

CHAPTER XXIII.

WINFIELD SCOTT.

Ancestors—Birthplace—Youthful Education—War Spirit—Trouble with Wilkinson—In the Field again in 1812—Battle of Queens-town—Scott a Prisoner—The Escape—"Defending the English Subjects"—Commissioned Brigadier-General—Battle of Lundy's Lane—In Baltimore—In Command of Eastern Department—Resignation—Resignation withdrawn—In the Black Hawk War—Scott as a Nurse—In Command at Charleston—The Florida War—The "Patriot War"—True Greatness—Candidate for President—Opposes admission of Texas—Mexican War—Scott at Rio Grande—Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, etc.—Scott captures Mexico—Suspended—Honors at Home—Position in Secession—Subsequent Life—Death.

WINFIELD SCOTT was born June 13, 1786, in Virginia, near Petersburg. His father had served as lieutenant and captain during the revolutionary war. He died when Winfield was but six years old, but his widow carried on the large and prosperous farm which he had left her. She managed to give her son an education unusually good for that period. He attended a high school in Richmond, and afterwards entered William and Mary College.

The boy was a diligent and faithful student, and he graduated with honors at the age of nineteen. His mother having died, he was entirely free to choose his path in life, and he selected the bar with a view to political advancement. He entered the law-office of Mr.

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David Robinson in Petersburg, and in his first circuit witnessed the trial of Aaron Burr for high treason. This interesting trial took place in May, 1807. About a month afterwards, in consequence of an insult offered to an American vessel by a British frigate, President Jefferson issued a proclamation interdicting the use of American harbors and rivers to British vessels of war. Volunteers were called for to enforce this measure and prevent British crews from landing to obtain supplies of any kind. Scott joined the volunteers as a cavalrman, having purchased his own uniform and horse. The war-spirit was fairly awakened within him. But the outburst of hostilities did not last, and after a very brief term of service he went to Charleston, South Carolina, to establish himself in the practice of law. For the next four years the country was hovering on the brink of war. Scott joined the army twice, and returned as often to the practice of law, but finally became a commissioned officer in the service.

Scott had at this time incurred the severe displeasure of Brigadier-General Wilkinson. This gentleman had been the friend and associate of Aaron Burr, but at Burr's trial for high treason Wilkinson had become State's evidence against him. Scott had made the remark that if Burr had been a traitor, Wilkinson had been equally so; and that nothing but President Jefferson's influence had prevented the trial of Wilkinson. As the latter was now Scott's superior officer, this expression of opinion was in contravention of one of the articles of war. Scott was accordingly tried by court-martial, and sentenced to suspension for twelve months.

In the autumn of 1811, Scott was appointed a member of the staff of Brigadier-General Hampton, the

the lives of the prisoners were spared, and it happened that two years afterward, when Scott was embarking for Europe, he met these twenty-one men, who were just returning from an English prison.

Scott, with the remainder of the prisoners, was permitted to continue the journey to Boston. Owing to a severe snow-storm, the trip occupied almost a month. In January, 1813, he was freed from his parole by exchange. At the same time he was appointed adjutant-general with the rank of colonel. With his battalion he joined the army of General Dearborn, on the Niagara frontier, and took part in the campaign of that year, of which a principal feature was the employment of Indians by the American general. In March, 1814, Scott was appointed brigadier-general, being then but twenty-seven years of age. So far the contest had been a series of skirmishes, generally indecisive in results, and a feeling of discouragement began to prevail throughout the country. An engagement at Chippewa which resulted in victory for the Americans turned the tide of popular feeling, and created a feeling of enthusiasm in favor of the continuance of the war. Scott received much commendation for his share in this contest. The battle of Niagara, or Lundy's Lane, followed. This was claimed as a victory by both sides, but the enemy was driven from the field. Scott was wounded by a musket-ball through the left shoulder-joint. He had been twice dismounted and badly contused by the rebound of a cannon-ball, some hours previously. He went to Philadelphia, and, after some weeks of rest necessitated by his wound, was ordered to Baltimore. Here he found a considerable force of militia assembled for the defence of the city; but as the danger of attack

seemed over, the force was disbanded before winter set in. Scott was extremely desirous of joining Jackson at New Orleans, but his physicians advised strongly against it, his wound not having yet healed perfectly. His headquarters were therefore established in Baltimore, whence he was twice called to Washington to consult on plans for the next campaign. But the war was ended by the treaty of peace, in very unexpected haste. The army was reduced to a peace establishment, namely, from sixty-five thousand men to ten thousand. Congress conferred on Scott a gold medal with suitable emblems and devices, in testimony of his "distinguished services at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane, and of his uniform gallantry and good conduct in sustaining against all foes the reputation of the arms of the United States."

In 1815 Scott made a visit to Europe and spent nearly a year there. He had the opportunity of viewing the troops of half Europe, which were then collected on the frontier of France, for his visit took place very soon after the battle of Waterloo. On his return from Europe he married Miss Maria Mayo, of Philadelphia. Offended at the promotion of General Macomb, who was his junior, to be the head of the army, Scott threatened to resign, but withdrew on reflection from that course of action. He spent several months in inspecting the Indian frontiers of Louisiana and Arkansas. After an interval of fifteen years of peace, Indian hostilities of some magnitude broke out in the frontier settlements of the Upper Mississippi. Black Hawk, the Indian chief, had collected a considerable band of followers, Sacs and Foxes, Winnebagoes, Sioux, etc. Scott, who was then in command of

the eastern department, was ordered to the northwest at the head of a considerable force of regulars. While he and his troops were in a steamer ascending Lake Huron, the Asiatic cholera broke out on board the vessel. The only surgeon on board sickened of the disease. Scott, who had taken some lessons in medicine from Surgeon Mower, showed much skill in this sudden epidemic. He administered the remedies himself, and checked the panic which had broken out among the troops. They landed in July at Chicago, then a mere hamlet. At a place called Badaxe, a decisive combat with the Indians took place. Many of the Indians were killed, and many more taken prisoners. Black Hawk escaped across the river with some hundreds of his followers, but were brought back by some tribes of Sioux who were friendly to the white men. A conference with the Indian leaders followed, and terms of peace were agreed on, which were very advantageous to the United States; a considerable extent of territory in Iowa and Illinois being ceded by the Indians, the States, however, paying liberally for the cession.

It was about this time that the policy of nullification was advocated by Southern leaders, and President Jackson commissioned Scott to go south and take such action as would check the nullifiers effectually, should any attempt at armed resistance to the United States be made. Scott visited Charleston, Savannah, and Augusta, and remained at the former city until the Compromise Act was passed and the Nullification Ordinance rescinded, when he returned to the North, the danger of civil war having been for the time averted.

The Seminole war began in 1835, by the surprise and massacre of Major Dade, with about one hundred

and ten men, and lasted seven years. The Creek Indians joined the Seminoles, and hostilities were carried on all through the region of the Lower Mississippi, until the Creeks had, according to treaty stipulations, retired to the far West, and the remnant of the Seminoles to lower Florida. President Jackson, a man of strong prejudices and antipathies, never favorably disposed to Scott, found fault with the latter, and actually ordered a court of inquiry into Scott's conduct in the Seminole and Creek campaigns. The court unanimously approved of Scott's action, and its emphatic acquittal administered a decided reproof to the president.

In 1837-8 singular disturbances took place on the Canadian frontier. Some radicals in Canada favored the idea of annexing Canada to the United States, and a number of Americans, with little knowledge of the subject or inquiry into the wishes of the Canadians, bound themselves to support this movement. This party took to themselves the singular title of "Canadian Patriots," and hence the trifling hostilities that resulted have been known as the "Patriot war." A number of Americans of the party took possession of a small British island, called Navy island, about a mile above Niagara Falls. A small steamer, the "Caroline," was used as a ferry-boat. This was seized by a party of Canadians, several persons on board were killed, the steamer was set on fire and sent over the cataract. This was the first act in a series of trifling skirmishes and annoyances inflicted by each party on the other. After some fighting, and much talking and diplomacy on both sides, peace was restored along the frontier.

In 1839 a convention of Whigs met at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to select candidates for president and vice-

president. At this convention, for the first time, Scott was drawn into the political arena, his name being presented as one of the candidates for the presidency, Mr. Clay and General Harrison being the other two nominees. The latter was the successful candidate. In 1841 Scott was appointed general-in-chief of the army, and was called to reside in Washington. The question of the admission of Texas was now agitating the whole country. Scott opposed it warmly, but when the territory was admitted, and war with Mexico was declared in consequence, he accepted the command of the forces intended to operate along the Rio Grande. The chief command had been intrusted to Major-General Taylor. It was agreed that Scott should move on Vera Cruz, and in March, 1847, the American troops landed at that city. The landing of the force, twelve thousand in number, was accomplished with great skill and success, not a single life being lost, although the troops had to be removed from transports into open boats in a rough sea, and on an enemy's coast.

The city of Vera Cruz and its fortress, the castle of San Juan de Ulloa, were strongly garrisoned, and the walls were in good condition. Immediately upon landing Scott ordered a complete reconnoissance both on the land and water fronts of the place. This was followed by a close investment, to cut off communication between the garrison and the interior. The blockade had been complete long before. As sieges have a general resemblance to each other, there is no need for dwelling here on the details of the capture of Vera Cruz. Batteries were formed, and the bombardment of the town commenced. Four days afterward, the governor sent messengers to General Scott to treat

for the surrender of the fortress and the city. Terms were agreed on, signed, and exchanged. The garrisons marched out, laying down their arms, were paroled and sent home as prisoners of war. Five thousand prisoners and four hundred pieces of ordnance were taken within twenty days after the landing; the American loss being estimated at the number of sixty-four killed or wounded.

The next important gain in the Mexican war was that of the battle of Cerro Gordo. Here the forces of Santa Anna, amounting, it is said, to twenty-five thousand, had intrenched themselves strongly, close to a lofty height, which commanded the approaches in all directions. The Mexican army had been divided, so as to hold the ridge of hills, but were driven from one position after another, until a general attack was ordered. The attack was completely successful, and the Mexicans were driven in disorder from their intrenchments.

The American force present was about eight thousand five hundred; the Mexicans were estimated at twelve thousand or more. About three thousand prisoners, four or five thousand stands of arms, and forty-three pieces of artillery were taken. At Contreras another victory was won, of which the results were a road to the capital opened, seven hundred killed, eight hundred prisoners taken, twenty-two cannon, thousands of small arms, seven hundred mules and horses; while the American loss was only sixty men killed and wounded.

At Churubusco the Mexican army reunited, and made a determined stand. The Mexicans numbered about twenty-seven thousand, the Americans one-third

commander of the southern army, whose headquarters were in New Orleans. In May, 1812, war having been actually declared at last, Scott set out with his chief for Washington via Baltimore. At the latter city he was delighted by the news that he had been promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy. He was ordered to Philadelphia, to collect volunteers for a regiment. Soon afterwards he received orders to report to Major-General Van Rensselaer, at Lewiston, opposite Queenstown. The object of the expedition was to storm the heights of Queenstown, which was occupied by a garrison of British foot-soldiers, supported by hosts of Indians.

While crossing, about daylight, the boats sustained a direct fire from the batteries on the heights, and also from several forts near the village below. Scott, at his own earnest solicitation, was permitted to cross over and take command of the forces in conflict with the enemy. He rapidly reconnoitred the heights, took up a position for defence until joined by the forces encamped at Lewiston, and attempted to unspike the guns left in the captured battery. While directing this operation, the enemy's forces, regulars, volunteers, and Indians, rushed on the American line of battle, and the latter, intimidated by the sudden attack, wavered and began to retreat. At this moment Scott appeared, and so aroused his discouraged troops that the line turned and faced the enemy, and in two successive charges drove back the British force. But the Americans were obliged to give up the heights, being driven back towards the river by the overwhelming numbers of the British. No reinforcements had arrived, and surrender was inevitable. Two flags of truce had

been sent to the British commander, but there was no cessation of hostilities. Scott then volunteered to carry a flag of truce himself, and make terms with the enemy. Two of his brother officers accompanied him, but they were intercepted by a couple of Indians, who seized and detained them until a detachment of regulars came up and made them prisoners. They were then lodged in a small inn, at the village of Newark, sentries being placed to guard them. In the evening the two Indians who had seized the party called and inquired for the "tall American," meaning Scott. The sentinel foolishly admitted them, and the Indians threatened to kill Scott, and proceeded to draw their knives and hatchets. Scott bravely defended himself until assistance arrived, but he had a very narrow escape from death at the hands of the savages.

The prisoners were treated with much courtesy by the British commander, and in company with a number of other Americans were paroled and embarked on board a vessel going to Boston. But before they sailed a commission was sent on board by order of Sir George Prevost, to seize and retain for trial, as traitors, every prisoner who could by possibility be claimed as a British subject. Scott, hearing a commotion on deck, hurried thither, and found that over twenty of his men had been seized and were under guard. After a warm altercation with the commissioners, he promised the "sequestered" prisoners the aid and protection of the government. In fulfilment of this promise he went to Washington to lay the matter before the president. A sharp correspondence with the British government followed, and severe retaliatory measures were threatened on both sides. From whatever reason,