

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.



Bk. VII. When Texas signified its willingness to become a member of the American confederacy, after its annexation had  
Ch. 5.  
A. D. 1845 been voted by the twenty-eighth Congress, Mexico recalled her minister, and made preparations to appeal to arms. Anticipating these troubles, the United States government sent a military force into Texas, and also a squadron into the Gulf of Mexico.

In the mean time negotiations were opened, both to avert hostilities and to settle the boundary between Texas and Mexico. With respect to Texas, the question was the Rio Grande, as the proper boundary. With Mexico, the whole of Texas itself was at issue. Mexico, intent upon recovering her province, or quarrelling with the United States, refused to treat, unless our ships were withdrawn from her coasts and our troops from her soil.

Refusal  
of Mexi-  
co to ne-  
gotiate.

Meeting  
of Con-  
gress.

1846.

Such was the state of things, a quasi war, when Congress assembled. One of its first measures was the consummation of the annexation of Texas, which was declared to be one of the United States of America, on equal footing with the rest. But the subject which most deeply engaged Congress was in reference to the tariff. The tariff-law of 1842 was repealed, and a lower scale of duties substituted, much to the detriment of manufacturers, especially of iron.

Troops  
ordered  
to the  
Rio  
Grande.

The attention of Congress however was soon recalled to the difficulties with Mexico. General Taylor, who commanded the American troops at Corpus Christi, had been ordered by the Secretary of War to the Rio Grande, the disputed boundary; and, in April, 1846, the little army under his command was encamped upon its banks. The design of this movement was to induce Mexico to negotiate, or to precipitate hostilities. But the people of Mexico could only be pacified by an appeal to arms, and they were only to be awakened to a sense of their

inferiority, or of their duties, by the sad experience of defeat and dismemberment.

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Ch. 5.

General Taylor, in the latter part of April, occupied a menacing position opposite Matamoras, after having built a fort at Point Isabel, which was made his main depôt. A body of Mexicans, meanwhile, was encamped on the west bank of the river, to watch the movements of General Taylor. These were under the command of General Arista, and were among the best troops in the Mexican service.

A. D.  
1846.  
Hostili-  
ties  
threat-  
ened.

On the 24th of April, Captain Thornton, with sixty-three dragoons, was sent up the river to reconnoitre; but he fell into an ambuscade, and was compelled to surrender to a superior force, after sixteen had been killed or wounded.

Capture  
of  
Thornton's  
party.

The capture of this party left no doubt of the hostile intentions of Mexico, and General Taylor immediately made a requisition for 5000 troops; however, before these could arrive, the campaign was fairly opened by the brilliant action of Palo Alto.

In the latter part of April, the Mexicans crossed the Rio Grande, with a view to occupy the ground between Point Isabel and the station which General Taylor occupied, and thus to cut off his communication. But General Taylor, on the first of May, left a detachment of his troops with Major Brown to defend the river-fort, which afterwards bore his name, and marched with his main body toward Point Isabel, in order to secure free access to his depôt. He, however, encountered no Mexican enemies. On the 7th of May, having secured his object, he commenced his return to Fort Brown.

Mexi-  
cans  
cross the  
Rio  
Grande.

This return to the river the Mexican general determined to prevent, and hence concentrated his troops, nearly 6000 in number, at Palo Alto, directly across the

Battle  
of Palo  
Alto.



BK. VII. road over which Taylor was to march. Here occurred,  
Ch. 5. on the 8th of May, the first battle of consequence in the  
A. D. war, in which the Americans overcame a body of well-  
1846. posted troops, nearly double their own number, and with  
the loss of only 55 killed and wounded, while the enemy  
had 200 killed and 400 wounded.

Battle of  
Resaca.

The next day another still more bloody fight occurred  
at a ravine, called Resaca, in which the Mexicans were  
totally routed, with great loss, and the capture of General  
La Vega, together with General Arista's papers and mili-  
tary stores. In this action, where 39 Americans were  
killed and 83 wounded, the light artillery did great ser-  
vice under Lieutenant Ridgely. The dragoons, under  
Captain May, also distinguished themselves.

Retreat  
of the  
Mexi-  
cans.

These brilliant victories resulted in the retreat of the  
Mexicans across the Rio Grande, and in the occupation  
of Matamoras by General Taylor. It was now resolved  
upon, both by the government at Washington and Gene-  
ral Taylor, to follow up these successes by an invasion  
of the enemy's territory, and by the attack on Monterey,  
the capital of New Leon, and the first position of strength  
on the highway to Mexico, as well as the key to all the  
northern provinces.

The con-  
quest of  
Mexico  
contem-  
plated.

Congress, meanwhile, had declared war with Mexico,  
and voted to raise ten millions of dollars and 50,000 men.  
Great vigour was shown by the government in transport-  
ing troops to the Rio Grande, the base of military opera-  
tions, although the means of forwarding them after their  
disembarkation were not sufficiently considered. By the  
middle of August, General Taylor found himself at the  
head of a considerable force, composed chiefly of volun-  
teers, all burning with eagerness to enter "the Halls of  
the Montezumas."

With all invading armies the means of subsistence

BK. VII. becomes the controlling question. Without sufficient at-  
Ch. 5. tention to the commissariat, Napoleon's generals suffered  
A. D. great disasters in Spain, and he himself was cut off in  
1846. Russia — this was *his* blunder. General Taylor disco-  
vered that only about 6000 men could be subsisted in  
the country around Monterey; nor had he the means of  
transporting a larger force.

Accordingly, with about 6000 men, he commenced his  
march to Monterey, on the 20th of August, leaving 2000  
behind, under General Patterson, to garrison Camargo,  
his main depôt on the Rio Grande. On the 19th of  
September, he arrived within three miles of Monterey,  
defended by fortifications of immense strength, and addi-  
tionally protected by forts erected outside of the city, on  
the two imposing heights of Independence and Federation.  
The possession of these works, called the Bishop's Palace  
and Fort Soldado, made certain the reduction of the city.

Advance  
of the  
Ameri-  
cans.

On the 20th, General Worth, with a division of the  
army, was put in movement, to storm these heights, while  
the remainder of the army was displayed on the eastern  
or opposite side of the city, to distract the enemy's  
attention.

Battle of  
Monte-  
rey.

The gallant stormers of Fort Soldado, under Colonel  
P. E. Smith and Captain C. F. Smith, effected their  
object, and possessed the heights of Federation; while  
Generals Twiggs and Butler attacked the city itself, and  
forced an entrance, though with great loss of life — 394  
being killed and wounded. This severe conflict withdrew  
attention from General Worth, who followed up his suc-  
cess, on the 22d, by storming the Bishop's Palace, which  
had been considered impregnable.

The Mexicans now withdrew from their outer defences,  
and occupied the cathedral and the main plaza, while the  
Americans made preparations to attack them, and gradu-



ally advanced, amid dreadful encounters, till within one square of the principal plaza, where the enemy was concentrated. General Taylor then withdrew his troops to the edge of the city, to concert with General Worth for a renewed attack on the following day.

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Ch. 5.  
A. D. 1846.

On the morning of the 24th, General Ampudia, who commanded the Mexicans, submitted a proposition to capitulate, which was agreed upon, and the city, with its military stores, fell into the hands of the Americans — the garrison, which had been 10,000, being permitted to march out with the honours of war, retaining their arms and six pieces of cannon. An armistice of eight weeks was also agreed upon.

Capitu-  
lation of  
Monte-  
rey.

Monterey now became the head-quarters of General Taylor, while Saltillo and Panas were respectively occupied by Generals Worth and Wool, with large detachments of the army.

A change of administration now occurred in Mexico, and Santa Anna, the ablest of all the Mexican generals, was recalled from Cuba and placed at the head of affairs. By indefatigable exertions, he raised an army of 20,000 men, concentrated them at San Louis Potosi, and strongly fortified his position.

Santa  
Anna  
recalled.

General Taylor, who had left Monterey, in the early part of December, for the interior, soon perceived that a larger force would be necessary, to attack San Louis Potosi, than what could be easily pushed forward. He accordingly came to the opinion that the advance should be abandoned, a defensive line occupied, and the decisive blow struck against the capital from the neighbourhood of Vera Cruz.

Taylor's  
position.

It so happened that the government was of the same opinion, through the suggestions of General Scott, who convinced Secretary Marey, in an able communication,



Siege of Monterey.



Bk. VII. that a vigorous march from Vera Cruz upon the city of  
Ch. 5. Mexico would alone compel the Mexicans to sue for peace.

A. D. As early, however, as the 22d of October, an expedition  
1846. against Vera Cruz was resolved upon, though without any

Plan of the invasion. ulterior purpose than the reduction of the city. To the genius of General Scott the country is indebted for the magnificent plan of strategy by which Mexico was subdued. He proposed first to capture Vera Cruz, and then to advance on the capital in two columns: one, of 10,000, from Monterey, and the other, of 20,000, from Vera Cruz. By this it was shown that, if Santa Anna remained at San Louis Potosi to oppose General Taylor, General Scott could then advance unresisted to the capital; or, if he detached to oppose Scott, then Taylor could advance upon San Louis Potosi.

The plan, however, was only partially adopted. It was settled that Scott should attack Vera Cruz, and then advance upon Mexico, while Taylor should maintain the defensive.

Scott takes the chief command. General Taylor's effective force now amounted to 16,000 men, 4000 less than was supposed, from which General Scott, now sent to take the chief command, detached 9000, in order to invest Vera Cruz, and advised Taylor to retire to Monterey.

Had Taylor, with his reduced force, retired to Monterey, it would have been considered by the enemy as a defeat; but he resolved to hold on to the position which he then occupied, in advance of Saltillo.

If he had then commanded the army, before so large a body was detached, with sufficient means of transportation, the great battle of the war would have been fought under the walls of San Louis Potosi, and Mexico entered from that side. But with 7 or 8000 men he could not act on the offensive.

Taylor did the best his means and circumstances permitted. He maintained a bold position, at the edge of the desert in advance of Saltillo, and thus invited an attack from the Mexican general, whose army, the best that Mexico ever saw, was defeated, demoralized, and reduced to half its numbers, and a way opened for Scott to advance upon the capital. Had it not been for the battle of Buena Vista, General Scott could not have taken Mexico, with the forces under his command, without great embarrassments.

While Taylor was thus maintaining his defensive attitude, and Scott organizing his expedition to attack Vera Cruz, Santa Anna came in possession of General Scott's despatches, and immediately resolved upon his measures, which, it must be conceded, were bold and grand—they were, to attack Taylor with his whole force, and then turn and crush Scott on his march to Mexico.

But it was the misfortune of Santa Anna to be beaten where he expected an easy victory. Buena Vista was won by skill and fortune. General Taylor occupied, for several weeks, a bold attitude at Agua Nueva, where he refreshed his troops, under 5000 in number, and imparted to them additional discipline. Upon this position Santa Anna advanced, with 20,000 men, on the 21st of February, 1847. Taylor hastily abandoned his camp, in order to lure the Mexicans to an unprepared attack, and by troops exhausted by fifty miles of continuous marching, and still suffering from hunger and thirst. Santa Anna, believing that the Americans were flying in dismay, eagerly pursued, until he was drawn into a mountain gorge, where alone a victory could be gained by the Americans, and where alone their commander was determined to fight.

This position had been chosen by General Wool, and



adopted by General Taylor. On the morning of the 22d of February, the birth-day of Washington, the battle commenced, and was fought with desperate valour during that day, and also during the next, before fortune declared in favour of the Americans. Great assistance was rendered, during this encounter, by the flying artillery, under Captain Bragg. Both officers and men greatly distinguished themselves, but none so much as the intrepid commander, without whose ability the Americans would probably have been overpowered by superior numbers. The Mexican loss was over 2000 in killed and wounded, beside 3000 deserters. The American loss was 267 killed and 456 wounded.

Santa Anna still had 15,000 men left, after this decisive battle, but he was without money and without depôts, and, in addition, a revolution was springing up in the capital of Mexico; he was, therefore, compelled to retreat towards San Louis Potosi, while General Taylor advanced to Agua Nueva.

While these splendid successes had been gained by General Taylor, General Scott was organizing his own expedition, and, early in March, landed in the vicinity of Vera Cruz, and invested that city. General Scott, in his communication to the Secretary of War, deemed that 20,000 men were necessary to capture Vera Cruz and advance upon Mexico. But he had only 12,000 men when, on the 28th of February, at Lobos, he organized his forces — with these he advanced to Vera Cruz.

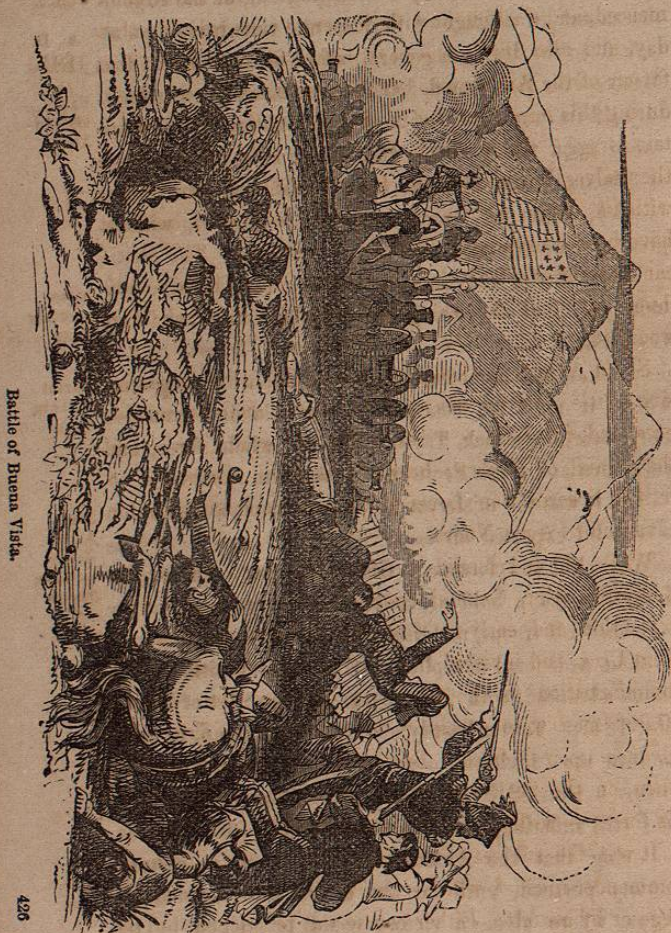
It was the subject of deliberation with the illustrious commander-in-chief, whether he would take the city by siege or by assault. Either course was practicable. The former would require science; the latter, desperate courage. By the former course fewer lives would be lost; by the latter, greater eclat would be gained. To his

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1847.

Battle  
of Buena  
Vista.Retreat  
of Santa  
Anna.Scott or-  
ganizes  
his  
troops.Move-  
ments  
before  
Vera  
Cruz.

Battle of Buena Vista.



honour, the considerations of humanity weighed more than those of glory — for, in war, the more lives that are lost, and the more desperate an action, the more impressive is the victory in the eyes of the great mass of the people.

The investment of the city, which contained about 15,000 inhabitants and was defended by a respectable garrison, commenced on the 10th of March. The batteries were planted with great judgment, about 900 yards from the city. But the works were frequently destroyed by the heavy northers, and the troops suffered much from excessive labour. On the 22d of March, the investment was completed, and General Scott summoned the city to surrender. General Morales, who commanded both the city and the castle of San Juan de Ulloa, a strong fortress in front of the city, peremptorily refused, and the bombardment commenced, both from the American batteries and from the ships in the harbour. On the 29th, the surrender of the city and castle was made, and the American flag was planted on the enemy's works.

Thus was this important place taken by the American commander, with only the inconsiderable loss of 65 men killed and wounded, and a secure base formed for military operations in the interior. Had the city been taken by assault, more than 2000 persons would probably have fallen, beside the great loss of life in the city itself.

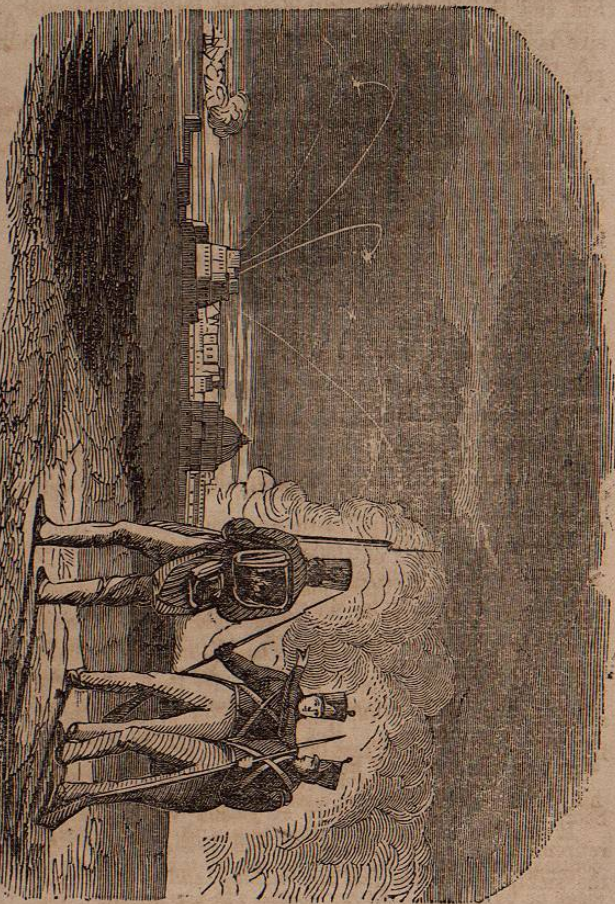
Meanwhile, the news reached the camp of General Scott of the brilliant victory at Buena Vista and the retirement of Santa Anna upon San Louis Potosi. As the sickly season was fast approaching, and as he wished to anticipate the enemy, in gaining healthy positions on the first mountain barriers, General Scott resolved to commence the march to the city of Mexico. As soon as means of transportation could be collected, they were put

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Siege of  
Vera  
Cruz.

Surrender of  
the city.

Scott  
resolves  
to advance on  
Mexico.



Siege of Vera Cruz.