

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.

Gordo, with such an army to oppose the advance of the General-in-Chief to the capital, how immense the force we should have been obliged to send into the field; how great must have been the destruction of life; and what an expense of treasure and of time, too, must there have been, before our flag would have floated, as it now does, above the towers of the ancient city of the Aztecs. Besides, had Santa Anna been successful in his northern campaign, the whole nation would have been animated with enthusiasm, and would have risen in arms. The internal dissensions, by which its energies were paralyzed, would have disappeared. The cries of the numerous parties opposed to the government would at once have been drowned by shouts of triumph. Then, with her population of seven millions, with her *people* united and taking up arms, and with her difficult mountain passes, Mexico would have been a formidable antagonist to any invading army, which should attempt to penetrate to her capital. It needed but one victory to produce this great change. And so the leading men of the country understood it. They had, therefore, spent much time, and exercised great care, in collecting, even from remote states,

in organizing, and in preparing at all points, what was called "the Liberating Army of the North." It was composed of the very flower of Mexico, and was commanded by her most distinguished warrior,—the *prestige* of whose name alone was regarded as worth a host. It was a beautiful body of men; the just pride and the hope of every patriot in the land. In a country whose vitals were torn by open rebellion, as well as by the insidious and assassin-like machinations of plotting factions,—without a dollar in her treasury, and with ruined credit,—it had been a great, a most difficult, effort to produce it. It went forth, and the whole nation kept a listening ear turned toward the direction of its march. Each breeze from the north was expected to bear upon its wings a cry of victory. It came at length, and glad sounds, as of a Jubilee, arose from every city and hamlet; but, ere their echoes had died away, the shattered remnant of an army was seen returning;—an army defeated and ruined. It was all that was left of the Liberating Army of the North. The whole Republic comprehended at once the character of the triumph it had just celebrated,

and, losing heart, despaired of success from that moment.

Such were the results of the operations of General Taylor's little "Army of Occupation" during one short month.

When the disparity of numbers, — the long time in which the two armies struggled together, — their condition, respectively, as they approached each other, and their comparative condition after they had separated, — are all carefully considered, the Battle of Buena Vista will probably be regarded as the greatest ever fought on this continent; and it may be doubted if there can be found one that surpasses it in the history of any nation or of any age.

APPENDIX