

4 With the Stars and Stripes in Mexico

William S. Henry¹



This excerpt from William Seaton Henry's Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico contains the perspective of a lower-ranking officer in an invading army; a perspective unique in this volume. Like Calderón de la Barca, Henry did not go to Mexico by choice. Once there, however, he was determined to make his mission a success. In his war memoirs, the captain expresses loyalty to his army unit, criticism of members of Congress who do not share the military's resolve to pursue the war, and unswerving condemnation for the enemy. A Jacksonian Democrat, Henry expresses an abiding faith in the success of U.S. farmers; a success that, as he believes, could be repeated in territories to be annexed by the United States. He thus pairs one of von Humboldt's key themes—the potential of Mexican agriculture—with the Manifest Destiny ideal of extending the borders of the United States. Yet he is also wary of incorporating Mexicans into the Union, as he increasingly perceives that his own way of life is incompatible with that of the Mexicans. This excerpt is also interesting for its views on northeastern Mexico, an area that

received few travelers in the nineteenth century, and for its comments on the impact of the U.S. invasion on Mexican consumer behavior:

The son of a prominent New York lawyer, Henry (1816–1851) was born in Albany, New York. He attended West Point and thereafter was assigned to the Third Infantry regiment. Beginning in April 1836, this regiment fought for the Texan cause in the war of secession from Mexico that resulted in the independence and subsequent incorporation of that state into the United States. In July 1845, the Third Infantry were the first of General Zachary Taylor's army to arrive at Corpus Christi—the prelude to war a year later, during which Henry participated in the march to the Rio Grande, and inland toward Monterrey. His letters home were published in a New York City newspaper and, in revised form, as Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico (1847).²



The Mexicans say there has been a special interposition of Divine Providence in our favor, causing the river to rise so that we can transport our troops and supplies to Camargo without any trouble. If they really think so, the omen must be anything but favorable to their cause. It certainly never was intended this lovely land, rich in every production, with a climate that exceeds anything the imagination can conceive of, should remain in the hands of an ignorant and degenerate race. The finger of Fate points, if not to their eventual extinction, to the time when they will cease to be owners, and when the Anglo-American race will rule with republican simplicity and justice, a land literally "flowing with milk and honey," who will, by their superior mental, if not physical abilities—by their energy and go-ahead-a-tiveness, which no sufferings or privations can retard, which shines alike in the frozen regions of the North and under the burning sun of the South, render available the surprising fertility of the soil, its immense mineral wealth, and populate the country with a race of men who will prove the infinite goodness of our Maker in creating nothing but what is for use and some good purpose.³

No part of Texas surpasses in fertility, or equals in salubrity, the Valley of the Rio Grande. The river courses its way from the mountains through a varied climate, which will produce anything, from wheat to sugar and cotton. Nothing can exceed the rich growth of vines. The melon flourishes, and our camp is daily supplied with fine watermelons. This region of country is bound to be settled very rapidly; if nothing else points it out as a desirable

location, the fact of the Rio Grande being really a navigable stream is sufficient. In point of health, few regions can surpass it. There are no causes for disease; there are no swamps which, in the heat of summer, throw out their poisonous miasma; the banks are high, and the country preserves that character to the Colorado. Let this boundary be settled, and there will be a tide of emigration to this favored region rarely equaled. If some of our northern farmers would settle here, they could make one flower garden of the river banks, from its source to its mouth. Cultivation can be carried out by white labor, I think, beyond a doubt. No summer climate can exceed it in loveliness; the everlasting breeze deprives the sun of much of its heat. Such evenings! Such a morn! Young people should come here to make love; the old should emigrate and rejuvenate themselves. To the former I say, the moon shines with such bewitching sweetness, no matter how determined they may be to live and die maids, they will find it impossible to resist "the little god."⁴ to the latter, some of the romance of their early days will be renewed, and their frames invigorated by the ocean breeze, which comes every evening laden with coolness and health....

August 7 [1846]. . . . We marched eighteen miles, and encamped at a ranch called Cayetana. Shortly after we arrived, a number of pack-mules came in, laden with fruit from Saltillo. It was packed in crates, and intended for the Matamoros market. There were apples, pears, pomegranates, quinces, and grapes; the latter good, the rest miserable. Being picked green, and exposed for eleven days to the intense heat, they had lost all their flavor. The men bought them in great quantities, and at exorbitant prices. I had a long conversation with the head man of the train; he appeared quite intelligent, and very frank, answering promptly all my questions. Being direct from Monterrey, he had to answer not a few regarding the defenses of the city, troops, &c. He says there are two thousand men at Monterrey, under General [Ignacio] Mejía, and none at Saltillo or San Luis Potosí; that they are daily looking for our arrival via Camargo, and that there will be no fight.

The water at this camp is miserable—nothing more than a hog-wallow. Water, no doubt, of the kind could be obtained by digging; but these miscreatures are too lazy for that. It is a great drawback to anything like comfort. The inhabitants of the *ranchos*⁵ are particular in their inquiries whether the troops are regulars or volunteers. Some of the disgraceful rows, proceeding from a few disorganizers among the latter, have been "druited" far and wide, establishing for that arm a reputation certainly not to be envied. The inhabitants

of this ranch say the Mexicans in their retreat, took every thing they could lay their hands upon, without paying for it. How different is our course of conduct. Here we are, invading an enemy's country as conquerors, and yet levy not one cent, buy everything; not only buy, but pay the most exorbitant prices. I sometimes doubt the good effects of such liberality. Will it not be their interest to continue a war which deprives them of nothing, but adds to their purses? However, we will always have the consolation of knowing we have brought no distress upon the poor.⁶

On the 28th [of August] we received something tangible from the city of Mexico. The report of the civil revolution is confirmed. [President Mariano] Paredes is a prisoner, [Valentín] Gómez Farías declared provisional president; Santa Anna invited to return, and probably by this time in the country. Santa Anna! Through what a strange, up-hill, down-hill series of events has he not passed? Twice president by means of his military popularity, banished from his country, and every thing connected with his name scorned and trampled upon, he lives to see himself recalled by the same fickle beings, placed at the head of their army, and will no doubt re-ascend the presidential chair! Fate! What hast thou yet in store for him who is as faithless to his promises as he is devoid of honor? . . .

[October] The question often arises with us, are we to have peace or war at the end of the armistice? By a great majority it is deemed folly to prosecute it in this quarter. Peace, not territory, is certainly the aim of our government; this cannot be obtained by slightly wounding the extremists of the body; we have not touched the heart, nor can we by this route. Until there is a government established which has the power to treat, I do not see that we are any nearer the settlement of our difficulties than previous to the battles of the 8th and 9th of May. We may go on and expend millions, and sacrifice the lives of thousands, without any good result. It strikes me an advance from this point can have no effect upon the settlement. Our better plan is to take Tampico, fortify and keep possession of the Sierra Madre and the Valley of the Rio Grande, until they come to terms. Let them come take it, if they can. If the war is to be prosecuted, let Veracruz be taken, and march directly upon the capital, batter its walls down, and see if some sense cannot be battered into the people. The victories on this frontier, as honorable and glorious as they have been to our army, are mere flashes in the pan as regards the question of peace. The humane and liberal policy pursued by the government in the prosecution of war has a tendency to prolong it. It is the first war of which I ever

heard which was an actual benefit to the enemy. Wherever we go, we pay for what we use at two or three times the usual price of the country, and both their civil and religious rights and property are protected. What more prosperous times can they desire? Their cry is, "Come along, gentlemen! Very glad to see you! Come from city to city; you spend your money freely—put us to very little inconvenience, and, really, times are first rate!" I must confess I am tired of this work, and long to see an honorable peace.

The wounded are doing very well—as well as they can with the few comforts and conveniences our medical department is enabled to supply. Nothing can exceed the devotion of our medical officers; they are literally fatigued to death. There was culpable negligence somewhere in not sending more medical officers into the field, but I presume the government, hugging unto themselves the chance of peace, thought there would be no more necessity for their services. The number was reduced so low immediately after the battle [of Monterrey], that one surgeon attended two regiments, four being the usual number in peace.

The great and valiant General [Pedro] Ampudia,⁸ after reaching Saltillo, issued his proclamation explaining the fall of Monterrey. To condense matters, he states, on the 21st he repulsed us with the loss of fifteen hundred; on the 22nd the Bishop's Palace fell, but not without great resistance; that, being scarce of ammunition and provisions, a conference was held on the 24th with the enemy, and such terms were made by which they saved their honor, and marched out with their arms; that General Santa Anna was coming, and then we would see who would be the conquerors. Was there ever such stuff and such lies? Mexican to the last. If you were to exterminate a whole army but the general, he would issue a bulletin claiming a victory. If these bulletins are salve to their wounded feelings, they are welcome to write and publish quires. Our loss of "fifteen hundred" is only magnified ten times our loss in the three days' fight. Their deficiency of ammunition is ridiculous. We found cords of it; but they may have thought a month's supply a deficiency. I hope they will always continue thinking so as long as they have that amount of "materiel" to present us with even at the cannon's mouth.

General Santa Anna arrived at Veracruz on the 16th of August. There cannot be a moment's doubt that our government, in permitting his return to the country, believed that his best exertions would be used to effect a reconciliation. All those hopes were immediately crushed upon the promulgation of his proclamation to the people the same day of his arrival. It spoke

war to the knife. He was immediately placed in command of the army... while he repaired to the tented field in his dream of winning fresh laurels, and driving the barbarians beyond the Sabine. He infused fresh energy and life into the people. With an activity characteristic of the man, he repaired to San Luis Potosí and strained every nerve for the purpose of collecting and disciplining a large army. On the 11th of October we heard he had arrived at San Luis with eight hundred men, and that Ampudia had left Saltillo to join him. Ampudia was ordered to Mexico to explain the fall of Monterrey. We all think Saltillo will fall into our hands without a blow. General Ampudia decided upon fortifying the place, and the citizens would not permit it. They very justly told him he had spent much time and money in fortifying Monterrey, a city whose natural defenses were much superior to theirs and had failed to hold it, and they had no idea of having their property destroyed; a very just conclusion. Taking Saltillo, we have the key to this whole valley; we are then over three hundred miles from San Luis Potosí, the march to which is difficult and part of the way over a desert. Having Saltillo, taking Monclova and Tampico, we can quietly settle down in as lovely a country as the sun ever shone upon, and tell México to come on. Tell her we have taken enough to remunerate us for the expenses of the war, and will keep it if she does not grant us peace by a certain day; then import your families, give them the land for a mere song, and before one could realize it this valley would be teeming with an American population. We do not want the valley, nor would I, if it can be prevented, keep it; but I certainly would not put our government to any more expense than simply holding it, which, compared to an onward movement, would be nothing. From what we have seen, I question the feasibility of "dictating a peace at the cannon's mouth," they are a stubborn, stiff-necked race; and I think the appearance of emigrants determined to settle this valuable part of her domain would have more effect upon her than hard knocks....

The more I ride over this region, the more I am struck with its fertility. Field after field of the finest... sugar cane stretch out for miles and miles. All this luxuriance is the spontaneous gift of nature; compared with ours, there is really no cultivation. Their ground is broken up by a primitive wooden plow, made of the crooked limb of a tree, shod with iron: the seed is barely stuck in, and if it gets one hoeing, it is about all; and yet, with all this neglect, they make magnificent crops. What would not the land produce by our preparation, and our care and attention during the early growth of the plant?

A most interesting incident connected with the fall of Monterrey I have nearly forgotten to record. It is stated, and generally believed, that a company of Lancers was commanded by a woman. Her name was Dos Amades. Seized with a patriotic spirit, she unsexed⁹ herself, and dressed in the full suit of a captain of Lancers; she desired to be led against the foe, and swore she would never yield until the "northern barbarians" were driven from her native land, or until she shed her last drop of blood in defense of her native country. Previous to our attack, she was paraded before the troops, and greatly excited and augmented their courage. She harangued them, and desired to be posted at that spot where the first shot would fall and where the thickest of the battle should rage. It is reported that on the 21st she led the charge of Lancers which proved fatal to some of our command.... There's an example of heroism worthy the day of old! It has remained for Mexico to produce a second Joan d'Arc, but not, like her, successful. She is reported to have been a daughter of one of the former governors of Nuevo León, and after the battle retired to the walks of private life.

On one of my late visits to [Monterrey] I paid an interesting one to a children's (female) school. The school-mistress was a respectable lady; the children had finished their recitations, and were actively engaged embroidering. There were some beautiful creatures among them, and with one bright-eyed little one I should most certainly have had a frolic had I been master of her language. There are several schools in the city, but education is wholly confined to the children of the higher class. The poor are kept in utter ignorance, and under a blind obedience to their priests. Their whole labor is for the Church; a child cannot be christened, a couple married, the dead buried, without extortionate fees for the Church. The priests are our bitterest enemies and opposers, and are the main-spring of the war.

Notes

1. William S. Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847), 120-22, 136-37, 160-61, 225-29, 233-34, 241-42.
2. Thomas O. Munnetlyn, "Henry, William Seaton," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/H/Hf/he39.html> [accessed June 12, 2003].

3. A concise statement of the ideology of Manifest Destiny that was central to U.S. territorial expansion.
4. Eros, the Greek god of love.
5. Small family farms.
6. A very high-minded statement that belittles the brutality of the occupation.
7. Valentín Gómez Farías was one of the most influential Liberals in early republican Mexico.
8. General in charge of repelling the advance of Taylor's army.
9. Behaving in a way that breaches gender stereotypes.

5 A View of Tropical Veracruz

Carl Christian Sartorius¹



Mexico: Landschaftsbilder (translated as Mexico: Landscape and Popular Sketches) by Carl Christian Sartorius is based on the author's life experience as a German plantation owner in the tropical regions of Veracruz. A permanent immigrant, Sartorius retained prejudices shared by many foreign observers. But he acquired a personal stake in the country that precludes Poinsett or Calderón's pessimistic outlook. Like many Mexican Liberals of his day, Sartorius disdained the moral and intellectual faculties of the indigenous and mestizo population, and desired to "improve" his adopted country by "whitening" it through German immigration. Written in a lively, engaging style, his book reads like an invitation to come to Mexico.² The following excerpt recalls Sartorius's immediate reaction to the tropics, where he first came into contact with indigenous Mexicans. It shows the fascination of a Romantic immigrant with a verdant, exotic landscape, and his harsh condemnation of what he thought of as primitive people who made the best use of their environment. The beautiful illustrations by the engraver