



Major-General Taylor.



GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR.



OMITTING genealogical details, we come at once to the fact that Major-General Zachary Taylor, the third son of Colonel Richard Taylor, was born in Orange county, Virginia, on the 24th of November, 1784. In the succeeding summer Colonel Taylor emigrated to Kentucky, then just beginning to be settled, and his children from their earliest years were inured to the hardships and perils of frontier life. His first military lessons are said to have been from a man named Whetsel, who loaded

his rifle while running and successively killed four Indians, who were pursuing him. Zachary Taylor was enrolled as a volunteer in one of the companies formed to oppose any scheme that might be concocted by Aaron Burr, during his suspicious sojourn in the west. In May, 1808, he received a commission as first lieutenant in the 7th regiment of United States infantry, the vacancy he was appointed to fill having been made by the death of his brother. He was ordered to report himself to General Wilkinson at New Orleans, where he was taken with the yellow fever, and recovered with a constitution so much shattered as to compel his temporary retirement from active service.

General Harrison having been ordered to march into the Indian country, erected a block-house and stockade on the Wabash, which afterwards was called Fort Harrison. Lieutenant Taylor was employed in the perilous duty of watching the movements of the hostile savages at this post, and performed it in such a manner as to be promoted to a captaincy in the beginning of 1812. He was then placed in command of Fort Harrison, and in September, 1812, made his memorable successful defense of that post, with a sickly garrison of fifty men, against a large body of Indians of Tecumseh's party. The attack was begun at midnight and the lower building was set on fire by the enemy. The flames soon reached the store-room where a quantity of whisky took fire, and spread the conflagration rapidly. By great perseverance and presence of mind, however, the fire was stopped in the building where it commenced, and the garrison kept up a steady discharge of musketry upon the enemy, who continued the assault for seven

hours. They then retired, carrying off the horses and cattle. The danger to which the whisky thus exposed the gallant captain, of death by flames on one side, or savage arms on the other, was probably remembered when he issued stringent orders against those who dealt in that article on the Rio Grande.

General Hopkins said of this achievement, in a letter to the governor of Kentucky, "the firm and almost unparalleled defense of Fort Harrison by Captain Zachary Taylor, has raised for him a fabric of character not to be effaced by eulogy." The government acknowledged it by conferring upon Taylor the rank of major by brevet.

In October and November, Major Taylor, in command of the Kentucky volunteers, and accompanied by General Hopkins, made two expeditions into the Indian country; one against the Kickapoo villages on the Illinois river, the other against the settlements in the neighbourhood of Tippecanoe. No general engagement was fought, but they were attended with many hardships and privations, and proved of incalculable benefits to the territories of Indiana and Illinois. Several of the enemy's towns, and large quantities of provisions were destroyed. This demonstration of our strength inspired them with awe. In the winter of 1813 Major Taylor was appointed to superintend the recruiting service in Indiana and Illinois, in which he continued with industry and success until July. In that month he proceeded with a force of Rangers and Kentucky volunteers against the Massassinawa town near the source of the Wabash. The town was found abandoned, and meeting with no supply of provisions, the detachment was exposed during its return to the severest privations.

Ordered to erect a fort on Rock river.

In the spring of 1814 he was ordered to St. Louis, to take command of the troops in the Missouri territory, and was actively employed on its frontiers until August. It was then ascertained that the British had taken Fort Shelby at Prairie du Chien, and were in great force on the Mississippi, with regulars and Indian allies. General Howard was furnished with ten companies of badly organized rangers, and about one hundred and twenty efficient regulars, to protect the frontier of Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, and restrain the depredations of the various savage tribes. With these slender resources he had to protect the interior settlements, and furnish detachments to invade the Indian territory. Of these, that which ascended the Mississippi, under Major Taylor, was the most important in its objects and the most beneficial in its results.

On the 22d of August, 1814, Major Taylor received orders to take command of three hundred and twenty men, principally militia, provided with boats and a few pieces of artillery, to ascend the Mississippi as high as the Indian village at the mouth of Rock river, to destroy the villages and corn, to disperse the Indians, and erect a fort on the most eligible site to command the river. The leading objects of the expedition were to restrain the Indians by the establishment of a military post in the heart of their country, and to arrest the descent of the British forces on St. Louis. The general closes his orders to the commanding officer thus: "should this command succeed in effecting all the objects for which it is intended the beneficial consequences to our country will be great. On the other hand, should this movement be stamped with disaster, no longer can even a hope be

Skirmish with the Indians.

indulged of the frontiers maintaining their ground. But from the officer who commands and those commanded by him, the most flattering expectations may be indulged." Thus was the fate of the frontier a second time staked on the fortunes of the defender of Fort Harrison.

In pursuance of his orders, Major Taylor proceeded to the mouth of Rock river, against a rapid current and amid the dangers of a lurking enemy, five hundred miles above the highest settlement or post on the Mississippi. Contrary to his expectations, and those of the general, he found a detachment of British troops, well supplied with artillery, and an immense body of Indians in possession of the place. After skirmishing with the Indians, and being sometime cannonaded by the British, without a possibility of returning their fire with effect, he dropped down to the rapid Desmoines, and having landed his forces, secured his boats, and fortified his camp, and commenced a fort so situated as to command the Mississippi and the mouth of the Desmoines. The erection of this fort in the face of the enemy, and at so great a distance from the source of supply, was attended with peculiar hazard, and almost incredible privation and toil. But the judgment, resolution, and skill of the commander, seconded by his animating example, surmounted every obstacle, enabled him to complete his important labour and to realize the most sanguine expectations of his superior.

The death of General Howard in October, called Major Taylor to St. Louis. In November he accompanied Colonel Russell several hundred miles up the Missouri, to secure a small settlement on that river, left much exposed to Indian depredations. In December

he was again ordered to Vincennes to take command of the troops in Indiana, where he remained until the conclusion of peace.

"When we look back," says Mr. Breckenridge, in a biographical sketch of General Taylor, written thirty years since; "when we look back on the many important services rendered by this officer to his country during the late war; when we reflect on the peculiar perils and hardships to which those services must have perpetually exposed him, performing as he did, in one year, marches in the territories of Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, amounting to more than three thousand miles, and find no solitary instance in which the extent of his achievements did not exceed the scanty measure of his means, we cannot restrain the expression of our regret at his detention from those glorious fields of civilized combat, where his genius might have borne him to nobler enterprise, and his valour displayed itself on a more conspicuous theatre. * * * * *

"With a frame fitted for the most active and hardy enterprise, an ardent spirit, a sanguine temper, and an invincible courage, gifted with a rapid discernment, a discriminating judgment, and a deep knowledge of mankind, and possessing a heart susceptible of the most generous impulses of humanity, we regard Major Taylor as an officer of peculiar promise, and hazard, we think, but little in the prediction that, in the event of a war at no distant period, between the United States and England or Spain, riding on the tide of military glory, he will find his true level at the head of the army."

The reduction of the army list on the conclusion of the war, led to the change of Major Taylor's rank to that

of a captain. He resigned in consequence, but in a year he was restored to the service and his former rank by President Madison. He was employed in the monotonous life of a soldier in time of peace until he became engaged in the Black Hawk war in 1832. He then held the rank of colonel, and was detached by General Atkinson to pursue the Indians after they had fled over the Wisconsin. He met them at a place called the Bad Axe, and, though they fought with the energy of despair, totally defeated them. The betrayal of Black Hawk shortly afterwards put an end to this war. An anecdote related of his conduct during this war by a writer in the "Literary World," gives an amusing example of his decision of character. He states that "while pursuing Black Hawk with a mixed force of volunteers and regulars, he found himself approaching Rock river, then said to be the north-western boundary of Illinois. The volunteers, as Taylor was informed, would refuse to cross the stream. They were militia, they said, called out for the defense of the state, and it was unconstitutional to order them to march beyond its frontier into the Indian country. Taylor thereupon halted his command and encamped within the acknowledged boundaries of Illinois. He would not, as the relator of the story said, budge an inch farther without orders. He had already driven Black Hawk out of the state, but the question of crossing Rock river seemed hugely to trouble his ideas of integrity to the constitution on one side, and military expediency on the other. During the night, however, orders came, either from General Scott or General Atkinson, for him to follow up Black Hawk to the last. The quietness of the regular colonel had rather

encouraged the mutinous militia to bring their proceedings to a head.. A sort of town meeting was called upon the prairie, and Taylor invited to attend. After listening some time quietly to the proceedings, it became Rough and Ready's turn to address the chair. 'He had heard,' he said, 'with much pleasure the views which several speakers had expressed of the independence and dignity of each private American citizen. He felt that all gentlemen there present were his equals—in reality, he was persuaded that many of them would in a few years be his superiors, and perhaps in the capacity of members of Congress, arbiters of the fortunes and reputation of humble servants of the republic like himself. He expected then to obey them as the interpreters of the will of the people; and the best proof he could give that he would obey them was now to observe the orders of those whom the people had already put in the places of authority, to which many gentlemen around him justly aspired. In plain English, gentlemen and fellow-citizens, the word has been passed on to me from Washington to follow Black Hawk, and to take you with me as soldiers. I mean to do both. There are the flat boats drawn up on the shore, and here are Uncle Sam's men drawn up behind you on the prairie.'” No answer could be made to such an argument. Instant obedience followed.

When the command of Major Dade had been massacred in Florida, the government determined to prosecute hostilities against the enemy with vigour, and Colonel Taylor was ordered to the seat of war. In December, 1837, he received orders to seek out any portion of the enemy, wherever to be found, and to destroy or capture his forces. He soon displayed his skill

in finding an Indian enemy, and his ability in defeating him. He was informed that the Micasukies had determined to fight him, and he was determined to indulge them, and accordingly the conflict took place on the 25th of December, on the shore of lake Okee-Chobee. The Indians, after a severe conflict, were beaten, and driven at all points. They had several hundred warriors engaged in an admirable position, which they defended for two hours and a half with the greatest gallantry, killing and wounding one-fifth of Taylor's whole command. After the victory, Colonel Taylor turned his whole attention to the care of the wounded, who were most tenderly treated. For his services in this affair, Colonel Taylor received the thanks of the president, and promotion to the rank of brigadier-general by brevet.

General Taylor continued to prosecute hostilities against the savages until April, 1840, when he was relieved by General Armistead.

He was then appointed to the command of the first department of the army in the south-west, and continued in the service there until, as we have already seen, he was ordered to Corpus Christi. We have already given detailed accounts of the four brilliant achievements which have made his name so universally popular throughout our country, and we will not now repeat them. We pass on to narrate such anecdotes of him as will serve to give the best idea of the man and his character.

When his reply to the communication of Ampudia respecting the blockading of the Rio Grande was published, it received the universal approbation of the

soldiers and their patriotic countrymen, and all felt assured that the honour of the country was safe in his hands. The troops felt that the man who could talk in such a manner was able to make good his words, and his order issued when about to march from Matamoras to Point Isabel, on the 7th of May, assured them of a speedy victory. He spoke to his inferior force of raw troops as to veterans, and in the confident tone of one who knows his own power, assured them of victory, and reminded them to place *their main dependence on the bayonet*, and as if his words had not been sufficient, his demeanour on the battle-field was such as to make the veriest coward dare a hundred deaths in his cause. When one of his officers saw him sitting on his horse in the thickest of the fight, with his sword drawn, while the balls were rattling around him, and desired him to retire a short distance, where his person would not be so much exposed, he smiled good-humouredly, and answered, "*let us ride a little nearer, the balls will fall behind us.*"

When the Mexican lancers made a charge upon the American right at Palo Alto, and the 5th infantry stood ready to receive it, General Taylor rode up and said, "Men, I place myself in your square." How could a man falter after such a mark of confidence?

Somewhat in the style of his speech to the militia men, is the remark made to General Ricardo, who exculpated his troops from the charge of stripping and mutilating the American dead, by saying that the women and rancheros did it; that they could not control them. General Taylor replied, "I am coming over to Matamoras, and I'll control them for you."

On the 30th of May, President Polk wrote to him, forwarding a commission as brevet major-general, and complimenting him on "the bright page he had added to American history." The legislature of Louisiana passed a vote of thanks, and ordered a sword to be presented to him. By an act of Congress he was promoted to be a full major-general.

At Monterey, he was in the town with his staff on foot, walking about perfectly regardless of danger, where the shot flew about as "if bushels of hickory nuts were hurled at us." Captain Henry says that seeing him crossing a street in a walk, while such a terrible cross-fire swept it that it seemed impossible for him to escape, he ran across and reminded him how much he was exposing himself. The answer the gallant captain received was, "Take an axe and knock in that door." Another officer, noticing his conduct in the streets of Monterey, says, "He was as cool as a cucumber, and ordered us to pass into the city and break open the houses. God knows how many of us got out."

Speaking of the battle of Buena Vista, Captain Henry says in his Campaign Sketches, "Our rear was in danger; the tide of battle was decidedly against us; the fortunes of the day seemed cast upon a die, when, at this critical juncture, General Taylor arrived upon the field, and occupied a commanding position upon an elevated plateau. *His presence restored confidence.* * * * General Taylor stood calm and unmoved upon the plateau—all eyes were turned upon him. The leaden messengers of death swept harmlessly by his person, while hundreds were passing to futurity. Bragg, with his battery had arrived at the point of fearful struggle. Alone

and unsupported was that battery and that brave old chief. Confident to the last of victory, he ordered his trusty captain to unlimber—to load with grape, and await the arrival of their masses until they nearly reached the muzzles of his pieces. On came the enemy like legions of fiends, certain of victory. When almost within grasp of the battery, Bragg opened his fire. The first volley staggered them, the second opened streets through their ranks, and the third put them in full retreat and saved the day."

"It was not," says Colonel Davis, "alone on the battle field that we learned to love General Taylor. The excitement of the carnage over, the same soul that could remain unmoved when his friends were falling like leaves about him, who could look unblanched upon the front of the thundering artillery, became the poor soldier's most sympathizing friend; and the eye so stern in battle was as mild as the tenderhearted matron's."

When the gallant Mississippi regiment was about to leave him, overpowered by the recollection of the high deeds which had endeared them to him, and with their demonstrations of respect and affection, he attempted in vain to address them. With tears streaming down his furrowed cheeks, all he could say was, "Go on, boys—go on—I can't speak." Such is the character of General Taylor, as a man.