

Literature, &c.

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FRAY CRISTOBAL.

A NARRATIVE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY
WAR IN TEXAS.

By Percy B St John.

Before the war which for many years filled with desolation and rapine the whole of Texas, colonization was extending its beneficial influence into the very heart of the country. The untiring energy and perseverance of the Anglo-Saxon race were carrying the arts of peace and civilization into the Wilds; and in every district where wood, water, and fertile land tempted the adventurer, arose farms cultivated fields. The savages, even the wild and warlike Comanches, were easily conciliated, and the whole land was dotted—at vast distances one from the other, it is true—with smiling homesteads. That happy and noble results would have ensued, none can doubt, had not the trump of war shaken the fabric of society and replaced the back settlements in the condition of a wild and unproductive waste.

Andrew Pollock, a Kentuckian landowner of no inconsiderable wealth, had been one of the earliest colonists who determined, at the instance of Moses Austin, the original settler, to make Texas his home. Of peculiar tastes, however, which led him to love the solitude and sublimity of the woods and the mighty prairies, where none but the painted Indian is found to dwell, Pollock with his family passed the outermost borders of civilization and erected his tent some thirty miles beyond San Antonio de Bexar, within the district where the Arabs of the American Desert, the Comanches, hunted and fought. His habitation presented, after two years of care had been devoted to it a most pleasing sight. Andrew Pollock had selected as his abiding place the mouth of a valley, where a stream burst from its pent-up position between craggy heights. To the north and east spread a vast plain, dotted with its lands of timber, while a thick grove in the vicinity of the dwelling showed that the wary Kentuckian was as much alive to the importance of his proximity to wood as to water. The dwelling and its appurtenances had been erected with care and taste; its size betokening that room had been provided for a large family, while a stockade proved that danger was yet to be feared in that secluded spot. Numerous fields of corn, maize, and other vegetable productions were carefully fenced in, while large herds of cattle roamed at will over the plain, recalled at even by the sound of the guardian's voice and bell.

Early on the first Sabbath morn in May 1835, the whole family and the labourers were congregated on a kind of lawn in front of the dwelling at breakfast. The family was composed of the father, mother, two sons, and a daughter, Helen Pollock, a charming girl, who added to unsophisticatedness of the wilds the advantages of an excellent education. A dozen farm labourers and their wives, with half as many slaves, completed the party, if we add a solitary Indian, who stood leaning against an upright post a little way from the table. Fray Cristobal was an anomaly in his tribe. About two-and-twenty, gay, tall, and handsome, with features utterly distinct from his companions, though paint and exposure had done their worst, this young man commanded a band of daring warriors, who carried their arms into the very heart of Mexico. His followers, about sixty in number, it was notorious, were better accoutred and better provided in every way than their fellows, while different from the usual Indian practice, they yielded implicit obedience to their chief. Between Pollock and Fray Cristobal, as he called himself, a friendship had subsisted ever since the farmers' settlement, which was invaluable to the white man, who, in the constant presence of his Comanche friend at his farm, found his best protection against injury.

'I tell you, Fray Cristobal,' said Andrew Pollock, 'on the present occasion you must be mistaken. A Mexican army in full march on Texas, and a regiment of dragoons about to pass this way—impossible!'

Fray Cristobal has seen them. War has begun, the Mexicans have thousands in the field, and my friend will feel the first blow if he is not wise,' replied the other calmly but firmly, in pure English, or rather American, as our tongue is called in these regions.

'You appear very positive,' said the colonist, 'and I must fain credit your words. But what would you have me do? If the Mexicans are in such force as this, surely to defend this house would be of little use, unless indeed your warriors could be brought down?'

'My warriors are far on the war path, and Fray Cristobal is alone. His arm would be as a reed to defend; but he will hide the grey head and his flock,' exclaimed he, his eye glancing with a look of mingled bitterness and admiration at Helen.

'Fly and leave my home to the destroyer? Or stay and be destroyed with your home,' said the Comanche chief.

Father, interposed Helen, rising and moving near to him, 'better let home and the wealth of this world perish alone, than us die with it. If there is danger, follow Cristobal's advice, and fly.'

'It is too late,' said the Indian in a tone of deep dejection; 'look up the valley; the somberos of the Mexicans are rising on the edge of the cliff.'

It was too true: the peace of that quiet spot

was to be invaded, and by the ruthless and pitiless Mexicans, with orders to treat all Americans as rebels, and put them to death on the spot. Before the strength of Texas was discovered, such was the terrible policy of the late President Santa Anna. A loud shout from the Mexican cavalry proclaimed their delight at their arrival at a habitation, and in a few moments the house was surrounded, and all its inhabitants made prisoners, with the exception of Fray Cristobal, who had instantly sought cover of the wood. The wild appearance of the centralist troops was little calculated to reassure the captives. With high low crowned hats, gaudy jackets adorned with buttons, pantaloons covered with tinsel, and the *scraps sattivero*, or fancy blanket, they at first glance looked picturesque enough; but black and unwashed faces, eyes which gleamed no fire of mind or intellect, the knowledge of their gross ignorance, with their huge mustaches, blunderbusses, and every variety of firearms, filled the thoughts with visions of banditti, to whom, in guise and conduct, the Mexican Soldiers unfortunately appropriate too much.

Andrew Pollock, with his whole family and dependents, were now led before the commanding officer, a young man in a faded uniform, with the addition of a yellow cloak and a high steeple crowned hat. This was Colonel Don Jose de Sarmiento, who, eyeing his prisoners with little favour—except the fair haired and now palid Helen—inquired who they were and what they did within the confines of the Mexican territory? Andrew Pollock, who understood the Spanish, replied somewhat haughtily that he was a free born American citizen, and, by adoption, a member of the new republic of Texas. Colonel Don Jose scarcely permitted him to finish his reply, ere he cried, 'A rebel! a rebel! *Muertos a todos los Tejanos!*' I shall rest here a day or so: to-morrow morning, at day break let these rebels—comprehending by a sweep of his arm all the white men—die. You, Pietro, back to General Woll, and bring his warrant for their execution.' Andrew Pollock and his sons with all the white men, were now hurried into one of the outhouses, round which a strong guard was placed while Helen and the rest of the women were placed in safe custody within one of the huts of the labourers, also guarded.

Colonel Jose, after giving the inexplicable order, as it appeared to his men, to spare all property as much as possible, and to touch nothing but what was absolutely necessary for their refreshment, sat down on the lawn with his officers to eat the untasted breakfast, which had been provided for its rightful owners. For some time the colonel was silent, apparently musing deeply within himself. At length he spoke in a low tone to the next in command. It appeared that, struck by the comfort, peace, and tranquillity of that retired hamlet, the soldier, called much against his will from the pleasures of Mexico city, had conceived a desire, very natural in a conqueror, of appropriating Pollock's property to his own use; and as of course, in his view of things, Mexico must triumph, of settling there and making it his home. 'It will make a lovely rancho,' said he, gazing with admiration at all the evidences of Anglo-Saxon taste and industry displayed around; and with that little fair beauty for its mistress, it would be a perfect paradise. Colonel Jose was notoriously a man of impulse; but as the present whim promised to transform a lieutenant colonel into a colonel, the inferior officer made no comment, but with a meaning smile said, 'You can learn your fate at once: make her hand the price of her father's life, and I doubt not Padre Vevortia will wed you on the spot. The old fellow will doubtless be too happy to give his daughter's hand and his possessions to save his rebel life.' Colonel Jose, approving of his subordinate's idea, Helen and her father were sent for. The interview took place in the room of the house where the invader unceremoniously installed himself in the arm chair that up to that day only the patriarch of the spot ever sat in. The colonel's air was self satisfied and confident. He knew the lax principles in vogue in Mexico, and that few would therefore hesitate between life and honour. He therefore boldly broached his proposition of giving Pollock and all his dependents liberty in exchange for his possessions and his daughter. Pollock was petrified; while Helen, who understood Spanish, looked at her captor in disgust. 'No, infamous spoliator!' said the stern Kentuckian, 'my life is in your hands—take it; but neither land nor child shall be yours. My daughter wed a Mexican robber! No. My life you will take; but yet a few days and my brave countrymen will scourge you and your race back beyond the Great River.' The colonel was astounded, and at once ordered his prisoners back to confinement. Setiments of this character were so new to him, that it required some leisure ere he fully comprehended their force. He then reiterated his commands for the execution, stroked his moustache with a self-satisfied air, and lay down to an early siesta.

Helen, meanwhile, who sat at her prison window gazing out upon the scene before her with vacant eye, dwelt with agony upon the position of her family. Her thoughts were of a mixed character. Horror at the proposition of the Mexican partisan was mingled with the reflection that her sacrifice might save many whom she loved. This again was doubtful, as the free gift of the property appeared the great object aimed at by Don Jose. Then

'Death to all Texans!—a cry which hurried hundreds of Texans to a bloody end. Four hundred were slaughtered in cold blood at one time in the war.

came upon her thoughts of one who had laid life and love at her feet, and whom she had rejected with disdain because of colour—Fray Cristobal. He had offered to quit his tribe, his roving life, all for her and settle down a colonist under the banner of Texas. Her manner, her shrinking repugnance at binding herself to one with Indian blood in his veins, had been sufficient answer for the warrior. He had spoken no more, but his altered mien indicated deeply-wounded feelings. Helen knew him well, and knew that, under other circumstances, Fray Cristobal had perilled life all, for her and her family. She felt with bitter regret that on his she now had no claim.

The day passed; the Mexican soldiers ate, drank, slept, and amused themselves, a few keeping watch. Night came, and then sentinels were posted at every weak point; in fact a chain of soldiers surrounded the house. Ingress and egress appeared equally impossible. Hours passed; at last meal was brought to the prisoners, with an intimation that at daybreak the terrible tragedy would be enacted. For greater safety, lights were denied them, though the guards omitted to deprive the captives of their pipes and tobacco pipes in which flints and steel were always.

For about two hours after sunset, no sound was to be heard save the measured tramp of the mounted sentinels, without the stockade, and of the foot within. Helen sat alone at the window of her hut, which overlooked the lawn, to the right was the outhouse containing the male prisoners, to the left, the stream. On this now fell the rays of the dim moon, just rising from a bank of clouds; on this Helen gazed, under the influence of the only feeling which preserved her from utter despair. It wanted an hour of midnight, and yet there was no sign given. Ten minutes more passed when a black mass rising slowly from the water gave hope, and made poor Helen's heart beat wildly. A figure was clearly visible. It stood upon the brink of a stream, near a woodpile, when a musket shot was fired by an observing sentinel. A heavy plunge was heard in the water, and when the alarmed sentinels reached the spot a dark mass was seen floating down the river, already at a distance. Satisfied that the Indian intruder had been slain, or mortally wounded, the soldiers, after reporting as much returned to their posts.

Helen, who had seen the Indian, after throwing a log into the river, glide behind the woodpile, now saw him, with intense anxiety, crawl along the line of buildings. He reached the spot where she stood, and was about to pass, when a low-whispered 'Christobal arrested him.' 'Miss Pollock,' said he in the same tone, 'in one sentence tell me all you know.' Helen in a few hurried words explained all. 'Your father, all, shall be saved.' Oh, Cristobal, do that: save my father, my mother, my brothers all, and my deep and eternal gratitude shall be yours.' 'Gratitude is but a cold word to me,' said Cristobal, who with her dropped all semblance of Indian manner. 'Be generous, dear Cristobal,' whispered Helen, blushing unseen in the darkness, I have been cruel, unkind, but your devotion to my friends will make me forget all. 'Even my Indian blood?' said Cristobal, with a sad melancholy in his tone which went to the girl's heart. 'All but your noble risk of life and all life's joys to save my friends.' 'And you, Miss Pollock?' 'Cristobal,' said the agitated girl hurriedly; 'dear Cristobal, such dreadful scenes as these makes us live years in an hour. Call me, then, Helen; save my father and mother and hope everything.' Fray seized the girl's hand through the barred window, and said in a husky tone, 'If I save all would you forget my Indian taint and become my wife?' 'I would I will,' said Helen, who at this hour of peril became a woman, forgetting all maiden coyness in the excitement of the moment. 'From gratitude only?' said Cristobal gloomily. 'I will never marry a man I do not love and respect.' 'And you will be mine?' 'I will.' 'You love me then?' 'Dear Cristobal, waste not the precious moments; think what is most dear to you, and doubt not but time will show you not far wrong.' There was a tenderness in Helen's tone which carried irresistible conviction, and pressing her hand to his lips the young man glided away towards the shed in which the men were confined.

A brief and hurried conversation now ensued, which having lasted about ten minutes; the Comanche chief returned, and bidding Helen be of good cheer, again sought the river, and plunging therein disappeared. The agitated girl now noticed that a great bustle was taking place in the shed containing the male prisoners, as if the whole party were busily engaged in moving all it contained. Sounds of breaking up barrels were plainly heard, and then the low and cautious striking of a light, Helen's heart beat violently; she felt confident that some plan arranged between Cristobal and her father was about to be carried out. Next instant a flame rose in the shed on the side communicated to the outholdings and granaries, while handfuls of burning sticks were cast from narrow loopholes, which were intended to supply light and air to the erection. The alarm was given; the sentinels rushed to stay the flames, and punish the audacious captives, when the door flew open, and a volley of musketry was poured upon the astonished Mexicans. The prisoners had been placed in the arsenal of the whole hamlet. And now, amid the roar of musketry and the cracking of the flames, came the fearful Comanche war-whoop from the plains upon the bewildered and affrighted Mexicans. To defend the house was impossible, as the fire would soon wrap it in one mass of flames; but for this a successful resistance might have been made. As it was, without attempting to recapture the armed Anglo-Saxons, who poured a galling fire

upon them, the Mexican cavalry mounted, and collecting in one dense body, retreated towards the valley, followed by the Comanche horse, of whom they entertained a most wholesome and salutary fear.

Efforts were now made to extinguish the flames, which had been the main instrument in dislodging the Mexicans, who, but for this, would have held good the house against the Comanches. It was, however, in vain, and all that could be done was to remove the wagons and every kind of valuable from their proximity to the conflagration. This the party soon effected, the furniture in the house being all saved and placed upon the green sward. At dawn of day nothing remained of the late comfortable home of the stern Kentuckian but smouldering rubbish and blackened stumps. Still more than he hoped for had been saved in shape of household goods and cattle, while not one precious life had been lost.

No time was, however, to be lost as the whole Mexican force could easily overtake them. The wagons were loaded with rapidity, the oxen harnessed, and the cattle all driven into herds. In an hour every preparation was made, the word was given, and, escorted by the Comanches, Andrew Pollock turned his back upon his late home, to seek one less subject to the inroads of an invading army. Like most of his neighbours, the patriarch of the wilderness had resolved to send his wife and daughter, with the other woman, to the sea coast and, joining General Samuel Houston, do battle for his country. For several days the Comanches, accompanied the cavalcade, and then, according to Indian custom, disappeared without the ceremony of an adieu. The leader, however, remained, who then in the presence of her whole family, declared the engagement between him and Helen. Andrew Pollock started in anger, and turning to his daughter, said, with little delicacy towards his Comanche preserver, 'Helen marry an Indian?' 'Who saved my father from death and me from worse?' replied Helen firmly. 'Not an Indian,' exclaimed Cristobal, at this instant extending a parchment to Andrew; 'but Henry Norton of Kentucky, captain in the service of the republic of Texas.' The young man then explained that his father, impelled by romantic feelings had wedded a beautiful Indian girl; that on coming into the enjoyment of that parent's property, galled by the concealed sneers of some of his acquaintance, and the feeling that Indian blood was in his veins, he had adopted his mother's baptismal name, and fled to her relatives, where, by dint of gallantry, by spending his income among them, he had raised the troops we have above alluded to. Until he saw Helen, he had determined for ever to dwell with the Comanches: her beauty had, however, won him back to civilisation. We need enter into no further particulars. The lovers were united; Henry, Andrew, and the sons, all distinguished themselves in the war of independence: it ended; and now peace being finally established, the family once more occupy their original abiding place, the writer in 1842 enjoyed their unaffected hospitality.

THE PUNJAB;

ITS TERRITORY, PEOPLE, ARMY, AND HISTORY.

The grave events of which the Punjab is destined to be the theatre—for we cannot hope that the war which has just commenced will have an early close—require that we should give a brief description of the country and its inhabitants, and also a sketch of its history, more particularly since the death of Runjeet Singh. It was that very sagacious potentate who first consolidated this wealthy and noble kingdom. He ruled it, if despotically, yet with sufficient wisdom and firmness, to repress the turbulent spirit of the people, and to preserve internal peace while he made important acquisitions from without, and continually extended the frontiers of his dominions. In our account we follow chiefly an excellent little work recently published by Messrs. Smith and Elder, entitled 'The Punjab,' by Lieut. Colonel Steinbach, an officer who was in the service of Runjeet Singh for eight years, and who has incorporated the observations of the most trustworthy writers with the results of his own experience.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TERRITORY.

The word Punjab is formed of two Persian words. *Punj*, five, and *aub*, waters; the five rivers which flow through and water this noble territory, conferring on it an appropriate name. The outermost of these rivers on each side enclose the kingdom; the Ravee on the west; and the Sutlej on the east, marking its boundaries too clearly to be mistaken. In some parts the Punjab extends beyond the confines of these rivers, as at Peshawar, which Runjeet submitted to his authority, but generally they may be said to enclose it, the northern boundary being formed by the range of the Caucasus, or Himalaya. In extent the Punjab is larger than Great Britain, and contains some of the most beautiful and fertile provinces of India.

The four divisions of territory formed by the five rivers have each in the native language the prefix of *Daab*, signifying a tongue of land formed by the confluence of two rivers. The streams are of advantage to the surrounding country in two ways. They serve for the purposes of irrigation, and as canals for carrying on traffic, most of them being navigable for a considerable distance. The plains they water are in general level and fertile, yielding an abundant return of produce for the slight and unskilful labour employed in their tillage. Artificial canals connected with the rivers are cut through