

THE
AMERICAN GIFT BOOK.

GENERAL TAYLOR.

MAJOR-GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR was born on the 24th of November, 1784, in Orange County, Virginia. While he was but a child, his father, Richard Taylor, removed to Kentucky, at that time an uninterrupted wilderness. In this place, amid scenes of wild sublimity, daring adventure, and savage combat, young Zachary passed his early days. The territory was then called by the natives 'the dark and bloody ground,' and the tales of burnings, and scalpings, and murder, which belong to that period, show that it was not an undeserved title. Used to these occurrences, Zachary soon acquired a degree of activity and endurance, unknown to the young men of a more congenial soil. It is said that on one occasion he swam the Ohio River and back again, when it was swelled with the floods of March; and while at school he was the champion of all his associates.

When he had arrived at his twenty-fourth year, the news of the outrage on the Chesapeake roused the whole country into indignation. Burning for revenge, the hardy western men poured to the standard of their country, eager for the commencement of hostilities. Among the foremost of these was Taylor, who was received into the

army as first lieutenant of the 7th infantry, on the 3d of May, 1808. After the war commenced, and the surrender of Hull had endangered all the northwestern frontier, Taylor was ordered to the north, and entered the command of General Harrison. Here he so distinguished himself as to receive a commission of captaincy, and soon after was intrusted with the command of a separate post. This was Fort Harrison, a small stockade defence in the territory of Indiana, garrisoned by only fifteen men who were fit for duty; the remainder of the command being sick or disabled. Besides these, there were nine women and children.

Before daylight on the morning of the 5th of September, 1812, the Miamies attacked the fort in great force, firing a large block-house which formed part of the entrenchments; and while the flames were raging, commenced with their rifles on the garrison. The block-house was in flames before it was discovered, and the sight appalled every heart except that of the commander. It was well known that the fire was each moment opening a road for the savages; and this, with the certainty of death by a cruel foe, the remembrance of their late losses, and the effects of recent sickness, all heightened by the screams of women and children, and the yells of hundreds of Indians, made that night-scene awful to the handful of men, who constituted the garrison. Two leaped from the pickets and disappeared in the darkness, and the remainder were so paralyzed that they would scarcely listen to their commander. The gallant young captain, however, was equal to the emergency. His determination was, not to yield the fort whatever might

be the force of the enemy; and he now ran from man to man, unfolding his plan of defence, and exhorting them to tear away the communications with the block-house, so that its flames would not communicate with the other buildings. By these exertions, he once more revived their hope, and they rushed to work with all the alacrity of renewed confidence. One party tore away every thing adjoining the burning house, while at the same time the remainder worked with almost incredible exertion to advance a breastwork in front of the falling building, so as to supply its place and thus defeat the aim of the Indians. Both were successful: the fort was saved, and the enraged enemy, after shooting the cattle and horses found in the neighborhood, sullenly retreated. The garrison had but three men killed, including one of the two who leaped the stockade in despair; the other got back to the fort, badly wounded. Disheartened by this unlooked-for defence, the Indians made no further attempt upon the fort. The garrison, however, suffered extremely from scarcity of provisions, as all the raw corn had been taken by the savages, besides the cattle and horses.

For the brave defence of Fort Harrison, Captain Taylor received the brevet rank of major, dated from the day of attack. This was the first brevet ever conferred in the American army. When the war closed, Taylor still remained in the army, improving himself not only in military tactics, but also in various branches of general knowledge. It is difficult, however, to trace his history in the interim between the English and Florida wars; the life of a soldier is rarely conspicuous in time of peace.

The dangers and horrors of the Florida war are familiar to every American. It was a period of disappointment and mortification; a field where the strong were made feeble, where numbers were almost useless, and the veteran of other fields had to learn war again. Perhaps no nation with the comparative strength of the United States, has ever fought another to so little advantage; and her numerous sons, whose bones now moulder amid the swamps of that fatal region, bear mournful witness to the cost of the Seminole war.

Taylor, however, was more fortunate than his brother officers. Instead of being obliged to drag out a tedious campaign, whose every advantage was with the enemy, he succeeded in bringing them to a general engagement in which they were defeated. The battle was fought near a large lake called by the Indians Okee-Chobee. In a dense forest of swamp and undergrowth, they were posted near this lake, where they considered themselves so secure as to send a challenge to Colonel Taylor to fight them if he wished. On the 25th of December, in the afternoon, the Americans reached the opposite shore of the lake, after a most tiresome march, through marshes, swamps, rivers, and dense forests. The advance guard experienced much difficulty in crossing, and at the moment of landing received a galling fire from the Indians, under which the commander, Colonel Gentry, and several of his men, fell. The party broke in terror, and rushed through the water, as far as the baggage, which had been left a great distance in the rear. The Indians now poured from their thickets, confident of similar success against the main body. Two infantry

companies advanced to meet them, and the conflict was bloody and stubborn. Of five companies of the 6th infantry, only one officer escaped unhurt, and one of these companies had but four members uninjured. The fierce charges of the Indians were, however, successfully resisted; they were repulsed again and again, and finally driven in confusion through the woods, and along the borders of the Okee-Chobee. The loss on both sides was heavy, and altogether this may be considered as one of the fiercest battles of the Florida war.

In speaking of this battle, Colonel Taylor said: "I trust I may be permitted to say that I experienced one of the most trying scenes of my life, and he who could have looked on it with indifference, his nerves must have been very differently organized from my own. Besides the killed, there lay one hundred and twelve wounded officers and soldiers, who had accompanied me one hundred and forty-five miles, most of the way through an unexplored wilderness, without guides; who had so gallantly beaten the enemy, under my orders, in his strongest position; and who had to be conveyed back through swamps and hammocks, from whence we set out, without any apparent means of doing so. This service, however, was encountered and overcome, and they have been conveyed thus far, and proceeded on to Tampa Bay on rude litters constructed by the axe and knife alone, with poles and dry hides—the latter being found in great abundance at the encampment of the hostiles. The litters were conveyed on the backs of our weak and tottering horses, aided by the residue of the command, with more ease and comfort to the sufferers than I could

have supposed possible ; and with as much as they could have been in ambulances of the most improved and modern construction."

The bravery of Colonel Taylor was not unrewarded. The brevet rank of brigadier-general was immediately conferred upon him, and he was highly commended in the annual report of the Secretary of War to Congress. Soon after, he was intrusted with the chief command in Florida, and established his head-quarters near Tampa Bay. But the nature of his duties prevented his participating in any other battle with the Indians, and in 1840 he was relieved from his arduous station by General Armistead. General Taylor was ordered to take command of the southern division of the army, with which he remained until the annexation of Texas to the United States, when the relations with Mexico assuming a belligerent aspect, he was placed in command of the "Army of Possession," which was destined to defend the newly acquired territory against expected invasion. His actions subsequent to this, it is scarcely necessary to relate. They are familiar to every one, and Palo Alto, Monterey and Buena Vista are now household words, whose very essence is praise and admiration to General Taylor.

In manners and address General Taylor is perfectly frank and easy, and greatly enjoys the society of intelligent friends. He is noted for his plainness, and want of all affectation, and this quality endears him to both officers and soldiers. Numerous incidents are related of him in this respect ; his departure from Point Isabel *en route* for Fort Brown was in a *Jersey wagon*, of ponderous materials and questionable shape ; and the talk-loving deputies

of Mexico, have learned to preserve proper taciturnity in his presence. This remarkable trait in a great military man, must be carefully distinguished from the carelessness, which is merely its caricature, and by which many individuals, with more enthusiasm than sound sense, have absolutely slandered, although unwittingly, the man whom they were laboring to praise. There never was a more silly, childish sentiment, than that put into the General's mouth at Buena Vista, concerning his white horse. "Some officer," says report, "remarked that old Whitey was rather too conspicuous an object for the General to ride." "Oh!" replied Taylor, "the old fellow missed the fun at Monterey, on account of a sore foot, and I am determined that he shall have his share this time."

General Taylor is above such nonsense at any time ; but amid the horrors of that battle-field, when death was stalking among his bosom friends, as they lay panting at his feet, his soul was attending to other interests than the situation of his white horse.

While on this part of our subject we would refer to the kindness of heart which has ever been a trait in the General's character. The extract we have given from his report of Okee-Chobee, is an excellent illustration. It is not often that a military man will acknowledge to his government, that his heart is moved by the scenes of a recent victorious battle field ; yet Taylor does so with a deep and solemn pathos. His letter to Henry Clay, announcing the death of young Clay, is another illustration ; and anecdotes from private sources furnish numerous others. It is evident that he takes no delight in war ; but that, if duty permitted, he would willingly

resign his command, as did General Washington, and retire to the substantial enjoyments of private life. It is pleasing to contemplate the character of General Taylor. Amid the bustle and wrestling and intriguing, the low resorts and disgusting rejoicings of the politicians that infest every public station of our country, the unruffled, unambitious course of one man, forms a most refreshing and wholesome relief. Entitled to all honor, he asks none; worthy of the highest post that can be conferred, he does not seek it; almost idolized by an entire people, his only ambition is to perform his duty. Although the most distinguished man in the army, his personal appearance is that of the poorest soldier; and although the theme of observation and remark to every beholder, he appears not to know it.

GENERAL TAYLOR AT FORT HARRISON.

THE defence of Fort Harrison is interesting not only on account of its display of military abilities, but as being the first event of any importance in which Gen. Taylor had an opportunity to display the qualities which have since rendered him so conspicuous. It was an emergency in which the young soldier carves out, in a great degree, his future prospects; either by unfolding talents which will one day make him illustrious, or by exhibiting a barrenness which will for ever bar his advance, except by other means than those of merit.



Defence of Fort Harrison.

Fort Harrison was a small stockade-work situated in Indiana, which was at that time an unknown wilderness. Its fortifications were an upper and a lower block-house, and a main fort with two bastions. These, with a sufficient garrison, would have been ample to resist any force of the Indians; but sickness had so reduced the soldiers, that at the arrival of Captain Taylor at the fort, he found only fifteen men fit for service.

On the evening of the 3d of September, 1812, the reports of four guns were heard at a short distance from the fort. This was in the direction of a field where two young men, citizens of the place, were making hay; but notwithstanding the apprehensions of the commander for their safety, he did not think prudent to investigate the matter that evening. Early on the following morning a small party was despatched for that purpose, who soon ascertained that their suspicions were but too true. Each of the young men had been shot with two balls, and afterwards shot and scalped in a dreadful manner. They were buried in the fort.

In the evening of the same day, about forty Indians presented themselves to the garrison, and gave so unsatisfactory an account of the object of their visit, that Captain Taylor was convinced that they were but spies. Accordingly he examined the men's arms, completed their cartridges, and increased his guard. He then cautioned the soldiers to be vigilant, and appointed an overseer over the whole. Having made these arrangements, he was obliged to retire to rest, as he was extremely debilitated by a recent severe attack of fever.

About 11 o'clock the guns of one of the sentries broke

upon the gloom, and the captain was immediately on his feet. The fort was in confusion; a large party of Indians had fired the lower block-house, and commenced an attack. The men were ordered to throw water upon the burning building, but so completely were they paralyzed by the sight of the flames and the yells of the Indians, that they ceased all effort, and gave themselves up for lost. At the same time the women and children rushed in among the soldiers, uttering the most piercing cries, which, united with the yells of hundreds of Indians, the crackling of flames, and firing of muskets, made the night terrible. Two men leaped the pickets in despair; all was uproar and distress.

Yet during the whole of this trying scene, young Taylor maintained his self-possession; and he alone saved the fort. Passing from man to man, he reminded them that their only chance of safety lay in action; exhorting them at the same time to tear away the wood-work between the burning building and the surrounding ones, so that the former only would be consumed. His coolness re-inspired the soldiers, they set to work with an energy greater than their former supineness; one part threw on water, another tore away the roof, and a third labored to complete a breastwork in advance of the block-house, so that the gap opened by its destruction might be immediately filled. Their labor was amply rewarded; the building was consumed without injuring others, and its fall only made visible to the astonished savages a new obstacle still more formidable than the block-house. Their yells were now terrible, and they poured into the fort an incessant shower of balls and arrows until six o'clock on

the morning of the 5th. They then withdrew from reach of the garrison, drove up all the horses and hogs that were in the neighboring fields, and shot them in sight of the fort. They also secured all the cattle belonging to the Americans, thus cutting off the latter from their most necessary food. No further molestation was given to the garrison, and on the following morning the enemy moved out of sight.

In this assault, the Americans lost three men killed and three wounded. It is somewhat strange; that all those who lost their lives, did so through carelessness or disobedience to orders. The first was a little deranged, and had been with the party who mounted the burning building, on which he remained after all had been ordered down. The second was in one of the bastions, and having killed an Indian, he was so eager to inform his companions that he neglected to stoop, and was immediately shot. The third was one of those who leaped the picket. He was caught by the Indians, and cut to pieces. His companion was dreadfully mangled, but succeeded in escaping to the fort. The assailants suffered severely; a considerable number were found on the field, and they carried several away.

For some days after the attack the garrison suffered severely from want of provisions, there being nothing left them, save a very scanty allowance of green corn. On the 16th they were relieved by Colonel Russel, who reached the fort with six hundred mounted rangers, and five hundred infantry.

For this spirited defence, Captain Taylor was rewarded with the brevet rank of major, dating from the

4th of September. This was the first brevet ever conferred in the American army.

BATTLE OF OKEE-CHOBEE.

THIS battle was fought on the 25th of December, 1837, between the Americans, under Colonel Taylor, and the Seminoles and Mickasukies, commanded by their chiefs, Alligator and Sam Jones. The United States army had now been in the Florida service for two years, and the colonel commanded the first brigade, stationed at Fort Gardner, south of the Withlacoochee. On the 19th of December he received a communication from Major-General Jesup, informing him that all hopes of bringing the war to a close by negotiation, through the interference or mediation of the Cherokee delegation, were at an end, and that Sam Jones, with the Mickasukies, had determined to "fight to the last." It also directed him to proceed with the least possible delay, against any portion of the enemy he might hear of, and to destroy or capture them.

The next morning after receiving this communication, the colonel left an adequate force under two officers to protect the depot, and marched with the remainder of his command, having with him but twelve days' rations, his means of transportation not enabling him to carry more. His force was composed of Captain Morris's company of the fourth artillery, consisting of thirty-five

men; the first infantry, under Colonel Davenport, one hundred and ninety-seven strong; the fourth infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Foster, two hundred and seventy-four; the Missouri volunteers, one hundred and eighty; Morgan's spies, forty-seven; and thirty pioneers, thirteen pontoniers, and seventy Delaware Indians; making in all, exclusive of officers, one thousand and thirty-two men. The greater part of the Shawnees had been detached, and the remainder refused to accompany him, under pretext that many of them were sick, and the rest without moccasins.

The army moved down the west side of the Kissimmee, in a southern course, towards Lake Istopoga. The colonel was induced to take this route for several reasons. He had learned that a portion of the enemy were in that direction, and imagined that if General Jesup should fall in with the Mickasukies, and drive them before him, they might attempt to escape by crossing the Kissimmee, from the east to the west side of the peninsula, between Fort Gardner and its entrance into Okee-Chobee, in which case he might be near at hand to intercept them. He also wished to overawe such of the Indians as had been making propositions to give themselves up, but had been slow to fulfil their promise; to erect block-houses and a small picket-work on the Kissimmee, forty or fifty miles below the fort, for a third depot. By this means he hoped to obtain a knowledge of the country, as he had no guide to rely on, and also to open a communication with Colonel Smith, who was operating by his orders, up the Caloosehatchee or Sanybel river.

In the evening of his first day's march, Colonel Tay-