

CHAPTER V.

HIS SERVICES IN THE VALLEY OF MEXICO.

GENERAL SCOTT, who was at Puebla with the main army, awaiting this reënforcement, began his march towards the city of Mexico on the day after General Pierce's arrival. The battle of Contreras was fought on the 19th of August.

The enemy's force consisted of about seven thousand men, posted in a strongly-intrenched camp, under General Valencia, one of the bravest and ablest of the Mexican commanders. The object of the commanding general appears to have been to cut off the communications of these detached troops with Santa Anna's main army, and thus to have them entirely at his mercy. For this purpose, a portion of the American forces were ordered to move against Valencia's left flank, and, by occupying strong positions in the villages and on the roads towards the city, to prevent reënforcements from reaching him. In the mean time, to draw the enemy's attention from this movement, a vigorous onset was made upon his front; and as the operations upon his flank were not immediately and fully carried out according to the plan, this front demonstration assumed the character of a

fierce and desperate attack, upon which the fortunes of the day much depended. General Pierce's brigade formed a part of the force engaged in this latter movement, in which four thousand newly-recruited men, unable to bring their artillery to bear, contended against seven thousand disciplined soldiers, protected by intrenchments, and showering round shot and shells against the assailing troops.

The ground in front was of the rudest and roughest character. The troops made their way with difficulty over a broken tract, called the Pedregal, bristling with sharp points of rocks, and which is represented as having been the crater of a now exhausted and extinct volcano. The enemy had thrown out skirmishers, who were posted in great force among the crevices and inequalities of this broken ground, and vigorously resisted the American advance; while the artillery of the intrenched camp played upon our troops, and shattered the very rocks over which they were to pass.

General Pierce's immediate command had never before been under such a fire of artillery. The enemy's range was a little too high, or the havoc in our ranks must have been dreadful. In the midst of this fire, General Pierce, being the only officer mounted in the brigade, leaped his horse upon an abrupt eminence, and addressed the colonels and captains of the regiments, as they passed, in a few stirring words — reminding them of the

honor of their country, of the victory their steady valor would contribute to achieve. Pressing forward to the head of the column, he had nearly reached the practicable ground that lay beyond, when his horse slipped among the rocks, thrust his foot into a crevice, and fell, breaking his own leg, and crushing his rider heavily beneath him.

Pierce's mounted orderly soon came to his assistance. The general was stunned, and almost insensible. When partially recovered, he found himself suffering from severe bruises, and especially from a sprain of the left knee, which was undermost when the horse came down. The orderly assisted him to reach the shelter of a projecting rock; and as they made their way thither, a shell fell close beside them, and exploded, covering them with earth. "That was a lucky miss," said Pierce calmly. Leaving him in such shelter as the rock afforded, the orderly went in search of aid, and was fortunate to meet with Dr. Ritchie, of Virginia, who was attached to Pierce's brigade, and was following in close proximity to the advancing column. The doctor administered to him as well as the circumstances would admit. Immediately on recovering his full consciousness, General Pierce had become anxious to rejoin his troops; and now, in opposition to Dr. Ritchie's advice and remonstrances, he determined to proceed to the front.

With pain and difficulty, and leaning on his orderly's arm, he reached the battery commanded

by Captain McGruder, where he found the horse of Lieutenant Johnson, who had just before received a mortal wound. In compliance with his wishes, he was assisted into the saddle; and, in answer to a remark that he would be unable to keep his seat, "Then," said the general, "you must tie me on." Whether this precaution was actually taken is a point on which authorities differ; but at all events, with injuries so severe as would have sent almost any other man to the hospital, he rode forward into the battle.

The contest was kept up until nightfall, without forcing Valencia's intrenchment. General Pierce remained in the saddle until eleven o'clock at night. Finding himself, at nine o'clock, the senior officer in the field, he, in that capacity, withdrew the troops from their advanced position, and concentrated them at the point where they were to pass the night. At eleven, beneath a torrent of rain, destitute of a tent or other protection, and without food or refreshment, he lay down on an ammunition wagon, but was prevented by the pain of his injuries, especially that of his wounded knee, from finding any repose. At one o'clock came orders from General Scott to put the brigade into a new position, in front of the enemy's works, preparatory to taking part in the contemplated operations of the next morning. During the night, the troops appointed for that service, under Riley, Shields, Smith, and Cadwallader, had occupied the villages and roads

between Valencia's position and the city; so that, with daylight, the commanding general's scheme of the battle was ready to be carried out, as it had originally existed in his mind.

At daylight, accordingly, Valencia's intrenched camp was assaulted. General Pierce was soon in the saddle, at the head of his brigade, which retained its position in front, thus serving to attract the enemy's attention, and divert him from the true point of attack. The camp was stormed in the rear by the American troops, led on by Riley, Cadwallader, and Dimmick; and in the short space of seventeen minutes it had fallen into the hands of the assailants, together with a multitude of prisoners. The remnant of the routed enemy fled towards Churubusco. As Pierce led his brigade in pursuit, crossing the battle field, and passing through the works that had just been stormed, he found the road and adjacent fields every where strewn with the dead and dying. The pursuit was continued until one o'clock, when the foremost of the Americans arrived in front of the strong Mexican positions at Churubusco and San Antonio, where Santa Anna's army had been compelled to make a stand, and where the great conflict of the day commenced.

General Santa Anna entertained the design of withdrawing his forces towards the city. In order to intercept this movement, Pierce's brigade, with other troops, was ordered to pursue a route by which the enemy could be attacked in the rear.

Colonel Noah E. Smith (a patriotic American, long resident in Mexico, whose local and topographical knowledge proved eminently serviceable) had offered to point out the road, and was sent to summon General Pierce to the presence of the commander-in-chief. When he met Pierce, near Coyacan, at the head of his brigade, the heavy fire of the batteries had commenced. "He was exceedingly thin," writes Colonel Smith, "worn down by the fatigue and pain of the day and night before, and then evidently suffering severely. Still, there was a glow in his eye, as the cannon boomed, that showed within him a spirit ready for the conflict." He rode up to General Scott, who was at this time sitting on horseback beneath a tree, near the church of Coyacan, issuing orders to different individuals of his staff. Our account of this interview is chiefly taken from the narrative of Colonel Smith, corroborated by other testimony.

The commander-in-chief had already heard of the accident that befell Pierce the day before; and as the latter approached, General Scott could not but notice the marks of pain and physical exhaustion, against which only the sturdiest constancy of will could have enabled him to bear up. "Pierce, my dear fellow," said he, — and that epithet of familiar kindness and friendship, upon the battle field, was the highest of military commendation from such a man, — "you are badly injured; you are not fit to be in your saddle." "Yes, general,

I am," replied Pierce, "in a case like this." "You cannot touch your foot to the stirrup," said Scott. "One of them I can," answered Pierce. The general looked again at Pierce's almost disabled figure, and seemed on the point of taking his irrevocable resolution. "You are rash, General Pierce," said he; "we shall lose you, and we cannot spare you. It is my duty to order you back to St. Augustine." "For God's sake, general," exclaimed Pierce, "don't say that! This is the last great battle, and I must lead my brigade!" The commander-in-chief made no further remonstrance, but gave the order for Pierce to advance with his brigade.

The way lay through thick standing corn, and over marshy ground intersected with ditches, which were filled, or partially so, with water. Over some of the narrower of these Pierce leaped his horse. When the brigade had advanced about a mile, however, it found itself impeded by a ditch ten or twelve feet wide, and six or eight feet deep. It being impossible to leap it, General Pierce was lifted from his saddle, and, in some incomprehensible way, hurt as he was, contrived to wade or scramble across this obstacle, leaving his horse on the hither side. The troops were now under fire. In the excitement of the battle, he forgot his injury, and hurried forward, leading the brigade, a distance of two or three hundred yards. But the exhaustion of his frame, and particularly the anguish of his knee, — made more intolerable by such

free use of it, — was greater than any strength of nerve, or any degree of mental energy, could struggle against. He fell, faint and almost insensible, within full range of the enemy's fire. It was proposed to bear him off the field; but, as some of his soldiers approached to lift him, he became aware of their purpose, and was partially revived by his determination to resist it. "No," said he, with all the strength he had left, "don't carry me off! Let me lie here!" And there he lay, under the tremendous fire of Churubusco, until the enemy, in total rout, was driven from the field.

Immediately after the victory, when the city of Mexico lay at the mercy of the American commander, and might have been entered that very night, Santa Anna sent a flag of truce, proposing an armistice, with a view to negotiations for peace. It cannot be considered in any other light than as a very high and signal compliment to his gallantry in the field, that General Pierce was appointed, by the commander-in-chief, one of the commissioners on our part, together with General Quitman and General Persifer F. Smith, to arrange the terms of this armistice. Pierce was unable to walk, or to mount his horse without assistance, when intelligence of his appointment reached him. He had not taken off his spurs, nor slept an hour, for two nights; but he immediately obeyed the summons, was assisted into the saddle, and rode to Tacubaya, where, at the house of the British consul general,

the American and Mexican commissioners were assembled. The conference began late in the afternoon, and continued till four o'clock the next morning, when the articles were signed. Pierce then proceeded to the quarters of General Worth, in the village of Tacubaya, where he obtained an hour or two of repose.

The expectation of General Scott, that further bloodshed might be avoided by means of the armistice, proved deceptive. Military operations, after a temporary interruption, were actively renewed; and on the 8th of September was fought the bloody battle of Molino del Rey, one of the fiercest and most destructive of the war.

In this conflict, General Worth, with three thousand troops, attacked and routed fourteen thousand Mexicans, driving them under the protection of the Castle of Chapultepec. Perceiving the obstinacy with which the field was contested, the commander-in-chief despatched an order to General Pierce to advance to the support of General Worth's division. He moved forward with rapidity; and although the battle was won just as he reached the field, he interposed his brigade between Worth and the retreating enemy, and thus drew upon himself the fire of Chapultepec. A shell came streaming from the castle, and, bursting within a few feet of him, startled his horse, which was near plunging over an adjacent precipice. Continuing a long time under fire, Pierce's brigade

was engaged in removing the wounded, and the captured ammunition. While thus occupied, he led a portion of his command to repel the attacks of the enemy's skirmishers.

There remained but one other battle, — that of Chapultepec, — which was fought on the 13th of September. On the preceding day, (although the injuries and the over-exertion, resulting from previous marches and battles, had greatly enfeebled him,) General Pierce had acted with his brigade. In obedience to orders, it had occupied the field of Molino del Rey. Contrary to expectation, it was found that the enemy's force had been withdrawn from this position. Pierce remained in the field until noon, when, it being certain that the anticipated attack would not take place before the following day, he returned to the quarters of General Worth, which were near at hand. There he became extremely ill, and was unable to leave his bed for the thirty-six hours next ensuing. In the mean time, the Castle of Chapultepec was stormed by the troops under Generals Pillow and Quitman. Pierce's brigade behaved itself gallantly, and suffered severely; and that accomplished officer, Colonel Ransom, leading the Ninth Regiment to the attack, was shot through the head, and fell, with many other brave men, in that last battle of the war.

The American troops, under Quitman and Worth, had established themselves within the

limits of the city, having possession of the gates of Belen and of San Cosma, but, up till nightfall, had met with a vigorous resistance from the Mexicans, led on by Santa Anna in person. They had still, apparently, a desperate task before them. It was anticipated, that, with the next morning's light, our troops would be ordered to storm the citadel, and the city of Mexico itself. When this was told to Pierce, upon his sick bed, he rose, and attempted to dress himself; but Captain Hardcastle, who had brought the intelligence from Worth, prevailed upon him to remain in bed, and not to exhaust his scanty strength, until the imminence of the occasion should require his presence. Pierce acquiesced for the time, but again arose, in the course of the night, and made his way to the trenches, where he reported himself to General Quitman, with whose division was a part of his brigade. Quitman's share in the anticipated assault, it was supposed, owing to the position which his troops occupied, would be more perilous than that of Worth.

But the last great battle had been fought. In the morning, it was discovered that the citadel had been abandoned, and that Santa Anna had withdrawn his army from the city.

There never was a more gallant body of officers than those who came from civil life into the army on occasion of the Mexican war. All of them, from the rank of general downward, appear to have

been animated by the spirit of young knights, in times of chivalry, when fighting for their spurs. Hitherto known only as peaceful citizens, they felt it incumbent on them, by daring and desperate valor, to prove their fitness to be intrusted with the guardianship of their country's honor. The old and trained soldier, already distinguished on former fields, was free to be discreet, as well as brave; but these untried warriors were in a different position, and therefore rushed on perils with a recklessness that found its penalty on every battle field—not one of which was won without a grievous sacrifice of the best blood of America. In this band of gallant men, it is not too much to say, General Pierce was as distinguished for what we must term his temerity in personal exposure, as for the higher traits of leadership, wherever there was an opportunity for their display.

He had manifested, moreover, other and better qualities than these, and such as it affords his biographer far greater pleasure to record. His tenderness of heart, his sympathy, his brotherly or paternal care for his men, had been displayed in a hundred instances, and had gained him the enthusiastic affection of all who served under his command. During the passage from America, under the tropics, he would go down into the stifling air of the hold, with a lemon, a cup of tea, and, better and more efficacious than all, a kind word, for the sick. While encamped before Vera Cruz, he gave

up his own tent to a sick comrade, and went himself to lodge in the pestilential city. On the march, and even on the battle field, he found occasion to exercise those feelings of humanity which show most beautifully there. And, in the hospitals of Mexico, he went among the diseased and wounded soldiers, cheering them with his voice and the magic of his kindness, inquiring into their wants, and relieving them to the utmost of his pecuniary means. There was not a man of his brigade but loved him, and would have followed him to death, or have sacrificed his own life in his general's defence.

The officers of the old army, whose profession was war, and who well knew what a soldier was, and ought to be, fully recognized his merit. An instance of their honorable testimony in his behalf may fitly be recorded here. It was after General Pierce had returned to the United States. At a dinner in the halls of Montezuma, at which forty or fifty of the brave men above alluded to were present, a young officer of the New England regiment was called on for a toast. He made an address, in which he spoke with irrepressible enthusiasm of General Pierce, and begged to propose his health. One of the officers of the old line rose, and observed, that none of the recently appointed generals commanded more unanimous and universal respect; that General Pierce had appreciated the scientific knowledge of the regular military men, and had acquired their respect by the independ-

ence, firmness, and promptitude, with which he exercised his own judgment, and acted on the intelligence derived from them. In concluding this tribute of high, but well-considered praise, the speaker very cordially acquiesced in the health of General Pierce, and proposed that it should be drunk standing, with three times three.

General Pierce remained in Mexico until December, when, as the warfare was over, and peace on the point of being concluded, he set out on his return. In nine months, crowded full of incident, he had seen far more of actual service than many professional soldiers during their whole lives. As soon as the treaty of peace was signed, he gave up his commission, and returned to the practice of the law, again proposing to spend the remainder of his days in the bosom of his family. All the dreams of his youth were now fulfilled; the military ardor, that had struck an hereditary root in his breast, had enjoyed its scope, and was satisfied; and he flattered himself that no circumstances could hereafter occur to draw him from the retirement of domestic peace. New Hampshire received him with pride and honor, and with even more enthusiastic affection than ever. At his departure, he had received a splendid sword at the hands of many of his friends, in token of their confidence; he had shown himself well worthy to wear, and able to use, a soldier's weapon; and his native state now gave him another, the testimonial of approved valor and warlike conduct.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPROMISE AND OTHER MATTERS.

THE intervening years, since General Pierce's return from Mexico, and until the present time, have been spent in the laborious exercise of the legal profession—an employment scarcely varied or interrupted, except by those episodes of political activity which a man of public influence finds it impossible to avoid, and in which, if his opinions are matter of conscience with him, he feels it his duty to interest himself.

In the presidential canvass of 1848, he used his best efforts (and with success, so far as New Hampshire was concerned) in behalf of the candidate of his party. A truer and better speech has never been uttered, on a similar occasion, than one which he made, (during a hurried half hour, snatched from the court room,) in October of the above year, before the democratic state convention, then in session at Concord. It is an invariable characteristic of General Pierce's popular addresses, that they evince a genuine respect for the people; he makes his appeal to their intelligence, their patriotism, and their integrity, and, never doubtful of their upright purpose, proves his faith in the great mind

and heart of the country both by what he says and by what he refrains from saying. He never yet was guilty of an effort to cajole his fellow-citizens, to operate upon their credulity, or to trick them even into what was right; and therefore all the victories which he has ever won in popular assemblies have been triumphs doubly honored, being as creditable to his audiences as to himself.

When the series of measures known under the collective term of The Compromise were passed by Congress, in 1850, and put to so searching a test, here at the north, the reverence of the people for the constitution, and their attachment to the Union, General Pierce was true to the principles which he had long ago avowed. At an early period of his congressional service, he had made known, with the perfect frankness of his character, those opinions upon the slavery question which he has never since seen occasion to change in the slightest degree. There is an unbroken consistency in his action with regard to this matter. It is entirely of a piece, from his first entrance upon public life until the moment when he came forward, while many were faltering, to throw the great weight of his character and influence into the scale in favor of those measures through which it was intended to redeem the pledges of the constitution, and to preserve and renew the old love and harmony among the sisterhood of states. His approval embraced the whole series of these acts, as well

those which bore hard upon northern views and sentiments as those in which the south deemed itself to have made more than reciprocal concessions.

No friend nor enemy, that knew Franklin Pierce, would have expected him to act otherwise. With his view of the whole subject, whether looking at it through the medium of his conscience, his feelings, or his intellect, it was impossible for him not to take his stand as the unshaken advocate of Union, and of the mutual steps of compromise which that great object unquestionably demanded. The fiercest, the least scrupulous, and the most consistent of those who battle against slavery recognize the same fact that he does. They see that merely human wisdom and human efforts cannot subvert it except by tearing to pieces the constitution, breaking the pledges which it sanctions, and severing into distracted fragments that common country which Providence brought into one nation, through a continued miracle of almost two hundred years, from the first settlement of the American wilderness until the revolution. In the days when, a young member of Congress, he first raised his voice against agitation, Pierce saw these perils and their consequences. He considered, too, that the evil would be certain, while the good was, at best, a contingency, and (to the clear, practical foresight with which he looked into the future) scarcely so much as that, attended, as the movement was and

must be, during its progress, with the aggravated injury of those whose condition it aimed to ameliorate, and terminating, in its possible triumph, — if such possibility there were, — with the ruin of two races which now dwelt together in greater peace and affection, it is not too much to say, than had ever elsewhere existed between the taskmaster and the serf.

Of course, there is another view of all these matters. The theorist may take that view in his closet; the philanthropist by profession may strive to act upon it uncompromisingly, amid the tumult and warfare of his life. But the statesman of practical sagacity — who loves his country as it is, and evolves good from things as they exist, and who demands to feel his firm grasp upon a better reality before he quits the one already gained — will be likely here, with all the greatest statesmen of America, to stand in the attitude of a conservative. Such, at all events, will be the attitude of Franklin Pierce. We have sketched some of the influences amid which he grew up, inheriting his father's love of country, mindful of the old patriot's valor in so many conflicts of the revolution, and having close before his eyes the example of brothers and relatives, more than one of whom have bled for America, both at the extremest north and farthest south; himself, too, in early manhood, serving the Union in its legislative halls, and, at a maturer age, leading his fellow-citizens, his brethren, from the widest-

sundered states, to redden the same battle fields with their kindred blood, to unite their breath into one shout of victory, and perhaps to sleep, side by side, with the same sod over them. Such a man, with such hereditary recollections, and such a personal experience, must not narrow himself to adopt the cause of one section of his native country against another. He will stand up, as he has always stood, among the patriots of the whole land. And if the work of anti-slavery agitation, which, it is undeniable, leaves most men who earnestly engage in it with only half a country in their affections — if this work must be done, let others do it.

Those northern men, therefore, who deem the great cause of human welfare all represented and involved in this present hostility against southern institutions, and who conceive that the world stands still except so far as that goes forward — these, it may be allowed, can scarcely give their sympathy or their confidence to the subject of this memoir. But there is still another view, and probably as wise a one. It looks upon slavery as one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream. There is no instance, in all history, of the human will

and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adapted to that end; but the progress of the world, at every step, leaves some evil or wrong on the path behind it, which the wisest of mankind, of their own set purpose, could never have found the way to rectify. Whatever contributes to the great cause of good, contributes to all its subdivisions and varieties; and, on this score, the lover of his race, the enthusiast, the philanthropist of whatever theory, might lend his aid to put a man, like the one before us, into the leadership of the world's affairs.

How firm and conscientious was General Pierce's support of the Compromise, may be estimated from his conduct in reference to the reverend John Atwood. In the foregoing pages it has come oftener in our way to illustrate the bland and prepossessing features of General Pierce's character, than those sterner ones which must necessarily form the bones, so to speak, the massive skeleton, of any man who retains an upright attitude amidst the sinister influences of public life. The transaction now alluded to affords a favorable opportunity for indicating some of these latter traits.

In October, 1850, a democratic convention, held at Concord, nominated Mr. Atwood as the party's regular candidate for governor. The Compromise, then recent, was inevitably a prominent element in the discussions of the convention; and a series of resolutions were adopted, bearing reference to

this great subject, fully and unreservedly indorsing the measures comprehended under it, and declaring the principles on which the Democracy of the state was about to engage in the gubernatorial contest. Mr. Atwood accepted the nomination, acceding to the platform thus tendered him, taking exceptions to none of the individual resolutions, and, of course, pledging himself to the whole by the very act of assuming the candidacy, which was predicated upon them.

The reverend candidate, we should conceive, is a well-meaning, and probably an amiable man. In ordinary circumstances, he would, doubtless, have gone through the canvass triumphantly, and have administered the high office to which he aspired with no discredit to the party that had placed him at its head. But the disturbed state of the public mind on the Compromise Question rendered the season a very critical one; and Mr. Atwood, unfortunately, had that fatal weakness of character, which, however respectably it may pass in quiet times, is always bound to make itself pitifully manifest under the pressure of a crisis. A letter was addressed to him by a committee, representing the party opposed to the Compromise, and with whom, it may be supposed, were included those who held the more thorough-going degrees of anti-slavery sentiment. The purpose of the letter was to draw out an expression of Mr. Atwood's opinion on the abolition movement generally, and with an especial

reference to the Fugitive Slave Law, and whether, as chief magistrate of the state, he would favor any attempt for its repeal. In an answer of considerable length, the candidate expressed sentiments that brought him unquestionably within the Free Soil pale, and favored his correspondents, moreover, with a pretty decided judgment as to the unconstitutional, unjust, and oppressive character of the Fugitive Slave act.

During a space of about two months, this very important document was kept from the public eye. Rumors of its existence, however, became gradually noised abroad, and necessarily attracted the attention of Mr. Atwood's democratic friends. Inquiries being made, he acknowledged the existence of the letter, but averred that it had never been delivered, that it was merely a rough draught, and that he had hitherto kept it within his own control, with a view to more careful consideration. In accordance with the advice of friends, he expressed a determination, and apparently in good faith, to suppress the letter, and thus to sever all connection with the anti-slavery party. This, however, was now beyond his power. A copy of the letter had been taken; it was published, with high commendations, in the anti-slavery newspapers; and Mr. Atwood was exhibited in the awkward predicament of directly avowing sentiments on the one hand which he had implicitly disavowed, on the other, of accepting a nomination based on principles diametrically opposite.

The candidate appears to have apprehended this disclosure, and he hurried to Concord, and sought counsel of General Pierce, with whom he was on terms of personal kindness, and between whom and himself, heretofore, there had never been a shade of political difference. An interview with the general and one or two other gentlemen ensued. Mr. Atwood was cautioned against saying or writing a word that might be repugnant to his feelings or his principles; but, voluntarily, and at his own suggestion, he now wrote, for publication, a second letter, in which he retracted every objectionable feature of his former one, and took decided ground in favor of the Compromise, including all its individual measures. Had he adhered to this latter position, he might have come out of the affair, if not with the credit of consistency, yet, at least, as a successful candidate in the impending election. But his evil fate, or, rather, the natural infirmity of his character, was not so to be thrown off. The very next day, unhappily, he fell into the hands of some of his anti-slavery friends, to whom he avowed a constant adherence to the principles of his first letter, describing the second as having been drawn from him by importunity, in an excited state of his mind, and without a full realization of its purport.

It would be needlessly cruel to Mr. Atwood to trace, with minuteness, the further details of this affair. It is impossible to withhold from him a

certain sympathy, or to avoid feeling that a very worthy man, as the world goes, had entangled himself in an inextricable knot of duplicity and tergiversation, by an ill-advised effort to be two opposite things at once. For the sake of true manhood, we gladly turn to consider the course adopted by General Pierce.

The election for governor was now at a distance of only a few weeks; and it could not be otherwise than a most hazardous movement for the democratic party, at so late a period, to discard a candidate with whom the people had become familiar. It involved nothing less than the imminent peril of that political supremacy which the party had so long enjoyed. With Mr. Atwood as candidate, success might still be considered certain. To a short-sighted and a weak man, it would have appeared the obvious policy to patch up the difficulty, and, at all events, to conquer, under whatever leadership, and with whatever allies. But it was one of those junctures which test the difference between the man of principle and the mere politician—the man of moral courage and him who yields to temporary expediency. General Pierce could not consent that his party should gain a nominal triumph, at the expense of what he looked upon as its real integrity and life. With this view of the matter, he had no hesitation in his course; nor could the motives which otherwise would have been strongest with him—pity for the

situation of an unfortunate individual, a personal friend, a democrat, as Mr. Atwood describes himself, of nearly fifty years' standing—incline him to mercy, where it would have been fatal to his sense of right. He took decided ground against Mr. Atwood. The convention met again, and nominated another candidate. Mr. Atwood went into the field as the candidate of the anti-slavery party, drew off a sufficient body of democrats to defeat the election by the people, but was himself defeated in the legislature.

Thus, after exhibiting to the eyes of mankind (or such portion of mankind as chanced to be looking in that direction) the absurd spectacle of a gentleman of extremely moderate stride attempting a feat that would have baffled a Colossus,—to support himself, namely, on both margins of the impassable chasm that has always divided the anti-slavery faction from the New Hampshire Democracy,—this ill-fated man attempted first to throw himself upon one side of the gulf, then on the other, and finally tumbled headlong into the bottomless depth between. His case presents a painful, but very curious and instructive instance of the troubles that beset weakness, in those emergencies which demand steadfast moral strength and energy—of which latter type of manly character there can be no truer example than Franklin Pierce.

In the autumn of 1850, in pursuance of a vote

of the people, a convention assembled at Concord for the revision of the constitution of New Hampshire. General Pierce was elected its president by an almost unanimous vote—a very high mark of the affectionate confidence which the state, for so long a time, and in such a variety of modes, had manifested in him. It was so much the higher, as the convention included New Hampshire's most eminent citizens, among whom was Judge Woodbury.

General Pierce's conduct, as presiding officer, was satisfactory to all parties; and one of his political opponents (Professor Sanborn, of Dartmouth College) has ably sketched him, both in that aspect and as a debater.

"In drawing the portraits of the distinguished members of the constitutional convention," writes the professor, "to pass Frank Pierce unnoticed would be as absurd as to enact one of Shakspeare's dramas without its principal hero. I give my impressions of the man as I saw him in the convention; for I would not undertake to vouch for the truth or falsehood of those veracious organs of public sentiment, at the capital, which have loaded him, in turn, with indiscriminate praise and abuse. As a presiding officer, it would be difficult to find his equal. In proposing questions to the house, he never hesitates or blunders. In deciding points of order, he is both prompt and impartial. His treatment of every member of the convention was

characterized by uniform courtesy and kindness. The deportment of the presiding officer of a deliberative body usually gives tone to the debates. If he is harsh, morose, or abrupt in his manner, the speakers are apt to catch his spirit by the force of involuntary sympathy. The same is true, to some extent, of the principal debaters in such a body. When a man of strong prejudices and harsh temper rises to address a public assembly, his indwelling antipathies speak from every feature of his face, and from every motion of his person. The audience at once brace themselves against his assaults, and condemn his opinions before they are heard. The well-known character of an orator persuades or dissuades quite as forcibly as the language he utters. Some men never rise to address a deliberative assembly without conciliating good will in advance. The smile that plays upon the speaker's face awakens emotions of complacency in those who hear, even before he speaks. So does that weight of character, which is the matured fruit of long public services and acknowledged worth, soothe, in advance, the irritated and angry crowd.

"Mr. Pierce possesses unquestioned ability as a public speaker. Few men, in our country, better understand the means of swaying a popular assembly, or employ them with greater success. His forte lies in moving the passions of those whom he addresses. He knows how to call into vigorous action both the sympathies and antipathies of

those who listen to him. I do not mean to imply by these remarks that his oratory is deficient in argument or sound reasoning. On the contrary, he seizes with great power upon the strong points of his subject, and presents them clearly, forcibly, and eloquently. As a prompt and ready debater, always prepared for assault or defence, he has few equals. In these encounters, he appears to great advantage, from his happy faculty of turning little incidents, unexpectedly occurring, to his own account. A word carelessly dropped, or an unguarded allusion to individuals or parties, by an opponent, is frequently converted into a powerful weapon of assault, by this skilful advocate. He has been so much in office, that he may be said to have been educated in public life. He is most thoroughly versed in all the tactics of debate. He is not only remarkably fluent in his elocution, but remarkably correct. He seldom miscalls or repeats a word. His style is not overloaded with ornament, and yet he draws liberally upon the treasury of rhetoric. His figures are often beautiful and striking, never incongruous. He is always listened to with respectful attention, if he does not always command conviction. From his whole course in the convention, a disinterested spectator could not fail to form a very favorable opinion, not only of his talent and eloquence, but of his generosity and magnanimity."

Among other antiquated relics of the past, and

mouldy types of prejudices that ought now to be forgotten, and of which it was the object of the present convention to purge the constitution of New Hampshire, there is a provision, that certain state offices should be held only by Protestants. Since General Pierce's nomination for the presidency, the existence of this religious test has been brought as a charge against him, as if, in spite of his continued efforts to remove it, he were personally responsible for its remaining on the statute book.

General Pierce has naturally a strong endowment of religious feeling. At no period of his life, as is well known to his friends, have the sacred relations of the human soul been a matter of indifference with him; and, of more recent years, whatever circumstances of good or evil fortune may have befallen him, they have alike served to deepen this powerful sentiment. Whether in sorrow or success, he has learned, in his own behalf, the great lesson, that religious faith is the most valuable and most sacred of human possessions; but, with this sense, there has come no narrowness or illiberality, but a wide-embracing sympathy for the modes of Christian worship, and a reverence for individual belief, as a matter between the Deity and man's soul, and with which no other has a right to interfere. With the feeling here described, and with his acute intellectual perception of the abortive character of all intolerant measures, as defeating

their own ends, it strikes one as nothing less than ludicrous that he should be charged with desiring to retain this obsolete enactment, standing, as it does, as a merely gratuitous and otherwise inoperative stigma upon the fair reputation of his native state. Even supposing no higher motives to have influenced him, it would have sufficed to secure his best efforts for the repeal of the religious test, that so many of the Catholics have always been found in the advance-guard of freedom, marching onward with the progressive party; and that, whether in peace or war, they have performed for their adopted country the hard toil and the gallant services which she has a right to expect from her most faithful citizens.

The truth is, that, ever since his entrance upon public life, on all occasions,—and often making the occasion where he found none,—General Pierce has done his utmost to obliterate this obnoxious feature from the constitution. He has repeatedly advocated the calling of a convention mainly for this purpose. In that of 1850, he both spoke and voted in favor of the abolition of the test, and, with the aid of Judge Woodbury and other democratic members, attained his purpose, so far as the convention possessed any power or responsibility in the matter. That the measure was ultimately defeated is due to other causes, either temporary or of long continuance; and to some of them it is attributable that the enlightened public

sentiment of New Hampshire was not, long since, made to operate upon this enactment, so anomalous in the fundamental law of a free state.

In order to the validity of the amendments passed by the convention, it was necessary that the people should subsequently act upon them, and pass a vote of two thirds in favor of their adoption. The amendments proposed by the convention of 1850 were numerous. The constitution had been modified in many and very important particulars, in respect to which the popular mind had not previously been made familiar, and on which it had not anticipated the necessity of passing judgment. In March, 1851, when the vote of the people was taken upon these measures, the Atwood controversy was at its height, and threw all matters of less immediate interest into the background. During the interval since the adjournment of the convention, the whig newspapers had been indefatigable in their attempts to put its proceedings in an odious light before the people. There had been no period, for many years, in which sinister influences rendered it so difficult to draw out an efficient expression of the will of the democracy, as on this occasion. It was the result of all these obstacles, that the doings of the constitutional convention were rejected in the mass.

In the ensuing April, the convention reassembled, in order to receive the unfavorable verdict of the people upon its proposed amendments. At the

suggestion of General Pierce, the amendment abolishing the religious test was again brought forward, and, in spite of the opposition of the leading whig members, was a second time submitted to the people. Nor did his struggle in behalf of this enlightened movement terminate here. At the democratic caucus, in Concord, preliminary to the town meeting, he urged upon his political friends the repeal of the test, as a party measure; and again, at the town meeting itself, while the balloting was going forward, he advocated it on the higher ground of religious freedom, and of reverence for what is inviolable in the human soul. Had the amendment passed, the credit would have belonged to no man more than to General Pierce; and that it failed, and that the free constitution of New Hampshire is still disgraced by a provision which even monarchical England has cast off, is a responsibility which must rest elsewhere than on his head.

In September, 1851, died that eminent statesman and jurist, Levi Woodbury, then occupying the elevated post of judge of the Supreme Court of the United States. The connection between him and General Pierce, beginning in the early youth of the latter, had been sustained through all the subsequent years. They sat together, with but one intervening chair between, in the national Senate; they were always advocates of the same great measures, and held, through life, a harmony of

opinion and action, which was never more conspicuous than in the few months that preceded Judge Woodbury's death. At a meeting of the bar, after his decease, General Pierce uttered some remarks, full of sensibility, in which he referred to the circumstances that had made this friendship an inheritance on his part. Had Judge Woodbury survived, it is not improbable that his more advanced age, his great public services, and equally distinguished zeal in behalf of the Union, might have placed him in the position now occupied by the subject of this memoir. Fortunate the state, which, after losing such a son, can still point to another, not less worthy to take upon him the charge of the nation's welfare.

We have now finished our record of Franklin Pierce's life, and have only to describe the posture of affairs which—without his own purpose, and against his wish—has placed him before the people of the United States, as a candidate for the presidency.