

The results of the Mexican war have given to the American people, as it were, a new character in the eyes of the civilized world, and measurably undeceived those political philosophers who have supposed that no nation can be strong without a powerfully centralised government; that it is necessary for command to flow down from the unit at the head of affairs through all the gradations of power to the most obscure and remote individuals of the nation, in order that the whole resources of the people may become effective for great national purposes. The war of 1812 was worth far more than it cost, in the great moral elevation which it gave to the United States in the scale of nations. While all Europe trembled at the gigantic power of France by land, it regarded with no less solicitude the unrivalled power of Britain by sea. The most powerful and best appointed navies of Europe had disappeared before the resistless valor of British seamen, and the defeat of the French Emperor at Waterloo gave satisfaction to the emancipated powers of Europe in a degree only heightened by the appearance of a naval power upon the ocean to curb British insolence upon that element.

What Wellington was to France were Hull and Decatur to Britain. From that hour to the present has British marine pretension been dwindling to the reality of its basis; and although the Tories and their American whig allies continue to chaunt, in after-dinner extacies, the old catch of Briannia rules the wave, it is but a lingering tribute to glories that have faded. In that three years war the supremacy of the American navy was apparent. A nation of 38 years of age had mastered the empress of the seas on her own element, and the most blind could see in the future that the sway of the ocean had passed into other hands than the successors of the Norse pirates. The English have, however, very reluctantly admitted the necessary conclusion resulting from a series of naval defeats, and have invented many reasons for the disaster. These reasons were laughed at by all Europe, who rejoiced that John Bull had met his match. The events of that war were not such as to afford the army opportunity to place itself on a level with the navy, and English historians, while acknowledging the superiority of the navy, have made amends by abusing the army; like the pugnacious urchin who, having suffered punishment from a school-mate, exclaimed, "If I cannot flog you I'll make mouths at your sister!" and Alison profoundly moralises as follows:

"Of all marvels, this amount of military force is the most marvellous, when the magnitude and resources of the Republic are taken into view, the vast extent of frontier they have to defend, and the arrogant tone which they assume in their diplomatic intercourse with foreign states. It is true, they have a militia everywhere established, which, in periods of danger, may, it is said, enrol fifteen hundred thousand combatants around its banners; but although such a force, composed of backwoodsmen, combating behind trees in their forests, may be very formidable, and may sometimes make a stout resistance behind intrenchments in the neighborhood of towns, yet the result of the war of 1812 demonstrated, what *a priori* might have been readily imagined, that it is incapable of carrying on war in the field, is wholly unfit for offensive operations, and cannot be relied on for the defence even of the strongest positions, if assailed with skill by much inferior forces.

The events of the last two years have put the seal on these "sagacities". The phrases of the historian are as inaccurate as the ideas are erroneous. Mr. Alison says, a force composed of 1,500,000 backwoodsmen. Does he indulge the European notion that we are all demi-savages, and suppose that all the people of the United States are backwoodsmen? The regiment of New-York has, without being backwoodsmen, done immortal service at Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, Churubusco and Chapultepec; while the field of Buena

Vista has witnessed the determined valor of the Western men, and their offensive operations against overwhelming force surpass all that is recorded of British valor, either on Indian or European fields. Singularly enough, the glorious victory of Buena Vista was achieved less by science and military leading than by the determined and indomitable valor of precisely those volunteer troops, (despite the blunders of officers,) which the historian denounced as not to be relied on for the defence of even the strongest position.

As this battle of Buena Vista is the most glorious for the American arms, so is the work quoted at the head of this article by far the best account of that memorable action which has been given to the public. Capt. Carleton of the Dragoons was an actor in that hard-won field, and being encamped with brother officers for some eight months afterwards upon the scene of triumph, collected the materials which form a most authentic narrative(see footnote). Capt. Carleton is eminently friendly to Gen. Taylor, and strives hard to make his merits apparent; but nevertheless, no one carefully following the facts but rises from the perusal firmly impressed with the conviction to which we have alluded, viz; that it was a battle won by the men almost in spite of the General, to whose mistakes one-half the slaughter of the troops may be fairly attributed. The whole narrative is given by Capt. Carleton with singular clearness and precision, but his reasoning is far from conclusive, more particularly in relation to the very questionable changing of position by General Taylor. It is to be remembered that after his advance from Monterey upon Saltillo, Gen. Minon, with 2000 superb cavalry, were hovering around the American army all winter, observing his movements, ready to open up communications and lend a hand to the advancing Mexicans at any point, while Santa Anna was known to be accumulating a force at San Luis. Under these circumstances Gen. Taylor took the initiative, as described by Capt. Carleton:

"It was, without doubt, the original purpose of General Taylor, in the event of Santa Annas marching from San Luis de Potosi to attack him, to offer battle at Agua Nueva, a hacienda twenty miles south of Saltillo, near which place he was then encamped. Accordingly, by the 10th of February, he had moved all his troops thither with the exception of Captain Webster's battery of two 24-pounder howitzers, which was left to occupy a redoubt that our forces had erected on an eminence commanding the approaches to the city, and a small battalion of riflemen, under Major Warren, of the First Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, to protect the depot of ammunition and provisions still remaining behind. It was necessary to select some place for an encampment, where the ground would be sufficiently extensive and otherwise suitable for the instruction of the troops; where wood and water would be convenient; and where, if circumstances should require it, a battle might be fought to good advantage. Agua Nueva possessed all these requisites in a greater degree than any other place within a hundred miles of Saitillo. Opposed to some strong reasons against it, as a position for battle, there were many in its favor. The enemy, in advancing upon the direct and great thoroughfare from San Luis de Potosi, had necessarily to approach by the hacienda La Encarnacion. Thence to Agua Nueva, it was thirty-five miles through a desert; a long and fatiguing march for any species of troops, but particularly for artillery and infantry, and without one drop of water for the whole distance, the first to be found being entirely in our possession. Therefore, *by maintaining that position, General Taylor would have the advantage* of the enemy's disarray from a forced march, of his consequent fatigue, and, more than all, of the unfitness of his men and animals, from long-continued thirst, for immediate battle; while, on the contrary, his own troops would be perfectly fresh, and prepared at all points to receive him. Besides, unless some spot should be chosen still farther in advance, it was better, when this was once occupied, to maintain it if possible, than to select one in the rear; *because the fact of retiring on the approach of an enemy, even for a better position, would be calculated to exert a moral effect upon raw troops greatly to be dreaded*, as it would cause them to lose confidence not only in their own strength, but in *the sagacity, firmness, and hopes of their leader*, and, on the other hand, would serve to *inspire their antagonists* with a more exalted idea of their own prowess.

These reasons for considering this spot as a very good one for a battle-ground, were chiefly dependent on the supposition that Santa Anna, if he came at all, would approach the Americans, encamped upon it, from La Encarnacion, by the direct road. Agua Nueva is situated at the southern extremity of the beautiful valley of La Encantada; and there were two other routes, by which, with great exertions, he might enter it. On one, he could march to the right, by La Hedionda, and thereby gain Buena Vista in our rear; and, on the other, he could pass to the left, by La Punta de Santa Elena, so as to attain the hacienda San Juan de la Vaquena, which would likewise enable him to get possession of the road to Saltillo, and oblige our army to fight under the disadvantage of having its communication entirely cut off. These were contingencies, and the only ones, which would render a change of position imperative. As a last resort, therefore, to be determined upon and adopted according to the dispositions of the enemy, his strength, the description of his forces, and the manner of his approach, General Taylor had it in his power to move back, and take another ground, which, as early as the December previous, General Wool had selected as a most excellent one for battle, and which, under certain circumstances, would be greatly superior to that which the army then occupied. This latter point was the Pass of Buena Vista, six miles in front of Saltillo, and fourteen in rear of Agua Nueva."

Now it will be observed that on the 10th February General Taylor occupied Agua Nueva, chiefly depending upon Santa Annas advance on the direct road from La Encarnacion. In that event Capt. Carleton tells us, the position of Agua Nueva was "*the best within a hundred miles of Saltillo*". On the 20th of February, ten days after he had been in camp, Gen. Taylor sent out parties which returned by 12 o'clock on the 21st, and reported Santa Anna advancing with his whole force by Encarnacion. At the moment that report was made, (12 oclock, Feb. 21,) Santa Anna was leaving La Encarnacion, and thus was fulfilled the condition on which the spot which Taylor had occupied for 11 days was the best within 100 miles of Saltillo. What then did Gen. Taylor do? Did he prepare to give battle to the fatigued and thirsty men issuing out of a narrow pass after a march of 35 miles? Not so; he beats a hasty retreat upon Buena Vista, as Capt. Carleton states it, as follows

"It was determined, after mature consideration, in order that the enemys advantages should be diminished as much as possible, to abandon Agua Nueva, and to fall back on the position in front of Buena Vista.

What advantages? The thirst, fatigue and disarray of a forced march, which had been so long calculated upon? Almost in the hour of battle it was discovered that the position was a strong one, and the men were compelled to make a forced march of 14 miles, almost in the face of an enemy, to regain a position from which it appears they ought never to have advanced. The haste of this retreat is indicated as follows:

"A considerable amount of stores was still remaining at Agua Nueva, and all the afternoon and evening of the 21st were diligently employed in bringing them away; Colonel Yell, with a part of his regiment of Arkansas Mounted Volunteers, having been ordered to remain behind and protect them to the last moment. It was long after dark when orders were given for the two companies of the 1st Dragoons, and a part of the regiment of Kentucky Mounted Volunteers, to return from the camp at Buena Vista to the assistance of Colonel Yell, in case the enemy should attempt to cut him off; and directions were sent to him, in the event of an attack, to fire the hacienda of Agua Nueva, and destroy the stores he might be unable to remove, and then to fall back on the position occupied by the army. It was nearly midnight when these troops arrived there. They had hardly formed when Colonel Yell's advanced piquet, stationed in the Pass of Carnero, was attacked by the Mexican light division and driven in; our men not even waiting to determine whether those who fired upon them were mounted or on foot. The order was

immediately given to set fire to the buildings, and at the same time the whole train of both loaded and empty wagons moved off with furious speed for Buena Vista; the troops remaining behind until all the stores were consumed."

This sacrifice and the moral influence, together with the serious fatigue of a hasty retreat on one side and of supposed victory on the other, were incurred on the eve of battle without an object. It was not until daybreak on the 22nd, that the cavalry had returned to Buena Vista, followed by the cavalry masses of Santa Anna. Where was Gen. Taylor in that hour? Capt. Carleton informs us:

"General Taylor had not yet returned from Saltillo, whither he had proceeded, on the evening of the 21st, with a small force, to make dispositions for its defence. General Wool, therefore, being next to him in rank, commanded the troops in his absence, and now gave the order to move forward to the battle-ground. It was received with three hearty cheers, when the regiments and corps broke into column, and each, to the time of some lively air, moved rapidly off to its position."

It will be remembered that Gen. Taylor had been idle 11 days at Agua Nueva, whither he had gone to fight Santa Anna, well knowing that Minon was on his flank with 2000 horse, and yet it was not until the shock of the battle took place that he left the field to look after the defences of Saltillo! He knew no more on the 21st February in relation to the Mexican forces than he had known 30 days before, yet the necessary duty of making disposition for the defence of Saltillo was neglected until nearly too late. General Wool made the disposition for the battle:

"By this time General Wool had placed our troops in their several positions, and the following was the order of battle for the 22d of February. Captain Washington's Battery occupied the road at La Angostura, supported by Colonel Hardin's First Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, posted, as before remarked, on the elevated tongue of land which extends from that point to the plateau. The Second Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, and one company of Texans, the whole under Colonel Bissell, were on its left, and near the foot of the plateau; while the Second Regiment of Kentucky Volunteers, under Colonel McKee, occupied the crest of a ridge in the rear of Washington's Battery, around which the road, divided, runs. The Arkansas and Kentucky Regiments of Mounted Volunteers, commanded, severally, by Colonel Yell and Colonel Marshall, were stationed on the extreme left, near the base of the mountains; while the brigade of Indiana Volunteers, under General Lane, (composed of the Second Regiment, commanded by Colonel Bowles, and the Third by Colonel Lane,) the First Regiment of Mississippi Riflemen, under Colonel Jefferson Davis, Captain Steen's squadron of the 1st Dragoons, Lieutenant-Colonel Mays squadron of the 2d Dragoons, and the light Batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg, occupied, as a reserve, the next ridges immediately in rear of the right of the plateau and of the ground of the Illinois Volunteers. In this position our army awaited the attack."

General Taylor meantime returned from Saltillo, and after reconnoitering:

"General Taylor, feeling convinced from the dispositions of Santa Anna, that he would defer making his grand attack until the next morning, and fearing that the strong force in the rear of the city, where all our stores were, might make a movement to take it, left General Wool in command, and again, at sunset, started from the field, with Colonel Mays squadron of the 2d Dragoons, and Colonel Davis's Regiment of Mississippi Riflemen, for Saltillo, the better to provide for such an emergency."

The strong force in the rear of the city was Minon's cavalry, which had been there all winter for the express purpose of striking a blow when Santa Anna should advance; and yet it was not until the battle

commenced that Gen. Taylor drew off a part of his small force to go and see to defences that had so long been neglected. During his absence on the morning of the 23d, the battle commenced by the advance of Gen. Ampudia on the enemy's right, followed by the attack of Gen. Pacheco, which was met by Gen. Lane, in command of the 2d Indiana regiment and Lieut. O'Brien's battery, which resulted in the retreat of the Indiana men through the prime fault of the officers. Pacheco's division then uniting with Lombardini's formed a centre column that overwhelmed our left, and turned the position, notwithstanding the determined resistance of the Illinois regiment, the conduct of which is thus described:

"The dragoons had hardly fallen back, and McCulloch's mounted Texans taken cover in the head of the first gorge, before the enemy, having continued to advance notwithstanding his severe losses, had passed with a large portion of his troops between the left of the Illinoisians and the mountain; so that that regiment, or rather the six companies of it, and the two pieces from Sherman's battery, were soon receiving a fire in front, on their left flank, and from their left and rear, at the same moment.

Inspector-General Churchill, who remained with Colonel Bissell, seemed at this time to be one of the chosen marks for the Mexican sharp-shooters; his horse being struck by three bullets in succession, and his reins cut in two by a fourth. The Illinois troops had ever been the particular favorites of that gallant veteran; and he determined to stand by them personally, and see whether his predilections were not based upon good grounds. His pride in them was fully gratified at beholding the unflinching firmness with which they maintained their position against such an immense host. At length, perceiving the danger they were in of being completely surrounded, he ordered Colonel Bissell to fall back to a point near the ravine, to prevent that issue. As regularly as if on drill, Colonel Bissell, having directed the signal, Cease firing, to be made, gave the command, Face to the rear! Battalion, about FACE! Battalion, forward, MARCH! which was executed until the danger of being outflanked was past, when again, at the command to halt, given by Inspector-General Churchill, who had walked his horse slowly in front of the retiring regiment, these cool and determined men stopped, faced about, and resumed the fire with a promptness and precision which would have done credit to any troops in the service; and all under a murderous storm of bullets from the enemy. Simple justice to these brave fellows renders it necessary that all the details of their conduct on this occasion should be given. Besides, it is an evidence of the manner in which troops, in their first battle, can behave, when they have been properly instructed and carefully disciplined. It is a sufficient encomium on them to say, that they had never before been under fire, and that during the short time they had been engaged, (twenty minutes,) they -had lost, in killed and wounded, no less than eighty, including officers and men. Lieutenants Thomas and French, the latter wounded, had likewise been obliged to fall back; but they soon came into battery again, and, in conjunction with Colonel Bissell's regiment, commenced a well-directed fire at the enemy's left flank, as he endeavored to cross the plateau and gain our rear."

This formidable column of the enemy pressed on, compelling the mounted volunteers to fall back, and was finally arrested only by the return of the Missouri regiment from Saltillo, whither it had gone on the 22d. All this time Gen. Taylor was absent with some of the best troops. However,

"It was at this critical juncture that General Taylor arrived upon the field from Saltillo, having completed his dispositions for the defence of the city. He was accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel May, with the two companies of the 2d Dragoons, and by Colonel Davis, with eight companies of his Mississippi Riflemen. Captain Albert Pike, with his own company and that of Captain John Preston, Jr., (the two united as a squadron,) and Lieutenant Kilburn, with one piece from Captain Braggs Battery, had also been ordered to the field of battle from below the city, where they had been on detached duty.

The Mississippi Riflemen halted near the hacienda long enough for the men to fill their canteens with water, when they were turned off from the road diagonally to the left, and advanced toward the point where our troops were fast giving ground to the enemy. The General commanding proceeded on directly to the plateau, having with him the 2d Dragoons.

"The aspect of affairs was now most gloomy, and our condition most critical; the scale for a short time appeared to be preponderating against us, and Victory to be deserting our banners and winging her way toward those of the enemy. But the idea of yielding the day so long as there was a man left to fight, never, for a moment, came into the mind of our determined leader; and, in his indomitable resolution to compel fortune to favor our side, he was seconded by men, true as the steel they wore, and firm and unyielding as the mountains around them. The gallant Colonel Davis, with his glorious Mississippians – men who had been tried in the fire of the storming of Monterey, and had stood the test like pure gold, now moved steadily forward through the broad current of our retreating horse and foot. He called loudly on those who were flying to come back with him and renew the combat. They were few indeed who heeded his call. Colonel Bowles, who, for some reason other than lack of courage, had ordered his regiment to retreat, now, having lost all hope of rallying it again, seized a rifle, and, followed by a handful of his men, joined the Mississippians as a private. During the whole day, he shared their perils, and was distinguished for his personal bravery. With these exceptions, Colonel Davis' appeal was of no avail, in vain he told them that his riflemen were a mass of men behind which they could take shelter and securely form. He pointed to his regiment, as he said this. It was, indeed, a wall of heroes. What must have been his pride in commanding such men! What the mortification and burning shame of the fugitives whom he addressed! Colonel Davis, as he passed by General Wool, who had now arrived at this part of the ground, was promised support; and the General immediately went in person to hasten the Third Indiana Regiment, from the rear of La Angostura, to his aid. But still the Mississippians moved onward. A large and deep ravine passed by their right, while another entered this after coming diagonally across their front from the left; the two embracing between them an inclined plane, which terminated at a point near their junction, (at this moment but a short distance in advance of the regiment,) but which was quite broad, and easy to be gained, at its upper and farther extremity near the mountains. On this plane, most of Ampudia's light division was now moving down, flanked by cavalry, and supported by reserves of the heavy infantry. The 3d Indiana Volunteers had not yet had time to come up, and it was all-important that the enemy should be checked, before he could effect a passage of the only ravine which would seriously retard his course onward to the road. Flushed with success, and apparently irresistible in numbers, he came down like an avalanche. Then it was that Davis and his followers surpassed all their former brilliant efforts. They counted not the odds, they waited for no support; but, thrown rapidly into order of battle, they pressed forward like Spartans; and, although the air was filled with the sharp hissing of a shower of lead, which came hurtling on, and cutting through their ranks with dreadful effect, still they did not pause until they had brought the enemy within close range of their own unerring weapons. Then their little line blazed forth a sheet of fire. The shock given by it to the head of the enemys column was most awful. Men went down before it as ripe grain falls before the reaper. Still the enemy came onward over his dead, and still forward pressed the riflemen, the latter a handful, the former a host. At length they paused; the Mississippians on the brink of the ravine, the Mexican light infantry on the plane beyond, the cavalry having been driven to cover on their left. But there was no cessation in the struggle, and Death still continued to gather in his bloody harvest. It was not enough for the Mississippians to hold such masses at bay; their blood was up, and the flight of the enemy alone could satisfy them. Giving one loud yell of defiance, which rang on the ear more like the roar of angry lions than the shout of men, they again rushed forward. A moment, and they were lost from the view of their antagonists. It was only a moment; but in it they had dashed into the ravine, clambered up the opposing wall, and now stood before the Mexicans upon their own side. For a few minutes more, the carnage was

terrible. At length, bloody and torn, the column of Ampudia lost its steadiness; its fire slackened; then all organization was gone; its ranks were resolved into a confused multitude, which in a moment crumbled away, the whole fleeing precipitately back to the reserves."

This Mississippi regiment had been marched 14 miles from Agua Nueva on the 22d, thence 5 miles to Saltillo, and back 5 miles to stem the eruption of the Mexicans, and this marching and counter-marching in the hour of battle was because the defences of Saltillo had been neglected 30 days at least. The cool, effective and determined conduct of our troops, and the terrible effect of their fire is well described in the following passage:

"After the Mexicans had failed in their attack on Buena Vista, they made a determined effort to force their way to the road at a point nearer the plateau. They brought down, from near the mountains opposite and to the left of the hacienda, a fresh brigade of cavalry, covered by infantry in all its passages of ravines. With this they advanced to engage the Mississippi Riflemen, the fragment of the 2d Indiana Volunteers, and the 3d regiment of the same, who were still acting together, and who had near them one howitzer under Captain Sherman. The position of these troops was some five hundred yards nearer the road than the point where Colonel Davis' regiment was first engaged in the morning, but farther down the same ravine. As soon as this new brigade indicated, by the manner of its approach, its determination to charge our riflemen and infantry, they were rapidly formed to receive it. The Mississippi regiment, in line of battle, extended across the little plain upon which they now were, their right being near the ravine, their front toward the mountains; the Indiana troops were formed so that their left rested on the right of Colonel Davis' regiment, their right upon the ravine higher up, their front being also toward the mountains, but more to the north. In this way, an obtuse re-entering angle was presented towards the approaching cavalry, Sherman's howitzer being on its left. The enemy was formed in close column of squadrons, and came down the slope at an easy hand-gallop. His ranks were well closed, his troopers riding knee to knee, and dressing handsomely on their guides. All the flags and pennons were flying, some fifteen hundred of them; the men were in full uniform, and the horses elegantly caparisoned. Every lancer sat erect, and kept his charger well in hand; and the whole brigade, preserving exactly its intervals and the direction of its march, moved forward with the ease and regularity of the best drilled troops on a field-day. Had the commander of this beautiful brigade desired to win the applause of both armies, he could not have put in better order, or led his men on with more of professional style. The *tout ensemble* of his column was most admirable. It had a sort of air about it, an easy, nonchalant manner of going into the work, which could not but recall to ones mind his ideal pictures of the cavalry of the olden days. Those fine fellows were the chivalry of Mexico, and, with the exception of the Presidents personal guard, the regiment of Tinssars, they were the most dashing troops the Republic had ever sent to the field. Opposed to them were our men on foot, a mere handful in comparison, and having about them none of the pomp and circumstance, the glitter, and gold, and feathers, and tassels, of their antagonists. They stood calmly and fearlessly still, with their pieces at a carry. But they, too, had an air; one that had mischief in it. Their ranks had been thinned out; some of their best men had fallen. There were even fathers standing there, whose sons had gone down by their sides, their pet boys, whom they had reared and brought forth to fight for their country. And there were sons, too, whose clothes had been baptized with their father's blood, not yet dry. Brothers, who had stood shoulder to shoulder in the morning, stood so no more; but, while one lay stark and motionless upon the earth, the other was near by to avenge him. There were neighbors, too, and friends, who had grown up together in school-boy days. They were not yet separated. The survivors stood there, while those who had borne all these tender relations to them were strwn, dead or dying, on every hand. Yet all in sight they lay; the familiar forms and faces of those to whom they had been deeply attached, and whom they had called by their first names from infancy. It cannot be wondered, then, that these men stood firm.

It was a sublime - a terrible sight. The troops on both sides were so cool and determined, that all knew the struggle must be sanguinary and desperate in the extreme. Not a word was spoken; the din of the surrounding battle seemed for a moment hushed; the rumbling sound of the earth, as the brigade swept onward like a living thunderbolt, appeared to be the only audible manifestation of the approaching carnage. As the Mexicans came nearer, they evidently indulged the belief, that they could draw the fire of our men before it could be very destructive; and that then, while their pieces were empty, they could overwhelm the slight barrier before them, and finish their work with the lance. But finding, on the contrary, that not a piece was discharged nor a man moving, the whole brigade began instinctively to diminish its gait. This was a fatal mistake; and, on their side, it seemed a pity it should have been made, it was so out of keeping with the skill indicated by their soldierly appearance and gallant bearing. Finally, instead of dashing forward in a most splendid charge, as they could have done, having the ground upon which to execute it, they had the madness to pull up to a walk, and at length *to halt* in the very net-work of the two lines of fire. The instant they did so, the pieces came down on both faces of the angle, as if swayed by the same hand. For a moment their muzzles moved slowly about, as each man felt for his aim; then they settled steady and firm as bars of steel. Now, like the blast of a trumpet, the dreadful word was shouted, Fire! Two sheets of flame converged on that beautiful brigade. It was appalling! The whole head of the column was prostrated, and riderless horses, a multitude, and crimson with blood, scattered from it in every direction.

Before the Mexicans could recover from the effects of this blow, Sherman cut them up with grape and canister. Then came the rapid and deadly firing by file, of our riflemen and infantry. No troops in the world could have faced it without the most awful sacrifice of life; and under it the whole brigade gave way, and fled to the mountains, leaving the ground literally covered with its dead."

The crisis of the battle was very near turning in favor of the enemy through the extraordinary conduct, of Gen. Taylor in playing into the hands of Santa Anna, by becoming the dupe of one of his shallow and dishonest tricks. This part of the combat is finely described by Capt. Carleton, as follows:

"But the most sanguinary part of the field was still that which was covered by the forces engaged in rear of the plateau. After the enemy's brigade of cavalry had been repulsed by the artillery, riflemen and infantry, under Sherman, Davis, and Lane, very soon the companies of the 1st and 2d Dragoons, Lieut. Reynolds, with his two pieces, Pike's and Preston's companies, and a few mounted and foot volunteers, who had been rallied at the hacienda, were ordered by Gen. Taylor to move directly up near the base of the mountains on the left, and to drive in the enemy's right by attacking him on that flank. This force was under the direction of Brevet Lieut. Col. May. The Mexicans soon began to give way before its advance, and to keep along the base of the mountain toward the plateau. It was while this was doing, that a violent tempest of hail and rain, with gusts of wind, came suddenly up, accompanied by vivid lightning and the most deafening peals of thunder. But the warring of the elements above stayed not the fury of the battle below. The loud thunder and the pattering of hail were answered back by the roar of cannon and the rattling of musketry.

From time to time, as our cavalry force under Lieut. Col. May pressed heavily on the right flank of the enemy, Reynolds' two pieces were brought into action, and played upon him until he gave ground, when they were quickly limbered up, and moved on again to new and closer positions; being supported on each flank by the regular Dragoons, with Pike's squadron to the left of all. Meanwhile Capt. Bragg, with three pieces of his battery without support, advanced upon the enemy, midway between the Dragoons and the

Mississippi and Indiana troops. The latter were also pushing on, and supporting, as they did so, Capt. Sherman with his howitzer. Our three pieces on the plateau likewise directed, for the time being, their fire upon the masses now giving way before this combined attack and advance of our entire strength and rear of that position. Meanwhile the whole fire of the 18 and 24-pounder battery of the enemy was concentrated on our corps moving up toward the mountains, and nearly enfiladed their lines. It was a fine battery, and the havoc it made in our ranks was a melancholy evidence of the skill with which it was served. But neither the effect of its heavy copper-shot, frightful as it was, nor the continuous fire of musketry from those now falling back, could retard the steady advance of our troops. They swept onward toward the mountains like a seine, and gathered this portion of the enemy's force into a sort of cul-de-sac, from which it seemed impossible for it to escape. The Mexicans, who were thus hemmed in, were played upon by no less than nine pieces of our light artillery at the same moment; being the centre of a cross fire from Reynolds' pieces to their right, and O'Brien's and Thomas' pieces on their left, while Sherman and Bragg were tearing them up in front. Although at first they answered our troops by a fire of musketry, as the ground from point to point afforded them cover, yet, as they became more condensed, and the effect of our shot more destructive, they grew panic-stricken. Then horse and foot mingled together, and, without pausing to resist the storm under which they suffered, pressed on closer and closer toward

the mountain. These were the men who had killed our wounded, when they drove us in the morning. These were the men who took no prisoners, when they might have taken many. These were the men who left no sign of life in any thing American which had fallen into their hands, the men who had stripped our poor fellows, and then stood over them and mutilated their remains in the most horrible and revolting manner. They were the men who had received the surrendered sword of the Texan Lieutenant, Campbell, a gallant gentleman, and then plunged it into his bosom. These were the men who in the morning had surrounded that grey-haired man, Lieut. Price, of Illinois, seventy-two years old, and cruelly forced their lances through him, as if for pastime. Now they were going back over the same ground where all this work had been done. We had but little consideration for those who had had no pity for our mangled and bleeding comrades. And every one knew, if the battle finally went against us, what would inevitably be his own fate. All these things inspired our troops with a determination never to despair of victory; and nerved them to press onward to the punishment of an enemy, who, in civilized warfare, had set the first example of murdering wounded men. Faster and faster our troops gathered them into that little cove in the side of the mountain. They were about 5000 or 6000 in all; cavalry and infantry, mingled in confusion; an armed multitude; a mere chaos of men and horses, and dead and dying, with flags, pennons, lances, and muskets, all mixed up. Hundreds of them endeavored to escape by clambering up the steep sides of the mountains; but most of them stood huddled together, while our shot went crashing through them, and our shells likewise, opening for themselves a bloody circle wherever they exploded.

It was at this time that the President of Mexico sent one of his staff officers, under a white flag, with a message to Gen. Taylor, desiring to know what he wanted. Gen. Wool was immediately directed to bear the commanding Generals reply to such a singular request; and, at the same time, orders were sent to our batteries to cease firing. Gen. Wool proceeded directly up to the head of the plateau, where, notwithstanding the interchange of flags, the 18 and 24-pounder battery still continued in operation on our troops in rear; but, finding he could not induce the Mexican officers there to cease their fire, he declared the parley at an end, and returned to our lines, without having had an interview with his Excellency. While all this was going on, the whole force which had turned our left succeeded in escaping from its perilous situation. Having recrossed the head of the deep ravine, they passed rapidly along the upper edge of the plateau, and, under cover of their battery there, in spite of all our exertions, united again with the main army in front."

The consequence of this absurd conduct on the part of Gen. Taylor, who with a total force of 4,691 men contending against 20,000 Mexicans, weakly gave up the advantages so hardly won by our gallant fellows, was that the escaped force rallying upon the Mexican reserves came forward in a blaze of fire, and, enveloping the Kentucky and Illinois regiments, drove them into a gorge where they suffered prodigious slaughter. This struggle was as follows:

"The advance of this column, however, was not retarded; for they were troops of the old line, and were accustomed to blood. Arriving opposite the head of the second gorge, one half of this column suddenly enveloped it, while the other half pressed on across the plateau, having for the moment nothing to resist them but the three guns in their front. The portion that was immediately opposed to the Kentucky and Illinois troops, ran down along each side of the gorge in which they had sought shelter, and also circled around its head; and then there was no possible way of escape for them except by its mouth, which opened upon the road. Its sides were steep, at least, at an angle of forty degrees, were covered with loose pebbles and stones, and went to a point at the bottom. Down there were our poor fellows, nearly three regiments of them, with but little opportunity to load or fire a gun, being hardly able to keep their feet. Above, the whole edge of the gorge, all the way around, was darkened by the serried masses of the enemy, and was bristling with muskets directed upon the crowd beneath. It was no time to pause; those who were not immediately shot down rushed on toward the road, their numbers growing less and less as they went; Kentuckians and Illinoisians, officers and men, all mixed up in confusion, and all pressing on over the loose pebbles and rolling stones of those shelving, precipitous banks, and having lines and lines of the enemy firing down from each side and in rear, as they went. Just then, the enemy's cavalry, which had gone to the left of the reserve, had come over the spur that divides the mouth of the second gorge from that of the third, and were now closing up the only door through which there was the least shadow of a chance for their lives. Many of those ahead endeavored to force their way out; but few succeeded; the lancers were fully six to one, and their long weapons were already reeking with blood. It was at this time that those who were still back in that dreadful gorge, heard, above the din of the musketry and the shouts of the enemy around them, the roar of Washington's Battery. No music could have been more grateful to their ears. A moment only, and the whole opening, where the lancers were busy, rang with the repeated explosions of spherical-case shot. They gave way. The gate, as it were, was clear, and out upon the road a stream of our poor fellows issued. They ran panting down towards the battery, and directly under the flight of iron then passing over their heads into the retreating cavalry. Hardin, McKee, Clay, Willis, Zabriskie, Houghton, but why go on? It would be a sad task indeed, to name over all who fell during this twenty minutes slaughter. The whole gorge, from the plateau to its mouth, was strewn with our dead; all dead; no wounded there, not a man; for the infantry had rushed down the sides, and completed the work with the bayonet."

This was the result of the generalship of Taylor in falling into the trap of Santa Anna. Had the leadership on that field been as able as the conduct of the men, how much blood might not have been spared!

The Battle of Buena Vista, with the Army of Occupation, for one month. By James Henry Carleton, Captain in the 1st Regiment of Dragoons. Harper Brothers

BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA. [The American Whig Review./ Volume 8, Issue 5, Nov 1843]

There is perhaps no single question of fact which usually involves so much diversity of opinion and of description, as that military engagement, the particulars of which may be derived solely from actors in the scene, and yet be found to differ in numberless details, and frequently in the most important elements. No two individuals will observe the incidents from precisely the same point of view, and, as in gazing upon the rainbow, every spectator sees a different one from his neighbor, so it would appear from the conflicting narratives of battles, that there are as many combats as there happen to be narrators. Hence every account of such historical events gives us an additional degree of approximation nearer to the truth, and the final historian, by taking a mean of the whole, is enabled to extract enough for practical purposes, of the philosophy which teaches by example. Whether the work of Captain Carleton, like his letter to a distinguished general, (p. 184,) touching a point not yet fully disposed of, settles the question of the battle of Buena Vista for all time, we are not prepared to affirm, but that it is a valuable addition to the facts already communicated to the public, in relation to what he is pleased to consider the great battle *par excellence* of the war, we think few will be disposed to deny. As set forth in his preface, Captain Carleton's facilities for qualifying himself for the task were unquestionable, and if he has not fully attained the object of his aspirations, the fact must not be attributed to want of zeal or of good intentions, but rather to the causes to which we have just briefly adverted.

The events preliminary to the battle are detailed by the author with commendable minuteness and perspicuity. The reasons for occupying Agua Nueva, which developed the consummate strategic talent of the American general, and the ease with which he baffled the well-laid plans of General Santa Anna, by discovering the purposes of that able and crafty commander, and concealing his own, are set forth with a clearness worthy of the subject, and with an apparent fidelity to truth worthy of the historian. Even the reconnaissance three days before the battle are described so faithfully as to include the most trivial incidents, in which the author evinces his determination not only to give the truth, but the whole truth. But for this desire to include all the events of one month, we do not see the importance of relating so particularly the events of both reconnaissance, as that under Major McCulloch seems alone to have resulted in any practical consequence, that intrepid officer having actually passed within the Mexican lines, while Colonel May's command appears only to have lost by capture one officer and one private. With the maneuvers, numbers, and position of the enemy, Captain Carleton has also made himself equally familiar, and in detailing his corps, divisions, and battalions, gives us the names of their several commanders, even down to the ranchero Colonels Blanco and Aguierra, those old friends and patrons of the Centre Division, who relieved its necessities by liberal supplies of forage at liberal prices, and whose good dinners will doubtless long be remembered by the most distinguished officers of the Chihuahua column. If we were disposed to cavil, we might feel inclined to question the declaration "that nothing more is necessary than a simple array of the facts which constituted the elements and characterized the movements of the two armies on that occasion, to enable any individual to understand how it (the battle) was fought and how won", (p. 1.) If "nothing more is necessary" than this, why not be satisfied with the official report of the commanding general? The facts are there set forth with classical simplicity and unrivalled perspicuity, and in the compass of a few pages, instead of a volume. We are inclined to believe, therefore, that some

persons, less amiable than ourselves, would not be unwilling to point the small end of an insinuation that our author was not altogether indifferent to a display of his literary abilities, even if he were not actuated by a desire to give a certain arm of the service a position somewhat more conspicuous than that which it occupies in the official reports, and in the opinions of many who participated actively in the conflict. We distinctly disclaim any reflection, direct, collateral, or remote, upon the corps referred to. Its chivalric gallantry is too well known, and has been too well tested to render it liable to suspicion; and if it failed on this occasion to contribute as much to the result as might have been anticipated, those who were mortified at the fact will know where to look for the cause. Without entering upon an elaborate discussion of the point, we are yet unwilling to admit the unqualified assertion that of the numerous triumphs of our arms, it [the battle of Buena Vista] is by far the greatest. (p. 1.) With deference to the superior military judgment, experience, and acquirements of Captain Carleton, we are constrained to believe that, tested by purely rational or military principles, with reference to the numbers engaged, the duration of the conflict, and the immediate consequences of the victory, that of Buena Vista is a less brilliant achievement than that of Resaca de la Palma. The odds in both engagements were nearly the same, eighteen hundred to seven or eight thousand in one case, and about forty-five hundred to eighteen or twenty thousand in the other; but here the resemblance ceases. In one case, the enemy selected his position; in the other this advantage, and a great one, was with the opposite party. In one case the victory was decisive and complete, the enemy's camp captured, with a large quantity of military stores, and himself driven across the Rio Grande; while in the other, the victory was at best a negative one, known only when the sun revealed the retreating foe, and in its results preserving only what we'd already gained, without adding anything to our acquisitions save national glory. We have neither space nor disposition to continue farther a comparison of the two battles; but conceive that even this brief statement affords a thorough refutation of a popular error, having its origin in the circumstances which attended the two events. But while we contend that the victory of Buena Vista, as a mere military triumph, is inferior to that of Resaca de la Palma, it cannot be denied that the lofty genius and moral power of the Commanding General were more eminently conspicuous in the conflict with General Santa Anna, than in the earlier one with General Arista. On the heights of Buena Vista, General Taylor constituted in himself the main body of the Americans, and under any other commander we have no doubt that even ten thousand Americans would have been defeated. One victory was due to the combined efforts of all; but it is scarcely too much to affirm that the other was due to the presence of a single individual. All that we have heard or seen on the subject, forces upon us the conclusion that no one but Zachary Taylor would have fought the battle, and no one but Zachary Taylor could have won it. And we hope that, if any of our readers do not now concur in this opinion, we shall be able to convince them of its correctness before bringing this article to a conclusion. In our narrative, while we shall endeavor to adhere rigidly to facts, we shall not, of course, indulge in that minuteness of detail, which belongs to the historian, and shall consult not only Captain Carleton's work, and the official reports, but the descriptions written at the time by those engaged; to the authors of which we here beg leave to make a general acknowledgment of our indebtedness.

There has been considerable discussion in relation to the *discoverer* of the merits of Buena Vista as a battle-field, the rival claimants to which are a distinguished general officer of the army, and a

Captain of Topographical Engineers. We have no disposition to enlist under the banner of either party; the fight, as it stands; is a very pretty one - on paper, and from the relations previously subsisting between the parties, it may be considered a family quarrel, and therefore not open to volunteers. Captain Carleton, however, appears to be one of the brotherhood, and, with a proper respect for discipline and subordination, takes up the championship of the senior officer. But the General, though grateful for his evidence, it is of opinion that "no great credit was due on account of the selection", in which we entirely concur, though he adds, if great credit is due to any one it belongs to himself, in which we do not concur at all. We have now before us the private journal of a member of General Wool's command, and in relation to this same battle-ground, we find, as early as December, 1846, the following observations:

"The position is one of great strength, and many officers, struck with its capabilities for defence, have pronounced it the spot for a battle, should the enemy attack us with large odds. Indeed, almost any one must perceive at once its importance, if there be any way of turning it on the east, which, from the road seems impracticable."

In view of these facts, we consider the claims of the general or the captain, to the discovery, to be just as good as, perhaps, fifty others, and no better. The honor is certainly one which Falstaff would have considered a very "trim reckoning" and one which might have belonged to "him that died o' Wednesday", with out exciting any extraordinary degree of envy among the survivors. But the folly of these posthumous pretensions is too transparent for serious examination; for of what value was General Wool's opinion, or Captain Hughes's, or even that of the entire army, without the approval of Zachary Taylor?

At an early hour in the morning of the 22d of February, the Mexican advance, composed of four light battalions, under General Ampudia, was discovered by the American pickets. Intelligence was at once conveyed to General Taylor, who was at his camp, on the hill overlooking Saltillo from the south, where, for the purpose of making arrangements for the defence of the city, he had repaired on the preceding day. He immediately moved forward and joined the forces at Buena Vista, at ten o'clock in the morning.

The time and the place, the hour and the man, seemed to promise a glorious celebration of the day. It was the 22d of February, the anniversary of that day on which the God of battles gave to freedom its noblest champion; to patriotism, its purest model; to America, a preserver, and to the world, the nearest realization of human perfection; but panegyric sinks before the name of WASHINGTON. The morning was bright and beautiful. Not a cloud floated athwart the firmament, or dimmed the azure of the sky, and a flood of golden radiance gilded the mountain tops and poured over the valleys, throwing light and shade into a thousand fantastic forms, and exhilarating every heart with the certainty of triumph. A soft breeze swept down from the mountains, rolling into graceful folds the banner of the republic, which was proudly streaming from the flag-staff of the Saltillo redoubt, and from the windows, towers and battlements of the city, in honor of the day.

In the choice of his position, General Taylor, and not General Wool, nor Captain Hughes, nor Corporal Trim, as we have shown, exhibited the same unerring judgment, by which every act of his life has been distinguished. Every faculty, being quickened by the extremity of the peril, lie here seems to have surpassed even the comprehensive sagacity and masterly *coup d'oeil* which characterized his dispositions at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and which crowned triumphantly all his operations, amid the blazing lines of Monterey. The mountains rise on either side of an irregular and broken valley, about two miles wide, traversed by a series of rugged ridges, and scarred with broad, deep and winding ravines. The main road between Encantada and Buena Vista follows the course of a little rivulet, the bed of which is so deep as to form an impassable barrier from the south, to cavalry, artillery and infantry ; while the other side is bounded by precipitous elevations, stretching perpendicularly towards the mountains, and separated by deep gullies, until they unite at the base of the range of which they are spurs. One of these ridges forms a plateau of nearly three hundred yards wide, and about a thousand yards long, which was the scene of the principal operations.

The place was not unworthy the approaching conflict. Nature was there in her grandeur and her power, and far as the eye could reach, the peaks of the Sierra Madre were towering to the skies. If Napoleon could excite enthusiasm from the antiquity of the pyramids, in that burst of sublime eloquence which of itself would render his name and memory immortal, the members of both armies might have here drawn inspiration from a higher source. They were in the presence of the pre Adamites. Around them were monuments of creation, which had risen when the "morning stars first sang together", and which will crumble into decay only, when "the sun shall slumber in the cloud, forgetful of the voice of the morning." While the American troops were taking their positions, the Mexicans were rapidly advancing. Column after column arrived in view; their immense masses rolling up clouds of dust before them, which hung like a canopy above the road, far beyond Encantada. The presence of the Mexican general-in-chief was first announced by a white flag, which was seen dimly fluttering in the distance, the emblem of peace being appropriately borne by a disciple of the healing art. The messenger was halted by the advance picket, to whom he delivered the following summons from General Santa Anna to General Taylor to surrender:

Camp at Encantada, Feb. 22d, 1847. You are surrounded by twenty thousand men, and cannot in any human probability avoid suffering a rout, and being cut to pieces with your troops; but as you deserve consideration and particular esteem, I wish to save you from a catastrophe, and for that purpose give you this notice, in order that you may surrender at discretion, under the assurance that you will be treated with the consideration belonging to the Mexican character; to which end you will be granted an hour's time to make up your mind, to commence from the moment when my flag of truce arrives in your camp. With this view, I assure you of my particular consideration. God and Liberty.

ANTONIO LOPEZ DR SANTA ANNA.

To General Z. Taylor, commanding the forces of the U. S.

To this elegant emblem of benevolent bravado, and characteristic "consideration", deemed by the Mexican General a fit accompaniment to the emblem of peace, General Taylor, from his

saddle, dictated the following reply, which in comprehensive brevity, has no parallel in military history, unless in the "*Veni, vidi, vici*," of Julius Caesar.

Headquarters Army of Occupation, near Buena Vista, Feb. 22d, 1847.

Sir: In reply to your note of this date, summoning me to surrender my forces at discretion, I beg leave to say that I decline acceding to your request.

With high respect, I am, sir,
Your obedient servant,
Z. TAYLOR

Maj. Gen. U. S. Army, commanding.
Senor General D. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, Commander-in-chief, La Encaniada.

During this epistolary episode, the Mexican troops had arrived on the ground, and General Santa Anna was completing his dispositions. His infantry was formed in two divisions, under Generals Lombardini and Pacheco. A battery of three sixteen-pounders was established on his left, supported by a regiment of engineers, under Colonel Blanco, while two batteries of eight and twelve-pounders of five guns each, were planted near his right, so as to sweep obliquely the American line. The cavalry, commanded by General Juvera, occupied the rear of the batteries, near the main body of which, on his extreme right, was also posted a regiment of hussars, under Colonel Andrele. By an oversight in the posting of the American troops in the morning, a duty which had been performed by General Wool, before General Taylor's arrival, a height on the left and a little in front of the American line, was not occupied, and the first act of the Mexican commander, seeing the importance of the point in turning his enemy, was to order General Ampudia, with his light battalions, to take possession of it, and hold it at all hazards.

The array on both sides was now complete. The opposing hosts only awaited the signals from their leaders, to let slip the dogs of war. But, for the first time in his Mexican campaign, General Taylor was acting on the defensive, and General Santa Anna was evidently unwilling to commence the action. His troops had just performed a march of more than forty miles, were of course much fatigued, and requited rest. Hours rolled by, without any decisive movement, after the response to the summons to surrender, which, it was thought, would at once introduce the roar of the enemy's artillery. During this pause upon the verge of battle, there was deep sensation within the American lines; each man seemed to feel that the hour for which he had marched so far, and toiled so long, had arrived; enthusiasm was tempered by a just sense of the immense issue involved in the struggle a great victory or an overwhelming defeat, and the stern silence was broken only by the shouts which ever and anon rose from the volunteers, as some change of position occurred among the Mexican troops. At length a flash is seen, a report is heard, and a shell explodes not far from the American centre. Several discharges from a seven inch howitzer followed at irregular intervals, but did no execution.

It was now nearly sunset. The Mexican bugles were heard sounding the retreat., and General Taylor, attended by his staff, rode up the broad platform, from which could then be seen the

entire Mexican army. Seldom has the eye rested upon a more imposing or thrilling picture. The serried hosts were all in position. The parting rays of the sun were glancing from the bayonets of thirteen thousand infantry, and the lances of five thousand cavalry; their crimson pennons were fluttering gaily in the breeze, and their blazing standards waving proudly over the magnificent array. Steeds richly caparisoned were moving from one point to another, while the towering plumes and gorgeous uniforms of their riders seemed sporting in mockery with the sunbeams. The twilight falls softly upon their glittering hosts, as the angel of death hovers above both armies, a sentinel for the night, from whose ruthless quiver the shafts of carnage are to fly tomorrow.

Ere the last note of the evening music has died away among the western hills, a sterner echo is startled from an opposite quarter. The Mexican light troops have gained a favorable position upon the heights on their right, and have commenced a rapid fire upon the American flank, composed of several companies of Arkansas and Kentucky cavalry, dismounted, and a battalion of riflemen from the 2d Indiana regiment, under Major Gorman, the whole commanded by Colonel Marshall. This fire was promptly and steadily returned. The Mexicans continued to advance up the mountain with the evident determination, not only to preserve the advantage of their plunging fire, but to gain the American flank; while their persevering enemy kept climbing with them, under cover of a nearly parallel ridge, until both parties had attained such an eminence, that flash followed flash like shooting stars, and the mountain seemed to belch forth fire and smoke, as if suddenly converted into a blazing volcano. This skirmishing continued until some time after dark, with no loss to the Americans, save four wounded, while the effect upon the Mexicans, though not precisely stated in General Santa Annas report, was probably more severe. They remained in possession of the heights.

Convinced that no serious attack would be made until the next day, General Taylor, with a squadron of the 2d dragoons, and the Mississippi regiment, returned to his camp near Saltillo. Both armies bivouacked for the night without fires, and slept upon their arms. A prisoner was taken during the night, but could impart no information, save as to the strength of the Mexican force. At an early hour on the morning of the 23d, the fire from the enemy's right was renewed, and soon after followed by repeated discharges of artillery from the same quarter, a battery of eight-pounders having been removed during the night to a point which commanded the entire plateau. The riflemen under Colonel Marshall were reinforced by three companies of the 2d Illinois regiment, under Major Trail, and returned the fire with spirit, gallantly maintaining their ground against a greatly superior force, and using their weapons with decisive effect. At the same time the advance of a body of Mexican infantry towards the head of a ravine, near which the Americans were posted was checked by a few shells from a twelve-pound howitzer, under Lieut. O'Brien, 4th artillery.

It was now eight o'clock, and the hour for the ground attack had arrived. The divisions of Generals Lombardini and Pacheco, numbering seven thousand men, advanced by columns on the American centre; Generals Mora y Villamil and Ampudia led a column of attack on the right, while General Juvera, at the head of three thousand lancers, was to turn the left flank of the Americans, by a rapid movement, under cover of the artillery, and the first and second divisions of infantry. In a few minutes the attack became general. Along the entire line, the battle raged

with variable intensity, while less than five thousand Americans found themselves arrayed against fifteen thousand of the victims of Mexican oppression, and the myrmidons of Mexican despotism. The lancers dashed forward in unbroken order, and with reckless impetuosity, their banners streaming gaily in the wind, and their plumes waving proud defiance to every foe. The base of the mountain, around which they were winding their way, seemed literally girdled with glittering steel, as their bright lances and polished sabres flashed back the beams of the morning sun. The 2d Indiana regiment, under Colonel Bowles, occupied a position to the left of the American centre, between which and the 2d Illinois regiment, commanded by Colonel Bissell, Lieuts. O'Brien and Bryan, the latter of the topographical engineers, were posted with three pieces of artillery from Washington's battery. Upon these the Mexican columns of infantry, under cover of their artillery, directed their march, and when within two hundred and fifty yards, opened, while still advancing, a most galling and terrific fire. The American troops were kneeling while awaiting this attack, and kept this position until the Mexicans came within fair point-blank range. The fire was then returned by both armies with deadly effect; the discharge of almost every musket was the summons of a destroying angel, and the artillery poured into the enemy's ranks showers of case shot, canisters and shells, which were attended with frightful slaughter. Still the enemy moved steadily on, the deep chasms in his ranks being filled up as rapidly as they were created, by the thousands in their rear. There seemed no power in lead or iron to arrest the progress of that mighty host. The 2d Indiana regiment, after gallantly sustaining itself for a time, gave way, under the ill-timed orders of Colonel Bowles, before the fierce and onward fire of the now victorious columns. O'Brien, thus deprived of support, was forced to fall back, leaving one gun on the ground *, of which the horses and cannoneers were all killed or disabled; and the 2d Illinois regiment was also compelled to retire, which it did in good order, before the overwhelming masses which had thus borne down all opposition. A few minutes more and the battle must have been hopelessly lost. The fate of the day trembled as it were upon a moment, but in that moment General Taylor arrived upon the field. The revulsion of feeling was electrical, and hope and confidence succeeded to despair. McKee's Kentuckians and Harden's Illinois battalion were at once ordered to join the intrepid Bissell, whose gallant regiment cheerfully responded to this support. The line was instantly re-formed, and with Sherman's and Bragg's artillery, now in battery on the plateau, opened once more the American fire. The thunders of the artillery, and the quick and startling volleys of the infantry, swept like the besom of destruction over the advancing legions. The Mexican columns wavered before the storm of balls which hurtled around them. The Americans seized the moment for an appeal to the bayonet. The Mexicans faltered, hesitated, and sullenly retired, with great slaughter, before a charge that seemed as irresistible as the decrees of destiny. The lost ground was regained, while the enemy, amid increasing carnage, and with the loss of two standards, taken by the Illinois regiments, sought safety and shelter in the ravines, into which they were driven. With the retreat of the Indiana regiment.. a portion of which was subsequently rallied in the most gallant manner, by Major Dix, serving on the staff of General Taylor, the American light troops retired before large masses of cavalry and infantry, which then poured down from the mountains. Many of these fugitives were not rallied until they arrived at the hacienda of Buena Vista, and a portion took no further part in the action.

The assaulting column on the right was successfully repulsed by Washington's artillery, and Lt. Col. Weatherford's battalion of Illinois volunteers. Horse and foot were mowed down before the

destructive fire which was opened upon them; while the battery of sixteen-pounders, which the Mexicans had established to cover the column of attack, and silence the American fire from this quarter, though served with great industry, did no execution.

The Mexicans having turned the American left, myriads of lancers, followed by a large body of infantry, were fast gaining the rear. The Mississippi riflemen, under Colonel Davis, had been posted near the base of the mountain, so as to form a crotchet perpendicular to the main line of battle; and the enemy, animated by the unfortunate retreat which they had just witnessed, pressed forward with a zeal that threatened to bear to the earth the little band that must alone stay their progress. The 3d Indiana regiment, under Colonel Lane, had been ordered forward to its support, but had not yet arrived; Colonel Davis was, therefore, compelled to receive the attack with his single regiment. It was composed of the men of Monterey, and, unawed by the overwhelming masses which had now reached a critical proximity, it marched unfalteringly forward. When within good range, each rifle sent forth its messenger of death, with certain execution. The sight of broken companies and disordered squadrons which followed, seemed to impart new zeal, and regard less of the odds, the regiment crossed a ravine, by which they were separated from the enemy, with a shout of defiance and of triumph, and again the report of their unerring rifles proved the death-knell of many an Aztec warrior. The Mexicans were thrown into disorder, and compelled to retire to the mountains before a reorganization could be effected.

While the dispersed cavalry of the Mexicans were rallying, Col. Davis was joined by the 3d Indiana regiment, and one piece of artillery under Lieut. Kilburn, and a short time subsequently by Capt. Sherman with a twelve pound howitzer. The action being renewed was maintained with great warmth and obstinacy at this point, the enemy making several efforts to force the line, and being as often repulsed with considerable loss. The confidence of the Mexicans was indeed of short duration. The panic was now re-acting and their shouts of triumph at the Indiana retreat, were followed by shrieks of terror and dismay. The concentration of a hot fire of artillery, upon their immense masses along the base of the mountain, and the determined resistance offered by the two regiments of foot, had been productive of fearful havoc, and had created such confusion in their ranks, that many of the two corps attempted to retreat upon their main body. To oppose this movement, Lieut. Rucker, with a squadron of the 1st dragoons, was ordered up a deep ravine, across which the retreating troops were endeavoring to make their way. The order was promptly obeyed, but owing to the brokenness of the ground, could not accomplish the object, and a large portion of the enemy secured their retreat. In the mean time several bodies of lancers were concentrating somewhat to the rear of the American left, with the apparent design of making a descent upon the hacienda of Buena Vista, in the vicinity of which the provision and baggage trains were deposited. Two pieces of artillery from Sherman's battery had previously been ordered thither, under Lieut. Reynolds, supported by regular dragoons and a squadron of Arkansas cavalry, under the warrior poet, Captain Pike. The scattered forces about the hacienda, the accumulation of fugitives from different parts of the field, were soon partially organized under the direction of Major Monroe, of the artillery, assisted by Major Morrison of the volunteer staff, and were posted to defend the position. Before the dragoons and artillery reached the hacienda, the columns of lancers, advancing at a gallop, were met near the Saltillo road, by the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry under Marshall and Yell, who, after discharging their carbines with but

little effect, succeeded in dividing the Mexican columns, one portion of which was driven back to its previous position. The advancing squadrons swept through the hacienda, where the fugitive Americans, from a secure retreat, opened a well-directed and effective fire upon them, while Reynolds artillery followed fast upon their precipitate course, with a fierce discharge of shot and shells, drove them across the entire valley, and forced them up a steep ascent through a gorge in the opposite range of mountains.

Notwithstanding these repeated repulses, those of the Mexicans who had been driven back from the hacienda, were soon joined by another body of cavalry, and thus reinforced, again advanced, with a view to engage the Indiana and Mississippi troops, which now held a position nearly midway between the base of the mountains and the hacienda. As one regiment was armed with rifles, the formation of a square would have afforded no strength ; the two corps were therefore posted so as to form a re-entering angle, the opening towards the enemy, and the vertex resting upon the edge of a deep ravine, and thus awaited the attack. For awhile on came the enemy, with lances in rest, dashing ahead with a haughty confidence and proud contempt for the insignificant numbers opposed to them. But as the distance diminished, their progress gradually became slower and slower, until by a strange fatality, the whole body halted within a hundred yards of the Americans. The movement seemed a mockery, and had they borne charmed lives, they could not have exhibited more indifference to human power. But that halt sealed their destiny. Both lines had followed Warren's instructions at Bunker Hill, and "the whites of the eyes" being now "fairly visible", the arms were levelled, and then gleamed forth a sheet of fire that scattered the foe like chaff, felling many a gallant steed to the earth, and sending scores of riders to the sleep that knows no waking.

The discomfited lancers once more sought safety in the mountains, and having regained their position on the, American left there was yet a formidable body of the enemy in that quarter, towards which the dragoons, and a portion of the Arkansas and Indiana troops under Roane and Gorman, were directed to hold them in check. Their masses were crowded in the narrow gorges and ravines, their own weapons were powerless from position; and upon them the infantry reopened a brisk fire, while Sherman, Reynolds and Kilburn, from their artillery, beautifully served, hailed the case-shot and canister with terrible execution.

At this time the entire Mexican force, which had gained the rear of the Americans, was in a critical position. The infantry held it on the left, while the artillery in front was making fearful carnage at every discharge. It was impossible to advance, and a junction with the main body seemed hopeless. In this dire dilemma, the treacherous cunning of his race came to the rescue of the Mexican commander. Four officers from a distant point were suddenly observed galloping at full speed towards the American lines. They were met by several officers of the Kentucky and Illinois regiments, which then occupied an advance position on the plateau, and one of them was conducted by Lieut. Col. Clay to the presence of General Taylor. It then appeared that he bore a verbal interrogatory from General Santa Anna, "to know what General Taylor wanted". This absurd message was at once believed to be a mere *ruse*, but under the sanctity of a white flag, the American commander was not at liberty to regard it as an act of bad faith, and dispatched General Wool to meet the Mexican General-in-Chief, at the same moment transmitting orders to

cease firing. Before General Wool reached the Mexican lines, however, they had re-commenced their fire, thereby at once exposing the dishonorable stratagem resorted to and avowing the shameless perfidy which had been thus successfully consummated. The flag of peace, prostituted to the purposes of treachery, had accomplished the ends which its wily originator designed; the cessation of the American fire had enabled the extreme right of the enemy to complete its retreat along the base of the mountain, and effect a re-union with the main body of the Mexican army.

The junction of the enemy's forces was effected near the position which the 2d Indiana regiment had occupied in the morning, and elated with the achievement, a portion of them made an effort again to advance. They were met by a blazing fire from the sections of artillery under O'Brien and Thomas, from which they recoiled with precipitation, and returned to the shelter of the hills and ravines. Encouraged by this repulse, Colonel Hardin determined to charge the Mexican battery near the base of the mountain, which; at various intervals during the day, had given serious annoyance to the troops on the plateau. He advanced at the head of his battalion, with spirit and enthusiasm, but before attaining his object, was arrested by a force, whose existence seemed a miracle.

The craft of General Santa Anna had restored his courage, and the time gained by his strategic negotiation had enabled him to recover a large body of his troops, and to make his dispositions, for what he calls his "final effort". A battery of twenty-four pounder guns, was mounted and posted so as to command a new advance. The column which had attacked the American right, early in the day, led by General Mora y Villamil of the Engineers, was transferred to the other flank, and these joined the reserves under General Perez, and the first, second and third divisions, under Generals Ortega, Guzman and Pacheco, which were stationed at the head of, and covered by a broad and deep ravine. The whole were commanded by General Perez, General Lombardini having been wounded early in the action. It was the last desperate struggle of a desperate man, and made with corresponding energy. And as if to give a still more imposing effect to the crowning effort of a mighty conflict, the lightnings flashed and quivered from clouds that appeared suddenly in the heavens; and the quick, deep, heavy toned thunders, reverberated with startling distinctness, over valley, plain and mountain, simultaneously with the first volley of heavy artillery, under cover of which the four divisions advanced to the charge. The small band under Hardin was met by a rampart of bayonets, and hurled back as the spray is dashed from the billow. The regiments of Bissell and McKee rushed to the rescue, but could as easily have arrested the lightning flashes about them, as overcome the mighty phalanx which bore down all before it. Manfully they breasted the moving myriads of steel and iron, which were rained upon them from ten thousand sources, but in vain, they only gave themselves up to immolation, victims to the overwhelming legions of the enemy. The carnage on both sides was terrible, wrought by a fire of musketry in which the balls flew faster than the hail-stones were falling around them. The progress of the Mexicans was like an avalanche and the Americans were driven down the ravines, along which there was a destructive fire of infantry, while the lancers were towards the lower end, to close the only avenue of escape. Their position was that of a scorpion girt with fire ; yet as they reached the end of the ravine, the charge of the cavalry was arrested by Washington's artillery, a few rapid and well directed volleys from which, saved from entire destruction the remnants of those brave regiments, which had so long borne the hottest of the fight. But in the

mean time the column were advancing on the plateau, with the majestic march of triumph. The American infantry had gone down before them; nearly every horse with O'Brien's pieces was killed; he had maintained his position with unrivaled heroism, and abandoned his guns only when the Mexicans had gained the muzzles. Victory, which but a few moments before had seemed within the grasp of the Americans, was torn as if by magic from their standard. The enemy had gained almost the extreme point of the plateau, the last citadel of hope, for there the American General yet held his position, not less a tower of strength to his friends, than of terror to his enemies. His eagle eye saw the extremity of the crisis, and his mighty will determined to avert it.

"High and inscrutable the old man stood, Calm in his voice, and calm within his eye"

though at that moment the result of the battle, the fate of the campaign, the life of every American from Buena Vista to the Rio Grande, depended on Zachary Taylor. How his lofty spirit amid the awful peril of the occasion bore it all nobly up, has already passed into history. The artillery under Thomas was already in position; that of Bragg arrived on the instant, yet both were without support, and the fate of O'Brien's guns seemed inevitably to be theirs. We have said both were without support, but we were in error. It is true there was then neither cavalry nor infantry on which to rely, but there was that which was superior to both; it was the moral power of the presence of the Commanding General, and thus panoplied, those heroes of Monterey rose with the occasion, and eclipsed even the fame they had previously rendered immortal. They opened at once a fire of canister upon the advancing hosts, while the remainder of Sherman's battery, just arrived, came immediately into action. The ponderous and triumphant columns reeled and quivered like a reed shaken with the wind, and before the showers of iron hail which now assailed them, squadrons and battalions fell like leaves in the storms of autumn. The cannonade on both sides was terrific, while the fire of the infantry seemed to be one continuous discharge. But the Mexicans in vain rushed on to fill the places of their fallen comrades. Their ranks became broken, order could not be restored, and they slowly and sullenly retired, pursued by the fire of the artillery and of the Mississippi and Indiana regiments, which arrived in time to participate in the glory of the last desperate repulse. The battle had now raged, with the exception of a few brief intervals, for nearly ten hours, and by a sort of mutual consent, both parties appeared willing to pause upon the result. Night fell, and the American General having brought up his fresh troops from Saltillo, slept with his men upon the battle ground, prepared, if necessary, to renew the conflict on the morrow. But ere the sun, which on this continent has shone on few so ghastly, rose again upon the field, the Mexican army had disappeared, leaving behind them hundreds of dead and dying whose bones are to whiten their native hills, and thousands of the wounded, whose moans of anguish were to excite in the bosoms of their enemies that sympathy and compassion which seem to have no place in the heart of the Mexican commander.

We have thus briefly, and we believe faithfully, sketched the leading incidents of the battle of Buena Vista, and the prominent position of the Commanding General has been at all times obvious. We have seen that the battle was in effect lost under General Wool though that gallant officer rivalled in his efforts the youthful valor that shone at Qucenston and Plattsburg when General Taylor arrived upon the field. His presence at once restored the confidence which had

been lost, and by his rapid dispositions he was enabled to recover the advantages which the enemy had gained. Throughout the day, wherever he moved, doubt and dismay gave way before him. By a sort of magnetic influence, he seemed to impart to every one to whom he was visible the same indomitable spirit and determined energy which animated his own breast. His name was the watchword, his voice the signal note, and his presence the certainty of triumph. When for a moment he left, the plateau to appeal to those who were flying or had fled from the field, to return to their colors and to duty, we are credibly informed that he was followed by General Wool to hasten his return, that he might be seen by those who were then contending against the unequal odds opposed to them. And in the darkest hour of that sanguinary day, when the star of hope had almost set in a sea of blood, General Taylor was alone the rallying point, of a handful, and in his trumpet tones to Bragg almost giving to the result

“The stamp of fate, the sanction of a god.”

Thus at two distinct periods, the American General alone turned the fate of the day, and saved our forces from total destruction. But when the last gun had been fired, and the shadows of night had fallen alike upon the living and the dead, the battle had not yet been won. There is little doubt, and with some there is none at all, that if General Taylor had fallen by that last gun, the sun would have risen upon the two armies flying from each other as fast as their disabled condition would have permitted them. Where then would have been the victory? How soon would the Mexican General have been advised of the fact, retraced his steps, recruited his starving legions with our abundant supplies at Saltillo, and falling upon the retreating Americans with the fury and malignity of a vindictive foe, strong in numbers and smarting under repeated defeats, given up the whole to indiscriminate slaughter! From this frightful catastrophe, General Taylor, under Providence, was the instrument of saving thousands of our countrymen; and by his conduct on the 22d and 23d of February, he has not only associated his name forever with him, who was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of the people”, but has acquired for himself the second place on the records of immortality, of that country which Washington saved.

I. The Battle of Buena Vista, with the operations of the Army of Occupation, for one month, By James Henry Carleton, Captain in the first regiment of Dragoons. New York: Harper and

II. Documents accompanying the Presidents Message, First Session Thirtieth Congress. Washington, 1847.

* This gun merits a passing remark. It was taken from the Mexicans near San Antonio do Bexar, on the 28th of October, 1835, by the unfortunate Colouel Fannin; attached to Washington's battery, in 1846; recovered by its original owners in 1847, but does appear among those recaptured by the lamented Drum at Churubusco. Correspondence of the St. Louis Republican.