

This regiment, too, had as much to do in front as one regiment could attend to, whilst about one thousand infantry on their right ran across the level ground between the two ravines, to cut off our retreat to the San Luis road, down which, under cover of Washington's guns, we could only reach the redoubt on the hill, where the First Illinois were posted in the early part of the action.

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

While our men were driven through the ravines, at the extremities of which a body of Mexican lancers was stationed to pounce upon them like tigers,—Brent and Whiting, of Washington's battery, gave them such a torrent of grape as to 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.

I soon discovered that the odds against us was so great, that we must be overpowered, and having witnessed, during the day, the barbarities committed upon our wounded officers, resigned myself to die. The right wing of the enemy's reserve had crossed over, and were turning our left flank—our men were too tired and broken down to bring them to the bayonet, and our only salvation was in retreat. I turned my eyes down the ravine, and the distance sickened me; and when I thought, but for one instant, upon how many gallant men would die there—murdered, butchered, even after surrender—my brain reeled: the order was given to retreat—no possible order could be observed, the banks were precipitate, rocky, and covered with loose rolling pebbles—five colonels were, with their regiments, at the head of the ravine where the order was given—three of them, John J. Hardin, Colonel McKee, and Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Clay, fell wounded, and were inhumanly lanced to death, and stripped of their clothing. I think the lance was run through poor Clay as often as ten times; his men carried him some two hundred yards, but to save their own lives, were compelled to abandon him; the wound which disabled him, was slight one through the legs. The same was poor Hardin's case. Colonel Bissell and myself escaped untouched, but a horrible massacre of our men took place here. Besides a large number of privates, there fell in this fatal ravine, Captain Zabriskie, First Illinois volunteers; Captain William T. Willis, Kentucky volunteers; Lieutenants T. Kelly, Rodney Ferguson, Edward F. Fletcher. Lauriston Robbins, Allen B. Roun-

tree, and James C. Steele, of Second Illinois volunteers; Lieutenant Hoten, First Illinois, and Lieutenant Ball, Second Kentucky volunteers.

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 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 blast 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.

The lancers who had dashed down the road to cut off our retreat, were driven back by Washington's artillery, which opened a well directed fire upon them; but for which, not one of us would have gotten out—the banks on each side of the ravine were very steep, at least fifty feet, and it was impossible to rally a man under the desolating fire which poured upon us from several thousand fresh troops. When we reached the redoubt it was nearly night; we had been in the engagement since daylight, and nature, unable to bear under greater burdens, yielded, officers and men sinking down upon the rocks and earth, completely exhausted. 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 our arms maintained.

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 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.

Throughout the action, General Taylor was where the shot fell hottest and thickest, two of which passed through his clothes. He constantly evinced the greatest quickness of conception, fertility of resource, and a cool, unerring judgment, not to be baffled. General Wool was wherever his presence was required, stimulating the troops to activity and exertion. The operations of General Lane were confined to his own brigade, and his efforts were worthy of better material for their application. Major Bliss bore himself with his usual gallantry, having his horse, as at Palo Alto, shot in the head. Mr. Crittenden, a son of the senator from Kentucky, was conspicuous in the field, as volunteer aid to General Taylor, and the medical director's assistant surgeon, Hitchcock, could be sometimes seen where the balls fell fastest, binding up a wound or dressing a broken leg, with true professional zeal; and anon, galloping with the ardor of an amateur knight, conveying orders to different commanders.

I could recount a thousand acts of individual courage worthy of record, but when all behaved so well, it would be invidious almost to record them. Captain

Lincoln was waving us on with his sword, when he fell dead into the arms of Captain Raith, of Belleville. Captain Steene, of the Dragoons, was on every part of the field, animating the volunteers by his presence and words; where the bullets were thickest his towering black was seen, until the gallant rider fell, severely wounded. Colonel Churchill has won an imperishable reputation for coolness and bravery. He rode along the lines but a minute before the enemy opened upon us, remarking, "My brave Illinoisians, you did not make this long march to be defeated now, did you?" and retired, his horse receiving four wounds.

General Wool behaved most gallantly, and has earned all the country can do for him, besides the respect, esteem and admiration of his brigade, who before the battle, had a long account of what they considered petty annoyances treasured against him.

What can be said of "Old Rough and Ready"? He was everywhere at the same time, animating, ordering, and persuading his men to remember the day and their country, and strike home for both. The breast of his coat was pierced by a canister shot. "These balls are growing excited," was his cool remark.

I give you a list of killed and wounded of our regiment; it is the highest, though bloodiest eulogium that can be passed upon it. I have extended this letter to an alarming length, I am aware, but your readers will excuse it—the theme is a mighty one—my heart is full, and my pen could not be controlled. Major Mansfield, for self-possession and cool courage, was unequalled by any officer on the field. General Taylor's staff, among whom is Lieutenant Pope, of our state, bore orders through every part of the field.

In this, as in every case of arbitrament by the sword

the laurel is closely entwined with the cypress, and the lustre of a brilliant victory is darkened by the blood with which it has been purchased. I am unable to state our loss, but it has been very severe, and proves the battle of Buena Vista to have been, by far, the most terrible conflict in which our troops have been engaged. Captain Lincoln, assistant adjutant-general to General Wool, fell early in the action, while proudly distinguished by his efforts to bring the flying regiment back to their position, and with his last breath bore testimony against Indiana cowardice. Colonel Yell was pierced by a lance, while gallantly leading his regiment against the Mexican cavalry. The noble Hardin met his death gloriously, while conducting the last terrible charge. Colonel McKee, after having gallantly sustained the honor of Kentucky, throughout the action, fell in the foremost rank, and Lieutenant-Colonel Clay was cut down at almost the same moment with Hardin and McKee, while giving his men the most brilliant example of noble daring and lofty chivalry. Others have fallen, but their names are not known to me; nor is it for me to pronounce the eulogy of those whose names I have recorded. Other and abler pens will do justice to the character and memory of the illustrious dead, whose devotion to the republic they have written with their blood and sealed with their lives. Lincoln was a gallant officer and accomplished gentleman, of pure heart and generous impulses, and worthy of his revolutionary lineage. Yell was a warm friend and gallant man, quick to see the right, and ready to pursue it. Hardin was one of Nature's noblest spirits, a soldier tried and true, a rare union of the best qualities of the head and heart. McKee was wise in council and brave in the field, with a heart

moved by the tenderest sympathies and most noble impulses. And what shall I say of Clay—the young, the brave, the chivalrous—foremost in the fight—the soul of every lofty sentiment? Devoted to his friends and generous to his enemies, he fell in the flower of his age and usefulness, and has left no worthier name behind him. If he was not the “noblest Roman of them all,” few will deny that in him—

“Were the elements
So mixed, that Nature might stand up and say
To all the world—THIS WAS A MAN.”

As General Taylor's own account of his brilliant achievements always presents the clearest conception of them to the mind, and affords the best index to his character, his detailed official report of this most splendid of all his military deeds, is given at length below. There are many incidents in such a battle as this, that must escape the attention of every one but the commanding general himself; and though his account is, of necessity, less exciting, as it is confined more to mere detail, than the graphic description already given, yet it presents facts in an authentic shape, and is therefore not only most sought after, but composes a necessary part of the history of the war. It is a monument, too, to the patriotism of the brave men who sacrificed their lives for their country on the bloody field of Buena Vista, no less than to his own genius, gallantry and patriotism, and as such must be preserved:

“I have the honor to submit a detailed report of the operations of the forces under my command, which resulted in the engagement of Buena Vista, the repulse

of the Mexican army, and the re-occupation of this position.

“The information which reached me of the advance and concentration of a heavy Mexican force in my front, had assumed such a probable form as to induce a special examination far beyond the reach of our pickets to ascertain its correctness. A small party of Texan spies, under Major McCullough, dispatched to the hacienda of Encarnacion, thirty miles from this, on the route to San Luis Potosi, had reported a cavalry force of unknown strength at that place. On the 20th of February, a strong reconnoissance, under Lieutenant-Colonel May, was dispatched to the hacienda of Hecliondo, while Major McCullough made another examination of Encarnacion. The result of these expeditions left no doubt that the enemy was in large force at Encarnacion, under the orders of General Santa Anna, and that he meditated a forward movement and attack upon our position.

“As the camp at Agua Nueva could be turned on either flank, and as the enemy's force was greatly superior to our own, particularly in the arm of cavalry, I determined, after much consideration, to take up a position about eleven miles in rear, and there await the attack. The army broke up its camp and marched at noon on the 21st, encamping at the new position a little in front of the hacienda of Buena Vista. With a small force I proceeded to Saltillo, to make some necessary arrangements for the defence of the town, leaving Brigadier-General Wool in the immediate command of the troops.

“Before those arrangements were completed, on the morning of the 22d, I was advised that the enemy was in sight, advancing. Upon reaching the ground, it

was found that his cavalry advance was in our front, having marched from Encarnacion, as we have since learned, at eleven o'clock the day previous, and driving in a mounted force left at Agua Nueva to cover the removal of public stores. Our troops were in position, occupying a line of remarkable strength. The road at this point becomes a narrow defile, the valley on its right being rendered quite impracticable for artillery by a succession of deep and impassable gullies, while on the left a succession of rugged ridges and precipitous ravines extends far back toward the mountain which bounds the valley. The features of the ground were such as nearly to paralyze the artillery and cavalry of the enemy, while his infantry could not derive all the advantage of its numerical superiority. In this position we prepared to receive him. Captain Washington's battery (Fourth artillery) was posted to command the road, while the First and Second Illinois regiments, under Colonels Hardin and Bissell, each eight companies, (to the latter of which was attached Captain Conner's company of Texas volunteers,) and the Second Kentucky, under Colonel McKee, occupied the crests of the ridges on the left and in rear. The Arkansas and Kentucky regiments of cavalry, commanded by Colonels Yell and H. Marshall, occupied the extreme left near the base of the mountain, while the Indiana brigade, under Brigadier-General Lane, (composed of the Second and Third regiments, under Colonels Bowles and Lane,) the Mississippi riflemen, under Colonel Davis, the squadrons of the First and Second dragoons, under Captain Steene and Lieutenant-Colonel May, and the light batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg, Third artillery, were held in reserve

"At eleven o'clock I received from General Santa Anna a summons to surrender at discretion, which, with a copy of my reply, I have already transmitted. The enemy still forebore his attack, evidently waiting for the arrival of his rear columns, which could be distinctly seen by our look-outs as they approached the field. A demonstration made on his left caused me to detach the Second Kentucky regiment and a section of artillery to our right, in which position they bivouacked for the night. In the meantime the Mexican light troops had engaged ours on the extreme left. (composed of parts of the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry dismounted, and a rifle battalion from the Indiana brigade, under Major Gorman, the whole commanded by Colonel Marshall,) and kept up a sharp fire, climbing the mountain side, and apparently endeavoring to gain our flank. Three pieces of Captain Washington's battery had been detached to the left, and were supported by the Second Indiana regiment. An occasional shell was thrown by the enemy into this part of our line, but without effect. The skirmishing of the light troops was kept up with trifling loss on our part until dark, when I became convinced that no serious attack would be made before the morning, and returned, with the Mississippi regiment and squadron of Second dragoons, to Saltillo. The troops bivouacked without fires, and laid upon their arms. A body of cavalry, some fifteen hundred strong, had been visible all day in rear of the town, having entered the valley through a narrow pass, east of the city. This cavalry, commanded by General Minon, had evidently been thrown in our rear to break up and harass our retreat, and perhaps make some attempt against the town, if practicable. The city was occupied by four excellent com-

panies of Illinois volunteers, under Major Warren, of the First regiment. A field-work, which commanded most of the approaches, was garrisoned by Captain Webster's company, First artillery, and armed with two twenty-four pound howitzers, while the train and headquarter camp was guarded by two companies of Mississippi riflemen, under Captain Rogers, and a field piece, commanded by Captain Shover, Third artillery. Having made these dispositions for the protection of the rear, I proceeded on the morning of the 23rd to Buena Vista, ordering forward all the other available troops. The action had commenced before my arrival on the field.

"During the evening and night of the 22nd, the enemy had thrown a body of light troops on the mountain side, with the purpose of outflanking our left; and it was here that the action of the 23rd commenced at an early hour. Our riflemen, under Colonel Marshall, who had been reinforced by three companies under Major Trail, Second Illinois volunteers, maintained their ground handsomely against a greatly superior force, holding themselves under cover, and using their weapons with deadly effect. About eight o'clock, a strong demonstration was made against the centre of our position, a heavy column moving along the road. This force was soon dispersed by a few rapid and well-directed shots from Captain Washington's battery. In the meantime the enemy was concentrating a large force of infantry and cavalry, under cover of the ridges, with the obvious intention of forcing our left, which was posted on an extensive plateau. The Second Indiana and Second Illinois regiments formed this part of our line, the former covering three pieces of light artillery under the orders of Captain O'Brien

—Brigadier-General Lane being in the immediate command. In order to bring his men within effective range, General Lane ordered the artillery and Second Indiana regiment forward. The artillery advanced within musket range of a heavy body of Mexican infantry, and was served against it with great effect, but without being able to check its advance. The infantry ordered to its support had fallen back in disorder, being exposed, as well as the battery, not only to a severe fire of small-arms from the front, but also to a murderous cross-fire of grape and canister, from a Mexican battery on the left. Captain O'Brien found it impossible to retain his position without support, but was only able to withdraw two of his pieces, all the horses and cannoneers of the third piece being killed or disabled. The Second Indiana regiment, which had fallen back as stated, could not be rallied, and took no farther part in the action, except a handful of men, who under its gallant colonel, Bowles, joined the Mississippi regiment, and did good service, and those fugitives who, at a later period in the day, assisted in defending the train and depot at Buena Vista. This portion of our line having given way, and the enemy appearing in overwhelming force against our left flank, the light troops which had rendered such good service on the mountain were compelled to withdraw, which they did, for the most part, in good order. Many, however, were not rallied until they reached the depot at Buena Vista, to the defence of which they afterwards contributed.

"Colonel Bissell's regiment (Second Illinois,) which had been joined by a section of Captain Sherman's battery, had become completely outflanked, and was compelled to fall back, being entirely unsupported. The enemy was now pouring masses of infantry and

cavalry along the base of the mountain on our left, and was gaining our rear in great force. At this moment I arrived upon the field. The Mississippi regiment had been directed to the left before reaching the position, and immediately came into action against the Mexican infantry which had turned our flank. The Second Kentucky regiment, and a section of artillery under Captain Bragg, had previously been ordered from the right to reinforce our left, and arrived at a most opportune moment. That regiment, and a portion of the First Illinois, under Colonel Hardin, gallantly drove the enemy, and recovered a portion of the ground we had lost. The batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg were in position on the plateau, and did much execution, not only in front, but particularly upon the masses which had gained our rear. Discovering that the enemy was heavily pressing upon the Mississippi regiment, the Third Indiana regiment, under Colonel Lane, was dispatched to strengthen that part of our line, which formed a crotchet perpendicular to the first line of battle. At the same time Lieutenant Kilburn, with a piece of Captain Bragg's battery, was directed to support the infantry there engaged. The action was for a long time warmly sustained at that point—the enemy making several efforts both with infantry and cavalry against our line, and being always repulsed with heavy loss. I had placed all the regular cavalry and Captain Pike's squadron of Arkansas horse under the orders of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel May, with directions to hold in check the enemy's column, still advancing to the rear along the base of the mountain, which was done in conjunction with the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry, under Colonels Marshall and Yell.

"In the meantime our left, which was still strongly threatened by a superior force, was further strengthened by the detachment of Captain Bragg's and a portion of Captain Sherman's batteries to that quarter. The concentration of artillery fire upon the masses of the enemy along the base of the mountain, and the determined resistance offered by the two regiments opposed to them, had created confusion in their ranks, and some of the corps attempted to effect a retreat upon their main line of battle. The squadron of the First dragoons, under Lieutenant Rucker, was now ordered up the deep ravine which these retreating corps were endeavoring to cross, in order to charge and disperse them. The squadron proceeded to the point indicated, but could not accomplish the object, being exposed to a heavy fire from a battery established to cover the retreat of those corps. While the squadron was detached on this service, a large body of the enemy was observed to concentrate on our extreme left, apparently with the view of making a descent upon the hacienda of Buena Vista, where our train and baggage were deposited. Lieutenant-Colonel May was ordered to the support of that point, with two pieces of Captain Sherman's battery under Lieutenant Reynolds. In the meantime, the scattered forces near the hacienda, composed in part of Majors Trail and Gormon's commands, had been to some extent organized under the advice of Major Munroe, chief of artillery, with the assistance of Major Morrison, volunteer staff, and were posted to defend the position. Before our cavalry had reached the hacienda, that of the enemy had made its attack; having been handsomely met by the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry under Colonels Marshall and Yell. The Mexican column

immediately divided, one portion sweeping by the depot, where it received a destructive fire from the force which had collected there, and then gaining the mountain opposite, under a fire from Lieutenant Reynolds' section, the remaining portion regaining the base of the mountain on our left. In the charge at Buena Vista, Colonel Yell fell gallantly at the head of his regiment; we also lost Adjutant Vaughan, of the Kentucky cavalry—a young officer of much promise. Lieutenant-Colonel May, who had been rejoined by the squadron of the First dragoons and by portions of the Arkansas and Indiana troops, under Lieutenant-Colonel Roane and Major Gorman, now approached the base of the mountain, holding in check the right flank of the enemy, upon whose masses, crowded in the narrow gorges and ravines, our artillery was doing fearful execution.

"The position of that portion of the Mexican army which had gained our rear was now very critical, and it seemed doubtful whether it could regain the main body. At this moment I received from General Santa Anna a message by a staff officer, desiring to know what I wanted? I immediately dispatched Brigadier General Wool to the Mexican general-in-chief, and sent orders to cease firing. Upon reaching the Mexican lines, General Wool could not cause the enemy to cease their fire, and accordingly returned without having an interview. The extreme right of the enemy continued its retreat along the base of the mountain, and finally, in spite of all our efforts, effected a junction with the remainder of the army.

"During the day, the cavalry of General Minon had ascended the elevated plain above Saltillo, and occupied the road from the city to the field of battle where

they intercepted several of our men. Approaching the town, they were fired upon by Captain Webster, from the redoubt occupied by his company, and then moved off towards the eastern side of the valley, and obliquely towards Buena Vista. At this time, Captain Shover moved rapidly forward with his piece, supported by a miscellaneous command of mounted volunteers, and fired several shots at the cavalry with great effect. They were driven into the ravines which lead to the lower valley, closely pursued by Captain Shover, who was farther supported by a piece of Captain Webster's battery, under Lieutenant Donaldson, which had advanced from the redoubt, supported by Captain Wheeler's company of Illinois volunteers. The enemy made one or two efforts to charge the artillery, but was finally driven back in a confused mass, and did not again appear upon the plain.

"In the meantime the firing had partially ceased upon the principal field. The enemy seemed to confine his efforts to the protection of his artillery, and I had left the plateau for a moment, when I was recalled thither by a very heavy musketry fire. On regaining that position, I discovered that our infantry (Illinois and Second Kentucky) had engaged a greatly superior force of the enemy—evidently his reserve—and that they had been overwhelmed by numbers. The moment was most critical. Captain O'Brien, with two pieces, had sustained this heavy charge to the last, and was finally obliged to leave his guns on the field—his infantry support being entirely routed. Captain Bragg, who had just arrived from the left, was ordered at once into battery. Without any infantry to support him, and at the imminent risk of losing his guns, this officer came rapidly into action, the Mexican line being

but a few yards from the muzzles of his pieces. The first discharge of canister caused the enemy to hesitate; the second and third drove him back in disorder and saved the day. The Second Kentucky regiment, which had advanced beyond supporting distance in this affair was driven back and closely pressed by the enemy's cavalry. Taking a ravine which led in the direction of Captain Washington's battery, their pursuers became exposed to his fire, which soon checked and drove them back with loss. In the meantime the rest of our artillery had taken position on the plateau, covered by the Mississippi and Third Indiana regiments, the former of which had reached the ground in time to pour a fire into the right flank of the enemy, and thus contribute to his repulse. In this last conflict we had the misfortune to sustain a very heavy loss. Colonel Hardin, First Illinois, and Colonel McKee and Lieutenant-Colonel Clay, Second Kentucky regiment, fell at this time, while gallantly leading their commands.

"No farther attempt was made by the enemy to force our position, and the approach of night gave an opportunity to pay proper attention to the wounded, and also to refresh the soldiers, who had been exhausted by incessant watchfulness and combat. Though the night was severely cold, the troops were compelled for the most to bivouac without fires, expecting that morning would renew the conflict. During the night the wounded were removed to Saltillo, and every preparation made to receive the enemy, should he again attack our position. Seven fresh companies were drawn from the town, and Brigadier-General Marshall, with a reinforcement of Kentucky cavalry and four heavy guns, under Captain Prentiss, First artillery, was near at

hand, when it was discovered that the enemy had abandoned his position during the night. Our scouts soon ascertained that he had fallen back upon Agua Nueva. The great disparity of numbers, and the exhaustion of our troops, rendered it inexpedient and hazardous to attempt pursuit. A staff officer was dispatched to General Santa Anna, to negotiate an exchange of prisoners, which was satisfactorily completed on the following day. Our own dead were collected and buried, and the Mexican wounded, of which a large number had been left upon the field, were removed to Saltillo, and rendered as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

"On the evening of the 26th, a close reconnoissance was made of the enemy's position, which was found to be occupied only by a small body of cavalry, the infantry and artillery having retreated in the direction of San Luis Potosi. On the 27th, our troops resumed their former camp at Agua Nueva, the enemy's rear-guard evacuating the place as we approached, leaving a considerable number of wounded. It was my purpose to beat up his quarters at Encarnacion early the next morning, but upon examination, the weak condition of the cavalry horses rendered it inadvisable to attempt so long a march without water. A command was finally dispatched to Encarnacion, on the 1st of March, under Colonel Belknap. Some two hundred wounded, and about sixty Mexican soldiers were found there, the army having passed on in the direction of Matehuala, with greatly reduced numbers, and suffering much from hunger. The dead and dying were strewn upon the road and crowded the buildings of the hacienda.

"The American force engaged in the action of