

CHAPTER XI.

General Taylor's Inauguration.—His Inaugural Address.—His first Annual Message.—His Proposition for adjusting the Slavery Question.—His illness and death.—Sensation created by the event.—Obituary Addresses, and the funeral.—Conclusion.

On the 23d of February General Taylor arrived at the Capital, where he was received with demonstrations of respect and confidence, due alike to his many private virtues and his eminent and brilliant public services; and with military and civic honors, such as became the high position to which he had been elevated by the free choice of a grateful nation.

In the meantime, extensive and appropriate arrangements were being made for his approaching inauguration. The enthusiastic attachment which every loyal American citizen felt for his character as a man, and the anxiety that pervaded all hearts to behold one, the splendor of whose military deeds had filled, not only the nation, but the world, with his fame, had drawn together, from all quarters of the Republic, an immense number of his ardent admirers and others, desirous of witnessing the imposing, and it may be truly said, the sublime spectacle of inducting into office an American President.

The ceremony of the inauguration of General Taylor as President of the United States, took place in front of the great portico of the Capitol, on Monday the 5th

day of March, at 12 o'clock, the day prescribed by the Constitution (March 4th) falling on Sunday. The multitude of people assembled on the occasion, from every part of the Union, to witness the spectacle, is supposed to have been much larger than was ever before collected in Washington.

At the break of day the strains of martial music resounded along every avenue of the city, and the star-spangled banner was everywhere to be seen unfolded to the breeze. The bells of the city rang out a stirring peal, and everything gave signs of the universal interest the occasion had excited. Long before the usual breakfast hour, the people were wending their way to the Capitol.

The procession, which had been formed under the direction of a marshal, took up its line of march, from Willard's hotel, down Pennsylvania Avenue, to the Capitol, at half-past 11 o'clock. General Taylor was accompanied in his carriage by Ex-President Polk, the Speaker of the late House of Representatives, and the Mayor of Washington. Upon reaching the Capitol, General Taylor entered the Senate Chamber, in company with Ex-President Polk, and took the seat prepared for him, Mr. Polk occupying another on his left. After a brief pause, the order of procession was announced, and the company retired from the Senate Chamber to the eastern portico of the Capitol, when the following admirable inaugural address was delivered by the President elect:—

"FELLOW-CITIZENS:—Elected by the American people to the highest office known to our laws, I appear here to take the oath prescribed by the Constitution; and, in compliance with a time-honored custom, to address those who are now assembled.

"The confidence and respect shown by my countrymen in calling me to be the Chief Magistrate of a Republic holding a high rank among the nations of the earth, have inspired me with feelings of the most profound gratitude; but, when I reflect that the acceptance of the office which their partiality has bestowed imposes the discharge of the most arduous duties, and involves the weightiest obligations, I am conscious that the position which I have been called to fill, though sufficient to satisfy the loftiest ambition, is surrounded by fearful responsibilities. Happily, however, in the performance of my new duties, I shall not be without able co-operation. The Legislative and Judicial branches of the Government present prominent examples of distinguished civil attainments and matured experience; and it shall be my endeavor to call to my assistance in the Executive Departments, individuals whose talents, integrity, and purity of character, will furnish ample guaranties for the faithful and honorable performance of the trusts to be committed to their charge. With such aids, and an honest purpose to do whatever is right, I hope to execute diligently, impartially, and for the best interests of the country, the manifold duties devolved upon me.

"In the discharge of these duties, my guide will be the Constitution which I this day swear to 'preserve, protect, and defend.' For the interpretation of that instrument I shall look to the decisions of the judicial tribunals established by its authority, and to the practice of the Government under the earlier Presidents who had so large a share in its formation. To the example of those illustrious patriots I shall always defer with reverence; and especially to his example who was, by so many titles, 'the Father of his country'

"To command the Army and Navy of the United States; with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, and to appoint ambassadors and other officers; to give to Congress information of the state of the Union, and recommend such measures as he shall judge to be necessary; and to take care that the laws shall be faithfully executed; these are the most important functions entrusted to the President by the Constitution; and it may be expected that I shall, briefly, indicate the principles which will control me in their execution.

"Chosen by the body of the people under the assurance that my administration would be devoted to the welfare of the whole country, and not to the support of any particular section, or merely local interest, this day renew the declarations I have heretofore made, and proclaim my fixed determination to maintain, to the extent of my ability, the Government in its original purity, and to adopt, as the basis of my public policy, those great republican doctrines which constitute the strength of our national existence.

"In reference to the Army and Navy, lately employed with so much distinction on active service, care shall be taken to ensure the highest condition of efficiency; and, in furtherance of that object, the military and naval schools, sustained by the liberality of Congress, shall receive the special attention of the Executive.

"As American freemen, we cannot but sympathize in all efforts to extend the blessings of civil and political liberty; but, at the same time, we are warned by the admonitions of history, and the voice of our own beloved Washington, to abstain from entangling alliances with foreign nations. In all disputes between

conflicting governments, it is our interest, not less than our duty, to remain strictly neutral; while our geographical position, the genius of our institutions and our people, the advancing spirit of civilization, and, above all, the dictates of religion, direct us to the cultivation of peaceful and friendly relations with all other powers. It is to be hoped that no international question can now arise which a government, confident in its own strength, and resolved to protect its own just rights, may not settle by wise negotiation; and it eminently becomes a government like our own, founded on the morality and intelligence of its citizens, and upheld by their affections, to exhaust every resort of honorable diplomacy before appealing to arms. In the conduct of our foreign relations, I shall conform to these views, as I believe them essential to the best interests and the true honor of the country.

"The appointing power vested in the President, imposes delicate and onerous duties. So far as it is possible to be informed, I shall make honesty, capacity, and fidelity, indispensable pre-requisites to the bestowal of office, and the absence of either of these qualities shall be deemed sufficient cause for removal.

"It shall be my study to recommend such Constitutional measures to Congress as may be necessary and proper to secure encouragement and protection to the great interests of Agriculture, Commerce, and Manufactures; to improve our rivers and harbors; to provide for the speedy extinguishment of the public debt; to enforce a strict accountability on the part of all officers of the Government, and the utmost economy in all public expenditures. But it is for the wisdom of Congress itself, in which all legislative powers are vested by the Constitution, to regulate these and other

matters of domestic policy. I shall look with confidence to the enlightened patriotism of that body to adopt such measures of conciliation as may harmonize conflicting interests, and tend to perpetuate that Union which should be the paramount object of our hopes and affections. In any action calculated to promote an object so near the heart of every one who truly loves his country, I will zealously unite with the coordinate branches of the Government.

"In conclusion, I congratulate you, my fellow-citizen, upon the high state of prosperity to which the goodness of Divine Providence has conducted our common country. Let us invoke a continuance of the same protecting care, which has led us from small beginnings to the eminence we this day occupy, and let us seek to deserve that continuance by prudence and moderation in our councils; by well-directed attempts to assuage the bitterness which too often marks unavoidable differences of opinion; by the promulgation and practice of just and liberal principles; and by an enlarged patriotism, which shall acknowledge no limits but those of our own wide-spread Republic."

As soon as the applause which marked the conclusion of this address had subsided, the oath to execute the office of President of the United States, and to the best of his ability to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, was administered by Chief Justice Taney. The ceremony at the Capitol was terminated by peals of artillery, when the President retraced his steps, and soon after entered the White House as the twelfth President of this great Republic.

Having thus complied with the provision of the Constitution necessary to qualify him for the discharge of the high and responsible duties he had assumed, all the

faculties of a great mind, the wisdom of a sound head, and the patriotism of a noble heart, were brought into requisition. The many admirable traits of character which had been claimed for him previous to his election to the Presidency, soon began to develop themselves more fully to the public, and every day added to the evidence, that he possessed no less the elements of a statesman than he had already proved to the world that he did those of a soldier. He seemed almost by intuition to grasp every question of national policy, and by his sound discriminating common sense, to unriddle what had puzzled the heads of our most experienced statesmen. His course was always straight to his object by the most direct path. He pursued no devious or winding way to reach the end his mind told him was right. None of the subtleties which sometimes mark the course of politicians and of statesmen, ever found favor with him. Having declared to the public, previous to his elevation to the Presidency, the policy he should pursue, and sworn to "preserve, protect, and defend" the Constitution, his sole aim seemed to be, an earnest desire faithfully to observe the oath, and to comply with the pledges he had made to the people.

It was not to have been expected that, in the discharge of the delicate and responsible trust which he was called upon to execute, of equalizing the offices of the Government, which for twenty years had been in the hands of the party opposed to his election, he should not have incurred the opposition of those upon whom the hand of reform was compelled to fall. It was, indeed, the inevitable result of measures a new administration was expected and required to adopt. But, however indiscriminately party fidelity required the Press opposed to his administration to denounce him, a spirit

of candor will force all to admit, that he exercised the delicate power of removal, with no feeling of party malice, and no love for political proscription. No President ever exercised it more sparingly, or with a more scrupulous regard for the public interests and individual justice. The principle he had avowed of removing no man for a mere difference of political opinion, was religiously adhered to, so far as it was in the power of man to do so; and if he ever departed from it, it was upon erroneous information.

Strong as was the confidence of the public in General Taylor's wisdom, patriotism, and honesty, and warmly as the Whig party were attached to him, no opportunity had presented itself for an avowal of his views upon the various local questions which had divided the people of the country; and accordingly the meeting of Congress, and his first annual message to that body, were looked to with deep anxiety, not only by his political friends, but by the whole American people. And above all, was there a painful solicitude in the public mind, both north and south, to know more explicitly than he had yet been called upon to declare them, his views upon the all-absorbing and most embarrassing subject of slavery. Though he had, on more than one occasion, declared the general principles that would govern him, with sufficient distinctness to satisfy all who were familiar with his frank and noble nature, as well as a very large portion of the party whose suffrages had elevated him to the Presidency; yet it need not be concealed that there was still a large class, even of his political friends, who did not give him their whole confidence. They feared that, being a southern man, reared under southern institutions, and his interests closely identified with slavery, that an undue share of

the influence of his administration would be exerted to extend and strengthen that institution; but, all such had yet to learn, as they did learn, that they did not understand General Taylor's true character, his enlarged patriotism, and his comprehensive and truly national views. This they discovered before his death, as they then and now frankly admit.

During the progress of the campaign, which resulted in placing him in the executive chair of the nation, he had, on various occasions, as has already been stated, avowed in general, but very explicit and manly terms, the leading features of the policy he should pursue. But he expressly declined, for reasons deemed generally satisfactory, in consideration of the peculiar and delicate position in which he was placed, to enter into a detailed exposition of his views upon the various questions of local and domestic policy, which were before the country. Hence the anxiety, to which reference has been made, to know the opinions he would advance and the recommendations he would make, in his first message to Congress.

The two houses of Congress assembled on Monday, the third day of December; but in consequence of the failure of the House of Representatives to effect an organization, its delivery was delayed until the twenty-fourth. On that day it was sent to both branches of Congress.

After invoking in appropriate and feeling terms, the guidance of the Almighty, and expressing the obligations of gratitude and thankfulness we were under to Him, for having stayed the ravages of the dreadful pestilence which had visited portions of our country, he briefly, but succinctly recapitulated the condition of our relations with foreign countries;—paid a feeling and elo-

quent tribute to the noble but unsuccessful struggle of the Hungarians for a national existence and independence, and expressed his deep sympathy for their cause,—referred to the projects of a ship canal through the State of Nicaragua, to connect the Atlantic and Pacific, and of a railroad across the Isthmus of Panama; and recommended them as worthy the consideration of Congress;—gave a statement of the condition of the finances of the government;—recommended a reduction of postage to a uniform rate, and the abolition of the franking privilege;—reiterated his views upon the exercise of the veto power, declaring that he should never resort to it except in extreme cases, such as were evidently contemplated by the framers of the Constitution, and the fathers of the Republic—to prevent the encroachment of the legislative power, for instance, or hasty and inconsiderate or unconstitutional legislation, and closed by thus declaring his opinion of the value of the Union, his warm attachment to it, and his firm determination to defend and preserve it:—

“But attachment to the union of the States should be habitually fostered in every American heart. For more than half a century, during which kingdoms and empires have fallen, this Union has stood unshaken. The patriots who formed it have long since descended to the grave; yet still it remains the proudest monument to their memory, and the object of affection and admiration with every one *worthy to bear the American name*. In my judgment, its dissolution would be the greatest of calamities; and to avert that, should be the study of every American. Upon its preservation must depend our happiness and that of countless generations to come. Whatever dangers may threaten it, I SHALL STAND BY IT AND MAINTAIN IT,

IN ITS INTEGRITY, TO THE FULL EXTENT OF THE OBLIGATIONS IMPOSED, AND THE POWER CONFERRED UPON ME BY THE CONSTITUTION.”

If there were nothing else in this first message of General Taylor to commend him to the favor of the American people, and it had been the last sentiment that ever fell from his lips, it would have endeared his memory to every American heart while the Republic stands. It was such a sentiment as was worthy the pure patriot, the illustrious soldier, and the incorruptible statesman who uttered it. It was such a declaration of determination to stand by and *defend* the Constitution, made by a man with hands so able, and a heart so willing, and a mind so resolute to carry them out, that has kept from breaking into an open flame the now inert spirit of treason to the country, that is known to exist in certain States of the Union. And it is only by a similar determined disposition to nip in the bud the first overt act, that that insane spirit of disunion will be kept confined to empty threats.

But this patriotic avowal of his determination to save the nation from the calamity with which it had then been threatened, as it is now, was not the only merit of the message. It was almost universally conceded to be a model document in its style and character, and to have conformed more literally to the design of the Constitution, in requiring the Executive simply to *recommend* measures to Congress, than any similar paper since the founders of the Republic. The variety of subjects touched upon, the simple brevity, yet perspicuity and directness with which they are presented, its freedom from that air of assumed superiority and arrogance, which form so offensive a feature in the official

communications of many public functionaries—the very absence, indeed, of all rhetorical flourish and studied straining for fine turned periods, as well as the entire reliance of its author on the ability of Congress to comprehend its duty, without the aid of a labored and tedious argument appended to each distinct “recommendation;”—all these served but to commend it to the popular mind, and to strengthen the confidence which had already begun to take so deep a root in the hearts of the people.

The message, it is true, contained no distinct avowal of the policy he should pursue in regard to one of the cardinal principles of the party to whom he owed his election,—that of protection to American industry, nor upon the slavery question, the two principal topics that occupied public attention. But his Secretary of the Treasury, within the sphere of whose legitimate duty it was, presented the first of these subjects to Congress with a force of reasoning, strengthened by an array of facts that exhausted the whole subject, and left no more to be said in favor of the principle, and little room for controverting his positions. In regard to the other, the time had not come for him to present his views to Congress. He was not then called upon, either by the Constitution or his obligation to the country, to submit to Congress any recommendations on the subject of slavery, as it could only serve to increase the bitter and angry dissensions that already existed to so great an extent among the people of the United States.

But an occasion was soon presented, when it became the duty of the President to express his opinions upon the agitating question of the extension, or non extension of slavery in the territory acquired from Mexico, and when he could do so without violating the princi-

ple of action he had marked out, or adding to the existing excitement. It had been well understood that the people of California had organized a State government, and that they would soon be applying to Congress, through her chosen Representatives, for admission into the Union. This had created no small commotion amongst many southern members of Congress, on the ground that it would destroy the “equilibrium” which they contended should exist between the free and slave States. The President was freely charged with exercising an improper influence upon the people of California, through the United States troops stationed there, with a view to coerce them into the adoption of a State government. A resolution was introduced into the House of Representatives, and adopted, calling upon him for all orders and correspondence, and all official information in his possession in relation to California. In accordance with this resolution, the President transmitted to the House, on the 21st of January, the information called for, with the following message, embracing his views upon the subject in dispute, and recommending what he conceived to be the wisest plan for settling the territorial difficulty. This message is so admirable in tone and temper, and contains sentiments so much in harmony with the intelligent public opinion, that it is here placed on record as the most striking evidence of the foresight, wisdom, and patriotism of General Taylor:—

“I transmit to the House of Representatives, in answer to a resolution of that body, passed on the 31st of December last, the accompanying reports of Heads of Departments, which contain all the official information in the possession of the Executive asked for by the resolutions.

"On coming into office I found the military commandant of the department of California exercising the functions of civil governor in that Territory; and left as I was to act under the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, without *the aid of any legislative* provision in establishing a government in that Territory, I thought it best not to disturb that arrangement, made under my predecessor, until Congress should take some action on that subject. I therefore did not interfere with the powers of the military commandant, who continued to exercise the functions of civil governor as before, but I made no such appointment, conferred no such authority, and have allowed no increased compensation to the commandant for his services.

"With a view to the faithful execution of the treaty so far as lay in the power of the Executive, and to enable Congress to act at the present session with as full knowledge and as little difficulty as possible on all matters of interest in these Territories, I sent the Hon. Thomas Butler King as bearer of dispatches to California, and certain officers to California and New Mexico, whose duties are particularly defined in the accompanying letters of instruction addressed to them severally by the proper Department.

"I did not hesitate to express to the people of those Territories my desire that each Territory should, if prepared to comply with the requisitions of the Constitution of the United States, form a plan of State constitution, and submit the same to Congress, with a prayer for admission into the Union as a State; but I did not anticipate, suggest, or authorize the establishment of any such government without the assent of Congress, nor did I authorize any government agent or officer to interfere with, or exercise any influence or

control over the election of delegates, or over any convention, in making or modifying their domestic institutions, or any of the provisions of their proposed constitution. On the contrary, the instructions given by my orders were, that all measures of domestic policy adopted by the people of California must originate solely with themselves; that while the Executive of the United States was desirous to protect them in the formation of any government republican in its character, to be at the proper time submitted to Congress, yet it was to be distinctly understood that the plan of such a government must at the same time be the result of their own deliberate choice, and originate with themselves, without the interference of the Executive.

"I am unable to give any information as to laws passed by any supposed government in California, or of any census taken in either of the Territories mentioned in the resolution, as I have no information on those subjects.

"As already stated, I have not disturbed the arrangements which I found had existed under my predecessor.

"In advising an early application by the people of the Territories for admission as States, I was actuated principally by an earnest desire to afford to the wisdom and patriotism of Congress the opportunity of avoiding occasions of bitter and angry dissensions among the people of the United States.

"Under the Constitution every State has the right of establishing, and from time to time altering, its municipal laws and domestic institutions, independently of every other State and of the General Government, subject only to the prohibitions and guarantees

expressly set forth in the Constitution of the United States. The subjects thus left exclusively to the respective States were not designed or expected to become topics of national agitation. Still, as under the Constitution Congress has power to make all needful rules and regulations respecting the Territories of the United States, every new acquisition of territory has led to discussions on the question whether the system of involuntary servitude which prevails in many of the States should or should not be prohibited in that Territory. The periods of excitement from this cause which have heretofore occurred have been safely passed, but during the interval of whatever length which may elapse before the admission of the Territories ceded by Mexico as States, it appears probable that similar excitement will prevail to an undue extent.

"Under these circumstances I thought, and still think, that it was my duty to endeavor to put it in the power of Congress, by the admission of California and New Mexico as States, to remove all occasion for the unnecessary agitation of the public mind.

"It is understood that the people of the western part of California have formed a plan of a State constitution, and will soon submit the same to the judgment of Congress, and apply for admission as a State. This course on their part, though in accordance with, was not adopted exclusively in consequence of, any expression of my wishes, inasmuch as measures tending to this end had been promoted by the officers sent there by my predecessor, and were already in active progress of execution before any communication from me reached California. If the proposed constitution

shall, when submitted to Congress, be found to be in compliance with the requisitions of the Constitution of the United States, I earnestly recommend that it may receive the sanction of Congress.

"The part of California not included in the proposed State of that name is believed to be uninhabited, except in a settlement of our countrymen in the vicinity of Salt lake.

"A claim has been advanced by the State of Texas to a very large portion of the most populous district of the Territory commonly designated by the name of New Mexico. If the people of New Mexico had formed a plan of a State government for that Territory as ceded by the treaty of Gaudalupe Hidalgo, and had been admitted by Congress as a State, our Constitution would have afforded the means of obtaining an adjustment of the question of boundary with Texas by a judicial decision. At present, however, no judicial tribunal has the power of deciding that question, and it remains for Congress to devise some mode for its adjustment. Meanwhile I submit to Congress the question, whether it would be expedient before such adjustment to establish a Territorial government, which, by including the district so claimed, would practically decide the question adversely to the State of Texas, or, by excluding it, would decide it in her favor. In my opinion such a course would not be expedient, especially as the people of this Territory still enjoy the benefit and protection of their municipal laws, originally derived from Mexico, and have a military force stationed there to protect them against the Indians. It is undoubtedly true that the property, lives, liberties, and religion of the people of New Mexico, are better protected than they ever were before the treaty of cession.