

CHAPTER XLVII

THE MOLINO DEL REY AND CHAPULTEPEC

THE hill of Chapultepec, crowned with the imposing structure which commemorates two Spanish viceroys and an Austrian emperor of Mexico, is a narrow volcanic ridge of rock rising sharply a hundred and ninety-five feet above the level lands that lie between it and the city. It is distant, in a southwesterly direction, a trifle over three miles from the Government Palace and the great plaza of the capital; and it lies a little more than a mile northerly from the Archbishop's Palace of Tacubaya.

The ridge is six or seven hundred yards long at its base, and runs nearly east and west.¹ On the northerly side and easterly end the rock is precipitous, and on the south it is also extremely steep; but on the west—the end away from the city—it slopes down at such an angle that, although rough and rocky, it is practicable for infantry.

The summit of the rock has been levelled off so as to make a platform for the palace, begun in 1783 by the then viceroy, Matías de Galvez, and continued by his son and successor, the more famous Bernardo de Galvez.² The untimely death of the latter and the suspicions of the Spanish court put a stop to the work before it was entirely completed, and for years it remained neglected, until, in 1833, it was utilized as the military college of the republic.³

¹ Or more nearly E. N. E. and W. S. W.

² Bernardo de Galvez was governor of Louisiana during the Revolution of the thirteen colonies. When Spain, in alliance with France, declared war on Great Britain, Galvez was almost the only Spanish leader who did anything effectual. He captured the British posts on the lower Mississippi, as well as Mobile and Pensacola, thus saving the Floridas for Spain in the treaty of 1783. Had the Floridas remained British at that time they might very well have been British to-day.

³ Dublan y Lozano, II, 603; decree of Nov. 16, 1833.

The palace, conforming to the general trend of the ridge, faces a little to the east of south. About it, on all sides, is a terrace of irregular shape and varying width, which is in part cut out of the rock and in part built up and supported by massive retaining walls. At the easterly end, where the rock was originally higher than elsewhere, a second and higher platform exists, formed by cutting off the summit of the hill at a level some fifteen or twenty feet above the principal terrace. At the time of the American invasion access to the palace was gained by a zigzag road or ramp cut along the southerly face of the rock. Starting at the foot of the ridge at the point nearest the city, the road mounted to the lower or principal terrace with one sharp turn about half-way up.

The less precipitous slopes of the hill of Chapultepec and a good deal of the land about its base were covered by a noble grove of venerable cypresses; and the hill and grove, together with some level open ground on the west, were enclosed to form a rude and neglected park, the forerunner of the beautiful pleasure-grounds which now delight the visitor to the city of Mexico. Around three sides of this enclosure there existed in 1847 high park walls, capable of offering a serious obstacle to infantry. From east to west the walls on each side ran nearly parallel to each other, and were about fifteen hundred yards, or over three-quarters of a mile, in length. At the eastern end the enclosure was irregular in shape, and narrowed down to about a hundred and fifty yards.

The western end of the enclosure was formed by a range of substantial stone buildings nearly a quarter of a mile long, which were collectively known as the Molino del Rey, or King's Mill. These buildings in the time of the Spaniards had been used, the southern end as a flour-mill, the northern end as a powder-mill; but at some later period a part of the buildings had been occupied by a cannon foundry.

Chapultepec, with its rock, its enclosure, and its solid building, constituted a military position which was evidently formidable by nature, and was reported to have been forti-

fied and to be strongly held; and many of the American officers were of opinion that upon the renewal of hostilities the first object should be the capture of this post. But when the armistice came to an end Scott had no plan of action ready. From the morning of August 21, when he first received Santa Anna's verbal request for a suspension of hostilities, down to September 6, when Scott sent notice that he would terminate the truce, more than sixteen days and nights had elapsed, and no preparation whatever had been made for the contingency of renewed hostilities.

"This evening," wrote Colonel Hitchcock in his diary of September 6, "the General called some of us together, including Capt. Robert E. Lee (engineer), to consider the best mode of threatening and attacking the city,—to determine the depot for the sick, wounded, supplies, etc."¹

It was high time. From Tacubaya on the north to San Agustin on the south, Scott's army, now reduced to much less than ten thousand effective men, was extended in a line fully eleven miles long; and an enterprising enemy could hardly have found much difficulty in defeating these distant divisions in detail. Scott, however, continued to repose confidence in the Mexican lack of initiative, and for five days longer he did not concentrate his forces.

"Being delayed," he reported, "by the terms of the armistice more than two weeks, *we had now, late on the 7th, to begin to reconnoitre the different approaches to the city, within our reach, before I could lay down any definitive plan of attack.*"²

But before these reconnoissances were begun Scott's attention was called to the Molino del Rey by a rumor that reached him, probably through Trist, that a cannon-foundry was in active operation in the old buildings. What was the origin of this rumor never appeared, but Scott, without further inquiry, unhesitatingly accepted it as true.

On the morning of Tuesday, the seventh of September,

¹ Hitchcock, 293.

² Scott to Marcy, Sept. 11, 1847; Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 355. Italics are not in the original.

a movement of large bodies of Mexican troops north of the Chapultepec enclosure was plainly visible from the roof of the Archbishop's Palace. Worth, who observed the movement with Scott, was of opinion that the intention of the Mexican commander was to bring on a general engagement, and advised an immediate attack, before the Mexican preparations were complete. Scott thought differently. The enemy's movement, he told Worth, was defensive merely, and intended to protect the very valuable cannon-foundry at the Molino del Rey. "Having heard," as he said in his official report, "that many church bells had been sent to be cast into guns, the enemy's movement was easily understood," and he therefore ordered Worth to make an attack on the mill with his whole division that night, to take the buildings, destroy the machinery, spike the guns, and return to camp the next morning.¹

The ground had not yet been examined thoroughly, and Worth thought it wise to make a reconnoissance before the time came for complying with the order. The result may best be stated in his own words:

"A close and daring reconnoissance, by Captain Mason of the engineers, made on the morning of the 7th, represented the enemy's lines collateral to Chapultepec to be as follows: His left rested upon and occupied a group of strong stone buildings, called El Molino del Rey, adjoining the grove at the foot of the hill of Chapultepec, and directly under the guns of the castle which crowns its summit. The right of his line rested upon another stone building, called Casa Mata, situated at the foot of the ridge that slopes gradually from the heights above the village of Tacubaya to the plain below. Midway between these buildings was the enemy's field battery, and his infantry forces were disposed on either side of it. This reconnoissance was verified by Captain Mason and Colonel Duncan, on the afternoon of the same day. The result indicated that the centre was the weak point of the enemy's position; and that his flanks were the strong points, his left flank being the stronger."²

The small and inconspicuous building known as the Casa Mata, used as a powder-magazine, was so situated in a fold

¹ Semmes, 431.

² Worth's Report, Sept. 10, 1847; Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 362.

of the hills as to escape accurate observation from the south. To the American engineers it appeared a square stone building protected by "an ordinary field entrenchment." In fact, it was "a strong stone citadel, surrounded with bastioned entrenchments and impassable ditches—an old Spanish work, recently repaired and enlarged."¹ It lay about five hundred yards due west from the northerly end of the Molino del Rey, so that the Mexican line, taking the latter building into account, formed two sides of a right-angled triangle, one side running east and west from the Casa Mata to the Molino del Rey, about five hundred yards; the other side, formed by the Molino del Rey itself, running nearly north and south, and being about four hundred yards long. The hypotenuse of the triangle roughly represented the position which the American troops must occupy, and from which they must attack an enemy posted on a re-entering angle.

Worth believed the task set for him was too hard for his unaided division, and he asked Scott for reinforcements. He was accordingly given the whole of Cadwalader's brigade of Pillow's division, three pieces of field artillery under Captain Drum, two heavy siege guns (twenty-four-pounders) under Captain Huger, and a force of cavalry under Major E. V. Sumner, which numbered (officers and men) about three hundred. Scott also assented to Worth's suggestion that the attack should be postponed till daylight the next morning; but he was not willing to accede to Worth's further suggestion that after the Molino del Rey was taken, an assault should be attempted on Chapultepec.

"For this difficult operation," he reported to the War Department four days later, "we were not entirely ready, and moreover we might altogether neglect the castle if, as we then hoped, our reconnoissances should prove that the distant southern approaches to the city were more eligible than this southwestern approach."²

Worth accordingly made his dispositions during the night of the seventh of September. By three o'clock in the morn-

¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

² Scott's Report; *ibid.*, 355.

ing of Wednesday, the eighth, the several columns of troops were in motion, "and when the gray of the morning enabled them to be seen, they were as accurately in position as if posted in midday for review."¹ The ground they occupied was barren and uncultivated, forming, in fact, the northerly end of the hill back of Tacubaya on which stood the Archbishop's Palace. This hill sloped down very gradually on the northeast toward Chapultepec, and on the north toward the Casa Mata. On the west of the ground occupied by Worth's command, a barranca or ravine, which was deep but not impassable, formed an obstacle to the movement of cavalry or artillery. Almost the whole field of battle was within distant range of the guns mounted on the terraces of the palace of Chapultepec.

Worth, being satisfied that the Mexican centre was the weak point, had organized an assaulting party of five hundred picked men and officers made up from the various organizations of his own division—an arrangement which was subsequently the subject of grave criticism. This assaulting party was posted near the centre of the American line. Just to the right of them were Captain Huger's two siege guns, which were supported by a light battalion of Worth's regulars under Captain E. Kirby Smith, and General Cadwalader's brigade was held in reserve, a little to the rear. Garland's brigade (or so much of it as was left after providing its quota of the detachments above mentioned) was posted on the right, together with Captain Drum's small battery, while on the left was the remaining part of Clarke's brigade (temporarily under command of Colonel McIntosh), with Duncan's field battery of six guns, which was regularly attached to Worth's division. On the extreme left, watching the barranca, was Major Sumner's cavalry.

The Molino del Rey had been occupied by the Mexican troops late on the afternoon of Monday, the sixth of September; the garrison then consisting of General Leon's brigade of four battalions of national guards—probably men of relatively pure Spanish descent. On Tuesday morning

¹ Worth's Report; *ibid.*, 363.

Rangel's brigade, also of four battalions of miscellaneous infantry—including the grenadiers of the guard—was sent to reinforce Leon. In addition, two regular battalions were stationed in the Casa Mata under General Pérez; and the centre was held by General Simeon Ramírez with six regular battalions and a light battery. These battalions, whose arrival had been observed from Tacubaya by Scott and Worth on Tuesday morning, were protected either by the buildings in which they were posted or by maguey hedges and light intrenchments.

Besides the forces above mentioned, the cavalry division under General Alvarez, four thousand strong, was stationed at the hacienda of Morales about a mile west of the Casa Mata. Santa Anna asserts that on Tuesday evening he gave orders to Alvarez to advance to a point "a little more than a cannon-shot from the Casa Mata" (which he personally pointed out) and to fall on the flank and rear of the American troops the moment an attack on the Mexican position was begun.¹

Such were Santa Anna's first dispositions, but on Tuesday night, with his usual restlessness, he decided to make important changes. He had received reports to the effect that an American attack on the extreme southeastern part of the city was imminent, and without stopping to verify these rumors he ordered Rangel's brigade back to the city, but with instructions to return to Chapultepec at daylight. One of the battalions of the five under General Ramírez was also ordered to fall back to a point between Chapultepec and the city.² Thus five battalions of infantry, out of sixteen in all, were withdrawn that night. Meanwhile, the remainder of the troops in the Mexican centre seem to have been moved toward their left and posted in front of the Molino del Rey, so that the Casa Mata remained entirely isolated.

At four o'clock the next morning, before dawn, Santa Anna received further reports confirming the rumor that the

¹ Santa Anna's Report of Nov. 12, 1847; *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, 108, from which the foregoing statements as to the Mexican forces are taken.

² *Ibid.*, 109.

American attack was to be delivered on the southeastern part of the city, and he at once sent orders for the five battalions to join him at what he regarded as the threatened spot. When he himself arrived there everything was quiet, and the five battalions were directed to return to the Molino del Rey. They duly set out for their posts, but both they and Santa Anna arrived after the battle was over.

Early on Wednesday morning, as soon as the swift tropical dawn enabled the American gunners to see their mark, Captain Huger's two twenty-four-pounders opened on the Molino del Rey. Almost at the same moment the assaulting party began to move forward. Only about ten rounds had been fired from each of the two guns when the assaulting party had reached the front of the buildings of the Molino del Rey, and, moving swiftly and steadily on, they drove back the Mexican troops in the field and captured their guns under a heavy fire from the troops directly assailed, as well as from those posted in the buildings. Under this heavy and concentrated fire, the American advance was presently checked; the men began falling back; the captured guns were abandoned; and Smith's light battalion with half of Cadwalader's brigade were sent forward to their support. As Cadwalader advanced, and the small assaulting column retreated, leaving their dead and severely wounded on the ground, a Mexican battalion from Chapultepec sallied out to reoccupy the ground, and murdered all but two of the American wounded.¹

But just before this repulse of the American assaulting column Garland's brigade on the right had begun an attack on the south end of Molino del Rey itself. Thus with the reinforcements sent forward to sustain the centre, and the advance of Garland, the whole of the American right and centre and half of the reserve were engaged in a desperate struggle; and for a time, which nobody attempted to esti-

¹ "Our soldiers with great enthusiasm left the recovered artillery in the midst of the slopes and pushed forward making a frightful havoc of the assailants (*haciendo un estrago horroroso en los asallantes*) and came actually to within musket shot of the enemy's line of battle."—(*Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 295.)

mate, a doubtful battle was waged—the Mexicans vigorously defending the buildings, and the Americans gradually pushing forward up to the very walls and endeavoring to break down the gates and doors. At length the southernmost gate was dashed in by Garland's infantry, and the assailants poured into the yard.¹ At almost the same moment the northwestern gate was forced and in a few minutes the buildings were taken; the Mexicans retreating toward Chapultepec, with the exception of nearly seven hundred men, whose retreat was cut off and who surrendered within the buildings.

Meanwhile the left wing of Worth's force had been heavily engaged in what was in fact an independent action. The American officers had all failed to perceive the really formidable character of the works of the Casa Mata, and Worth had confidently ordered an advance against it as soon as the attack had fairly begun on the right. After a brief cannonade from Duncan's battery, an assault was attempted which carried Clarke's brigade up to the very slope of the parapet; but the Mexican fire was too severe, and the brigade fell back in disorder upon Duncan's battery which had been engaged, while the assault on the Casa Mata was in progress, in a contest with the Mexican cavalry.

When Clarke's brigade advanced in front of the position of Duncan's guns, the latter's fire on the Casa Mata had necessarily ceased. But just at this moment the gunners caught sight of the cavalry division of Alvarez advancing toward the ravine. Accompanied by a part of Cadwalader's brigade, which had been sent to its support when the assault on the Casa Mata was ordered, the battery was rushed to the extreme left of the American line, near the edge of the barranca, and as Alvarez came within canister range Duncan "opened a most effective fire, which soon broke the squadrons and drove them back in disorder." At the same time Sumner, with his three hundred horsemen, managed to cross

¹ Lieutenant U. S. Grant was among the first to enter the yard. A vivid account of this part of the contest will be found in Grant's *Personal Memoirs*, I, 152.

the ravine near its mouth, but with some loss, as his command was exposed to a severe fire from the Casa Mata. But once across, this small command boldly held its position, threatening Alvarez, who, without making any further effort, fell back to the distant hacienda he had at first occupied.

This cavalry interlude was just over when the remnants of Clarke's broken brigade fell back to the security of Duncan's battery, which at once opened fire for a second time on the Casa Mata. But by this time the Molino del Rey was taken, the Mexicans who had defended it were in flight, and the Casa Mata was in its turn abandoned, General Pérez and his men retreating northwesterly across the fields. The Americans were unequal to attempting any pursuit, though an artillery fire was kept up on the retreating Mexicans as long as they remained within range.

Hardly was the action thus ended when reinforcements on both sides began arriving in the neighborhood. Santa Anna, with the five battalions he had withdrawn the night before, had come up on the road skirting the northerly wall of the Chapultepec enclosure, where he met the stream of fugitives from the Molino del Rey. Here he halted, endeavoring to collect and reorganize the battalions which had been engaged.

On the American side, Pillow, on his own responsibility, had marched with Pierce's brigade for the scene of action as soon as it was perceived that the anticipated skirmish had developed into a battle. On his way he was met by orders from Scott directing him to come to Worth's assistance, but he arrived too late to take any part in the battle.

Both Worth and Cadwalader, it was reported, had again begged Scott to be allowed to pursue, and to attempt the capture of Chapultepec; but permission being refused, all that was now left for the American forces to do was to collect their dead and wounded and to destroy the foundry which had been Scott's sole object in ordering the attack.¹ But here a surprise awaited Scott and his staff.

¹ General Grant, writing nearly forty years afterward, says: "Had this victory been followed up promptly, no doubt Americans and Mexicans would

"Our principal object of assault," Colonel Hitchcock noted in his diary immediately after the battle, "was a building supposed to be a foundry. Strange to say, our information turned out to be false. The building was captured but no foundry was discovered. It seems it had been a foundry, but is no longer in use."¹

Nothing remained, therefore, but to do such damage as was possible to the building, to remove the captured Mexican guns and some ammunition, and to blow up the powder-magazine situated in the Casa Mata. By noon the American troops were back in their former quarters, and in the afternoon Santa Anna ventured to the scene of the battle, although at nightfall his troops were again withdrawn. "At about three o'clock in the afternoon," he related, "I succeeded in causing the enemy to fall back on Tacubaya, the field remaining in possession of our troops"; and on the strength of this he proclaimed a Mexican victory.²

The American troops engaged, including both officers and men, numbered 3,447, and the casualties were 116 killed, 653 wounded, and 18 missing, or 787 in all, being nearly 23 per cent of the force engaged. The heaviest loss was in the regiments that took part in the assault on the Casa Mata, the fifth regular infantry in particular losing more than 38 per cent of its numbers. It is to be observed that the losses on the American side in this brief struggle were greater than those suffered in the two days of Buena Vista or in any other battle of the war.

On the Mexican side the statistics are involved in the

have gone over the defences of Chapultepec so near together that the place would have fallen into our hands without further loss." He admits that this result could not have been foreseen, but he adds that it is "always in order to follow a retreating foe."—(Grant's *Personal Memoirs*, I, 152.)

¹ Hitchcock, 296. It came to be believed in the American army that the foundry story had been treacherously spread by Santa Anna in order to induce Scott to attack a position considered by the Mexicans to be impregnable.

² *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 111. The official reports of Scott and Worth, with subreports, are in Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 354-375. Santa Anna's brief report, with a report from Alvarez of the cavalry operations, are in *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, 108-111, 125-131. Accounts by other eye-witnesses will be found in Semmes, 431-447, and Anderson, 311-313; and see also Roa Bárcena, 424-453; Ripley, II, 357-385; Wilcox, 429-442; Stevens, 84-88; *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 289-301.

customary doubt. The most careful of the Mexican historians, gathering his information from various sources and personal recollection, estimates the infantry force engaged at 4,000 rank and file; besides the cavalry division of Alvarez, which he estimates at 3,000 men, although Santa Anna stated it at 4,000.¹ In addition, the artillery posted at the palace of Chapultepec took a part in the combat, though distant and ineffectual. Worth reported that the Mexicans were commanded by Santa Anna in person and that their numbers exceeded 14,000; and his estimate of the Mexican strength seems to have been generally concurred in by the American officers present, who based their judgment on personal observation, on the extent of the lines occupied, and on the severity of the fire. No doubt Worth's figures were much exaggerated; but it also seems probable that the Mexican estimate of 4,000 infantry is too low. Taking everything into account, it is likely that their total force present on the field, including the cavalry, may have amounted to 9,000 or 10,000, or considerably more than double Worth's numbers.

As for the Mexican losses, it is hard to form even a plausible conjecture as to their killed and wounded, though the total must have been considerable.² The prisoners taken numbered 685, including 53 commissioned officers,³ and it would appear that the desertions from the scattered forces were exceedingly numerous. It is, perhaps, not far from the truth to say that the Mexicans on this day lost from all causes, including desertion, one-half of the infantry actually engaged. The losses in their cavalry must have been trifling.

The leaders on both sides were the subject of severe criticism. Santa Anna, in his usual fashion, endeavored to make a scape-goat of Alvarez, whom he accused of incapacity and cowardice in failing to charge the American left while it

¹ Roa Bárcena, *Invasion Norte-Americana*, 427. This author, it is to be noted, asserts that Santa Anna withdrew many more men than he was willing to admit during the night of September 7.

² "No hallo dato alguno digno de fé."—(Roa Bárcena, 445.)

³ Inspector-General's Report, Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 430.