

## CHAPTER XLIV

### CONTRERAS

SIXTEEN weeks elapsed between the day of Cerro Gordo and the day when Scott was ready to move forward from Puebla, but the time had not been wasted. The troops had been constantly drilled, the health of the men had improved by their long stay in the mountains, reinforcements and recruits had arrived, and by the first week in August not only had the numbers of the American army been restored, but it had been brought to a higher state of efficiency.

The reinforcements had come after exasperating delays. Colonel Childs, with the garrison from Jalapa, had been ordered up as early as June 3; but he had been instructed to wait for detachments from Vera Cruz, and he therefore waited, first for a party of recruits that was coming up under Colonel McIntosh and subsequently for General Cadwalader, who had reached Vera Cruz with his brigade in the month of June. Both McIntosh and Cadwalader had some trouble with guerrilleros not far from Vera Cruz. Having safely reached Perote, they in turn waited until General Pillow (who had been promoted to the rank of major-general) was sufficiently recovered from his wound to be able to take the field; and finally the whole body started from Perote on July 1, reaching Puebla on July 8.<sup>1</sup> Scott then had under him 8,061 effectives, rank and file, besides 2,302 reported sick.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, however, it was reported that Brigadier-General Franklin Pierce had arrived at Vera Cruz with a

<sup>1</sup> The details of Pillow's march from Jalapa to Puebla are given in *Autobiography of an English Soldier*, 215-230. And see Ripley, II, 130-139; Brooks, *A Complete History of the Mexican War*, 445-452.

<sup>2</sup> Scott to Marcy, July 25, 1847; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 1013.

strong detachment of the new "regular" troops, and Scott, after some hesitation, decided to wait for him also before attempting an advance. Pierce and his brigade arrived at Vera Cruz on June 27, 1847, where they found the yellow-fever raging fearfully and the city everywhere appearing "like the very habitation of pestilence." Pierce at once moved his men to Vergara, about two miles north of Vera Cruz, and there encamped on the beach, waiting for transportation; but notwithstanding his best exertions he was delayed until the middle of July, his men suffering a good deal from sickness. When at last he started he was attacked by guerrilleros near the National Bridge, but had little difficulty in driving them away; by the twenty-first of the month he was at Santa Anna's hacienda of Manga de Clavo; and he reached Puebla on August 7 with twenty-four hundred men in good order and without the loss of a single wagon. Some of his men, however, had been wounded on the road, and they had also experienced a good deal of sickness, due, as he thought, to "excessive indulgence in fruits, which it was found impossible to keep from the troops."<sup>1</sup>

In anticipation of Pierce's arrival Scott had carefully made his preparations for the march into the valley of Mexico, and with a force numbering in all 10,738, rank and file,<sup>2</sup> he now set forth to meet an enemy who, he believed, might "amount to some thirty-odd thousand, including good, bad, and indifferent."<sup>3</sup> His communications with his base at Vera Cruz had long been difficult. He now determined to sever them altogether. "Isolated and abandoned," as he thought himself, he made up his mind "to throw away the scabbard and to advance with the naked blade in hand."<sup>4</sup> The memory of Cortés and his ships never left Scott's mind, and with a boldness which subsequent events fully justified he advanced, like the *conquistadores*, without the possibility of retreat or reinforcement, to attempt the capture of a popu-

<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne's *Life of Franklin Pierce*, 68-94. His account of Pierce's march consists largely of extracts from the latter's journal.

<sup>2</sup> Scott to Marcy, Sept. 18, 1847; Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 384.

<sup>3</sup> Same to same, July 25, 1847; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 1013.

<sup>4</sup> Same to same, Feb. 24, 1848; *ibid.*, 1223; Scott's *Autobiography*, 460.

lous city, the capital of a country of seven million inhabitants.

The city of Puebla was left in charge of a small garrison of three hundred and ninety-three men, consisting of one small company of cavalry, two of regular artillery, and six companies of Pennsylvania volunteers, all under command of Colonel Childs, of the regular army. There were, in addition, eighteen hundred sick in the hospital, of whom many were convalescent, besides a number of civil employees. Childs also had available for defence a considerable amount of captured artillery.<sup>1</sup>

Scott's staff was numerous and well organized, and his engineers in particular were remarkable for their character and attainments. Almost all of them subsequently acquired brilliant military reputations. They were Major John Lind Smith, Captain Robert E. Lee, and Lieutenants P. G. T. Beauregard, Isaac I. Stevens, Z. B. Tower, Gustavus W. Smith, George B. McClellan, and John G. Foster.

The army was organized into four infantry divisions, with a cavalry brigade under Colonel Harney, consisting of detachments from the first, second, and third regiments of dragoons. The first division, under General Worth, consisted of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth regiments of regular infantry, the second and third regiments of artillery serving as infantry, and two batteries of field artillery. It was divided into two brigades, under Colonels Garland and Clarke, of the regular army, respectively.

The second division, under General Twiggs, consisted of the rifle regiment, the first and fourth artillery serving as infantry, the first, third, and seventh regular infantry, and one battery of field artillery. It was divided into two brigades; the first under General Persifer F. Smith, the second under Colonel Bennet Riley, of the regular army.

The fourth division, under General Quitman, consisted of volunteers—New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina—with a battalion of marines. The New York and South Carolina regiments formed one brigade, under General

<sup>1</sup> Childs's report; Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 471.

Shields, the marines and the Pennsylvania volunteers another brigade, under Colonel Watson.

Finally, the third division, under General Pillow, was made up of the two brigades which had last arrived. The first brigade, under General Cadwalader, consisted of the "voltigeurs" and the newly raised eleventh and fourteenth regiments, with Magruder's battery of field artillery.<sup>1</sup> The second brigade, under General Pierce, comprised the new ninth, twelfth, and fifteenth regiments of "regular" infantry.<sup>2</sup>

Pillow's two brigadiers deserve attention, for they were types of the men whom the American military system of that day placed in high command. They were both lawyers of distinction, both, of course, Democrats, and each was about forty-two years of age. George Cadwalader was a native of Philadelphia, and was descended from a family whose members had achieved distinction in the Revolutionary War, but he was as yet without other military antecedents. Franklin Pierce was also the son of a soldier of the Revolution who had been a governor of New Hampshire. He had graduated at Bowdoin College in the class of 1824; had served nine years in both houses of Congress, where he had been an ardent supporter of Jackson and Van Buren; and had resigned from the Senate in 1842. After retiring from Congress he had enjoyed a successful legal practice in New Hampshire, serving as United States district attorney. He had declined a reappointment to the Senate to fill a vacancy, and had also declined the appointment of Attorney-General of the United States. When the war broke out Pierce had enlisted as a private in the New Hampshire battalion of volunteers raised under the call of November, 1846, where he had his first experience in military drill; and on March 3, 1847, he was appointed brigadier-general, to command one of the brigades of the new regular troops raised for the war.

<sup>1</sup> Magruder's battery was formed from the men of the first artillery regiment, and was armed with guns taken from the Mexicans at the battle of Cerro Gordo. "Stonewall" Jackson was the junior lieutenant of the battery.

<sup>2</sup> Further details as to the organization of the army will be found in Scott's *Autobiography*, 460-465.

Everything being ready at last, the march from Puebla began on the morning of August 7, the cavalry brigade and Twiggs's division leading the way. A little before sunrise the troops were drawn up in the plaza in the presence of nearly the whole population of the city, who had turned out to witness their departure. The general, to quote an eyewitness,

"took off his hat, and waving it around his head—his white locks giving him the appearance of some inspired old patriarch—shouted forth in the voice of a Stentor: 'Now, my lads, give them a Cerro Gordo shout!' A simultaneous hurrah arose on the morning air, from twenty-five hundred brazen throats, that shook the walls of the palace and must have given a death-blow to the hopes of any Mexican patriots who were looking on. The cry was joined in and prolonged by the by-standers of the other corps, and before its echoes had died away, the division, with its bands playing and banners flying, was in motion. It was, indeed, a thrilling spectacle to behold this vanguard of the American army moving to the conquest of Mexico."<sup>1</sup>

The next day Quitman's division marched out, and it was followed on the ninth and tenth of August by Worth's and Pillow's divisions. General Scott himself left Puebla on the eighth with Quitman, but he soon overtook and continued with Twiggs. The various corps were at no time beyond five hours—seven or eight miles—apart, which Scott considered "supporting distance"; and that they were sufficiently near was proved by the entire failure of the Mexican cavalry to annoy them. The army, therefore, marched forward without interruption, precisely as Cortés had advanced three hundred and twenty-eight years before. Like Cortés, they found at one point that the road had been obstructed by felling trees and by some beginnings of intrenchments; but they pushed forward through *Texmelúcan* and *Rio Frio*, north of the great snow mountain of *Iztaccihuatl*, to a point nearly ten thousand five hundred feet above the sea. On the third day after leaving Puebla each division came in succession to the summit of the pass.

<sup>1</sup> Semmes, 320.

"They had not advanced far, when, turning an angle of the sierra, they suddenly came on a view which more than compensated the toils of the preceding day. It was that of the Valley of Mexico, or *Tenochtitlan*, as more commonly called by the natives; which, with its picturesque assemblage of water, woodland, and cultivated plains, its shining cities and shadowy hills, was spread out like some gay and gorgeous panorama before them. In the highly rarefied atmosphere of these upper regions, even remote objects have a brilliancy of coloring and a distinctness of outline which seem to annihilate distance. Stretching far away at their feet, were seen noble forests of oak, sycamore, and cedar, and beyond, yellow fields of maize and the towering *maguay*, intermingled with orchards and blooming gardens; for flowers, in such demand for their religious festivals, were even more abundant in this populous valley than in other parts of *Anahuac*. In the centre of the great basin were beheld the lakes, occupying then a much larger portion of its surface than at present; their borders thickly studded with towns and hamlets, and, in the midst,—like some Indian empress with her coronal of pearls,—the fair city of Mexico."<sup>1</sup>

In the eyes of Scott's engineers the most conspicuous and interesting feature of the landscape was the chain of shallow lakes which lie on the southern and southeasterly sides of the city of Mexico, and which in 1847 had so shrunk as to leave near their margins wide stretches of swampy meadow that proved, upon near approach, to be impassable by artillery or wagons.

The direct road from Puebla, winding down from the mountain heights near the conspicuous and snow-covered mass of *Iztaccihuatl*, passed along the northeasterly shore of *Lake Chalco*, the southernmost in the chain of lakes, and then upon an ancient causeway over the isthmus lying between *Lakes Xochimilco* and *Texcoco*. On this isthmus a rocky hill known as the *Peñon Viejo* was made strong by every device of the engineering art. The direct access to the city was thus controlled by what was believed to be an impregnable position, and the isthmus was further strengthened by strong works thrown up round the neighboring village of *Mexicalcingo*.

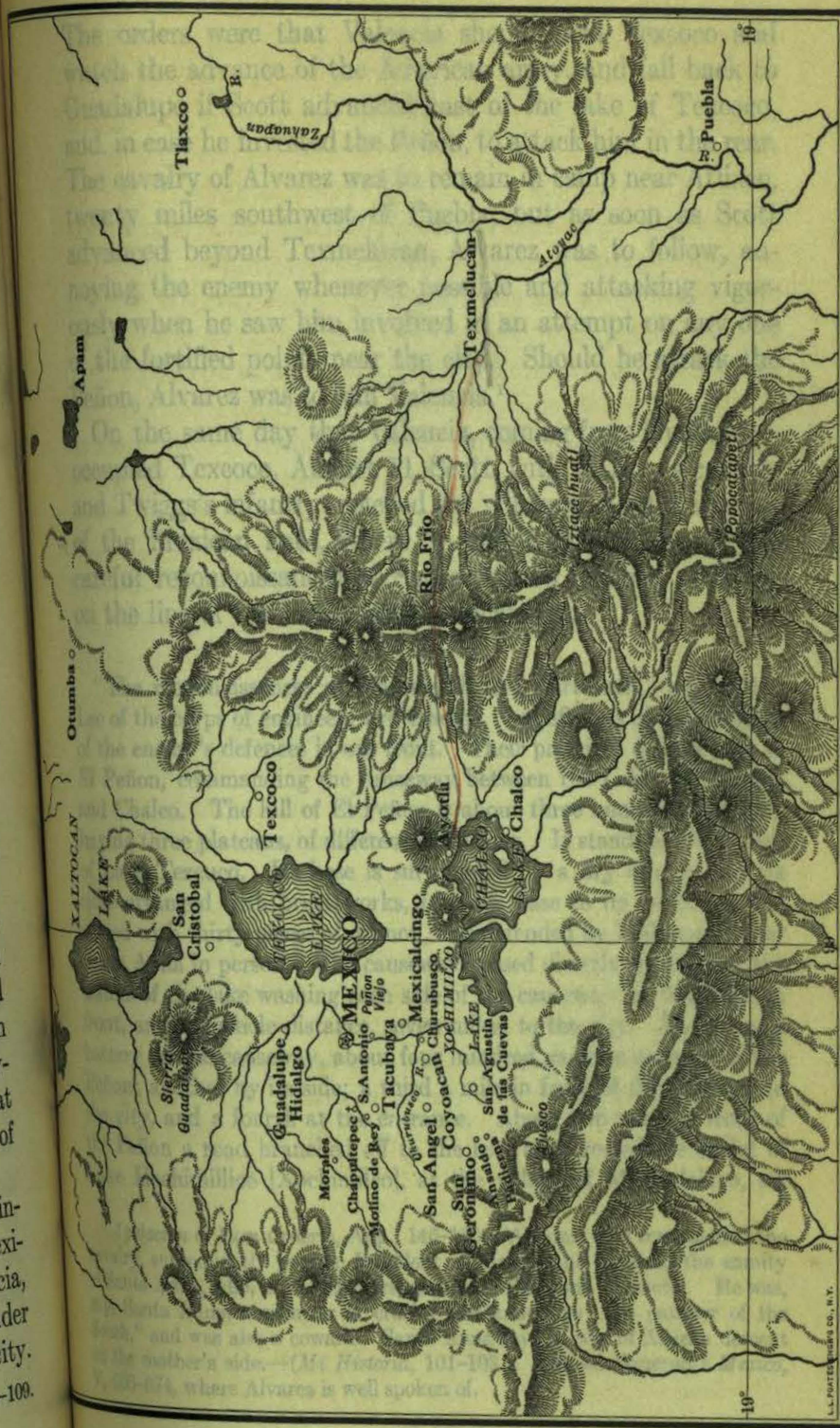
<sup>1</sup> Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, II, 51. Scott's line of march was not, at this part of his route, exactly that of Cortés, who crossed by the pass south of *Iztaccihuatl*, between it and *Popocatepetl*.

On each flank of the line between these two points were marshes and lakes, so that a turning movement was not possible except by a very long march around the lakes to the east and north, or by a shorter march westerly along the southern shore of Lake Chalco. Foot-hills, however, of the southern mountains came down close to Chalco, and it was the belief of the Mexican commanders that that road was impracticable for an army. Nevertheless, west of Chalco the high-road leading south from the city of Mexico to Cuernavaca and Acapulco was fortified at two points: first, at the bridge and convent of Churubusco, and, second, further south at the hacienda of San Antonio. To the west of the city the hill of Chapultepec, crowned by the old palace of the Spanish viceroys, whose guns commanded two of the roads issuing from the city, was considered a sufficient protection. On the north a beginning had been made in fortifying the hills near Guadalupe, but it had been subsequently decided to construct no fortifications on that side beyond the city gates, so that Guadalupe remained almost unprotected.

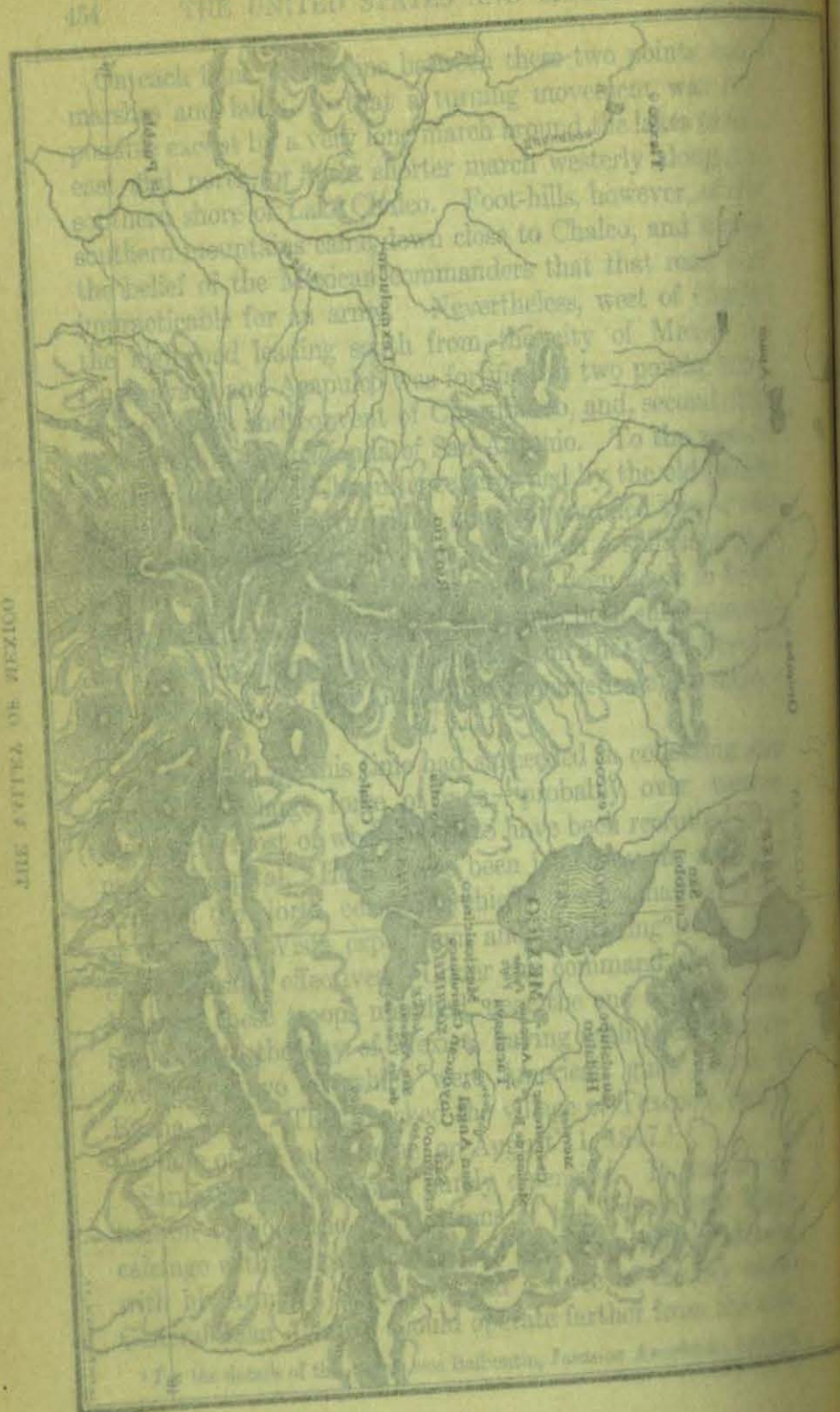
Santa Anna by this time had succeeded in collecting and equipping a large force of men—probably over twenty thousand—most of whom seem to have been recruited in or near the capital. He had also been joined by the so-called Army of the North, consisting chiefly of what had been left of the Buena Vista expedition, and numbering more than four thousand effectives. Under the command of General Valencia these troops marched, near the end of July, from San Luis to the city of Mexico, having with them twenty-two guns, two of which were American guns taken at Buena Vista. They reached the village of Texcoco, east of the lake of the same name, on August 11, 1847.<sup>1</sup>

Santa Anna's plan was purely defensive. It was his intention to hold the fortifications of the Peñon and Mexicalcingo with the principal part of his forces, while Valencia, with his Army of the North and a force of cavalry under General Juan Alvarez, should operate farther from the city.

<sup>1</sup> For the details of this march, see Balbontin, *Invasion Americana*, 105-100.



THE VALLEY OF MEXICO



THE CAUSEWAY OF MEXICO

The orders were that Valencia should hold Texcoco and watch the advance of the American army, and fall back to Guadalupe if Scott advanced east of the lake of Texcoco, and, in case he invested the Peñon, to attack him in the rear. The cavalry of Alvarez was to remain in camp near Atlixco, twenty miles southwest of Puebla, but as soon as Scott advanced beyond Texmelúcan, Alvarez was to follow, annoying the enemy whenever possible and attacking vigorously when he saw him involved in an attempt on any one of the fortified points near the city. Should he attack the Peñon, Alvarez was to join Valencia.<sup>1</sup>

On the same day that Valencia, coming from Guadalupe, occupied Texcoco, August 11, Scott, with Harney's cavalry and Twigg's infantry, reached the village of Ayotla, in front of the Mexican lines, where he halted and at once began careful reconnoissances of Santa Anna's fortified positions on the line of the Peñon and Mexicalcingo.

"The reconnoissances of the twelfth and thirteenth," as Captain Lee of the corps of engineers wrote home, "satisfied us of the strength of the enemy's defences in our front. Their principal defence was at El Peñon, commanding the causeway between the Lakes of Tezcuco and Chalco. The hill of El Peñon is about three hundred feet high, having three plateaus, of different elevations. It stands in the waters of Lake Tezcuco. Its base is surrounded by a dry trench, and its sides arranged with breastworks, from its base to its crest. It was armed with thirty pieces of cannon, and defended by 7,000 men under Santa Anna in person. The causeway passed directly by its base; the waters of the lake washing each side of the causeway for two miles in front, and the whole distance, seven miles, to the city. There was a battery on the causeway, about four hundred yards in advance of the Peñon; another by its side; a third a mile in front of the entrance to the city, and a fourth at the entrance. About two miles in front of the Peñon a road branched off to the left, and crossed the outlet of Lake Hochimillico [Xochimilco], at the village of Mexicalcingo, six

<sup>1</sup> *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 146-150. Alvarez, who commanded the cavalry, subsequently became President of Mexico and incurred the enmity of Santa Anna, who, in his memoirs, gives him the worst character. He was, says Santa Anna, a monster of cruelty and known as "the panther of the South," and was also a coward. Santa Anna says he was of African descent on the mother's side.—(*Mi Historia*, 101-103.) But see Bancroft's *Mexico*, V, 666-674, where Alvarez is well spoken of.

miles from the main road. This village, surrounded by a marsh, was enveloped in batteries, and only approached over a paved causeway, a mile in length; beyond, the causeway continued through the marsh for two miles further, and opened upon terra firma at the village of Churubusco."<sup>1</sup>

The garrison of the Peñon was in large part composed of volunteers from the city of Mexico, consisting of four newly raised battalions known respectively as Victoria, Hidalgo, Independencia, and Bravo, the first two being composed mostly of men of good families and some social position, and the two latter of artisans and mechanics. It had been previously announced that upon the approach of the American troops a single alarm gun should be fired in the city as a signal recalling to every Mexican between fifteen and sixty years old the duty of presenting himself with or without arms at the fortified points of the capital, in accordance with an order issued by the Minister of War. Early in the morning of August 9 rumors had been in circulation that the American vanguard had moved from Puebla, and a great number of people of all classes assembled in and about the National Palace, waiting impatiently for the sound of the alarm gun. At two o'clock in the afternoon the signal was given, and it was immediately greeted by enthusiastic cheers for the republic and the President, and cries of death to the enemies of the country, while at the same time the bands of music of the various bodies of troops struck up popular airs. The head-quarters of the battalions of the national guard were soon crowded with people coming to enlist, and Santa Anna issued a patriotic proclamation calling upon the people of Mexico to "imitate the virtues of their Spanish ancestors and show themselves the heroes of the new world." The clergy lent their presence and encouragement to the volunteers, who marched out at once over the seven miles from the city to the Peñon, where their camp for several days was visited by numbers of well-to-do people who regarded the occasion as a sort of agreeable picnic. General Bravo,

<sup>1</sup> Captain R. E. Lee to Mrs. Totten, Aug. 22, 1847; Sen. Doc. 65, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 461.

meanwhile, had assumed command at Mexicalcingo, and the Mexican forces awaited, with something, for the moment, like general enthusiasm, the expected attack by the American invaders.<sup>1</sup>

While Scott was pushing his reconnoissances in front of Ayotla the other divisions of his army were arriving, and they encamped in his rear along the shores of Lake Chalco, Worth's division being at the little village of Chalco on the easterly border of the lake. Worth immediately began reconnoissances in the neighborhood of his camp, with a view to ascertaining whether it was practicable for the army to move westward, south of Lake Chalco, so as to gain the highway leading south from the city of Mexico in the direction of Cuernavaca and Acapulco, thus turning the positions of the Peñon and Mexicalcingo. This route had been considered by Scott while the army remained at Puebla, and his engineers had carefully gathered such information as was available in regard to it; but the evidence seemed to be, on the whole, unfavorable, and Scott himself had not directed the making of any inquiries in that direction after the troops had arrived in the valley. Under Worth's orders, however, Colonel Duncan, of the artillery, with a strong escort, marched on the early morning of August 14 and found that the road, though rough, could readily be made passable for artillery and trains. It ran over the hills along the edge of the lake upon firm ground and appeared to Duncan's party, who went within ten miles of the Acapulco highway, to offer no real difficulties to the passage of the entire army.

On the morning of that same day (Saturday, August 14) Scott had summoned a meeting of general officers at his head-quarters at Ayotla, and laid before them a plan of attack upon the fortified village of Mexicalcingo, which, he said, he did not consider unalterable should Colonel Duncan's reconnoissance prove that the route south of Lake Chalco was practicable. His plan, briefly, involved masking the Peñon by a relatively small body and making a

<sup>1</sup> *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 671; *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 213-218.