

## *CONQUEST OF THE SOUTHWEST*

Sam Houston was elected commander-in-chief of the armies. The consultation then adjourned, to meet in Washington, Texas, on the 1st of March, 1836. The consultation had accomplished much more than had been expected. It had laid the foundation of a government and had begun a revolution.

## CHAPTER IV

### GENERAL SAM HOUSTON

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As Houston played so great a part in the future history of Texas his previous history requires more than a passing notice.<sup>1</sup> The Houston family was one of consideration, entitled to wear armor in the old country—the North of Ireland. One of them had been among the redoubtable defenders of Londonderry in 1689. They had settled in Virginia. While not belonging to the landed gentry of the Old Dominion, they were large and prosperous farmers.

Houston's father was an officer in the famous brigade of riflemen that Morgan led to Wash-

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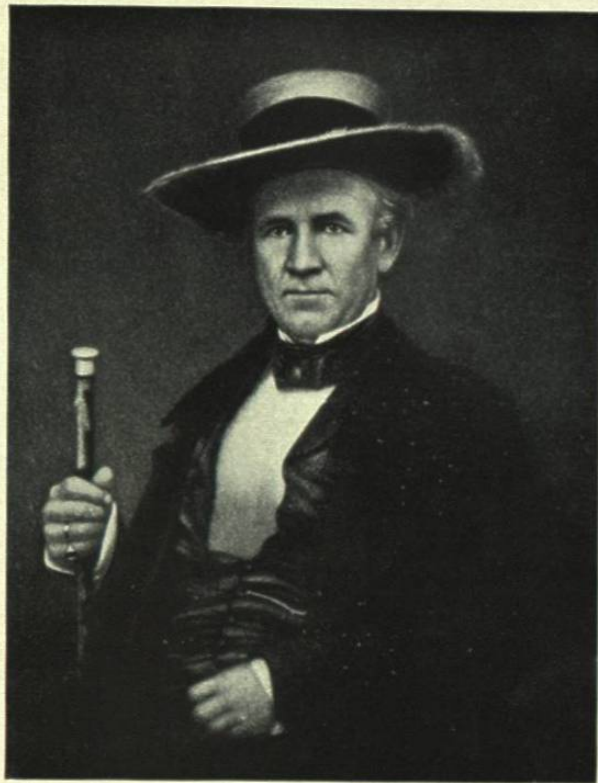
<sup>1</sup> This biography of Sam Houston is abridged from my book *American Fights and Fighters—Border*, by permission of the publishers, McClure, Phillips & Co. The curious will find some of the more important battles in the Texan War of Independence, which are briefly referred to here, from lack of space, treated at great length in the book cited.



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ington's assistance "from the right bank of the Potomac." His mother was one of those pioneer women of superb physique, high principle, and strength of mind and courage. After the death of her husband, when young Sam, who was born in 1783, was but thirteen years old, she took the family far over the Alleghany Mountains and settled in western Tennessee, on the borders of the Cherokee Nation.

Such schooling as the neighborhood afforded was given to Sam. His educational opportunities were meager, but he made the best of his limited advantages, and with such books as the Bible, the Iliad, Shakespeare, The Pilgrim's Progress, and later, when he was commander-in-chief of the Texan army, Cæsar's Commentaries—in translation, of course—he gave himself a good grounding. He was a close student in his way, and in manner and ability, when he became Governor of Tennessee, President of Texas, Senator of the United States, Governor of Texas, etc., he had no cause to



GENERAL SAM HOUSTON.

From an old daguerreotype.



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blush when placed by the most distinguished men of his time.

According to some authorities, his unwillingness to be a clerk in a country store, according to others, the refusal of his older brothers to allow him to study Latin, caused him to abandon civilization and cast his lot in with the Cherokees, whose territory lay adjacent to his home. He was adopted into the family of one of the sub-chiefs of the tribe, and for a long period lived a wild, savage life among them. At different intervals during his long career he resumed his relations with them, on one occasion taking from among them a wife, who afterward died, leaving no children.

When he was asked to come back to civilization, he remarked in his grandiloquent way, that he preferred "measuring deer tracks to measuring tape." After several years with the Cherokees, at the age of eighteen, finding himself in debt for some barbaric finery, he returned to the settlement and opened a country school. His pluck was greater than his



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attainments, which yet appear to have been sufficient to make the school a success, for it included all the children of the neighborhood, and he was enabled to raise the tuition fee from six to eight dollars per year, one-third payable in corn at thirty-three and one-half cents per bushel, one-third in cash, and one-third in cotton goods or other kind. He once said, after he had filled almost every elective position except that of President of the United States, that he experienced a higher feeling of dignity and self-satisfaction when he was schoolmaster than at any period of his life.

Tired of school-teaching he enlisted in the army as a private and soon won promotion to the rank of ensign. He distinguished himself greatly under the command of Andrew Jackson by his desperate courage at the battle of Tohopeka, or Horseshoe Bend, where he was so severely wounded in the performance of a deed of headlong valor, that his life was despaired of for a long time. After these early exploits he resigned from the service;

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one of his reasons being a severe and well-merited rebuke which he received for appearing before Calhoun, the Secretary of War, dressed like an Indian. He was usually a dandy in his dress, although at times he affected peculiar and striking costumes, which his great height and imposing presence enabled him to wear without inspiring that ridicule which would have attended a similar performance on the part of a less splendid man.

When he was inaugurated Governor of Tennessee, August 2, 1827, he wore "a tall bell-crowned, medium-brimmed, shining black beaver hat, shining black patent-leather military stock, or cravat, incased by a standing collar, ruffled shirt, black satin vest, shining black pants gathered to the waistband with legs full, same size from seat to ankle, and a gorgeous, red-ground, many colored gown, or Indian hunting shirt, fastened at the waist by a huge red sash covered with fancy bead work, with an immense silver buckle, embroidered silk stockings, and pumps with large silver



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buckles. Mounted on a superb dapple gray horse he appeared at the election unannounced, and was the observed of all observers."<sup>1</sup> I should think he might have been.

When he was United States Senator, it was his habit to wear, in addition to the ordinary clothing of a gentleman of the time, an immense Mexican sombrero and colored blanket, or serape, and his appearance naturally excited attention in Washington.

While candidate for re-election as Governor of Tennessee, he separated from his young wife after three months of married life, gave over his campaign, and once more sought asylum with the Cherokees. The reason for this separation has never been discovered, although Houston explicitly stated that no reflection upon the character or the conduct of the lady in question was implied or expressed by his conduct.<sup>2</sup> Championing the Indians when he

<sup>1</sup> Statement of Colonel D. D. Claiborne quoted in Sam Houston, etc., by Alfred M. Williams.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Houston, by Sarah Barnwell Elliott in the Beacon Biographies.

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came back to civilization, he became involved in a quarrel with Representative Stansberry, whom he publicly caned. For his conduct he was formally censured at the bar of Congress. This quarrel brought him into public notice again. It is shrewdly surmised that he provoked it for that purpose, for he said: "I was dying out once, and had they taken me before a justice of the peace and fined me ten dollars for assault and battery, it would have killed me; but they gave me a national tribunal for a theater and that set me up again."

Like many men of great physical vigor he was much given to excess. In his last sojourn among the Cherokees, the Indians expressed their contempt for his dissipated habits by naming him the "Big Drunk"; but drunk or sober, there was something about him that inspired respect. Whatever he did he was always "Sam Houston." People used to say that he really signed his name "I am Houston." After he was converted, however—and in a large measure before that time, at



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the instance of his third wife, a woman of noble character, who married him to reform him and did so—he entirely stopped drinking and demeaned himself to the end of his life as a sincere and humble Christian of the highest type. When he got drunk, he got thoroughly drunk, and when he became converted to the Baptist faith, he did it with the same completeness; a thorough-going man, indeed.

In one particular he was remarkable among his contemporaries. He had great reluctance to resort to the duel, which was then the usual method of settling differences between gentlemen. He had to endure many sharp remarks and bitter criticisms on this account; his courage was even impugned, at times, although we now realize that this was not only beyond question, but that its high quality was actually established by these very refusals. Sometimes his wit enabled him to escape. On one occasion, after counseling with his secretary, he informed a gentleman who brought him a challenge that his principal was number four-

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teen on the list, and that he could hold out no hope of meeting him until he had disposed of the previous thirteen.

His grandiloquent mind invested the slightest occurrence with majesty. When he started for Texas in 1832, with a commission from President Jackson to negotiate treaties between the United States and the Indians, and with, in all probability, a secret commission to examine into, and report upon, the local condition with regard to Mexico, and the feeling of the colonists with regard to annexation to the United States,<sup>1</sup> a friend of his gave him a razor, which he received with these words:

“Major Rector, this is apparently a gift of little value, but it is an unestimable testimony to the friendship which has lasted many years, and proved steadfast under the blasts of calumny and injustice. Good-by. God bless you. When next you see this razor it shall be shaving the President of the Republic, by G—d.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sam Houston, etc., by Alfred M. Williams.

<sup>2</sup> A rather singular indication, not only of his ambition, but also of the desire of his principals, and the opinion of the United States!



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His manner toward ladies was as magnificent as his person, his dress, his oratory. His habitual word of address to them was "lady"; a very courtly, distinguished old fellow was he.

After his supercession as Governor of Texas, because of his unwillingness to allow the state to go out of the Union, when the officers of the Confederacy established a stringent law requiring all men over sixteen years to register and obtain a pass, Houston paid no attention to the order. When he was halted by an officer who demanded his pass, the old man waved him aside in his most Olympian manner, frowning as he remarked, "San Jacinto is my pass through Texas." Small wonder that the people loved him.

He had a sense of humor and the dramatic such as few men enjoyed. He was one of the best campaigners among thousands of brilliant specimens that America has produced. His witty and epigrammatic speech may be illustrated. A friend once betrayed him. When the man's character was assailed in his pres-

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ence, Houston remarked: "You mustn't be too hard on S. I was always fond of dogs and S. has all the virtues of a dog except his fidelity." One of his remembered phrases describing a certain great personage is: "Ambitious as Lucifer and cold as a lizard." He may fairly be called a statesman. He most certainly can be styled an orator. A little verse, which he wrote to a relative, illustrates that he was not deficient in the arts and graces. and is worth quoting:

Remember thee? Yes, lovely girl,  
While faithful memory holds its seat,  
Till this warm heart in dust is laid,  
And this wild pulse shall cease to beat.  
No matter where my bark is tost,  
On life's tempestuous, stormy sea,  
My anchor gone, my rudder lost,  
Still, cousin, I will think of thee.

Houston did everything in his power to prevent the secession of Texas in 1861, but when she left the Union he went with her. We can understand him. Texas was like his own child. He died in reduced circumstances in



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1863, his last years embittered by the too evident failure of the Confederacy and the discords which tore his beloved country in twain. The world is familiar with the events of his strange, romantic and useful career, few Americans have been more written about, and few men deserved it more. While he did not rise to the solitary heights of greatness, he was one of the most eminent men of his time, and his valuable services to Texas are held in undying remembrance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following is a summary of his career: "Born near Lexington, Va., March 2, 1793; died at Huntsville, Texas, July 25, 1863. An American gentleman and statesman. He served in the War of 1812; was a member of Congress from Tennessee, 1823-27; was Governor of Tennessee, 1827-29; as commander-in-chief of the Texans, defeated the Mexicans at San Jacinto, April, 1836; was President of Texas, 1836-38 and 1841-44; was United States Senator from Texas, 1845-59; and was Governor of Texas, 1859-61."—*Century Dictionary of Names*.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE —THE CONSTITUTION