

teers,) and the 2d Kentucky, under Colonel McKee, occupied the crests of the ridges on the left and in rear. The Arkansas and Kentucky regiments of cavalry, commanded by Colonels Yell and H. Marshall, occupied the extreme left near the base of the mountain, while the Indiana brigade, under Brigadier-General Lane, (composed of the 2d and 3d regiments, under Colonels Bowles and Lane,) the Mississippi riflemen, under Colonel Davis, the squadrons of the 1st and 2d dragoons, under Captain Steen and Lieutenant-Colonel May, and the light batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg, 3d artillery, were held in reserve.

At eleven o'clock, a summons to surrender at discretion was received from General Santa Anna, which was declined. The enemy still forebore his attack, evidently waiting for the arrival of his rear columns, which could be distinctly seen by our look-outs as they approached the field. A demonstration made on his left caused me to detach the 2d Kentucky regiment and a section of our artillery to our right, in which position they bivouacked for the night. In the mean time the Mexican light troops had engaged ours on the extreme left, (composed of parts of the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry dismounted, and a rifle battalion from the Indiana brigade, under Major Gorman, the whole commanded by Colonel Marshall,) and kept up a sharp fire, climbing the mountain side, and apparently endeavouring to gain our flank. Three pieces of Captain Washington's battery had been detached to the left, and were supported by the 2d Indiana regiment. An occasional shell was thrown by the enemy into this part of our line, but without effect. The skirmishing of the light troops was kept up



Battle of Buena Vista.

with trifling loss on our part until dark, when I became convinced that no serious attack would be made before morning, and returned, with the Mississippi regiment and squadron of 2d dragoons, to Saltillo. The troops bivouacked without fires, and lay upon their arms. A body of cavalry, some fifteen hundred strong, had been visible all day in rear of the town, having entered the valley through a narrow pass east of the city. This cavalry, commanded by General Minon, had evidently been thrown in our rear to break up and harass our retreat, and perhaps make some attempt against the town if practicable. The city was occupied by four excellent companies of Illinois volunteers, under Major Warren, of the 1st regiment. A field-work, which commanded most of the approaches, was garrisoned by Captain Webster's company, 1st artillery, and armed with two twenty-four-pound howitzers, while the train and head-quarter camp was guarded by two companies of Mississippi riflemen, under Captain Rogers, and a field-piece commanded by Captain Shover, 3d artillery. Having made these dispositions for the protection of the rear, I proceeded on the morning of the 23d to Buena Vista, ordering forward all the other available troops. The action had commenced before my arrival on the field.

During the evening and night of the 22d, the enemy had thrown a body of light troops on the mountain side, with the purpose of outflanking our left; and it was here that the action of the 23d commenced at an early hour. Our riflemen, under Colonel Marshall, who had been reinforced by three companies under Major Trail, 2d Illinois volunteers, maintained their ground hand-

somely against a greatly superior force, holding themselves under cover, and using their weapons with deadly effect. About eight o'clock, a strong demonstration was made against the centre of our position, a heavy column moving along the road. This force was soon dispersed by a few rapid and well-directed shots from Captain Washington's battery. In the mean time the enemy was concentrating a large force of infantry and cavalry under cover of the ridges, with the obvious intention of forcing our left, which was posted on an extensive plateau. The 2d Indiana and 2d Illinois regiments formed this part of our line, the former covering three pieces of light artillery, under the orders of Captain O'Brien—Brigadier-General Lane being in the immediate command. In order to bring his men within effective range, General Lane ordered the artillery and 2d Indiana regiment forward. The artillery advanced within musket range of a heavy body of Mexican infantry, and was served against it with great effect, but without being able to check its advance. The infantry ordered to its support had fallen back in disorder, being exposed, as well as the battery, not only to a severe fire of small-arms from the front, but also to a murderous cross-fire of grape and canister from a Mexican battery on the left. Captain O'Brien found it impossible to retain his position without support, but was only able to withdraw two of his pieces, all the horses and cannoneers of the third piece being killed or disabled. The 2d Indiana regiment, which had fallen back as stated, could not be rallied, and took no farther part in the action, except a handful of men, who, under its gallant colonel, Bowles, joined the Mississippi regiment,

and did good service, and those fugitives who, at a later period in the day, assisted in defending the train and depot at Buena Vista. This portion of our line having given way, and the enemy appearing in overwhelming force against our left flank, the light troops which had rendered such good service on the mountain were compelled to withdraw, which they did, for the most part, in good order. Many, however, were not rallied until they reached the depot at Buena Vista, to the defense of which they afterward contributed.

Colonel Bissel's regiment, (2d Illinois,) which had been joined by a section of Captain Sherman's battery, had become completely outflanked, and was compelled to fall back, being entirely unsupported. The enemy was now pouring masses of infantry and cavalry along the base of the mountain on our left, and was gaining our rear in great force. At this moment I arrived upon the field. The Mississippi regiment had been directed to the left before reaching the position, and immediately came into action against the Mexican infantry which had turned our flank. The 2d Kentucky regiment and a section of artillery under Captain Bragg, had previously been ordered from the right to reinforce our left, and arrived at a most opportune moment. That regiment, and a portion of the 1st Illinois, under Colonel Hardin, gallantly drove the enemy, and recovered a portion of the ground we had lost. The batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg were in position on the plateau, and did much execution, not only in front, but particularly upon the masses which had gained our rear. Discovering that the enemy was heavily pressing upon the Mississippi regiment, the 3d Indiana regiment, under

Colonel Lane, was despatched to strengthen that part of our line, which formed a crotchet perpendicular to the first line of battle. At the same time Lieutenant Kilburn, with a piece of Captain Bragg's battery, was directed to support the infantry there engaged. The action was for a long time warmly sustained at that point—the enemy making several efforts both with infantry and cavalry against our line, and being always repulsed with heavy loss. I had placed all the regular cavalry and Captain Pike's squadron of Arkansas horse under the orders of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel May, with directions to hold in check the enemy's column, still advancing to the rear along the base of the mountain, which was done in conjunction with the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry under Colonels Marshall and Yell.

In the mean time our left, which was still strongly threatened by a superior force, was farther strengthened by the detachment of Captain Bragg's and a portion of Captain Sherman's batteries to that quarter. The concentration of artillery fire upon the masses of the enemy along the base of the mountain, and the determined resistance offered by the two regiments opposed to them, had created confusion in their ranks, and some of the corps attempted to effect a retreat upon their main line of battle. The squadron of the 1st dragoons, under Lieutenant Rucker, was now ordered up the deep ravine which these retreating corps were endeavouring to cross, in order to charge and disperse them. The squadron proceeded to the point indicated, but could not accomplish the object, being exposed to a heavy fire from a battery established to cover the retreat of those corps. While the squadron was detached on this service, a

large body of the enemy was observed to concentrate on our extreme left, apparently with the view of making a descent upon the hacienda of Buena Vista, where our train and baggage were deposited. Lieutenant-Colonel May was ordered to the support of that point, with two pieces of Captain Sherman's battery under Lieutenant Reynolds. In the mean time, the scattered forces near the hacienda, composed in part of Majors Trail and Gorman's commands, had been to some extent organized under the advice of Major Munroe, chief of artillery, with the assistance of Major Morrison, volunteer staff, and were posted to defend the position. Before our cavalry had reached the hacienda, that of the enemy had made its attack; having been handsomely met by the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry under Colonels Marshall and Yell. The Mexican column immediately divided, one portion sweeping by the depot, where it received a destructive fire from the force which had collected there, and then gaining the mountain opposite, under a fire from Lieutenant Reynolds' section, the remaining portion regaining the base of the mountain on our left. In the charge at Buena Vista, Colonel Yell fell gallantly at the head of his regiment; we also lost Adjutant Vaughan, of the Kentucky cavalry—a young officer of much promise. Lieutenant-Colonel May, who had been rejoined by the squadron of the 1st dragoons and by portions of the Arkansas and Indiana troops, under Lieutenant-Colonel Roane and Major Gorman, now approached the base of the mountain, holding in check the right flank of the enemy, upon whose masses, crowded in the narrow gorges and ravines, our artillery was doing fearful execution.

The position of that portion of the Mexican army which had gained our rear was now very critical, and it seemed doubtful whether it could regain the main body. At this moment I received from General Santa Anna a message by a staff officer, desiring to know what I wanted. I immediately despatched Brigadier-General Wool to the Mexican general-in-chief, and sent orders to cease firing. Upon reaching the Mexican lines, General Wool could not cause the enemy to cease their fire, and accordingly returned without having an interview. The extreme right of the enemy continued its retreat along the base of the mountain, and finally, in spite of all our efforts, effected a junction with the remainder of the army.

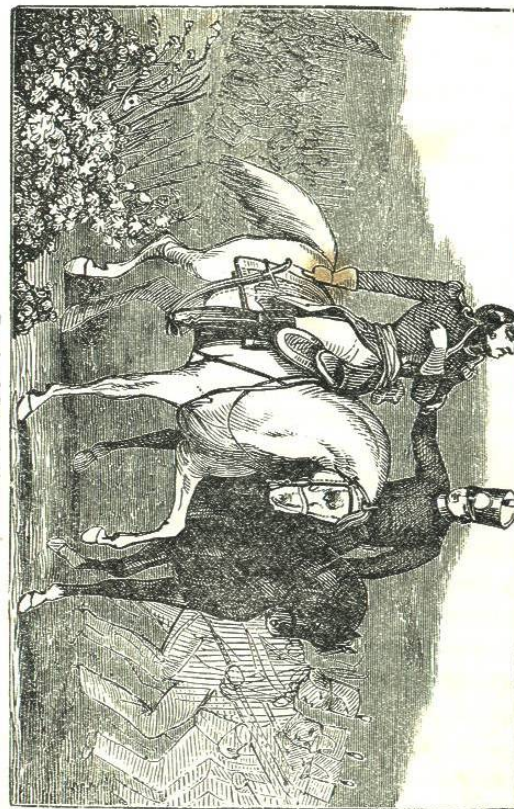
During the day, the cavalry of General Minon had ascended the elevated plain above Saltillo, and occupied the road from the city to the field of battle, where they intercepted several of our men. Approaching the town, they were fired upon by Captain Webster from the redoubt occupied by his company, and then moved off towards the eastern side of the valley, and obliquely towards Buena Vista. At this time, Captain Shover moved rapidly forward with his piece, supported by a miscellaneous command of mounted volunteers, and fired several shots at the cavalry with great effect. They were driven into the ravines which lead to the lower valley, closely pursued by Captain Shover, who was farther supported by a piece of Captain Webster's battery, under Lieutenant Donaldson, which had advanced from the redoubt, supported by Captain Wheeler's company of Illinois volunteers. The enemy made one or two efforts to charge the artillery, but was finally driven

back in a confused mass, and did not again appear upon the plain.

In the mean time, the firing had partially ceased upon the principal field. The enemy seemed to confine his efforts to the protection of his artillery, and I had left the plateau for a moment, when I was recalled thither by a very heavy musketry fire. On regaining that position, I discovered that our infantry (Illinois and 2d Kentucky) had engaged a greatly superior force of the enemy—evidently his reserve—and that they had been overwhelmed by numbers. The moment was most critical. Captain O'Brien, with two pieces, had sustained this heavy charge to the last, and was finally obliged to leave his guns on the field—his infantry support being entirely routed. Captain Bragg, who had just arrived from the left, was ordered at once into battery. Without any infantry to support him, and at the imminent risk of losing his guns, this officer came rapidly into action, the Mexican line being but a few yards from the muzzle of his pieces. The first discharge of canister caused the enemy to hesitate, and the second and third drove him back in disorder, and saved the day. The 2d Kentucky regiment, which had advanced beyond supporting distance in this affair, was driven back and closely pressed by the enemy's cavalry. Taking a ravine which led in the direction of Captain Washington's battery, their pursuers became exposed to his fire, which soon checked and drove them back with loss. In the mean time the rest of our artillery had taken position on the plateau, covered by the Mississippi and 3d Indiana regiments, the former of which had reached the ground in time to pour a fire into the

right flank of the enemy, and thus contribute to his repulse. In this last conflict we had the misfortune to sustain a very heavy loss. Colonel Hardin, 1st Illinois, and Colonel McKee and Lieutenant-Colonel Clay, 2d Kentucky regiment, fell at this time while gallantly leading their commands.

No farther attempt was made by the enemy to force our position, and the approach of night gave an opportunity to pay proper attention to the wounded, and also to refresh the soldiers, who had been exhausted by incessant watchfulness and combat. Though the night was severely cold, the troops were compelled for the most to bivouac without fires, expecting that morning would renew the conflict. During the night the wounded were removed to Saltillo, and every preparation made to receive the enemy, should he again attack our position. Seven fresh companies were drawn from the town, and Brigadier-General Marshall, with a reinforcement of Kentucky cavalry and four heavy guns, under Captain Prentiss, 1st artillery, was near at hand, when it was discovered that the enemy had abandoned his position during the night. Our scouts soon ascertained that he had fallen back upon Agua Nueva. The great disparity of numbers, and the exhaustion of our troops, rendered it inexpedient and hazardous to attempt pursuit. A staff officer was despatched to General Santa Anna to negotiate an exchange of prisoners, which was satisfactorily completed on the following day. Our own dead were collected and buried, and the Mexican wounded, of which a large number had been left upon the field, were removed to Saltillo, and rendered as comfortable as circumstances would permit.



Death of Colonel Clay.