

but, if not, which appeared to him probable, he hoped to surprise him by daybreak the following morning in his camp at Agua Nueva.

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

* Our piquets had met with patrols from General Miñon's brigade on several previous occasions down this road toward La Encarnacion, and shots had been exchanged between them. Ampudia justified his firing, and the risk of thereby alarming our camp, by saying he believed our men had mistaken his own for General Miñon's troops.

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.

The burning of the buildings, and of several large stacks of unthreshed grain, illumined the whole valley of La Encantada, and painted the rugged and picturesque features of the surrounding mountains in bright relief against the murky shadows of the intervening gorges. Perhaps no single picture of some of the most striking effects of war could produce a stronger or more lasting impression, than the one here exhibited. The noise of the falling timbers, the roar of the flames, the huge column of ascending smoke, the appearance of armed and mounted men moving between the spectator and the fire, with the brilliant light flashing here and there on burnished arms and glittering appointments,—taken in connection with the scattered shots interchanged between still other of our advanced parties and those of Ampudia, the heavy rumbling of our rapidly retreating train of wagons, in-

termingled with the distant trumpet-signals now and then faintly heard in the direction of the approaching enemy, — all conspired to render that cold, deep midnight, one which could never be forgotten. Besides, the scene of that conflagration, with its attendant circumstances, was invested with another and more fearful interest; for it awakened the reflection, that the coming morrow was to behold the two armies, now so near each other, in mortal strife, the issue of which no one could contemplate without intense anxiety.

It was daybreak on the morning of the 22d of February, when all our cavalry had returned to Buena Vista, leaving the whole valley of La Encantada open to the enemy. But before that time Santa Anna had again put the heavy masses of his column in motion for the Pass of Carnero, being still under the impression that he should be able to come suddenly upon General Taylor's force at Agua Nueva, and to cut it up before it could be suitably disposed for battle. Great, therefore, was his astonishment on coming through the mountain gorge, far enough to command a view of that place, to find it entirely abandoned. At first he imagined our forces had retired

under the cover of intrenchments, which he had heard we had thrown up; and he immediately directed his troops so as to turn our right, in order to gain La Encantada and the road between us and Saltillo, in accordance with a part of one of his three previous plans of operation. But, upon approaching the ruins of the hacienda, a Mexican servant, whom he found there, informed him that our army had been evacuating its position ever since the preceding day, and had fallen back toward the city. By this movement, all his purposes, based upon the expectation of resistance at Agua Nueva, were rendered abortive. But this masterly strategy of our commander, in his change of position, was then, as had been calculated, construed by Santa Anna into a precipitate retreat. Therefore, without pausing to refresh his already exhausted troops, he pushed on with his whole cavalry force and his light division, to cut us to pieces. This he believed he could the more readily accomplish, as he had previously ordered General Miñon, with his 2000 choice troops, to get in rear of us, if possible, at Buena Vista; if not, by the Pass of Palomas Adentro, and a narrow and

winding pathway over the mountains to the valley east of Saltillo.* Supposing that order already executed, he indulged the hope that he could yet entrap, between two formidable portions of his army, what he imagined to be our panic-stricken and fugitive columns. Elated by such a brilliant prospect, he urged more rapidly forward his weary and nearly famished troops, leaving directions for his artillery and heavy infantry to follow as fast as possible.

Thus, by General Taylor's falling back to Buena Vista, he caused Santa Anna to become inspired with the hope just mentioned. Under its influence, he compelled his whole army, already suffering from thirst and worn down by the fatigue of a continuous march of thirty-five miles over a desert, to hurry on fourteen more, without rest, and with only the refreshment of a meagre repast and a single draught of water.

* General Miñon says in his Report, that Santa Anna did not direct or suggest the latter movement until the evening of the 22d; that before that time he (General Miñon) had taken the responsibility of moving thither, and had gained a position east of the town, as soon as he could do so after he had learned that General Taylor had fallen back on Buena Vista. Santa Anna himself is the opposing authority.

No calculations could have had results more fortunate than those of General Taylor. Santa Anna had cherished the vain belief that his antagonist remained totally ignorant of his movements; and, by his extreme solicitude to keep up that ignorance until the moment of attack, he permitted himself to be completely out-generalled, even on this very point. For his own place and condition were perfectly known, while he himself remained, as he unwillingly admits, entirely in the dark as to those of General Taylor, whose retrograde and apparently confused and hurried march decoyed him into what he has since termed a Thermopylæ. It is very doubtful if, with all his superiority of numbers, he could have been induced to venture to this spot, had not his elation at the prospect of our speedy destruction borne him so far forward before he was undeceived as to our flight, that he could not recede, nor avoid a battle, without disgrace.

He was, therefore, singularly unfortunate in thus having the scene of his anticipated engagement so suddenly, unexpectedly, and, as it were, mysteriously changed from a known to an unknown point. Nor was he less so as to

the *time* he had selected for it. If, in the whole year, there be one day, above all others, when the heart of an American is naturally animated by the purest sentiments of patriotism, — when all that is greatest and best in his country's history is brought most vividly to his mind, as an example that should strengthen his purpose, and nerve his arm, to emulate the glorious deeds of the Past, — that is the day which gave birth to THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY. But it was on the morning of Washington's Birthday, that Santa Anna indulged in the delusive hope, that an army of Americans, unmindful of its sublime associations, and recreant to their country and their name, had basely fled before him.

It was eight o'clock when the "long roll" called our men to arms. No one, who there witnessed the cheerful alacrity with which they seized their weapons, and sprang to their places in the lines, — who saw the firm resolve impressed on every countenance in that determined little band, — can ever forget the sight.

Every banner was unfurled to the bright sun and enlivening breeze; and, as the various bands of music struck up the national air of

"*Hail, Columbia,*" the sacred battle-cry, — "THE MEMORY OF WASHINGTON!" — passed from regiment to regiment, and from corps to corps, amid the most enthusiastic shouts.

Could the friends at home, of those here marshalled for the conflict, have seen the spirit which animated them; could they have beheld them cut off from the hope of returning with honor to all they loved, except through their own brave exertions, surrounded,* as they were, by foes bent on their destruction, proverbially merciless, smarting under the disgrace of recent defeats, and now about to fight under the immediate eye of their most distinguished general; — could their dearest friends have seen them thus, not one but would have glowed with pride at their gallant bearing, and would himself have girded on their arms, and, invoking for them the aid of the God of Battles, would, in the spirit of the heroic past, have bid them go forth to victory, or, if it must be, to the sacrifice.

* The 2000 cavalry, under General Miñon, had already come through the Pass of Palomas Adentro in rear of us; and General Urrea and General Romero, with another brigade of cavalry, had previously been sent through the mountains by the way of Tula, and were at this time on the road east of Monterey. — See *Santa Anna's Report*.

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 during 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.

In the mean time, Santa Anna's cavalry came thundering along the valley of La Encantada, and down the road through the Pass, a vast cloud of dust distinctly marking its progress. The first evidence it received, that any check would be offered to its onward course to Saltillo, was the sight of Washington's Battery of eight pieces, which had been directed by General Wool to occupy La Angostura, and was then advancing over the crest of a ridge, and descending the slope of the road leading to that position; and of the First Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, which was already on the high ridge to the left of it. As soon as the enemy discovered this force,

and before he had come within range of Washington's guns, his bugles sounded a halt. Immediately afterwards, all the more advanced squadrons wheeled about, and retired behind a protecting elevation of the ground,⁽¹⁾ while those in the rear came rapidly up, and formed upon them. In a short time, their compact and serried masses, thus accumulated, with their flags and pennons flying, and their bright lances sparkling in the sun, extended from the stream nearly half way to the mountains on our left.

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

* That is, the *very first* positions of the several regiments and corps. Every change they afterwards made is noted in the text.

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 May's 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.

The situation of the troops was now such that most of them could command a view of the upper end of the pass and the opening to the valley beyond. The enemy was evidently waiting for the arrival of his rear

columns. In the mean time, General Taylor had returned from Saltillo. As he rode along our lines, he was everywhere received with the most enthusiastic cheers; and the sound of each wild hurrah could be distinctly heard by those of the Mexican army who had already arrived on their ground.

General Wool also rode along the lines, and addressed a few spirited and patriotic remarks to each regiment and corps which he passed. He reminded the troops of his own column particularly of their past labors, and their protracted and weary marches* to find the enemy, who now stood before them in sufficient strength to give them all they could require in the way of combat, and to afford *every* man an opportunity to win all the distinction he could wish. And he suggested to the minds of all the great good fortune which was theirs, to be called more signally to mark the anniversary of a day already hallowed to their country, and one on which no man could be unfaithful to the trust she had confided to him,—that of maintaining the glory of her arms and the

* See Appendix, A.

lustre of the American name as bright and unsullied as they had been left by her greatest general, to whom this day had given birth. This was, likewise, responded to by three hearty cheers.

For a long time, the engineers and topographical engineers of both armies were busily employed; ours, in moving far to the front, to get a more accurate view of their different forces as they came up, and to learn their several positions, — and theirs, in gaining elevated points between the two lines, to reconnoitre our ground and the disposition of our troops. Our exact strength they already knew from their spies and from their friends in Saltillo.

Meanwhile Santa Anna sent in a flag of truce* to General Taylor, with the following note:

“HEAD-QUARTERS OF THE LIBERATING
ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC.

“You are surrounded by twenty thousand men, and cannot, in any human probability, avoid suffering a rout

* The bearer of this flag was a German named Vanderlinden, then the Surgeon-General of the Mexican army. He seemed very anxious to impress upon the mind of the officer who met him the important fact, that Santa Anna had *twenty-three generals* with him.

and being cut to pieces with your troops. But, as you deserve from me consideration and particular esteem, I wish to save you from a catastrophe; and for that purpose I 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 this end, you will be granted an hour's time to make up your mind, to commence from the moment when a flag of truce arrives in your camp. With this view, I assure you of my particular consideration.

“God and Liberty! Camp at Encantada, February 22, 1847.

“ANTO. LOPEZ DE SANTA ANNA.

“TO GENERAL Z. TAYLOR,

“*Commanding the Forces of the United States.*”*

In answer to the foregoing, General Taylor immediately despatched this note:

“HEAD-QUARTERS, ARMY OF OCCUPATION,
Near Buena Vista, Feb. 22, 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,

“*Major-General U. S. A., Commanding.*

“Señor General D. ANTO. LOPEZ DE SANTA ANNA,

“*Commanding in chief, Encantada.*”

* See Appendix, C.

A short time afterwards,* the whole of the Mexican army had come up and been formed upon their ground in the following order :

The first and second divisions of infantry were placed in two lines, one in rear of the other, on one of the ridges in front of our position; there being another and rather more elevated one between us. A battery of 16-pounders, supported by the regiment of engineers, was established on a higher point on their right; and two others, of 12 and 8 pounders, and the 7-inch howitzer, on their left and near the road. The latter were placed in battery by Santa Anna in person; the former, by his Chief of Engineers, General Moray Villamil, and his Chief of Artillery, General Corona. The cavalry was then disposed in rear of his right and left flanks, and the regiment of hussars, — Santa Anna's personal guard, — in rear of the centre. There was a small eminence on his left, directly upon the road, and in front of Washington's Battery, which the beautiful battalion of Leon

* "We took a position and awaited the infantry, which arrived at one o'clock, having taken on the road five wagons, and some provisions and forage left by the enemy." — *Mexican Engineer's Report of the Battle.*

was ordered to occupy. The general park was placed in rear of all, and covered by the brigade of General Andrade. Santa Anna's own position was the same as that of his hussars.

It was past two o'clock before all these arrangements had been completed. In the interval, General Ampudia and Colonel Baneneli, with the four battalions of light infantry, were directed to get possession of one of two gradual slopes^(J) of the mountain to the left of the plateau. This movement being observed, a portion of the Arkansas and Kentucky Volunteers, and a small battalion from the Indiana brigade, all on foot, and armed with rifles, were placed under the command of Colonel Marshall, and sent up the other slope^(K) to resist them. While these troops were approaching each other, and severally climbing up their opposite ridges (which, it should be remarked, draw closer and closer together, and finally unite near the summit of the mountain), each evidently endeavoring to outflank the other, a movement was made on the enemy's left, which induced General Taylor to order a corresponding one on our right. Accordingly, Captain Bragg's Light

Battery, with Colonel McKee's Regiment of Kentucky foot Volunteers as a support, was sent across the stream, to occupy a position between it and the mountains on that side, and somewhat in advance of the Battery at La Angostura.

Captain Washington had already detached two of his pieces, which were sent up to the left of the plateau, under Lieutenant Bryan, of the Topographical Engineers, then temporarily on duty in the artillery, — when he was asked by General Wool, if he could spare still another.

"Yes," said he.

"But what will become of this key to our position, if you are deprived of three of your guns?"

"I WILL DEFEND IT," was his gallant reply; and he immediately detached Lieutenant O'Brien, then commanding his first section, with another piece.

When this gun was joined to the section already on the plateau, Lieutenant O'Brien took command of the whole; the Second Regiment of Indiana Volunteers being ordered up to sustain him.

At three o'clock precisely, the enemy opened

the battle by firing a shell from his howitzer at this part of our lines. Immediately afterwards, Ampudia's light division became warmly engaged with our riflemen, on the side of the mountain; the former discharging their pieces in continuous and rapid volleys; the latter, lying behind the crest of their ridge, firing deliberately, and doing terrible execution with their unerring weapons. From that time until dark, these troops continued the conflict without changing their positions, except to approach each other by climbing still higher up the mountain, until, at last, there were two lines of combatants from near the plateau to its very summit.

The fighting in this quarter, together with an occasional cannonade, directed by the enemy at the troops on the plateau, constituted the action of the 22d; the two armies not becoming regularly engaged on that day. At dark, a shell was thrown into the air by the enemy, as a signal for his light division to cease the contest; and not a gun was fired afterwards, by either side, for the whole night, except a few shots now and then exchanged between the advanced piquets and moving patrols of the two forces.

The loss on the American side during this day's contest was very trifling, four men only being wounded; while that of the Mexican army was over three hundred,* in killed and wounded.

By night fall, Colonel Hardin's First Regiment of Illinois Volunteers had completed a parapet on the high ridge it occupied, extending along its whole front; and, under the direction of our engineers, had dug a ditch and thrown up an epaulment in front of Washington's Battery, with a traverse upon its right, continuing the ditch and a slight breastwork from thence to the brink of the impassable gullies of the stream. This ditch was occupied by an immediate supporting force de-

* "The enemy, so soon as he perceived that we had occupied the height that flanked his left and our right, detached two battalions to dislodge us, which led to a warm engagement, that lasted all the afternoon and till after dark, when he was repulsed with a loss of four hundred men, according to the report of the prisoners. Ours was much less, as we had the advantage of the ground." — *Santa Anna's Report of the Battle.*

"The enemy tried in vain to dislodge them [Ampudia's light battalions] from their position, by moving against it a heavy column; and was compelled to retire, leaving the ravine [between the two slopes] filled with wounded." — *Mexican Engineer's Report.*

tached from Colonel Hardin's regiment, consisting of two companies, and commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Weatherford. To provide for the contingency of the advance of our batteries during the battle, a small opening was left between the left of the epaulment and the high bluff, sufficiently wide for the passage of cannon. But, in order to prevent the enemy from having the advantage of it in case of an assault, it was choked up by two wagons, laden with stones, and having their wheels locked by chains. They could easily be removed by us, and the way be opened in case of necessity.

Early in the day, General Miñon, with his brigade, had entered the valley east of Saltillo, as Santa Anna had anticipated; but the latter, finding General Taylor had made a stand and was determined to offer him battle, sent directions to the former to remain in that quarter, and to fall upon us during our retreat before his overwhelming masses. In order the more certainly to insure that none of our army should escape, a thousand mounted rancheros, armed with lances and *machetes*,*

* *Ma-che-te*, a kind of long, heavy knife, similar to those used in cutting down Indian corn.

who had been collected at Monclova, Buena-ventura, and Parras, and were commanded by Colonel Miguel Blanco and Colonel Aguierra, were also sent from Patos, by a mule-path leading through the mountains, into the same valley. While, therefore, General Miñon was to hover about the east side of the road leading from Saltillo to Monterey, along which, it was supposed, we should soon be flying in great confusion, Colonels Blanco and Aguierra were to occupy the small town of Capellania on the west, likewise to await our retreat, and to assist in cutting us up without quarter.

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 May's squadron of the 2d Dragoons, and Colonel Davis's Regiment of Mississippi Riflemen, for Saltillo, the better to provide for such an emergency. On arriving there, he arranged that Warren's and Webster's commands should remain to garrison the town and redoubt, re-

spectively, as they had previously done; and that the train and head-quarters camp, then established on the brow of the hill immediately south of the town, should be defended by one 6-pounder, detached from Captain Bragg's Battery, and under the command of Lieutenant Shover, with a support of two companies of Colonel Davis's riflemen, under Captain Rogers.

After the action of the 22d had drawn to a close, Santa Anna made a final address to those of his troops that remained in our front. He referred to the wrongs which, he said, had been inflicted upon their country by the barbarians of the North; wrongs which could not be submitted to without eternal disgrace, and which could be redressed only by the last resort of nations. The United States of the North had, coward-like, presumed on their strength alone, and wantonly set at defiance every principle of right. They had provoked this war under the cover of other objects to be gained, but really for their own aggrandizement, and the acquisition of territory clearly the property of the United States of the South. The one country aimed only at the entire destruction of the nation-