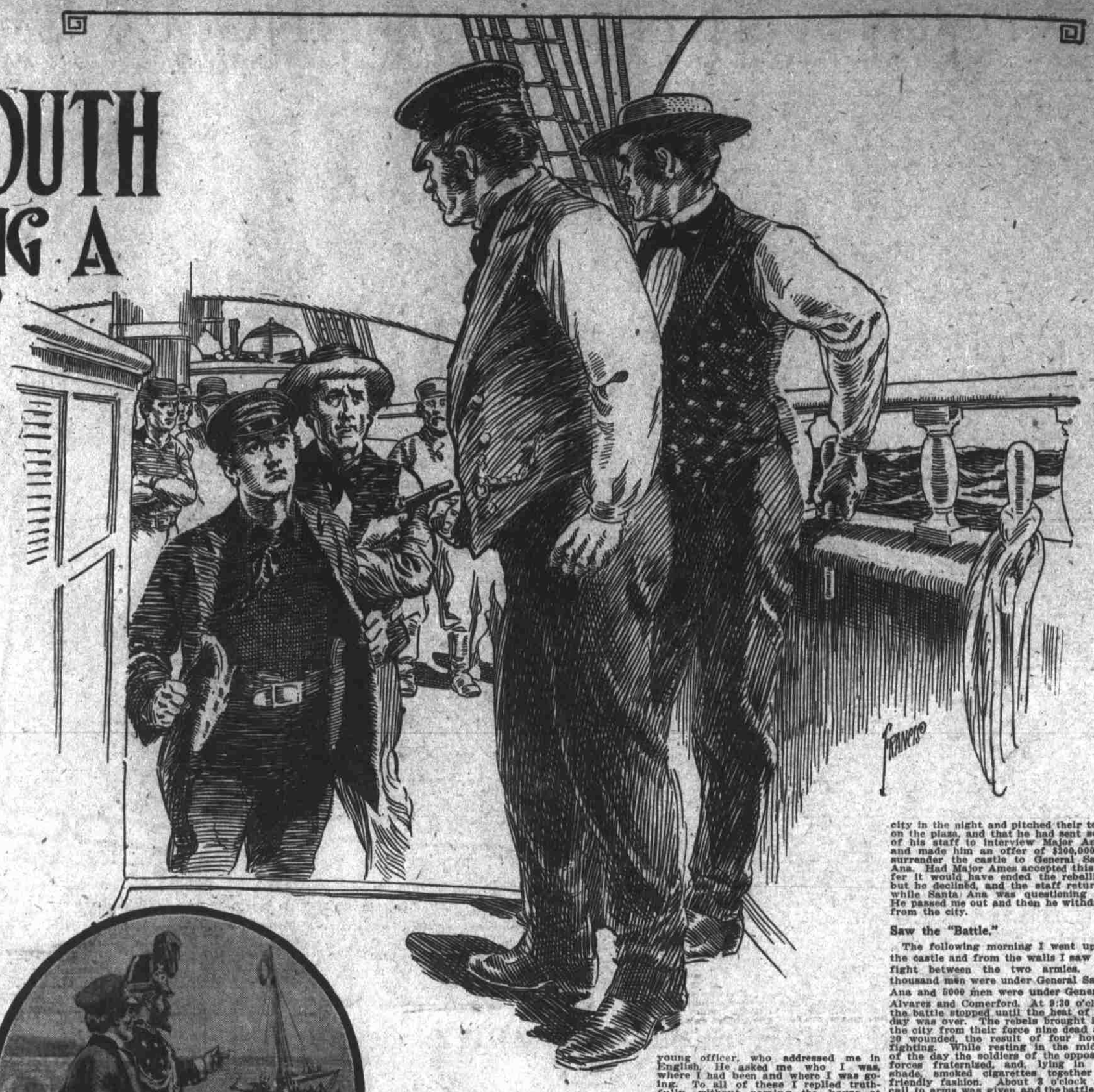
How an AMERICAN YOUTH JUST MISSED BEING A MEXICAN ADMIRAL



INFORMED THEM THAT WE HAD TAKEN THEIR PISTOLS

By A. P. Stanton.

I SHIPPED on the old bark President in San Francisco in 1854 as second mate. The bark had been chartered to load logwood on the coast of Mexico and deliver it at Valparaiso, Chile. While we were getting the bark ready for the voyage, the captain had a proposition made to him to take a party of 300 men as passengers and land them at Cape St. Lucas. As it would not interfere with the voyage for which we were chartered, he accepted it. The bark was fitted up with standing bunks between decks, and as soon as we were ready we dropped down to old Meiggs wharf and there took on our passengers, with all their traps and bedding. From here a tug towed us to sea, and left us after crossing the bar. We now learned that the men we had taken on board were recruits for the army of the "gray-haired man of destiny," General William Walker, who at that time was with a large command in the state of Sonora, Mexico, endeavoring to create a revolution, with the intention of adding another slave state to the Union.

The party we had on board was the hardest set of men I had ever met, drinking and fighting all the time, except when sleeping off their debauch. They took command and ran the bark, as we did not dare to interfere with them, and it was a relief when the last one went over the side in the harbor at Cape St. Lucas. From that place we went to San Blas and discharged the freight we had on board. We then went down the coast 60 miles to Apallo to take on our cargo of logwood. The wood was as heavy as iron; it is called by the Mexicans "Brazilian" logwood. The wood was brought alongside in lighters from the beach.

The second day after we began to load I found we had about one-tenth of the cargo aboard. Therefore I sounded the pumps, and found 22 inches of water. I started the pumps and pumped it clear. The next night I was obliged to do the same, and as the cargo was taken on board the ship sank deeper in the water, so that it took longer each night to pump the bark dry. In the voyage down from San Francisco we had carried a very light cargo, and, as the sides of the bark had been high out of the water, I thought that the leaking came from the opening of the seams, caused by the extremely hot weather, and I concluded that as she sank in the water by reason of the heavy cargo, the planks would swell and stop the leak. But when we had the cargo on board I found she leaked so much that it took one dog watch to pump her dry. After we got to sea the bark rolled and rocked, and the leak gained so much that each watch had to take a turn at the pumps, and each day it took longer to keep the water down.

"To Callao or H——."

The weather was pleasant, with a good northwest wind. From the day we left Apallo we had carried the starboard stunsails set. How badly would she leak was my thought, if we encountered a gale? The same thought was in the minds of others on board. The carpenter told me that the men were afraid to continue the voyage, and wanted to put into some Mexican port and have the bark calked, and he asked if I would speak to the captain and state their wishes. When I went below to dinner I asked the captain if he did not think it unsafe to continue the voyage, and would it not be better to run into some port and have the upper works calked. He got angry at my question, and replied that she would go to Callao or to H——. Now, I had not been much of a Biblical scholar, but I knew that the latter place was not the port I had shipped for, and I had no intention of going on such a voyage if I could help myself.

I told the carpenter what the captain had said. Shortly after, the carpenter reported to me that the crew wanted to know if I would take the bark into port. I thought of this all night before I gave an answer. I could see no chance for our lives if we continued the voyage, and I could not understand why the captain was so averse to going into port, unless it was owing to the cost of recalking the sides. By holding to his purpose he stood a chance of losing everything—his life and ours.

I told the carpenter to tell the men that if they would stand by me I would take charge of the bark at 12 noon, and take her into Acapulco. I wished to wait until the captain and mate made it 12 o'clock, so that I would have the latitude, which would give me the course to steer.

While waiting for this event I prepared myself by taking possession of the mate's pistol and dirk knife. These I gave to the carpenter, while I went down into the captain's cabin and took the captain's holster and two pistols, and put it around my waist under my coat. When eight bells struck I told the captain that the course of the bark was going to be changed, so as to go into Acapulco, and that he could retain command if he would take the bark in, as that was the nearest port; if not, I would take her in. The captain and mate rushed down for their arms, and became quite angry when they could not find them, and I informed them that I had taken them. The crew by this time had all mustered aft to emphasize the demand I had made upon the captain.

The captain and mate then had a long conference, and after it was concluded the captain informed us that he would take the bark into Acapulco. We kept the arms, however, and I saw that she was steered the true course. Every day the water gained on us, and when off the harbor of Acapulco we found 14 feet of water in the hold, and were working the pumps all the time, day and night.

Acquitted by Board.

We found the harbor blocked by two revenue cutters and the bark Caroline, which had been taken from General Walker at Mazatlan and turned into a sloop of war. The Caroline fired a gun with a ball across our bow, and we hove to. An officer came on board, found that we had no contraband of war and that we were in a sinking condition. Upon this they allowed us to go into the harbor. I then presented a petition to the American consul, signed by the carpenter and all the crew, asking for a survey of the bark. The consul appointed the carpenter of the Pacific Mail Steamship company stationed at Acapulco and two sea captains, who were residents of the town, to examine the bark.

After a careful survey by these three men the ship was condemned as unseaworthy. The crew was then discharged and I was left on board with a gang of longshoremen to attend to unloading and storing the cargo until the owners provided for it otherwise. While at work discharging cargo the United States side wheel steamer Mississippi came into Acapulco from San Francisco to protect the interests of the Americans at that port, as General Alvarez, governor of the state of Guerrero, and General Comerford, mayor of Acapulco, had started a rebellion against the rule of General Santa Ana, then president of Mexico. The harbor as blockaded and the Pacific Mail steamships were not allowed to come in. At that time Acapulco was a coaling station for the steamers of this company, and the only port at which its steamers touched between San Francisco and Panama.

No sooner had the Mississippi dropped anchor in the harbor than the captain of our bark entered a charge of mutiny against the carpenter, crew and myself. The carpenter and crew were arrested on shore and taken on board the Mississippi, and a boat was sent alongside the bark for me. We remained on board the steamer a few days until the consular court was convened, before which I had a hearing. The first lieutenant of the steamer was appointed to defend me, and the court, after hearing the testimony of both sides, discharged us, as it was found that we had used no violence, and had protected the captain's life as well as our own in the measures we had taken.

Upon being discharged I went on board the bark and finished discharging the cargo. She was then put up at auction and sold to the highest bidder. A Captain Jack bought her and put her on the beach and patched and partly repaired her; then he took the cargo to Chile; from there he sailed her to Australia, and there took on a cargo of coal for San Francisco. On the way to this port she ran into a norther and was obliged to put into Cape St. Lucas for a harbor. The bark that night sank at her anchor.

After the bark was sold the crew and I were paid what was then due us and also for three months' extra pay. We were then sent to a boarding house, where our board was to be paid until some vessel should come into the harbor and return us to the United States. As our vessel had come into port in a sinking condition and had been condemned as unseaworthy, and as we had been tried for mutiny, it had naturally caused a good deal of comment in Acapulco. The captain and mate had reported that I was the instigator and ringleader of the whole affair, and that I was not yet 18 years of age, and there was some curiosity to see me when I came ashore after discharging the cargo.

An Attraction at Church.

At this time the army of Santa Ana was marching upon Acapulco from the City of Mexico with an army of 6000 men to put down the rebellion headed by Generals Alvarez and Comerford, and any one who was credited with having pluck or courage was sought for to aid the rebel cause.

The barber was the interpreter for all that did not understand Spanish, so when I went ashore the first place I went to was his shop. While having my hair cut, he explained the customs of the country to me, when I told him I had never been in Mexico before. In telling me where to go and what I could see he said that up at the Catholic cathedral at the evening service there were 100 girls, well trained singers in the choir, and it was worth one's while to go. One evening I strolled to the church and went in out of curiosity to see so large a choir. I entered a large stone building with stone floor and men, women and children were kneeling around the altar or stations around the church, and in the center were some box pews. I walked into one, intending to sit down, but there was no seat.

A few minutes after I went in a young girl came with her duenna carrying two cushions to kneel on. She looked at me, smiled and bowed and motioned to the servant to place the cushions side by side. When placed she pointed to one and spoke in Spanish, which I didn't understand, but holding out her prayerbook to me—for me to help her hold it I understood—and took my place by her side. When she kneeled I did the same and I became so interested in the young lady that I quite forgot the singers.

When the service was over I went out with her, and as we walked down the street we tried to talk, but I could not understand and I didn't think the young lady could do any better with what I said. We came to a large gate, she stopped and said something to me; I could not understand and I raised my hat and bade her "good evening." She smiled again and went in the gate.

I repeated over to myself the words she said and went to the barber shop to ask the barber what the sentence meant. I told him and he wanted to know if any one had said that to me. I said:

"Yes, a young lady said that to me this evening." He asked me what I said, and I replied that I did not understand.

"Well," said he, "she asked you to enter the house and you should have said: 'Si Senorita,' and have gone in." I made up my mind to do so.

The next evening I went to church I could not remember the pew that I had been in. The center body of the church had 32 pews, double row, 16 on a side. I stood outside and waited to see if the young lady came in and I would follow her. She did and when I went in she looked up and smiled and told the servant to place the cushions side by side and again I helped her hold the book and as we reached the gate that evening, when she asked me to enter, I raised my hat and said, "Si, Senorita," and walked in. It was a large house, built on three sides of a courtyard, containing a large center court with orange trees for shade. Under one of the trees sat a gentleman and lady. The young lady spoke to them and the gentleman came and took me by the hand, calling me by name, and speaking better English than I could, and told me he was General Comerford. He knew me by having had a friend point me out, telling him who I was. Thus I became acquainted with the general.

Command of the Fleet.

General Alvarez's son, John Alvarez, a young man who had been educated at West Point, came in during the evening and I made his acquaintance. I had a delightful evening and the general invited me to come to dinner the next day. I went, and after dinner he offered me the command of the rebel fleet if I would join his party. I thought I would inspect the fleet before joining. The next day I inspected it, and found it to consist of one vessel—what we would call a "plunger"—a boat 31 feet long with one sail, a mainsail, with a brass gun on the bow, a crew of two men, and a dory at anchor for tender to go from the beach to the sloop. I declined the honor with many thanks, and laughed heartily at the command that had been offered me.

OFFERED ME COMMAND OF THE MEXICAN "NAVY"

The city of Acapulco contained at this time between 300 and 400 Americans from all parts of the United States, most of them prospectors, miners and gamblers. An American kept the only barber shop in the city. He had a large hall, and in one corner was his shop, in another part of the room a billiard table, and there were also tables fitted up for a variety of gambling games.

This place was the headquarters of the Americans, and at all times, day or night, we went there to learn the latest news. From 4 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock the city was very lively; drilling the troops up by the castle was the principal attraction. The castle was on an eminence opposite the entrance to the harbor, and commanded the city. It was an old Spanish fortification, with a moat and drawbridge.

After 10 o'clock until 3 p. m. the city was in appearance deserted. All business was suspended on account of the intense heat. But at 3 o'clock the city woke up and drilling resumed until dark, which in this latitude comes very soon after sunset. It was very amusing to see the army drill. Every one who could bear arms, except the very aged, was recruited, and their uniforms were of all descriptions, from a dress suit to a shirt merely, and not all the soldiers supplied with arms. Every hour news was brought in from Santa Ana's army, detailing how they were closing the gap toward the city, etc.

I was spending the evening at General Comerford's home, and at midnight I bade the family "good evening" and started down to the hotel to get the latest news of the army. I had walked but a few steps when I was arrested by two soldiers. As I did not speak or understand Spanish, and as they did not speak English, I did not comprehend the meaning of my arrest. They led me along until they came to a young officer, who addressed me in English. He asked me who I was, where I had been and where I was going. To all of these I replied truthfully, without naming the house at which I had passed the evening.

The officer and the soldiers took me to the plaza, which was surrounded by a guard of soldiers. In the center of the plaza three tents had been pitched. To one of these I was conducted and passed inside. Here I found four or five officers, one of whom was sitting at a table facing the entrance. He who had conducted me made his report in Spanish, and the officer at the table asked me in English the same questions which the young officer had previously asked. He then asked me if I knew Major Ames, the American commanding the castle.

"Only slightly," I replied.

He then asked me if he could be "purchased."

"No," I replied. "Major Ames was educated at West Point, and is a loyal officer and a gentleman."

Could Not Be Bought.

At this he shrugged his shoulders and smiled, showing by these actions that he did not believe in his honor. Before anything more could be said four officers entered the tent, and, bowing to the officer at the table, spoke to him in Spanish. From the expression on the faces of the officers at the table I knew that some plan had miscarried. The officer at the table looked toward me and said: "You were right." He then told the officer who had arrested me to pass me outside the lines, saying to me that I had better go to my hotel and keep within the house.

When I arrived at the hotel it was explained to me that General Santa Ana, with his staff of officers and a few hundred soldiers, had slipped into the city in the night and pitched their tents on the plaza, and that he had sent some of his staff to interview Major Ames, and made him an offer of $200,000 to surrender the castle to General Santa Ana. Had Major Ames accepted this offer it would have ended the rebellion; but he declined, and the staff returned while Santa Ana was questioning me. He passed me out and then he withdrew from the city.

Saw the "Battle."

The following morning I went up in the castle and from the walls I saw the fight between the two armies. Six thousand men were under General Santa Ana and 5000 men were under Generals Alvarez and Comerford. At 9:30 o'clock the battle stopped until the heat of the day was over. The rebels brought into the city from their force nine dead and 20 wounded, the result of four hours' fighting. While resting in the middle of the day the soldiers of the opposing forces fraternized, and, lying in the shade, smoked cigarettes together in friendly fashion. About 3 o'clock the call to arms was given and the battle recommenced, lasting until dark. The killed on the rebel side was 12 and 40 wounded in the afternoon's engagement. The army of Generals Alvarez and Comerford came into the city to camp for the night. General Santa Ana camped on the battlefield.

The next morning the army moved out of the city to renew the battle, but they could not find Santa Ana's army, as during the night he had commenced a retreat for the City of Mexico. Generals Alvarez and Comerford were not prepared for Santa Ana's retreat, and it was five days before they could get their pack trains ready to follow him with their army. Then it was a race to see which should get into the City of Mexico first.

Generals Alvarez and Comerford followed the army of Santa Ana, whose men began to desert and join the army of the pursuers. So fast did they flock to their side that Generals Alvarez and Comerford, who had taken the merchants, bakers and small storekeepers from Acapulco, sent some of the bakers back to supply the town. So every day we had word from the army. Several days after they had started Mrs. Comerford was anxious to hear the news. A little before 11 o'clock I started for the barber's gambling saloon, for that was where every one drifted to hear reports of any kind, and I promised Mrs. Comerford that I would return and tell her what I had learned.

Attacked by Two Men.

I had not walked far when I felt that I was followed, and two men made a rush for me. I sprang into a corner against a wall and faced the two men, holding my Panama in my left hand and bowie knife in the right. The two had dirks. One clipped my temple as I cut him from his eye to his chin; fending the other off with my hat, he drove his dirk into my wrist, striking a stone and broke off the blade. They would have killed me if it had not been for the watchman, who walks the city with a lantern and would at every corner call out the hour and "All is well." They heard him and ran.

I then went direct to the Pacific Mail Steamship company's doctor, who tried to pull out the broken blade, but could not do it. I asked him to take the bandages and dressing and we went to the carpenter and blacksmith shops, where we could put it into a vice and pull it out that way. We did so. The blade stuck out a quarter of an inch and when we got it in the vice I placed my fingers around the blade, clasping them tight, and jerked it out. The doctor stopped the blood and dressed the wound, and told me to work the wrist every day, the more the better, and not to mind the pain, as the blade had gone into the wrist joint, and if I did not work it I would have a stiff wrist for the balance of my life. Well! I have the scars, but that wrist is as supple as the other.

General Santa Ana arrived first, and with him but half of his staff officers and a few hundred men of his army. The rest of his soldiers had left him and joined the opposing force. When Generals Alvarez and Comerford arrived under the walls of the City of Mexico, they had with them 40,000 men who had flocked to them on the march to the capital. Santa Ana now saw that his cause was hopeless, and he escaped to the coast and went to the West Indies and afterward died there.

General Alvarez assumed the presidency of Mexico. This act was afterward confirmed by the people. General Comerford became the chief justice. "There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

My story shows that I did not take the tide at the flood. Had I done so, I would have accepted the offer of General Comerford. This would have made me admiral of the fleet—the first officer of the Mexican navy commissioned by the president. Shortly after these events the army disbanded, the blockade was raised from the port of Acapulco, and the Pacific Mail steamer Sonora came into the harbor, and on her I returned to San Francisco, leaving my embryo greatness behind me.

ENGLAND THINKING ABOUT ABOLISHING IMPRISONMENT FOR DEBT

From a Staff Correspondent.

LONDON, Aug. 4.—No doubt most Americans were under the impression that imprisonment for debt was a thing of the past in England, and as a matter of fact it is a good many years since any one has been imprisoned, technically speaking, for that offense. Every year, however, many thousands of Englishmen, nearly all men of the working class are committed to prison for no other reason than that they owe money and cannot pay it.

The matter reached the proportions of a scandal some years ago, and as is always the case when things begin to irritate the conscience of John Bull, a select committee of the house of commons was appointed to see what was wrong and what ought to be done to put it right. That committee held a lot of sittings, heard some scores of witnesses and took several reams of testimony, and now it has reported. If its recommendations are carried out no more honest debtors will go to prison in England.

When imprisonment for debt was abolished contempt of court was left, and it is for contempt of court that most of the poor debtors are sent to prison. When the creditor has exhausted persuasion and threats in the effort to collect his due, he summons the debtor before the county court. If all the debt summonses were heard by the judge he would be able to do nothing else, so the ordinary cases are heard before a minor official known as the registrar. This functionary being satisfied that the debt is due makes an order on the debtor to pay it, and in most cases when a poor man is before him allows him to pay it by installments, the amount of which he fixes. The debtor fails to pay the installments and he is taken before the judge and charged with contempt in failing to obey the order of the registrar. Unless the judge is satisfied that the man has no means at all he commits him to jail for a period varying from a few days to as many months.

The select committee has recommended that this system be abolished and that the power of commitment for contempt in connection with debts be wiped out, except in certain special cases. These cases are, broadly speaking, those into which an element of fraud enters. A blow is also struck at the installment dealers who occupy most of the time of the county court registrars with their cases. The committee would abolish imprisonment altogether in such cases, and in its report it declares that dealers of this class persuade poor people to enter contracts for the purchase of goods which they cannot afford to buy, at exorbitant prices. The honest trader is also to be protected by the extension of the rule regarding undischarged bankrupts to these smaller debtors. Under this rule a person against whom there is an unsatisfied judgment who obtains further credit without disclosing this fact shall be deemed guilty of fraud.

Another salutary recommendation is that it shall be a rule that registrars and judges shall make no order for payment at all unless they are satisfied that the debtor is in receipt of an income leaving a margin over what is necessary for the support of himself and those dependent on him. This minimum subsistence level is to be determined by taking into account the size of his family, and the cost of food and shelter in each district and it is even recommended that definite levels should be fixed in each district and given the force of an order of the court in each case. It is suggested that these schedules should be sent to the lord chancellor and an effort made to fix a scale as nearly uniform as possible, having due regard to the varying cost of living in different localities.

An interesting section of the report deals with the right or need of a workman to obtain credit. It is pointed out that to prohibit a workman from obtaining goods on credit is to assume that he has savings which make his getting credit unnecessary, an assumption which is contrary to the fact in a vast number of cases. When a workman is out of work or on short time, and has no savings, he must obtain credit, or be thrown with his family on the rates. If, on the other hand, he does obtain credit and on return to full work fails to pay his debt by reasonable installments, the committee considers that he should be compelled to do so.

A landlord, it is further pointed out, can rarely insist on payment of rent in advance and with large numbers of the working classes his remedy by distress is valueless. He cannot get rid of a tenant who fails to pay, without, in many cases, weeks of delay, and a limited credit is compulsorily given in the first place and a contumacious tenant can force a considerable extension of such credit.

Similarly, in the case of illness, if the breadwinner falls ill he may be able to pay the doctor for the first visit, but if the illness continues wages cease and there is no money coming in. But the doctor cannot refuse to continue his visits because he is not paid and if he pulls his patient through, when the latter recovers and returns to work and does not pay, the man who saved him, it is considered, should have a remedy.

A case that would be amusing if it were not for its tragic features has just come to light in one of the suburban courts in London. Charles Edward Sherry was ordered in 1898 to pay his wife $5 a week on a separation order. He was a ship's cook and he went off to sea after turning over to her all that he owned and thought no more about the matter. He neglected to take a receipt and last year when he turned up in the district again he was arrested for being in arrears with 516 payments and duly sent to jail for contempt of court. He was kept there for three months and when he came out he found a policeman waiting for him with a fresh warrant for the arrears which had been piling up while he was locked up. This time he got six weeks and the prospects are that his wife will be able to keep him in prison for the rest of his natural life.

Obviously he cannot earn any money and therefore cannot pay any alimony, while he is in prison, but that does not alter the fact that the alimony keeps on accumulating. The case has been taken up by a firm of solicitors who say they will carry it to the house of lords if necessary, but that may take three or four years and in the meantime Sherry may have to stay in jail with brief periods of liberty at intervals of six weeks or so.

Race Wagers in India.

From Tit-Bits.

The native of India wagers his money according to the colors worn by the jockeys and takes no heed of the merits of the horses, or he will back a horse ridden by his favorite jockey, no matter whether the animal is a rank outsider or not.

His ideas of gambling, in fact, are ristinctly novel. Some of the more wealthy Indians form rings and back every horse in the race, thus gaining the satisfaction of getting a winner every time. It is really only of late years that the native of India has become an habitual gambler on the turf, and nowadays the bulk of the betting of the various racing centers in India is done by natives. Indeed, the authorities are becoming somewhat concerned about the growth of the betting which takes place among Indian natives, it being asserted that as many as 30 lacs of rupees (about £300,000) is lost and won in the course of a season.

The ignorant masses have not a great deal of actual money to wager, but so badly bitten are many of them with the craze for betting at race meetings that they frequently wager what little property they possess on a horse, and if they lose they simply replace their loss by stealing a neighbor's goods. The consequence is that when the racing season comes around the police are kept very busy dealing with cases of petty larceny and other crimes involving loss of property.