

Mr. Tyler, doubtless, like several of his successors, was weaker in office than Mr. Polk, whose little strength lay in the most odious elements of the human character—*cunning and hypocrisy*. It is true that these qualities, when discovered, become positive weaknesses; but they often triumph over wisdom and virtue before discovery. It may be added that a man of meaner presence is not often seen. He was, however, virtually, the nominee of General Jackson.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WAR WITH MEXICO—GENERAL TAYLOR.

HOSTILITIES with Mexico, might, perhaps, have been avoided; but Texas lay between—or rather in the scale of war.

At an advanced stage of the diplomatic quarrel, Brigadier-General Taylor was ordered, with a respectable number of regular troops, to Corpus Christi, near the Mexican frontier, as a good point of observation. This selection of the commander was made with the concurrence of the autobiographer, who, knowing him to be slow of thought, of hesitancy in speech, and unused to the pen, took care, about the same time, to provide him, unsolicited, with a staff officer, Captain

(subsequently, Lieutenant-Colonel) Bliss, his exact complement, who superadded modest, quiet manners, which qualities could not fail to win the confidence of his peculiar commander, and on which usefulness entirely depended. The whole intent was a success: the combination of the general and the chief of his staff working like a charm. Though, perhaps, somewhat in advance of chronology, a little fuller sketch of one of the most fortunate of men, may here not be out of place. The autobiographer knew him well.

General Taylor's elevation to the Presidency, the result of military successes, though a marvel, was not a curse to his country. Mr. Webster, in his strong idiomatic English, said of the nomination that it was "not *fit* to be made;" but probably he would have been equally dissatisfied with any candidate other than himself.

With a good store of common sense, General Taylor's mind had not been enlarged and refreshed by reading, or much converse with the world. Rigidity of ideas was the consequence. The frontiers and small military posts had been his home. Hence he was quite ignorant, for his rank, and quite bigoted in his ignorance. His simplicity was childlike, and with innumer-

able prejudices—amusing and incorrigible—well suited to the tender age. Thus if a man, however respectable, chanced to wear a coat of an unusual color, or his hat a little on one side of the head;—or an officer to leave the corner of his handkerchief dangling from an outside pocket—in any such case, this critic held the offender to be a coxcomb—perhaps, something worse, whom he would not, to use his oft-repeated phrase, "touch with a pair of tongs." Any allusion to literature much beyond good old Dilworth's Spelling Book, on the part of one wearing a sword, was evidence, with the same judge, of utter unfitness for heavy marchings and combats. In short, few men have ever had a more comfortable, labor-saving contempt for learning of every kind.* Yet this old soldier and neophyte statesman, had the true basis of a great character:—pure, uncorrupted morals, combined with indomitable courage. Kind-hearted, sincere, and hospitable in a plain way, he had no vice but prejudice, many friends, and left behind him not an enemy in the world—not even in

* Marlborough, one of the greatest generals of any age, and the first diplomat and courtier of his own, was also without science and literature—knowing nothing of history except the little he picked up at the acting of some of Shakspeare's dramas.

the autobiographer, whom, in the blindness of his great weakness, he—*after* being named for the Presidency—had seriously wronged.

Ought this, charitably, to be supposed an unconscious error, or placed to a different account?

"To keep the proud thy friend, see that thou do him not a service:
For, behold, he will hate thee for his debt."

Prov. Philosophy.

As early as May, 1846, when it was known that the Mexicans had assumed a threatening attitude on the Rio Grande, an inclination to send Scott to that frontier was intimated. He replied, 1. That it was harsh and unusual for a senior, without reënforcements, to supersede a meritorious junior; 2. That he doubted whether that was the right season, or the Rio Grande the right basis for *offensive* operations against Mexico; and suggested the plan of conquering a peace which he ultimately executed.

Leading Democrats took alarm at the appointment of a Whig to so high a trust—fearing, as they did him the honor to say—his "knack at success," and caused Mr. Polk to doubt and reject his views. Whereupon Scott intimated that without the approval of his plan of campaign, and the steady confidence and support

of the Government, he would not be able to conduct any expedition to advantage; for soldiers had a far greater dread of a fire upon the rear, than of the most formidable enemy in front. The President at once caused him to be relieved from the proposed mission.

At this period, Scott usually—as always in troublous times—spent from fifteen to eighteen hours a day in his office, happened, on being called upon by the Secretary of War to be found absent. In explanation, Scott hurriedly wrote a note to say that he was back in the office, having only stepped out, for the moment, to take—regular meals being out of the question—"a hasty plate of soup." This private note being maliciously thrown into party newspapers, all the wittings—forgetting their own *hasty* pudding, fastened upon it, with much glee, and also tried their clumsy wit on the phrase "conquer a peace;" but not *after* the early fact, as also on the "fire upon the rear;" but never *after* the fire of the enemy and that of the Administration, on front and rear, had been silenced by the campaign of 1847.

These were no *trivialities* in their day; for, by the aid of party madness and malice they came very near destroying Scott's usefulness in the Mexican war.

Taylor's early successes on this side of the Rio Grande, so handsomely reported by Bliss, won him great favor with the country. A resolution giving him the thanks of Congress, and a sword was promptly introduced. Scott hastened to address a circular (private) note to a dozen members of the two Houses of Congress—including the Kentucky Senators, and Mr. Jefferson Davis—arguing that the gold medal ought to be substituted for the sword—being the higher honor, and eminently Taylor's due. The suggestion was adopted, and further to show that Scott did not neglect the hero of the Rio Grande, he annexes the following report:

“HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY, }
WASHINGTON, July 25, 1846. }

“HON. W. L. MARCY, Secretary of War:

[*Endorsed by Major-General Scott, on the Resolution of Congress voting a medal to Major-General Taylor, which Resolution the Secretary had referred to General Scott.*]

“As medals are among the surest monuments of history, as well as muniments of individual distinction,

there should be given to them, besides intrinsic value and durability of material the utmost grace of design, with the highest finish in mechanical execution. All this is necessary to give the greater or adventitious value; as in the present instance, the medal is to be, at once, an historical record and a reward of distinguished merit. The credit of the donor thus becomes even more than that of the receiver interested in obtaining a perfect specimen in the fine arts.

“The within resolution prescribes *gold* as the material of the medal. The general form (circular) may be considered as equally settled by our own practice, and that of most nations, ancient and modern. There is, however, some little diversity in *diameter* and *thickness* in the medals heretofore ordered by Congress, at different periods, as may be seen in the cabinets of the War and Navy Departments. Diversity in dimensions is even greater in other countries.

“The specific character of the medal is shown by its two faces, or the *face* and the *reverse*. The within resolution directs ‘appropriate devices and inscriptions thereon.’

“For the *face*, a bust likeness is needed, to give, with the name and the rank of the donee, *individual*-

ity. To obtain the likeness, a first-rate miniature painter should, of course, be employed.

"The reverse receives the device, appropriate to the events commemorated. To obtain this, it is suggested that the resolutions and despatches, belonging to the subject, be transmitted to a master in the art of design—say Professor Weir, at West Point—for a drawing—including, if practicable, this inscription:

PALO ALTO;

RESACA DE LA PALMA:

May 8 and 9, 1846.

"A third artist—all to be well paid—is next to be employed—a die sinker. The mint of the United States will do the coinage.

"Copies, in cheaper metal, of all our gold medals, should be given to the libraries of the Federal and State Governments, to those of colleges, etc.

"The medals voted by the Revolutionary Congress were executed—designs and dies—under the superintendence of Mr. Jefferson, in Paris, about the year 1786. Those struck in honor of victories, in our

war of 1812, were all—at least so far as it respected the land service—done at home, and not one of them presented, I think, earlier than the end of Mr. Monroe's Administration (1825). The delay principally resulted from the want of good die sinkers. There was only one of mediocre merit (and he a foreigner) found for the army. What the state of this art may now be in the United States I know not. But I beg leave again to suggest that the honor of the country requires that medals, voted by Congress, should always exhibit the arts, involved, in their highest state of perfection *wherever* found; for letters, science, and the fine arts constitute but *one* republic, embracing the world. So thought our early Government, and Mr. Jefferson—a distinguished member of that general republic.

"All which is respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War."

But before his written solicitude about the medal—in May—the day on which the news of Taylor's first victories (two) arrived—a number of leading Whigs (not including Mr. Clay or Mr. Webster) in a panic, about the soup, called upon the autobiographer to in-

quire whether Taylor was a Whig or not, and whether he might not advantageously be Scott's substitute as their next Presidential candidate? More amused than offended at their cowardice and candor, Scott gave emphatically, all the points in the foregoing sketch of the then rising general, omitting (it is believed) any allusion to his lack of general information, and added, as a striking proof of his honesty this anecdote:

Early in the times of Jacksonism, in Kentucky, the demagogues broke the Constitution, and the supreme judges of the State, together; set up a new supreme court of their own, and a rag bank without a dollar in specie—literally to "emit bills of credit" in violation of the Constitution of the United States. Money (bills of credit) being superabundant, a wild spirit of speculation became general running into madness, soon followed by coextensive bankruptcy and ruin. Colonel Zachary Taylor chanced to visit Louisville (his home) in the height of the speculation; but though not infected himself, he was induced to endorse a heavy obligation of a friend, which, of course, in due time fell upon him. He resolutely refused to take any relief from the stop-laws of the same demagogues, or to pay in their rag currency, and although a dear lover of money,

persistently paid his endorsement in specie. In continuation, Scott stated that being in Louisville, in the command of the Western Department of the army, he gave the colonel the short leave of absence that brought him there with the heavy bags which finally freed him from debt. The parting with the cash agonized him not a little, but soon he recovered, and the next moment felt happy in his double-proof integrity.

And had Scott no trial of his own? The statement, just given fixed Taylor as the next Whig candidate for the Presidency; but Scott, without murmur or petulance, did not fail to make his backsliding Whig friends feel their inferiority. Never had he been better self-poised, and to his last hour he cannot fail to point to this period of obloquy on the part of enemies and desertion of friends, as by far the most heroic of his life. Happily by the ruling of Providence, that, and other defeats in politics, have proved to him blessings in disguise. Whether, looking to subsequent events, the country has equally profited by the results, he has the vanity to doubt.

By extraordinary importunities from Washington, one object being to decry Scott's plea for adequate preparation, and his doubts as to the line of opera-

tions from the Rio Grande—aided by a letter from that man of rare abilities and every moral excellence—John J. Crittenden—written at Scott's desk, and which he read with a dissenting smile—Taylor was told to say no more of reinforcements and means of transportation; but, added Crittenden—"the public is impatient; take foot in hand and off for the Halls of Montezuma." Thus stimulated, Taylor, against his own judgment, marched under the greatest difficulties upon the little village of Monterey, which he captured (*cui bono?*) and became *planted*—as it was impracticable—no matter with what force, to reach any vital part of Mexico by that route. Accordingly, Taylor remained fast at Monterey and its neighborhood, with varying numbers, down to the peace.

Reliable information reached Washington, almost daily (see Taylor's own Reports, Ex. Doc. No. 60, H. of R., 30th Con., 1st Session), that the wild volunteers as soon as beyond the Rio Grande, committed, with impunity, all sorts of atrocities on the persons and property of Mexicans, and that one of the former, from a concealed position, had even shot a Mexican as he marched out of Monterey, under the capitulation.*

* This case was one reported by Taylor, who asked for advice. And

There was no legal punishment for any of those offences, for by the strange omission of Congress, American troops take with them beyond the limits of their own country, no law but the Constitution of the United States, and the rules and articles of war. These do not provide any court for the trial or punishment of murder, rape, theft, &c., &c.—no matter by whom, or on whom committed.

To suppress these disgraceful acts abroad, the autobiographer drew up an elaborate paper, in the form of an order—called, his *martial law order*—to be issued and enforced in Mexico, until Congress could be stimulated to legislate on the subject. On handing this paper to the Secretary of War (Mr. Marcy) for his approval, a *startle* at the title was the only comment he then, or ever made on the subject. It was soon silently returned, as too explosive for safe handling. A little later the Attorney-General called (at whose instance can only be guessed) and asked for a copy, and the law officer of the Government whose business it is to speak

what advice does the reader suppose the Secretary to have given? To execute the brute under martial law? No! Taylor was advised to send the monster home—that is, to reward him with a discharge! See the same document. (P. 369.) I had left Washington two days earlier.

on all such matters, was stricken with legal dumbness. All the authorities were evidently alarmed at the proposition to establish martial law, even in a foreign country, occupied by American troops. Hence they touched the subject as daintily as a "terrier mumbles a hedgehog." I therefore was left in my own darkness on the subject. I sent the paper, however, to General Taylor, telling him frankly, that it had been seen by at least two members of the cabinet, but that it was not approved or disapproved by either, and for that reason it was not enjoined upon him, but left to his own responsibility to adopt it as his order or not, as he might think proper.

It is understood that Taylor on casting his eye slightly over the paper, and perceiving it contained what he termed, "a learned commentary on the military code," threw it aside—saying, "It is another of *Scott's Lessons*" or "*Novels*"—as his tactics and military institutes had been previously called by officers of a certain age (not West Point graduates) who deemed it a great hardship, late in life, to be obliged, for the first time, to study the simplest elements of their profession.

This paper will be inserted entire, in a subsequent part of this narrative: 1. On account of its history

just given; 2. Because, without it, I could not have maintained the discipline and honor of the army, or have reached the capital of Mexico.

The martial law order was not published until the autobiographer was fairly out of the United States—at Tampico. It was successively republished at Vera Cruz, Puebla, and the capital, so that it might be familiarly known to every man in the army, and in a translation, it was also extensively circulated among the people of the country. Under it, all offenders, Americans and Mexicans, were alike punished—with death for murder or rape, and for other crimes proportionally. It will be seen that the order did not in the least interfere with the administration of justice between Mexican and Mexican, by the ordinary courts of the country. It only provided a special American tribunal for any case to which an American might be a party. And further, it should be observed, that military commissions in applying penalties to convicted felons, were limited to "*known* punishments, in like cases, in some of the States of the United States"—the latter, as such, being without a common law, or a common criminal code.

Notwithstanding the cowardice of certain high func-

tionaries on the subject, there has been no pursuit of the author. On the contrary, it has been admitted by all that the order worked like a charm; that it conciliated Mexicans; intimidated the vicious of the several races, and being executed with impartial rigor, gave the highest moral deportment and discipline ever known in an invading army.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SCOTT ORDERED TO MEXICO — VISITS CAMARGO — RE-EM-
BARKS FOR VERA CRUZ.

SEVERAL times in the summer and autumn of 1846, I repeated to the War Department my desire to be ordered to Mexico at the head of a competent force. At length my request was acceded to.

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, }
November 23, 1846. }

SIR :

The President, several days since, communicated in person to you his orders to repair to Mexico, to take the command of the forces there assembled, and particularly to organize and set on foot an expedition to operate on the Gulf coast, if, on arriving at the theatre of action, you shall deem it to be practicable. It is not