

frontal attack upon Mexicalcingo by the remainder of Twiggs's, Quitman's, and Pillow's divisions. Worth, meanwhile, with such artillery as he could get over the road, was to pass to the south of Lake Chalco and attack Mexicalcingo in the rear.<sup>1</sup>

The plan obviously involved the most serious risks; but if the road south of Chalco was not passable for the army with all its trains and artillery, it was the only solution of the problem which presented itself. Late in the afternoon, however, Duncan and his party returned from their reconnoissance, having had a skirmish with a party of guerillas in which Lieutenant Schuyler Hamilton had been severely wounded, and reported to Worth the entire feasibility of gaining the Acapulco road. Duncan was at once despatched, weary as he was, to Scott's head-quarters to report in person the results of his reconnoissance; and upon hearing his report Scott abandoned the plan of a frontal attack and determined upon pursuing the southern route.

"In ordinary circumstances," says Ripley, "and in ordinary warfare, the movement around Lake Chalco would have been dangerous in the extreme, for it abandoned all communication, and left a long and narrow, and in some places, as was afterward apparent, dangerous defile in rear of the American army. Everything was placed in the hazard of the battle by the movement, and retreat, in case of ill success, was out of the question. But the movement on Mexicalcingo was no less hazardous in such event, and, besides, there was the positive certainty of the greatest difficulty in the front; and as for the impracticability of the retreat, such had been the character of all or nearly all the operations of the war."<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of Sunday, August 15, therefore, the movement was begun, Worth leading and proceeding some distance on the road before dark. Pillow and Quitman followed on Monday morning, while Twiggs remained at Ayotla

<sup>1</sup> "The plan almost decided upon is to carry the town of Mexicalcingo on the border of the canal leading to the city. This as you will see will . . . secure comfortable shelter to our troops in case of proposals to negotiate; and should these not come, a comparatively bloodless capture of the city."—(Trist to Buchanan, August 14, 1847; *State Dept. MSS.*)

<sup>2</sup> Ripley, II, 203.

"in order to threaten the Peñon and Mexicalcingo and to deceive the enemy as long as practicable."

The movement of the American army had, of course, been observed by Santa Anna, and as soon as it was well ascertained orders were given for the withdrawal of the greater part of the Mexican troops to the fortified positions of San Antonio and Churubusco. Ex-President Herrera was left in command of the Peñon, and the national guards returned from their picnic to the city, discontented and discouraged at the unheroic ending of an expedition which had been begun with such a display of noisy patriotism. They found the city deserted by most of the wealthier families. The sight of the empty and silent streets was not calculated to encourage the impressionable volunteers.

On Monday, August 16, Twiggs's division marched from Ayotla, and soon after starting met the cavalry of Alvarez advancing from Texcoco. Twiggs halted, deployed into line facing easterly, and opened with his artillery upon the Mexican lancers, whom a few shots sufficed to disperse; and the division then proceeded without molestation over the road which Duncan had explored, reaching the Acapulco highway and joining the rest of the army near the village of Talpam or, as it was otherwise called, San Agustin de las Cuevas—a village which had been in former days much resorted to by the people of Mexico during the celebration of the feast of the Ascension.<sup>1</sup> The village lay in the midst of a fertile and productive country, but on the west was "a great tract of black lava, sterile, bleak and entirely destitute of vegetation," known as the Pedregal—an ancient flow of lava from the neighboring mountain of Ajusco.

On the high-road and about a mile north of San Agustin lay what Madame Calderon called the "noble hacienda" of San Antonio—"a fine solid mass of building, and as you enter the court-yard, through a deep archway, the great out-houses, stables, and especially the granary, look like remains

<sup>1</sup> An interesting account of the prodigious gambling and cock-fighting that went on during the three days of the fair will be found in Madame Calderon's *Life in Mexico*, 163-165.

of feudalism, they are on so large and magnificent a scale." This hacienda, as the Americans soon discovered, had been strongly fortified by the Mexicans and completely commanded the approach to the city from San Agustin. About two miles north of San Antonio on the road to the city was a fortified convent and bridge at Churubusco, which was known to be strongly held, although with what force was quite uncertain. West of San Agustin, a mule track led across the Pedregal to another road running northerly through the village of San Angel toward the city of Mexico.

The first obstacle to be encountered by Scott's army in making an advance along the Acapulco road toward the city was, therefore, the hacienda of San Antonio, which could only be approached by artillery along a straight piece of road, the ground upon the east being too soft for artillery; and the ground upon the west, the Pedregal, being too rough even for the passage of animals. The problem of turning the works at San Antonio, therefore, resolved itself into the question whether artillery could be taken from San Agustin across the southern end of the Pedregal to the San Angel road, a distance of five miles or less. That question was soon answered by Scott's engineers, who reported that although the existing mule path was not practicable for wheeled vehicles, it could be made practicable without much difficulty.

The engineers' reports having been submitted to General Scott, orders were issued early on the nineteenth directing Pillow's division to open a road for the siege trains in the direction of San Angel, Twiggs being ordered to advance and cover Pillow's division. The men were to carry subsistence in their haversacks and to bivouac one night, it being expected that their wagons would follow on the next day. Worth's division was to continue to mask San Antonio, and Quitman's division was to remain in reserve at San Agustin and eventually to follow Worth by the direct road.<sup>1</sup>

Pillow's and Twiggs's divisions marched out according to orders, and Pillow's men set to work upon the road. As

<sup>1</sup> General Orders No. 258; Sen. Doc. 65, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 470.

the troops advanced across the Pedregal, and just before they came upon the San Angel road, they discovered a large body of Mexican troops with numerous artillery posted on the other side of that road and commanding the western outlet of the path which they had been following.

The San Angel road at this point ran northwesterly, following the general course of a small mountain stream, the Magdalena Brook, which ultimately fell into what was called the Churubusco River. The banks of the stream were steep, and it ran through a deep and rugged ravine. On its westerly side a number of other small streams coming down from the mountains fell into it, forming a series of rounded promontories which seemed to afford good opportunities for defence. The westerly track, which Twiggs's division had followed from San Agustin to the edge of the Pedregal, descending into the valley of the main stream, passed close by the small ranch of Padierna and there joined the San Angel road. The hill opposite to the ranch of Padierna, on which the Mexican troops were stationed, was known to the Mexicans as the hill of Padierna, or by the native Indian name of Pelon Cuauhtitla.

The San Angel road ran from Padierna about a mile further south, where it ended at the village of Contreras. North of Padierna on the road was a ranch called Ansaldo; and about a quarter of a mile west of Ansaldo, among the foot-hills, was a little Indian village known as San Gerónimo, surrounded by orchards. On both sides of the Magdalena Brook the ground was open, and generally cultivated—the favorite crop being Indian corn, now nearly ripe and standing higher than a man's head.

The American commanders confused the names of the several ranches and villages. To the ranch of Padierna they sometimes gave the name of Contreras, while Ansaldo and San Gerónimo were not distinguished, the village being frequently called by the name of the ranch. The contest which ensued in this neighborhood was, therefore, called by the Americans the battle of Contreras, and by the Mexicans, more correctly, the battle of Padierna.

The Mexican troops whom Pillow and Twiggs thus encountered proved to be Valencia's Army of the North, with a force of cavalry under General Torrejon. Valencia, as has been seen, had been directed to occupy the village of Texcoco in order to observe Scott's movements, and at Texcoco Valencia remained until August 14, when the movement of Scott's whole army to the south of Lake Chalco began to be suspected. Valencia thereupon decided to march by way of Guadalupe and the city to watch the San Angel road.<sup>1</sup> His division reached the village of San Angel on August 16, and he immediately proceeded to reconnoitre in the direction of the village of Contreras with the view to ascertaining whether the American forces could make their way across the Pedregal to the San Angel road. He appears to have become satisfied that the only possible means of crossing the lava beds was by means of the path which was actually followed by Twiggs and Pillow on the nineteenth; but late on the seventeenth of August he wrote to Santa Anna that his officers had discovered that there were four paths in all, one of which was even practicable for artillery, and all of which terminated at San Angel. These officers, therefore, reported to Valencia that it would be impossible to protect the factory of Magdalena (Contreras), which was about five miles from San Angel, and at the same time to watch all four of the paths; and that if only the path leading to Padierna was guarded by his troops, he might end by being completely cut off in the mountains without succor or means of retreat. Valencia's officers further reported that the village of San Angel itself could not be held unless it were fortified, and that there was no time for doing this in view of the nearness of the enemy. They therefore recommended falling back nearer to the city of Mexico, unless reinforced that same night with two thousand infantry.<sup>2</sup>

Santa Anna at once replied that as yet only the advance of Scott's army had reached San Agustin, that it consisted

<sup>1</sup> This movement seems to have been undertaken without orders, and even in defiance of orders, as Santa Anna seems to have wished Valencia to follow Twiggs toward San Agustin.—(*Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 148, 150.)

<sup>2</sup> Valencia to Minister of War, August 17, 1847; *ibid.*, 151.

of but twenty-five hundred men with four field-pieces, and that it was, therefore, improbable that Scott would undertake to march to San Angel on the following day in the face of a superior Mexican force. It was believed that Scott, on the other hand, might endeavor to carry the works at San Antonio by a direct assault, and Santa Anna considered there was no necessity for abandoning San Angel before it was positively known whether the enemy determined to advance upon that point. Valencia was accordingly ordered to remain at San Angel unless, contrary to all probability, Scott should advance on the following morning, and "in that case, and only in that case, your Excellency will march to Tacubaya, being careful to learn positively before undertaking the march whether the enemy has actually started."<sup>1</sup> But by the next morning, Wednesday, the eighteenth of August, Valencia had come to the conclusion that so far from falling back from San Angel toward the city, as he had been advised to do, it would be better for him to advance south and occupy the hill of Padierna with his entire force; and during that day he threw up intrenchments and placed his guns in position to command the approaches over the Pedregal.

While Valencia was thus busy intrenching himself the Americans were pushing their reconnoissances in the direction of his camp, and at eleven o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, August 18, a force which he estimated at twelve hundred strong, with two guns, appeared in his neighborhood. A few shots were fired and the American force fell back toward San Agustin, much to the gratification of the Mexican commander.<sup>2</sup>

Valencia now fully expected to be attacked in force, but Santa Anna seems to have become convinced that the real attack would be made upon the hacienda of San Antonio. At any rate, orders were sent to Valencia that evening advising him of the American movements in front of the hacienda.

<sup>1</sup> Alcora to Valencia, August 17, 1847; *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>2</sup> Valencia to Minister of War, August 18, 1847; *ibid.*, 153.

"His Excellency the President therefore directs," the orders ran, "that at dawn to-morrow morning your Excellency will march with the whole force of the army under your command and take up a position in the village of Coyoacan where you will remain, sending forward your artillery to the fort of Churubusco and the works at the bridge of that name."<sup>1</sup>

Valencia, however, had no idea of obeying this very brief and simple order and determined to remain where he was. His motive seems never to have been in any particular doubt. He was no friend of Santa Anna's, and indeed he was not identified with any one of the principal factions. He was a man who was perpetually intriguing for his own benefit. He had opposed Bustamante and supported Santa Anna in 1841; he had opposed Santa Anna and helped to drive him out of the country in 1844; and he was now openly ambitious to put himself into Santa Anna's seat as President of the republic. He was probably not a very accomplished soldier, but he saw clearly that Scott was far more likely to attempt to turn the position at San Antonio by way of the San Angel road than he was to attack the hacienda and its strong outlying works. Valencia, therefore, at 5 P. M. wrote to the Secretary of War acknowledging receipt of the order to march to Coyoacan and to send his artillery forward to the bridge of Churubusco, and politely expressing his regret at being unable to comply with the orders given him.

"I should like," he wrote, "to reply to this order as I have done to others; but unfortunately it is impossible for me, both because of my military and patriotic conscience, and in my view of events, to see things in the same light. I believe that the cause of the nation depends on not abandoning these positions, and the road which leads from San Augustin to Padierna at this point. It is as clear to me as the light of day that the enemy will attack, if not to-morrow, on the next day; and that he will do it simultaneously upon two obvious points, namely, San Antonio and Churubusco on the one hand, and the point which is held by the army under my command on the other; that one attack will be a feint, while the other will be made with all

<sup>1</sup> Minister of War to Valencia, August 18, 1847; *ibid.*, 152.

possible vigor; but that if he finds one of them abandoned when he begins to move, he will suspend his movement upon the other until his forces have an opportunity by making a rapid march to place themselves in a position to attack the remaining point in flank and turn the position. This is what I believe will happen if this road be abandoned; and the Mexican army will find itself attacked in flank and in front, while, at the same time, if the enemy does not choose to operate in this manner, he is free to approach the City with impunity, —those of his forces who may have come by this village (San Angel) being in a position to march directly from here upon Mexico either by the straight road to Niño Perdido, or else by that of Miscoac to the gate of Piedad, or else to Tacubaya."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time he wrote to Santa Anna a private letter explaining that as a Mexican and as a general in command he could not conscientiously obey the orders to retreat and abandon the position of Padierna, where he had every probability of victory, especially as he was perfectly convinced that the abandonment of his intrenched camp "would be our destruction." And to Tornel, who was Santa Anna's chief adviser, he wrote that he considered it would be not only a great mistake to obey the order but a betrayal of his most sacred duties; and he therefore begged Tornel to use his influence with Santa Anna, inasmuch as the enemy might be beaten beyond a doubt if the whole army were concentrated at Padierna.<sup>2</sup> To these communications Santa Anna replied from Churubusco that same night, explaining that the order to fall back had been based upon the reasons given by Valencia himself in his note of the day before, in which he had reported that there were four paths leading from San Augustin to San Angel, and that if he held the position at Padierna he might be completely cut off without supplies and without means of retreat. This and other statements in the letter referred to had seemed to be conclusive and were the reasons for directing a retreat to Coyoacan; but at the same time the President could not be indifferent to the reasons given for holding the post, and Valencia might remain in the position which he occupied, assuming

<sup>1</sup> Valencia to Minister of War, Aug. 18, 1847; *ibid.*, 152.

<sup>2</sup> Valencia to Santa Anna; same to Tornel, Aug. 18, 1847; *ibid.*, 159.

that his reconnoissances had enabled him to find a suitable intrenched camp which he could defend.<sup>1</sup>

Santa Anna also sent a personal note to Valencia to the effect that the enemy's movements had fully confirmed the expectations upon which he had based his order of the day before.

"Nevertheless," he added, "since the problem is presented, I do not wish that its solution should be based on any supposed lack of patriotism on my part, in regard to which I yield to no man; and I prefer to take my chances of all that may happen, rather than to give an opportunity to any one to say that things did not turn out as well as they might because I insisted that they should be done correctly and according to rule. Do what you like and let each one bear the responsibility that pertains to him."<sup>2</sup>

In judging of Santa Anna's responsibility for what followed, it must be borne in mind that he had the most profound and well-justified distrust of his own army. He had made up his mind weeks before that he would not venture upon any offensive movements, and that the only chance of success lay partly in intrigues to gain time and partly in awaiting attack behind intrenchments. Up to this time he had been disappointed in Scott's failure to deliver frontal attacks upon the strong positions at the Peñon and at San Antonio. But Scott's reconnoissances in force during the day upon which the foregoing letter was written had undoubtedly revived Mexican hopes that Scott might yet attack the lines of San Antonio, and for this reason Santa Anna was at that moment all the more willing to refrain from attempting to exercise authority over Valencia. It is indeed, difficult to say what he could have done that evening. Valencia was at a distance with an independent command, and he flatly refused to obey orders; and Santa Anna, indulging in the hope and expectation that the main attack would be directed upon San Antonio and not upon Valencia, took the path of least resistance by leaving the

<sup>1</sup> Minister of War to Valencia, Aug. 18, 1847; *ibid.*, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Santa Anna to Valencia, Aug. 18, 1847; *ibid.*, 160.

latter to his own devices while discharging the whole responsibility upon him for any disaster.

On the morning of Thursday, the nineteenth, therefore, Valencia moved his entire force from San Angel to the hill of Padierna—previously held only by a relatively small detachment, which had been engaged in throwing up intrenchments—and during the morning his troops were in position to await the expected American advance.

The hill upon which his camp was situated was a rounded elevation chiefly covered with fields of corn. The easterly slope toward the Pedregal was abrupt, and the view was to some extent obstructed by trees and bushes. On his left and left rear was a deep ravine formed by one of the streams that emptied into the Magdalena Brook. Along the easterly slopes (not the summit) of the hill his artillery was placed in the arc of a circle, supported by the greater part of his infantry, while at the same time the westerly side of the Magdalena Brook near the bottom of the hill was held by small detachments of cavalry and infantry of the line, and the rocky slope descending from the Pedregal into the valley directly in front of the hill was covered with skirmishers.<sup>1</sup> A small advanced party was placed in observation on the hill of Zacatepec, an eminence in the Pedregal which commanded a view as far as San Agustin, and from which any advance of the American troops could readily be seen.

On the left of Valencia's main line were the local troops of San Luis Potosí, and on the right was Cabrera's brigade, made up of auxiliaries and "active militia" from Celaya, Guanajuato, and Querétaro. Head-quarters were established in the rear of the batteries near the centre, and a second line was formed by four battalions, including the *guarda costa* of Tampico, troops who had seen service in all the battles against Taylor. The reserves, who were at first stationed at the ranch of Ansaldo under the orders of General Salas, the late President substitute, was composed of

<sup>1</sup> Balbontin says the ranch itself, on the east of the brook, was not occupied. (*Invasion Americana*, 112.)

the corps of engineers, three battalions of infantry, and three regiments of cavalry; but they were soon withdrawn to join the main body. The extreme right was supported by two regular battalions. In this position Valencia waited until afternoon, when he received a message from the hill of Zacatepec that the Americans were advancing toward that point.

When Twiggs had crossed the Pedregal, Smith's brigade, which was leading, drove back Valencia's advanced parties and emerged in full view of his camp. The rifle regiment were sent forward as skirmishers to clear the ground. Descending into the ravine, they came in contact with some Mexican troops who were sheltered behind a maguey hedge within about three hundred yards of Valencia's intrenchments. The riflemen seem to have fallen back at this time to the Padierna ranch, so that the skirmishers on each side held, speaking generally, the two opposite banks of the brook at the bottom of the ravine. From this time forward, during the remainder of the afternoon, the Americans kept up an active fire, simulating, as far as possible, a real attack.

As soon as the Mexican pickets had been thus driven back, Magruder's battery of field artillery and the mountain howitzer and rocket battery were placed in position opposite Valencia's camp and about nine hundred yards distant from it at the top of the easterly slope of the ravine.

"As soon as our batteries were established," as Twiggs reported, "the enemy opened a most destructive fire from several of his large guns. The cannonading was kept up on both sides for several hours, until, compelled by the loss of officers, men, and crippled pieces, our batteries were placed for the time under shelter."

The cannonading on the American side was indeed entirely futile, for the guns were too light to do any serious damage to the Mexican forces at the range at which they were compelled to fire; while the Mexican guns, of much heavier calibre, soon began to get the range of the American batteries and, as one of Magruder's men wrote, "nothing but

their excessively bad firing had saved our battery from being totally annihilated." At sunset the American skirmishers seem to have fallen back from the ravine toward a more secure position in the Pedregal, and the batteries also were still further withdrawn, though they were unable to proceed far in the darkness owing to the difficulties of the ground. The attack in front, therefore, accomplished nothing, although the noise and fury of the cannonading, and the skirmishing in the ravine, doubtless served to divert Valencia's attention from the more important movements which the American commanders were making in an effort to turn one or the other flank of the Mexican line.

A direct attack upon Valencia's front, in the face of his numerous artillery and over the difficult ground, had soon been seen to be impracticable, and it was not seriously undertaken. Nor did the ground upon the American left appear to offer any prospect of success; and therefore, after such examination as was practicable, Riley's brigade of regular troops were sent far toward the American right in an attempt to gain the road leading from Padierna toward the city of Mexico, and thus to interpose, if possible, between Valencia and the city. The route which Riley was compelled to take was, as Twiggs reported,

"most difficult and tedious, passing over volcanic rocks and across large fissures barely narrow enough to permit the men to get over by leaping. Accompanied by Lieutenant Tower of the engineers, this brigade finally reached the main road, and got in a position in rear of the enemy's position."

Cadwalader's brigade of Pillow's division was next sent to join Riley as soon as it became evident that it was practicable for infantry to cross the Pedregal in the direction which Riley had been following. Riley, however, without waiting for Cadwalader, pushed forward across the road, past the hacienda of Ansaldo, toward the village of San Gerónimo. Before he reached that village he was confronted by a body of cavalry and two battalions of infantry with one field-piece, which had been sent from Valencia's