

and quake with the repeated echoes, convinced our whole army that the gallant Washington was making good his promise to defend that point; and many and heart-felt were the wild hurrahs that rent the air in exultation at his efforts. Nothing could withstand the terrible tempest of iron which he hurled into the compact column before him. The first shock impeded its advance; it then wavered a moment,—halted,—and finally turned in confusion, and rushed into the mouth of the third gorge,^(a) and up the great ravine in front,^(b) to seek protection behind the spurs which projected upon the road.

In this splendid demonstration of the capacity of artillery, and its importance as an arm, Captain Washington completely repulsed over 4000 of the flower of the Mexican army, and convinced them, beyond a doubt, of their inability to force him from his position. He was ably supported by his remaining three subalterns, Lieutenants Brent, Whiting, and Couch, who managed the pieces with great skill, and exhibited superior courage and address throughout the whole affair.

Just as Captain Washington opened his fire, Captain Sherman, with his other section,^(s) was

ordered up to the plateau. He immediately came into battery near the head of the first gorge,^(c) and opened his fire; Lieutenant Reynolds of his company directing one of the pieces, and the Captain himself the other. He was in a short time supported by Colonel McKee's 2d Kentucky Volunteers, which, according to instructions given to Major Mansfield, had been sent for, to come from its position across the stream, and which was brought into action with much spirit on his right. In a few minutes more, Captain Bragg, with two of his pieces, also came up, and, passing to the left of the 1st Dragoons, wheeled into battery, having three of Captain Sherman's guns on his right,—Lieutenant Thomas's being the first,—and the fourth (Lieutenant French's) at some distance to his left. A complete line of artillery was thus formed, extending from near the head of the first gorge to the brink of the ravine in rear of the plateau, and was supported by the 1st Dragoons, the Second Regiment of Kentucky Volunteers, the six companies of Colonel Bissell's regiment, and four companies of the First Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, under their gallant Colonel Hardin, who came upon the pla-

teau the moment General Mora y Villamil's column had been repulsed. The direction of the fire of this whole force was now toward the mountain on our left. The enemy's second column had by this time succeeded in advancing across the whole plateau; and, being within good range, every discharge of our artillery took effect upon it. The firing on our side was now incessant and most terrible; the storm of iron and lead beating against the dark masses of the Mexicans with dreadful fury. They, however, stood firm to their work, and for a while returned the fire with such determined valor, as to elicit the admiration of all who were opposed to them.

Meanwhile, their cavalry swept by between their infantry and the mountain at the head of the plateau, in rapid pursuit of the Indiana regiment; the left of General Ampudia's force leaving the foot of the slope on which they had been contending, and pressing forward with them. Those of the Arkansas and Kentucky Mounted Volunteers, who had remained near the head of the ravine, were obliged immediately to give way before this force, which came pouring down upon them from the plateau. This movement interrupted the commu-

nication between our riflemen in the mountains and our main army. No sooner did they discover that the enemy's lancers and infantry had got between them and their friends, than they immediately abandoned their position, and succeeded in forcing their way around the intercepting column below, which for a time was held in check by the Arkansas and Kentucky cavalry, under Colonels Yell and Marshall, who, luckily, had been able to make a short stand after they had gained a little plain⁽⁶⁾ in rear of the ravine from which they had just been compelled to retire. In this movement the riflemen suffered great loss, — the Texan company being nearly destroyed. The rest of General Ampudia's force poured down the mountain in hot pursuit, and, uniting with the lancers, compelled the Arkansas men, Kentuckians, riflemen, and all, to give way before them; the two former alternately yielding and disputing the ground, the others following in the footsteps of the volunteers who had first retreated.

Our whole left had now been forced, and the enemy was in possession of every advantage arising from the peculiar nature of the

ground; the alternate ridges and ravines being as much in his favor as in ours.

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 Bragg's 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.

Up to this time General Wool, being next in command, had assigned the positions for

* For the position he assumed, see the Plan of the Battle.

all the troops, and conducted the battle from the beginning; but, the moment General Taylor arrived at the front and assumed the direction of affairs, he immediately started to assist General Lane in rallying the 2d Indiana Volunteers, and to endeavor to restore something like order to our left, which by this time had swung around so as to face toward the mountains on that side, and in a direction perpendicular to the original line. The position of the batteries still in active operation on the plateau, the point of land on which Colonel Hardin had thrown up a parapet, and Captain Washington's position at La Angostura, were at this moment the only portions of the ground we first occupied, from which we had not been driven. Already our loss in officers and men had been immense; and among them was included the gallant and chivalrous Assistant Adjutant-General, Captain George Lincoln,* one of the most promising young officers in the army, and one who, possessing

* He had been endeavoring to rally the 2d Indiana Volunteers, by urging them, by every thing men can hold dear, to return to their duty. Finding all his appeals of no avail, he returned himself to the conflict upon the plateau, when, just as he arrived at the rear of the 2d Kentucky Volunteers, then manfully struggling with the

every quality which can adorn a gentleman, was admired and beloved by all who knew him.

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

enemy, he was shot in two places, and instantly expired. Alas! how many were the hearts which the intelligence of his early death penetrated with the deepest sorrow!

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's 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,⁽⁶⁾ 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

* The same that, before day, had reinforced it against our riflemen.

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 enemy's 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,⁽⁹⁾ 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 simply 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 Mexi-

cans 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.

The Mississippians then turned to the right, to beat up the cover of what had been the flanking cavalry of this column. They found it attempting to cross the ravine on that hand, in order to attack them in reverse. A few only had crossed, — their commander among them, — but they never went back; and those who were pressing down to succeed them, received a fire it was impossible for them to withstand. They, too, gave way, and fled back to the point whither the light infantry had retreated, and where they were now just forming again.

For a little while, this part of the field appeared to be comparatively safe, and, by the determined valor of one small regiment, an imminent peril to our whole army seemed to be averted. The Mississippians gathered up their wounded, and, taking them to the rear of the first ravine they had crossed, there

formed again in line of battle. They were then joined by the 3d Indiana Volunteers, under Colonel Lane, and by Lieutenant Kilburn with one piece of artillery. The fire of this combined force caused those who had just before contended with Colonel Davis's regiment to fall back, for a short time, still farther, and beyond range.

While all this was doing, other large masses of the enemy's cavalry⁽¹⁰⁾ had kept along under the base of the mountains, farther toward Saltillo, and, having crossed many difficult ravines near their sources, moved down directly toward Buena Vista, passing, however, more than half a mile to the right of General Ampudia's column. They had in front of them Colonel Yell's and Colonel Marshall's Mounted Volunteers;⁽¹¹⁾ too few to offer successful resistance, yet endeavoring to maintain, point after point, the ground they were forced to yield.* Seeing this, General Taylor ordered the handful of cavalry, then near him on the plateau, to move rapidly to the rear, in order to assist in repelling this force. It was all united

* Had the Arkansas and Kentucky (mounted) volunteers never been allowed horses, they would have been able to make a stand, on this occasion, as well as the Mississippians.

in one column, under Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel May, and was composed of four companies of regular Dragoons, viz. one under Lieutenant Rucker, assisted by Lieutenant Buford, one under Lieutenant Carleton, assisted by Lieutenant Whittlesey and Lieutenant Evans, one under Lieutenant Campbell, and one under Lieutenant Givens; besides Captain Pike's and Captain Preston's companies of Arkansas Mounted Volunteers. This column moved to the left, passing some distance in rear of the Mississippi regiment, and then established itself on the right of Colonel Marshall's men; Colonel Yell, with his, being on the left. The force, thus accumulated, immediately stopped the enemy, and caused him to fall back again near the mountains. As he could not now be reached by our Dragoons, except in detail, owing to the impossibility of crossing several intervening ravines, otherwise than by one or two paths only wide enough for one horse to pass at a time, Colonel May despatched Lieutenant Evans, of the 1st Dragoons, with a message to General Taylor, requesting some pieces of artillery.

While our cavalry force was thus holding that of the enemy in check, and while the Mississippi Riflemen, and 3d Indiana Volun-

teers, assisted by Lieutenant Kilburn, were engaged with the troops under General Ampudia, General Wool was making every effort to rally our men who had first given way; and General Lane, though wounded and bleeding, was also endeavoring to gather up the scattered fragments of the regiment with which he had opened the battle. In this they were ably assisted by Inspector-General Churchill,—by Major Monroe, of the Artillery,—and likewise by Captain Steen, of the 1st Dragoons, who fell, severely wounded, while on this duty. None, however, were so successful in arresting their flight, as the intrepid Major Dix, of the Pay Department. Having ridden rapidly in amongst them, he seized the standard of the 2d Indiana Volunteers, and then called to the men, and asked them if they would desert their colors. He told them that they had sworn to protect them, and now, if they were still determined to do so, they must return with him to the fight. He swore to them, that, with God's help, he would not see the state of Indiana disgraced by having her flag carried out of battle until it could be carried out in triumph; and that back into it again it should go, if he had to take it there and

defend it alone. This touched the hearts of many of those who were within the sound of his voice. It seemed to banish the panic which had fallen upon them; they were themselves again; they rallied, thought of their homes, gave three cheers for Indiana, and again gathered around her flag. Captain Linnard, of the Topographical Engineers, who had been very active in seconding Major Dix in his appeal to these men, and in putting them in order as they came together, now got a drum and fife, and directed the national quick-step to be played, when the word was given to move on. Major Dix then led off with the flag, while the gallant Captain brought up the rear; and in this way, taking a direction toward Colonel Davis's and Colonel Lane's regiments, back again they went into battle.* All the rest continued their flight; most of them to the hacienda of Buena Vista, but many even to the city of Saltillo, where they reported that all was lost, and our army in full retreat. The reader should bear in mind, that, while all this was taking place to the left and rear, the battle raged with desperate fury on the plateau. This great centre of the conflict was now under the eye and immediate direc-

* See Appendix, D.

tion of the respective commanders of the two opposing armies.

Santa Anna, finding it was impossible for the infantry of his centre column to drive back our line of artillery under Sherman and Bragg, and its supporting force under Hardin, Bissell, and McKee, hurried up the Battalion de San Patricio,* with a battery of 18 and 24-pounders; and, with incredible exertions, he succeeded in bringing it around the heads of the large ravine in front, and along the steep sides of the spurs of the mountain, where the battle first opened, and thence down to the very point^(L) occupied by O'Brien's section before he moved forward in the morning. Its fire now enfiladed the whole plateau; being directed from its upper edge toward the road.

Even with this additional strength, the centre column could not clear the plateau, but was itself compelled to give ground before the

* This *Battalion of Saint Patrick* was composed of some of the Irish soldiers who had deserted from the American army and gone over to the enemy. It was commanded by a man named Riley, also a deserter. Subsequently, the whole battalion was taken in one of the battles in front of the city of Mexico, and sixty of them were hung near Chapultepec. The Irishmen in our army, who had remained true to their colors, were the most clamorous for their execution.

withering effects of the iron poured into it by our light artillery. At length, being broken near its centre, one half pushed over the ravine in rear, and in a direction to reënforce the troops under General Ampudia; while the other half, except the corps of Sappers and Miners, which stood firm by the battery, fell back toward the ravine in front, bearing with them Santa Anna himself, whose horse had been shot down under him. The moment this latter half began to move, Hardin, Bissell, and McKee, with their respective commands, dashed gallantly forward to a point within close musket-shot, when they opened their fire, and followed up the enemy with great slaughter until he became covered by the ravine. Being then, in turn, threatened by the cavalry which had flanked General Mora y Villamil's column, they fell back to the heads of the first and second gorges in their rear; Colonel Hardin's command going to the support of Captain Bragg's section, which, in the mean time, had limbered up and come into battery again, far in advance⁽¹²⁾ of its first position.

Lieutenant O'Brien had by this time come back on the plateau once more. He had been obliged (not having a single cannoneer to

work the guns) to go down to La Angostura with the section he had been able to bring off, in order to procure a fresh one of two 6-pounders, which Captain Washington gave him in exchange; and, although Lieutenant French, in consequence of his wound, had been compelled to give up the command of his gun, it fell into good hands, and was kept actively employed under the direction of Lieutenant Garnett, one of the aides-de-camp of General Taylor. So that there were now eight pieces on the plateau alone.

As our left was now the most seriously menaced, not only by the forces which had turned it in the beginning of the battle, but likewise by more than half of the enemy's centre column, General Taylor ordered Captain Sherman and Captain Bragg, each with a section of his battery, to proceed there and strengthen it. This left on the plateau Lieutenant O'Brien with his two pieces, and Lieutenants Thomas and Garnett, each with one. As occasion seemed to render it necessary, the fire of these four guns was directed, now toward the front, now toward the battery at the head of the plateau, and now toward the heavy masses threatening our left and rear, and always with marked effect.

The position of affairs was at this time, in brief, as follows:

The enemy's reserve kept its ground in front. His battery near the road, and likewise his 8-pounder battery, still continued to play respectively upon Washington at La Angostura, and upon the plateau. The third gorge and the ravine in front of the plateau were filled by his first and a part of his second columns of attack, held in check by the 1st and 2d Illinois Volunteers and the 2d Kentucky Regiment, stationed in and near the heads of the first and second gorges, and supporting the four pieces under O'Brien, Thomas, and Garnett. These pieces had the enemy's 18 and 24-pounder battery directly opposite to them, and still close under the mountain at the head of the plateau.⁽¹²⁾ The rest of the enemy's second column, all of his third, and the heavy bodies of his cavalry which had turned our left, stretched along near the base of the mountains on that flank, in an irregular line, and faced toward the road; the infantry and a portion of the cavalry were upon the left,⁽¹³⁾ nearest the plateau; while the most of the cavalry and a small portion of the infantry were on the right,⁽¹⁴⁾ and near-

ly opposite Buena Vista. Against this latter part of the enemy's forces, we had also an irregular line. The right of it was composed of the pieces⁽¹⁵⁾ under Sherman, Bragg, Reynolds, and Kilburn, scattered along at uncertain intervals, and having, as their nearest support, Colonel Davis's and Colonel Lane's regiments, together with such of the volunteers of other corps, whether of horse or of foot, as had up to this time been rallied and brought back into the battle. The left⁽¹¹⁾ consisted of the four companies of the 1st and 2d Dragoons, Pike's and Preston's companies, all that remained of Colonel Marshall's mounted men, and also the fragment of Colonel Yell's regiment, which was on the extreme left.

Following up these various positions, the reader cannot fail to observe, that the whole scene of combat now extended over a space of ground upwards of two miles in length, by nearly a mile in breadth.

For a long while the conflict was continued without any decided success on the part of either army; and the whole field, during this period, might be compared to an intricate game of chess, the Pass at La Angostura, defended by Washington, being the key to our

position. If this were carried, we were irretrievably checkmated, and the game was lost.

Had the enemy at this time brought up his powerful reserve, and gathered around it the scattered portions of his first column, it would have required all our artillery under Sherman, Bragg, and O'Brien, and the infantry then on the plateau, to maintain it; while his superiority in numbers in rear might, probably would, have beaten our forces there, and then been at liberty to overpower Washington by attacking him in reverse, or to move on, carry Saltillo, and get possession of all our stores and ammunition there; either of which movements would eventually have destroyed us. But from some unaccountable motive, or blind fatality, he allowed most of his army, still in our front, to remain comparatively inactive; and that too, in one of the most critical conditions of the battle. By doing this, he allowed General Taylor time and opportunity to strengthen his left with artillery from the plateau. The latter promptly seized the great advantage afforded by this fault, as has already been shown; and now, for a season, the balance preponderated slightly in our favor.

About twelve o'clock at noon, Colonel May's

column of Dragoons was ordered to return from the left to the plateau. Large masses of the enemy's line, extending along the base of the mountain, soon afterward began to give way before the destructive artillery fire, then concentrated upon it, and the determined resistance of the Mississippi Riflemen and the 3d Indiana Volunteers. Some of their corps now attempted to return to the main army in front. Seeing this, General Taylor detached the two companies of the 1st Dragoons, to proceed up the deep ravine ⁽¹⁶⁾ in rear of the plateau, and there to charge into and disperse them. These companies had hardly started on this service, before it was observed that a brigade of the enemy's cavalry, mostly lancers, had succeeded in crossing the difficult ravines which lay between it and the Arkansas and Kentucky Mounted Volunteers, and, having forced the latter to give ground, was evidently meditating a descent upon our baggage train, now parked upon the road a short distance below Buena Vista.* Colonel May, with the two com-

* It will be remembered that this train, during the night of the 22d, was parked in a hollow, half way from the hacienda to La Angostura. When our left gave way, on the morning of the 23d, the poor teamsters thought