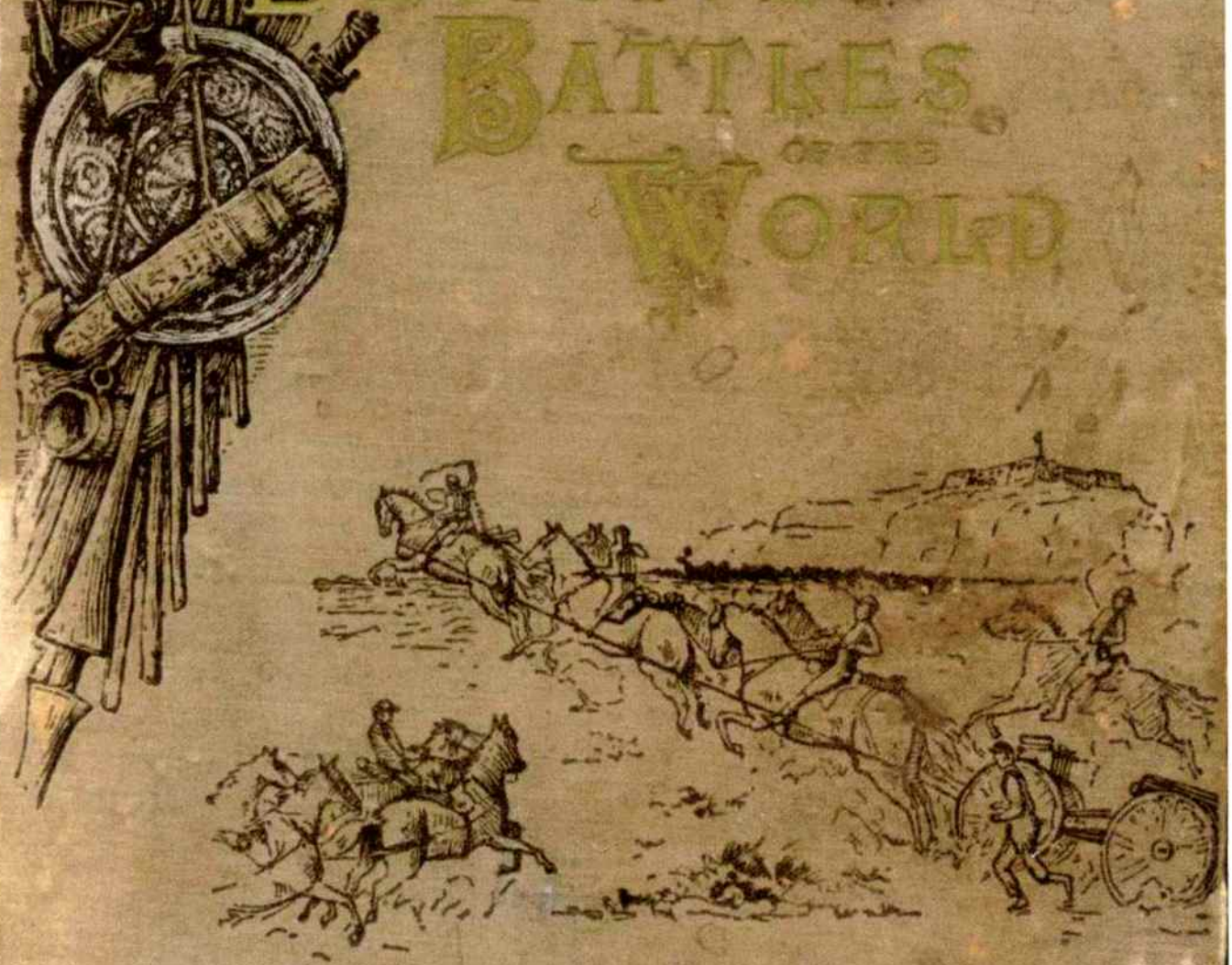
DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE WORLD



BRIGADIER-GENERAL CHARLES KING, U. S. A.

FROM MARATHON TO SANTIAGO

FAMOUS AND Decisive Battles OF THE World

The ESSENCE of HISTORY for 2500 YEARS

With Plans of Battlefields, Maps and One Hundred and Ten Engravings from Paintings by Meissonier, DeNeuville, Alma Tadema, Woodville and others.

BY

CHARLES KING, Brigadier-General, U. S. A.

Author of "Fort Frayne", "A West Point Parallel", Etc.

CHAPULTEPEC.

1847

BY JAMES H. WILLARD.

THE ancient Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, crowned a slight elevation in the heart of an irregular basin, 7,500 feet above sea level. Upon its site—midway between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, and some two hundred miles west of Vera Cruz—rises the fair city of Mexico. Coyoacan, older than the capital itself, and once the seat of Cortez's government, nestled near the city. Around, are lakes of beauty; tall mountains look down upon the cathedral, built above the ruins of an Aztec temple.

Upon this garden spot of the republic, the American army was advancing. The fields of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma had been fought and won. Matamoras had fallen; the capitulation of the city had followed the storming of Monterey; the decisive action at Buena Vista had passed into history. Then the Americans invested Vera Cruz by land and by sea. The Mexicans struck their flag after a terrible bombardment. In the words of an eyewitness: "Bombs were flying into Vera Cruz like hail. Sulphureous flashes, clouds of smoke and the dull booms of heavy guns arose from the walls of the city in return; while ever and anon a red sheet of flame would leap from the great brass mortars of the castle, followed by a report which fairly made the earth tremble. . . . A huge black cloud of smoke hung like a pall over the American army, completely concealing it from view; the Mexicans had ceased firing in order to prevent our troops from directing their guns by the flashes

from the walls: but, having obtained the exact range before dark, the gunners continued their fire, every shell falling directly into the city. Suddenly a vivid, lightning like flash would gleam for an instant upon the dense cloud of smoke over our lines, and then, as the roar of the great mortar was borne to our ears, the ponderous shell would be seen to dart upward like a meteor, and after describing a semicircle in the air, descend with a loud crash upon the housetops, or into the resounding streets. Then, after a brief but awful moment of suspense, a lurid glare, illuminating for an instant the white domes and grim fortresses of Vera Cruz, falling into ruins with the shock, and the echoing crash that came to our ears told that a shell had exploded, and executed its terrible mission."

After the fall of the hitherto impregnable defences of Vera Cruz, the American army marched along the great national road toward the City of Mexico. Entrenched among the rocky defiles and precipitous cliffs of the Sierra Madre, General Santa Anna contested the advance of the invaders. Cannon roared and echoed along the gorges. A murderous storm greeted the Americans as they swept over the parapets, leaped among their foes, and with the bayonet won the victory of Cerro Gordo.

Jalapa, La Hoya, Perote aud Puebla fell in quick succession. Three large cities, two castles, upward of 700 cannon, immense quantities of small arms and ammunition, with 10,000 prisoners fell into the hands of the Americans in the space of two months.

Then with consummate science and ability, General Scott led his army around Lake Chalco, and fought the battles of Contreras and Churubusco. Then came an armistice, which terminated however, on September 6th. Two days later, the American guns opened on Molino del Rey. After a severe resistance, the Mexicans were driven from their stronghold; the citadel of Casa Mata fell to the Americans on the same day.

The Castle of Chapultepec was now the only obstacle to an attack upon the City of Mexico. In his report, General Scott described this fortress as "a natural and isolated mound, of great elevation, strongly fortified at its base, on its acclivities and

heights. Besides a numerous garrison, here was the military college of the republic, with a large number of sub-lieutenants and other students. Those works were within direct gunshot of the village of Tacubaya, and, until carried, we could not approach the city on the west without making a circuit too wide and too hazardous."

Against a background of shadowy hills, rose the crenelated walls of the grim fortress that kept ward over what was once the "Venice of the Aztecs." Against its frowning bastions the American commander was now to throw his battle-scarred veterans; nothing stood between them and the coveted city—picturesque, redolent of its Spanish ancestry, except this last link in the chain of obstacles that had hampered their progress from the waters of the Gulf to the basin of Mexico. Siege gun and mortar hurled an iron storm against the walls, until a preconcerted lull in the firing, gave the signal for the storming party to advance. Sweeping the enemy from the woods, Pillow's men reached the base of the hill and clambered up the ascent. Every Mexican gun that could be brought to bear, sent a pitiless hail of grape into their ranks. The sirocco breath of the cannon fanned the cheeks of the assailants, as they labored over the rocky way. A Pennsylvanian, Cadwalader, led the gallant band. Although wounded, Pillow would not leave the field, but was carried up the hill to witness the bravery of his command.

In the words of the General-in-Chief, "The broken acclivity was still to be ascended, and a strong redoubt midway to be carried, before reaching the castle on the heights. The advance of our brave officers, though necessarily slow, was unwavering, over rocks, chasms, and mines, and under the hottest fire of cannon and musketry. The redoubt now yielded to resistless valor, and the shouts that followed announced to the castle the fate that impended. The enemy were steadily driven from shelter to shelter. The retreat allowed not time to fire a single mine without the certainty of blowing up friend and foe. Those who at a distance attempted to apply matches to the long trains were shot down by our men. There was death below as well as

above ground. At length, the ditch and wall of the main work were reached; the scaling-ladders were brought up and planted by the storming parties; some of the daring spirits first in the assault were cast down—killed or wounded; but a lodgment was soon made; streams of heroes followed; all opposition was overcome, and several of our regimental colors were flung out from the upper walls, amidst long continued shouts and cheers, which sent dismay into the capital. No scene could have been more animating or glorious." Colonel Ransom met a soldier's death in the headlong assault. Major Seymour mounted the ladders with the rank and file, gained the parapet, and tore down the Mexican colors with his own hands.

Quitman assaulted the fortress from the opposite side. As the September sun first touched citadel and bastion, his cannon roared messages of doom to the foe in their emplacements at the base and along the acclivity of the death-dealing hill. Swift, sure hurt lurked in the deep ditches that gridironed the meadow across which Shields led the heroes of Churubusco, in the wild rush that gave them the coveted wall—an outpost of death. Here Van O'Linda fell, Baxter received a mortal wound, Geary was disabled; Shields, himself, though severely wounded, refused to leave the field. Smith scattered the Mexican skirmishers with musketry; Benjamin shelled the sloping woods; Hunt tore the enemy's lines with shrapnel and shell. Then the bugles sounded the assault. In an unbroken line, the Americans swept up to the outer line of breastworks, under a canopy of shot and shell; in deadly grapple they threw themselves upon the foe. Bayonet crossed sword; clubbed rifles rose and fell; the bellow of cannon ceased as the indescribable mass swayed in the agonies of conflict. Against the desperate valor of the Americans, resistance was in vain. Quitman had opened another path to Chapultepec itself. A general and ten colonels were among the hundred officers captured; 550 of the rank and file were made prisoners. Among the spoils were 1,000 muskets and seven pieces of artillery.

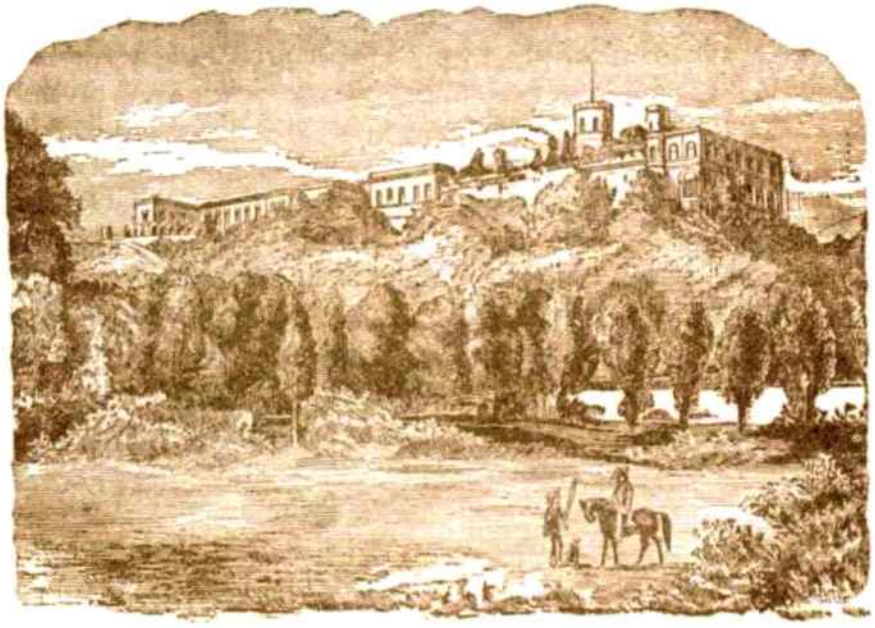
Gallant Casey led the regulars on this glorious day until severely wounded; then Paul, at their head, won deathless renown.

Miller led the volunteers after the fall of the lamented Twiggs. The bravery of the regulars was emulated by the volunteers. Those whose consign lay on the south side of the stubbornly defended hill, fought their way past every obstacle to Pillow's regulars, and with colors mingled, struggled up the death-strewn gullies, side by side. General Pillow, in speaking of the brilliant operations around Chapultepec, said: "That the enemy was in large force, I know, certainly, from personal observation. I know it also from the fact that there were killed and taken prisoners, one major-general, and six brigadiers. As there were six brigadier-generals, there could not have been less than six brigades. 1,000 men to each brigade, (which is a low estimate, for we had previously taken so many general officers prisoners, that the commands of others must have been considerably increased,) would make 6,000 troops. But independent of these evidences of the enemy's strength, I have General Bravo's own account of the strength of his command, given me only a few minutes after he was taken prisoner. He communicated to me, through Passed Midshipman Rogers, that there were upward of 6,000 in the works and surrounding grounds. The killed, wounded, and prisoners, agreeably to the best estimate I can form, were about 1,800, and immense numbers of the enemy were seen to escape over the wall on the north and west sides of Chapultepec."

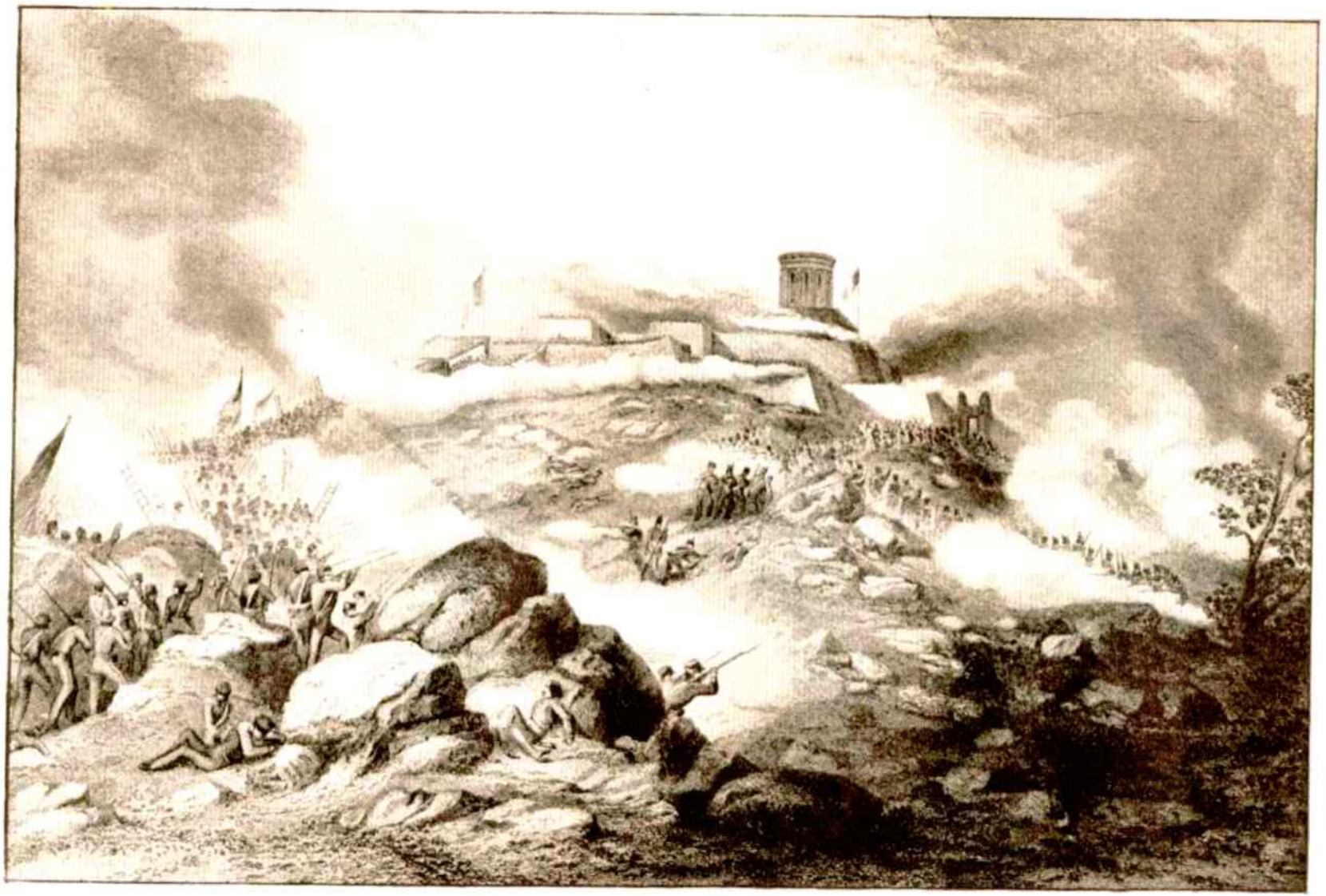
The storming of Chapultepec opened a direct road to the City of Mexico. Worth pounded the San Cosme gate and found himself in the city; Quitman forced an entrance by the Belen gate, after an advance and assault, comparable to Napoleon's passage of the Lodi. Terrific fighting ensued, until General Santa Anna and his army abandoned the city. Childs, left behind in Puebla, was besieged for forty days, but offered such heroic resistance that the siege was raised. Lane fought and won the battle of Huamantla—where the dashing Captain Walker fell, then marched to the relief of Childs, winning the battle of Atlixco on the way. Then came the capture of Guaymas, and fierce combats with guerillas who infested every plain and thicket; then, La Paz, San José and the remaining opera-

tions in California and New Mexico. The "Treaty of peace, friendship, limits and settlement between the United States of America, and the Mexican Republic," was concluded at Guadaloupe Hidalgo, February 2d, 1848.

Seldom is the historian called upon to record such valor as the American troops illustrated, from the opening of the campaign on the Rio Grande to their occupation of the capital of Mexico, and during the subsequent sanguinary engagements that preceded the treaty of peace.



CASTLE OF CHAPULTEPEC.



THE STORMING OF CHAPULTEPEC