

CHAPTER IV.

ADMINISTRATION OF GENERAL HARRISON.

Bx. VII. No President, since Washington, has entered upon
Ch. 4. the duties of his office with more popular enthusiasm
A. D. than William Henry Harrison. From no administration
1841. were greater expectations formed: since an entire change
 of policy was expected, in order to relieve the public em-
 barrassments, restore credit, and foster the various inter-
 ests of the country.

The new cabinet. Daniel Webster, the most commanding and compre-
 hensive intellect which our nation has produced, was his
 Secretary of State; and this great statesman was sup-
 ported by Thomas Ewing, as Secretary of the Treasury;
 John Bell, as Secretary of War; George E. Badger, as
 Secretary of the Navy; John J. Crittenden, as Attorney-
 General, and Francis Granger, as Postmaster-General.
 These distinguished gentlemen formed one of the ablest
 cabinets known since the times of the early Presidents —
 selected for their ability and experience, and representing
 all sections of the land.

Death of Harri- son. But before the assembling of Congress — before any
 measure of importance could be adopted, and within one
 month from his inauguration, General Harrison died, —
 worn out with the excitements pertaining to his new po-
 sition, and oppressed by the load of responsibilities. He

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had for years led a quiet life, in agricultural pursuits, at **Bx. VII.**
 his farm on the North Bend, near Cincinnati, and was **Ch. 4.**
 not fitted to encounter the long speeches and long dinners **A. D.**
 to which he was compelled to submit, or the importunities **1841.**
 of office-hunters, or the intrigues of politicians. He was
 killed with kindness and labours, even as Voltaire, after
 a long residence at Ferney, was smothered with the roses
 which the Parisians collected for his honour.

The Vice-President, John Tyler, became, of course,
 the occupant of the "White House," retaining the cabi-
 net of his predecessor, and pursuing for a while the
 measures of the party which had elevated him into
 power.

On the 31st of May, 1841, a special session of Con- **Repeal**
 gress was convened, in pursuance of a call made by Har- **of the**
 rison, with a view of relieving the financial troubles of the **Sub-**
 country. On the 6th of August, Congress repealed the **Trea-**
 Sub-Treasury law of Van Buren, and also established a **sury.**
 uniform system of bankruptcy throughout the United **Bank-**
 States, which latter created a sort of commercial jubilee **rupt**
 for all bankrupts and debtors, and by which their debts **law.**
 were cancelled and their claims relinquished. Such was
 the universal commercial distress and the extent of fail-
 ures, that this extraordinary measure proved advantageous,
 although designed as a mere remedy for existing evils,
 rather than as a settled policy to be uniformly pursued.

The attention of Congress, however, was mainly di- **Veto of**
 rected to the establishment of a national bank, as the **the bank**
 most efficient means of restoring the credit of the country. **bi. ls.**
 But, to the general disappointment of his party and the
 dismay of all financial men, the President vetoed the bill.
 Another, similar in character, was passed, and was again
 vetoed; upon which the cabinet resigned, with the excep-
 tion of Mr. Webster, who was induced to remain, from

BR. VII.
Ch. 4. patriotic considerations, and attend to the rising difficulties with England.

A. D. The United States were now on the eve of a war with 1841. the first power of the world—the country was deeply embarrassed, and its credit in Europe destroyed. Many Repudi-
ation. of the States were compelled to suspend the payment of the interest of their debts, and were stigmatized abroad as repudiating States. Pennsylvania, which had greatly suffered by the failure of the new bank, under Mr. Bid-
dle, which bore the name of the United States Bank, and thus deceived foreigners, and which also suffered from injudicious public expenditures, became a by-word in Europe. Its stock fell below fifty cents on the dollar, and great numbers who held the stock were ruined; and it is a glorious proof of the immense resources of the State that it should so soon retrieve its fortunes and its good name.

New
cabinet.

On the resignation of the old cabinet, Walter Forward became Secretary of the Treasury, John C. Spencer, Secretary of War, Abel P. Upshur, Secretary of the Navy, Hugh S. Legare, Attorney-General, and Charles A. Wickliffe, Postmaster-General.

1842. The twenty-seventh Congress commenced its session on the 6th of December, 1841, and passed an act apportioning the representatives according to the new census, which had just been completed, by which the United States contained over seventeen millions of people—being a gain of thirty-three and a half per centum, or about one-third, over the preceding ten years. It must be borne in mind that this gain was made during all the financial troubles of the country. This Congress also passed a The ta-
riff bill. new tariff law, and provided for the publication of Lieutenant Wilkes's account of the Exploring Expedition, which had returned, after a three years' cruise, with 500 sketches

of natural scenery, 200 portraits, and 2000 specimens of BR. VII.
Ch. 4. birds, beside a great quantity of shells, fishes, animals, insects, &c.,—which collection furnishes an excellent A. D.
1842. foundation for a national museum.

The great event of 1842 was an important treaty with Treaty
with
Eng-
land. England, negotiated with Lord Ashburton by Mr. Webster (August 20th), which settled the question of the North-eastern Boundary, and which prevented hostilities with that nation, which, of all powers, should be the last for the United States to encounter in war. Amid the wrecks of liberty in Europe and the triumphs of absolutism on the Continent, it behooves our government to extend a sympathizing arm to England—the only country in Europe where liberty is enjoyed, and our sister by the ties of blood, as well as our best friend from kindred language, literature, and religion. Mr. Webster was much aided in effecting this memorable treaty by the judicious and magnanimous course pursued by General Scott, amid the excited people of Maine, and who, but for his conciliatory course, might have been involved in hostilities before the treaty could be made. The general who conquers on the field of battle is great; but greater is that general who foregoes the acquisition of military laurels in the disinterested desire for national peace.

Mr. Webster, soon after he had effected this great Retire-
ment of
Mr. Web-
ster. treaty and saved the nation from war, retired from the post he had so gloriously filled, and Mr. Upshur received in his stead the portfolio of the State Department. But Mr. Upshur retained the seal of office only a short time, being accidentally killed, with Mr. Gilmer, Secretary of War, by the bursting of a large gun on the steam-frigate Princeton. John C. Calhoun then became Secretary of State, and a complete change of measures from those with which the administration started, ensued. He signed

BR. VII. a treaty of annexation between the United States and
Ch. 4. Texas, which treaty the Senate did not confirm. It con-
A. D. firmed, however, an important treaty which he made with
1843 China.

to
1845. The last session of the twenty-seventh Congress repealed
the bankrupt law, which had been perverted and abused,
and by which creditors had been despoiled of their pro-
perty.

The
troubles
in Rhode
Island.

The administration of Mr. Tyler was marked by do-
mestic troubles in Rhode Island, from the efforts of a
large party to secure a new and more democratic consti-
tution. A convention was accordingly called to draft a
new constitution, in which universal suffrage should be
instituted. It is singular that the colony of Roger Wil-
liams should not have kept pace with the surrounding
states in popular privileges. The convention assem-
bled in the autumn of 1841, and adopted a constitution,
and submitted it to the people for ratification. The
proceedings, however, were deemed illegal, inasmuch as
the legislature alone could authorize the governor to call
such a convention, and the majority of the people refused
to vote. The constitution, which had been adopted by
14,000 voters, was declared treasonable by the governor,
in a proclamation. The result was an appeal to arms by
the friends of radical reform. Thomas H. Dorr, elected
governor by the votes of this party, attempted to seize
the arsenal, and to defend his position. He gathered
together about 1000 men, who however dispersed on the
appearance of a body of 7000 men. The leader of the
party fled, and \$1000 were offered for his apprehension.
After various adventures he surrendered himself to gov-
ernment, was tried for treason, found guilty, and sen-
tenced to the penitentiary; but, on taking, afterwards,
the oath of allegiance, he was released (July 1845).

Imprisonment
of Dorr.

Disturbances, nearly contemporaneous, took place in BR. VII.
Albany and Rensselaer counties, in the State of New Ch. 4.
York, from the unwillingness of the tenantry to pay their A. D.
rents to the patroon at Albany. It was regarded by these 1843
tenants, who occupied lands which had been anciently to
granted to the Van Rensselaer family, and for which they 1845.
paid a small annual sum, that these rents, however small, Riots
of the
Anti-
renters.
were a relic of feudal institutions. In the attempt to col-
lect them serious opposition was made, and the disturb-
ances extended to the Livingston manor, in Columbia
county. So violent has been the resistance to the law,
that the tenantry have virtually carried their point, on
account of the sympathy of the more democratic portion
of the community.

By far the most important event of this administration, Admis-
sion of
Texas.
if viewed in its ultimate results, was the admission of
Texas into the Union (February 23d, 1845). The Tex-
ans had secured their independence chiefly through the
military successes of General Houston, who defeated the
Mexicans at the battle of San Jacinto, and took Santa
Anna himself, the president of Mexico, a prisoner. After
independence from Mexico was secured, Texas made re-
peated overtures to be received into the Union, which
were objected to by General Jackson and Mr. Van Buren,
on the ground of the peaceful relations with Mexico.
But a stronger opposition existed in the minds of the
northern members of Congress, on account of the exten-
sion of slave territory and the practical endorsement of
slavery by the United States. But the recommendation
of President Tyler had the fortune to be approved by a
majority of Congress, including nearly all the southern
members, and Texas, with a territory from which four
new slave States might be formed, was admitted into the
Union. The Mexican war was the result of this act.

Bk. VII. In May, 1844, two important conventions were held
 Ch. 4. in Baltimore, to nominate candidates for the presidency.
 A. D. Henry Clay was nominated by the Whigs, and James K.
 1844. Polk by the democratic party.

Presi- No man, in the political annals of this nation, has
 dential excited such general admiration as Clay, or has been
 election. favoured with more enthusiastic friends; but he had his
 enemies also, and was committed to measures which were
 not universally popular. Hence, the illustrious pacifi-
 cator lost his election. James K. Polk, who had been
 Speaker of the House of Representatives, became Presi-
 dent of the United States, 4th of March, 1845.

CHAPTER V.

ADMINISTRATION OF PRESIDENT POLK.

JAMES K. POLK was inducted into his high office on Bk. VII.
 the 4th of March, 1845; and his party, which has had Ch. 5.
 the ascendancy, with few brief intervals, since the retire- A. D.
 ment of the elder Adams, had full scope to prosecute its 1845.
 measures.

He selected for his cabinet, James Buchanan, of Penn- The
 sylvania, as Secretary of State; Robert J. Walker, of cabinet.
 Mississippi, Secretary of the Treasury; William L. Marcy,
 of New York, Secretary of War; George Bancroft, of
 Massachusetts, Secretary of the Navy; Cave Johnson,
 of Tennessee, Postmaster-General; and John Y. Mason,
 of Virginia, Attorney-General.

Nothing important of a national character, except a
 threatened invasion of Texas by Mexico, transpired pre-
 vious to the meeting, in December, of the twenty-ninth
 Congress.

By the battle of San Jacinto, Texas had won her in- Inde-
 dependence, and her separate nationality was acknow- pend-
 ledged by the United States, as well as by other govern- ence of
 ments. In the exercise of the right which this independ- Texas
 ence secured, she sought a union with the United States.
 This right was undoubted, whatever may have been the
 course of her citizens to secure independence, or what-
 ever may have been their motives in seceding from a
 State which did *not* recognise the institution of slavery.