

forward to a room in one of the buildings of the village which had escaped the conflagration. There the bandages were taken from their eyes, when they found themselves in the presence of the Mexican President, surrounded by his generals. The Major at once informed his Excellency of the mission with which he was charged. To this, General Santa Anna,—to use his exact language, as reported by himself,—replied as follows:

“Say to General Taylor; that we sustain the most sacred of causes,—the defence of our territory and the preservation of our nationality and rights; that we are not the aggressors, and that our government has never offended that of the United States. We can say nothing of peace while the Americans are on this side of the Rio Bravo del Norte, or occupy any part of the Mexican territory, or blockade our ports. We are resolved to perish or vindicate our rights. Fortune may not always favor the enemy; his experience on the 22d and 23d should convince him that his luck may change. The Americans wage against us a war of Vandalism, whose excesses outrage those sentiments of humanity which one civilized nation ought to evince toward

another. In proof of this assertion, you have but to go outside of this apartment to see still smoking the dwellings of this recently flourishing village; you passed the same vestiges of desolation at La Encantada, on your route hither; and, if you will go a little farther on, there, to Catana, you will hear the moans of the widows and orphans of innocent victims who have been sacrificed without necessity.

“With respect to the wounded whom General Taylor invites me to send for, I can only say there can be none save those who have been too much hurt to arise from the field, or those most in advance who remained in the ravines; and, as I have not the means for their conveyance, I trust that, under the protection of the law of nations, he will have them carried to Saltillo. As for the prisoners General Taylor wishes to exchange, I know not who they can be, unless some of our dispersed troops, or some who, from the fatigue of the last two days, remained asleep when we moved. But, in consideration of the courtesy he has shown with regard to our wounded, I consent, in the name of the nation, to release all the prisoners we have, whether taken at Encarnacion or La Angostura.”

His Excellency, in continuation, spoke of his having won the battle of General Taylor, as of something about which there could be no difference of opinion. He remarked casually, that he had brought with him, as trophies from the field, three pieces of ordnance, and as many stands of colors;* and that, in falling back to the position he then occupied, he had done so as a mere matter of convenience to himself and his army. Major Bliss and his interpreter were then permitted to take their leave without being blindfolded. The Major immediately returned, with his escort, to Buena Vista, the commanding General having come back from La Encantada during his absence.

All the rest of the 24th, and the day following, were spent in collecting and burying our dead,† and in gathering up the Mexican

* The reader has already been informed how Santa Anna obtained the three cannon to which he alluded. The flags, which he dignified by the title of "stands of colors," were merely the small ensigns which belonged to some of those volunteer companies who ran from the field, and which, being encumbrances to their flight, their bearers had thrown away.

† Each regiment and corps chose for itself some quiet little nook to the left of the small eminence⁽²²⁾ in rear of

wounded, and taking them to Saltillo, where they received precisely the same personal kindness and professional treatment from our surgeons as had been bestowed upon the men of our own army. Preparations were also made to renew the conflict, should the enemy return. Captain Prentiss's heavy guns took the place of Washington's Light Battery at La Angostura; and Lieutenant Benham, of the Engineers, with a large detail of men, soon improved the ditch, raised the epaulment, and strengthened the traverse at that point to such a degree as to make it far more difficult to carry than ever.

Up to this moment, in describing the hurried movements and combat of the two forces, and the continued pressing of one important event upon another, it has been impossible, — without danger of injuring the impression it was hoped the reader would have of the battle in its progress from the beginning, — to mention many individuals by name, except those belonging to the Line of the Army. To all who have thus far perused this narrative, this must certainly have been self-evident.

La Angostura, and there buried, side by side, the remains of the gallant men death had selected from it.

But justice to the Staff, always so distinguished, demands that, at this point, the names of all its members, who participated in the conflicts of the 22d and 23d of February, should be distinctly recorded.

Of the Adjutant-General's Department, there were but two officers on the field; Major Bliss and Captain Lincoln. It would be supererogatory to write here any thing more than the names of these two distinguished soldiers. The same remark is applicable to Inspector-General Churchill, and to Colonel Whiting, Assistant Quartermaster-General, two of the staunchest veterans in the service. Colonel Belknap, on duty in the staff of the commanding General, was conspicuous for his efforts to rally our flying troops, as was also Major Munroe, Chief of Artillery. Major Joseph H. Eaton and Lieutenant Garnett, aides to General Taylor, and Lieutenant McDowell, aide to General Wool, carried the orders of their respective chiefs into all parts of the field, and were noticed everywhere for their coolness and address. The same may be said of Lieutenant Robinson, aide to General Lane. Of the Quartermaster's Department, there were but two captains present;

Captain William W. Chapman and Captain Chilton. The former, as extra aide to General Wool, displayed great bravery in repeatedly conveying orders under the most withering fire, and was highly complimented for his admirable arrangements for the defence of the train on the afternoon of the 23d. The latter, being extra aide to General Taylor, was conspicuous for his daring. Captain Sibley, of the same department, was on duty at the head-quarter encampment near Saltillo, where, though not actively engaged, he rendered good service.

Of the Medical Department, there were on the field Dr. Hitchcock, Dr. Madison, Dr. Levely, and Dr. Prevost. They were ably assisted by the surgeons of the Volunteer regiments. The courageous manner in which these gentlemen passed along our lines and rendered assistance to the wounded, oftentimes at the moment they fell; the positions of imminent peril to which they cheerfully and at all times hurried, whenever their professional services were required on the instant; the care with which they had those who were struck borne to the rear, and subsequently carried to Saltillo, and their assiduity in attend-

ing upon them day and night, gained for them the unqualified praise of the whole army. Major Dix, Major Coffee, and Major Colquitt, of the Pay Department, and extra aides to the commanding General, were, in a high degree, conspicuous for their intrepidity.

The services, during the battle, of Major Mansfield, of the Corps of Engineers, were just such as would be expected from an officer who enjoys the reputation throughout the army of being qualified in every respect to command a hundred thousand men. Lieutenant Benham, of the same corps, was always in advanced positions, and consequently always in danger. He performed his duties with great credit, and had the honor to be wounded. Of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, there were five officers present in the battle; Captain Linnard, Lieutenant Sitgreaves, Lieutenant Pope, Lieutenant Franklin, and Lieutenant Bryan; and each one of them was highly distinguished for the fearlessness with which he discharged the important duties of his station. They all served as extra aides to General Taylor or General Wool.

Lieutenant Kingsbury was the only officer of the Ordnance Department present. In ad-

dition to the performance of the legitimate and extremely arduous duties of his station, he likewise served as extra aide to the commanding General, and acquitted himself with gallantry. The Subsistence Department was well represented by Captain Amos B. Eaton, who also served upon the field in the immediate staff of General Taylor. Major Craig, Chief of Ordnance, and Surgeon Craig, Medical Director, had been detached from headquarters, and did not arrive upon the field until the morning of the 24th, but came in time to render valuable services in their respective departments of the staff. Major McCulloch, Major Roman, Captain Davis, Captain Howard, Captain Naper, and Captain Gilbert, of the Volunteer staff, did their duty like soldiers. Mr. Thomas L. Crittenden, of Kentucky, volunteered his services as aide to General Taylor. His coolness and daring were the subject of remark. Mr. March, Mr. Parker, Mr. Addicks, Mr. Potts, Mr. Henry A. Harrison, Mr. Burgess, Mr. Henry Howard, and Mr. Dusenbury, though not attached to the army in a military capacity, went upon the ground and fought with great courage.

During the evening of the 25th, Lieutenant

Rucker, with his company of 1st Dragoons as a guard, marched all the Mexican prisoners, who were to be given up, to La Encantada, where Inspector-General Churchill formally turned them over to Captain Faulac of the Mexican army, the Adjutant-General of Santa Anna.* On the 26th, our spies reported that the enemy was beginning to break up his camp at Agua Nueva, and was rapidly falling back upon the road leading toward San Luis de Potosí. Early in the afternoon of that day, a strong party of observation, composed of the two companies of the 1st Dragoons, associated with Pike's and Preston's companies of Arkansas Mounted Volunteers, pushed on within half a mile of Agua Nueva, and, during a close reconnoissance, succeeded in capturing two lancers, from whom it was ascertained that the whole of the enemy's artillery and infantry had already gone, leaving a force of upwards of 3000 cavalry, under General Torrejon, to cover their retreat. On the 27th our entire army returned to Agua Nueva. The enemy's cavalry had abandoned that place at half past eight o'clock in the morning. Our advance-guard, composed of the 1st Dragoons, entered

* See Appendix, G.

it two hours later. The ruins of the village were literally crowded with the enemy's wounded, and many who had died were lying about still unburied. Here we learned from the surgeons and wounded officers, who had been left behind, that the whole Mexican army was in a state of utter disarray and demoralization; that 4000 men, at least, had already deserted, 3000 of them having abandoned their colors on the night of the 23d.* It was General Taylor's purpose at once to pursue the enemy so as to beat up his quarters at Encarnacion by daybreak the following morning; but, upon examination, our cavalry and artillery horses were found to be so exhausted, as to be in no condition to take the road for so long a march without water, until they had had at least one day's repose.

On the 28th, the wounded whom the enemy had abandoned at Agua Nueva were carried to the hospitals at Saltillo. Late in the evening of the same day, the few prisoners General

* Which was the fact. We subsequently learned that at least 2000 went by Parras, toward the west; that as many more passed by La Hedionda toward the east; while large numbers took the Mazapil road, and scattered through the country in that direction.

Miñon had taken came in from Encarnacion, having been released at that point by Santa Anna, and furnished with passports to our army. Lieutenant Sturgis and the dragoon, who had been lost at La Hedionda on the evening of the 20th, and whom we had considered as sacrificed, to our astonishment and great joy returned with this party. At the time they were captured, they had arrived at the top of the hill, which they had climbed in order to reconnoitre the valley beyond, when they were fired upon by an out-lying piquet of General Miñon's brigade, some twenty-five in number; but, fortunately, were not struck. They immediately turned and ran down towards the place where they had been obliged to leave their horses, the whole piquet following them. In their rapid flight, they both fell prostrate, and were overtaken and secured by the Mexicans before they could recover their feet. They would have been murdered on the instant, had it not been for the timely intervention of the officer commanding the party. They were then taken to General Miñon's head-quarters at Guachuchil. The General treated Lieutenant Sturgis with marked courtesy and kindness, and showed a most gentlemanly and deli-

cate regard for his situation and feelings; not asking, or permitting any of his officers to ask, any questions about our army, about the immediate purpose of our strong party of observation then at La Hedionda, or any other question which the Lieutenant could not answer with perfect freedom and propriety. He then figured as a mere spectator in the brigade, in its march to the valley north of Saltillo, and, during the battle, in its advance up into the Pass between the city and Buena Vista. All the time it was under the fire of Webster's, Donaldson's, and Shover's guns, he had the misfortune to be in imminent peril of his life from the shot of his most intimate friends, then cutting up the brigade about him. On the morning of the 24th, he still accompanied General Miñon, as he left the valley by the Palomas Pass, and as he afterwards circled around by the way of San Antonio to La Hedionda, and thence, finally, to Encarnacion. On being released at that point, General Miñon kindly presented the Lieutenant with a most beautiful cloak, made of black velvet and richly embroidered; and also with a horse, on which to return to Agua Nueva. Santa Anna likewise gave him a passport under his

own hand. Justice toward General Miñon, who is represented as being a most accomplished and elegant gentleman, requires that his kind and considerate deportment toward one of our officers, whom the fortune of war had thrown into his hands, should be fully stated.

On the 1st of March, Colonel Belknap was furnished with a command, and ordered to proceed to Encarnacion to cut up the enemy's rear guard of cavalry, reported as still remaining at that place. This command was composed of the four companies of the 1st and 2d Dragoons; two pieces from Washington's Battery; two or three hundred volunteer cavalry, including Major McCulloch's Texas spy-company, and Colonel Bissell's Second Regiment of Illinois Volunteers; the last in wagons, so as to move rapidly and still be fresh for combat. It left Agua Nueva at three o'clock in the afternoon, the purpose being to march most of the way in the night, the better to elude observation, and then to attack the enemy in his camp at daybreak the following morning. There was every indication, for the whole of the way, of a most hurried retreat and the most dreadful distress. The road was

literally strewed with the dead and dying, and with those perishing from fatigue and want of water. It was a most melancholy and touching picture, that of soldiers in uniform, who, having been spared in battle, were now yielding up their lives without a wound.

Colonel Belknap arrived at Encarnacion just at the first gray of morning; but nearly all of the enemy had fled. Several white flags were flying upon the battlements of the church of the hacienda and other elevated points, indicating any thing but resistance on the part of those who still remained. Some few officers and men, on seeing the approach of our party, attempted flight by mounting their horses and hurrying away. The Texas spy-company started in pursuit of them, and, as it was a level and open plain, the whole chase was in full view of the command. The Mexicans, one after another, were caught to a man, and conducted back to the hacienda.

We imagined, that, during the battle, and upon the field when the conflict was ended, and afterwards upon the road over which the enemy had retreated, we had witnessed human suffering in its most distressing forms. But such was not the case. The scene presented

to our eyes on entering within the walls of Encarnacion was so filled with extreme and utter agony, that we at once ceased to shudder at the remembrance of any misery we had ever before looked upon. There were three hundred men crowded together in that wretched place, two hundred and twenty-two of whom had been wounded at Buena Vista and brought thus far. There were five officers amongst them. As they had received but little surgical attention, and had been harassed and worn down by travelling so far, while debilitated with pain and loss of blood, their wounds were nearly all either gangrened or highly inflamed. Many of them were enduring the most excruciating torments; many were delirious from excess of anguish; while others, whose wounds had become mortified, were perfectly composed, and yet were even more piteous to behold, as their very quietness was but a more certain indication of speedy dissolution. In fine, the whole hacienda presented, at one glance, a picture of death, embracing all the degrees, from the strong man, bearing up with fortitude against the sure and speedy fate which awaited him, down to the poor mortal struggling in the last throes of existence. And all

intermixed with them, were the bodies of those who had just commenced the long journey, yet warm, and lying in the various positions they were severally in when life departed. Poor fellows! No beloved eye had beamed tearfully upon them in their last moments. No voice of affection had murmured in their ear little gentle words of hope, or that touching comfort, "*We shall meet again!*" And there was no kind hand to honor their remains by straightening them for the grave.

During the fury and excitement of battle, we had no time to indulge in feelings of sympathy and commiseration for distress; particularly when we witnessed it among those of our enemies who had been stricken down. Then, we were Americans, and they Mexicans, our bitter and relentless foes. Now, meeting together when the thunder and excitement of the battle had subsided, we were men, and were meeting too on that level, of which all become sensible in the presence of death. The Mexicans had been taught to believe the Americans were almost savages; but, when they saw our men kneeling down beside their suffering comrades, grasping them kindly by the hand, giving them water, and all the bread and meat they had brought

for themselves, they were affected even to tears, and feelingly exclaimed, "*Buenos Americanos! Buenos Americanos!*" There was a priest there, dressed in his white robes; and, without exaggeration it may be said, his whole time, while we were there, was occupied in administering the sacrament of extreme unction to those who were dying.

At Encarnacion, we learned that Santa Anna himself had hurried on directly to the capital, but that all that was left of his army, in a state of almost positive disorganization, had retired by the way of Cedral, Vanegas, and Matahuala; General Miñon's brigade covering the retreat. Couriers preceded the President, announcing to the people a brilliant victory over the Americans!* Bonfires and illuminations lit up every town and city from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. Fêtes and balls, and merry peals of bells, and grand processions and orations, were the consequences of the report of a triumph, which flew throughout the length and breadth of the land. As early as the 27th of February, Santa Anna wrote to the Minister of War and

* See Appendix, H.

Marine an account of the operations of his army, and concluded by saying; "The nation, for which a triumph has been gained at the cost of so many sufferings, will learn, that, if we were able to conquer in the midst of so many embarrassments, there will be no doubt as to our final success in the struggle we sustain, if every spirit but rallies to the one sacred object of common defence. The army has done more than could be expected under the laws of nature. After a march of twenty leagues, [!] sixteen of them without water, and without other food than a single ration, which was dealt out at Encarnacion,* it endured the fatigue of combat for two days, and finally triumphed." What a triumph! If the manner in which the Mexican forces retreated from Buena Vista, and went back toward the capital of the Republic, was that which should characterize the return of a victorious army, God spare us from ever winning a battle!

We afterwards learned from the Mexicans themselves, that every hacienda and rancho, on the road over which their countrymen retreated, was crowded with the wounded, and

* See Appendix, I.

those who were sick and disabled from the hardships and sufferings incident to such a confused rout; and that, finally, of all that army which, one month before, had left San Luis Potosí, confident of success, and moving off in its strength with inspiring music, with pomp and magnificence, with the brazen clangor of trumpets, and with banners flying, — an army commanded by the President in person, and the finest the Republic had ever sent to the field, — there returned less than 12,000 men, and they worn down by fatigue, with loss of discipline and *morale*, and with all their high bearing completely subdued.

During the night of the 2d of March, Colonel Belknap's command returned to the camp at Agua Nueva. On learning the wretched condition of those of the enemy left at Encarnacion, General Taylor sent to their relief eighteen mule-loads of provisions and other necessaries, and, at the same time, had such of the wounded as were capable of being removed, brought to Saltillo, where they could receive better attention.

While the main "Army of Occupation" was thus employed in the advanced points to

which its operations had been pushed, its line of communication with its dépôts of supplies at Camargo, Matamoras, and the Brazos St. Iago, was entirely cut off by the large cavalry force, under General Urrea and General Romero, then on the road between Monterey and the Rio Grande. One of our trains had been attacked, its escort captured, and its unarmed teamsters had been butchered, and then burnt with their wagons. Attempts to destroy several other trains had likewise been made; but the different forces which guarded them had the better fortune to drive the enemy off, and, on two or three occasions, to cause him considerable loss. Now that Santa Anna's principal army had been beaten from our front, it was an easy matter for General Taylor to open his communication to the rear. For this purpose, leaving General Wool in command at Agua Nueva, he started, on the 8th of March, for Monterey, whence, proceeding in person against General Urrea and General Romero, he at once forced them beyond the Sierra Madre, thus leaving the whole valley of the Rio Bravo del Norte again in our possession.

At the Battle of Buena Vista, the conflict

was begun with only 4691 men on the American side. Santa Anna's army numbered more than 21,000, in our front, all regulars; General Miñon's brigade of veteran cavalry of 2000, and the rancho force at Cappellania of 1000, in our rear; beside the brigade of General Urrea and General Romero, east of Monterey. The *whole* of this force, reckoning from the Rio Grande, was cut up or driven back far to the south of the mountains, and all by our handful of men, *in less than twenty days* after the first gun was fired.

The effects of the Battle of Buena Vista upon the war were incalculable. Had Santa Anna destroyed General Taylor's army, — and, under the circumstances, defeat and total destruction were synonymous, — he could have poured his triumphant column through that gate of the mountains, the Rinconada Pass, into the valley of the Rio Grande; and then, subsisting upon our stores, fighting with our guns and our ammunition, and using our extensive means of transportation with which to pursue his onward course, what could have interposed to prevent this self-styled "Napoleon of the West" from executing his favorite vaunt, that he would plant the flag of Mexico

upon the banks of the Sabine? In addition to all this, Colonel Doniphan's command, which fought the battle of Sacramento on the 28th of February, must inevitably have been cut off, and every advantage, which, from the battle of Palo Alto up to that time, had been won at so much cost of blood and treasure, would have been snatched from us, and the whole war farther removed than ever from any prospect of a termination. Had Santa Anna been victorious over the Americans at Buena Vista, and then pushed his operations into Texas, with a force, it will be remembered, of over 26,000 regulars, well supplied with all the *matériel* of war, would the investment of Vera Cruz have been attempted at the time it was? Would not the veteran army of the United States have been compelled first to retrace its steps in order to force back the veteran army of Mexico? * Suppose Santa Anna had been successful, would he not have had time, had it been his policy so to do, to reach Vera Cruz, and attack General Scott, even before the city and the Castle of San Juan d'Ulloa had surrendered? Or, had he marched directly to Cerro

* See Appendix, J.