

That camp had been, unexpectedly, our formidable point of attack the afternoon before, and we had now to take it, without the aid of cavalry or artillery, or to throw back our advanced corps upon the road from San Augustin to the city, and thence force a passage through San Antonio.

Accordingly to meet contingencies, Major-General Worth was ordered to leave, early in the morning of the 20th, one of his brigades to mask San Antonio, and to march with the other six miles, via San Augustin, upon Contreras. A like destination was given to Major-General Quitman and his remaining brigade in San Augustin—replacing, for the moment, the garrison of that important depot with Harney's brigade of cavalry, as horse could not pass over the intervening rocks, &c., to reach the field of battle.

A diversion for an earlier hour (daylight) had been arranged the night before, according to the suggestion of Brigadier-General Smith, received through the engineer, Captain Lee, who conveyed my orders to our troops remaining on the ground opposite to the enemy's centre—the point for the diversion or a real attack, as circumstances might allow.

Guided by Captain Lee, it proved the latter under the command of Colonel Ransom, of the 9th, having with him that regiment and some companies of three others—the 3d, 12th, and rifles.

Shields, the senior officer at the hamlet, having arrived in the night, after Smith had arranged with Cadwalader and Riley the plan of attack for the morning, delicately waived interference; but reserved to himself the double task of holding the hamlet with his two regiments,



General Butler.



(South Carolina and New York volunteers,) against ten times his numbers on the side of the city, including the slopes to his left, and, in case the camp in his rear should be carried, to face about and cut off the flying enemy.

At three o'clock, A. M., the great movement commenced on the rear of the enemy's camp, Riley leading, followed successively by Cadwalader's and Smith's brigades, the latter temporarily under the orders of Major Dimick of the 1st artillery—the whole force being commanded by Smith, the senior in the general attack, and whose arrangements, skill, and gallantry, always challenge the highest admiration.

The march was rendered tedious by the darkness, rain, and mud; but about sunrise, Riley, conducted by Lieutenant Tower, engineer, had reached an elevation behind the enemy, whence he precipitated his columns;—stormed the intrenchments, planted his several colours upon them, and carried the work—all in seventeen minutes.

Conducted by Lieutenant Beauregard, engineer, and Lieutenant Brooks, of Twiggs's staff, both of whom, like Lieutenant Tower, had, in the night, twice reconnoitered the ground—Cadwalader brought up to the general assault, two of his regiments—the voltigeurs and the 11th, and at the appointed time, Colonel Ransom, with his temporary brigade, conducted by Captain Lee, engineer, not only made the movement to divert and to distract the enemy; but, after crossing the deep ravine in his front, advanced, and poured into the works and upon the fugitives, many volleys from his destructive musketry.

In the mean time Smith's own brigade, under the



temporary command of Major Dimick, following the movements of Riley and Cadwalader, discovered, opposite to, and outside of the works, a long line of Mexican cavalry, drawn up as a support. Dimick, having at the head of the brigade the company of sappers and miners, under Lieutenant Smith, engineer, who had conducted the march, was ordered by Brigadier-General Smith, to form line faced to the enemy, and in a charge against a flank, routed the cavalry.

Shields, too, by the wise disposition of his brigade and gallant activity, contributed much to the general results. He held masses of cavalry and infantry, supported by artillery, in check below him, and captured hundreds, with one general, (Mendoza,) of those who fled from above.

I doubt whether a more brilliant or decisive victory—taking into view, ground, artificial defenses, batteries, and the extreme disparity of numbers—without cavalry or artillery on our side—is to be found on record. Including all our corps directed against the intrenched camp, with Shields's brigade at the hamlet, we positively did not number over four thousand five hundred rank and file; and we know, by sight and since, more certainly by many captured documents and letters, that the enemy had actually engaged on the spot seven thousand men, with at least twelve thousand more hovering within sight, and striking distance—both on the 16th and 20th. All, not killed or captured, now fled with precipitation.

Thus was the great victory of Contreras achieved; one road to the capital opened; seven hundred of the enemy killed; eight hundred and forty-three prisoners,

including, among eighty-eight officers, four generals; besides many colours and standards; twenty-two pieces of brass ordnance—half of large calibre; thousands of small arms and accoutrements; an immense quantity of shot, shells, powder, and cartridges; seven hundred pack mules, many horses, &c., all in our hands.

It is highly gratifying to find that, by skilful arrangement, and rapidity of execution, our loss in killed and wounded, did not exceed, on the spot, sixty—among the former the brave Captain Charles Hanson, of the 7th infantry—not more distinguished for gallantry, than for modesty, morals, and piety. Lieutenant J. P. Johnstone, 1st artillery, serving with Magruder's battery—a young officer of the highest promise, was killed the evening before.

One of the most pleasing incidents of the victory is the recapture, in the works, by Captain Drum, 4th artillery, under Major Gardner, of the two brass six pounders, taken from another company of the same regiment, though without the loss of honour, at the glorious battle of Buena Vista—about which guns the whole regiment had mourned for so many long months! Coming up, a little later, I had the happiness to join in the protracted cheers of the gallant 4th on the joyous event, and, indeed, the whole army sympathizes in its just pride and exultation.

The battle being won before the advancing brigades of Worth's and Quitman's divisions were in sight, both were ordered back to their late positions—Worth, to attack San Antonio, in front, with his whole force, as soon as approached in the rear, by Pillow's and Twiggs's divisions—moving from Contreras, through San Angel



and Coyoacan. By carrying San Antonio we knew that we should open another—a shorter and better road to the capital, for our siege and other trains.

Accordingly, the two advanced divisions and Shields's brigade marched from Contreras, under the immediate orders of Major-General Pillow, who was now joined by the gallant Brigadier-General Pierce of his division, personally thrown out of activity, late the evening before, by a severe hurt received from the fall of his horse.

After giving necessary orders on the field, in the midst of prisoners and trophies, and sending instructions to Harney's brigade of cavalry, left at San Augustin, to join me, I personally followed Pillow's movement.

Arriving at Coyoacan, two miles by a cross road, from the rear of San Antonio, I first detached Captain Lee, engineer, with Captain Kearney's troop, 1st dragoons, supported by the rifle regiment, under Major Loring, to reconnoiter that strong point, and next despatched Major-General Pillow, with one of his brigades (Cadwalader's) to make the attack upon it, in concert with Major-General Worth, on the opposite side.

At the same time, by another road to the left, Lieutenant Stevens, of the engineers, supported by Lieutenant G. W. Smith's company of sappers and miners, of the same corps, was sent to reconnoiter the strongly fortified church or convent of San Pablo, in the hamlet of Churubusco—one mile off. Twiggs with one of the brigades, and Captain Taylor's field battery, were ordered to follow and attack the convent. Major Smith, senior engineer, was despatched to concert with Twiggs the mode and means of attack, and Twiggs's other brigade, I soon ordered up to support him.

Next (but all in ten minutes) I sent Pierce (just able to keep the saddle) with his brigade (Pillow's division) conducted by Captain Lee, engineer, by a third road, a little farther to our left, to attack the enemy's right and rear, in order to favour the movement upon the convent and cut off the retreat towards the capital. And finally, Shields, senior brigadier to Pierce, with the New York and South Carolina volunteers, (Quitman's division,) was ordered to follow Pierce, closely, and to take the command of our left wing. All these movements were made with the utmost alacrity by our gallant troops and commanders.

Finding myself at Coyoacan, from which so many roads conveniently branched, without escort or reserve, I had to advance, for safety, close upon Twiggs's rear. The battle now raged from the right to the left of our whole line.

Learning, on the return of Captain Lee, that Shields, in the rear of Churubusco, was hard pressed, and in danger of being outflanked, if not overwhelmed, by greatly superior numbers, I immediately sent, under Major Sumner, 2d dragoons, the rifles, (Twiggs's reserve,) and Captain Sibley's troop, 2d dragoons, then at hand, to support our left, guided by the same engineer.

About an hour earlier, Worth had, by skilful and daring movements upon the front and right, turned and forced San Antonio—its garrison, no doubt, much shaken by our decisive victory at Contreras.

His second brigade, (Colonel Clarke's,) conducted by Captain Mason, engineer, assisted by Lieutenant Hardcastle, topographical engineer, turned the right, and by



a wide sweep, came out upon the high road to the capital. At this point, the heavy garrison (three thousand men) in retreat, was, by Clarke cut in the centre: one portion, the rear driven upon Dolores, off to the right; and the other upon Churubusco, in the direct line of our operations. The first brigade, (Colonel Garland's,) same division, consisting of the second artillery, under Major Galt, the 3d artillery, under Lieutenant-Colonel Belton, and the 4th infantry, commanded by Major F. Lee, with Lieutenant-Colonel Duncan's field battery (temporarily) followed in pursuit through the town, taking one general prisoner, the abandoned guns, (five pieces,) much ammunition and other public property.

The forcing of San Antonio was the *second* brilliant event of the day.

Worth's division being soon reunited in hot pursuit, he was joined by Major-General Pillow, who, marching from Coyoacan and discovering that San Antonio had been carried, immediately turned to the left, according to my instruction, and though much impeded by ditches and swamps, hastened to the attack of Churubusco.

The hamlet or scattered houses, bearing this name, presented, besides the fortified convent, a strong field-work, (*tete de pont*) with regular bastions and curtains, at the head of a bridge, over which the road passes from San Antonio to the capital.

The whole remaining forces of Mexico—some twenty-seven thousand men—cavalry, artillery, and infantry, collected from every quarter—were now in, on the flanks or within supporting distance of those works, and seemed resolved to make a last and desperate stand; for if beaten here, the feebler defenses at the gates of the

city—four miles off—could not, as was well known to both parties, delay the victors an hour. The capital of an ancient empire, now of a great republic; or an early peace, the assailants were resolved to win. Not an American—and we were less than a third of the enemy's numbers—had a doubt as to the result.

The fortified church or convent, hotly pressed by Twiggs, had already held out about an hour, when Worth and Pillow—the latter having with him only Cadwalader's brigade—began to manœuvre upon the *tete de pont*, with the convent at half gun-shot, to their left. Garland's brigade, (Worth's division,) to which had been added the light battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, continued to advance in front, and under the fire of a long line of infantry, off on the left of the brigade; and Clarke, of the same division, directed his brigade along the road or close by its side. Two of Pillow's and Cadwalader's regiments, the 11th and 14th, supported and participated in this direct movement: the other (the *voltigeurs*) was left in reserve. Most of these corps—particularly Clarke's brigade, advancing perpendicularly—were made to suffer much by the fire of the *tete de pont*, and they would have suffered greatly more by flank attacks from the convent, but for the pressure of Twiggs on the other side of that work.

This well-combined and daring movement, at length reached the principal point of attack, and the formidable *tete de pont*, was, at once, assaulted and carried by the bayonet. Its deep wet ditch was first gallantly crossed by the 8th and 5th infantry, commanded respectively by Major Waite and Lieutenant-Colonel Scott—followed closely, by the 6th infantry, (same brigade) which had



been so much exposed in the road—the 11th regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel Graham, and the 14th, commanded by Colonel Trousdale, both of Cadwalader's brigade, Pillow's division. About the same time, the enemy, in front of Garland, after a hot conflict of an hour and a half, gave way, in a retreat towards the capital.

The immediate result of this *third* signal triumph of the day were three field-pieces, one hundred and ninety-two prisoners, much ammunition and two colours, taken in the *tete de pont*.

As the concurrent attack upon the convent favoured physically and morally, the assault upon the *tete de pont*, so, reciprocally, no doubt, the fall of the latter, contributed to the capture of the former. The two works were only some four hundred and fifty yards apart; and as soon as we were in possession of the *tete de pont*, a captured four-pounder was turned and fired—first by Captain Larkin Smith, and next by Lieutenant Snelling, both of the 8th infantry—several times upon the convent. In the same brief interval, Lieutenant-Colonel Duncan, (also of Worth's division,) gallantly brought two of his guns to bear, at a short range, from the San Antonio road, upon the principal face of the work, and on the tower of the church, which, in the obstinate contest had been often refilled with some of the best sharp-shooters of the enemy.

Finally, twenty minutes after the *tete de pont* had been carried by Worth and Pillow, and at the end of a desperate conflict of two hours and a half, the church or convent—the citadel of the strong line of defense along the rivulet of Churubusco—yielded to Twiggs's division,



Battle of Churubusco.