

LIFE
OF
FRANKLIN PIERCE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS PARENTAGE AND EARLY LIFE.

FRANKLIN PIERCE was born at Hillsborough, in the State of New Hampshire, on the 23d of November, 1804. His native county, at the period of his birth, covered a much more extensive territory than at present, and might reckon among its children many memorable men, and some illustrious ones. General Stark, the hero of Bennington, Daniel Webster, Levi Woodbury, Jeremiah Smith, the eminent jurist, and governor of the state, General James Miller, General McNeil, Senator Atherton, were natives of old Hillsborough county.

General Benjamin Pierce, the father of Franklin, was one of the earliest settlers in the town of Hillsborough, and contributed as much as any other man to the growth and prosperity of the county. He was born in 1757, at Chelmsford, now Lowell, in Massachusetts. Losing his parents

early, he grew up under the care of an uncle, amid such circumstances of simple fare, hard labor, and scanty education as usually fell to the lot of a New England yeoman's family some eighty or a hundred years ago. On the 19th of April, 1775, being then less than eighteen years of age, the strippling was at the plough, when tidings reached him of the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord. He immediately loosened the ox chain, left the plough in the furrow, took his uncle's gun and equipments, and set forth towards the scene of action. From that day, for more than seven years, he never saw his native place. He enlisted in the army, was present at the battle of Bunker Hill, and after serving through the whole revolutionary war, and fighting his way upward from the lowest grade, returned, at last, a thorough soldier, and commander of a company. He was retained in the army as long as that body of veterans had a united existence; and, being finally disbanded, at West Point, in 1784, was left with no other reward, for nine years of toil and danger, than the nominal amount of his pay in the Continental currency—then so depreciated as to be almost worthless.

In 1785, being employed as agent to explore a tract of wild land, he purchased a lot of fifty acres in what is now the town of Hillsborough. In the spring of the succeeding year, he built himself a log hut, and began the clearing and cultivation of

his tract. Another year beheld him married to his first wife, Elizabeth Andrews, who died within a twelvemonth after their union, leaving a daughter, the present widow of General John McNeil. In 1789, he married Anna Kendrick, with whom he lived about half a century, and who bore him eight children, of whom Franklin was the sixth.

Although the revolutionary soldier had thus betaken himself to the wilderness for a subsistence, his professional merits were not forgotten by those who had witnessed his military career. As early as 1786, he was appointed brigade major of the militia of Hillsborough county, then first organized and formed into a brigade. And it was a still stronger testimonial to his character as a soldier, that, nearly fifteen years afterwards, during the presidency of John Adams, he was offered a high command in the northern division of the army which was proposed to be levied in anticipation of a war with the French republic. Inflexibly democratic in his political faith, however, Major Pierce refused to be implicated in a policy which he could not approve. "No, gentlemen," said he to the delegates, who urged his acceptance of the commission, "poor as I am, and acceptable as would be the position under other circumstances, I would sooner go to yonder mountains, dig me a cave, and live on roast potatoes, than be instrumental in promoting the objects for which that army is to be raised!" This same fidelity to his

of manner; its source lies deep in the kindliness of his nature, and in the liberal, generous, catholic sympathy, that embraces all who are worthy of it. Few men possess any thing like it; so irresistible as it is, so sure to draw forth an undoubting confidence, and so true to the promise which it gives. This frankness, this democracy of good feeling, has not been chilled by the society of politicians, nor polished down into mere courtesy, by his intercourse with the most refined men of the day. It belongs to him at this moment, and will never leave him. A little while ago, after his return from Mexico, he darted across the street to exchange a hearty gripe of the hand with a rough countryman upon his cart—a man who used to “live with his father,” as the general explained the matter to his companions. Other men assume this manner, more or less skilfully; but with Frank Pierce it is an innate characteristic; nor will it ever lose its charm unless his heart should grow narrower and colder—a misfortune not to be anticipated, even in the dangerous atmosphere of elevated rank, whither he seems destined to ascend.

There is little else that it is worth while to relate, as regards his college course, unless it be, that, during one of his winter vacations, Pierce taught a country school. So many of the statesmen of New England have performed their first public service in the character of pedagogue, that it seems almost a necessary step on the ladder of advancement.

CHAPTER II.

HIS SERVICES IN THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEGISLATURES.

AFTER leaving college, in the year 1824, Franklin Pierce returned to Hillsborough. His father, now in a green old age, continued to take a prominent part in the affairs of the day, but likewise made his declining years rich and picturesque with recollections of the heroic times through which he had lived. On the 26th of December, 1825, it being his sixty-seventh birthday, General Benjamin Pierce prepared a festival for his comrades in arms, the survivors of the revolution, eighteen of whom, all inhabitants of Hillsborough, assembled at his house. The ages of these veterans ranged from fifty-nine up to the patriarchal venerableness of nearly ninety. They spent the day in festivity, in calling up reminiscences of the great men whom they had known, and the great deeds which they had helped to do, and in reviving the old sentiments of the era of seventy-six. At nightfall, after a manly and pathetic farewell from their host, they separated—“prepared,” as the old general expressed it, “at the first tap of the shrouded drum, to move and join their beloved Washington, and

the rest of their comrades, who fought and bled at their sides." A scene like this must have been profitable for a young man to witness, as being likely to give him a stronger sense, than most of us can attain, of the value of that Union which these old heroes had risked so much to consolidate — of that common country which they had sacrificed every thing to create; and patriotism must have been communicated from their hearts to his, with somewhat of the warmth and freshness of a new-born sentiment. No youth was ever more fortunate than Franklin Pierce, through the whole of his early life, in this most desirable species of moral education.

Having chosen the law as a profession, Franklin became a student in the office of Judge Woodbury, of Portsmouth. Allusion has already been made to the friendship between General Benjamin Pierce and Peter Woodbury, the father of the judge. The early progress of Levi Woodbury towards eminence had been facilitated by the powerful influence of his father's friend. It was a worthy and honorable kind of patronage, and bestowed only as the great abilities of the recipient vindicated his claim to it. Few young men have met with such early success in life, or have deserved it so eminently, as did Judge Woodbury. At the age of twenty-seven, he was appointed to the bench of the Supreme Court of the state, on the earnest recommendation of old General Pierce.

The opponents of the measure ridiculed him as the "baby judge;" but his conduct in that high office showed the prescient judgment of the friend who had known him from a child, and had seen in his young manhood already the wisdom of ripened age. It was some years afterwards when Franklin Pierce entered the office of Judge Woodbury as a student. In the interval, the judge had been elected governor, and, after a term of office that thoroughly tested the integrity of his democratic principles, had lost his second election, and returned to the profession of the law.

The last two years of Pierce's preparatory studies were spent at the law school of Northampton, in Massachusetts, and in the office of Judge Parker at Amherst. In 1827, being admitted to the bar, he began the practice of his profession at Hillsborough. It is an interesting fact, considered in reference to his subsequent splendid career as an advocate, that he did not, at the outset, give promise of distinguished success. His first case was a failure, and perhaps a somewhat marked one. But it is remembered that this defeat, however mortifying at the moment, did but serve to make him aware of the latent resources of his mind, the full command of which he was far from having yet attained. To a friend, an older practitioner, who addressed him with some expression of condolence and encouragement, Pierce replied, — and it was a kind of self-assertion which no triumph would

have drawn out,—“ I do not need that. I will try nine hundred and ninety-nine cases, if clients will continue to trust me, and, if I fail just as I have to-day, will try the thousandth. I shall live to argue cases in this court house in a manner that will mortify neither myself nor my friends.” It is in such moments of defeat that character and ability are most fairly tested; they would irremediably crush a youth devoid of real energy, and being neither more nor less than his just desert, would be accepted as such. But a failure of this kind serves an opposite purpose to a mind in which the strongest and richest qualities lie deep, and, from their very size and mass, cannot at once be rendered available. It provokes an innate self-confidence, while, at the same time, it sternly indicates the sedulous cultivation, the earnest effort, the toil, the agony, which are the conditions of ultimate success. It is, indeed, one of the best modes of discipline that experience can administer, and may reasonably be counted a fortunate event in the life of a young man vigorous enough to overcome the momentary depression.

Pierce's distinction at the bar, however, did not immediately follow; nor did he acquire what we may designate as positive eminence until some years after this period. The enticements of political life—so especially fascinating to a young lawyer, but so irregular in its tendencies, and so inimical to steady professional labor—had begun to

operate upon him. His father's prominent position in the politics of the state made it almost impossible that the son should stand aloof. In 1827, the same year when Franklin began the practice of the law, General Benjamin Pierce had been elected governor of New Hampshire. He was defeated in the election of 1828, but was again successful in that of the subsequent year. During these years, the contest for the presidency had been fought with a fervor that drew almost every body into it, on one side or the other, and had terminated in the triumph of Andrew Jackson. Franklin Pierce, in advance of his father's decision, though not in opposition to it, had declared himself for the illustrious man, whose military renown was destined to be thrown into the shade by a civil administration the most splendid and powerful that ever adorned the annals of our country. I love to record of the subject of this memoir, that his first political faith was pledged to that great leader of the democracy.

I remember meeting Pierce, about this period, and catching from him some faint reflection of the zeal with which he was now stepping into the political arena. My sympathies and opinions, it is true,—so far as I had any in public affairs,—had, from the first, been enlisted on the same side with his own. But I was now made strongly sensible of an increased development of my friend's mind, by means of which he possessed a vastly greater power, than heretofore, over the minds with which

he came in contact. This progressive growth has continued to be one of his remarkable characteristics. Of most men you early know the mental gauge and measurement, and do not subsequently have much occasion to change it. Not so with Pierce: his tendency was not merely high, but towards a point which rose higher and higher, as the aspirant tended upward. Since we parted, studious days had educated him; life, too, and his own exertions in it, and his native habit of close and accurate observation, had likewise begun to educate him.

The town of Hillsborough, in 1829, gave Franklin Pierce his first public honor, by electing him its representative in the legislature of the state. His whole service in that body comprised four years, in the two latter of which he was elected speaker by a vote of one hundred and fifty-five, against fifty-eight for other candidates. This overpowering majority evinced the confidence which his character inspired, and which, during his whole career, it has invariably commanded, in advance of what might be termed positive proof, although the result has never failed to justify it. I still recollect his description of the feelings with which he entered on his arduous duties—the feverish night that preceded his taking the chair—the doubt, the struggle with himself—all ending in perfect calmness, full self-possession, and free power of action, when the crisis actually came.

He had all the natural gifts that adapted him for the post; courtesy, firmness, quickness and accuracy of judgment, and a clearness of mental perception that brought its own regularity into the scene of confused and entangled debate; and to these qualities he added whatever was to be attained by laborious study of parliamentary rules. His merit as a presiding officer was universally acknowledged. It is rare that a man combines so much impulse with so great a power of regulating the impulses of himself and others as Franklin Pierce. The faculty, here exercised and improved, of controlling an assembly while agitated by tumultuous controversy, was afterwards called into play upon a higher field; for, during his congressional service, Pierce was often summoned to preside in committee of the whole, when a turbulent debate was expected to demand peculiar energy in the chair.

He was elected a member of Congress in 1833; being young for the station, as he has always been for every public station that he has filled. A different kind of man—a man conscious that accident alone had elevated him, and therefore nervously anxious to prove himself equal to his fortunes—would thus have been impelled to spasmodic efforts. He would have thrust himself forward in debate, taking the word out of the mouths of renowned orators, and thereby winning notoriety, as at least the glittering counterfeit of true

celebrity. Had Pierce, with his genuine ability, practised this course, had he possessed even an ordinary love of display, and had he acted upon it with his inherent tact and skill, taking advantage of fair occasions to prove the power and substance that were in him, it would greatly have facilitated the task of his biographer.

To aim at personal distinction, however, as an object independent of the public service, would have been contrary to all the foregone and subsequent manifestations of his life. He was never wanting to the occasion; but he waited for the occasion to bring him inevitably forward. When he spoke, it was not only because he was fully master of the subject, but because the exigency demanded him, and because no other and older man could perform the same duty as well as himself. Of the copious eloquence — and some of it, no doubt, of a high order — which Buncombe has called forth, not a paragraph, nor a period, is attributable to Franklin Pierce. He had no need of these devices to fortify his constituents in their high opinion of him; nor did he fail to perceive that such was not the method to acquire real weight in the body of which he was a member. In truth, he has no fluency of words, except when an earnest meaning and purpose supply their own expression. Every one of his speeches in Congress, and, we may say, in every other hall of oratory, or on any stump that he may have mounted,

was drawn forth by the perception that it was needed, was directed to a full exposition of the subject, and (rarest of all) was limited by what he really had to say. Even the graces of the orator were never elaborated, never assumed for their own sake, but were legitimately derived from the force of his conceptions, and from the impulsive warmth which accompanies the glow of thought. Owing to these peculiarities, — for such, unfortunately, they may be termed, in reference to what are usually the characteristics of a legislative career, — his position before the country was less conspicuous than that of many men, who could claim nothing like Pierce's actual influence in the national councils. His speeches, in their muscular texture and close grasp of their subject, resembled the brief but pregnant arguments and expositions of the sages of the Continental Congress, rather than the immeasurable harangues which are now the order of the day.

His congressional life, though it made comparatively so little show, was full of labor, directed to substantial objects. He was a member of the judiciary and other important committees; and the drudgery of the committee room, where so much of the real public business of the country is transacted, fell in large measure to his lot. Thus, even as a legislator, he may be said to have been a man of deeds, not words; and when he spoke upon any subject with which his duty, as chair-

man or member of a committee, had brought him in relation, his words had the weight of deeds, from the meaning, the directness, and the truth, that he conveyed into them. His merits made themselves known and felt in the sphere where they were exercised; and he was early appreciated by one who seldom erred in his estimate of men, whether in their moral or intellectual aspect. His intercourse with President Jackson was frequent and free, and marked by friendly regard on the part of the latter. In the stormiest periods of his administration, Pierce came frankly to his aid. The confidence then established was never lost; and when Jackson was on his death bed, being visited by a gentleman from the north, (himself formerly a democratic member of Congress,) the old hero spoke with energy of Franklin Pierce's ability and patriotism, and remarked, as if with prophetic foresight of his young friend's destiny, that "the interests of the country would be safe in such hands."

One of President Jackson's measures, which had Pierce's approval and support, was his veto of the Maysville Road bill. This bill was part of a system of vast public works, principally railroads and canals, which it was proposed to undertake at the expense of the national treasury — a policy not then of recent origin, but which had been fostered by John Quincy Adams, and had attained a gigantic growth at the close of his presidency. The estimate of works undertaken, or projected, at the com-

mencement of Jackson's administration, amounted to considerably more than a hundred millions of dollars. The expenditure of this enormous sum, and doubtless of other incalculable amounts, in progressive increase, was to be for purposes often of unascertained utility, and was to pass through the agents and officers of the federal government — a means of political corruption not safely to be trusted even in the purest hands. The peril to the individuality of the states, from a system tending so directly to consolidate the powers of government towards a common centre, was obvious. The result might have been, with the lapse of time and the increased activity of the disease, to place the capital of our federative Union in a position resembling that of imperial Rome, where each once independent state was a subject province, and all the highways of the world were said to meet in her forum. It was against this system, so dangerous to liberty, and to public and private integrity, that Jackson declared war, by the famous Maysville veto.

It would be an absurd interpretation of Pierce's course, in regard to this and similar measures, to suppose him hostile either to internal or coastwise improvements, so far as they may legitimately be the business of the general government. He was aware of the immense importance of our internal commerce, and was ever ready to vote such appropriations as might be necessary for promoting it,

when asked for in an honest spirit, and at points where they were really needed. He doubted, indeed, the constitutional power of Congress to undertake, by building roads through the wilderness, or opening unfrequented rivers, to create commerce where it did not yet exist; but he never denied or questioned the right and duty to remove obstructions in the way of inland trade, and to afford it every facility, when the nature and necessity of things had brought it into genuine existence. And he agreed with the best and wisest statesmen in believing that this distinction involved the true principle on which legislation, for the purpose here discussed, should proceed.

While a member of the House of Representatives, he delivered a forcible speech against the bill authorizing appropriations for the Military Academy at West Point. He was decidedly opposed to that institution, as then and at present organized. We allude to the subject in illustration of the generous frankness with which, years afterwards, when the battle smoke of Mexico had baptized him also a soldier, he acknowledged himself in the wrong, and bore testimony to the brilliant services which the graduates of the Academy, trained to soldiership from boyhood, had rendered to their country. And if he has made no other such acknowledgment of past error, committed in his legislative capacity, it is but fair to believe that it is because his reason and conscience accuse him of no other wrong.

It was while in the lower house of Congress, that Franklin Pierce took that stand on the slavery question, from which he has never since swerved a hair's breadth. He fully recognized, by his votes and by his voice, the rights pledged to the south by the constitution. This, at the period when he so declared himself, was comparatively an easy thing to do. But when it became more difficult, when the first imperceptible movement of agitation had grown to be almost a convulsion, his course was still the same. Nor did he ever shun the obloquy that sometimes threatened to pursue the northern man, who dared to love that great and sacred reality—his whole, united, native country—better than the mistiness of a philanthropic theory.

He continued in the House of Representatives four years. If, at this period of his life, he rendered unobtrusive, though not unimportant, services to the public, it must also have been a time of vast intellectual advantage to himself. Amidst great national affairs, he was acquiring the best of all educations for future eminence and leadership. In the midst of statesmen, he grew to be a statesman. Studious, as all his speeches prove him to be, of history, he beheld it demonstrating itself before his eyes. As regards this sort of training, much of its good or ill effect depends on the natural force and depth of the man. Many, no doubt, by early mixture with politics, become the mere

politicians of the moment, — a class of men sufficiently abundant among us, — acquiring only a knack and cunning, which guide them tolerably well through immediate difficulties, without instructing them in the great rules of higher policy. But when the actual observation of public measures goes hand in hand with study, when the mind is capable of comparing the present with its analogies in the past, and of grasping the principle that belongs to both, this is to have history for a living tutor. If the student be fit for such instruction, he will be seen to act afterwards with the elevation of a high ideal, and with the expediency, the sagacity, the instinct of what is fit and practicable, which make the advantage of the man of actual affairs over the mere theorist.

And it was another advantage of his being brought early into the sphere of national interests, and continuing there for a series of years, that it enabled him to overcome any narrow and sectional prejudices. Without loving New England less, he loved the broad area of the country more. He thus retained that equal sentiment of patriotism for the whole land, with which his father had imbued him, and which is perhaps apt to be impaired in the hearts of those who come late to the national legislature, after long training in the narrower fields of the separate states. His sense of the value of the Union, which had been taught him at the fireside, from earliest infancy, by the

stories of patriotic valor that he there heard, was now strengthened by friendly association with its representatives from every quarter. It is this youthful sentiment of Americanism, so happily developed by after circumstances, that we see operating through all his public life, and making him as tender of what he considers due to the south, as of the rights of his own land of hills.

Franklin Pierce had scarcely reached the legal age for such elevation, when, in 1837, he was elected to the Senate of the United States. He took his seat at the commencement of the presidency of Mr. Van Buren. Never before nor since has the Senate been more venerable for the array of veteran and celebrated statesmen, than at that time. Calhoun, Webster, and Clay, had lost nothing of their intellectual might. Benton, Silas Wright, Woodbury, Buchanan, and Walker, were members; and many even of the less eminent names were such as have gained historic place — men of powerful eloquence, and worthy to be leaders of the respective parties which they espoused. To this dignified body (composed of individuals some of whom were older in political experience than he in his mortal life) Pierce came as the youngest member of the Senate. 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 theatre 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.

Modes of public service remained, however, requiring high ability, but with which few men of competent endowments would have been content to occupy themselves. Pierce had already demonstrated the possibility of obtaining an enviable position among his associates, without the windy notoriety which a member of Congress may readily manufacture for himself by the lavish expenditure of breath that had been better spared. In the more elevated field of the Senate, he pursued the same course as while a representative, and with more than equal results.

Among other committees, he was a member of that upon revolutionary pensions. Of this subject he made himself thoroughly master, and was recognized by the Senate as an unquestionable authority. In 1840, in reference to several bills for the relief of claimants under the pension law, he delivered a speech which finely illustrates as well the sympathies as the justice of the man, showing how vividly he could feel, and, at the same time, how powerless were his feelings to turn him aside from the strict line of public integrity. The merits and sacrifices of the people of the revolution have never been stated with more earnest gratitude than in the following passage:—

“I am not insensible, Mr. President, of the advantages with which claims of this character always come before Congress. They are supposed to be based on services for which no man entertains a higher estimate than myself—services beyond all praise, and above all price. But, while warm and glowing with the glorious recollections which a recurrence to that period of our history can never fail to awaken; while we cherish with emotions of pride, reverence, and affection the memory of those brave men who are no longer with us; while we provide, with a liberal hand, for such as survive, and for the widows of the deceased; while we would accord to the heirs, whether in the second or third generation, every dollar to which they can establish a just claim,—I trust we shall not, in the strong current of our sympathies, forget what becomes us as the descendants of such men. They would teach us to legislate upon our judgment, upon our sober sense of right, and not upon our impulses or our sympathies. No, sir; we may act in this way, if we choose, when dispensing our own means, but we are not at liberty to do it when dispensing the means of our constituents.

“If we were to legislate upon our sympathies—yet more I will admit—if we were to yield to that sense of just and grateful remuneration which presses itself upon every man’s heart, there would be scarcely a limit for our bounty. The whole exchequer could not answer the demand. To the

patriotism, the courage, and the sacrifices of the people of that day, we owe, under Providence, all that we now most highly prize, and what we shall transmit to our children as the richest legacy they can inherit. The war of the revolution, it has been justly remarked, was not a war of armies merely — it was the war of nearly a whole people, and such a people as the world had never before seen, in a death struggle for liberty.

“The losses, sacrifices, and sufferings of that period were common to all classes and conditions of life. Those who remained at home suffered hardly less than those who entered upon the active strife. The aged father and mother underwent not less than the son, who would have been the comfort and stay of their declining years, now called to perform a yet higher duty — to follow the standard of his bleeding country. The young mother, with her helpless children, excites not less deeply our sympathies, contending with want, and dragging out years of weary and toilsome days and anxious nights, than the husband in the field, following the fortunes of our arms without the common habiliments to protect his person, or the requisite sustenance to support his strength. Sir, I never think of that patient, enduring, self-sacrificing army, which crossed the Delaware in December, 1777, marching barefooted upon frozen ground to encounter the foe, and leaving bloody footprints for miles behind them — I never think

of their sufferings during that terrible winter without involuntarily inquiring, Where then were their families? Who lit up the cheerful fire upon their hearths at home? Who spoke the word of comfort and encouragement? Nay, sir, who furnished protection from the rigors of winter, and brought them the necessary means of subsistence?

“The true and simple answer to these questions would disclose an amount of suffering and anguish, mental and physical, such as might not have been found in the ranks of the armies — not even in the severest trial of that fortitude which never faltered, and that power of endurance which seemed to know no limit. All this no man feels more deeply than I do. But they were common sacrifices in a common cause, ultimately crowned with the reward of liberty. They have an everlasting claim upon our gratitude, and are destined, as I trust, by their heroic example, to exert an abiding influence upon our latest posterity.”

With this heartfelt recognition of the debt of gratitude due to those excellent men, the senator enters into an analysis of the claims presented, and proves them to be void of justice. The whole speech is a good exponent of his character; full of the truest sympathy, but, above all things, just, and not to be misled, on the public behalf, by those impulses that would be most apt to sway the private man. The mere pecuniary amount, saved to the nation by his scrutiny into affairs of this

kind, though great, was, after all, but a minor consideration. The danger lay in establishing a corrupt system, and placing a wrong precedent upon the statute book. Instances might be adduced, on the other hand, which show him not less scrupulous of the just rights of the claimants, than careful of the public interests.

Another subject upon which he came forward was the military establishment, and the natural defences of the country. In looking through the columns of the Congressional Globe, we find abundant evidences of Senator Pierce's laborious and unostentatious discharge of his duties — reports of committees, brief remarks, and, here and there, a longer speech, always full of matter, and evincing a thoroughly-digested knowledge of the subject. Not having been written out by himself, however, these speeches are no fair specimens of his oratory, except as regards the train of argument and substantial thought; and adhering very closely to the business in hand, they seldom present passages that could be quoted, without tearing them forcibly, as it were, out of the context, and thus mangling the fragments which we might offer to the reader. As we have already remarked, he seems, as a debater, to revive the old type of the Revolutionary Congress, or to bring back the noble days of the Long Parliament of England, before eloquence had become what it is now, a knack, and a thing valued for itself. Like those strenuous

orators, he speaks with the earnestness of honest conviction, and out of the fervor of his heart, and because the occasion and his deep sense of it constrain him.

By the defeat of Mr. Van Buren, in the presidential election of 1840, the administration of government was transferred, for the first time in twelve years, to the whigs. An extra session of Congress was summoned to assemble in June, 1841, by President Harrison, who, however, died before it came together. At this extra session, it was the purpose of the whig party, under the leadership of Henry Clay, to overthrow all the great measures which the successive democratic administrations had established. The sub-treasury was to be demolished; a national bank was to be incorporated; a high tariff of duties was to be imposed, for purposes of protection and abundant revenue. The whig administration possessed a majority, both in the Senate and the House. It was a dark period for the democracy, so long unaccustomed to defeat, and now beholding all that they had won for the cause of national progress, after the arduous struggle of so many years, apparently about to be swept away.

The sterling influence which Franklin Pierce now exercised is well described in the following remarks of the Hon. A. O. P. Nicholson:—

“The power of an organized minority was never more clearly exhibited than in this contest. The

democratic senators acted in strict concert, meeting night after night for consultation, arranging their plan of battle, selecting their champions for the coming day, assigning to each man his proper duty, and looking carefully to the popular judgment for a final victory. In these consultations, no man's voice was heard with more profound respect than that of Franklin Pierce. His counsels were characterized by so thorough a knowledge of human nature, by so much solid common sense, by such devotion to democratic principles, that, although among the youngest of the senators, it was deemed important that all their conclusions should be submitted to his sanction.

“Although known to be ardent in his temperament, he was also known to act with prudence and caution. His impetuosity in debate was only the result of the deep convictions which controlled his mind. He enjoyed the unbounded confidence of Calhoun, Buchanan, Wright, Woodbury, Walker, King, Benton, and indeed of the entire democratic portion of the Senate. When he rose in the Senate or in the committee room, he was heard with the profoundest attention; and again and again was he greeted by these veteran democrats as one of our ablest champions. His speeches, during this session, will compare with those of any other senator. If it be asked, why he did not receive higher distinction, I answer, that such men as Calhoun, Wright, Buchanan, and Woodbury, were the ac-

knowledged leaders of the democracy. The eyes of the nation were on them. The hopes of their party were reposed in them. The brightness of these luminaries was too great to allow the brilliancy of so young a man to attract especial attention. But ask any one of these veterans how Franklin Pierce ranked in the Senate, and he will tell you, that, to stand in the front rank for talents, eloquence, and statesmanship, he only lacked a few more years.”

In the course of this session, he made a very powerful speech in favor of Mr. Buchanan's resolution, calling on the president to furnish the names of persons removed from office since the 4th of March, 1841. The whigs, in 1840, as in the subsequent canvass of 1848, had professed a purpose to abolish the system of official removals on account of political opinion, but, immediately on coming into power, had commenced a proscription infinitely beyond the example of the democratic party. This course, with an army of office seekers besieging the departments, was unquestionably difficult to avoid, and perhaps, on the whole, not desirable to be avoided. But it was rendered astounding by the sturdy effrontery with which the gentlemen in power denied that their present practice had falsified any of their past professions. A few of the closing paragraphs of Senator Pierce's highly effective speech, being more easily separable than the rest, may here be cited.

“One word more, and I leave this subject—a painful one to me, from the beginning to the end. The senator from North Carolina, in the course of his remarks, the other day, asked, ‘Do gentlemen expect that their friends are to be retained in office against the will of the nation? Are they so unreasonable as to expect what the circumstances and the *necessity* of the case forbid?’ What our expectations were is not the question now; but what were your pledges and promises before the people. On a previous occasion, the distinguished senator from Kentucky made a similar remark: ‘*An ungracious task, but the nation demands it!*’ Sir, this demand of the nation,—this plea of STATE NECESSITY,—let me tell gentlemen, is as old as the history of wrong and oppression. It has been the standing plea, the never-failing resort of despotism.

“The great Julius found it a convenient plea when he restored the *dignity* of the Roman Senate, but destroyed its *independence*. It gave countenance to, and justified, all the atrocities of the Inquisition in Spain. It forced out the stifled groans that issued from the Black Hole of Calcutta. It was written in tears upon the Bridge of Sighs in Venice, and pointed to those dark recesses upon whose gloomy thresholds there was never seen a returning footprint.

“It was the plea of the austere and ambitious Strafford, in the days of Charles I. It filled the

Bastille of France, and lent its sanction to the terrible atrocities perpetrated there. It was this plea that snatched the mild, eloquent, and patriotic Camille Desmoulins from his young and beautiful wife, and hurried him to the guillotine, with thousands of others, equally unoffending and innocent. It was upon this plea that the greatest of generals, if not men,—you cannot mistake me,—I mean him, the presence of whose very ashes, within the last few months, sufficed to stir the hearts of a continent,—it was upon this plea that he abjured the noble wife who had thrown light and gladness around his humbler days, and, by her own lofty energies and high intellect, had encouraged his aspirations. It was upon this plea that he committed that worst and most fatal act of his eventful life. Upon this, too, he drew around his person the imperial purple. It has in all times, and in every age, been the foe of liberty, and the indispensable stay of usurpation.

“Where were the chains of despotism ever thrown around the freedom of speech and of the press, but on this plea of STATE NECESSITY? Let the spirit of Charles X. and of his ministers answer.

“It is cold, selfish, heartless, and has always been regardless of age, sex, condition, services, or any of the incidents of life that appeal to patriotism or humanity. Wherever its authority has been acknowledged, it has assailed men who stood

by their country when she needed strong arms and bold hearts, and has assailed them when, maimed and disabled in her service, they could no longer brandish a weapon in her defence. It has afflicted the feeble and dependent wife for the imaginary faults of the husband. It has stricken down Innocence in its beauty, Youth in its freshness, Manhood in its vigor, and Age in its feebleness and decrepitude. Whatever other plea or apology may be set up for the sweeping, ruthless exercise of this civil guillotine at the present day, in the name of LIBERTY let us be spared this fearful one of STATE NECESSITY, in this early age of the republic, upon the floor of the American Senate, in the face of a people yet free!"

In June, 1842, he signified his purpose of retiring from the Senate.

It was now more than sixteen years since the author of this sketch had been accustomed to meet Frank Pierce (that familiar name, which the nation is adopting as one of its household words) in habits of daily intercourse. Our modes of life had since been as different as could well be imagined; our culture and labor were entirely unlike; there was hardly a single object or aspiration in common between us. Still we had occasionally met, and always on the old ground of friendly confidence. There were sympathies that had not been suffered to die out. Had we lived more constantly together, it is not impossible that the relation might have

been changed by the various accidents and attritions of life; but having no mutual events, and few mutual interests, the tie of early friendship remained the same as when we parted. The modifications which I saw in his character were those of growth and development; new qualities came out, or displayed themselves more prominently, but always in harmony with those heretofore known. Always I was sensible of progress in him; a characteristic — as, I believe, has been said in the foregoing pages — more perceptible in Franklin Pierce than in any other person with whom I have been acquainted. He widened, deepened, rose to a higher point, and thus ever made himself equal to the ever-heightening occasion. This peculiarity of intellectual growth, continued beyond the ordinary period, has its analogy in his physical constitution — it being a fact that he continued to grow in stature between his twenty-first and twenty-fifth years.

He had not met with that misfortune, which, it is to be feared, befalls many men who throw their ardor into politics. The pursuit had taken nothing from the frankness of his nature; now, as ever, he used direct means to gain honorable ends; and his subtlety — for, after all, his heart and purpose were not such as he that runs may read — had the depth of wisdom, and never any quality of cunning. In great part, this undeteriorated manhood was due to his original nobility of nature. Yet it may not

be unjust to attribute it, in some degree, to the singular good fortune of his life. He had never, in all his career, found it necessary to stoop. Office had sought him; he had not begged it, nor manœuvred for it, nor crept towards it—arts which too frequently bring a man, morally bowed and degraded, to a position which should be one of dignity, but in which he will vainly essay to stand upright.

In our earlier meetings, after Pierce had begun to come forward in public life, I could discern that his ambition was aroused. He felt a young man's enjoyment of success, so early and so distinguished. But as years went on, such motives seemed to be less influential with him. He was cured of ambition, as, one after another, its objects came to him unsought. His domestic position, likewise, had contributed to direct his tastes and wishes towards the pursuits of private life. In 1834, he had married Jane Means, a daughter of the Rev. Dr. Appleton, a former president of Bowdoin College. Three sons, the first of whom died in early infancy, were born to him; and, having hitherto been kept poor by his public service, he no doubt became sensible of the expediency of making some provision for the future. Such, it may be presumed, were the considerations that induced his resignation of the senatorship, greatly to the regret of all parties. The senators gathered around him, as he was about to quit the chamber; political opponents took leave of him as of a personal friend;

and no departing member has ever retired from that dignified body amid warmer wishes for his happiness than those that attended Franklin Pierce.

His father had died three years before, in 1839, at the mansion which he built, after the original log cabin grew too narrow for his rising family and fortunes. The mansion was spacious, as the liberal hospitality of the occupant required, and stood on a little eminence, surrounded by verdure and abundance, and a happy population, where, half a century before, the revolutionary soldier had come alone into the wilderness, and levelled the primeval forest trees. After being spared to behold the distinction of his son, he departed this life at the age of eighty-one years, in perfect peace, and, until within a few hours of his death, in the full possession of his intellectual powers. His last act was one of charity to a poor neighbor—a fitting close to a life that had abounded in such deeds. Governor Pierce was a man of admirable qualities—brave, active, public-spirited, endowed with natural authority, courteous yet simple in his manners; and in his son we may perceive these same attributes, modified and softened by a finer texture of character, illuminated by higher intellectual culture, and polished by a larger intercourse with the world, but as substantial and sterling as in the good old patriot.

Franklin Pierce had removed from Hillsborough in 1838, and taken up his residence at Concord, the

capital of New Hampshire. On this occasion, the citizens of his native town invited him to a public dinner, in token of their affection and respect. In accordance with his usual taste, he gratefully accepted the kindly sentiment, but declined the public demonstration of it.