

forms their chief amusement. Throughout the day the time is generally spent in sleeping or lounging; but in the evening parties meet together for dance and song, according to the immemorial custom of all Spaniards. These parties are often made the occasions of great festivity, especially on important holidays.

GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF
BUENA VISTA.

BY AN EYEWITNESS.*

Camp at Buena Vista, Feb. 24, 1847.

MESSRS. EDITORS:—On the morning of the 22d, intelligence reached General Taylor, at his camp on the hill overlooking Saltillo from the south, that Santa Anna, whose presence in our vicinity had been reported for several days, was advancing upon our main body, stationed near the rancho Sancho Juan de Buena Vista, about seven miles from Saltillo. The general immediately moved forward with May's squadron of dragoons, Sherman's and Bragg's batteries of artillery, and the Mississippi regiment of riflemen, under Colonel Davis, and arrived at the position which he had selected for awaiting the attack of the enemy, about eleven o'clock. The time and the place, the hour and the man, seemed to promise a glorious celebration of the day. It was the

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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—for 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 the flood of golden radiance, which gilded the mountain tops and poured over the valleys, wrought light and shade into a thousand fantastic forms. A soft breeze swept down from the mountains, rolling into graceful undulation the banner of the Republic, which was proudly streaming from the flag-staff of the fort, and from the towers and battlements of Saltillo. The omens were all in our favor.

In the choice of his position, General Taylor had exhibited the same comprehensive sagacity and masterly *coup d'œil* which characterized his dispositions at 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 three miles in width, dotted over with hills and ridges, and scarred with broad and winding ravines. The main road lies along the course of an arroyo, the bed of which is now so deep as to form an almost impassable barrier, while the other side is bounded by precipitous elevations, stretching perpendicularly towards the mountains, and separated by broad gullies, until they mingle into one at the base of the principal range. On the right of the narrowest point of the roadway, a battalion of the

1st Illinois regiment, under Lieut. Colonel Weatherford, was stationed in a small trench, extending to the natural ravine, while, on the opposite height, the main body of the regiment, under Colonel Hardin, was posted, with a single piece of artillery from Captain Washington's battery. The post of honor on the extreme right was assigned to Bragg's artillery, his left supported by the 2d regiment of Kentucky foot, under Colonel McKee, the left flank of which rested upon the arroyo. Washington's battery occupied a position immediately in front of the narrow point of the roadway, in the rear of which and somewhat to the left, on another height, the 2d Illinois regiment, under Colonel Bissell, was posted. Next on the left, the Indiana brigade, under General Lane, was deployed, while on the extreme left the Kentucky cavalry, under Colonel Marshall, occupied a position directly under the frowning summits of the mountains. The two squadrons of the 1st and 2d dragoons, and the Arkansas cavalry, under Colonel Yell, were posted in the rear, ready for any service which the exigencies of the day might require.

These dispositions had been made for some time, when the enemy was seen advancing in the distance, and the clouds of dust which rolled up before him gave satisfactory evidence that his numbers were not unworthy the trial of strength upon which we were about to enter. He arrived upon his position in immense numbers, and with force sufficiently numerous to have commenced his attack at once, had he been as confident of success as it subsequently appeared he was solicitous for our safety. The first evidence directly afforded us of the presence

of Santa Anna was a white flag, which was dimly seen fluttering in the breeze, and anon Surgeon-General Lindenberg, of the Mexican army, arrived, bearing a beautiful emblem of benevolent bravado and Christian charity. It was a missive from Santa Anna, suggested by considerations for our personal comfort, which has placed us under lasting obligations, proposing to General Taylor terms of unconditional surrender; promising good treatment, assuring us his force amounted to upwards of 20,000 men, that our defeat was inevitable, and that, to spare the effusion of blood, his proposition should be complied with. Strange to say, the American General showed the greatest ingratitude, evinced no appreciation whatever of Santa Anna's kindness, and informed him that whether his force amounted to 20,000 or 50,000, it was equally a matter of indifference; the terms of adjustment must be arranged by gunpowder.

The messenger returned to his employer, and we watched in silence to hear the roar of his artillery. Hours rolled by without any movement on his part; and it appeared that the Mexican commander, grieved at our stubbornness, was almost disposed to retrace his steps, as if determined to have no further intercourse with such ungrateful audacity. At length he mustered resolution to open a fire from a mortar, throwing several shells into our camp, without execution. While this was going on, Captain Steen, of the 1st dragoons, with a single man, started toward a hill, on which the Mexican General seemed to be stationed, with his staff, but before he completed the ascent the party vanished, and when he reached the top he discovered that two regiments had thrown themselves into squares to resist the charge. The Cap-

tain's gravity was overcome by this opposition, and he returned.

Just before dark, a number of Santa Anna's infantry had succeeded in getting a position high up the mountains on our left, from which they could make a noise without exposing themselves to much danger, and at a distance of three hundred yards, opened a most tremendous fire upon Col. Marshall's regiment. This was returned by two of his companies, which were dismounted and detached for the purpose, as soon as they could arrive within a neighborly range. The skirmishing continued till after dark, with no result to us, save the wounding of three men very slightly.

During the night, a Mexican prisoner was taken, who reported Santa Anna's force as consisting of fifteen pieces of artillery, including some twenty-four-pounders, six thousand cavalry, and fifteen thousand infantry—thus confirming the statement of his superior.

The firing on our extreme left, which ceased soon after sunset on the 22d, was renewed on the morning of the 23d, at an early hour. This was also accompanied by quick discharges of artillery from the same quarter, the Mexicans having established, during the night, a twelve-pounder, on a point at the base of the mountain, which commanded any position which could be taken by us. To counteract the effect of this piece, Lieut. O'Brien, 4th artillery, was detached with three pieces of Washington's battery, having with him Lieut. Bryan, of the topographical engineers, who, having planted a few shells in the midst of the enemy's gunners, for the first time effectually silenced his fire.

From the movements soon perceptible along the left

of our line, it became evident that the enemy was attempting to turn that flank, and for that purpose had concentrated a large body of cavalry and infantry on his right. The base of the mountain around which these troops were wending their way, seemed girdled with a belt of steel, as their glittering sabres and polished lances flashed back the beams of the morning sun. Sherman's and Bragg's batteries were immediately ordered to the left; Col. Bissell's regiment occupied a position between them, while Col. McKee's Kentuckians were transferred from the right of our line, so as to hold a position near the centre.

The second Indiana regiment, under Col. Bowles, was placed on our extreme left, nearly perpendicular to the direction of our line, so as to oppose, by a direct fire, the flank movement of the enemy. These dispositions having been promptly effected, the artillery of both armies opened its fires, and simultaneously the Mexican infantry commenced a rapid and extended discharge upon our line, from the left to McKee's regiment. Our artillery belched forth its thunders with tremendous effect, while the Kentuckians returned the fire of the Mexican infantry with great steadiness and success; their field officers, McKee, Clay, and Fry, passing along their line, animating and encouraging the men by precept and example.

The second Illinois regiment also received the enemy's fire with great firmness, and returned an ample equivalent. While this fierce conflict was going on, the main body of Col. Hardin's regiment moved to the right of the Kentuckians, and the representatives of each State seemed to vie with each other in the honorable ambition of doing the best service for their country. Both regiments gal-

lantly sustained their positions, and won unfading laurels. The veterans of Austerlitz could not have exhibited more courage, coolness and devotion.

In the mean time the enemy's cavalry had been stealthily pursuing its way along the mountain, and though our artillery had wrought great havoc among its numbers, the leading squadrons had passed the extreme points of danger, and were almost in position to attack our rear. At this critical moment, * * * * * Several officers of Gen. Taylor's staff immediately dashed off, to arrest, if possible, the retreating regiment. * * * Major Dix, of the pay department, formerly of the 7th infantry, * * * and seizing the colors of the regiment, appealed to the men to know whether they had determined to desert them. He was answered by three cheers, showing that * * * * * they were not unmindful of an act of distinguished gallantry on the part of another. A portion of the regiment immediately rallied around him, and was re-formed by the officers. Dix, in person, then led them towards the enemy, until one of the men volunteered to take the flag. The party returned to the field. * * * * *

While the day, however, by this disgraceful panic, was fast going against us, the artillery was advanced, its front extended, and different sections and pieces under Sherman, Bragg, O'Brien, Thomas, Reynolds, Kilburn, French, and Bryan, were working such carnage in the ranks of the enemy as to make his columns roll to and fro, like ships upon the billows. His triumph, at the Indiana retreat, was but a moment, and his shouts of joy were soon followed by groans of anguish, and shrieks of expiring hundreds.

Washington's battery on the right had now opened its fire, and driven back a large party of lancers, advancing in that direction. Along the entire line the battle raged with great fury. Twenty-one thousand of the victims of Mexican oppression and the myrmidons of Mexican despotism were arrayed against five thousand Americans, sent forth to conquer a peace. The discharges of the infantry followed each other more rapidly than the sounds of the Swiss Bell-Ringers in the fierce fervor of a *finale*, and the volleys of artillery reverberated through the mountains, like the thunders of an Alpine storm.

The myriads of Mexican cavalry still pressed forward on our left, and threatened a charge upon the Mississippi rifles, under Colonel Davis, who had been ordered to support the Indiana regiment. * * * * *
* * * * * Colonel Davis immediately threw his command into the form of a V, the opening towards the enemy, and awaited his advance. On he came, dashing with all the speed of Mexican horses; but when he arrived at that point from which could be seen the whites of his eyes, both lines poured forth a sheet of lead that scattered him like chaff, felling many a gallant steed to the earth, and sending scores of riders to the sleep that knows no waking.

While the dispersed Mexican cavalry were rallying, the 3d Indiana regiment, under Colonel Lane, was ordered to join Colonel Davis, supported by a considerable body of horse. About this time, from some unknown reason, our wagon-train displayed its length along the Saltillo road, and offered a conspicuous prize for the

Mexican lancers, which they seemed not unwilling to appropriate. Fortunately, Lieutenant Rucker, with a squadron of the first dragoons, (Captain Steen having been previously wounded and Captain Eustis confined to his bed by illness,) was present, and by order of General Taylor, dashed among them in a most brilliant style, dispersing them by his charge, as effectually as the previous fire of the Mississippi riflemen. May's dragoons, with a squadron of Arkansas cavalry, under Captain Pike, and supported by a single piece of artillery, under Lieutenant Reynolds, now claimed their share in the discussion; and when the Mexicans had again assembled, they had to encounter another shock from the two squadrons, besides a fierce fire of grape from Reynolds' six-pounder.

The lancers once more rallied, and, directing their course towards the Saltillo road, were met by the remainder of Colonel Yell's regiment and Marshall's Kentuckians, who drove them towards the mountains on the opposite side of the valley, where, from their appearance when last visible, it may be presumed they are still running. In this precipitate movement, they were compelled to pass through a rancho, in which many of our valiant comrades had previously taken refuge, who from this secure retreat, opened quite an effective fire upon them.

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At this time the Mexican force was much divided, and the fortunes of the day were with us. Santa Anna saw the crisis, and by craft and cunning sought to avert it. He sent a white flag to Gen. Taylor, desiring to know "what he wanted." This was at once believed to be a

mere *ruse* to gain time and re-collect his men, but the American General thought fit to notice it, and General Wool was deputed to meet the representative of Santa Anna, and to say to him that we "wanted" peace. Before the interview could be had, the Mexicans themselves re-opened their fires, thus adding treachery of the highest order to the other barbarian practices which distinguish their mode of warfare. The flag, however, had accomplished the ends which its wily originator designed, for though our troops could have effectually prevented the remainder of the cavalry from joining the main body, it could only have been done by a fire, which, while the parley lasted, would have been an undoubted breach of faith. Although a portion of the lancers during this interim had regained their original position, a formidable number still remained behind. Upon these the infantry opened a brisk fire, while Reynolds's artillery, beautifully served, hailed the grape and cannister upon them with terrible effect.

The craft of Santa Anna had restored his courage, and with his reinforcement of cavalry he determined to charge our line. Under cover of their artillery, horse and foot advanced upon our batteries. These, from the smallness of our infantry force, were but feebly supported, yet, by the most brilliant and daring efforts, nobly maintained their positions. Such was the rapidity of their transitions, that officers and pieces seemed empowered with ubiquity; and upon cavalry and infantry alike, wherever they appeared, they poured so destructive a fire as to silence the enemy's artillery, compel his whole line to fall back, and soon to assume a sort of

sauve qui peut movement, indicating any thing but victory. Again our spirits rose. The Mexicans appeared thoroughly routed, and while their regiments and divisions were flying before us, nearly all our light troops were ordered forward, and followed them with a most deadly fire, mingled with shouts which rose above the roar of artillery.

While our men were driven through the ravines, at the extremities of which a body of Mexican lancers were stationed to pounce upon them like tigers, Brent and Whiting, of Washington's battery, gave them such a torrent of grape as put them to flight, and thus saved the remnants of those brave regiments which had long borne the hottest portion of the fight. On the other flank, while the Mexicans came rushing on like legions of fiends, the artillery was left unsupported, and capture by the enemy seemed inevitable. But Bragg and Thomas rose with the crisis, and eclipsed even the fame they won at Monterey; while Sherman, O'Brien, and Bryan, proved themselves worthy of the alliance. Every horse with O'Brien's battery was killed, and the enemy had advanced to within a range of grape, sweeping all before him. But here his progress was arrested, and before the showers of iron hail which assailed him, squadrons and battalions fell like leaves in the blasts of autumn. The Mexicans were once more driven back with great loss, though taking with them the three pieces of artillery which were without horses.

In this charge the 1st Illinois regiment and McKee's Kentuckians were foremost. The pursuit was too hot, and as it evinced too clearly our deficiency in numbers,



Battle of Buena Vista.

the Mexicans, with a suddenness which was almost magical, rallied and returned upon us. They came in myriads, and for a while the carnage was dreadful on both sides. We were but a handful to oppose the frightful masses which were hurled upon us, and could as easily have resisted an avalanche of thunderbolts. We were driven back, and the day seemed lost beyond redemption. Victory, which a moment before appeared within our grasp, was suddenly torn from our standard. There was but one hope; but that proved an anchor sure and steadfast.

Thus thrice during the day, when all seemed lost but honor, did the artillery, by the ability with which it was manœuvred, roll back the tide of success from the enemy, and give such overwhelming destructiveness to its effect, that the army was saved and the glory of the American arms maintained. At this moment, however, let it never be forgotten, that while every effective man was wanted on the field, hundreds of volunteers had collected in the rancho, with the wagon-train, whom no efforts or entreaties could induce to join their brethren, neighbors, and friends, then in the last struggle for victory.

The battle had now raged with variable success for nearly ten hours, and by a sort of mutual consent, after the last carnage wrought among the Mexicans by the artillery, both parties seemed willing to pause upon the result. Night fell, and the American General, with his troops, slept upon the battle ground, prepared, if necessary, to resume operations on the morrow. But ere the sun rose again upon the scene, the Mexicans had disappeared, leaving behind them only the hundreds of their

dead and dying, whose bones are to whiten their native hills, and whose moans of anguish were to excite in their enemies that compassion which can have no existence in the bosoms of their friends.

THE MISSISSIPPIANS AT BUENA VISTA.

THE most trying scene for the Mississippi regiment was immediately after the retreat of Colonel Bowles' Indianians. At that time the battle was raging with a violence that shook earth and air for miles around. Cannon pealed after cannon, and thousands of muskets and small arms mingled together in one uninterrupted roar, while the neighboring mountains broke and rolled back the heavy sound as it leaped from crag to crag. Colonel Davis was ordered to advance and support the Indiana regiment. Before him were the cavalry with loosened reins and panting steeds, shouting from rank to rank, as they swept down upon the retreating regiments; while on either side, columns of infantry were marching and countermarching and raking the field with their rifles. But, cool and intrepid, the colonel rode to the front of his regiment and ordered them into line. They formed, and he galloped by the long-extended ranks, his eye ranging along every movement until they had formed into two lines which met in the form of a V, the opening toward the enemy. Nearer and nearer drew the Mexican steeds, until each rifleman trembled with excitement

and impatience. Colonel Davis was silent. Now their dresses could be distinguished, and the next moment their faces and features. High hopes and unbreathed fears were centered upon that little volunteer band, and the stern eye of the commanding General hung over them with an almost agonized intensity. All around them was clamor, and uproar, and the gushing of blood, and shrieks of mangled soldiers. Colonel Davis was silent. Would he retreat like the Indianians, or permit the enemy to crush him without resistance? Not long was the suspense. Sure of victory, each Mexican grasped his lance and heaved forward for the charge, when "Fire!" rang along the volunteers; a roar like thunder followed, and man after man sunk down in bloody heaps to the ground. Struck with dismay, the lacerated columns heaved back, and in mad confusion horse trod down horse, crushing wounded and dying beneath their hoofs, in the reckless rushings of retreat. It was a horrible moment; and when the pageant had passed away, heaps of mutilated beings were stretched along the ground, writhing in the extremities of agony. But a moment before they had been strong in life and hope; now they were torn and trampled into the earth, while the blood was pouring from a dozen wounds, and the heart hurrying on to its last throb.