the falling avalanche. I tremble at its voice. It is the voice of the Invisible – the whisper of a God!

I tremble and worship.

Reader, could you thus stand upon the summit of Orizava, and look down to the shores of the Mexican Gulf, you would have before you, as on a map, the scene of our “adventures.”

Chapter Two.
An Adventure among the Creoles of New Orleans

In the "fall" of 1846 I found myself in the city of New Orleans, filling up one of those pauses that occur between the chapters of an eventful life – doing nothing. I have said an *eventful* life. In the retrospect of ten years, I could not remember as many weeks spent in one place. I had traversed the continent from north to south, and crossed it from sea to sea. My foot had pressed the summits of the Andes, and climbed the Cordilleras of the Sierra Madre. I had steamed it down the Mississippi, and sculled it up the Orinoco. I had hunted buffaloes with the Pawnees of the Platte, and ostriches upon the pampas of the Plata: to-day, shivering in the hut of an Esquimaux – a month after, taking my *siesta* in an aery couch under the gossamer frondage of the corozo palm. I had eaten raw meat with the trappers of the Rocky Mountains, and roast monkey among the Mosquito Indians; and much more, which might weary the reader, and ought to have made the writer a wiser man. But, I fear, the spirit of adventure – its thirst – is within me slakeless. I had just returned from a "scurry" among the Comanches of Western Texas, and the idea of "settling down" was as far from my mind as ever.

"What next? what next?" thought I. "Ha! the war with

Mexico."

The war between the United States and that country had now fairly commenced. My sword – a fine Toledo, taken from a Spanish officer at San Jacinto – hung over the mantel, rusting ingloriously. Near it were my pistols – a pair of Colt's revolvers – pointing at each other in sullen muteness. A warlike ardour seized upon me, and clutching, not the sword, but my pen, I wrote to the War Department for a commission; and, summoning all my patience, awaited the answer.

But I waited in vain. Every bulletin from Washington exhibited its list of new-made officers, but my name appeared not among them. In New Orleans – that most patriotic of republican cities – epaulettes gleamed upon every shoulder, whilst I, with the anguish of a Tantalus, was compelled to look idly and enviously on. Despatches came in daily from the seat of war, filled with newly-glorious names; and steamers from the same quarter brought fresh batches of heroes – some legless, some armless, and others with a bullet-hole through the cheek, and perhaps the loss of a dozen teeth or so; but all thickly covered with laurels.

November came, but no commission. Impatience and ennui had fairly mastered me. The time hung heavily upon my hands.

"How can I best pass the hour? I shall go to the French opera, and hear Calve."

Such were my reflections as I sat one evening in my solitary chamber. In obedience to this impulse, I repaired to the theatre;

but the bellicose strains of the opera, instead of soothing, only heightened my warlike enthusiasm, and I walked homeward, abusing, as I went, the president and the secretary-at-war, and the whole government – legislative, judicial, and executive. "Republics *are* ungrateful," soliloquised I, in a spiteful mood. "I have 'surely put in strong enough' for it; my political connections – besides, the government owes me a favour – "

"Cl'ar out, ye niggers! What de yer want?"

This was a voice that reached me as I passed through the dark corner of the Faubourg Tremé. Then followed some exclamations in French; a scuffle ensued, a pistol went off, and I heard the same voice again calling out:

"Four till one! Injuns! Murder! Help, hyur!"

I ran up. It was very dark; but the glimmer of a distant lamp enabled me to perceive a man out in the middle of the street, defending himself against four others. He was a man of giant size, and flourished a bright weapon, which I took to be a bowie-knife, while his assailants struck at him on all sides with sticks and stilettoes. A small boy ran back and forth upon the banquette, calling for help.

Supposing it to be some street quarrel, I endeavoured to separate the parties by remonstrance. I rushed between them, holding out my cane; but a sharp cut across the knuckles, which I had received from one of the small men, together with his evident intention to follow it up, robbed me of all zest for pacific meditation; and, keeping my eye upon the one who had cut me,

I drew a pistol (I could not otherwise defend myself), and fired. The man fell dead in his tracks, without a groan. His comrades, hearing me re-cock, took to their heels, and disappeared up a neighbouring alley.

The whole scene did not occupy the time you have spent in reading this relation of it. One minute I was plodding quietly homeward; the next, I stood in the middle of the street; beside me a stranger of gigantic proportions; at my feet a black mass of dead humanity, half doubled up in the mud as it had fallen; on the banquette, the slight, shivering form of a boy; while above and around were silence and darkness.

I was beginning to fancy the whole thing a dream, when the voice of the man at my side dispelled this illusion.

"Mister," said he, placing his arms akimbo, and facing me, "if ye'll tell me yur name, I ain't a-gwine to forgit it. No, Bob Linkin ain't that sorter."

"What! Bob Lincoln? Bob Lincoln of the Peaks?"

In the voice I had recognised a celebrated mountain trapper, and an old acquaintance, whom I had not met for several years.

"Why, Lord save us from Injuns! it ain't you, Cap'n Haller? May I be dog-goned if it ain't! Whooray! – whoop! I knowed it warn't no store-keeper fired that shot. Haroo! whar are yur, Jack?"

"Here I am," answered the boy, from the pavement.

"Kum hyur, then. Ye ain't badly skeert, air yur?"

"No," firmly responded the boy, crossing over.

"I tuk him from a scoundrelly Crow thet I overhauled on a fork of the Yellerstone. He gin me a long pedigree, that is, afore I kilt the skunk. He made out as how his people hed tuk the boy from the Kimanches, who hed brought him from somewhar down the Grande. I know'd it wur all bamboozle. The boy's white – American white. Who ever seed a yeller-hided Mexikin with them eyes and ha'r? Jack, this hyur's Cap'n Haller. If yur kin iver save his life by givin' yur own, yur must do it, de ye hear?"

"I will," said the boy resolutely.

"Come, Lincoln," I interposed, "these conditions are not necessary. You remember I was in your debt."

"Ain't worth mentioning Cap; let bygones be bygones!"

"But what brought you to New Orleans? or, more particularly, how came you into this scrape?"

"Wal, Cap'n, bein' as the last question is the most partickler, I'll gin yur the answer to it fust. I hed jest twelve dollars in my pouch, an' I tuk a idee inter my head thet I mout as well double it. So I stepped into a shanty whar they wur a-playin' craps. After bettin' a good spell, I won somewhar about a hundred dollars. Not likin' the sign I seed about, I tuk Jack and put out. Wal, jest as I was kummin' roun' this hyur corner, four fellers – them ye seed – run out and jumped me, like so many catamounts. I tuk them for the same chaps I hed seed parley vooin' at the craps-table; an' tho't they wur only jokin', till one of them gin me a sockdolloger over the head, an' fired a pistol. I then drewed my bowie, an' the skrimmage begun; an' thet's all I know about it,

cap'n, more'n yurself.

"Let's see if it's all up with this'n," continued the hunter, stooping. "I'deed, yes," he drawled out; "dead as a buck. Thunder! ye've gin it him atween the eyes, plum. He *is* one of the fellers, es my name's Bob Linkin. I kud sw'ar to them mowstaches among a million."

At this moment a patrol of night gendarmes came up; and Lincoln, and Jack, and myself were carried off to the calaboose, where we spent the remainder of the night. In the morning we were brought before the recorder; but I had taken the precaution to send for some friends, who introduced me to his worship in a proper manner. As my story corroborated Lincoln's, and his mine, and "Jack's" substantiated both; and as the comrades of the dead Creole did not appear, and he himself was identified by the police as a notorious robber, the recorder dismissed the case as one of "justifiable homicide in self-defence"; and the hunter and I were permitted to go our way without further interruption.

Note. Craps is a game of dice.

Chapter Three.
A Volunteer Rendezvous

"Now, Cap," said Lincoln, as we seated ourselves at the table of a café, "I'll answer t'other question yur put last night. I wur up on the head of Arkansaw, an' hearin' they wur raisin' volunteers down hyur, I kim down ter jine. It ain't often I trouble the settlements; but I've a mighty *puncheon*, as the Frenchmen says, to hev a crack at them yeller-bellies. I hain't forgot a mean trick they sarved me two yeern ago, up thar by Santer Fé."

"And so you have joined the volunteers?"

"That's sartin. But why ain't you a-gwine to Mexico? That 'ere's a wonder to me, cap, why you ain't. Thur's a mighty grist o' venturin', I heern; beats Injun fightin' all holler, an' yur jest the beaver I'd 'spect to find in that 'ar dam. Why don't you go?"

"So I purposed long since, and wrote on to Washington for a commission; but the government seems to have forgotten me."

"Dod rot the government! git a commission for yourself."

"How?" I asked.

"Jine us, an' be illected – thet's how."

This had crossed my mind before; but, believing myself a stranger among these volunteers, I had given up the idea. Once joined, he who failed in being elected an officer was fated to shoulder a firelock. It was neck or nothing then. Lincoln set

things in a new light. They were strangers to each other, he affirmed, and my chances of being elected would therefore be as good as any man's.

"I'll tell yur what it is," said he; "yur kin turn with me ter the rendevooz, an' see for yurself; but if ye'll only jine, an' licker freely, I'll lay a pack o' beaver agin the skin of a mink that they'll illect ye captain of the company."

"Even a lieutenancy," I interposed.

"Ne'er a bit of it, cap. Go the big figger. 'Tain't more nor yur entitled to. I kin git yur a good heist among some hunters thet's thur; but thar's a buffalo drove o' them parleyvoos, an' a feller among 'em, one of these hyur creeholes, that's been a-showin' off and fencin' with a pair of skewers from mornin' till night. I'd be dog-gone glad to see the starch taken out o' that feller."

I took my resolution. In half an hour after I was standing in a large hall or armoury. It was the rendezvous of the volunteers, nearly all of whom were present; and perhaps a more variegated assemblage was never grouped together. Every nationality seemed to have its representative; and for variety of language the company might have rivalled the masons of Babel.

Near the head of the room was a table, upon which lay a large parchment, covered with signatures. I added mine to the list. In the act I had staked my liberty. It was an oath.

"These are my rivals – the candidates for office," thought I, looking at a group who stood near the table. They were men of better appearance than the *hoi polloi*. Some of them already

affected a half-undress uniform, and most wore forage-caps with glazed covers, and army buttons over the ears.

"Ha! Clayley!" said I, recognising an old acquaintance. This was a young cotton-planter – a free, dashing spirit, – who had sacrificed a fortune at the shrines of Momus and Bacchus.

"Why, Haller, old fellow! glad to see you. How have you been? Think of going with us?"

"Yes, I have signed. Who is that man?"

"He's a Creole; his name is Dubrosc."

It was a face purely Norman, and one that would halt the wandering eye in any collection. Of oval outline, framed by a profusion of black hair, wavy and perfumed. A round black eye, spanned by brows arching and glossy. Whiskers that belonged rather to the chin, leaving bare the jawbone, expressive of firmness and resolve. Firm thin lips, handsomely moustached; when parted, displaying teeth well set and of dazzling whiteness. A face that might be called beautiful; and yet its beauty was of that negative order which we admire in the serpent and the pard. The smile was cynical; the eye cold, yet bright; but the brightness was altogether *animal*– more the light of instinct than intellect. A face that presented in its expression a strange admixture of the lovely and the hideous – physically fair, morally dark – beautiful, yet brutal!

From some undefinable cause, I at once conceived for this man a strange feeling of dislike. It was he of whom Lincoln had spoken, and who was likely to be my rival for the captaincy.

Was it this that rendered him repulsive? No. There was a cause beyond. In him I recognised one of those abandoned natures who shrink from all honest labour, and live upon the sacrificial fondness of some weak being who has been enslaved by their personal attractions. There are many such. I have met them in the *jardins* of Paris; in the *casinos* of London; in the cafés of Havanna, and the "quadroon" balls of New Orleans – everywhere in the crowded haunts of the world. I have met them with an instinct of loathing – an instinct of antagonism.

"The fellow is likely to be our captain," whispered Clayley, noticing that I observed the man with more than ordinary attention. "By the way," continued he, "I don't half like it. I believe he's an infernal scoundrel."

"Such are my impressions. But if that be his character, how can he be elected?"

"Oh! no one here knows another; and this fellow is a splendid swordsman, like all the Creoles, you know. He has used the trick to advantage, and has created an impression. By the by, now I recollect, you are no slouch at that yourself. What are you up for?"

"Captain," I replied.

"Good! Then we must go the 'whole hog' in your favour. I have put in for the first lieutenancy, so we won't run foul of each other. Let us 'hitch teams'."

"With all my heart," said I.

"You came in with that long-bearded hunter. Is he your

friend?"

"He is."

"Then I can tell you that among these fellows he's a 'whole team, and a cross dog under the waggon' to boot. See him! he's at it already."

I had noticed Lincoln in conversation with several leather-legging gentry like himself, whom I knew from their costume and appearance to be backwoodsmen. All at once these saturnine characters commenced moving about the room, and entering into conversation with men whom they had not hitherto deigned to notice.

"They are canvassing," said Clayley.

Lincoln, brushing past, whispered in my ear, "Cap'n, I understan' these hyur critters better'n you kin. Yer must mix among 'em – mix and licker – thet's the idee."

"Good advice," said Clayley; "but if you could only take the shine out of that fellow at fencing, the thing's done at once. By Jove! I think you might do it, Haller!"

"I have made up my mind to try, at all events."

"Not until the last day – a few hours before the election."

"You are right. It would be better to wait; I shall take your advice. In the meantime let us follow that of Lincoln – 'mix and licker'."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Clayley; "let us come, boys," he added, turning to a very thirsty-looking group, "let's all take a 'smile'. Here, *Captain* Haller! allow me to introduce you;" and the next

moment I was introduced to a crowd of very seedy-looking gentlemen, and the moment after we were clinking glasses, and chatting as familiarly as if we had been friends of forty years' standing.

During the next three days the enrolment continued, and the canvass was kept up with energy. The election was to take place on the evening of the fourth.

Meanwhile my dislike for my rival had been strengthened by closer observation; and, as is general in such cases, the feeling was reciprocal.

On the afternoon of the day in question we stood before each other, foil in hand, both of us nerved by an intense, though as yet *unspoken*, enmity. This had been observed by most of the spectators, who approached and formed a circle around us; all of them highly interested in the result – which, they knew, would be an index to the election.

The room was an armoury, and all kinds of weapons for military practice were kept in it. Each had helped himself to his foil. One of the weapons was without a button, and sharp enough to be dangerous in the hands of an angry man. I noticed that my antagonist had chosen this one.

"Your foil is not in order; it has lost the button, has it not?" I observed.

"Ah! monsieur, pardon. I did not perceive that."

"A strange oversight," muttered Clayley, with a significant glance.

The Frenchman returned the imperfect foil, and took another.

"Have you a choice, monsieur?" I inquired.

"No, thank you; I am satisfied."

By this time every person in the rendezvous had come up, and waited with breathless anxiety. We stood face to face, more like two men about to engage in deadly duel than a pair of amateurs with blunt foils. My antagonist was evidently a practised swordsman. I could see that as he came to guard. As for myself, the small-sword exercise had been a foible of my college days, and for years I had not met my match at it; but just then I was out of practice.

We commenced unsteadily. Both were excited by unusual emotions, and our first thrusts were neither skilfully aimed nor parried. We fenced with the energy of anger, and the sparks crackled from the friction of the grazing steel. For several minutes it was a doubtful contest; but I grew cooler every instant, while a slight advantage I had gained irritated my adversary. At length, by a lucky hit, I succeeded in planting the button of my foil upon his cheek. A cheer greeted this, and I could hear the voice of Lincoln shouting out:

"Wal done, cap'n! Whooray for the mountain-men!" This added to the exasperation of the Frenchman, causing him to strike wilder than before; and I found no difficulty in repeating my former thrust. It was now a sure hit; and after a few passes I thrust my adversary for the third time, drawing blood. The cheer rang out louder than before. The Frenchman could no

longer conceal his mortification; and, grasping his foil in both hands, he snapped it over his knee, with an oath. Then, muttering some word about “better weapons” and “another opportunity”, he strode off among the spectators. Two hours after the combat I was his captain. Clayley was elected first lieutenant, and in a week from that time the company was “mustered” into the service of the United States government, and armed and equipped as an independent corps of “Rifle Rangers”. On the 20th of January, 1847, a noble ship was bearing us over the blue water, toward the shores of a hostile land.

Chapter Four.
Life on the Island of Lobos

After calling at Brazos Santiago, we were ordered to land upon the island of Lobos, fifty miles north of Vera Cruz. This was to be our "drill rendezvous." We soon reached the island. Detachments from several regiments debarked together; the jungle was attacked; and in a few hours the green grove had disappeared, and in its place stood the white pyramids of canvas with their floating flags. It was the work of a day. When the sun rose over Lobos it was a desert isle, thickly covered with a jungle of mangrove, manzanel, and icaco trees, green as an emerald. How changed the scene! When the moon looked down upon this same islet it seemed as if a warlike city had sprung suddenly out of the sea, with a navy at anchor in front of its bannered walls!

In a few days six full regiments had encamped upon the hitherto uninhabited island, and nothing was heard but the voice of war.

These regiments were all "raw"; and my duty, with others, consisted in "licking them into shape". It was drill, drill, from morning till night; and, by early tattoo, I was always glad to crawl into my tent and go to sleep – such sleep as a man can get among scorpions, lizards, and soldier-crabs; for the little islet seemed to have within its boundaries a specimen of every reptile that came

safely out of the ark.

The 22nd of February being Washington's birthday, I could not get to bed as usual. I was compelled to accept an invitation, obtained by Clayley, to the tent of Major Twing, where they were – using Clayley's own words – "to have a night of it."

After tattoo we set out for the major's marquee, which lay near the centre of the islet, in a coppice of caoutchouc-trees. We had no difficulty in finding it, guided by the jingling of glasses and the mingling of many voices in boisterous laughter.

As we came near, we could perceive that the marquee had been enlarged by tucking up the flaps in front, with the addition of a fly stretched over an extra ridge-pole. Several pieces of rough plank, spirited away from the ship, resting upon empty bread-barrels, formed the table. Upon this might be recognised every variety of bottles, glasses, and cups. Open boxes of sardines, piles of ship-biscuits, and segments of cheese filled the intervening spaces. Freshly-drawn corks and glistening fragments of lead were strewed around, while a number of dark conical objects under the table told that not a few champagne bottles were already "down among the dead men."

On each side of the table was a row of colonels, captains, subalterns, and doctors seated without regard to rank or age, according to the order in which they had "dropped in". There were also some naval officers, and a sprinkling of strange, half-sailor-looking men, the skippers of transport brigs, steamboats, etcetera; for Twing for a thorough republican in his

entertainments; besides, the *day* levelled all distinctions.

At the head of the table was the major himself, who always carried a large pewter flask suspended from his shoulders by a green string, and without this flask no one ever saw Major Twing. He could not have stuck to it more closely had it been his badge of rank. It was not unusual, on the route, to hear some wearied officer exclaim, "If I only had a pull at old Twing's pewter!" and "equal to Twing's flask" was an expression which stamped the quality of any liquor as superfine. Such was one of the major's peculiarities, though by no means the only one.

As my friend and I made our appearance under the fly, the company was in high glee, everyone enjoying himself with that freedom from restraint of rank peculiar to the American army-service. Clayley was a great favourite with the major, and at once caught his eye.

"Ha, Clayley! that you? Walk in with your friend. Find seats there, gentlemen."

"Captain Haller – Major Twing," said Clayley, introducing me.

"Happy to know you, Captain. Can you find seats there? No. Come up this way. Cudjo, boy! run over to Colonel Marshall's tent, and steal a couple of stools. Adge, twist the neck off that bottle. Where's the screw? Hang that screw! Where is it anyhow?"

"Never mind the screw, Mage," cried the adjutant; "I've got a patent universal here." So saying, this gentleman held out a

champagne bottle in his left hand, and with a down-stroke of his right cut the neck off, as square as if it had been filed.

"Nate!" ejaculated Hennessy, an Irish officer, who sat near the head of the table, and who evidently admired that sort of thing.

"What we call a Kentucky corkscrew," said the adjutant coolly. "It offers a double advantage. It saves time, and you got the wine clear of – "

"My respects, gentlemen! Captain Haller – Mr Clayley."

"Thank you, Major Twing. To you, sir."

"Ha! the stools at last! Only one! Come, gentlemen, squeeze yourselves up this way. Here, Clayley, old boy; here's a cartridge-box. Adge! up-end that box. So – give us your fist, old fellow; how are you? Sit down, Captain; sit down. Cigars, there!"

At that moment the report of a musket was heard without the tent, and simultaneously a bullet whistled through the canvas. It knocked the foraging-cap from the head of Captain Hennessy, and, striking a decanter, shivered the glass into a thousand pieces!

"A nate shot that, I don't care who fired it," said Hennessy, coolly picking up his cap. "An inch of a miss – good as a mile," added he, thrusting his thumb into the bullet-hole.

By this time every officer present was upon his feet, most of them rushing towards the front of the marquee. A dozen voices called out together:

"Who fired that gun?"

There was no answer, and several plunged into the thicket in

pursuit. The chaparral was dark and silent, and these returned after a fruitless search.

"Some soldier, whose musket has gone off by accident," suggested Colonel Harding. "The fellow has run away, to avoid being put under arrest."

"Come, gentlemen, take your sates again," said Hennessy; "let the poor divil slide – yez may be thankful it wasn't a shell."

"You, Captain, have most cause to be grateful for the character of the missile."

"By my sowl, I don't know about that! – a shell or a twenty-four would have grazed me all the same; but a big shot would have been mighty inconvanient to the head of my friend Haller, here!"

This was true. My head was nearly in range; and had the shot been a large one, it would have struck me upon the left temple. As it was, I felt the "wind" of the bullet, and already began to suffer a painful sensation over the eye.

"I'm mighty curious to know which of us the fellow has missed, Captain," said Hennessy, turning to me as he spoke.

"If it were not a 'bull' I should say I hope neither of us. I'm inclined to think, with Colonel Harding, that it was altogether an accident."

"By the powers! an ugly accident too, that has spoiled five dollars' worth of an illigant cap, and a pint of as good brandy as ever was mixed with hot water and lemon-juice."

"Plenty left, Captain," cried the major. "Come, gentlemen,

don't let this damp us; fill up! till up! Adge, out with the corks! Cudjo, where's the screw?"

"Never mind the screw, Mage," cried the adjutant, repeating his old trick upon the neck of a fresh bottle, which, nipped off under the wire, fell upon a heap of others that had preceded it.

And the wine again foamed and sparkled, and glasses circled round, and the noisy revelry waxed as loud as ever. The incident of the shot was soon forgotten. Songs were sung, and stories told, and toasts drunk; and with song and sentiment, and toast and story, and the wild excitement of wit and wine, the night waned away. With many of those young hearts, old with hope and burning with ambition, it was the last "Twenty-second" they would ever celebrate. Half of them never hailed another.

Chapter Five.
A Skeleton Adventure

It was past midnight when I withdrew from the scene of wassail. My blood was flushed, and I strolled down upon the beach to enjoy the cool fresh breeze that was flowing in from the Mexican Sea.

The scene before me was one of picturesque grandeur, and I paused a moment to gaze upon it. The wine even heightened its loveliness to an illusion.

The full round moon of the tropics was sweeping over a sky of cloudless blue. The stars were eclipsed and scarcely visible, except a few of the larger ones, as the belt of Orion, the planet Venus, and the luminous radii of the Southern Cross.

From my feet a broad band of silver stretched away to the horizon, marking the meridian of the moon. This was broken by the line of coral reef, over which the surf curled and sparkled with a phosphoric brightness. The reef itself, running all round, seemed to gird the islet in a circle of fire. Here only were the waves in motion, as if pressed by some subaqueous and invisible power; for beyond, scarcely a breath stirred the sleeping sea. It lay smooth and silent, while a satellite sky seemed caved out in its azure depths.

On the south, a hundred ships were in the deep roadstead,

a cable's length from each other – their hulls, spars, and rigging magnified to gigantic proportions under the deceptive and tremulous moonbeam. They were motionless as if the sea had been frozen around them into a solid crystal. Their flags drooped listlessly down, trailing along the masts, or warped and twined around the halyards.

Up against the easy ascent extended the long rows of white tents, shining under the silvery moonbeam like pyramids of snow. In one a light was still gleaming through the canvas, where, perchance, some soldier sat up, wearily wiping his gun, or burnishing the brasses upon his belts.

Now and then dark forms – human and uniformed – passed to and fro from tent to tent, each returning from a visit to some regimental comrade. At equal distances round the camp others stood upright and motionless, the gleam of the musket showing the sentry on his silent post.

The plunge of an oar, as some boat was rowed out among the anchored ships – the ripple of the light breaker – at intervals the hail of a sentinel, "Who goes there?" – the low parley that followed – the chirp of the cicada in the dark jungle – or the scream of the sea-bird, scared by some submarine enemy from its watery rest – were the only sounds that disturbed the deep stillness of the night.

I continued my walk along the beach until I had reached that point of the island directly opposite to the mainland of Mexico. Here the chaparral grew thick and tangled, running down to the

water's edge, where it ended in a clump of mangroves. As no troops were encamped here, the islet had not been cleared at this point, and the jungle was dark and solitary.

The moon was now going down, and straggling shadows began to fall upon the water.

Certainly some one skulked into the bushes! – a rustling in the leaves – yes! some fellow who has strayed beyond the line of sentries and is afraid to return to camp. Ha! a boat! a skiff it is – a net and buoys! As I live, 'tis a Mexican craft! – who can have brought it here? Some fisherman from the coast of Tuspan. No, he would not venture; it must be —

A strange suspicion flashed across my mind, and I rushed through the mangrove thicket, where I had observed the object a moment before. I had not proceeded fifty yards when I saw the folly of this movement. I found myself in the midst of a labyrinth, dark and dismal, surrounded by a wall of leaves and brambles. The branches of the mangroves, rooted at their tops, barred up the path, and vines laced them together.

"If they be spies," thought I, "I have taken the worst plan to catch them. I may as well go through now. I cannot be distant from the rear of the camp. Ugh! how dismal!"

I pushed on, climbing over fallen trunks, and twining myself through the viny cordage. The creepers clung to my neck – thorns penetrated my skin – the *mezquite* slapped me in the face, drawing blood. I laid my hand upon a pendent limb; a clammy object struggled under my touch, with a terrified yet

spiteful violence, and, freeing itself, sprang over my shoulder, and scampered off among the fallen leaves. I felt its fetid breath as the cold scales brushed against my cheek. It was the hideous iguana.

A huge bat flapped its sail-like wings in my face, and returned again and again, breathing a mephitic odour that caused me to gasp. Twice I struck at it with my sword, cutting only the empty air. A third time my blade was caught in the trellis of parasites. It was horrible; I felt terrified to contend with such strange enemies.

At length, after a continued struggle, an opening appeared before me – a glade; I rushed to the welcome spot.

"What a relief!" I ejaculated, emerging from the leafy darkness. Suddenly I started back with a cry of horror; my limbs refused to act; the sword fell from my grasp, and I stood palsied and transfixed, as if by a bolt from heaven.

Before me, and not over three paces distant, the image of Death himself rose out of the earth, and stretched forth his skeleton arms to clutch me. It was no phantom. There was the white, naked skull, with its eyeless sockets, the long, flesh-less limbs, the open, serrated ribs, the long, jointed fingers of Death himself.

As my bewildered brain took in these objects I heard a noise in the bushes as of persons engaged in an angry struggle.

"Emile, Emile!" cried a female voice, "you shall not murder him – you shall not!"

"Off! off! – Marie, let me go!" was shouted in the rough

accents of a man.

"Oh, no!" continued the female, "you shall not – no – no – no!"

"Curses on the woman! There, let me go now!"

There was a sound as of someone struck with violence – a scream – and at the same moment a human figure rushed out of the bushes, and, confronting me, exclaimed: "Ha! Monsieur le Capitaine! *coup pour coup*!" I heard no more; a heavy blow, descending upon my temples, deprived me of all power, and I fell senseless to the earth. When I returned to consciousness the first objects I saw were the huge brown whiskers of Lincoln, then Lincoln himself, then the pale face of the boy Jack; and, finally, the forms of several soldiers of my company. I saw that I was in my own tent and stretched upon my camp-bed.

"What? – howl – what's the matter! – what's this?" I said, raising my hands to the bandage of wet linen that bound my temples.

"Keep still, Cap'n," said Bob, taking my hand from the fillet and placing it by my side.

"Och! by my sowl, he's over it; thank the Lord for His goodness!" said Chane, an Irish soldier.

"Over what? what has happened to me?" I inquired.

"Och, Captin, yer honour, you've been nearly murthered, and all by thim Frinch scoundhrels; bad luck to their dirty frog-atin' picthers!"

"Murdered! French scoundrels! Bob, what is it?"

"Why, yer see, Cap'n, ye've had a cut hyur over the head; and

we think it's them Frenchmen."

"Oh! I remember now; a blow – but the Death? – the Death?"

I started up from the bed as the phantom of my night adventure returned to my imagination.

"The Death, Cap'n? – what do yer mean?" inquired Lincoln, holding me in his strong arms.

"Oh! the Cap'n manes the skilleton, maybe," said Chane.

"What skeleton?" I demanded.

"Why, an owld skilleton the boys found in the chaparril, yer honner. They hung it to a three; and we found yer honner there, with the skilleton swinging over ye like a sign. Och! the Frinch bastes!"

I made no further inquiries about the "Death."

"But where are the Frenchmen?" asked I, after a moment.

"Clane gone, yer honner," replied Chane.

"Gone?"

"Yes, Cap'n; that's so as he sez it," answered Lincoln.

"Gone! What do you mean?" I inquired.

"Desarted, Cap'n."

"How do you know that?"

"Because they ain't here."

"On the island?"

"Searched it all – every bush."

"But who? which of the French?"

"Dubrosc and that 'ar boy that was always with him – both desarted."

"You are sure they are missing?"

"Looked high and low, Cap'n. Gravenitz seed Dubrosc steal into the chaparril with his musket. Shortly afterwards we heern a shot, but thought nothin' of it till this mornin', when one of the sodgers foun' a Spanish sombrary out thar; and Chane heern some'dy say the shot passed through Major Twing's markey. Besides, we foun' this butcher-knife where yer was lyin'."

Lincoln here held up a species of Mexican sword called a *macheté*.

"Ha! – well."

"That's all, Cap'n; only it's my belief there was Mexicans on this island, and them Frenchmen's gone with them."

After Lincoln left me I lay musing on this still somewhat mysterious affair. My memory, however, gradually grew clearer; and the events of the preceding night soon became linked together, and formed a complete chain. The shot that passed so near my head in Twing's tent – the boat – the French words I had heard before I received the blow – and the exclamation, "*Coup pour coup*!" – all convinced me that Lincoln's conjectures were right.

Dubrosc had fired the shot and struck the blow that had left me senseless.

But who could the woman be whose voice I had heard pleading in my behalf?

My thoughts reverted to the boy who had gone off with Dubrosc, and whom I had often observed in the company of the

latter. A strange attachment appeared to exist between them, in which the boy seemed to be the devoted slave of the strong fierce Creole. Could this be a woman?

I recollected having been struck with his delicate features, the softness of his voice, and the smallness of his hands. There were other points, besides, in the *tournure* of the boy's figure that had appeared singular to me. I had frequently observed the eyes of this lad bent upon me, when Dubrosc was not present, with a strange and unaccountable expression.

Many other peculiarities connected with the boy and Dubrosc, which at the time had passed unnoticed and unheeded, now presented themselves to my recollection, all tending to prove the identity of the boy with the woman whose voice I had heard in the thicket.

I could not help smiling at the night's adventures; determined, however, to conceal that part which related to the skeleton.

In a few days my strength was restored. The cut I had received was not deep – thanks to my forage-cap and the bluntness of the Frenchman's weapon.

Chapter Six.
The Landing at Sacrificios

Early in the month of March the troops at Lobos were re-embarked, and dropped down to the roadstead of Anton Lizardo. The American fleet was already at anchor there, and in a few days above a hundred sail of transports had joined it.

There is no city, no village, hardly a habitation upon this half-desert coast. The aspect is an interminable waste of sandy hills, rendered hirsute and picturesque by the plumed frondage of the palm-tree.

We dared not go ashore, although the smooth white beach tempted us strongly. A large body of the enemy was encamped behind the adjacent ridges, and patrols could be seen at intervals galloping along the beach.

I could not help fancying what must have been the feeling of the inhabitants in regard to our ships – a strange sight upon this desert coast, and not a pleasing one to them, knowing that within those dark hulls were concealed the hosts of their armed invaders. Laocoon looked not with more dread upon the huge ribs of the Danaic horse than did the simple peasant of Anahuac upon this fleet of "oak leviathans" that lay within so short a distance of his shores.

To us the scene possessed an interest of a far different

character. We looked proudly upon these magnificent models of naval architecture – upon their size, their number, and their admirable adaptation. We viewed with a changing cheek and kindling eye this noble exhibition of a free people's strength; and as the broad banner of our country swung out upon the breeze of the tropics, we could not help exulting in the glory of that great nation whose uniform we wore around our bodies.

It was no dream. We saw the burnished cannon and the bright epaulette, the gleaming button and the glancing bayonet. We heard the startling trumpet, the stirring drum, and the shrill and thrilling fife; and our souls drank in all those glorious sights and sounds that form at once the spirit and the witchery of war.

The landing was to take place on the 9th, and the point of debarkation fixed upon was the beach opposite the island of Sacrificios, just out of range of the guns of Vera Cruz.

The 9th of March rose like a dream, bright, balmy, and beautiful. The sea was scarcely stirred by the gentlest breeze of the tropics; but this breeze, light as it was, blew directly in our favour.

At an early hour I observed a strange movement among the ships composing the fleet. Signals were changing in quick succession, and boats gliding rapidly to and fro.

Before daybreak the huge surf-boats had been drawn down from their moorings, and with long hempen hawsers attached to the ships and steamers.

The descent was about to be made. The ominous cloud which

had hung dark and threatening over the shores of Mexico was about to burst upon that devoted land. But where? The enemy could not tell, and were preparing to receive us on the adjacent shore.

The black cylinder began to smoke, and the murky cloud rolled down upon the water, half obscuring the fleet. Here and there a broad sail, freshly unfurled, hung stiffly from the yard; the canvas, escaping from its gasket fastenings, had not yet been braced round to the breeze.

Soldiers were seen standing along the decks; some in full equipments, clutching the bright barrels of their muskets, while others were buckling on their white belts, or cramming their cartouche-boxes.

Officers, in sash and sword, paced the polished quarter-decks, or talked earnestly in groups, or watched with eager eyes the motions of the various ships.

Unusual sounds were heard on all sides. The deep-toned chorus of the sailor, the creaking of the capstan, and the clanking of the iron cogs; the "heave-ho!" at the windlass, and the grating of the huge anchor-chain, as link after link rasped through the rusty ring – sounds that warned us to make ready for a change.

In the midst of these came the brisk rolling of a drum. It was answered by another, and another, and still another, until all voices were drowned by the deafening noise. Then followed the mingling shouts of command, a rushing over the decks, and streams of blue-clad men poured down the dark sides,

and seated themselves in the surf-boats. These were filled in a twinkling, and all was silent as before. Every voice was hushed in expectation, and every eye bent upon the little black steamer which carried the commander-in-chief.

Suddenly a cloud of smoke rose up from her quarter; a sheet of flame shot out horizontally; and the report of a heavy gun shook the atmosphere like an earthquake. Before its echoes had subsided, a deafening cheer ran simultaneously through the fleet; and the ships, all together, as if impelled by some hidden and supernatural power, broke from their moorings, and dashed through the water with the velocity of the wind. Away to the north-west, in an exciting race; away for the island of Sacrificios!

On struggled the ships, bending to the breeze and cleaving the crystal water with their bold bows; on the steamers, beating the blue waves into a milky way, and dragging the laden boats in their foamy track. On followed the boats through the hissing and frothy caldron. Loud rolled the drum, loud brayed the bugle, and loud huzzas echoed from the adjacent shores.

Already the foe was alarmed and alert. Light horsemen with streaming haste galloped up the coast. Lancers, with gay trappings and long pennons, appeared through the openings of the hills. Foaming, prancing steeds flew with light artillery over the naked ridges, dashing madly down deep defiles, and crushing the cactus with their whirling wheels. “Andela! Andela!” was their cry. In vain they urged their horses, in vain they drove the spur deep and bloody into their smoking sides. The elements

were against them, and in favour of their foes.

The earth and the water were their impediments, while the air and the water were the allies of their enemies. *They* clung and sweltered through the hot and yielding sand or sank in the marshy borders of the Mandinga and the Medellin, while steam and the wind drove the ships of their adversaries like arrows through the water.

The alarm spread up the coast. Bugles were sounding, and horsemen galloped through the streets of Vera Cruz. The alarm-drum beat in the plaza, and the long roll echoed in every *cuartel*.

Signal rockets shot up from San Juan, and were answered by others from Santiago and Concepcion.

Thousands of dark forms clustered upon the roofs of the city and the ramparts of the castle; and thousands of pale lips whispered in accents of terror, "They come! they come!"

As yet they knew not how the attack was to be made, or where to look for our descent.

They imagined that we were about to bombard their proud fortress of San Juan, and expected soon to see the ships of these rash invaders shattered and sunk before its walls.

The fleet was almost within long range, the black buoyant hulls bounded fearlessly over the water. The eager crowd thickened upon the walls. The artillerists of Santiago had gathered around their guns, silent and waiting orders. Already the burning fuse was sending forth its sulphurous smell, and the dry powder lay temptingly on the touch, when a quick, sharp cry

was heard along the walls and battlements, a cry of mingled rage, disappointment, and dismay.

The foremost ship had swerved suddenly from the track; and bearing sharply to the left, under the *manège* of a skilful helmsman, was running down under the shelter of Sacrificios.

The next ship followed her guide, and the next, and the next; and, before the astonished multitude recovered from their surprise, the whole fleet had come to within pistol-shot of the island!

The enemy now, for the first time, perceived the *ruse*, and began to calculate its results. Those giant ships, that but a moment ago seemed rushing to destruction, had rounded to at a safe distance, and were preparing, with the speed and skilfulness of a perfect discipline, to pour a hostile host upon the defenceless shores. In vain the cavalry bugle called their horsemen to the saddle; in vain the artillery car rattled along the streets; both would be too late!

Meanwhile, the ships let fall their anchors, with a plunge, and a rasping, and a rattle. The sails came down upon the yards; and sailors swung themselves into the great surf-boats, and mixed with the soldiers, and seized the oars.

Then the blades were suddenly and simultaneously dropped on the surface of the wave, a naval officer in each boat directing the movements of the oarsmen.

And the boats pulled out nearer, and by an echelon movement took their places in line.

Light ships of war were thrown upon our flanks, to cover the descent by a cross fire. No enemy had yet appeared, and all eyes were turned landward with fiery expectation. Bounding hearts waited impatiently for the signal.

The report of a single gun was at length heard from the ship of the commander-in-chief; and, as if by one impulse, a thousand oars struck the water, and flung up the spray upon their broad blades. A hundred boats leaped forward simultaneously. The powerful stroke was repeated, and propelled them with lightning speed. Now was the exciting race, the regatta of war! The Dardan rowers would have been distanced here.

On! on! with the velocity of the wind, over the blue waves, through the snowy surf – on!

And now we neared the shore, and officers sprang to their feet, and stood with their swords drawn; and soldiers half sat, half crouched, clutching their muskets. And the keels gritted upon the gravelly bed; and, at the signal, a thousand men, in one plunge, flung themselves into the water, and dashed madly through the surf. Thousands followed, holding their cartridge-boxes breast-high; and blades were glancing, and bayonets gleaming, and banners waving; and under glancing blades, and gleaming bayonets, and waving banners, the dark mass rushed high upon the beach.

Then came a cheer, loud, long, and exulting. It pealed along the whole line, uttered from five thousand throats, and answered by twice that number from the anchored ships. It echoed along

the shores, and back from the distant battlements.

A colour-sergeant, springing forward, rushed up the steep sides of a sand-hill, and planted his flag upon its snowy ridge.

As the well-known banner swung out upon the breeze, another cheer, wild and thrilling, ran along the line; a hundred answering flags were hauled up through the fleet; the ships of war saluted with full broadsides; and the guns of San Juan, now for the first time waking from their lethargic silence, poured forth their loudest thunder.

The sun was just setting as our column commenced its advance inward. After winding for a short distance through the defiles of the sand-hills, we halted for the night, our left wing resting upon the beach.

The soldiers bivouacked without tents – sleeping upon their arms, with the soft sand for their couch and the cartridge-box for their pillow.

Note. Cuartel is the quarter of the city.

Chapter Seven.
The City of the True Cross

Vera Cruz is a fortified city. Round and round it is girt by a wall, with regular batteries placed at intervals. You enter it from the land side by three gates (*garitas*), and from the sea by a beautiful pier or mole that projects some distance into the water. The latter is a modern construction; and when the sun is descending behind the Mexican Cordilleras to the west, and the breeze blows in from the Gulf, this mole – the seat of but little commercial activity – becomes the favourite promenade of the dark-eyed Vera-Cruzanas and their pallid lovers.

The city stands on the very beach. The sea at full tide washes its battlements, and many of the houses overlook the water. On almost every side a plain of sand extends to a mile's distance from the walls, where it terminates in those lofty white sand-ridges that form a feature of the shores of the Mexican Gulf. During high tides and "northers" the sea washes over the surrounding sand-plain, and Vera Cruz appears almost isolated amid the waves. On one side, however, towards the south, there is variety in the aspect. Here appear traces of vegetation – some low trees and bushes, a view of the forest inward into the country, a few buildings outside the walls, a railway-station, a cemetery, an aqueduct, a small sluggish stream, marshes and stagnant pools.

In front of the city, built upon the coral reef, stands the celebrated fortress-castle of San Juan de Ulloa. It is about one thousand yards out from the mole, and over one of its angles towers a lighthouse. Its walls, with the reef on which it stands (Gallega), shelter the harbour of Vera Cruz – which, in fact, is only a roadstead – from the north winds. Under the lee of San Juan the ships of commerce lie at anchor. There are but few of them at any time.

Another large fort (Concepcion) stands upon the beach at the northern angle of the city, and a third (Santiago) defends it towards the south. A circular bastion, with heavy pieces of ordnance, sweeps the plain to the rear, commanding it as far as the sand-ridges.

Vera Cruz is a pretty picture to look at, either from the sea or from the sand-hills in the interior. Its massive domes – its tall steeples and turreted roofs – its architecture, half Moorish, half modern – the absence of scattered suburbs or other salient objects to distract the eye – all combine to render the City of the True Cross an unique and striking picture. In fact, its numerous architectural varieties, bound as they are into compact unity by a wall of dark lava-stone, impress you with the idea that some artist had arranged them for the sake of effect. The *coup d'oeil* often reminded me of the engravings of cities in *Goldsmith's Epitome*, that used to be considered the bright spots in my lessons of school geography.

At break of day, on the 10th, the army took up its line of

march through hills of sand-drift. Division lapped upon division, regiment upon regiment, extending the circle of investment by an irregular echelon. Foot rifles and light infantry drove the enemy from ridge to ridge, and through the dark mazes of the chaparral gorge. The column continued its tortuous track, winding through deep denies, and over hot white hills, like a bristling snake. It moved within range of the guns of the city, screened by intervening heights. Now and then the loud cannon of Santiago opened upon it, as some regiment displayed itself, crossing a defile or pushing over the spur of a sand-hill. The constant rattling of rifles and musketry told that our skirmishers were busy in the advance. The arsenal was carried by a brilliant charge, and the American flag waved over the ruins of the Convent Malibran. On the 11th the Orizava road was crossed, and the light troops of the enemy were brushed from the neighbouring hills. They retired sullenly under shelter of their heavy guns, and within the walls of the city.

On the morning of the 12th the investment was complete. Vera Cruz lay within a semicircle, around its centre. The half circumference was a chain of hostile regiments that embraced the city in their concave arc. The right of this chain pitched its tents opposite the isle of Sacrificios; while five miles off to the north, its left rested upon the hamlet Vergara. The sea covered the complement of this circle, guarded by a fleet of dark and warlike ships.

The diameter hourly grew shorter. The lines of circum-

vallation lapped closer and closer around the devoted city, until the American pickets appeared along the ridges of the nearest hills, and within range of the guns of Santiago, Concepcion, and Xjuoa.

A smooth sand-plain, only a mile in width, lay between the besiegers and the walls of the besieged.

After tattoo-beat on the night of the 12th, with a party of my brother officers, I ascended the high hill around which winds the road leading to Orizava.

This hill overlooks the city of Vera Cruz.

After dragging ourselves wearily through the soft, yielding sand, we reached the summit, and halted on a projecting ridge.

With the exception of a variety of exclamations expressing surprise and delight, not a word for awhile was uttered by any of our party, each individual being wrapped up in the contemplation of a scene of surpassing interest. It was moonlight, and sufficiently clear to distinguish the minutest objects on the picture that lay rolled out before us like a map.

Below our position, and seeming almost within reach of the hand, lay the City of the True Cross, rising out of the white plain, and outlined upon the blue background of the sea.

The dark grey towers and painted domes, the Gothic turret and Moorish minaret, impressed us with the idea of the antique; while here and there the tamarind, nourished on some azotea, or the fringed fronds of the palm-tree, drooping over the notched parapet, lent to the city an aspect at once southern and

picturesque.

Domes, spires, and cupolas rose over the old grey walls, crowned with floating banners – the consular flags of France, and Spain, and Britain, waving alongside the eagle of the Aztecs.

Beyond, the blue waters of the Gulf rippled lightly against the sea-washed battlements of San Juan, whose brilliant lights glistened along the combing of the surf.

To the south we could distinguish the isle of Sacrificios, and the dark hulls that slept silently under the shelter of its coral reef.

Outside the fortified wall, which girt the city with its cincture of grey rock, a smooth plain stretched rearward to the foot of the hill on which we stood, and right and left along the crest of the ridge from Punta Hornos to Vergara, ranged a line of dark forms – the picket sentries of the American outposts, as they stood knee-deep in the soft, yielding sand-drift.

It was a picture of surprising interest; and, as we stood gazing upon it, the moon suddenly disappeared behind a bank of clouds; and the lamps of the city, heretofore eclipsed by her brighter beam, now burned up and glistened along the walls.

Bells rang merrily from church-towers, and bugles sounded through the echoing streets. At intervals we could hear the shrill cries of the guard, "*Centinela! alerte*!" (Sentinel, look out), and the sharp challenge, "*Quien viva*?" (Who goes there?)

Then the sound of sweet music, mingled with the soft voices of women, was wafted to our ears, and with beating hearts we fancied we could hear the light tread of silken feet, as they

brushed over the polished floor of the ball-room.

It was a tantalising moment, and wistful glances were cast on the beleaguered town; while more than one of our party was heard impatiently muttering a wish that it might be carried by assault.

As we continued gazing, a bright jet of flame shot out horizontally from the parapet over Puerto Nuevo.

"Look out!" cried Twing, at the same instant flinging his wiry little carcase squat under the brow of a sand-wreath.

Several of the party followed his example; but, before all had housed themselves, a shot came singing past, along with the loud report of a twenty-four.

The shot struck the comb of the ridge, within several yards of the group, and ricocheted off into the distant hills.

"Try it again!" cried one.

"That fellow has lost a champagne supper," said Twing.

"More likely he has had it, or his aim would be more steady," suggested an officer.

"Oysters, too – only think of it!" said Clayley.

"Howld your tongue, Clayley, or by my sowl I'll charge down upon the town!"

This came from Hennessy, upon whose imagination the contrast between champagne and oysters and the gritty pork and biscuit he had been feeding upon for several days past acted like a shock.

"There again!" cried Twing, whose quick eye caught the blaze

upon the parapet.

"A shell, by the powers!" exclaimed Hennessy. "Let it dhrop first, or it may dhrop on ye," he continued, as several officers were about to fling themselves on their faces.

The bomb shot up with a hissing, hurtling sound. A little spark could be seen as it traced its graceful curves through the dark heavens.

The report echoed from the walls, and at the same instant was heard a dull sound, as the shell buried itself in the sand-drift.

It fell close to one of the picket sentinels, who was standing upon his post within a few paces of the group. The man appeared to be either asleep or stupefied, as he remained stock-still. Perhaps he had mistaken it for the ricochet of a round shot.

"It's big shooting for them to hit the hill!" exclaimed a young officer.

The words had scarcely passed when a loud crash, like the bursting of a cannon, was heard under our feet; the ground opened like an earthquake, and, amidst the whistling of the fragments, the sand was dashed into our faces.

A cloud of dust hung for a moment above the spot. The moon at this instant reappeared, and as the dust slowly settled away, the mutilated body of the soldier was seen upon the brow of the hill, at the distance of twenty paces from his post.

A low cheer reached us from Concepcion, the fort whence the shell had been projected.

Chagrined at the occurrence, and mortified that it had been

caused by our imprudence, we were turning to leave the hill, when the "whish" of a rocket attracted our attention.

It rose from the chaparral, about a quarter of a mile in rear of the camp, and, before it had reached its culminating point, an answering signal shot up from the Puerto Nuevo.

At the same instant a horseman dashed out of the thicket, and headed his horse at the steep sand-hills. After three or four desperate plunges, the fiery mustang gained the crest of the ridge upon which lay the remains of the dead soldier.

Here the rider, seeing our party, suddenly reined up and balanced for a moment in the stirrup, as if uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

We, on the other hand, taking him for some officer of our own, and wondering who it could be galloping about at such an hour, stood silent and waiting.

"By heavens, that's a Mexican!" muttered Twing, as the ranchero dress became apparent under a brighter beam of the moon.

Before anyone could reply, the strange horseman wheeled sharply to the left, and drawing a pistol, fired it into our midst. Then spurring his wild horse, he galloped past us into a deep defile of the hills.

"You're a set of Yankee fools!" he shouted back, as he reached the bottom of the dell.

Half a dozen shots replied to the taunting speech; but the retreating object was beyond pistol range before our astonished

party had recovered from their surprise at such an act of daring audacity.

In a few minutes we could see both horse and rider near the walls of the city – a speck on the white plain; and shortly after we heard the grating hinges of the Puerto Nuevo, as the huge gate swung open to receive him. No one was hit by the shot of his pistol. Several could be heard gritting their teeth with mortification as we commenced descending the hill.

"Did you know that voice, Captain?" whispered Clayley to me, as we returned to camp.

"Yes."

"You think it was – "

"Dubrosc."

Chapter Eight.
Major Blossom

On reaching the camp I found a mounted orderly in front of my tent.

"From the general," said the soldier, touching his cap, and handing me a sealed note.

The orderly, without waiting a reply, leaped into his saddle and rode off.

I broke the seal with delight:

"Sir, – You will report, with fifty men, to Major Blossom, at 4 a.m. to-morrow.

"By order, – "

(Signed) "A.A.A. – G.

"Captain Haller, commanding Co. Rifle Rangers."

"Old Bios, eh? Quartermaster scouting, I hope," said Clayley, looking over the contents of the note.

"Anything but the trenches; I am sick of them."

"Had it been anybody else but Blossom – fighting Daniels, for instance – we might have reckoned on a comfortable bit of duty; but the old whale can hardly climb into his saddle – it *does* look bad."

"I will not long remain in doubt. Order the sergeant to warn the men for four."

I walked through the camp in search of Blossom's marquee, which I found in a grove of caoutchouc-trees, and out of range of the heaviest metal in Vera Cruz. The major himself was seated in a large Campeachy chair, that had been "borrowed" from some neighbouring rancho, and perhaps it was never so well filled as by its present occupant.

It would be useless to attempt an elaborate description of Major Blossom. That would require an entire chapter.

Perhaps the best that can be done to give the reader an idea of him is to say that he was a great, fat, red man, and known among his brother officers as "the swearing major". If anyone in the army loved good living, it was Major Blossom; and if anyone hated hard living, that man was Major George Blossom. He hated Mexicans, too, and mosquitoes, and scorpions, and snakes, and sand-flies, and all enemies to his rest and comfort; and the manner in which he swore at these natural foes would have entitled him to a high commission in the celebrated army of Flanders.

Major Blossom was a quarter-master in more senses than one, as he occupied more quarters than any two men in the army, not excepting the general-in-chief; and when many a braver man and better officer was cut down to "twenty-five pounds of baggage", the private lumber of Major Blossom, including himself, occupied a string of wagons like a siege-train.

As I entered the tent he was seated at supper. The viands before him were in striking contrast to the food upon which the

army was then subsisting. There was no gravel gritting between the major's teeth as he masticated mess-pork or mouldy biscuit. He found no *débris* of sand and small rocks at the bottom of his coffee-cup. No; quite the contrary.

A dish of pickled salmon, a side of cold turkey, a plate of sliced tongue, with a fine Virginia ham, were the striking features of the major's supper, while a handsome French coffee-urn, containing the essence of Mocha, simmered upon the table. Out of this the major from time to time replenished his silver cup. A bottle of *eau-de-vie*, that stood near his right hand, assisted him likewise in swallowing his ample ration.

"Major Blossom, I presume?" said I.

"My name," ejaculated the major, between two swallows, so short and quick that the phrase sounded like a monosyllable.

"I have received orders to report to you, sir."

"Ah! bad business! bad business!" exclaimed the major, qualifying the words with an energetic oath.

"How, sir?"

"Atrocious business! dangerous service! Can't see why they sent me."

"I came, Major, to inquire the nature of the service, so that I may have my men in order for it."

"Dangerous service!"

"It is?"

"Infernal cut-throats! thousands of 'em in the bushes – bore a man through as soon as wink. Those yellow devils are worse than

– !" and again the swearing major wound up with an exclamation not proper to be repeated.

"Can't see why they picked *me* out. There's Myers, and Wayne, and Wood, not half my size, and that thin scare-the-crows Allen; but no – the general wants *me* killed. Die soon enough in this infernal nest of centipedes without being shot in the chaparral! I wish the chaparral was – !" and again the major's unmentionable words came pouring forth in a volley.

I saw that it was useless to interrupt him until the first burst was over. From his frequent anathemas on the "bushes" and the "chaparral", I could gather that the service I was called upon to perform lay at some distance from the camp; but beyond this I could learn nothing, until the major had sworn himself into a degree of composure, which after some minutes he accomplished. I then re-stated the object of my visit.

"We're going into the country for mules," replied the major. "Mules, indeed! Heaven knows there isn't a mule within ten miles, unless with a yellow-hided Mexican on his back, and such mules we don't want. The volunteers – curse them! – have scared everything to the mountains: not a stick of celery nor an onion to be had at any price."

"How long do you think we may be gone?" I inquired.

"Long? Only a day. If I stay overnight in the chaparral, may a wolf eat me! Oh, no! if the mules don't turn up soon, somebody else may go fetch 'em – that's all."

"I may ration them for one day?" said I.

"Two – two; your fellows'll be hungry. Roberts, of the Rifles, who's been out in the country, tells me there isn't enough forage to feed a cat. So you'd better take two days' biscuit. I suppose we'll meet with beef enough on the hoof, though I'd rather have a rump-steak out of the Philadelphia market than all the beef in Mexico. Hang their beef! it's as tough as tan leather!"

"At four o'clock then, Major, I'll be with you," said I, preparing to take my leave.

"Make it a little later, Captain. I get no sleep with these cursed gally-nippers and things; but, stay – how many men have you got?"

"In my company eighty; but my order is to take only fifty."

"There again! I told you so; want me killed – they want old Bios killed! Fifty men, when a thousand of the leather-skinned devils have been seen not ten miles off! Fifty men! great heavens! fifty men! There's an escort to take the chaparral with!"

"But they are fifty men worth a hundred, I promise you."

"Bring all – every son of a gun – bugler and all."

"But that, Major, would be contrary to the general's orders."

"Hang the general's orders! Obey some generals' orders in this army, and you would do queer things. Bring them all; take my advice. I tell you, if you don't, our lives may answer for it. Fifty men!"

I was about to depart when the major stopped me with a loud "Hilloa!"

"Why," cried he, "I have lost my senses! Your pardon,

Captain! This unlucky thing has driven me crazy. They must pick upon *me*! What will you drink? Here's some good brandy; sorry I can't say as much for the water."

I mixed a glass of brandy and water; the major did the same; and, having pledged each other, we bade "good night", and separated.

Chapter Nine.
Scouting in the Chaparral

Between the shores of the Mexican Gulf and the "foot-hills" (*piedmont*) of the great chain of the Andes lies a strip of low lands. In many places this belt is nearly a hundred miles in breadth, but generally less than fifty. It is of a tropical character, termed in the language of the country *tierra caliente*. It is mostly covered with jungly forests, in which are found the palm, the tree-ferns, the mahogany and india-rubber trees, dyewoods, canes, llianas, and many other gigantic parasites. In the underwood you meet thorny aloes, the "pita" plant, and wild mezcal; various Cactacese, and flora of singular forms, scarcely known to the botanist. There are swamps, dark and dank, overshadowed by the tall cypress, with its pendent streamers of silvery moss (*Tillandsia usneoïdes*). From these arise the miasma – the mother of the dreaded "vomito."

This unhealthy region is but thinly inhabited; but here you meet with people of the African race, and nowhere else in Mexico. In the towns – and there are but few – you see the yellow mulatto, and the pretty quadroon with her black waving hair; but in the spare settlements of the country you meet with a strange race – the cross of the negro with the ancient inhabitants of the country – the "zamboes."

Along the coast and in the black country, behind Vera Cruz, you will find these people living a half-indolent, half-savage life, as small cultivators, cattle-herds, fishermen, or hunters. In riding through the forest you may often chance upon such a picture as the following: —

There is an opening in the woods that presents an aspect of careless cultivation – a mere patch cleared out of the thick jungle – upon which grow yams, the sweet-potato (*Convolvulus batata*), chilé, melons, and the calabash. On one side of the clearing there is a hut – a sort of shed. A few upright poles forked at their tops; a few others laid horizontally upon them; a thatch of palm leaves to shadow the burning rays of the sun – that is all.

In this shadow there are human beings – men, women, children. They wear rude garments of white cotton cloth; but they are half-naked, and their skins are dark, almost black. Their hair is woolly and frizzled. They are not Indians, they are not negroes, they are "zamboes" – a mixture of both. They are coarse-featured, and coarsely clad. You would find it difficult, at a little distance, to distinguish their sex, did you not know that those who swing in the hammocks and recline indolently upon the palm-mats (*petatés*) are the men, and those who move about and do the work are the females. One of the former occasionally stimulates the activity of the latter by a stroke of the "cuarto" (mule-whip).

A few rude implements of furniture are in the shed: a "metaté" on which the boiled maize is ground for the "tortilla" cakes; some

"ollas" (pots) of red earthenware; dishes of the calabash; a rude hatchet or two; a "macheté"; a banjo made from the gourd-shell; a high-peaked saddle, with bridle and "lazo"; strings of red-pepper pods hanging from the horizontal beams – not much more. A lank dog on the ground in front; a lean "mustang" tied to the tree; a couple of "burros" (donkeys); and perhaps a sorry galled mule in an inclosure adjoining.

The zambo enjoys his *dolce far niente* while his wife does his work – what work there is, but that is not much. There is an air of neglect that impresses you; an air of spontaneity about the picture – for the yams and the melons, and the chilé-plants, half choked with weeds, seem to grow without culture, and the sun gives warmth, so as to render almost unnecessary the operations of the spindle and the loom.

The forest opens again, and another picture – a prettier one – presents itself. It bears the aspect of a better cultivation, though still impressing you with ideas of indolence and neglect. This picture is the "rancho", the settlement of the small farmer, or "vaquero" (cattle-herd). Its form is that of an ordinary house, with gables and sloping roof, but its walls are peculiar. They are constructed of gigantic bamboo canes, or straight poles of the *Fouquiera splendens*. These are laced together by cords of the "pita" aloe; but the interstices between are left open, so as freely to admit the breeze. Coolness, not warmth, is the object of these buildings. The roof is a thatch of palm-leaves, and with far-impending eaves casts off the heavy rain of the tropics. The

appearance is striking – more picturesque even than the chalet of Switzerland.

There is but little furniture within. There is no table; there are few chairs, and these of raw hide nailed upon a rude frame. There are bedsteads of bamboo; the universal tortilla-stone; mats of palm-leaf; baskets of the same material; a small altar-like fireplace in the middle of the floor; a bandolin hanging by the wall; a saddle of stamped leather, profusely ornamented with silver nails and plates; a hair bridle, with huge Mameluke bit; an escopette and sword, or macheté; an endless variety of gaily-painted bowls, dishes, and cups, but neither knife, fork, nor spoon. Such are the movables of a "rancho" in the *tierra caliente*.

You may see the ranchero by the door, or attending to his small, wiry, and spirited horse, outside. The man himself is either of Spanish blood or a "mestizo" (half-breed). He is rarely a pure Indian, who is most commonly a peon or labourer, and who can hardly be termed a "ranchero" in its proper sense.

The ranchero is picturesque – his costume exceedingly so. His complexion is swarthy, his hair is black, and his teeth are ivory white. He is often moustached, but rarely takes the trouble to trim or keep these ornaments in order. His whisker is seldom bushy or luxuriant. His trousers (*calzoneros*) are of green or dark velvet, open down the outside seams, and at the bottoms overlaid with stamped black leather, to defend the ankles of the wearer against the thorny chaparral. A row of bell buttons, often silver, close the open seams when the weather is cold. There

are wide drawers (*calzoncillos*) of fine white cotton underneath; and these puff out through the seams, forming a tasty contrast with the dark velvet. A silken sash, generally of scarlet colour, encircles the waist; and its fringed ends hang over the hips. The hunting-knife is stuck under it. There is a short jacket of velveteen, tastefully embroidered and buttoned; a white cambric shirt, elaborately worked and plaited; and over all a heavy, broad-brimmed hat (*sombrero*), with silver or gold band, and tags of the same material sticking out from the sides. He wears boots of red leather, and huge spurs with bell rowels; and he is never seen without the "seraph". The last is his bed, his blanket, his cloak, and his umbrella.

His wife may be seen moving about the rancho, or upon her knees before the metaté kneading tortillas, and besmearing them with *chilé Colorado* (red capsicum). She wears a petticoat or skirt of a naming bright colour, very short, showing her well-turned but stockingless ankles, with her small slippered feet. Her arms, neck, and part of her bosom are nude, but half concealed by the bluish-grey scarf (*rebozo*) that hangs loosely over her head.

The ranchero leads a free, easy life, burthened with few cares. He is the finest rider in the world, following his cattle on horseback, and never makes even the shortest journey on foot. He plays upon the bandolin, sings an Andalusian ditty, and is fond of *chingarito* (mezcal whisky) and the "fandango."

Such is the ranchero of the *tierra caliente* around Vera Cruz, and such is he in all other parts of Mexico, from its northern

limits to the Isthmus.

But in the *tierra caliente* you may also see the rich planter of cotton, or sugar-cane, or cocoa (*cacao*), or the vanilla bean. His home is the "hacienda". This is a still livelier picture. There are many fields inclosed and tilled. They are irrigated by the water from a small stream. Upon its banks there are cocoa-trees; and out of the rich moist soil shoot up rows of the majestic plantain, whose immense yellow-green leaves, sheathing the stem and then drooping gracefully over, render it one of the most ornamental productions of the tropics, as its clustering legumes of farinaceous fruit make it one of the most useful. Low walls, white or gaily painted, appear over the fields, and a handsome spire rises above the walls. That is the "hacienda" of the planter – the "rico" of the *tierra caliente*, with its out-buildings and chapel belfry. You approach it through scenes of cultivation. "Peons", clad in white cotton and reddish leathern garments, are busy in the fields. Upon their heads are broad-brimmed hats, woven from the leaf of the sombrero palm. Their legs are naked, and upon their feet are tied rude sandals (*guarachés*) with leathern thongs. Their skins are dark, though not black; their eyes are wild and sparkling; their looks grave and solemn; their hair coarse, long, and crow-black; and, as they walk, their toes turn inward. Their downcast looks, their attitudes and demeanour, impress you with the conviction that they are those who carry the water and hew the wood of the country. It is so. They are the "Indios mansos" (the civilised Indians): slaves, in fact, though freemen by

the letter of the law. They are the "peons", the labourers, the serfs of the land – the descendants of the conquered sons of Anahuac.

Such are the people you find in the *tierra caliente* of Mexico – in the environs of Vera Cruz. They do not differ much from the inhabitants of the high plains, either in costume, customs, or otherwise. In fact, there is a homogeneousness about the inhabitants of all Spanish America – making allowance for difference of climate and other peculiarities – rarely found in any other people.

Before daybreak of the morning after my interview with the "swearing major", a head appeared between the flaps of my tent. It was that of Sergeant Bob Lincoln.

"The men air under arms, Cap'n."

"Very well," cried I, leaping from my bed, and hastily buckling on my accoutrements.

I looked forth. The moon was still brightly shining, and I could see a number of uniformed men standing upon the company parade, in double rank. Directly in front of my tent a small boy was saddling a very small horse. The boy was "Little Jack", as the soldiers called him; and the horse was little Jack's mustang, "Twidget."

Jack wore a tight-fitting green jacket, trimmed with yellow lace, and buttoned up to the throat; pantaloons of light green, straight cut, and striped along the seams; a forage-cap set jauntily upon a profusion of bright curls; a sabre with a blade of eighteen inches, and a pair of clinking Mexican spurs. Besides these, he

carried the smallest of all rifles. Thus armed and accoutred, he presented the appearance of a miniature Ranger.

Twidget had *his* peculiarities. He was a tight, wiry little animal, that could live upon mezquite beans or maguey leaves for an indefinite time; and his abstemiousness was often put to the test. Afterwards, upon an occasion during the battles in the valley of Mexico, Jack and Twidget had somehow got separated, at which time the mustang had been shut up for four days in the cellar of a ruined convent with no other food than stones and mortar! How Twidget came by his name is not clear. Perhaps it was some waif of the rider's own fancy.

As I appeared at the entrance of my tent, Jack had just finished strapping on his Mexican saddle; and seeing me, up he ran to assist in serving my breakfast. This was hastily despatched, and our party took the route in silence through the sleeping camp. Shortly after, we were joined by the major, mounted on a tall, raw-boned horse; while a darkie, whom the major addressed as "Doc", rode a snug, stout cob, and carried a large basket. This last contained the major's commissariat.

We were soon travelling along the Orizava road, the major and Jack riding in advance. I could not help smiling at the contrast between these two equestrians; the former with his great gaunt horse, looming up in the uncertain light of the morning like some huge centaur; while Jack and Twidget appeared the two representatives of the kingdom of Lilliput.

On turning an angle of the forest, a horseman appeared at

some distance along the road. The major gradually slackened his pace, until he was square with the head of the column, and then fell back into the rear. This manoeuvre was executed in the most natural manner, but I could plainly see that the mounted Mexican had caused the major no small degree of alarm.

The horseman proved to be a zambo, in pursuit of cattle that had escaped from a neighbouring corral. I put some inquiries to him in relation to the object of our expedition. The zambo pointed to the south, saying in Spanish that mules were plenty in that direction.

"*Hay muchos, muchissimos*," (There are many), said he, as he indicated a road which led through a strip of forest on our left.

Following his direction, we struck into the new path, which soon narrowed into a bridle-road or trail. The men were thrown into single file, and marched *à l'Indienne*. The road darkened, passing under thick-leaved trees, that met and twined over our heads.

At times the hanging limbs and joined parasites caused the major to flatten his huge body upon the horn of the saddle; and once or twice he was obliged to alight, and walk under the impeding branches of the thorny acacias.

Our journey continued without noise, silence being interrupted only by an occasional oath from the major – uttered, however, in a low tone, as we were now fairly "in the woods". The road at length opened upon a small prairie or glade, near the borders of which rose a "butte", covered with chaparral.

Leaving the party in ambuscade below, I ascended the butte, to obtain a view of the surrounding country. The day had now fairly broken, and the sun was just rising over the blue waters of the Gulf.

His rays, prinkling over the waves, caused them to dance and sparkle with a metallic brightness; and it was only after shading my eyes that I could distinguish the tall masts of ships and the burnished towers of the city.

To the south and west stretched a wide expanse of champaign country, glowing in all the brilliance of tropical vegetation. Fields of green, and forests of darker green; here and there patches of yellow, and belts of olive-coloured leaves; at intervals a sheet of silver – the reflection from a placid lake, or the bend of some silent stream – was visible upon the imposing picture at my feet.

A broad belt of forest, dotted with the lifelike frondage of the palm, swept up to the foot of the hill. Beyond this lay an open tract of meadow, or prairie, upon which were browsing thousands of cattle. The distance was too great to distinguish their species; but the slender forms of some of them convinced me that the object of our search would be found in that direction.

The meadow, then, was the point to be reached.

The belt of forest already mentioned must be crossed; and to effect this I struck into a trail that seemed to lead in the direction of the meadow.

The trail became lighter as we entered the heavy timber. Some distance farther on we reached a stream. Here the trail entirely

disappeared. No "signs" could be found on the opposite bank. The underwood was thick; and vines, with broad green leaves and huge clusters of scarlet flowers, barred up the path like a wall.

It was strange! The path had evidently led to this point, but where beyond?

Several men were detached across the stream to find an opening. After a search of some minutes a short exclamation from Lincoln proclaimed success; I crossed over, and found the hunter standing near the bank, holding back a screen of boughs and vine-leaves, beyond which a narrow but plain track was easily distinguished, leading on into the forest. The trellis closed like a gate, and it seemed as if art had lent a hand to the concealment of the track. The footprints of several horses were plainly visible in the sandy bottom of the road.

The men entered in single file. With some difficulty Major Blossom and his great horse squeezed themselves through, and we moved along under the shady and silent woods.

After a march of several miles, fording numerous streams, and working our way through tangled thickets of nopal and wild maguey, an opening suddenly appeared through the trees. Emerging from the forest, a brilliant scene burst upon us. A large clearing, evidently once cultivated, but now in a state of neglect, stretched out before us. Broad fields, covered with flowers of every hue – thickets of blooming rose-trees – belts of the yellow helianthus – and groups of cocoa-trees and half-wild plantains, formed a picture singular and beautiful.

On one side, and close to the border of the forest, could be seen the roof of a house, peering above groves of glistening foliage, and thither we marched.

We entered a lane, with its *guardarayas* of orange-trees planted in rows upon each side, and meeting overhead.

The sunlight fell through this leafy screen with a mellowed and delicious softness, and the perfume of flowers was wafted on the air.

The rich music of birds was around us; and the loveliness of the scene was heightened by the wild neglect which characterised it.

On approaching the house we halted; and after charging the men to remain silent, I advanced alone to reconnoitre.

Chapter Ten.
Adventure with a Cayman

The lane suddenly opened upon a pasture, but within this a thick hedge of jessamines, forming a circle, barred the view.

In this circle was the house, whose roof only could be seen from without.

Not finding any opening through the jessamines, I parted the leaves with my hands, and looked through. The picture was dream-like; so strange, I could scarcely credit my senses.

On the crest of the little hillock stood a house of rare construction – unique and unlike anything I had ever seen. The sides were formed of bamboos, closely picketed, and laced together by fibres of the *pita*. The roof – a thatch of palm-leaves – projected far over the eaves, rising to a cone, and terminating in a small wooden cupola with a cross. There were no windows. The walls themselves were translucent; and articles of furniture could be distinguished through the interstices of the bamboos.

A curtain of green *barège*, supported by a rod and rings, formed the door. This was drawn, discovering an ottoman near the entrance, and an elegant harp.

The whole structure presented the *coup-d'oeil* of a huge birdcage, with its wires of gold!

The grounds were in keeping with the house. In these, the

evidence of neglect, which had been noticed without, existed no longer. Every object appeared to be under the training of a watchful solicitude.

A thick grove of olives, with their gnarled and spreading branches and dark-green leaves, stretched rearward, forming a background to the picture. Right and left grew clumps of orange and lime trees. Golden fruit and flowers of brilliant hues mingled with their yellow leaves; spring and autumn blended upon the same branches!

Rare shrubs – exotics – grew out of large vessels of japanned earthenware, whose brilliant tints added to the voluptuous colouring of the scene.

A *jet d'eau*, crystalline, rose to the height of twenty feet, and, returning in a shower of prismatic globules, stole away through a bed of water-lilies and other aquatic plants, losing itself in a grove of lofty plantain-trees. These, growing from the cool watery bed, flung out their broad glistening leaves to the length of twenty feet.

So signs of human life met the eye. The birds alone seemed to revel in the luxuriance of this tropical paradise. A brace of pea-fowl stalked over the parterre in all the pride of their rainbow plumage. In the fountain appeared the tall form of a flamingo, his scarlet colour contrasting with the green leaves of the water-lily. Songsters were trilling in every tree. The mock-bird, perched upon the highest limb, was mimicking the monotonous tones of the parrot. The toucans and trogons flashed from grove to grove, or balanced their bodies under the spray of the *jet d'eau*; while the

humming-birds hung upon the leaves of some honeyed blossom, or prinkled over the parterre like straying sunbeams.

I was running my eye over this dream-like picture, in search of a human figure, when the soft, metallic accents of a female voice reached me from the grove of plantains. It was a burst of laughter – clear and ringing. Then followed another, with short exclamations, and the sound of water as if dashed and sprinkled with a light hand.

What must be the Eve of a paradise like this! The silver tones were full of promise. It was the first female voice that had greeted my ears for a month, and chords long slumbering vibrated under the exquisite touch.

My heart bounded. My first impulse was "forward", which I obeyed by springing through the jessamines. But the fear of intruding upon a scene *à la Diane* changed my determination, and my next thought was to make a quiet retreat.

I was preparing to return, and had thrust one leg back through the hedge, when a harsh voice – apparently that of a man – mingled with the silvery tones.

"*Anda! – anda! – hace mucho calor. Vamos á volver*." (Hasten! – it is hot. Let us return.)

"*Ah, no, Pepe! un ratito mas*." (Ah, no, Pepe! a little while longer.)

"*Vaya, carrambor*!" (Quick, then!)

Again the clear laughter rang out, mingled with the clapping of hands and short exclamations of delight.

"Come," thought I, once more entering the parterre, "as there appears to be one of my own sex here already, it cannot be very *mal à propos* to take a peep at this amusement, whatever it be."

I approached the row of plantain-trees, whose leaves screened the speakers from view.

"*Lupé! Lupé! mira! que bonito*!" (Lupé! Lupé! look here! What a pretty thing!)

"*Ah, pobrecito! echalo, Luz, echalo*." (Ah! poor little thing! fling it back, Luz.)

"*Voy luego*," (Presently.)

I stooped down, and silently parted the broad, silken leaves. The sight was divine!

Within lay a circular tank, or basin, of crystal water, several rods in diameter, and walled in on all sides by the high screen of glossy plantains, whose giant leaves, stretching out horizontally, sheltered it from the rays of the sun.

A low parapet of mason-work ran around, forming the circumference of the circle. This was japanned with a species of porcelain, whose deep colouring of blue and green and yellow was displayed in a variety of grotesque figures.

A strong jet boiled up in the centre, by the refraction of whose ripples the gold and red fish seemed multiplied into myriads.

At a distant point a bed of water-lilies hung out from the parapet; and the long, thin neck of a swan rose gracefully over the leaves. Another, his mate, stood upon the bank drying her snowy pinions in the sun.

A different object attracted me, depriving me, for awhile, of the power of action.

In the water, and near the jet, were two beautiful girls clothed in a sort of sleeveless, green tunic, loosely girdled. They were immersed to the waist. So pellucid was the water that their little feet were distinctly visible at the bottom, shining like gold.

Luxuriant hair fell down in broad flakes, partially shrouding the snowy development of their arms and shoulders. Their forms were strikingly similar – tall, graceful, fully developed, and characterised by that elliptical line of beauty that, in the female form more than in any other earthly object, illustrates the far-famed curve of Hogarth.

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