JAMES K. POLK'S ADMINISTRATION.*

(ELEVENTH PRESIDENT: 1845-1849.)

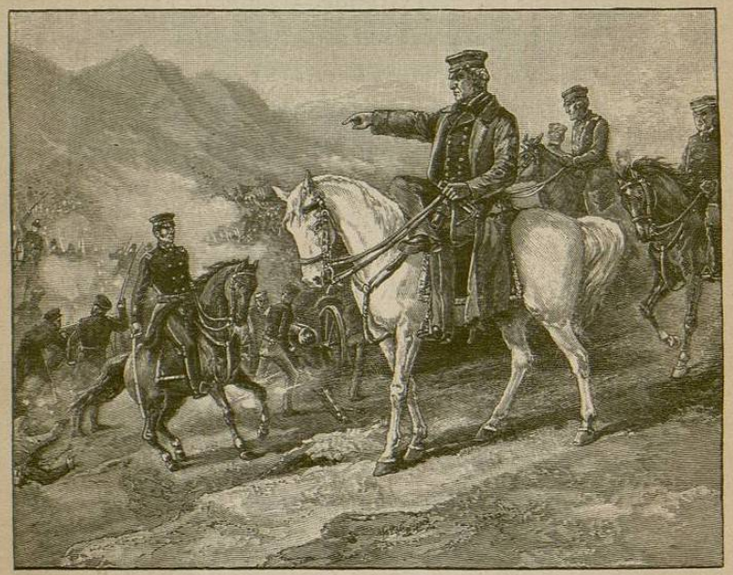
WAR WITH MEXICO (1846-'47).

1. GENERAL TAYLOR'S ARMY.

Campaign on the Rio Grande.—General Taylor having been ordered with his troops into the disputed territory, advanced to the Rio Grande and built Fort Brown. Returning from Point Isabel, whither he had gone for supplies, on the plains of PALO ALTO (päh'lō ähl'tō) he met six thousand Mexicans, under General Arista (ah rees'tah), drawn up across the road. (Map opp. p. 161.) Though they outnumbered his little army three to one, he routed them with a loss of but nine men killed. The next afternoon, he met them again at RESACA DE LA PALMA (rā säh'käh dā läh pähl'mäh), posted in a deep ravine through which the road ran, flanked by thickets. Their artillery held Taylor's men in check for a time, when Captain May, charging with his cavalry in the face of a murderous fire, captured the guns, and with them their commander, General La Vega (läh vā'gäh), just in the act of firing a gun. The infantry now rushed forward and drove the enemy, who fled across the Rio Grande in utter rout.

* James K. Polk was born 1795; died 1849. He was a conspicuous opposer of the administration of John Quincy Adams, and a warm supporter of Jackson. In 1839, having served fourteen years in Congress, he declined a re-election and was chosen governor of Tennessee. His Presidential nomination, in connection with that of George M. Dallas, of Pennsylvania, as Vice-President, had the effect of uniting the democratic party, which had been disturbed by dissensions between the friends and opponents of Martin Van Buren. The Mexican war, which was strongly opposed in many States, the enactment of a tariff based on a revenue principle instead of a protective one, and the agitation caused by the "Wilmot proviso" (p. 190), conspired to affect his popularity before the end of his term. He had, however, previously pledged himself not to be a candidate for re-election. He died about three months after his retirement from office.

Invasion of Mexico.—*Capture of Monterey* (Sept. 24).—General Taylor, with about six thousand men, advanced upon Monterey (mŏn tā rā′). This city, surrounded by mountains and almost impassable ravines, was strongly fortified, and its streets were barricaded and defended by a garrison of ten thousand men. A grand assault was made on the city. To



GENERAL TAYLOR AT BUENA VISTA.

avoid the deadly fire from the windows, roofs, and barricades, the troops entered the buildings and dug their way through the stone walls from house to house, or passed from roof to roof. They came at last within one square of the Grand Plaza, when the city was surrendered. The garrison was allowed to march out with the honors of war.

Battle of Buena Vista (bwā′näh vees′täh) (February 23, 1847).—Santa Anna, the Mexican general, learning that the flower of Taylor's command had been withdrawn to aid

General Scott, determined to crush the remainder. The little American army took post at Buena Vista, a narrow mountain pass with hills on one side and a ravine on the other.* Here it was attacked by Santa Anna with twenty thousand of the best troops of Mexico. The battle lasted from early morning till dark. In the final desperate encounter, our infantry being overwhelmed by numbers, Bragg's artillery was ordered to the rescue. Without any infantry support, they dashed up to within a few yards of the crowded masses of the enemy. A single discharge made them waver. "A little more grape, Captain Bragg!" shouted Taylor. A second and a third discharge followed, and the Mexicans broke and fled in disorder. During the night, Santa Anna drew off his defeated army.

General Taylor's work was now done. His army was intended only to hold the country already gained, while General Scott penetrated to the capital from Vera Cruz (vā räh krōōs).

2. GENERAL KEARNEY'S ARMY.

Conquest of New Mexico and California.—General Kearney (kär′ne) was directed to take the Mexican provinces of New Mexico and California. Starting from Fort Leaven-

* Several anecdotes are told of General Taylor in connection with this battle. The day before the principal attack, the Mexicans fired heavily on our line. A Mexican officer, coming with a message from Santa Anna, found Taylor sitting on his white horse, with one leg over the pommel of his saddle. The officer asked him "what he was waiting for"? He answered, "For Santa Anna to surrender." After the officer's return, a battery opened on Taylor's position, but he remained coolly surveying the enemy with his spy-glass. Some one suggesting that "Whitey" was too conspicuous a horse for the battle, he replied that the "old fellow had missed the fun at Monterey, and he should have his share this time". Mr. Crittenden having gone to Santa Anña's head-quarters, was told if General Taylor would surrender, he should be protected. Mr. Crittenden replied, "General Taylor never surrenders." This became a favorite motto during the election of 1848. The anecdote told concerning Capt. Bragg is disputed, but has become historical.

worth (June, 1846), a journey of about a thousand miles brought him to Santa Fe.* Unfurling there the United States flag, he continued his march toward California (map opp. p. 161). On his way, however, he learned from Kit Carson, the noted hunter, that he was too late. The winter before, Captain John C. Fremont, with a company of sixty men, had been engaged in surveying a new route to Oregon. Hearing that the Mexican commandant intended to expel the American settlers, he went to their rescue, although he was not aware that war had broken out between the United States and Mexico. With greatly inferior numbers, he was victor over the Mexicans in every conflict. By the help of Commodores Sloat and Stockton, and also General Kearney, who came in time to aid in the last battle, the entire country was conquered.

3. GENERAL SCOTT'S ARMY.

Capture of Vera Cruz (March 29, 1847).—General Winfield Scott landed an army twelve thousand strong, without opposition, and forthwith drew his siege-lines among the shifting sand-hills and chaparral thickets about Vera Cruz (map opp. p. 161). After a fierce bombardment of four days, the city and the strong castle of San Juan de Ulloa (sähn hoo ähn′ dā ool yō′ah) were surrendered.

March to Mexico.—*Battle of Cerro Gordo* (April 18).—In about a week, the army took up its march for the capital. At the mountain pass of Cer′ro Gor′do, the enemy were strongly fortified. Our men cut a road around the base of

* Colonel Doniphan, with one thousand men, the main body of General Kearney's command, marched over a thousand miles through a hostile country, from Santa Fe to Saltillo, having on the way fought two battles and conquered the province and city of Chihuahua (che wa̱h′ wa̱h). At the end of their term of service, he marched his men back to New Orleans and discharged them. They had been enlisted, taken five thousand miles, and disbanded, all in a year.

the mountain through the forest, and dragged cannon up the precipice by ropes, to the rear of the position. Thence a plunging fire was opened simultaneously with an assault in front. The Mexicans fled in such haste that Santa Anna with difficulty escaped on his wheel-mule, leaving behind him his wooden leg.

The city of Puebla (pwĕb′ lah), next to Mexico in importance, surrendered without resistance. Here Scott waited nearly three months for re-inforcements.

Battles before Mexico.—With eleven thousand men, the march was resumed (August 7), and in three days the army reached the crest of the Cor dil'le ras, where the magnificent valley of Mexico lay stretched before them. In the valley, was the city, surrounded by fertile plains and cloud-capped mountains. But the way thither was guarded by thirty thousand men and strong fortifications. Turning to the south to avoid the strongest points, by a route considered impassable, the army came before the intrenched camp of CONTRERAS (kon trā′ras), within fourteen miles of Mexico (Aug. 19). The next morning, this was taken, the troops having moved to their positions in darkness so intense that, to avoid being separated, they had to touch each other as they marched. The same day, the height of CHURUBUSCO (choo roo boo′sko) was stormed, numerous batteries were captured, and the defenses laid bare to the causeways leading to the very gates of the city. An armistice and fruitless negotiations for peace delayed the advance until General Scott found that the Mexicans were only improving the time in strengthening their works. Once more (September 8), our army moved to the assault. The attack was irresistible. The formidable outworks were taken one by one. At last, the castle of CHAPULTEPEC (chä pool te pek′), situated on a high rock commanding the city, was stormed. The next day (Sep-

tember 14), the army entered the city, and the stars and stripes waved in triumph over the palace of the Mon te zu'mas.

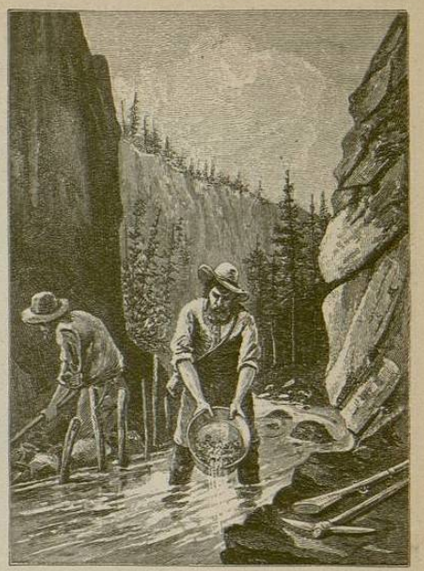
Peace.—The fall of the capital virtually closed the war. A treaty was concluded, February 2, 1848. The United States gained the vast territory reaching south to the Gila (hē'lah) and west to the Pacific (see maps of IVth and VIth Epochs).

Domestic Affairs.—*The Wilmot Proviso.*—The new territory, the prize of the war, became at once the bone of contention. David Wilmot offered in Congress (August, 1846) an amendment to an appropriation bill forbidding slavery in any of this territory. This measure, though lost, excited violent debate, and became the great feature of the fall election.

Discovery of Gold in California.—A workman in digging a mill-race in the Sacramento valley (February, 1848) discovered shining particles of gold. A further search proved that the soil for miles around contained the precious metal. The news flew in every direction. Emigration began from all parts of America, and even from Europe and Asia. In eighteen months, one hundred thousand persons went from the United States to this El Do ra'do, where a fortune was to be picked up in a few days. Thousands made their way across the desert, amid privations which strewed the route with skeletons. The bay of San Francisco was quickly surrounded by an extemporized city of shanties and booths. All ordinary employments were laid aside. Ships were deserted by their crews, who ran to the mines, sometimes, it is said, headed by their officers. Soon, streets were laid out, houses erected, and from this Babel, as if by magic, grew up a beautiful city. For a time, lawlessness reigned supreme. But, driven by the necessity of events, the most respectable citizens took the law into their own hands, organized vigi-

lance committees, and administered a rude but prompt justice which presently restored order.

Political Parties.—Three parties now divided the suffrages of the people. The whigs nominated General Taylor for President; the democrats, Lewis Cass; and the free-soilers, who were opposed to the extension of slavery, Martin Van Buren. The personal popularity of General Taylor, on account of his many sterling qualities and his brilliant victories in the Mexican war, made him the favorite candidate, and he was elected.



WASHING OUT GOLD.

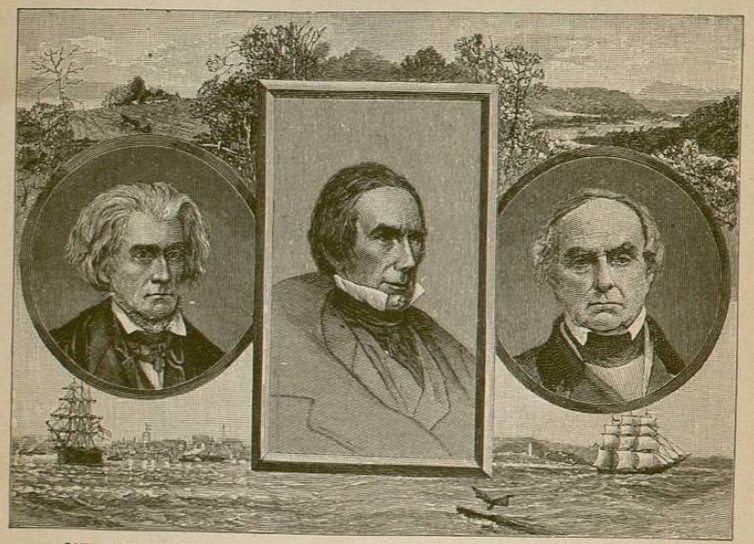
TAYLOR AND FILLMORE'S ADMINISTRATION.*

(TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH PRESIDENTS: 1849-1853.)

General Taylor, like General Harrison, died soon after his elevation to the Presidency. Millard Fillmore, Vice-President, succeeded him.

* Zachary Taylor was born in Virginia in 1784. Soon after his birth, his parents removed to Kentucky. His means of education were extremely scanty, and until he was twenty-four years of age he worked on his father's plantation. Madison, who was a relative and at that time Secretary of State, then secured for him an appointment in the army as lieutenant. From this, he rose by regular and rapid degrees to a major-generalship. Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterey, and Buena Vista won him great applause. He was the hero of a successful war, and the soldiers admiringly called him "Old Rough and Ready". Many whig leaders violently opposed

Domestic Affairs.—Slavery questions were the great political topic of this administration. When California applied for admission to the Union as a free State, all these subjects were brought to a focus. A hot debate ensued, and for



JOHN C. CALHOUN. HENRY CLAY. DANIEL WEBSTER.

awhile it seemed as if the Union would be rent asunder. At this terrible crisis, Henry Clay, the "Great Pacificator", came forward, and, with his wonderful eloquence, urged the

his nomination. Daniel Web'ster called him "an ignorant frontier colonel". The fact that he was a slave-holder was warmly urged against him. He knew nothing of civil affairs, and had taken so little interest in politics that he had not voted in forty years. His nomination caused a secession from the whigs, resulting in the formation of the free-soil party; yet he maintained his popularity as President, and was one of the most esteemed who have filled that office. He died July 9, 1850, at the Presidential mansion, after an illness of five days.

Millard Fillmore was born in Cayuga county, N. Y., 1800; died at Buffalo, 1874. He learned the trade of fuller, taught school, practiced law, served as Assemblyman for three terms and as Congressman for four terms, ran unsuccessfully for governor, and was comptroller of the State of New York when he was nominated for the Vice-Presidency. By his integrity, industry, and practical ability, he won a place among the first statesmen of his day. Signing the Fugitive Slave Law, however, cost him much of his popularity at the North.

necessity of mutual compromise and forbearance. Daniel Webster* warmly seconded this effort at conciliation.

The Compromise of 1850.—The Omnibus Bill, Clay's measure, proposed (1) that California should come in as a free State; (2) that the Territories of Utah and New Mexico should be formed without any provision concerning slavery; (3) that Texas should be paid $10,000,000 to give up its claim on the Territory of New Mexico; (4) that the slave trade should be prohibited in the District of Columbia; and (5) that a FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW should be enacted providing for the return to their owners of slaves escaping to a free State. The various provisions of this bill were finally, though separately, adopted as the best solution of the problem.

Foreign Affairs.—*Invasion of Cuba.*—About five hundred adventurers, "filibusters", undertook the annexation of Cuba to the United States. The attempt ended in defeat, and in the execution, at Havana, of Lopez, the leader (1851).

Political Parties.—The democratic and whig parties both declared that they stood by the provisions of the Omnibus Bill. The free-soil party was outspoken against it. Frank-

* When Daniel Webster, the great American statesman and jurist, was fourteen years old, he first enjoyed the privilege of a few months schooling at an academy. The man whose eloquence was afterward to stir the nation, was then so shy that he could not muster courage to speak before the school. He says, "Many a piece did I commit and rehearse in my own room, over and over again; yet when the day came, when my name was called, and I saw all eyes turned toward me, I could not raise myself from my seat." In other respects, however, he gave decided promise of his future eminence. One year after, his father resolved to send him to college—a dream he had never dared to cherish. "I remember the very hill we were ascending through deep snow, in a New England sleigh, when my father made known this purpose to me. I could not speak. How could he, I thought, with so large a family, and in such narrow circumstances, think of incurring so great an expense for me? A warm glow ran all over me, and I laid my head on my father's shoulder and wept." Having finished his collegiate education and entered his profession, he at once rose to eminence. By rapid strides, he placed himself at the head of American orators. It was a disappointment to Webster's friends, as it was, perhaps, to himself, that he was never placed in the Presidential chair. But, like Clay, although he might have honored that position he needed it not to enhance his renown. His death, in 1852, called out more orations and sermons, than had any other except that of Washington.

lin Pierce, the Presidential nominee of the democratic party, was elected by a large majority over General Scott, the whig candidate.

PIERCE'S ADMINISTRATION.*

(FOURTEENTH PRESIDENT: 1853-1857.)

Domestic Affairs.—*Kansas-Nebraska Bill.*—The Compromise Bill of 1850 produced only a lull in the slavery excitement. It burst out anew when Stephen A. Douglas brought into Congress his famous bill organizing the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska, and advocating the doctrine of "squatter sovereignty"; *i. e.*, the right of the inhabitants of each Territory to decide for themselves whether the State should come into the Union free or slave.† This bill

* Franklin Pierce was born 1804; died 1869. He had barely attained the requisite legal age when he was elected to the Senate. He there found such men as Clay, Webster, Calhoun, Seward, Benton, and Silas Wright. Nathaniel Hawthorne says in his biography of Mr. Pierce: "With his usual tact and exquisite sense of propriety, he saw that it was not the time for him to step forward prominently on this highest theater in the land. He beheld these great combatants doing battle before the eyes of the nation, and engrossing its whole regards. There was hardly an avenue to reputation save what was occupied by one or another of those gigantic figures." During Mr. Tyler's administration he resigned. When the Mexican war broke out, he enlisted as a volunteer, but soon rose to the office of brigadier-general. He distinguished himself under General Scott, against whom he afterward successfully ran for the Presidency, and upon whom, during his administration, he conferred the title of lieutenant-general. Pierce opposed anti-slavery measures in every shape. He, however, espoused the national cause at the opening of the Civil War.

† The public lands have often threatened the peace of the nation. 1. The question of their ownership was one of the greatest obstacles to the union of the States. In 1781, New York was the first to present her western territory to the general government. Virginia followed her example in 1784, donating the great North-western Territory—a princely domain, which, if retained, would have made her the richest of the States; she reserved only 3,709,848 acres in Ohio, which she subsequently sold in small tracts to settlers. Massachusetts, in 1785, relinquished her claim, retaining a proprietary right over large tracts in New York. Connecticut, in 1786, did the same, and from the sale of her lands in Ohio (the "Western Reserve") laid the foundation of her school fund. Georgia and the Carolinas gave up their right to territory from which have been carved the States of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. 2. After these lands became the property of the general government, a perplexing question was, Shall they be free? Upon it, for years, hinged largely the politics of the

being a virtual repudiation of the Missouri Compromise, excited intense feeling.* It, however, became a law (1854).

"Border Warfare."—The struggle was now taken from Congress to Kansas. A bitter contest arose between the pro-slavery and the anti-slavery men—the former anxious to secure the State for slavery; the latter, for freedom. Each party sent armed emigrants to the Territory and civil war ensued. Bands of armed men crossed over from Missouri, took possession of the polls, and controlled the elections. Houses were attacked and pillaged, and men murdered in cold blood. For several years, Kansas was a scene of lawless violence.

Foreign Affairs.—*Mexico.*—Owing to the inaccuracy of the map used in the treaty between the United States and Mexico, a dispute arose with regard to the boundary line. General Gadsden negotiated a settlement whereby Mexico was paid $10,000,000, and the United States secured the region (map, Epoch VI.) known as the "Gadsden purchase".

Japan.—Commodore Perry's expedition to Japan (1854) excited great attention. He negotiated a treaty which gave to the merchants of the United States two ports of entry in that exclusive country.

Political Parties.—The compromises of 1820 and 1850 having been abolished, the slave question became the turning point of the election. New party lines were drawn to meet

country. The admission of Missouri, Texas, California, and Kansas was each the signal for the re-opening of this vexed question. Though the public lands have been the cause of intestine strife, they have been a great source of national wealth. Their sale has brought large sums into the treasury. They have been given to settlers as a stimulus to immigration. They have been granted to endow colleges and schools, to build railroads, to reward the soldiers and support their widows and orphans (see page 310).

* The bitter discussion on the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the contest in Kansas, lasted for years. Senator Sumner, of Massachusetts, during a speech that occupied two days (May 19-20, 1856), having made some severe reflections upon Senator Butler, of South Carolina, was assaulted by Preston S. Brooks, a nephew of Butler and a South Carolina representative. Mr. Brooks, having resigned his seat, was immediately returned. It was over three years before Mr. Sumner recovered his health.