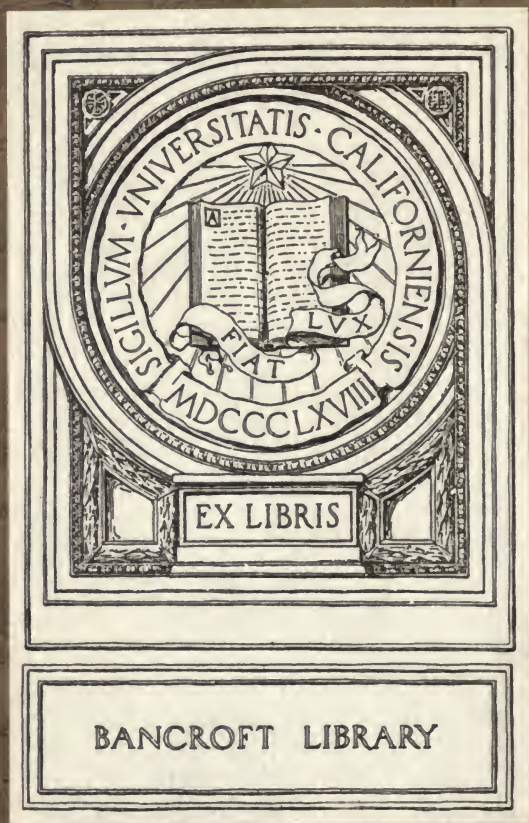


Battle of Buena Vista

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BATTLE

OF

BUENA VISTA.

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FROM THE "SOUTHERN QUARTERLY REVIEW," FOR JANUARY, 1851.

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1851.

BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA.

1. *The Battle of Buena Vista*, with the Operations of the Army of Occupation, for one month. By JAMES HENRY CARLETON, Capt. First Regiment of Dragoons. New-York: Harper & Brothers. 1848.
2. *The War with Mexico*; by R. S. RIPLEY, Brevet Major in the United States Army, First Lieutenant of the Second Regiment of Artillery, etc. In 2 vols. New-York: Harper & Brothers, publishers. 1849.
3. *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico*; by Capt. W. S. HENRY, U. S. Army. With engravings. New-York: Harper & Brothers. 1847.
4. *The Mexican War*; a history of its origin, and a detailed account of the victories, which terminated in the surrender of the capital, etc.; to which is added the treaty of peace, and valuable tables, etc. By EDWARD D. MANSFIELD, Graduate of the United States Military Academy. New-York: Published by A. S. Barnes & Co. 1850.
5. *Congressional Documents*, 1848-9.

IN a preceding number, the campaign of Gen. Taylor has been traced to the capitulation of Monterey. The limited space allowed us prevented the full discussion of our subject in a single paper, and excluded many minor views and illustrations, relating to the operations and battles that were criticised. Compelled to divide the Mexican career of Taylor into two periods, which, for symmetry and force, should have been included in a single representation, we sought the most natural point of separation, and drew our first conclusion, at the temporary suspension of arms, after the conquest of Monterey. Other reasons conduced to this selection. To that time, Taylor had been our sole commander in Mexico—he had battled entirely, or in a large proportion, with regulars—he had enjoyed the implicit confidence of his government, and had regulated his movements according to his own judgment, and on his own responsibility, with little, if any interference, on the part of his superiors in authority; and, as we have seen, his success was complete, under innumerable adverse circumstances. Subsequently, however, there was a change in all these particulars, except the last. The reliance of his government was somewhat

weakened by the armistice at Monterey—by differing with him on the policy of establishing a defensive line, as urged by Taylor, and advocated by Mr. Calhoun and others—and perhaps, also, by political considerations, since it was then first intimated that Taylor might become a successful candidate for the presidency. Another chief, and of higher rank, was ordered into the field, and, although operating on a different line, (not so directed definitely,* however,) Taylor was thus subjected to a double supervision, which was, to a degree, exercised; and nearly all his veteran troops were taken from him—those whom he had taught to conquer, against every odds, and between whom and their leader existed that ardent attachment which bound the tenth legion to Cæsar. Yet his advice, here, was partially adopted. On the 15th of October, 1846, he recommended, for a decisive blow on Mexico, through Vera Cruz, 25,000 men,† of which 10,000 should be regulars, when, at that time, he had but 3,000 regulars with his army; and, on the 12th of November, for the reduction of Vera Cruz and the Castle only, he advised 10,000 men,‡ of which 4,000 should be regulars, and promised to hold 3,000 regulars in readiness, to meet the remainder from the States. In thus volunteering to deprive himself of the sure means of victory, and to incur the exposure to disaster and defeat, with inexperienced soldiers, or compelling himself to inactivity and a defensive attitude, he made an offering to patriotism, without a parallel in military history; but it beautifully illustrates the maxim, that “he never errs who sacrifices self,” by placing to his military career the crown of imperishable glory. The after achievement was more important, and certainly more brilliant, than any that preceded it; which may be ascribed to the vaster crisis of his position, and to the higher energy, the superior courage, and the more determined will, that it awakened and developed.

Our topic, therefore, will commence with the resumption of hostilities, in Nov., 1846; and Gen. Taylor's progress will be briefly presented, to the consummation of his splendid victory of Buena Vista. But, before proceeding to its consideration, it is proper that we should allude, how-

* Letter of Secretary Marcy to General Scott, Nov. 23d, 1836. Ex. Doc. number 60, p. 836.

† Letter General Taylor, Ex. Doc. number 60, p. 351.

‡ Ibid, p. 374.

ever briefly, to some of our authorities. It was designed to do this, before the completion of our original plan; but this completion may be long postponed, possibly never executed, and, as it neither accords with our inclination, nor with our regard for the truth and impartiality of history, to omit all notice of the writers on the war, we will delay it no longer. Of the many who have contributed letters touching the events, or sketches of battles, or campaigns, or full military and political histories of the times, and bearing on our subject, we will, on this occasion, name only four. It has been remarked that, in reading a historical work, it is a desideratum to know the character of the author, his situation in society, his political and domestic relations, and the important circumstances of his life, as capable of furnishing a key to his writings, or a ground of confidence in his statements. We are fortunate in possessing this knowledge of three of our authors—these are all officers of the army, distinguished for merit, as their brevets indicate, and, as they have demonstrated, each competent to give an accurate and perspicuous account of both the campaigns in Mexico. We will take them up in the order of rank.

Captain (now Brevet Major) Henry, in his "Campaign Sketches," has given a narrative of the operations of Taylor's army, to which he was attached, from the landing at Corpus Christi to the battle of Buena Vista. He is not comprehensive in details, nor does he aim at completeness. He omits the discussion of the plans of campaign, and makes little if any scientific criticism, either on plans or battles. His descriptions of the last are clear and correct, and all his facts are reliable. But the especial interest of his volumes consists in presenting, in easy and flowing language, in a diary form, graphic delineations of the country traversed—incidents of the various marches—anecdotes and chit-chat of camp—the manner of death, in battle, of many officers—becoming notices of the author's comrades, and touching eulogiums on his friends, who were slain. Devoid of pretension and malice, and exhibiting often his own lively and joyous disposition, spirited, humorous, pathetic, as the scene required, the work affords very pleasant reading, and is highly creditable to its writer.

Captain (now Brevet Major) Carleton wrote an account of the battle of Buena Vista, including the operations of

the "army of occupation" for one month. We esteem this quite a brilliant performance. It contains some errors and omissions, demanding revision and correction, and a few redundancies, to which the pruning knife could be judiciously applied. Thus perfected, it would present the most full, forcible and finished description of this great battle, and would survive all the partial and more ephemeral—indeed, all the sketches—yet written. The important events are prominently exhibited, in the gorgeous style of a rich imagination, yet generally with correct taste. He participated in the scenes he describes—an important advantage over others—he witnessed what he depicts, with some of the colouring, but more than the truth of poetry, and, impressed with the grandeur of the achievement, he often rises into eloquence. The book is a monument to his ability, beyond any of his deeds in arms—will live when they shall be forgotten, whatever they may be—and is worthy of permanent place in the American library.

Lieutenant (and Brevet Major, also,) Ripley has offered the only complete history yet written of the entire war. He is a younger man, a younger officer, and less familiar with the pen, than the others. The task he assumed was a bold and ambitious one; but indefatigable energy, a characteristic of the man, has accomplished it. We are surprised that he should have entered so fully into the political discussions of the day. But it is more to be wondered at, that he should have adopted with enthusiasm his political creed—right, as we are constrained to say it is,—and have permitted it to bias his judgment upon military operations, and military achievements, when accomplished by leaders professing an antagonist political faith. This is certainly an error on the part of a soldier. Like other citizens, he is entitled to his opinions; and when the State law, wherever his station may be, authorizes, he may vote accordingly. And, on all suitable occasions, he is at liberty, temperately and judiciously, to express his convictions. But it is not his province to be an active partisan, nor is it consistent with his position. He is commissioned for life, and owes subordination to existing power. His superiors in the government are liable to change; not so with himself. The exponents of his principles may continue at the head of affairs but for a brief period; the opponents may attain the ascendancy, and, with too much political ardour, carried away by

strong adherence to the one, and bitter dislike of the other, he may reluctantly and negligently perform what the last might require of him. In a General, it might, in war, lead to disaster and national disgrace; in peace, to endless orders and evasions, and consequent detriment to the public interest. In a junior officer, the proclivity would exist, yet the evil not occur, only through failure of the power and the opportunity. A military writer of a military history—and Napier, whom our author admires, is an excellent example—should deal with politics in general, rather than in detail; without ever descending into minute analyses of political questions, or denunciations of political parties, or sarcasms on political leaders. He should present a clear, accurate and comprehensive narrative of military events, with lucid and applicable professional criticism, and with allusions to State affairs, and such only, as may be essential to a proper understanding of the military operations. But, a military work, vindicating one set of political principles, and one political sect, with *ex parte* earnestness, and correspondingly depreciating their opposites, whatever may be its pretensions, cannot be received as impartial history, and, whatever its literary merit, is not becoming to the dignity of a gallant soldier.

It has been said that Major Ripley did not write the book that bears his name. The army, generally, entertain this opinion, and some have even asserted that he never saw it until published! A member of the military family of a certain distinguished general in the war, it has been said that the chief dictated and arranged, and the subordinate (*aide*) adopted and fathered the history. It is affirmed that the last possessed neither the political experience and knowledge, nor the partisan rancour, exhibited in its pages; nor could he have wielded the controversial pen which defends the administration and depreciates the (supposed) opposition generals. Suspicion has even gone so far as to intimate that two political writers are implicated in its production—one having been a conspicuous member of Mr. Polk's cabinet. From our perusal, we did not derive these impressions, and we regard the criticism as unduly harsh. That the military portion of the book may be mainly attributed to Ripley we have no doubt. The military terms, the tactical phraseology, the quotations from Napier, interspersed through the descriptions of the combats, and elsewhere, and the air of

assumed authority, in giving utterance to oracular military dicta, are certainly Ripley's. A difference, perhaps, in style—more terse, more pointed, and barbed with personal venom, of wider grasp, and more equally sustained—may indicate the work of an older and more interested head, in some, if not all, of the controversial chapters. And, in corroboration, without quoting many pages equally convincing, we refer to the second volume, pp. 222, 363 and 629, in which the writer speaks like one in power, and *almost* assumes the first person. But, without distinguishing the authors, and their several parts, we will regard the book as a whole, and remark upon it as a truthful and “impartial” history, as professed to be in its preface.

The work is quite well written, and is printed and published in the usually good style of the Harpers. In diction, it is, in places, diffusive and somewhat heavy, and new expressions, such as “adulous,” vol. i., p. 62, are occasionally coined. Here and there, are manifested more of the smartness of special pleading, than of the grave analysis and deliberate judgment of historical writing. Yet there is much vivid and forcible narrative—the combats are depicted with warmth and correctness, and the manner, in general, is direct and perspicuous. The sources of information have been thoroughly ransacked—much industry of research, and much labour of investigation, and an able sifting of documents, are obvious. The Mexican authorities were also attentively examined—their State matters well discussed—their civil and military dissensions, the purposes and policy of their leaders and parties; and the influences exerted on all, by the progress of the war, are strongly presented. And in this respect the book will be highly valuable for future reference, since it is very doubtful if the same data can be again collected. It was scarcely necessary, however, to give the Mexican statements prominence over our own, and least of all was it proper to base upon them censures of our generals, as in vol. i., p. 441, in which blame is cast on Taylor for not acting at Buena Vista as a Mexican officer subsequently said that he might have done with success! The introductory history of Mexico is summary and satisfactory. The account of Kearney's march to Santa Fé—of the conquest of New Mexico—of the civil government erected, with its defence, is well written; temperate, truthful and sufficiently copious. No prejudice is betrayed here; ample justice is done to all

concerned, and the narrative is without redundancies. Were the entire history penned in the same spirit of candour with this chapter, it would be a valuable record of our achievements—a standard authority—and worthy a permanent place in every library. Wool's expedition, destined for Chihuahua, is similarly handled, and merits similar praise. And we will include, likewise, the sketches of naval operations. The recital of events in California is made with great minuteness, and the comments on the difficulties that arose among the American leaders* are liberal, and, we think, just.

* Several errors are committed, for one of which Ripley is not blameable, since he adopted the official report of Com. Sloat; but two of them demand of us some notice. A pretty thorough account of this conquest may be found in the Review, of July, 1849, and, to fortify asseverations there, we are constrained to take issue with Ripley and his authorities. He says that Com. Sloat received information at Mazatlan, on 7th June, 1846, that induced him to make a descent on California, and Sloat's letter, of 31st July, 1846, justifies him. To the assertion, we offer the following, in contradiction. On the 31st of May, the Commodore wrote, that he had "received such intelligence as would justify his acting." On th 6th of June, (Cong. Doc., 1st session 30th Cong. Report Senate Com., number 75,) he said that, on reflection, he could not act. and that it was humiliating, etc., because to all the world it appeared "*that we were actually at war on the other (Gulf) coast.*" For this timidity he was afterwards rebuked by Secretary Bancroft. Now, we ask what more could he have learned next day, (the 7th June,) to determine him, than that hostilities existed between the two countries? As stated on the 8th, he was, at all events, going to California. He arrived on the 2d July, and, hearing of Frémont's movements, who had revolutionized the province, presumed they were authorized, and on the 7th he took the town of Monterey. On 6th July he had written to Capt. Montgomery, at San Francisco, that he "preferred being sacrificed for doing too much, rather than too little." (same Document.) Why sacrificed at all, if he received news on 7th June, to justify him, under his orders of 24th of June, 1845? But Frémont clinches the matter, when he deposes thus before the above named committee: "He (Sloat, at Monterey, on Frémont's arrival there, 19th July,) then inquired to know under what instructions I had acted, in taking up arms under the Mexican authorities. I informed him that I had acted on my own responsibility, and without any authority from the government, to justify hostilities. Commodore Sloat appeared greatly disturbed with this information, and gave me distinctly to understand, that, in raising the flag at Monterey, *he had acted upon the faith of our operations in the North.*"

Ripley says, again, that Frémont "*reported to Gen. Kearney, as commanding the forces,*" at Los Angeles, and intimates, on this account, more severe censure for his subsequent disobedience. Now, Frémont did not *report* to Kearney at all. He wrote a private letter, in reply to several notes of the same character. When the convention of Cowenga was sent to Angeles, the bearer, Col. Russell, was directed to ascertain who was in command, and to deliver it accordingly. (Testimony of Col. Russell, Frémont's Court Martial, p. 321.) By the testimony of both Russell and Kearney, pp. 321, 324, the last acknowledged Stockton to be supreme, advised the delivery of the paper to him, and it was done. It was never offered to Kearney. These items are of no great importance, but we cite and refute them to establish truth, and to prove what we had previously written.

Little more may be said in praise of the work. The remainder is composed in a reprehensible spirit of partizanship. The views it offers are altogether one-sided; the arguments in support are too shallow, to impose either on the student of history or on those who are familiar with the matters in dispute. The ordinary reader, however, of which class the masses consist, is liable to be warped into prejudice, and induced to look with cold admiration on the glorious deeds of some of the greatest soldiers in our annals, and to learn, in the end, to regard those deeds as due, not in any degree, to the high qualities of these chiefs, but to the mere chances of fortune. To aid in dispelling such delusions, and in averting somewhat the ill consequences of such impressions, we will briefly dissect a portion of the book—not to make an exposure of even a large part of its unfair reasoning and false conclusions, but sufficiently so to disclose the *animus* of the author.

An elaborate vindication of the administration is attempted, upon every point that has been brought into controversy. Discredit or error is not allowed, in any instance. The country had pronounced judgment, and Mr. Polk and his minister received liberal commendation, for the generally able discharge of their duties. The conduct of the war was in striking contrast with that of 1812, and the credit was awarded where it was merited. But these officers possessed neither omniscience nor ubiquity; their judgments were human, and therefore fallible, and, in the management of a foreign war, waged 1500 to 2000 miles from the seat of government, it was not only natural, but inevitable, that blunders should be sometimes committed. That there were such, every candid mind, however inclined to the existing authorities, must acknowledge. For some, there are valid excuses; for others, depending upon political party aims, rather than purely patriotic impulses and objects, there can be none—and the discriminating writer, honestly endeavouring to establish truth, must censure or condemn, as the case requires.

At p. 250-1, vol. i., Ripley makes a warm defence of the authorities at Washington. At 355, he vindicates the Secretary for issuing an order directly to Gen. Patterson, instead of transmitting it through Taylor, to prepare for an attack on Tampico. He says, the violation of this great principle, can ordinarily "lead to nothing but evil,"

and, in the next breath, remarks, that it was not "very flagrant" in this case. If the military principle is of the prominence he gives it, and we fully concur, any violation, under any circumstances, must inevitably terminate in immediate or remote evil. It strikes at the very root of subordination, and a single exercise of such power, by an authority like the head of the war department, would be a precedent and a sanction for its exercise through all the grades of service, tending to subvert all order and discipline. There is no military rule, perhaps, of greater force, than to preserve "the chain of communication (of orders) which binds the military compact,"* and it is fortunate that occasions arise at intervals for its practical assertion and general recognition. Gen. Jackson was similarly interfered with, in 1817, (see letter, Nashville, Tenn., April 22d, 1817,) and did not hesitate to resent it in the strongest terms, although at a period of profound peace, when little of the detriment might have accrued which was calculated to affect Taylor, engaged in a foreign war. The principle, however, existed at all times, and its assertion was equally necessary, in peace and war. Taylor protested, in a manly letter, and the Secretary returned some sort of an apology. Yet Ripley justifies it, on grounds quite flimsy to military men, and declares the departure from a fundamental maxim not "very flagrant." But, a soldier himself, we do not regard this as his opinion, and we offer it as one proof of his strong political bias. At p. 503, vol. i., the President is sustained in the most wanton and indefensible of all his acts—the recommendation to create the office of Lieutenant General, with the intimation that Benton was to fill it. The friends of Mr. Polk regarded the measure as ill advised, since a majority of them, we believe, united in rejecting the bill to authorize it. And the good faith of Mr. Polk, as an officer and a man, is seriously implicated. The President and Scott became reconciled in Nov., 1846. They had "many long personal interviews"†—the progress of the war, the plans for its prosecution, including the Vera Cruz expedition, were discussed—mutual confidence appeared to be restored—Scott was unreservedly entrusted with the command in Mexico, and left for the

* Gen. Jackson's letter, 22d April, 1817.

† Scott's letter, 24th Feb., 1848.

seat of war, with expressions of "fervent gratitude" for the "confidence and kindness" of the President. Yet, Ripley says, Mansfield also and Benton stated it publicly, that this same President, even then, had resolved to supersede Scott in command of the army in the field! The Secretary wrote to Scott, 23d Nov., 1846, "It is not proposed to control your operations by definite and positive instructions. * * * The work is before you, and the means provided are committed to you, in the full confidence that you will use them to the best advantage." This looks very much like yielding entire control to Scott, and must have inspired him with the belief, that he was to command the army to the conquest of peace. And we know that such was his opinion, for, when informed that a Lieutenant General was to be created, (he then at the Brazos,) so impressed was he with the confidence of the President, that he said, "Mr. Polk must appoint *me*." Yet, Ripley says, there is not a trace of the pen to show that the President ever designed that Gen. Scott should do more than capture Vera Cruz and the Castle! And we are compelled by this, and the statements of others, to believe it. Thus Scott was to incur the labour of organizing an army—the hazard of landing on the coast of Mexico, opposite the highway to the capital—endure the drudgery of bombarding, and occupying works incapable of a prolonged resistance, attended with fatigue and comparatively little glory—and, when the vista of true military renown was opened before him, and all his toils were to be amply rewarded, at this moment he was to be superseded and degraded! The General-in-chief of the United States Army—of high military reputation, and of unsurpassed military attainments—to be over-rode by a civilian—a man not "baptized in fire," and eminent only as a politician! This is one of the strongest instances of the predominance of party feeling and party designs, over both justice and patriotism, in the President; and as Ripley, *an educated officer*, defends the measure, we cannot offer a more forcible example of his own party feeling against Scott, nor of his political bias.

We are of those who firmly believe—and all history bears us out—that mere theoretical military knowledge does not constitute, and cannot create, the great commander. The high traits essential to success—to unvaried success, under all circumstances—may be educated and

perfected ; but they are born with the man, and are developed by events. Hannibal had no experience of war, when associated in the chief command in Spain, and had acquired but little when elevated to the supreme control ; and his hatred of Rome induced an evasion or disruption of all treaty stipulations ; yet, for sixteen years, his career was a series of splendid triumphs. Cæsar made his first campaign at 41 years of age, and, from the outset, he was General-in-chief—his first advent into Spain being civil, rather than military, and for the purpose of filling his coffers, rather than extending his military reputation ; and his early affair with the pirates only a daring and chivalrous adventure of—at the moment in exile—a reckless youth. Hampden and Cromwell were great leaders, without theoretic information. Lord Clive and Jackson were extraordinary soldiers, without any military attainment. And Prince Eugene said, “ The greatest generals have commonly been those who have been at once raised to command, and introduced to the great operations of war, without being occupied in the petty calculations and manœuvres which employ the time of inferior officers.” We will not say that Col. Benton might not have risen at once to the summit of military renown, by the force of exalted genius ; and, with such belief, *necessity* would have justified the President in giving him supreme command in the war. But while Scott lived, and aspired to new laurels in his profession, we maintain that this necessity did not exist. Scott was no unfledged and untried soldier. His past career guaranteed the accomplishment of brilliant operations. The war of 1812 proved his abilities, and his reputation for courage and skill was at least co-extensive with the country. Not a slur had ever been cast upon his untarnished escutcheon as a great captain.

Ripley exhibits some very decided military prejudices. The tone of his book is adverse to both our generals—Scott and Taylor. Few things achieved by them are heartily approved—indeed, none, we believe, without some grain of qualification. Neither in the operations nor in the combats, has full justice been awarded. These are narrated with general accuracy, and described with fullness and much force. But, in his “ observations ” and running commentaries, with some judicious remarks,

there is a great deal of depreciating criticism, some sarcasm, and many sneers.

His maxims are carelessly scanned, or, for effect; parts are quoted to sustain the author's views; while the whole would, in some instances, have contradicted him, or have modified his conclusions. At p. 95, vol. 1, is a fling at all the generals of the army, for their imbecility, with "hardly an exception." At p. 160 is an illiberal allusion to Gen. Taylor, who, it appears, in his dispatch of 1st Aug., 1846, presented, as a consideration, in his march to Monterey, the question of subsistence, and said, in this respect, it would be somewhat of an "experiment," since he could acquire from the Mexicans themselves no definite information on the subject, and it was utterly impracticable, with his limited means of transportation, to carry supplies in a rapid movement on Saltillo. Ripley designates it as an "experimental expedition," and positively asserts that Taylor urged no other reason for his advance, than to ascertain the subsistence resources of that region. Yet, in a previous letter, (July 2d, 1846,) Taylor speaks of an ulterior object, of no less importance than cutting off the northern provinces of Mexico; and, some time after, in a letter to Wool, he remarked that he expected to be at Saltillo on the 1st of October. Unjust and uncalled for originally, what will be thought of the repetition of the charge—always with a sneer—at least seven times in the same volume, and when, in p. 161, he actually quotes the passage containing Taylor's ulterior views. At p. 169, he says, "without any definite object, other than to ascertain the capacity of a certain region, in subsistence," etc. At p. 248, "the expedition was treated of as one of experiment upon the agricultural capacity of the valley of the San Juan," etc. At p. 252, "as the whole expedition had been experimental," etc. At p. 315, "had enjoyed two weeks observation upon the agricultural capacity of the country." At p. 355, "information respecting the capacity of the country to support 6000 men, or more, had been the avowed object in marching upon that town." (Monterey.) At p. 503, "Gen. Taylor's plan, which, after his experiment at Monterey." And at p. 313, "and as the General had been unable to extend his views beyond the experimental march to Monterey," etc. Here the word *unable* betrays conclusively the tincture of bitterness

which prompted all the allusions. At p. 355, he is captious with Taylor on other grounds. Again, at p. 304, in regard to his orders to Wool. At p. 257, harsh concerning the battle of Monterey. At 434, severe on Taylor, and ardent in defence of the administration. He is also unjust respecting Buena Vista, and the preliminary operations, and particularly so in alluding to the withdrawal of troops from Taylor, by Scott.

At p. 155, vol. 1, is a sarcasm on Scott, for his letter to the Secretary of War, in which he speaks of conquering a peace, by "regular, incessant, and forward movements" against the enemy, and these words are quoted, ~~as being~~ *ridiculous*. We wonder how else Major Ripley would have subdued Mexico, and, as a consequence, have "conquered peace?" How else was it accomplished at last? Two pages previously are slighting remarks. At pp. 11, 12, vol. 2, the same. At p. 82, vol. 2, he blames Scott for the attack and failure of Pillow at Cerro Gordo, and did not see "the necessity of attacking them (the lines) seriously, in front." Yet the ground had been reconnoitered by Pillow himself. Scott relied upon his knowledge, and, at his own desire, we believe, ordered him to the post. The works proved stronger than either general had supposed, although battery no. 1,—which was assailed—~~or~~, more properly, the angle between nos. 1 and 2—had been seen in reverse from the opposite side of Plan del Rio, (p. 31, vol. 2.) In the same page, and previously, are strictures on Scott's report, that his order for the battle had been "executed," and some deviations are given. Why not publish the "order," and permit the public judgment on its execution? We regard it as a masterly programme! No other battle had so detailed a sketch in advance, and few, in history, were so exactly executed, according to the design. At p. 87, vol. 2, he censures Scott, in a "however," for taking Quitman along with the army, instead of Pillow, when both were made Major Generals, and there were not, indeed, troops enough for the command of one, the Georgia and other regiments having been sent home. This course, on the part of Scott, was within his discretion, and his motives are his own. The service suffered no injury by the decision. Pillow returned in season for the operations in the valley, and, while absent, had the opportunity, at New-Orleans,

of vindicating himself from the charges of Col. Haskell. At p. 96, the government* would not intrust Scott with the power to negotiate, because it was "*aware of his character and feelings.*" This is a very grave insinuation. Was Scott partial to the Mexicans? Were his political feelings bitter against the administration? Did he carry party schemes to the head of an invading army? Would he have destroyed his reputation, ~~and have sacrificed his patriotism,~~ by assenting to a treaty that, though momentarily elevating his party, would injure permanently the interest of his country and impair its honour? All this, if anything, may be legitimately inferred, and the hero of Niagara was as far removed from such a "character," and such "feelings," as light is from darkness. The two powers, of war and diplomacy, have often been united. Napoleon, in Italy, is a famous example. The great soldier necessarily possesses many of the high qualities of the statesman. Were this the occasion, and space permitted, the propriety of uniting the powers could be demonstrated. Scott had already acted successfully in both capacities; and, withholding the one, and conferring it upon Chief Clerk Trist, betrayed a design to injure Scott, or a want of confidence in his integrity or ability, deeply wounding to his sensibility as a man, to his pride as a soldier in chief command, and was well calculated to sour him against the existing authority at Washington. At p. 150, Scott's motives—none the best—are divined, for the reconciliation with Trist. And finally, at p. 432, Ripley exults that Scott's name had been dropped, as a candidate for the presidency, in consequence of the proceedings of the celebrated Court of Inquiry! We cannot now discuss this matter, nor can we afford room for other citations of Ripley's prejudices. The 2d volume is replete with disparagement of Scott—all that he did, when present, was suggested to him; all that was done, when he was not on the ground, was the sole work of others! We have, however, exposed enough, we trust, to illustrate the controlling sentiment of the book, and will improve, if need be, other occasions to discuss our differences with the author on other points. In the mean time, we sin-

* The President and his cabinet are not the *government*; but the term, with that meaning, has crept into all the official correspondence, and we continue it for brevity, as well as for euphony.

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cerely recommend to him a critical revision of his work, the suppression of many illiberal passages, the assumption of a more elevated and impartial tone, and an appendix, containing the official papers relating to controverted points. This accomplished, it will do him great credit—it will afford interesting and instructive reading, and become a standard authority in our collections. Did it not possess some decided features of merit, we assure him, even this much time would not have been spared to the consideration of its errors.

The volume of E. D. Mansfield, "a graduate of the United States Military Academy," and the last we propose to notice, purports to be a history of the war, but we regard it rather as a general review of the war. It gives the principal events, in order, but enters into no discussions of moment—avoids all details of description, and all analyses of political or military action, and is not very particular about dates. It aims to be just, as far as it goes, and we do not think it unduly partial. The vindication of Gen. Scott, throughout, indicates an ardent friendship or admiration for that officer; yet he is not lauded extravagantly nor improperly, at the expense of others. It is well enough written, without any special claim to commendation, for style or arrangement. The high praise awarded to West Point graduates, both here and in Ripley's book, does not emanate with grace or delicacy from élèves of that institution.* The services of those gentlemen were too conspicuous to be overlooked by the country—they constituted a majority of the regular officers, and were freely distributed among the volunteer troops—and other writers could have displayed their merits, and the high character and eminent value of that academy, without any sacrifice of modesty or good taste. We are sure that so high a mark could never be omitted or disregarded in any comprehensive and fair representation of our Mexican operations—and none other will be

* A writer of South-Carolina, signing "Marlborough," to a series of highly interesting and valuable sketches of the battles and manœuvres in which the Palmetto Regiment was engaged, remarks: "Let others gainsay, but it is our opinion, that the scenes of glory and success, which have so constantly attended our arms in Mexico, are attributable to the admirable *stamina* to be found among the *officers* of the regular army. They are, in the main, the effects of West Point intelligence and West Point discipline!" Such compliments are appreciated, and they have an influence.

generally received ~~or permanently preserved~~. Claiming the same alma mater, we feel justified in making these remarks, which another, through fear of the charge of invidiousness, however appropriate they may be, would hesitate to offer. The book of Mansfield, as a general guide, giving a succinct account of the operations of the war, is very useful, and the original tables, in the appendix, are highly interesting and valuable.

After this, in a measure, digression, much longer than was anticipated, we turn to the main subject of this paper—the battle of Buena Vista, with a summary notice of the preliminary operations.

The armistice at Monterey was disapproved by the President, and, according to its terms, he sent instructions to Taylor, on the 13th October, that it should cease at once. On the 6th of November, Taylor dispatched an officer, to communicate to Santa Anna the decision of our government. On the 13th of the same month, Worth was directed to occupy Saltillo—Taylor accompanying the column, and it was effected, without resistance, on the 16th. Wool had reached Monclova on the 29th of October, en route for Chihuahua, and, in a letter to Taylor, pertinently inquired what was to be gained by the movement on that place. In reply, he was instructed to abandon the original enterprize, and march his forces to Parras, 70 miles south-west of Saltillo. The expedition was a misdirected one, and proved a failure. Had it been accomplished, the result would not have been at all commensurate with the labour employed, and the suffering and expense incurred, in organizing an army in the interior of Western Texas, and transporting its supplies, and moving the troops, through a desert prairie, on this side the Rio Grande, and a comparatively barren and difficult country beyond. Victoria was taken by our troops, under Quitman, on the 29th of December, and Tampico having been seized by the navy, on the 14th of November, the country, from the Rio Grande and the coast, down to Tampico, westward to the Sierra Madre, was in our possession. And, as Kearney had subdued New Mexico, and Stockton and Frémont had subjugated California, the scheme, as far as contemplated and desirable, of severing from Mexico her northern provinces, was executed. The position of the army, however, is regarded by Ripley and others as having been vicious, and, in a military point of

view, untenable. Under some circumstances, we might concur in the opinion; but, considering those that actually existed, we cannot hesitate to approve the proceedings of Taylor, and we think substantial reasons may be offered in vindication. Taylor's letter, of the 8th of December, 1846, explains fully his objects, and establishes conclusively the justness of his measures. If it were intended to occupy and maintain a defensive line, it would run from Parras to Tampico. Victoria and Saltillo would be intermediate points, and the latter of greater importance than any, since it covers the only accessible route for artillery, from San Louis through the pass of La Angostura. With a strong garrison, and fortified by works here, the plan would be consummated. As Taylor esteemed the Mexicans not at all formidable, and having little confidence in themselves, without artillery, the other points could be readily held, with moderate forces, supplied with that arm. The Tula passes debouched no great way from Victoria. They were practicable for cavalry and infantry; but, as Ripley suspects,* if for artillery also, to secure the line, it would only have been necessary to render this place as strong as that near Saltillo—*certainly* the only dangerous points. Victoria was near the port of Soto la Marina, whence all requisite stores could be drawn. Parras was in a productive region, affording supplies and guarding the right flank. Tampico, near the Gulf coast, was equally important, for similar reasons, on our left. The objection, therefore, of spreading the troops over a line of "600 miles," would have been obviated, and likewise, that of the equidistance of all the parts from San Louis, by which, it is true, in an *open* country, the enemy could have attacked and overwhelmed our detachments in detail. Now, early in January, Taylor had ample forces at Victoria to hold that place and the adjacent defiles. At Saltillo, including Wool's command, he had more than he carried into action on the 23d of February, with which he resisted the army of Santa Anna. But had Wool continued at Parras, there were other reinforcements, intended by Taylor (see letter of the 8th of December,) for Saltillo, and as Wool per-

* Lieut. Meade had examined some of these passes, and found them impracticable. Henry's "Sketches," vol. 2d, p. 290. And Capt. Limard, escorted by May's dragoons, had reconnoitered others, with like result.

formed the march between the places in less than two days, (his cavalry and artillery 40 miles a day,) he was within striking distance, in case of alarm. For a defensive line, Taylor's plan was consequently wise, and in every way calculated to effect his purposes. Additionally, his reserves were posted at Monterey, nearest the Angostura pass, which he regarded the only dangerous point of the line. On the contrary, if, instead of defence, it were designed to advance on San Luis, his operations were equally judicious, since it was necessary to cover all the country that was essential to the security of his army and of his line of communication. It is really hypercriticism to denounce these arrangements; it is like advancing certain rules of war that are entirely inapplicable to the case, and reminds us of the charge against General Scott, in 1836, that he introduced all the parade and the grand evolutions of European armies, in his operations against the Seminole Indians, and about as reasonably advanced, in this instance, as would have been such operations.

The President, however, determined upon a different policy. He would not desist from all effort, on occupying a section, not vital, of the enemy's country—he aimed not at a quasi-peace, liable to be broken monthly, and requiring large expenditure, without adequate, or indeed, any return, for hostilities would not have ceased; but he demanded a firm treaty, negotiated and fixed by legitimate governmental authorities, and, to procure it, resorted to other, and more vigorous and compulsory measures, than a defensive line.

Several events occurred, about this period, which entirely deranged Taylor's contemplated schemes. One was an alarm at Saltillo, on the 19th of December. Worth was there with 1200 men (fewer effectives) and 8 guns. The enemy, within the town, conceived the conquest of them easy, and the governor of the state (province?) expressed his hopes, in a dispatch to the Mexican commander, whose cavalry was within 60 miles, requested an attack on us, and promised the co-operation of the citizens of the place, numbering in population from 15 to 20,000.* The courier—one at least—was captured, and his papers sent to Worth, who, apprehending a serious movement

* Henry, vol. 2d, p. 245.

against his small command, called for reinforcements. Wool marched his forces, with praiseworthy expedition, to Worth's assistance. Twiggs' division, on the march to Victoria, was recalled, and returned to Monterey. Butler, with two regiments of volunteers, advanced rapidly from the last place, and the 2d Kentucky regiment made a creditable march, from Camargo to Monterey. With this concentration of troops, the alarm was dispelled. As a consequence, however, Parras was definitely abandoned, and Wool was retained in the vicinity of Saltillo. Taylor, in the mean time, retraced his way towards Victoria. Other occurrences were, that Gen. Scott arrived at the Brazos on the 28th of December, began his preparations for the descent on Vera Cruz, made a requisition on Taylor for nearly all his regular, and a large portion of his volunteer troops, and advised him to fall back on Monterey and assume the defensive. In a letter to Scott, of the 4th of January, 1847, the Secretary of War made a similar recommendation. Worth, under orders from Scott, of the 3d January, received through Butler, marched his division from Saltillo on the 9th. It numbered, by his own report, including those to be attached en route, in the aggregate, 2,666. Twiggs' division, of 1,465, followed, the next day, by 3,268 volunteers under Patterson, moved from Victoria for Tampico, on the 14th. Ripley makes, at this point, another of his unfair allusions to Taylor, vol. 1, p. 340. Opposed to the propriety of occupying Victoria, he remarks that Taylor was forced, by the "state of his supplies," to evacuate the "newly occupied town." The fact is as given, but there was a reason for it, which a candid historian would have offered; but, not desiring to do justice, it was withheld, since we will not suppose him ignorant. Taylor had concentrated at Victoria, on the 4th of January, and, learning from Scott's letter, of the 25th November, from New-York, received 24th of December, that a portion of his troops were to be taken from him, he suspended his operations, in a good degree, and awaited farther instructions. He was thus in statu until the 14th of January, when Scott's orders of the 3d arrived. On that day his troops moved for Tampico, an excellent position for Scott's designs. The "state of supplies" was an element in this decision, because he looked daily for an order to divide his army, and, accordingly, had neither continued arrangements for the defensive line,

nor established his depôt, of provisions, etc., at Soto la Marina, as previously contemplated. It is plain that he could not have acted more judiciously, and, indeed, any different course might have proved unwise.

Other troops joined Scott, from the Rio Grande, and Taylor was left with 1000 regulars,* and a volunteer force of some 6000 men, partly new levies, to protect his extensive line, threatened by Santa Anna and 20,000 or more men in front.

Ripley sneers at the complaint, made by Taylor to Scott, for this large withdrawal of force, and charges inconsistency, because the former said, subsequently—the 27th of January, at Monterey—that the troops “left him in that quarter would doubtless enable him to hold the positions then occupied.” And he gives the noble old soldier no credit whatever for his previous offer, spontaneously made, to place a large portion of the army at Scott’s command, for the coast expedition. The truth is, he objected at last, less to the deprivation of force, than to the number of his veterans taken, and the manner of the act—having been kept in ignorance of the plans of the government, and deeming it preposterous, as intimated in the letter of 25th of November, (Ex. Doc. number 60, p. 373,) that he should be expected to take the offensive, in the month of March, with his impaired and diminished army. And is it strange that, at the first view—when almost in despair at his position, and speaking heroically of carrying “out, in good faith, the views of the government, though he may be sacrificed in the effort,” and feeling that he had lost its confidence—that he should fear the inadequacy of his means to maintain himself? And when, a fortnight later, he had looked around—acquired new resolution—conceived that Santa Anna and the main body of the enemy would move against Scott rather than himself—and perceived that he was only expected to defend his line as far as Monterey, is it very absurd, that, like an undaunted soldier, as he was, he should express

* Taylor’s letter to Scott, January 15th, 1847. Ex. Doc. number 60, page 863. We will say, of this document, that it is most vilely compiled. Scarcely half a dozen letters ever occur successively, according to dates. To search for those required, through a disarray of 1277 pages, demands as much time, and much more patience, than to have written them all. Scott, in his letter of the 3d of January, supposes that Taylor would still have 2000 regulars—an error to be attributed to the want of returns.

the *hope* that he could hold his ground? Instead of blame, we would accord to him high praise. And we want terms to convey our admiration, at the grand effort of self-control, which prompted and qualified his letter to Scott, of the 15th January, when he learned the full extent of the reduction of his forces. Napoleon threw up his commensation in Italy for a less cause! Away with the denunciatory opinions, based upon a bitter prejudice, that fancies "no good can come out of Nazareth!"

Taylor evacuated Victoria, restricted his line to the river, and, from Camargo, via Monterey, to Saltillo, and, on the 24th of January, established his head quarters at Monterey. He disregarded the *advice* of Scott and the Secretary of War, to abandon Saltillo, for the following reasons, given in his letter of the 7th of February, 1847: "Not to speak of the pernicious moral effect, upon volunteer troops, of falling back from points which we have gained, there are powerful military reasons for occupying this extreme of the pass rather than the other. The scarcity of water and supplies, for a long distance in front, compels the enemy either to risk an engagement in the field, or hold himself aloof from us; while, if we fall back on Monterey, he could establish himself strongly at Saltillo, and be in position to annoy more effectually our flanks and communications." It may be added, that, holding the Angostura, through which, alone, artillery could move towards the Rio Grande, the line of communication was comparatively secure. And also, if defeated in this position, there were almost impregnable passes to fall back on, in the retreat to Monterey, where the struggle, with reinforcements from the rear, might be again and again renewed; and the enemy would be kept longer engaged in the north, while Scott would more surely find an open highway to the capital.

News arrived, on the 30th of January, that Majors Borland and Gaines' command, of 70 aggregate, had been captured by the enemy's cavalry, at Encarcacion, 55 miles south of Saltillo, on the 20th, while reconnoitring; and also, that Capt. Hardy and 17 men had been taken by rancheros, in the same direction, on the 27th. Taylor the next day hastened from Monterey to his advanced posts, and, on the 5th of February, fixed his head quarters at Aqua Nueva, beyond the pass of Angostura or Buena Vista, and 18 miles south of Saltillo. By the 14th, his

forces were assembled in that quarter, and he was rapidly procuring ample supplies for his army. Yet, even at that date, notwithstanding the capture of his parties indicated the presence of the enemy in considerable force, Taylor did not anticipate an advance, on their part, and was anticipating (see official letter) the arrival of new regiments, to enable him to make a diversion, to favour Scott. It was not until the 21st that he was confident there would be an attack upon him, and he ordered up Gen. Marshall's* troops, including Capt. Prentiss' battery of eighteen pounders, from the Rinconada.

The question, whether Santa Anna should have marched against Scott or Taylor, has been a good deal discussed, and we will offer our views in this place. On the 13th of January, Lieut. Richey, while bearing Scott's letter of the 3d, among others, from Monterey, to Taylor, at Victoria, was lassoed and murdered at Villa Gran. His papers, including this requisition for troops, and the plan of the descent on Vera Cruz, were seized, and conveyed promptly to Santa Anna, at San Louis. The enemy thus became early acquainted with our designs, and Scott fully expected to be met by him, in great force, at Vera Cruz; while, as late as the 14th of February, Taylor did not contemplate a battle near Saltillo. Both Generals were deceived; and both our historians (Ripley and Mansfield) argue that they should have penetrated the intentions of Santa Anna—in other words, that the latter acted with wisdom in the course he pursued. With due deference, we disagree to their conclusion, and concur in the justness of the conceptions of our Generals—not only as the circumstances then appeared to them, but judging also after the event. And, while our limits do not permit a full survey, with illustrations, of the points at issue, we will yet offer concisely a few considerations, which are conclusive to our mind.

1. Santa Anna, at San Louis, was about equi-distant from Saltillo, Vera Cruz and Mexico. He commanded over 20,000 men—including Minon and Urrea, nearer 30,000—leaving 5 or 6,000 in observation of Taylor, he could have reached Vera Cruz by the middle of February, and, on the way, have recruited as many more. Having

* These troops arrived early on the 24th, and were in readiness for Santa Anna, had he renewed the battle on that day.

40,000 troops, or even fewer, he could have easily supplied and strengthened both city and castle, and, in all probability, have repulsed Worth and his 5,000 men, when they landed on the beach.

2. Scott had the larger American army, and aimed to reduce Vera Cruz—the high road to the capital would be open to him, as a consequence—the conquest of the city of Mexico would destroy the *morale* of the people and soldiery, and the subjugation of the country must inevitably follow. It was Santa Anna's first duty to protect the more vital interest, to insure safety to the capital, and meet the invader at the coast, rather than move the flower of the Mexican army in the opposite direction, and attack in a remote and comparatively insignificant province.

3. The *morale* of the Mexicans would have been greatly more elevated by defeating at Vera Cruz than Saltillo, for obvious reasons—it would have been known and felt immediately in the richest and most populous parts of the State—the *fact* would have been indisputable, because the scene was near enough for it to be *known* absolutely—and the grand army would have been crippled and driven to sea.

4. If Santa Anna had money and supplies to march against Taylor, the same would have enabled him to operate, to the same distance, against Scott, and, arriving among a wealthier population, near his own home, and nearer the capital, where Congress, in December, had been unanimous for the continuance of war, he could largely have increased both.

5. Had Santa Anna forced back Taylor, it would not have been a Plassey overthrow—the latter would have rallied at the Rinconada, again at Monterey, where the siege would have been protracted, or better fortune have raised it, by a victory. Santa Anna could not neglect and pass it by. New regiments would have been on the line, in season to aid in defence against detachments, and the movement would have failed of important results; while Scott would have encountered little resistance in his march to the capital.

6. A few thousand troops, to manœuvre in front of Taylor, were sufficient. The route to San Louis was full of difficulties—the water tanks were already destroyed—and the knowledge of Taylor's diminished command

should have induced the belief that no advance was contemplated on his part.

7. Santa Anna did no reason from the past. Arista, in his chosen position, with odds of 4 to 1, and having fine troops, too, was disastrously defeated. He knew, through his spies at Saltillo, that Taylor's force was *about* in the same proportion—knew the Angostura, where he might be met to advantage—from sad experience with the Texans, should have known that he could not *annihilate* Taylor, and therefore, could not promptly control his communications, and threaten an advance to the Rio Grande—and he should have calculated the effect, to his country, of the failure of his operation.

The Mexican historians, after the event, it is true, but with knowledge of Santa Anna's means and designs, denounce his course without qualification. At p. 111, they say, "Considering these things, under this point of view, the battle of the Angostura was for us the *loss of the capital*, and would also have been, even if a *victory* had been the result of that action. Its importance to the Americans was great, and would have been great, whatever had been its issue."

Even up to the 20th of February, there was no certain knowledge of the approach of Santa Anna; but, on that day, Col. May, with 400 men and 2 guns, was sent to La Hedionda, to reconnoitre the valley around Potosi hacienda, at which, it was supposed that Minon and his 2000 cavalry were posted, and ascertain if the enemy were advancing through the Palomas pass, which debouched to the north of Saltillo. And Major McCulloch, with his Texan spies, was ordered, on similar duty, to Encarnacion. May saw none of the enemy, but a Mexican informed him, at night, that Santa Anna was moving from the latter place, to attack Taylor on the following day. To be in at the fight, May marched all night, with great celerity, making 60 miles in less than 21 hours, and at dawn communicated his intelligence to Taylor. McCulloch returned the same morning, and confirmed its truth, excepting the probability of Santa Anna's* having marched forward. Both these officers conducted their commands with consummate prudence and skill.

* Col. Jefferson Davis, in his speech of 5th of August, 1850, in the Senate, says, that the movement to Buena Vista was determined upon, and commenced before the return of McCulloch.

It was determined immediately to withdraw from Aqua Nueva, and take position near the hacienda of Buena Vista. The former place offered the advantage of receiving the enemy, after a long march, without water; but this was more than counterbalanced by the possibility of its being turned, by either flank, and our communication intercepted. The face of the pass, near Buena Vista, presented serious obstacles to the efficient action of the Mexican cavalry and artillery—his favourite arms—and enclosed between mountains, was highly favourable to the resistance of a small to a large force. Accordingly, on the same day, our army retired there and encamped.* The stores remaining were guarded, and to be removed as promptly as practicable, by Yell and his regiment, with orders to burn the hacienda and all within, in case there was danger of being cut off. His picquets were fired on the same night. He set fire to the buildings, dispatched his wagons at great speed, saw the stores destroyed, (those not carried to the rear,) and proceeded to the main body, near the Angostura. Santa Anna had anticipated a surprise. Disappointed in this, he construed our retirement into a precipitate retreat, and, without permitting his troops to recover from the fatigue of a forced march, or even to satisfy their thirst, pressed forward eagerly, with the full expectation of cutting us to pieces. He thus rushed, by elated hopes, into the Thermopylæ, from which, had he desired, he could not withdraw honourably, without risking a battle. Minon moved, the same day, (22d,) through the pass of Palomas Adentro, opening near Saltillo, to the east of which he posted his 2000 cavalry, to obstruct our retreat, after being forced. 1000 rancheros, armed with long knives, were stationed on the west of the road, to aid in the butchery; and Urrea, with his brigade, had traversed the defiles of Tula, and was in the vicinity of Monterey. Taylor had hastened to Saltillo, on the 21st, to place it in a proper state of defence, and the command was left with Wool. The glorious 22d of February, the birth-day of the illustrious Washington, broke upon the hostile array. Under a national air, and amid the high inspiration, to the army, of the day and the occasion, Wool advanced the troops to the field of combat.

* Except Hardin's Illinois regiment, which halted at La Angostura, one mile and a half south of Buena Vista.

With the aid of Inspector Churchill, an estimable officer, and perhaps under general directions from Taylor, they were arranged in order of battle. Before these dispositions were completed, the Mexicans made their appearance—halted beyond the range of our fire—perceived our resolution to face the music of war—and prepared at once for the conflict. Taylor, learning their arrival—without finishing his preparations at Saltillo—returned to meet the greater danger. He approved the positions of the troops—received Santa Anna's audacious summons, to surrender *at discretion*, only allowed because "his particular esteem was deserved"—and returned the celebrated answer, brief, simple, modest, yet calm with undaunted resolution, and firm as the base of the Sierra Madre.

The scene of the mighty struggle which followed lies at a point of the pass a mile and a half south of Buena Vista, and near seven miles from Saltillo. This pass, varying in width from one and a half to four miles, and just here about three miles across, extended from Saltillo to La Encantada, some 12 or 14 miles. The stream flowing between these places was, at this point, nearly equidistant from the mountains, rising 2 or 3000 feet, on either hand, and the road ran not far from its border. La Angostura, "the Narrows," is formed by a high bluff, the jutting extremity of the spur of the mountain, on one side, and the stream, with steep banks, on the other, which restricted the pass to the width of an ordinary highway. Our right flank was protected by a net-work of gullies, washed by the stream, over 20 feet deep, with precipitous sides, which extended nearly to the mountain, and was deemed impassable, certainly by artillery, if not for all arms. After a movement of observation on their part, which was checked, the enemy made no attempts over this lower level, and the battle ground, greatly to our advantage, was limited to the eastern level, a mile and a half across, and about sixty feet higher. There were several spurs of the mountain on this side, running down to the road, with intervening ravines, difficult of passage. The principal one, terminating in a narrow ridge at Angostura, difficult of ascent there, and commanding the road for a good distance, widened, towards its base, in a south-eastern direction, into a plateau—the *plateau*—some four hundred yards across, nearest the road, and two hundred at the mountain. This plateau was broken, or

scalloped, as you proceeded south, by three gorges, opening upon the road, and increasing in length as you advanced. Beyond, were a ridge, and another broad ravine or valley, the head of which could be turned—and still another succeeded. In the rear, there was one extending to the mountain, behind which were two others, successively, with numerous minor branches. These constitute the striking features of the field,* and may enable the reader to derive a tolerable idea of the battle, from a general description.

Taylor's force consisted of, aggregate,† 3,406 volunteer infantry, including 368 Mississippi riflemen: 809 volunteer cavalry, and 209 U. S. dragoons, in all, 1018 cavalry, and 16 field pieces of artillery, Washington's horse battery, 8 guns, Sherman's and Bragg's, each 4 guns, and 267 officers and men to work them! Total, 4691,‡ without a single regular infantry soldier, and with an aggregate of regular troops, of 476!

Santa Anna's army was composed of 17,600 infantry, artillerymen, etc.—4338 cavalry, excluding Minon's 2000 cavalry, at Saltillo, and his 1000 rancheros butchers—and 20 guns, ranging from 8 to 24 pounders. Total, 21,338, and, simply to be mentioned, 3000 seven miles in our rear. The Mexican historians, calculated by their translator, place the number at 20,553, including the 23 GENERALS§—which the bearer of Santa Anna's summons impressed upon those who received him—and 39 guns.

* There was some discussion about the claimants to the selection of this field. Butler, Wool, and Capt. Hughes, T. E., each (or through friends) preferred their right to the honour. At length, however, the weight of evidence confers it upon Wool. But it is of little consequence. Taylor *approved it*, if he did not know of it before the crisis arrived. He determined to hold Saltillo—it was natural to choose, having the time, that position, at or in the vicinity of the town, upon which the enemy could be received to most advantage, and we imagine that no military eye would have glanced over the ground, without perceiving its strong points, and other advantages for battle. Yet, if any special credit is due to General Wool, let it be fully rendered.

† Aggregate—the word includes officers. It is technical.

‡ Henry says 4,425 men and 334 officers—total, 4,759. Ripley says, 4,425 bayonets and sabres, and 15 light guns. He, perhaps, excludes the 6 pounder captured at Monterey, attached to Washington's company, and lost by O'Brien. Mansfield, who is always general, says about 5,000 men. All are near the mark. We have chosen Carleton's statement, who had equal access to all the returns, and seems exceedingly careful in his figures. Yet, in none of the reports have we seen a return of the Texas mounted company, which, on the 23d, took post to the right, and in rear of Steen's dragoons.

§ Carleton.

Washington's battery was stationed at La Angostura, which was our extreme right, on the 23d. Hardin's regiment supported it—a portion behind a parapet, on the tongue of land above, and the remainder entrenched near the guns. It was also supported by McKee's Kentuckians, in the crest of a knoll in the rear. Bissell was on the plateau, with his 2d Illinois regiment, and an associated company of Texan foot. At the base of the mountain, the farther side of the plateau, was posted the volunteer cavalry. The other troops were in reserve, on a ridge in rear of that which Hardin occupied. Santa Anna's forces were drawn up in two lines of infantry, with batteries on their flanks, the cavalry behind them, and the general park in rear, guarded by lancers, and posted on a ridge in our front, with a higher one intervening. His first aim was to occupy the slope of the mountain, ascending from the plateau, on our left, and, for the purpose, dispatched Ampudia, with his four battalions of light infantry. Perceiving the design, Taylor directed a portion of the cavalry to dismount, and, reinforced by some Indiana troops, all armed with rifles, and commanded by Marshall, to ascend the opposite slope (a gorge between) and resist them. O'Brien, with 3 pieces from Washington's battery, sustained by Bowles' regiment, was ordered in support. A shell, thrown from a Mexican howitzer, announced, at 3 P. M., the commencement of the combat. Ampudia and Marshall begun, and continued their sharp-shooting and efforts to out-flank each other, until dark, with trifling loss on our side, (4 wounded) but a good deal of slaughter from our marksmen—300 killed and wounded. With this skirmishing, and an occasional cannonade at our troops on the plateau, precluded by the distance from a reply, ended the affair of that day. An apparent intention of Santa Anna looking to our right also, induced Taylor to send Bragg and McKee's regiment to an elevated ground in the rear of the net-work of gullies, where they passed the night. Feeling sure the enemy would postpone his grand attack until morning, the General went again to Saltillo for the night, in order to complete his arrangements there for security.

On the 23d our dispositions were slightly altered. Washington remained as before. Ampudia having been strengthened by 2000 infantry, a battalion of riflemen (Illinois and Texas) was ordered to join Marshall, still on the moun-

tain side. Bissell was on the plateau, opposite the head of the second gorge, with a gun on each flank—Steen's squadron to the right and rear of them—and McCulloch's mounted Texans to their right and rear. Bowles' 2d, and O'Brien's 3 pieces, on the left of the plateau—Lane's 3d on the knoll behind Washington—while the volunteer cavalry was in the ravine near the plateau, and near the mountain. The others were where the previous night had found them.

The Mexicans were formed in three columns of attack : the first, under Villamel, to carry La Angostura ; the second, under Lombardini, to skirt the mountain and force our left ; the third, under Pacheco, to pass up the third gorge, and unite with the second in its object ; Ampudia was to clear the mountain, and join the others, for a combined assault *in reverse*, or upon our *rear*. The three first were accompanied by strong bodies of cavalry. The 12 pounders and howitzer were placed on an eminence, in front of "the Narrows," to aid Villamel ; the 8 pounders were on a ridge near the mountain, beyond the broad ravine, having a plunging fire on the plateau. Ortega commanded the powerful reserve.

At the earliest dawn, the mountain forces began their work, and briskly kept it up. Our main body quietly awaited the onset of the formidable columns. On they came, marching as on parade, in beautiful array, and with admirable precision, proving their instruction and their discipline. Pacheco, having fewer obstacles of ground, was in advance. Bowles' regiment and O'Brien's guns were beyond the third gorge, to meet him. The pieces were vigorously served, and, without intermission, vomited forth their destructive hail. To avoid the enfilade of the 8 pounder battery, he now facing the road, General Lane* ordered him, with the infantry support, still farther forward, and again he poured his iron missiles (two canisters at a charge) into the serried masses of the foe. Bowles† misunderstood the order, and directed his men to "*cease firing, and retreat,*" which they did with all speed, fleeing from the field. O'Brien obeyed Lane, but the enemy continued to advance—their prostrated platoons were re-

* There were a General and a Colonel Lane on the field.

† Bowles was a brave man—he fought the rest of the day with a musket. A court acquitted him of cowardice, but not of *dullness*. Paymaster Dix gallantly rallied some of his men.

placed—their numbers were overwhelming—while our artillerists, momentarily thinned, were too few to resist them. When almost at his muzzles, O'Brien, much crippled in force, retired with two guns, and left to the enemy the third, without *an unwounded man or horse* to manage it! Nor, on reaching support, were his others in better plight. During this conflict of 25 minutes, Villamil, with his 4000 choice troops, marched upon La Angostura; but a few rounds from Washington's splendid battery broke the head of their column, and drove the entire mass headlong into the broad ravine, for security, and checked, for that day, any repetition of the attempt upon that point.

Pacheco reached the plateau and united with Lombardini—passing near four companies of Arkansans, they too fled the field. His cavalry, pursuing Bowles' Indiana regiment, moved near the base of the mountain, and excited in our riflemen there the fear of being cut off, and they, together with the volunteer cavalry, retreated. Pressed by the enemy's cavalry, and Ampudia, who descended the slope, great loss was sustained, and the Texas company* was nearly destroyed. The masses on the plateau now maintained their position, against the guns of Sherman, Bragg, Thomas, Garnett and O'Brien, who had exchanged with Washington his two pieces, and promptly appeared again upon the scene. The artillery was formed across the plateau, at the head of the first gorge, and, supported by Hardin, M'Kee and Bissell, sent a storm of iron and lead against the enemy, who replied with unyielding obstinacy.

At this crisis, our left forced and turned, and the retiring tide moving upon Buena Vista, and our centre opposed by tremendous odds, Taylor returned from Saltillo, (11 A.M.) and assumed a conspicuous place on the plateau, between the north ravine and the head of the first gorge. At this fearful moment, he was advised to fall back—to concentrate and occupy new ground—that "all was lost." But the courage of the indomitable chieftain rose with the occasion. Seeing at a glance the condition of affairs, he replied, "No, WE WILL DECIDE THE BATTLE HERE!" His humanity, too, shrank from the butchery of his comrades, strown over the field, and he said also, "I WILL NEVER, ALIVE, LEAVE MY WOUNDED

* A Texas Lieutenant offered his sword in surrender—it was seized and plunged into him.

BEHIND!" Cheers greeted his arrival—new spirit was imparted to the troops—confidence was re-awakened by the presence of that brave heart, which had never known defeat, and which scorned a "surrender"—and victory was again anticipated, with sanguine hope.

Davis* saw Ampudia's command, strengthened by cavalry, moving down the second ridge, behind the plateau, elated with conquest, and, asking Wool for Lane's regiment in support, he turned from the road, with his 368 riflemen, to check their progress. Advancing to a minor branch of the ravine, on his right, he hurled a volley into the enemy and staggered him, his cavalry being forced for shelter into the neighbouring ravine. Not satisfied with the distance, he dashed across the branch, met Ampudia face to face, and, without aid, put his infantry to flight, in a disorganized and confused multitude. Seeking the cavalry under cover, a few of whom had crossed to charge in reverse, never to return, they fled. Returning along the ridge, to his first position, Davis was joined by Lane and Kilburn's gun, and, forming again in line, awaited events.

Torrejon's† brigade of horse, pursuing the retiring forces farther left, was received by them at Buena Vista. A shock of cavalry ensued‡—the enemy were divided—one portion traversed the hacienda, worried by the deserters from the battle, and others there, and crossed the western mountain—the other retreated rapidly, under a few rounds from Reynolds' gun, to the eastern base. The dragoons, arrived too late to participate in the struggle.

A fresh body of cavalry, 1500 strong, now dashed down, in splendid style, to overwhelm Davis. Forming an angle, opening to them—Lane extending to the ravine, on his right, and he across the plain, in line—they awaited the charge of the gaudy lancers. On they came, in perfect order, at an easy gallop, expecting a discharge of our pieces, at long range, and then to cut us up. Disappointed, they drew up to a trot—not a shot yet—at 80 yards

* Davis' regiment had escorted Taylor from Saltillo, and this was its first appearance that day on the field. This regiment had fought gallantly at Monterey.

† This brigade contained about 1000 men. The Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry, in this affair, numbered about 450.

‡ Yell was killed here, and Adjutant Vaughan, of Kentucky, under 24 wounds.

they halted! Then simultaneously pealed the rifle and the musket, emptying many a saddle, and followed by a deadly "*fire by file*," and grape and canister from Sherman, then at hand, the brilliant troopers, and their supporting infantry, were forced back, in utter confusion. Bragg now appeared, with 3 guns—two squadrons of dragoons and one of Arkansans marched upon the enemy's left flank—and all advanced, to drive him, pell-mell, against the mountain.

In the mean time, the conflict on the plateau was going on obstinately, and with doubtful result. At length, Santa Anna, perceiving that his centre column could not carry the ground, against our formidable array of artillery, ordered up the San Patricio battalion, (deserters from our army,) with a battery of 18 and 24 pounders, to mingle in the strife. These heavy pieces swept the entire length of the plateau, and the numerous infantry accompanied them with a rapid fire. Had the reserves been brought forward at this juncture, the day would, in all probability, have been gained. The omission was fatal. At last they gave way—their masses retired, broken in the middle—one half crossing the north ravine, to aid Ampudia; the other fell back to the ravine in front, bearing off Santa Anna himself. The heavy battery continued at the head of the plateau, and opposed to them were the guns of O'Brien, Thomas and Garnett, the others having hastened to the aid of Davis, then in the crisis of his daring effort to resist cavalry in open plain, in line, and the supporting regiments of infantry, which advanced in pursuit of Santa Anna and his defeated and retreating column. The enemy on our left were now between two fires—Davis and the cavalry on their left, with Bragg literally tearing them to pieces, and our troops on the plateau, on their right, and in a few moments 6000 men must have laid down their arms; but a white flag* appeared, bearing to Taylor the inquiry, *what did he want?* Generous old man, to

* The Mexican historians make a romantic affair of this flag. They say an officer Montega became "mived up with the Americans." Objecting to death or capture, he adopted the feint for his own security. Carried to Taylor, he returned with our "two officers of the army," who went for an interview with Santa Anna, and slipped away, unnoticed. The Other Side, page 126. They say, also, that, after O'Brien lost his gun, some persons appeared before Santa Anna, and, as from Taylor, demanded his surrender. To which "original request," that chief, with dignity, refused to accede." Page ditto. All stuff—the American translator puts it right.

respond to such an absurdity! He silenced all our guns, and sent Wool to confer with the enemy. Effecting their purpose of escape, *they would not cease firing*, and did not receive him. A happy stratagem, which saved one-third of their army.

Santa Anna now prepared for his final effort. He witnessed the failure on our left, and resolved, in the absence of much of our force in that quarter, to throw an avalanche of troops upon our centre. He moved his 8 pounder battery nearer to the scene—he ordered up his reserves, and, under Perez, directed them to the plateau. At first, not seeing his object, O'Brien's and Thomas' guns, and Bissell, McKee and Hardin, were far in front, continuing their advance upon the fugitives; but orders were sent to those on our left to hurry to the plateau. Perez, with the reserves, increased now to 12,000 men, emerged from the ravine, where they had been organized, encountered our advance—who, driving one column, dreamed not of the approach of another more formidable—by irresistible numbers forced our infantry to give way,* and finally to seek shelter in the second gorge. Half of their column enveloped the head of the gorge in a few minutes, passed down its sides, and slaughtered many brave men, without the power of resistance, and, when attempting escape by the outlet upon the road, the hostile cavalry were there to hem them in. But Washington, in a moment, dispersed these last, and our unfortunates found protection under his guns. The other half—soon joined again by the first—pressed across the plain, having only O'Brien and Thomas, with 3 guns, to oppose them—the former near a hundred yards in the advance. The pieces were worked with every ability—the enemy approached in front—assistance was coming in rear—if O'Brien withdrew his guns, they might sweep over the plain before the arrival of succour—if he fought until they reached him his guns would be lost, but they would be temporarily delayed—

Enemy * These regiments were Hardin's, Bissell's and McKee's, the last entire, the others respectively of 8 and 6 companies. Two of the former, at Saltillo, and two of the latter there also, with two others, detached in the morning to reinforce Marshall. They were taken rather by surprise—one regiment in line, another in column of companies, and a third deploying from column of divisions. Hardin, McKee and Clay were killed—the enemy *made no prisoners* on that field. The two last were graduates of West Point Academy. The first was not, although the public prints have asserted it. He was a native of Kentucky—a resident of, and had been in Congress from, Illinois.

aid might arrive, and the day might yet be ours! With generous heroism, he chose the last. He poured into them the iron hail—he shot down their leading files; but on they came! At length, with four or five wounded men, he loaded again—the enemy almost upon him—gave a last fire, with marked effect, and abandoned his guns.* At that instant, Bragg, under whip and spur, came dashing up the ascent, promptly came “*to action*,” and plied that glorious battery of Ringgold’s,† with a celerity and skill never surpassed. He asked Taylor, near by, for support. “THERE IS NONE,” said he, “BUT MAJOR BLISS AND MYSELF. STAND TO YOUR GUNS AND GIVE THEM (the Mexicans) H——!”‡ And Bragg, like a well-trained soldier, obeyed him to the letter! At only fifty paces—the danger imminent—Thomas alone by his side, he outdid all his former efforts. He tore down the enemy by numerous lines—he annihilated the leading platoons—he checked their progress—they recoiled. Sherman coming, shoulder to shoulder, opened a hundred other avenues of death—they reeled to and fro. Davis and Lane, from the north ravine, appearing upon their right flank, delivered a well-directed fire—and the column yielded ground, and finally rushed from the field! The day was won—“victory perched upon our standard!” With the removal of the enemy beyond our fire ended the great combat, and ended, too, in many respects, the most brilliant feat of arms in American history.§ The enemy’s loss was about 2500,

* O’Brien had three horses shot under him, and was wounded. He demanded a court of inquiry, to investigate the causes of the loss of his guns. Of course there was but one opinion; yet it prevented all after controversy. His guns were borne off by the Mexicans, and were re-captured by his own regiment, at Churubusco. O’Brien wrote a voluminous, and, for reference, a valuable work, on courts martial. He died of cholera, in Texas, in 1850.

† This battery was carried to Texas by Ringgold, was fought by Ridgely, at Resaca and Monterey, and, at his death, turned over to Bragg, in whose hands its reputation was certainly not diminished.

‡ It was said that Taylor replied, “A little more grape, Captain Bragg.” A good catch phrase, but not true. We give the exact, or nearly the exact words spoken, as we heard them from *one* of the *best* authorities.

§ Some cannonading followed the retreat, and our troops pursued the enemy, though without recovering our lost guns; but the day was really over. We have omitted many details, but nothing of importance bearing on the current of events. And we omit the affair at Saltillo. Four infantry companies, under Major Warren, and an artillery company, under Captain Webster, garrisoned the place. Minon made an attempt there, and was repulsed. Lieut. Shover, with a 6 pounder, and Lieut. Donaldson, with a howitzer, pursued him, and did some execution—all very gallantly.

killed and wounded, and several thousand missing. On our side, there were 272 killed, 388 wounded, 6 missing—in all, 666.

On the mere perusal of an account of this battle, the blood courses freer, and all the animal energies are to the utmost aroused. Like Henry Clay, after Monterey, one feels that he, too, "could slay an enemy." The glory of war is magnified, the daring actors in its scenes of hazard and carnage are exalted in estimation, and we become emulous of their deeds of chivalry. The first thought to ~~strike~~ a reflecting mind is, how was it won? how could it be won with such disparity of force? and, more particularly, how could *four guns* of light artillery, whatever the skill of their management, stay the progress of 12,000 soldiers? The result looks like the effect of great magnetic power. All the experience of war, all the rules and maxims of the world's chief warriors, and all the reasoning upon the vast difference of *morale* between two people and two races, would have argued against the possibility of victory, to sixty men at most, against such immense odds! How loudly it speaks for the tenacious courage and the unyielding fortitude of the American soldier, and how much more loudly it speaks for the unsuspected efficiency of the horse artillery, which has been brought to perfection only in our ~~own~~ service. That all engaged in the conflict—save the few deserters—discharged their duty, is not to be doubted; ~~the record discloses the naked truth.~~ If misfortunes, under fortuitous circumstances, or from inability, beset many of them, it was not their fault. Bravery, enthusiasm, perception of the consequences of defeat, were all present, to impel them to superhuman effort. And sure we are that it was exerted. A certain arm of service possessed higher power; yet its success could carry no discredit to the failure of others.

But we mean, briefly, it is true, to notice in detail some of the events of Buena Vista, including the dispositions of the parties, and will indulge in few abstract or declamatory remarks. Our limits and design exclude such grateful pastime, and restrict to severe analysis, and dry, but, it is hoped, not useless, military comments. At no period, within nearly 70 years, has the duty been more urgent on our people to dwell on military topics—to discuss questions relating to war—to acquire and digest the

approved maxims, and to set in progress all those military preparations dictated by a wise forecast; and, if hints are offered, here and there, derived from study of the best authorities, they may not prove untimely nor unprofitable.

The Romans always formed their ~~order~~ *line* of battle in the same manner. They encamped in an entrenched square, and, when about to engage in combat, drew out their army in three lines, with intervals of fifty toises (three and a half feet each) between them, and their cavalry on the flanks. From the restoration of the true military system, under Gustavus Adolphus, up to 1792, the principles and the spirit of the Roman organization and line of battle were observed. The experience of subsequent wars, and the constant direction to military studies of so many and such great minds, for a long period, produced some important changes, and tended to perfect military institutions. But throughout this period, of more than 20 centuries, the "orders"* of battle, variable, to a degree, with the general, and somewhat with the position, have undergone little modification, within certain limits, and we find the one most approved at the present day the same that was successful at Sparta and Thebes—the oblique order. Napoleon said truly, that "among the moderns there was no natural order," and that "nothing absolute either can or ought to be prescribed;"† yet, when he said that the oblique order was "une utopie inapplicable," Jomini makes issue with the conqueror, shows that many of his greatest battles were gained under it, and leaves the impression that the "line" and the "order" were confounded; and the indiscriminate use of the terms in De Vernon's work, written for the Polytechnic School, under the empire, and sanctioned by the emperor and a board of his officers, confirms it. "The oblique order is a disposition

* Jomini draws a very just distinction between lines and orders of battle, and he is, we think, the first military writer who has done it. "I call the line of battle the deployed portion, or composed of battalions in column of attack, which an army will take in occupying a camp and ground upon which to receive battle, without a determined object—it is the proper name for troops, formed according to the rules for exercise, in one or many lines. The order of battle on the contrary, is the disposition of troops indicating a *determined manœuvre*, as the parallel order, the perpendicular, etc." *L'Art de la Guerre*, page 214. They are confounded in the *Tactics for our army*—at least the names are.

† Montholon.

tending to unite half the forces, at least, to overwhelm a wing, while holding the other portion beyond reach of the enemy, either in echellons or inclined from the line." Taylor's order resembled this; but neither he nor Wool, perhaps, thought of any particular disposition, but arranged the troops according to the nature of the ground, the Angostura, an essential point to be defended, and the plateau, the probable battle-ground, extending to the left and front. And the centre and left being in echellons, fortifying the remark that "nothing absolute should be prescribed," varied from the system of 12 orders laid down by Jomini, one of which, he supposed, must be inevitably employed in every case. It was an original modification, which he had not conceived. Standing on the defensive,* with less than half his force (efficient) on the plateau, Taylor, in our judgment, should have planted there all his horse artillery, except Washington's. None was required in reserve. A few more pieces, with O'Brien, would have repelled Pacheco at the outset, and, turning upon Lombardini, well supported, would equally have checked his advance. To break our left—the weak point, seen at a glance by Santa Anna, and promptly improved—would give a reverse fire upon our entire line, when, ordinarily, defeat ensues, and, the communication cut, disaster results. When the flanks are not strengthened, a defensive oblique is liable, therefore, to the above objection. The mountain slope, as Ripley well says, should have been at once occupied, and the front slope, which Marshall ascended first and withdrew from, under the belief that he was ordered, which would have kept off Ampudia from the beginning. The cavalry were properly posted, and, with more guns to have cut up the enemy's horse and annoyed Lombardini, would have proved effective. As it was, there was no alternative but to retire. The strongest point in our

* Jomini remarks, on defensive combats, "that a general who awaits the enemy like an automaton, without aiming to do more than fight valiantly, will be subdued when he may be attacked. It is not so with him who awaits with the firm resolution to combine decided manœuvres against his adversaries, in order to seize the moral advantage of the *offensive impulse*, and with the certainty of directing his masses on the most important point; in the simple *defensive* this never occurs."—page 219. Taylor falsified the first clause. He combined no manœuvres—was on the simple defensive—only repelled when attacked—and yet triumphed. We will not pause to explain the causes of it.

line was the Angostura,* and yet the bulk of our force was concentrated around it. Sanguine as Washington was of repelling all efforts there, his confidence was not shared by his seniors—the light artillery, although renowned, was not supposed as effective as it proved to be. Bissell advanced to O'Brien's relief, and McKee and Bragg quickly crossed the road to assist; but their efforts were separate—had they been together, a simultaneous advance might, at that time, have forced back the enemy. And this could have been arranged. The moment the enemy formed his columns, it was perceived that our right, over the gullies, was not threatened, and McKee and Bragg moved away, under the mere advice of Mansfield, and without orders. This was the first crisis of the battle, and, as is seen, it could have been made the last.

Santa Anna's attack upon our whole line at the same time, was contrary to all the rules of the art, and can never be justified, except with a vast superiority of forces. The experience of Mexican armies against Americans, might have told him, that his *real* superiority was not so immense, and should have taught him caution. A few guns and a small force to engage Washington were sufficient; and a similar or less one should, by all means, have menaced us over the gullies. To carry our entire line simultaneously, was a preposterous conception. He advanced in the parallel order, with his right re-inforced. After forcing O'Brien and then Bissell to give ground, Carleton well says, that had his reserves been promptly brought forward, he would have taken the plateau. Sweeping down it to the road—our centre crushed—the Angostura inevitably captured—and our army scattered,

* Jomini, page 221, deduces the following truths, from a discussion in one of his chapters: "1st. The topographical key of a field of battle is not always the tactical key. 2d. The decisive point of a battle-field is unquestionably that which unites the strategic advantage with the most favourable localities. 3d. When there are no formidable obstacles of ground about the strategic point, this is ordinarily the most important. 4th. Sometimes the determination of this point depends on the positions of the troops respectively—in lines extended or cut up, the centre is the most essential to be attacked—in close lines, the centre is the strongest," etc. Angostura is called the key of Buena Vista. For us it was. It was the strongest point by nature, and was strengthened by art. For the enemy, it was neither the tactical nor topographical point to be attacked—this was our left, as Santa Anna had the military parts to perceive. And as the strategic aim was probably to seize our communications, and operate on the Rio Grande, it is a question if the point selected for attack did not combine all the three requisites.

to be taken in detail, the day would have been his beyond recovery. His timidity—want of perception—or engrossed attention upon a preconceived* manœuvre, prevented, and it is rarely that a general has two certain opportunities of success in the same combat. He, however, judiciously seized the mountain slope, and with equal judgment saw and struck at our weak points, forcing our left, and taking us in reverse. But even when this was done, the character of the ground precluded the use of artillery, and following up his success, upon the rear of the plateau—the north ravine prevented the last.

The second crisis was at the arrival of Taylor, when our army, in the main, was forced, and when the brilliant achievement of Davis against Ampudia, rescued it from overthrow. Both of Davis' feats were most remarkable, and of all others, perhaps, on that field, prove the extraordinary daring of our soldiers. The first, repelling thousands of infantry and cavalry with 368 riflemen! And again, assisted by Lane, driving back 1500 cavalry, on open plain and formed only in line! His own courage and the quality of his troops disclose the secret. He had many gentlemen in his ranks—there could be no shrinking when he led, and they were tolerably disciplined, and had burnt powder before.

It was contrary to rule for Marshall and Tell to await the charge of cavalry. A maxim says, "*that cavalry, however heavy or firm it may be, must never wait to receive the charge of another body of cavalry, not even of light cavalry; for the simplest laws of dynamics show, that it must inevitably be overthrown by the velocity of the charging body.*"† Our men fired their carbines at 60 paces, and the enemy was upon them by the time they could draw their swords. They were not overthrown, because, perhaps, our large horses could sustain the

* Minon says Santa Anna made no combinations—that he believes "a battle is no more than the shock of men, with much noise, shouts, and shots, to see who can do the most, each in his own way"—and "cannot conceive how it happens that a victory may be gained by wise and well calculated manœuvres"—Carleton—Appendix. We disagree to this. Santa Anna did combine; and his stratagem of the white flag, at the proper moment, to save one-third of his army, was very creditable.

† This is sanctioned by Napoleon, if neither in Montholon nor Las Casas. It is said, in the same authority, De Vernon, that when cavalry mean to charge, and are at 600 yards, the first 200 should be in the small trot; the second 200, full trot; the next 160 at a full gallop; and the last 50 paces at full speed.

shock ; and their riders, stout-hearted, would fight under the disadvantage.*

The last crisis was on the plateau, when O'Brien lost his two pieces, and Bragg and Thomas, with four guns, stopped the career of the reserves. And this was the grandest of all, because the instant fate of our army depended on the successful issue, and for the brilliancy of the achievement. Nothing in the annals of civilized warfare equals this feat—nothing occurs to us as at all comparable to it. The rapidity of the fire—the short distance—the grape and canister—the precision of aim†—~~and the contrary in the enemy~~—and the inflexible resolution to die by the guns, combined to effect it. This has been called a battle of horse artillery on our part ; and while we do not and cannot say that others were not essentially instrumental in winning the victory, after a ten hours' struggle of *all* arms, yet certainly without the artillery, the day would have been lost. It was most efficient wherever it was employed. O'Brien, early in the morning, by beautiful firing, drove Ampudia higher up the mountain slope, and beyond his power of elevation. Against Pacheco with more men, and a strong infantry support, he would probably have checked the column, and as it was, he made great havoc in its ranks. Again on the plateau, he retarded Perez, and thus enabled assistance to arrive in season to repulse him. His heroism here merits the highest admiration, and his method of "turning over" guns to the enemy, should never be forgotten. The array of artillery across the plateau, after the retreat of Bowles's regiment, alone prevented the enemy from forcing our centre, with the disastrous consequences which must have ensued. The artillery practice, more especially Bragg's, which all commend, drove the enemy on the left into the *cul de sac*, and combined with that from the plateau, would have compelled a surrender, but for the flag. Washington held his important post against vast odds, and rescued hundreds of men in the gorge, from certain destruction. And finally, this arm closed the contest in a halo of glory, which will encircle it forever.

* At the battle of Sohr, the Austrians awaited the Prussian charge, and the whole body was destroyed.

† At Zorndorf, one cannon shot mowed down 42 men ! Well served artillery is a most effective arm, and we repeat that the South should encourage the organization of many divisions of the horse artillery.

With some merit, Buena Vista has also been styled, the battle of volunteers. It is very true, that over nine-tenths of the force were of that description of troops, but it must not be inferred that they were *militia*. They were superior to this last, because, if the men were not picked, the ranks were, at least, filled by adventurous and daring spirits, and fortunately, as a general rule, the leading officers were chosen by them, for their *merit*, and not often from personal or political predilection. Besides, if not "baptized in fire," they were partially disciplined—the Illinois regiments had been under most competent and untiring instructors. All the field officers of the Kentucky infantry were West Pointers; and Marshall of the cavalry, and Davis of the rifles, were from the same institution. For a prompt effort, however hazardous—for a sudden grasp at victory, even in the jaws of death, they were inferior to none. Like the Romans of old, they fought more from confidence in individual prowess, than from dependence on the "elbow touch," or the multitude. And the only fear to be apprehended was, that they possessed not that unshrinking fortitude, which could patiently receive the "winged instruments of death," without retort—peculiar to veterans, and which justified the heroic Gen. Michel, in exclaiming at Waterloo, "*the guard dies, but never yields!*" Yet our untried volunteers exhibited even this highest trait of the soldier, in some instances—possibly attributable to the apparently desperate condition of affairs, which nerved the intelligent of all grades—perhaps, to their little instruction—*most* probably to the presence of that indomitable chieftain—a participant of the danger, with the serene aspect of a protected observer—under whose eye they stood, and to win whose approbation, they would have stormed even the Rock of Gibraltar!

Col. Davis in the Senate, said, that Buena Vista was "fought without an erroneous order as to position or time." This may be true, and yet not all the truth. With regard to position* we have briefly spoken. But during the combat, when sudden manœuvres are often, according to all experience, more effective than the best pre-arranged combinations; General Taylor in several very important movements, gave no orders at all. McKee

* Col. Davis, it occurs to us, means the placing of troops, and the time of doing so. But we will not alter the text. His speech was delivered Aug. 5th, 1850.

and Bragg left the eminence in rear of the crossing of the gullies, without orders, and arrived timely on the Plateau. Bragg again, in procuring ammunition, perceived Davis' struggle with the 1500 lancers, and hastened to his assistance. Again, when the enemy retreated along the skirt of the mountain, (under the flag,) he supposed a renewed attack would be made on the plateau, and flew there, just at the moment O'Brien abandoned his guns, and without orders; and Davis himself moved against Ampudia without orders.* But we do not concur with Ripley by any means, in censuring Taylor for the omission, or detracting an item from his conduct of the battle, and the high credit that is due to him. We would rather praise those officers, for quick intelligence and responsible action, for surveying the entire field—perceiving when their services were required, and hastening promptly to render them—in a word, for *anticipating* orders in a crisis, rather than supinely resting on their arms, until the General, at a distant point, should direct by positive instruction, through legitimate channels, their every movement. And, we confidently believe, they only anticipated the orders which would have sent them on the same services which they performed: and that Taylor failed to give the directions, because he saw that they even foreseen, and the proper action begun.

The Mexican historians assert, that if the chief Mexican officers had discharged their duty equally with the subalterns, the result would have been different; and it is possibly true: although, like them, we will not exempt their favorite, Santa Anna, from the imputation. We suspect that he was chary of his person. His horse was shot, it is true, and he was borne along with the retiring column, in the first repulse. But where was he, when the reserves made their grand attack? Was he at their head? Was he in their midst? It strikes us forcibly, that the Mexicans never so much required the lead of Santa Anna, as in this charge. An intrepid chief, in whom all had unlimited confidence, could unquestionably have inspired the enthusiasm, to induce 12,000 men to over-run four guns! A Ney, a Lannes, or a McDonald, as at Wagram, would probably not even have slackened his pace. The

* Two signal instances of anticipation are found in the defence of Caesar's camp against the Nervians, (in 2d Book of Commentaries,) and the march of Dessaix to Marengo, which secured the victory.

Bragg

were

met

Nervie

The Roman generals were not necessarily exposed, save after defeat, and following the custom of many of them, he remained in the rear, and perhaps beyond the range of our guns. But the Roman armies from incessant drilling during peace; and their exalted *morale*, from almost invincible success, rarely required the inspiring example of their leaders. In modern armies the battle fields are much larger, exacting activity in the General—the use of fire arms, exposes him more or less at all points, and the danger of leading is not much enhanced; while the less experience—the less training—the often diminished *morale* of troops, frequently demand his presence, to insure a victory. Of all periods, over half his forces engaged, and a final effort to overthrow his adversary, this was the one for Santa Anna to appear at their head, and lead them on. Higher, more patriotic interests checked the impulse perhaps, and urged to the security of self. What if Taylor had remained at the hacienda Buena Vista, with a glass, could he have directed his troops with sufficient promptness? Had he not occupied a conspicuous point, amid the carnage, near to the “flashing of his guns,” would the volunteers have exhibited the same valor? Would even his artillery have been served with the same constancy and precision? Whatever their bravery, it is highly doubtful. The example and participation in hazard, of a beloved chieftain, excite his soldiers to extraordinary exertion. When Alexander’s troops were perishing of drought in the desert, a horn of water was brought from afar to the King, who, instead of drinking, poured it upon the sands before all eyes, and it quenched the thirst of the entire army! Cæsar marched bareheaded before his army in Gaul, in all weathers, and they advanced at his order, in sunshine or in storm. And Hannibal and Napoleon trudged on foot through the snows of the higher Alps, and dispelled both fatigue and cold from their followers. So Taylor in that doubtful crisis—amid the horrors of war, and exposed to every shot, neutralized the appalling danger to his troops, inspired *into* them, his own fearless resolution, and they won for him his noblest field!*

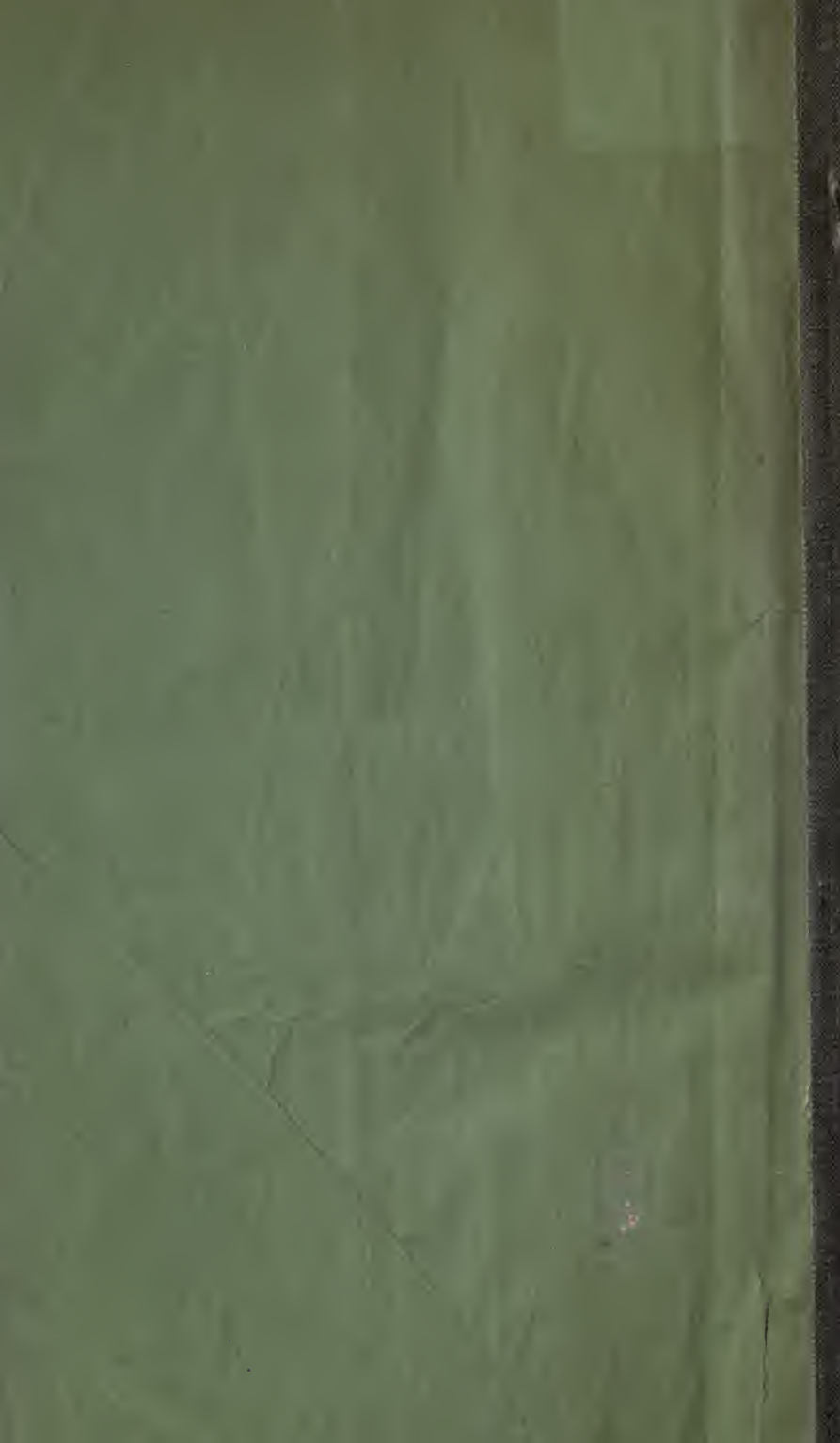
luther

Taylor’s conduct at Buena Vista was comparatively faultless. The few errors that a severe criticism may de-

* Our limits exclude many reflections that we should have been pleased to offer.

fect, are unimportant. Eminent success attended him, as in all the efforts of his career: and invariable success, through a life of vicissitudes and of high responsibilities, marks the enlightened judgment, rather than the favor of inconstant fortune. He displayed the energy, the fortitude, the quick perception and prompt action, and the valor of the great captain; and, likewise, the ready decision and iron firmness, when he exclaimed "*we will decide the battle here.*" It was a rare instance of sublime self-reliance, akin to that "destiny" of exalted genius, which impels it to superhuman trial. With the heroic, he displayed equally the tenderer virtues of the man. His humanity was his crowning grace; and the illustrious sentiment, "I WILL NEVER, ALIVE, LEAVE MY WOUNDED BEHIND!" should be inscribed upon each chieftain's banner, and enshrined in the heart of every soldier. H.





**Lithomount
Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Stockton, Calif.
PAT. JAN 21, 1908**

