

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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Shoreleave, Monterey, 1843

INTRODUCTION

Richard Henry Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast" is generally taken as the ready reference for a description of life in Alta California, during the Mexican period. But there were other seamen and other accounts, not all of which jibe with Dana's observations.

One of these was written by William H. Thomes, who arrived in Monterey in 1843, less than ten years after Dana's visit, aboard the Boston trading ship "Admittance". Although he was only 16 at the time, his story, entitled "On Land and Sea", was not published for some forty years. In the intervening time Thomes was a journalist, publisher and a

writer of adventure stories for boys. He was a keen observer and his description of the sights and sounds of Monterey as well as his encounters with several of the city's prominent citizens help flesh out our understanding of that era. As a writer, he also had a weakness, common at the time, for using phonetically questionable dialect, particularly as uttered by Louis, a French shipmate, who is referred to as Lewey, and Captain Peter Peterson of the "Admittance", a Dane by birth. Thomes also indicates he had some knowledge of Spanish, but that may be judged by any first year Spanish student.

His account is a lively one, full of humor, but at a distance of forty years, some of the incidents related may have been colored by his desire to "spin a good yarn." The book first appeared in 1884 and was republished in 1970 by Literature House, an imprint of the Gregg Press. Thomes' original spelling, punctuation and capitalization have been left intact. The illustrations by F. Childe Hassam appeared in the original edition.



A Young American Sailor Visits Monterey

Cattle raising and the exchange of hides and tallow for trade goods was the primary occupation of Californios during the Mexican period. The business was almost the complete monopoly of several Boston firms. Although, by law, trade was supposed to be cleared through Monterey, ships commonly traded at various spots along the coast convenient to the haciendas of ranch owners. The "Admittance", belonging to the house of Appleton & Hooper, left the East Coast the 27th day of October, 1842, with young Thomes aboard. We pick up his story some four months later:

. . .at daybreak we saw the long, sandy shore, at the south of the bay of Monterey, with the white surf beating on the beach, and the dark forests, and high hills, in the rear; and there was Point Pinos, or the Point of Pines with its black, rugged rocks, and the green pine-trees extending nearly to the edge of the water, while off our larboard bow was the high bluff called Ano Nuevo or New Year, close to Santa Cruz, where a bad surf is always raging. . .I am told that it is now a fashionable watering place. It used to be a watering place for us boys, but there was not much fashion about it in 1843.

There was no work for us that afternoon, except to get the ship in apple-pie order for port. There was a dead calm, and we could not see the city of Monterey, for it was hidden from sight by Point Pinos, but we could note the curve of the bay, like a crescent, and the white sand, and the surf breaking on shore, and once we noticed a horseman riding along the beach, driving a lot of bullocks at full gallop.

We ate our dinners at twelve bells, and had just finished when cats'-paws (of wind) came over the water from the northeast, and away we went for the bay, and as we drew up toward the Point of Pines, with a fresh breeze, we saw a solitary ship at anchor in the harbor, and the American flag at her peak, and a piece of blue bunting at her bowsprit.

She was a small sloop-of-war, but her name we could only guess at as war-ships don't often exchange signals with merchantmen, unless in distress. It is not dignified enough. (The sloop was later identified as the "Dale.")

The captain had mounted a white shirt, a blue suit of clothes, with short, round jacket, and all hands had donned clean togs, and a better looking crew never went into Monterey harbor, than that on the "Admittance," on the afternoon of March 4, 1843, just one-hundred and twenty-eight days from Boston.

I heard a ringing blast from a couple of trumpets, and, looking toward the hill, close to a ravine, just ahead of us, saw an adobe fort, and a company of Mexican soldiers dressed in blue cotton cloth, with red facings, being put through the manual by a fierce little sergeant, who yelled at his command so that he could be heard all over the harbor, and his "carambas" were hurled at

the heads of his men on every occasion presentable, and for all the extra blunders, there were two "carambas."¹

Thomes later had the opportunity to inspect the port's defenses and reported:

The fort was armed with four long, brass nine-pounders, the handsomest guns I ever saw, all covered with scroll-work and figures. One was appropriately named the Apostle Paul, another was named St. John, a third, St. Jose, and the fourth bore the name of a lady, the sacred Santa Barbara. . . The guns were mounted on ruined and decayed carriages, and two of them were pointed toward the planet Venus, when in sight, and the other two were so much depressed that, had they been loaded and fired, the balls would have startled the people on the other side of the hemisphere like a clap of thunder.²

After anchoring, the attention of the crew of the "Admittance" was caught by some activity in front of the custom house.

. . . as several persons were standing in front of it, on a platform, waving serapas (sic) to attract our attention, it was supposed that the gentlemen had business with us, and wanted to come on board, for, wonderful as it may seem, the port officers of Monterey did not own a boat for the purpose of boarding vessels that traded with the people.*

The antics of the crowd at last attracted the attention of the old man, and he ordered the starboard quarter-boat to be lowered and then and there the mate made me coxswain. . .

The boat's crew consisted of Lewey, Frank, Harry and myself, and, as we pulled for the shore, we wanted to cheer; so glad were all to think that we were to see new faces and hear strange voices. One of the men in front of the custom house beckoned us to come to a little cove just in front of the building, but the rocks looked threatening, and we feared to stave the boat, because then we knew we should catch it. We backed the boat up to the rocks and the Mexican gentlemen filed into the stern-sheets, and all saluted us politely with, -

"Buenos dias, muchachos," and to their delight Lewey and I responded with the next Mexican interrogation, in regular line, as with us -

"Where did you boys learn to speak Spanish?" asked a gentleman, whom we supposed to be a Mexican, as he was dark and thin, a man about forty years of age, I judged, with a slight stoop to his shoulders, dressed as a European, except that he had a bright-colored serapa around his neck and a broad-brimmed sombrero, with a silver cord, and two little silver tassels hanging down over the rim.

"We might retaliate, Yankee-like, by asking where you learned to speak such good English?" I answered, laughing, after we stowed our cargo so it would not tumble overboard and drown.

"Oh, I'm a Yankee," was the reply. "I have been a resident of Monterey for the past ten years or more. My name is Thomas D. Larkin, and I am a native of Charlestown, Massachusetts."

He appeared to be a little deaf, and held one of his hands back of his ear when he saw that you were disposed to speak to him, yet there were people who said that he could hear as well as any one when there was an occasion to be alert and vigilant. He said that he owned a store in the town, and we after-

wards learned that he was considered the richest man in Monterey and did the most business. I don't suppose that there was another man in California who performed so much, and got so little pay, for keeping the Golden State out of the hands of the English, as Mr. Thomas D. Larkin who was afterward appointed United States consul for the whole country. . .He was a liberal, hospitable man, and always entertained strangers and sea captains with the best that his house afforded. He had in his library a complete set of Scott's works, and. . .when he learned that I was fond of reading, lent me two or three of the works at one time, to peruse while we cruised up and down the coast. . .until I had read them all. Many a glass of wine, plate of frioles and tortillas did he give me, when I was sent to his store, or house while we were in port. He lived near the plaza, in the most pretentious building in Monterey, and was the leading American in the country, and the man the Mexicans always applied to when a government loan was desirable to suppress a revolution or stir one up.

By this time the boat was alongside. The mate did the honors of the gangway, welcoming the visitors, and pointing out (Captain Peterson), who was all smiles, and terrible Spanish and who gave Mr. Larkin a warm welcome, for they had met many times before.

Mr. Larkin acted as interpreter, and then the first serious question was asked by the collector of the port.

"Why had the "Admittance" put into Monterey?" Every sailor knows that it was formerly the custom of the people, trading in the Pacific, to leave their consciences at Cape Horn, and pick them up on the return home, if they could be found. . .so the old man equivocated a little as he said, - "Oh, ve just comes in here for vood and vater, as ve is bound to the Sandwich Islands."

This was to make the Mexicans get up and tear their hair, and implore the captain to remain, but they did nothing of the kind. They had been treated to just such remarks before, and knew as well that the ship was intended for trade on the coast as the captain. A Mexican can lie as well as an American trader, and I am not sure that the former is a little superior to the latter in cool, downright story-telling when it suits him, and he can do it in such calm, indifferent manner that the ordinary, lively Yankee gets frantic at the thought of being outwitted and deceived on all important occasions.

We pulled the custom-house officials ashore, and by the time they were landed it was sundown. The "Dale" fired a musket from her quarter deck, hauled down her flags and a fife and drum played the "Star-Spangled Banner."

It was a calm, quiet night on the water, but in town it seemed as though every family owned a dozen dogs, and that they were all barking at the same time, in answer to the short yelps of hundreds of coyotes, assembled in the hills just back of the city, and waiting for something to turn up, so a supper could be procured.

While I was looking at the ship, I heard someone come on deck, and, turning, saw that the captain had come out of his cabin to take a survey of the situation.

"Vell, Thom, vot does you think of Monterey?" the captain asked.

"I haven't seen enough of it to form an opinion. I suppose it is a pleasant place, to judge by the looks of the town from the harbor, sir."

"Yes, it is de most important city of de coast, and much trade is here. Ve will see enough of it afore ve is ready to leave California," he said and, bidding me be careful. . .left me to my solitary watch. I lighted my pipe and listened to the surf and dogs.³

The next day the "Admittance" was entered at the custom house, and we hoisted out the long-boat, carried many tons of goods on shore, and landed them on the beach, and then rolled the heavy boxes up the steep rocks into the building, where the cloths and silks could be examined at leisure by Mexican officials.

It was cruel and wet work. We were "turned to" at four o'clock in the morning, before daybreak, and did not cease labor until six in the evening, with only a half an hour for breakfast, and the same for dinner.

Yet the boys, who manned the quarter-boats, did not have such a hard time as the sailors. We were required to dress something after the style of man-of-war's men — blue flannel shirts, with white stars on the collars, blue cloth trousers, leather belts, and bare feet. . . We carried passengers from shore to ship, men, women and children, all desirous of seeing the latest style of goods from Boston, and all anxious to buy, and to have their accounts charged, to be paid for at some future period in hides and tallow.

Some of the ladies we carried on board were extremely pretty, but most of them were rather passe, old, wrinkled and smelling of cigarette smoke. All the married women smoked, but I never saw a fashionable doncellita use tobacco in any form in public, although she might have done so in private, but if she did, it was not considered *comme il faut* by good society, and she knew it, and so avoided being tabooed. The married *senoras* could smoke, and make corn-stalk leaf cigarettes all day, and not excite remarks. It did not look badly, after a while, to see a pretty woman puffing volumes of smoke through her nostrils and lips in delightful freedom. As she never expectorated while indulging in the masculine pastime, it was not so offensive as it might have been.

We found lots of fun transporting the ladies, for sometimes we had as many as seven young *senoritas* in the boat at one time.

How those Monterey girls did chatter, under the careful charge of an old *duenna*, to keep them out of mischief, and the men at a distance. Lewey and I would pretend that we could not speak or understand a word of Spanish, and then they would let their thoughts run wild, and say things which they never would have uttered had they suspected that we were deceiving them. . . They usually approached our boat very cautiously, and the old *duenna* would say, by way of introduction, -

"Buenos dias, muchachos."

This was put out as a feeler, but I would remove my hat, very politely and say, -

"No entender, *senoritas*."

Then the old lady would try again, and exclaim, -

"Como sa va?" or "How do you do?"

To this we would, with one accord, reply, as before, -

"No entender, *senoritas*." We did not understand.

"Oh, come along, girls," the old lady would exclaim. "These boys are *gringos*. . . and don't understand a word we say. We can talk before them without fear."

And they did, for they boasted of what they intended to buy, and did not care if they never paid for the articles purchased. Perhaps one or two might be contemplating marriage, and wanted to go on board to get the wedding finery, and then we heard some things that would startle us, and several times that bad boy Lewey, in his confusion and delight, would. . . tumble off his thwart, into the bottom of the boat, and laugh until I feared he would burst a blood-vessel, while the ladies would wonder what was the matter with the lad, and I excused him by tapping my forehead and whispering, -



"Poco loco," or that he was a little cracked or crazy, and they never once suspected that I could speak more Spanish than they gave me credit for, until we landed them safely (back) on the beach, and then. . .we would remove our fancy straw hats and salute (them) with, -

"Buenos dias, señoritas. Salve todas, y venir usted aqui otra vez," which was not the best of Spanish, but it answered our purpose at the time, and made the young girls giggle like boarding-school misses, and to scoot off home, and tell their female friends how they were shamefully deceived by the gringos, and yet all we said was, -

"Good-by, ladies, and may God bless you, and hope you will come again."

The men would chat with us quite freely, and set us right when we made mistakes, which was rather often, do all they could to instruct us, and never laughed at our blunders, as Americans do when foreigners try to speak English. They were too polite for that. . .

Mr. Dana has stated in his interesting book that the real Mexican ladies were grossly immoral, but I think he unintentionally misrepresents some of the handsomest women in the world, for, during all the time I was on the coast, I never heard of a single case of domestic unfaithfulness on any part of the rich senoras, and such a thing as a young girl being led astray was not known, except in one case, and that was repaired by a speedy marriage.⁴

In addition to Larkin, Thomes had the opportunity to meet another one of Monterey's influential citizens.

One day a schooner drifted around the Point of Pines, just as we were rowing the old man on board. All the ensigns were displayed in honor of the new arrival, and even the Mexican flag was run up at the fort, an unusual event, as bunting was not plentiful in the Mexican army or navy.

"That is the schooner 'California' (with) Captain Cooper," the

master. . .said. "Let us hurry on board and welcome Captain Cooper in a ship-shape manner."

There was a five-knot breeze blowing. It was fair for the schooner to enter the harbor, and she had all sail set, yet the Mexican (vessel) appeared to drift slowly toward the anchorage, and there was not even a ripple at her bow. She was one of those crafts that could neither sail on the wind, before the wind, nor with the wind free, and sometimes she would tear the water all to pieces under her bow and seemed to be doing wonders, yet not make three knots an hour.

We pulled alongside the "California", and were most hospitably received by Captain Cooper, who was not in uniform, and did not own one. He had been up to San Francisco for a load of flour for the troops, and the people of Monterey, and thought he had made a good passage, as he had been but four days on the way, and a fair wind all the time.

Captain Cooper was an American from Massachusetts, a half brother of Mr. Thomas D. Larkin, and the head of the Mexican navy on the Pacific coast. He had become a naturalized citizen of California, married a Mexican wife, and taken up large tracts of land in various parts of the country, but his home was at Monterey, when on shore, and there he enjoyed himself, and dispensed a liberal hospitality to all who were honored with his acquaintance. . .

The captain was an elderly man, a thick, stout, old fellow, nervous and abrupt in his movements and had a peculiar habit of biting one of his hands — the one that was withered — when in passion, or laboring under excitement. No matter who was near him, or what he was saying, if suddenly vexed, up would go his hand to his mouth, and he would take a cruel nip at the member, and then seem satisfied that he had done his duty, and cool off.

Once his man-of-war was captured by one of our ships, after a desperate struggle. . .in which a member of his crew was punched by a boathook and blood nearly drawn. The old fellow nearly chawed himself up he was so mad at the outrage. . .But the vessel was restored to him, and an apology made. . .

In the course of a few days. . .Captain Arthur arrived on the "California" bound south. (His ship) belonged to a Boston firm, and had been on the coast so many years that it was related of her at one time the owners proposed to send the vessel to Europe, but the old craft refused to move out of her usual course, and, in spite of helm and sails, poked her nose around Cape Horn, (turned back) and did not stop her rapid progress of five knots an hour until she dropped anchor in the harbor of Monterey, and there seemed to recover her senses, and was like all other vessels, ready to answer her helm, and go from place to place as her commander desired.

The harbor was now so full of vessels that the commandante of the presidio sent word that we had got to stop such foolishness, as his flag was almost worn out, hoisting it day after day, in honor of arrivals, and that he had no other to raise in case of a sudden revolution. The wind had destroyed all of the bunting except the turkey buzzard, and that threatened to leave the next time there was a stiff breeze.⁵

Although Monterey had no "Barbary Coast," as such, it was not hard for a companion-starved, salt-dried, command-weary seaman to find a drink or a little diversion ashore. Young Thomes tells of his first shore leave in California:

The next Sunday the larboard watch was allowed to go on liberty, and all were cautioned not to get drunk, and to come off at sundown, under the most direful pains and penalties. As it was a saint's day there were great preparations on land to celebrate it in a becoming manner.

We dispatched our breakfast in a hurry and dressed. We did not dare to dress as well as we could have done, for fear our shipmates would think we were putting on airs, so all the boys in the watch contented themselves with blue shirts, silk handkerchiefs around their necks, blue trousers, and very neat, low shoes, well calculated to show to advantage our clean white stockings. On our heads we wore sennit hats, with broad ribbons, and "Admittance" on them in gold letters, in humble imitation of the man-of-war's men.

. . . the last words Mr. Prentice (the first mate) said to us, in a tone of voice that was well calculated to make us feel pleasant and comfortable, were, — "If you boys get into any mischief I'll skin you alive when you come on board," and then he grinned, as if he really believed his warning was effectual.

"The Dale", at eight bells, hoisted her flag as usual, a marine fired off his musket, the drum and fife played "The Star Spangled Banner," and cutters were piped away to take the officers on shore for a day's employment.

As soon as the boat touched the beach we jumped on shore, and walked toward the town, and even at that early hour we could see that preparations had been made for a magnificent Sunday demonstration.

Near the beach, about half way between the custom house and the town, was a rough shanty, one story high, and just large enough to hold about ten sailors. It was known as Cook's Pulperia, and a very valuable man Cook was to ship-masters, for if a sailor ran away Old Cook could always tell where he had gone, and for a few dollars would bring him back in less than forty-eight hours. The liquors he sold were auguardiente, a native species of rum, and California wine. To drink two glasses of the former was sufficient to make a sailor desire to fight his best friend, and clean out the officers of the ship, and any who drank half a bottle of the wine had an irresistible impulse to steal a horse, murder some pious family, or commit suicide.

"Hullo, boys," shouted Old Cook, as we passed his pulperia, and the seamen could not withstand his cordial salutation. "Come in lads and see me for a while."

They hesitated for a moment only, for they had heard that Cook's auguardiente, at a real a glass, had more fight in it than all the rest in town, and that it could burn the throat and stomach quicker than any other brand. They went in, and anchored, but Lewey, Tom, Davy, and myself kept on, after declining an invitation to take a glass with the rest, just to set us up for the day.

We took a hurried look at the town, and found that the houses were built around the plaza, in a straggling, disconnected sort of manner, all of adobe, and with tiles on the roof to keep out the rain, but the residences of the poorer class were thatched, and not nearly so imposing as they might have been. Most of them were of one story, but Mr. Larkin's, and the governor's place, were quite pretentious, and had upper rooms. We saw the governor for the time being, Don Juan B. Alvarado, sitting at a window, in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a cigar, and a sentry was pacing before his door, musket in hand, to keep people at a distance.

The main street was full of Indians, dressed with long hair, and not much else; elegant and graceful caballeros were dashing up and down on spirited horses, giving the numerous dogs no peace or rest, while from the plaza came the ding of bells, summoning the good people to mass and prayers, as a slight relish for the feast that was to come afterward.

We wandered along, and came to Mr. Larkin's house, and saw him and the old man sitting on the piazza, having a comfortable smoke, and talking over trades, hides, and tallow.

Mr. Larkin beckoned us to come toward him, while the captain surveyed us with pride, proud to think that he had three such noble, nice-looking boys under his command. Of course we did not count Davy one of us, for he was an ordinary seaman, and not a boy, being over twenty-one years of age. At least we thought the captain had some such reflections, for he said, as we approached the piazza, -

"If you boys get into any scrapes I'll skin you alive tomorrow."

The very words Mr. Prentice had used when we left the ship, showing that one of them must have plagiarized, and we never knew which was entitled to the original remark. It should have been copyrighted, for we heard it often enough during the voyage.

"Oh, let the boys alone," said Mr. Larkin, with a pleasant smile. "I'm sure they are good, honest boys, and mean to enjoy themselves on this their liberty day on shore."

"You does not know dem like me," was the captain's answer. "Dey is in mischief all de time."

"Oh, they are nice lads, and an honor to any ship," Mr. Larkin said. "Now boys, when you get hungry at twelve o'clock or so, come here, and I'll give you a dish of frijoles and bread. My cook will tend to you."

We thanked the kind hearted gentleman, and then roamed around the town.

In front of the poorer houses we saw families seated, enjoying the delicious fragrance of the air, for the hills were covered with green grass, and the valleys filled with wild flowers, hundreds of different varieties being seen with their balsams. The sun shone down warm and bright, and the place seemed a paradise to me then, and I thought I should like to live there forever, and do nothing but ride horse-back, and dance with the pretty doncellitas. All the Mexicans greeted us pleasantly, and invited us to enter their houses, but we did not have time to accept every invitation.

(In one) house that was entered we found a guitar and harp in full blast, and a group of old women ranged around the room. The floor was of earth, beaten hard, and swept clear of litter, and on the floor were half a dozen young people enjoying a fandango, the national dance of the country. The girls did not move about very lively but shuffled their feet, and held their arms down at their sides, in a stiff and constrained manner, and did not look at their partners at all, but the men made amends for the coldness of the women, and cavorted all around them, and struck some very graceful attitudes, as they advanced and retreated, now repelled, and again encouraged, by the fickle girls, while every moment the old ladies would lift their hands, and clap them together, and shout out, at the top of their voices -

"Bueno, bueno!"

We joined in the cry, and also clapped our hands with the rest, and that pleased them, for two young girls came toward Lewey and myself, and before we were aware of their intention, they had snatched the hats from our heads, and retired to the other end of the room. Then all laughed at the challenge, for it was an invitation to waltz, as near as we could judge.

"By gracious, I goes for von of dem," said the impetuous Lewey, and I took the other laughing girl. . . Round we went, to the intense delight of the old ladies, for it is quite probably that they had never seen an American or French boy waltz before. I had taken some lessons when I little suspected that I should ever exhibit my best steps to an audience of Mexican men and women.

The girls were not elaborately dressed, wearing two garments, an inner one, the name of which I have forgotten, and a skirt, descending from the waist as far as the ankles, or a little above them, when the movement of the music was somewhat more lively than usual. The inner garment, which the French, I think, call a chemise, was without sleeves, and cut so low in neck, that even a fashionable, ball-room young lady would have been envious, and my modesty, during that waltz, caused me to look up instead of down, as is the modern custom of dancing.

"Bueno muchachos; bueno muchachas," roared the old women, in an agony of delight, expressing themselves to the effect that we were good boys, and good girls.

Tom and Simple Davy caught the infection and the spirit. They threw off their hats, dashed into the open space, and commenced a double shuffle. Then all the men joined in the shouts which the old ladies uttered, and the clapping of hands was something to be remembered for many long days. . . Round and round we whirled, until we were brought up all standing by hearing a harsh voice at the door saying -

"You boys, jist walk yourselves out of dis. I should be a shamed of myself if I vas a boy, to do such dings. I send you on board de ship if you does not keep out of dese places, and sich company," and there stood Captain Peterson, with an awful look of disgust on his face, examining us from the doorway.

We wished the old man miles away, or in some comfortable warm place, and then stopped the waltz, as we could not disobey orders, we wondered how the captain would like it had he been interrupted at a dance, and they were very frequent in California.

. . . We were not afraid of being corrupted. In fact, we defied them to do it. We were perfectly confident of our own goodness, and thought the old man ought to let us alone, but he did not. . .

As it was now twelve o'clock, we felt as hungry as boys with good appetites usually feel at that hour of the day, and recollected Mr. Larkin's invitation to dinner. As the captain was going to the merchant's house, we all followed in his wake, and refused the importunities of the men and women to enter their humble abodes, and see what they were like. . .

. . . When we arrived at Mr. Larkin's that gentleman told us to go into the kitchen, and his cooks would give us something to eat, and they did. We had frijoles, the best bean that ever grew it seems to me at this late date, tortillas, bread, real soft-tack, and a bottle of native wine. . .

It is said that the wines of California, at the present day, equal the best in the world, and we hope the report is true, but in olden times the native liquors were harsh, and far from palatable, and on that account Mr. Larkin made a mistake in giving us a bottle of wine with our dinner, for we were not accustomed to it, and it stimulated us to deeds of daring we should not have thought of at other times. . . We did enjoy our dinner, thanks to the kindness of Mr. Larkin, and we ate all that was set before us by the surprised cooks, who feared a corner in beans and tortillas, so sharp was our appetites. But the wine did the business for us. . . for as soon as we finished the liquor, we had a strong desire to return, and conclude our waltzes with the young ladies, but were prudent enough to know that the captain had his eye on us, and would be displeased if we disobeyed his commands. We did not care so much for his frowns as the idea of being caught, and deprived of liberty for some Sundays to come.

We began to think we should have a rather dull afternoon on shore unless

something turned up to amuse us, and while thus ruminating we saw a cock-fight going on, with the principal men in town surrounding the ring, and betting their pesos and reals with all who would cover their stakes, vaquaro or Indian, merchant or sailor, it made no difference as long as there was a chance to win money.

We stood and watched the sport for some time, but did not find it very lively, when two large and fierce cocks were introduced, and all the interest of the hour seemed to centre on them. We learned from the murmurs that passed from one to the other that these were the boss fighters of Monterey, and that large sums of money were wagered on their respective qualities. Their heels were armed with steel gaffs, sharp as needles, and there was blood in their eyes as they were placed opposite to each other in the ring by attendants.

. . . Lewey, in his usual quiet way, drew four firecrackers from his pocket (he had a half-dozen bunches in chest, on board, for he was very fond of fireworks. . .)

Bets were freely made on the black or brown bird; but just as everyone had staked his last dollar, and the cocks were squaring off at each other, some person threw half a bunch of firecrackers in the ring, and the birds, with shrill cackles of astonishment, flew to the roofs of the neighboring adobe houses, and there crowed defiance at each other, and the swearing crowd. I believe that all bets were declared off by the umpire, but we did not stop to wait for his decision.

As we wandered around, we saw, near the edge of the plaza, two country carts, rude and strong vehicles, with wheels made from the solid trunk of some hard-wood tree, with two round holes in the centre, to admit the axles. On these carts were extended two large bears, of a dirty grey color, and each animal must have weighed at least five hundred pounds. They had been lassoed the day before, near the Carmel mission, by a band of expert horsemen, and brought to town to afford amusement to several wild bulls, and the people generally.

"By gracious, here comes Peter with a senorita on his arm and a cap on his head," cried Tom, and, sure enough, we saw the captain sailing down the street, shaping his course for the bears, and playing the agreeable to a mighty pretty little girl, relative or daughter of Don Pio Pico, a gentleman who was for some time the governor of California, and who gave our forces considerable trouble during the Mexican war. He was one of the most able and valiant of all the old residents, and very much a gentleman, as he had some regard for his word, when it was pledged, while Castro cared neither for his pledges nor his honor.

We felt a little envious of the captain. He had prevented our dancing. . . and yet here he was making himself agreeable to a little beauty, and we could not rebuke him.

The captain was all smiles and bows, and the lady appeared to be much interested in the specimens of natural history before her, but like other men, the old man wanted to be still more attentive, so he commenced trying to speak Spanish, the very thing he should have avoided on that occasion, had he been wise.

"Este," and here he stuck, as he pointed at the brutes, and we waited in silence for the next sentence, a regular lecture of the habits and customs of the bears.

"Si," said the lady, encouraging with a word, and waiting for more pretty talk.

The captain looked a little puzzled, and then turned to Lewey.



"Here, you boy," he asked, "Vat is bear in Spanish?"

"Borrigo," answered that bad boy, giving the name of the first animal he could think of, and that was a mule.

"Este borrico," said the captain, and the young lady laughed. . .and I thought Lewey would burst, he tried so hard to keep from grinning.

The first persons we met were rancheros, mounted on splendid horses. One. . .offered to let us ride his horse, and Lewey accepted this act of kindness in the same free and frank manner in which it was proffered. The boy mounted, after being cautioned about using the cruel curb, a bit so powerful that a horse's jaw could be broken even by a gentle pull. . .The French lad was elated.

"Me off," shouted Lewey, as he crawled into the saddle, and settled his feet and person firmly, and there was a smile of satisfaction on his good-looking face.

"Vamous," shouted the ranchero, and struck the noble horse on the flank, and away he went and Lewey's hat fell off at the first rush, and the animal dashed down toward the plaza at a rapid gait, to the intense delight of the little naked children, who were all around. . .

"That cursed heretic will kill somebody if he is not careful," a Mexican growled, and I feared that he would. . .when I saw an old woman almost under the horse's feet, and yet, wonderful to relate, escape unhurt, losing only her slippers and a coarse mantilla.

On he dashed, and then turned his horse suddenly, and swayed in the saddle, but clung to the pommel, and was saved from falling. He came toward us at full speed, and without the slightest regard for those in the street, like the careless, good-natured boy that he was, and the Mexicans. . .began to take shelter in the nearest open houses, and to shut the doors, and then to look out

the windows, the only safe places, they seemed to think, and they were right.

He did not pretend to guide the horse because he did not know that it was necessary to press the rein on the neck, instead of tugging at the bits, and although several scurvy-looking curs rushed at the animal, and barked, Lewey paid no attention and came in all of a glow, and the horse only stopped because his owner made a sign, which was well understood, thus Lewey's shipmates were saved from being mangled by the sagacity of the spirited brute.

"Dat bery good," said the boy as he dismounted. "I'd like to ride all day, same as dat," but, as the Mexican feared the census of Monterey would show a decided decrease,. . . further indulgence was prohibited. The ranchero intimated that I could have a chance if I wanted to, and I was very willing.

Just as I was climbing in the saddle, Tom said, -

"Hurry up, old fellow. Here comes Peter, hat and all, on the dead run."

I looked up the street, and saw our respected captain bearing down upon us, and waving his arms in a frantic manner, as though brushing aside a number of vivacious (sic) hornets. We thought he was encouraging us to have a little more equestrian exercise in the crowded streets, and that he was glad his boys were having so much enjoyment on shore, but, for fear we might be mistaken, Tom and Lewey thought it expedient that I should not stand upon the order of my riding, but ride at once, and listen to his words of praise afterwards. . .

"Away you go," said Tom. "Peter is yelling himself hoarse, he is so pleased with us."

The old man had stopped, removed his beaver hat, and was wiping his heated brow with an intensely red handkerchief, and looking after me and the horse, with admiration and respect beaming from his blue eyes. But I did not quite understand why he should shake his fist at me, unless it was the custom of the country.

As I did not go through the town after Lewey's exploits, I rode along the fine beach, as the tide was low and the sand smooth. I knew that I could not run over anyone there. The horse liked it, and I liked it and we kept on until I came to an old wreck, blown ashore during some northeaster, and there I turned, and walked the animal slowly back to the town, and by this time the captain had disappeared; gone back to Mr. Larkin's quite probably, to boast of the goodness of his boys. . . .

As evening drew on. . . we waited on the beach (and) our pinnace landed to take the liberty men on board, and down they came, with the sailors of the "Dale", all roaring drunk and defiant of discipline and order. I must confess that we boys enjoyed the excitement, for it was something new to hear men give back answers to their officers, and to tell them that they could have a good stand-up fight if they wanted one, while the truth was not one sailor out of a dozen could walk upright without support. Our men were not quite as bad as "The Dale's" crew, but there was an immense amount of embracing and slobbering over each other, and the naval officers were very patient, all things considered.

The old man hove into sight, and he looked very thoughtful as he told us to get the boat ready. We gave the customary shove, tumbled in, and bent to our oars.

For a moment there was an ominous silence, like the calm before a gale. Then the storm began, just as we had feared.

"Dis is the last day dat you boys has liberty on shore Sunday while you are on dis coast," he said.

We pulled on in silence. The captain continued. -

"You goes on shore, and I tells you to act like young gentlemen, and vat does I see?"

As we didn't know what he had really seen we held our tongues, but we breathed hard.

"I tells all the peoples vot nice boys I has, and dey believe me," the captain continued.

"Yes," I remarked, before the captain could regain his breath, "If our liberty days on shore don't amount to more than this one, we should prefer to remain on board and study navigation," a favorite hobby of the captain's.

"You goes on shore no more on liberty until you learns to behave yourselves," was the last word the captain had on the subject. "In vid your bow oar, Vay enough. Hook on the boat, and hoist it up," and the old man seized the man-ropes and went on deck. He must have forgotten his threats, for we heard no more about restricting our liberty, except when we were ready to enjoy it, and then we were merely cautioned to be good, and we were, as a matter of course.⁶

Thomes returned to the East Coast in 1846 and became a journalist and then a partner in the publishing firm of Thomes and Tallbot. During this time he married Captain Peterson's daughter. He also made several other trips to California, and wrote numerous articles and stories of his experiences. His last visit was in 1885 when he was interviewed by Bancroft, furnishing the historian with much useful information about the early days in Golden State.

FOOTNOTES:

*The whereabouts of the custom house launch in 1843 is unknown, but there was such a vessel the following year. See footnote to "The French Presence", *Noticias*, March 1987.

REFERENCES:

All references are from Thomes' book "On Land and Sea," or "California in the Years 1843, '44 and '45." Some passages have been rearranged in the interest of narrative flow.

¹ pp. 71-73

² p. 79

³ pp. 74-82

⁴ pp. 106-109

⁵ pp. 141-144

⁶ pp. 111-136

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