

PRESIDENT POLK'S ADMINISTRATION.

THE great achievements of President Polk's administration were four in number: the full establishment of the independent treasury, which divorced government dealings from the banks; the low tariff; the adjustment of a northwest boundary with Great Britain, which secured our title to Oregon; and the management of our annexation of Texas, by diplomacy and bloodshed, so as to despoil Mexico of a still further portion of her domains, and gain a broad southerly area to the Pacific, inclusive of California and New Mexico. All four of these achievements were clearly purposed by our eleventh President when he entered upon his executive duties; in all four he took the initiative, so far as possible, before Congress assembled in its first session under his term; and, with the cooperation of Congress, he accomplished, before that first session ended, every one of the projects except the last, which, proving slow and difficult of fulfilment, and withal developing only gradually before our people as the extent of his secret purpose revealed itself, he dispatched as rapidly and surely as the exigencies would permit. Before another presidential election he had wrought out his task to completion.

I shall in this paper¹ consider those four cardinal points of policy only so far as the testimony afforded by Mr. Polk's papers, and especially his Diary, may furnish to our own age plain illustration and proof of historical importance. The first three topics may be passed over rapidly. The sub-treasury or independent treasury plan originated under President Van Buren, as a Democratic measure; but when the Whigs came into power, they at once repealed the sub-treasury act before a fair trial of the experiment, mean-

¹ See also President Polk's Diary, in *The Atlantic* for August.

ing to restore the former national bank system, which, however, Harrison's untimely death and the Vice-President's recreancy debarred them from doing. In this respect, therefore, Polk, as a Democratic President, had simply to restore Democratic policy to the national finances, and the Van Buren measure was reenacted, to remain enduring. "I have always been for the independent treasury, like Silas Wright," records this new President, referring to the immediate author of the original bill. Next, as concerns the low tariff, that most admirable achievement of this new administration, Polk was a strong pioneer in the reduction of duties, and neither the fears nor the opposition of his own party friends could divert him. He had, to be sure, equivocated somewhat in his opinions in the presidential canvass of 1844; and when, in his first presidential message, he boldly proposed tariff reform in this open-trade direction, ably seconded though he was by his Secretary of the Treasury, the consternation was very great among Pennsylvanians of his party. Secretary Buchanan, as I have mentioned elsewhere, would gladly have left the Cabinet and gone upon the supreme bench of the United States, so as to shirk the issue with his political friends, had not Polk kept back his promised appointment to the place until the legislative struggle was over, thereby committing to his own policy the aid which he needed. Mr. Polk is entitled fairly to the fame of a successful experiment on the basis of non-protection and liberal trade which gave to this country great mercantile prosperity and commercial expansion down to the civil war, and won the approval of all political parties. "The tariff portion," as he states, of his first annual message, in the Diary, "is mine, and all the message is mine." He evidently, and with

good reason, cherished the belief that such a tariff, framed in coöperation with Sir Robert Peel's corn laws and England's new departure for free trade with the world, would aid in uniting the two countries more closely in reciprocal commerce, and in reconciling Great Britain to concessions most desirable for settling the Oregon question. While procuring the needful enactment, Polk's Diary shows him in his former and most familiar character of a driver of business through the national legislature. We see him, by the light of his private revelations, strongly interesting himself in the progress of this tariff-reduction measure through the two Houses during every stage, setting his heart upon accomplishing the work wholly and at once during the first and long session of Congress; and, with this end steadily in view, we perceive him forcing it through with indefatigable zeal against all factional opposition among his party supporters, and in spite of foreign war and other dangerous responsibilities which had accumulated upon his hands in those same early months. A tariff-reduction act was not unpopular with the country at large, and hence the House passed it with comparative harmony. But the real struggle came, as such struggles will, in the Senate and confederate branch; and upon the Democrats of that less responsive chamber he next brought to bear all the personal arguments he could urge in private conference, all the persuasion of Cabinet officers, all the patronage at his official command, for gaining his end.

The executive anxiety was not without good cause, for Polk's party friends were so much divided upon this vexatious issue that, after the best efforts of the White House were exhausted, the fate of the measure was found to depend finally on the uncertain vote of a single Democratic Senator. The casting vote of Vice-President Dallas, however, carried the bill through its most critical stage, after which the act passed the Senate by a majority

of one. On the 29th of July, 1846, the President rejoiced that his tariff measure was finally passed, and he felt himself free to veto a river and harbor act which came also to hand for his signature.

Upon the Oregon boundary, Polk's Diary opens with confidential interviews which Buchanan had with him upon the subject, while negotiations remained at a stand after the compromise of boundary suggested on our side had been rejected by the English minister in discourteous language, which Polk quickly resented. And now we see the Secretary of State timorous over the situation, while the President, confident that reflection would bring the adversary to his own proposition, waited for British overtures, betraying no nervousness and willing to bide his time. In spite of Buchanan's dread, our people had no fight for the line of $54^{\circ} 40'$, though there was abundant bluster in Congress over the subject. The fair compromise line was in due time proposed again, this time by Great Britain's negotiator, and a treaty based upon that settlement was promptly ratified by our Senate before the long session ended. Thus happily was an old controversy laid at rest; and so far honorably, as Jefferson had borne us beyond the Mississippi, did this new Democratic Executive plant American colonization firmly upon the Pacific strand.

But the fourth object to which the President had devoted himself from the outset was not gained so readily; and vainly imagining that he could buy out Mexico through its rulers, and gain the new domain he wanted by threats or cajolery, he was cast upon the undesired alternative of war to gain his end; and the war once begun, he found it far more stubborn and protracted than he had looked for, though a weak nation was our foe. The love of liberty and of territorial integrity burns strong in the breasts of the humblest of republican communities; and, whatever their dissen-

sions with one another, they will turn their arms unitedly against invaders from without, and even their corrupt leaders would rather encourage than betray them. Polk saw clearly what our superior American people, or at least the Southern portion, coveted; and surely, could the new acquisition have been fairly gained, the precious soil was well worth our permanent acceptance. But what we could not obtain by fair means Polk set himself to acquiring by foul; and while "Texas reannexation" had been the immediate aim of the party that came with him into power, he planned and carried out with remarkable secrecy and constancy a dismemberment of our sister republic far beyond what this rallying cry had called for or expected. The Diary and Correspondence, with their private disclosures, confirm the worst that was ever imputed to this administration in its deadly and depredating course. But Polk was one of those to whom the end justifies the means; he was fully imbued with the reckless spirit of manifest destiny which was so rampant in that era, and he felt himself God's chosen instrument, in a sense, to advance the stars and stripes, and despoil the weak of their inheritance. Such was the prevalent perversion of the Monroe Doctrine that we seemed actually devoted to the idea of making converts to the republican faith of the rest of this continent, and encouraging all Spanish-American neighbors to emulate our national example to the point of casting off European allegiance, and experimenting in the same direction with ourselves, only for the sake of leading them to misrule and internal disorder, so as to make them the readier prey to our own territorial greed. Mr. Polk meant to vindicate his Mexican policy by the private papers which he preserved so carefully; but this vindication was evidently staked upon the expectation that public gratitude would redound because of the splendid expansion that he gave to our national boundaries. He toiled

and he despoiled for the glory of the American Union; but he could see nothing wrong in his despicable treatment of Mexico, in the crime he perpetrated against liberty and the sacred rights of property. He was not the kind of patriot to place himself at another's point of view, and could feel no tender compunctions for an adversary, and least of all for a weak one.

Those familiar with our annals will recall the leading facts regarding the admission of Texas into the Union in 1845. Wrested from the Mexican confederacy and people by American colonists and adventurers who had settled within its neighboring limits by foreign permission, this independent, or rather revolutionary Texan republic sought constitutional alliance with the United States; and after that successful presidential canvass in which the Lone Star issue became so prominent, our Democratic Congress, shortly before Polk's accession, passed a provisional act for admitting into the Union that foreign but adjacent jurisdiction as a new State capable of subdivision. But in order to unite the wavering party elements in Congress, this admission act placed upon our Executive the alternative of accepting Texas immediately under the provisions therein specified, or of beginning negotiations anew with that republic which Mexico still claimed, and postponing annexation indefinitely. The real intent of Congress was, of course, to trust the incoming President as umpire; but Tyler, the retiring Executive, eager for his own glory, at once, and just before retiring from office, chose the first alternative, and dispatched his swift messenger to Texas with the tender of immediate annexation and admission to state membership. Polk might consequently have disclaimed the responsibility of a decision; but, as his papers show, he assembled his Cabinet soon after his term began, to consider whether to adopt the late President's action or not; and upon the advice of these coun-

selors he pronounced for pursuing the same line of policy, and issued appropriate orders. Francis P. Blair, who, like Benton of the Senate, had desired indefinite postponement under the second alternative, angrily charged Polk, during the hot canvass of 1848, with having pledged himself to the second alternative while the act was pending. This, however, Polk has emphatically denied; and those who best knew the surrounding circumstances and had been intimate in the confidence of the President-elect — among them Secretary Buchanan and the manager of the Texas compromise act, Secretary Walker — corroborate by their written statements, preserved among Polk's papers, what Polk himself asserts, and all those cognizant of his traits of character might naturally look for: that he kept his choice of plans strictly to himself, and made no pledge in advance whatever. But this, at least, Polk declares unhesitatingly: that his constant desire had been to have Texas admitted into the Union as soon as possible, by one means or another, and hence that the first alternative was his silent preference, since it best secured such admission practically. "For had annexation by negotiation been adopted," is his just comment in the retrospect, "Texas would have been lost to the United States."

The alternative of immediate annexation once decided upon, there was no sign of feebleness in Mr. Polk's pursuit of the chosen course. To Andrew J. Donelson, dispatched upon this mission, the President wrote June 15, repeating his desires, already expressed, that the Texas convention, then about to meet, should accept annexation to the United States unqualifiedly and at once. "That moment," he writes, "I shall regard Texas as part of the Union; and our army and navy will defend and protect her by driving an invading Mexican army out." Donelson was by that time in Texas; and Polk promised to send an additional force to the Gulf the next day, leaving

him to his own discretion in employing our troops or vessels should a Mexican army cross the Rio Grande. All we want, he says, is for Texas to assent to the terms of our statute, and he will not wait for the tedious process of forming a new constitution. "Of course," he adds, "I would maintain the Texan title to the extent which she claims it to be, and not permit an invading enemy to occupy a foot of the soil east of the Rio Grande." In this strain President Polk wrote to Sam Houston, also, assuring him that all rights of territorial boundary would be maintained, if only Texas would accept unconditionally the act of our Congress. Here we have the key to Polk's whole Mexican policy: which was to adopt the pretentious claim set up lately by the Texan revolutionists, that the boundaries of that republic extended to the Rio Grande, and over unsettled soil which the Mexican state of Texas had never included; and then to manipulate a treaty settlement with Mexico which should give to our Union another immense fraction of that unhappy nation's domains. By pressure upon that impoverished country Polk thought himself capable of driving a money bargain with her pride. Texas embraced her opportunity to the fullest extent, and voted in convention to accept the terms tendered by Congress, and enter the American Union as a new State; and by September 16, as the Diary informs us, the President announced clearly to his Cabinet that he should try to adjust, through this Texas question of limits, a permanent boundary between Mexico and the United States, so as to comprehend Upper California and New Mexico, and give us a line from the mouth of the Rio Grande to latitude 32° north, and thence west to the Pacific. For such a boundary he was willing, he said, to pay \$40,000,000, but could probably purchase it for \$15,000,000 or \$20,000,000. In these views the Cabinet unanimously concurred, and instructions were given, accordingly, to John

Slidell, who went at once as a special minister to Mexico, that republic having previously broken off its relations with us because of our league with Texas. But this September conference followed preparations which the President himself had already secretly started. Slidell, a member of the House, was at his home in Louisiana when sent off; but there are indications in the Diary that he had been fixed upon for such a contingency as the present, and had received from Polk himself oral and strictly confidential instructions before he left Washington in the spring. Meanwhile, Dr. Parrott, Slidell's prospective secretary of legation, who had been in the city of Mexico as a secret emissary, wrote from there, August 19, that Mexico was not likely to fight the United States over the admission of our new State, that there would be no invasion of Texas, and that our Executive ought to restore Mexican relations if he could.

In much of the underhand work of 1845 — in the instructions sent to our naval officers who were cruising off the Pacific coast, for instance — Polk dared not trust himself to writing out contemporaneously in his own journal; he would instruct various persons by word of mouth, and enjoin upon them the utmost secrecy; but his Diary's later allusions aid historical testimony already gathered from other sources. The Diary of May 30, 1846, contains the President's incidental admission, at that tardy date, that in Slidell's instructions of 1845 "the acquisition of California and New Mexico, with perhaps some northern provinces," had been included. Polk's reticence to others he practiced with constant constraint for himself when committing his Mexican plans privately to paper; for in all this he meant to forestall public opinion, not to court it, believing that the public results would justify him before the people.

In Polk's private correspondence may be found General Scott's report with the

President's indorsement, dated January 13, 1846, in justification of the famous order which required General Taylor to advance from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande. Its preamble is worth quoting in this connection, inspired as it probably was in expression by the commander-in-chief or Secretary of War: "Congress having accepted the constitution adopted by the State of Texas, in convention assembled, in which constitution the Rio Grande del Norte is, at least in part, claimed as one of her boundaries, — subject, it may be, to future modification in part, by a treaty of limits between the United States and Mexico," — the President of the United States, through the War Department, had deemed it his duty to give instructions to General Zachary Taylor to advance and occupy such positions at or near Rio del Norte as might be necessary.

President Polk has been greatly blamed for precipitating the United States into an unrighteous war with Mexico, and at the same time placing the onus of hostilities, most craftily and dishonestly, upon that republic. The familiar phrases of his message will be recalled: "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil;" "War exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself." The real climax as shown by the Diary makes his dissimulation even greater than has been supposed. Saturday, the 9th of May, 1846, was a memorable one. Slidell was now in Washington, having returned from a mission for purchase utterly fruitless; and Polk, feeling convinced that nothing but war would give us the treaty of ample cession that he was bent upon procuring, took up a war policy. It was not the original Texas which had won its independence that he wanted to annex, for Mexico sought no recovery; nor was it Texas as voted to the Rio Grande, for Taylor held that disputed solitude

by military possession, and was the real aggressor ; but it was a new and broader belt to the Pacific, whose clear title could be won, as now seemed clear, only by force of arms. Congress being in the midst of its long session, the President summoned his Cabinet on this Saturday, and stated that it was his desire to send to the two Houses an immediate war message. But no news of any armed advance or opposition by the Mexicans, or of bloodshed or collision of any sort, had yet reached Washington from the front, where General Taylor with his command was already posted to make the disputed area of Texas our own. The Cabinet as a whole advised the President encouragingly, but Buchanan not without hesitation, while Bancroft, the Secretary of the Navy, gave his candid opinion that we ought to wait for some act of hostility before declaring war. Polk's Diary shows, however, that he preferred to recommend war as matters stood, for after the adjournment he made his preparations to write a message. But a new and sudden turn was given to the situation about sunset of the same day, when dispatches from General Taylor reached the White House by the Southern mail, reporting that slight and casual attack by Mexicans and loss of life on the line of the Rio Grande which has since passed into history. Here then was the opportunity for throwing all scruples aside ; and that Polk made the most of this *casus belli*, of this shedding the first drop of blood by Mexico, the American world is well aware. The Cabinet were summoned once more, in the evening ; and they agreed unanimously that a war message should be sent in to Congress on Monday, based upon this new state of facts. But would not that war message have been sent the same, had not this opportune intelligence arrived from the front ? All now, says the Diary, was unity and energy. Mr. Polk worked all Sunday over the message, except for his attendance on morning church ; Secre-

tary Bancroft, who took dinner with him, giving his skillful literary aid in the afternoon. There was great excitement in Washington, and confidential friends of the Democracy were preparing to have Congress coöperate. "It was," records the President piously, but with no apparent sense of the unrighteousness of his secular task, "a day of great anxiety to me, and I regretted the necessity for me to spend the Sabbath in the manner I have." On the morning of Monday, the momentous 11th of May, Mr. Polk shut out company, and carefully revised this war message, which he sent in to Congress about noon ; and such was the haste of preparation that he had not time to read over the accompanying executive correspondence, though he had seen the originals. Sidel-ell, in the afternoon, called upon him, to announce that though the bill for declaring war with Mexico passed the House, the Senate had adjourned without action, and evidently not united. But the bill went through that branch on Tuesday, with a slight amendment, in which the House concurred. The act was brought to the President soon after the noon of Wednesday, May 13, and he approved and signed it ; and an executive proclamation was forthwith issued which announced the existence of war, following the example of President Madison in 1812.

But there were already symptoms of national dissension to impress the Cabinet circle ; Buchanan, at least, among Polk's chosen advisers, showing, besides his characteristic timidity, some forecast of the public dangers which would attend this new greed for expansion. In draughting a circular to our ministers in Europe, which announced the Mexican war, he stated expressly, and as though to allay suspicion, that our object was not to dismember Mexico nor to make conquest ; that our boundary line as claimed against that republic was the Rio Grande. This draught was read at the Cabinet

meeting on this same 13th of May ; and the Diary gives a full account of the conference. "I will not tie up my hands by any such pledge," declared the President at once and decidedly. "In making peace with our adversary, we shall acquire California and New Mexico and other further territory, as an indemnity for this war, if we can." A warm discussion now arose in the Cabinet, Buchanan contending on his part that England and France would in that case help Mexico against us ; for as yet the Oregon line was still in controversy with Great Britain. But again did the President refuse to embarrass his course by any such pledge ; nor, he added, would he tolerate any intermeddling by European nations. The Secretary of State, says the Diary, stood alone in this matter ; Marcy being absent on account of business pressure at the War Department. Secretary Bancroft, the Attorney-General, and the Postmaster-General all sided strongly with the President, while Secretary Walker spoke with much excitement against the draught as Buchanan had prepared it. At last, to end discussion, Mr. Polk stepped to his table and wrote out a new paragraph in place of that which had disclaimed all intention of further dismemberment ; and Buchanan's dispatches, when sent abroad, substituted the presidential paragraph for his own. "This," records Polk, "was one of the most earnest and interesting discussions which have occurred in my Cabinet," and it ended a day "of intense application, anxiety, and labor."

Some authentic explanation has long been wished of Secretary Bancroft's naval order, dated on May 13, when war was declared, which instructed our blockading squadron in the Gulf to permit Santa Anna, as a returning exile from Havana, to pass through with his suite, unmolested. The historical suspicion has been that this ex-President and military chief of Mexico was in secret

concert with our administration ; and the Polk papers make that suspicion a certainty by their revelations. It appears from the Diary that about February 13, 1846, and before our Mexican relations had culminated in war, a Spanish-American officer and revolutionist — Colonel Atocha by name — held a secret interview at Washington with President Polk, and gave the latter the impression, while Mexico was in strong public commotion, that Santa Anna had sent to arrange for his own restoration to the head of the Mexican government, on the assurance that our ends would be gained in return. Mr. Polk consulted his Cabinet upon such an arrangement, and with their consent, though Buchanan opposed, dispatched his confidential agent to Havana, when war broke out, to confer with the distinguished exile. That agent was Commander Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, of the navy, to whose rumored mission Mr. Benton alludes in his *Thirty Years' View*, though more slightly, perhaps, than the facts justify. Mackenzie's dispatches to the President, which were received at Washington on the 3d of August, are contained in full in the Polk Correspondence. It appears that the President made the Bancroft order to our blockading squadron the occasion for an oral message to Santa Anna, which Mackenzie reduced to writing and read to the Mexican general ; thereby exceeding his authority, according to Polk's Diary record of January, 1848, since he should have delivered it orally. In course of the two interviews they held together, Santa Anna, as Mackenzie reports, asserted that, if in power once more in his own country, he would make concessions rather than see Mexico ruled by a foreign prince ; that he preferred a friendly arrangement with the United States to the ravages of war ; that he desired republican principles and a liberal government, excluding all mediation of England and France. Santa Anna advised that Taylor should ad-

vance his forces to Santillo. He also expressed a sense of his own kind treatment while a prisoner after the battle of San Jacinto, and said that if he did not return to Mexico he should like to become a citizen of the United States, and live in Texas. Santa Anna wrote a paper, it seems, for submission to our State Department. It is hard to say whether Polk's administration, in thus cooperating with the ablest of all Mexicans of the age, civil or military, in a subtle and sly intrigue for revolutionizing the republic with which we were now at war, was not overreached in its own game; at all events, Santa Anna, with his suite, passed our blockading line to Vera Cruz under the Bancroft order, not many weeks later, reëntered his country, and placed himself at the head of affairs; proving himself, however, after having done so, the most energetic and persistent of all Mexican opponents in the field, instead of our artful ally for dismemberment.

Most of the familiar episodes of the Mexican war are strongly lighted up by the daily entries of Polk's Diary: his strong dislike of Scott, and his increasing disparagement of Zachary Taylor as the latter began to be talked about for the next President; the earnest intrigue in the administration circle to supersede both of these Whig generals by the Democratic Benton, under a projected measure for creating a lieutenant-general to outrank them both, — a scheme in which Benton personally was most active; the failure of such a bill for want of a party support in Congress, followed by Polk's abortive effort to bring Benton into the field as one of the new major-generals, and Benton's haughty refusal of a commission because the President would not retire all the existing major-generals in his own favor, and give him plenary powers to arrange a treaty besides;¹ the Calhoun

¹ "The difficulty," records Polk in his Diary, "is about recalling Butler and Patterson"

"fencing in" plan for conducting the war by seizing and holding simply the territory we wanted, which appears to have been first broached by a military officer, but was dropped upon full Cabinet consultation, because such inactivity would not give us a parchment title, and might make the war too unpopular at home to be borne; Polk's disgust upon finding that the Whigs were having this war to their own party account, while he bore all the odium of it; Scott's quarrels at the front, and his recall after the capture of the city of Mexico; Trist, the clerk of the State Department, and his troubles over a treaty which he could not procure in a satisfactory form until he had ceased to be an accredited agent for negotiating one. Many were the mean expedients brought forward from time to time for heading off public opinion in the unhappy republic whose patriotism thwarted us. Our Executive at first employed Roman Catholic priests with his invading army, — "not," says the Diary, "as chaplains," but because "they spoke the Mexican language" and might "undecieve" the adversary; and in their last straits, Polk and his Cabinet had nearly decided to help the peace party of Mexico into power if they would execute in due form the desired treaty of peace and dismemberment.

At last, however, with all this fair domain our own prize, Mr. Polk viewed with alarm and evident surprise the portentous aspect of the slavery struggle which this war had aroused among his own people. He feared that such an agitation would "destroy the Democratic party, and perhaps the Union;" though slavery had, as he believed, "no legitimate connection with the war into Mexico, being a domestic, not a foreign question." But with this premonition, and to check the "worse than useless discussion," this "wicked agitation," he publicly proposed extending the Missouri Compromise line (the Democratic major-generals). "I would have recalled Scott and Taylor."

across to the Pacific, and considered himself a national umpire in doing so. This adjustment failing in Congress, it is due to President Polk to say, further, that during the last weeks of his official term he showed himself in private counsel a true lover of the Union, like Jackson before him, strongly contrasting with Calhoun and many others of his own slaveholding section. The Diary records an interview which he held at the White House with Calhoun January 16, 1849, at the time when the latter was gathering Southern Congressmen into caucus, and trying to combine them for an inflammatory appeal to Southern constituents. Mr. Polk thought that movement mischievous, and on this occasion expressed to the great nullifier his own strong attachment to the Union and his wish to preserve it. With reference to our new domain, which was being peopled so rapidly in the Sacramento region since the gold discovery, Polk now took the very ground which Zachary Taylor occupied soon after as his successor. "California might be admitted into the Union as a State, and so might even New Mexico; and thus we should get rid of the Wilmot anti-slavery proviso," said Polk: "and this is the only practical mode of settling the territorial question, — to leave the new States to themselves and arrest this slavery agitation." To this Calhoun expressed himself opposed. He said California ought not now to be admitted as a State, because slaveholders had found no opportunity to go there, and it was sure to become a free State: now was the time for the South to resist Northern aggressions. The two parted in disagreement; and the President, commenting in his journal upon this interview, declares himself satisfied that Calhoun does not want the question settled, that he desires disunion. "I set my face against all this," he records: "let California decide slavery or no slavery, and no Southern man should object."

Polk's Diary discloses a secret chapter in the expansion policy of this industrious administration which deserves a final notice. No sooner had the Mexican war been brought substantially to a close before our untiring President undertook the annexation of Cuba. On the 30th of May, 1848, just as a new presidential canvass was opening, and even before ratifications had been exchanged and peace secured with Mexico, Polk broached this other matter to his Cabinet; but by this time he had learned a lesson in self-constraint, and restricted his proposal to that of a fair purchase, disclaiming all wish for a forcible annexation. His Cabinet were evidently divided at first on this subject, and the Northern portion of it nervous and distrustful; Robert J. Walker and John Y. Mason being his chief supporters in the council. Buchanan objected that it would be a firebrand in the presidential canvass; but Cass, the party candidate, had declared himself quite ready and willing to risk his chances upon such an issue. On the 6th of June Polk brought the subject up again; insisting that a proposition of purchase should be made through our minister in Spain. A day or two after came confirmation of a speedy peace with Mexico, and Polk made it clear to his doubting advisers that he had no treacherous plans in reserve. Cubans were at this time in insurrection; and General Quitman, so gallant on the Mexican battlefields, would gladly have sailed with a force of our returning volunteers upon a filibustering expedition. But this, said the President, he could not connive at; he proposed taking no part in Cuban revolutions, but to let Spain know that we meant to keep back our American troops; at the same time notifying that power of our willingness to offer a price for the island. In this form, says the Diary, the Cabinet unanimously agreed to the President's proposal; even Buchanan assenting with the rest. A few days

after, Mr. Polk made his offer in due form by a dispatch transmitted to Minister Saunders at Madrid; sending him a power to treat for Cuba, with a hundred million dollars as the limit of a purchase, — and all this “profoundly confidential.” There is a later record of September 16 in Polk’s journal, stating that an important dispatch from Minister

Saunders at Spain was read in the Cabinet. What its purport was the Diary does not indicate, but doubtless Spain repulsed our overtures; and there the matter dropped. With a Whig President, chosen by the people a few weeks later, this subject, and in fact all schemes for further territorial aggrandizement, became indefinitely postponed.

James Schouler.

A SINGULAR LIFE.

XXIII.

To the end of her life Helen will see the look on Emanuel Bayard’s face when she had spoken these words.

With more of terror than delight, the woman’s nature sprang, for that instant, back upon itself. Would she have recalled what she had said? It is possible; for now she understood how he loved her, and perceived that she had never understood what a man’s love is.

Yet when he spoke, it was with that absence of drama, with that repression amounting almost to commonplace, which characterize the intensest crises of experience.

“Do you?” he said. “Have you?”

And at first that was all. But his voice shook, and his hand; and his face went so white that he seemed like a man smitten rather by death than by love.

Helen, in a pang of maiden fright, had moved away from him, and retreated to the sofa; he sank beside her silently. Leaning forward a little, he covered his eyes with one hand. The other rested on the cushion within an inch of her purple dress; he did not touch her; he did not touch it. Helen felt sorry, seeing him so troubled and wrung; her heart went out in a throb of that maternal compassion which is never absent from the love of any woman for any man.

“Oh,” she sighed, “I meant to make you happy, to give you comfort! And now I have made you unhappy!”

“You have made me the happiest of all miserable men!”

He raised his head, and looked at her till hers was the face to fall.

“Oh, don’t!” she pleaded. “Not like *that!*”

He paid no heed to this entreaty. The soul of the saint and the heart of the man made duel together; and the man won, and exulted in it, and wondered how he dared; but his gaze devoured her willfully. The first embrace of the eyes — more delicate, more deferent, and at once less guarded than the meeting of hands or clasp of arms — he gave her, and did not restrain it. Before it, Helen felt more helpless than if he had touched her. She seemed to herself to be annihilated in his love.

“Happy?” he said exultingly. “You deify me! You have made a god of me!”

“No,” she shook her head with a little teasing smile, “I have made a man of you.”

“Then they are one thing and the same!” cried the lover. “Let me hear you say it. Tell it to me again!”

She was silent, and she crimsoned to the brows.

“You are not sure!” he accused her. “You want to take it back. It was a