

## CHAPTER XVI

### LAST YEARS — DEATH

HOUSTON had not taken the means to secure for himself a life of luxurious ease after his retirement from public life. He had had ample opportunities to acquire wealth by obtaining tracts of rich lands and advantageous holdings in the newly founded towns, by which many of his associates laid the foundations of large fortunes, but he did not take them, nor did he engage in any of the schemes for the profitable development of the resources of a new country. He was indifferent to money, and during his early career in Texas lived in a careless frontier fashion, which often left him in straits for the means to purchase the common necessities of life. After his second marriage he lived in a more orderly manner, but without much more attention to the accumulation of property. He was always generous after the early Texas fashion, and his horses and belongings were at the service of any one in want or for the needs of his neighbors. The salary of his public office was always expended liberally, and he had no professional income, his practice as a lawyer having only been in the early days, when he addressed frontier juries without much reference to statute and precedent, and took his pay

in whatever came handy. He had been almost entirely in public life, and lived by it. In his old age he had only a small piece of property near the town of Huntsville, a house consisting of a double log-cabin, and a limited amount of land around it. To this he retired, after his deposition as governor, without an occupation or an opportunity to earn an income. His later years were undoubtedly passed in poverty, particularly after the commercial and industrial isolation of the Confederacy set in, with its necessary privations upon the whole of the community, but the story that he and his family suffered for the want of the common necessaries of life is exaggerated. They lived like their neighbors, and in the productive soil and genial climate there was no want of the means of living, whatever there may have been of the luxuries.

Shortly after his retirement, Houston passed through the city of Houston on his way to Sour Lake, a bathing place of medicinal waters in Jefferson County, which he visited for the benefit of his health. It was the time of the hottest ebullition of the secession excitement. War had been declared, and the community was in all the furor of military enthusiasm. No one doubted of the success of the South, and any one who should venture to say that it was not sure of victory was regarded as a traitor and a public enemy. Houston was asked to speak by his friends, and there were violent threats from the secession element that he should not be allowed to do

so. He treated the threats with his usual contempt, and delivered his speech in the evening from the steps of the Academy. His friends armed themselves to protect him, and surrounded the platform. There was a secession torchlight procession, which paraded up and down the street while he was speaking, and a great deal of noise and disturbance. What was rare with Houston, he sometimes lost the thread of his discourse, and turned to a friend near him to ask him to supply it. But he spoke with his usual force and courage. He told his excited and confident audience that the result of the war would be against them. The South would win victories at first, but the North had the whole of Europe to draw upon to supply its armies, and would work with the relentless force of a machine, while the South was isolated, and had no resources with which to make good its inevitable exhaustion.

There was an uneasiness about what Houston might do, and a dread of his power and influence upon the people among the secession element. Although he had peacefully retired from the governorship, he was suspected of plotting either with the Federal Government or to have Texas set up for herself as an independent Republic. On April 4, 1861, Governor Clark wrote to President Davis, urging the Confederate Government to take more effective measures for the protection of the frontier. He said: "It is more than probable that an effort will soon be made by the submission party of this State, with General Hous-

ton at its head, to convert Texas into an independent Republic, and one of the most effective arguments will be that the Confederate States has supplied the place of the 2500 United States troops formerly upon our frontier with only a single regiment;” and there are other references in the correspondence of the time to such a design on the part of Houston. But his enemies took counsel of their fears. There is no evidence that Houston entertained any such purpose, and he certainly took no active steps to bring it about. On the contrary as the war kindled, his sympathies were strongly for the South, and he urged the most strenuous measures of resistance. In a speech at a festival of Baylor University at Independence, May 10, 1861, Houston declared his allegiance to his section, and his readiness to enter the ranks, if necessary, to repel invasion. He said:—

“Now that not only coercion, but a vindictive war is to be inaugurated, I stand ready to redeem my pledge to the people. Whether the Convention was right or wrong is not now the question. Whether I was treated justly or unjustly is not now to be considered. I put all that under my feet and there it shall stay. Let those who stood by me do the same, and let us all show at a time when perils environ our beloved land we know how to be patriots and Texans. Let us have no past but the glorious past, whose glorious deeds shall stimulate us to resistance to tyranny and wrong, and, burying in the grave of oblivion all our past differences, let us go forward

determined not to yield until our independence is acknowledged; or, if not acknowledged, wrung from our enemies by the force of our valor. It is no time to turn back now; the people have put their hands to the plough; they must go forward; to recede would be worse than ignominy. Better meet war in its deadliest shape than cringe before an enemy whose wrath we have invoked. I make no pretension as to myself. I have yielded up office, and sought retirement to preserve peace among our people. My services are perhaps not important enough to be desired. Others are perhaps more competent to lead the people through the revolution. I have been with them through the fiery ordeal once, and I know that with prudence and discipline their courage will surmount all obstacles. Should the tocsin of war, calling the people to resist the invader, reach the retirement to which I shall go, I will heed neither the denunciations of my enemies or the clamor of my own friends, but will join the ranks of my countrymen to defend Texas once again."

He did not forget his humorous sarcasm upon his opponents, who had been very vigorous in bringing on the war, but less decided in taking part in it. Mr. North gives an account of a scene at a review in Galveston in which he scored them in his rough and popular fashion: —

"During the first year of the war, Colonel Moore had organized a splendid regiment of 1100 young men, volunteers mostly from Galveston, finely

equipped, of which Sam Houston, Jr., was a member. They were on dress parade daily, and presented a charming appearance. It was as fine a regiment as went to the war from any section of the country. The Colonel was justly proud of them, and fond of exhibiting their superior drill and 'dress' to the public, and particularly to old military men. They fought their first battle at Pittsburgh Landing, or Shiloh, as the Confederates called it. But before leaving the island for the seat of war, the Colonel invited General Houston to review his regiment. Now Judge Campbell, of one of the judicial districts of Texas, and Williamson S. Oldham, member of the Confederate Congress, had been the old General's bitter enemies during the canvass on secession. They had followed him night and day throughout the State. On the day set for him to review and put the regiment through some military evolutions, the General was on hand at the hour and place. This called out a large concourse of people to witness the performance; the day was sunny and beautiful; the hour ten in the forenoon; the regiment was in complete uniform and perfectly armed; their arms glistened in the sunbeams as they stood in perfect 'dress' and at 'present arms,' when the 'hero of San Jacinto,' supported by their Colonel, stood in front. He was the hero of San Jacinto sure enough, for there he stood in the same military suit he had worn in 1836 at the battle of San Jacinto, when Santa Anna was captured, his pants tucked in the top of military boots;

suspended at his side was the same old sword, and on his head was a weather-beaten, light-colored, broad-brimmed planter hat, the left side buttoned up to the crown. There he stood, the very impersonation of the olden times. It was a sight for sensation. All eyes were now upon him, some of them dimmed with tears, and many a throat of soldier and spectator was choking down feeling unutterable, — the writer among the rest. Not a word had yet passed the General's lips, but now the Colonel passed him his own sword and told him to proceed. Then came:—

“Shoulder arms.

“‘Right about face.’ The regiment now facing to the rear, the General cried out in stentorian tones of sarcasm: ‘Do you see anything of Judge Campbell or Williamson S. Oldham here?’

“‘No,’ was the emphatic reply.

“‘Well,’ said the General, ‘they are not found at the front nor even at the rear.

“‘Right about, front face.

“‘Eyes right. Do you see anything of Judge Campbell's son here?’

“‘No, he has gone to Paris to school,’ responded the regiment.

“‘Eyes left. Do you see anything of young Sam Houston here?’

“‘Yes,’ was the thrilling response.

“‘Eyes front. Do you see anything of old Sam Houston here?’ By this time the climax of excitement was reached, and the regiment and citizens re-

sponded in thunder tones, 'Yes!' and then united in a triple round of three times three and a tiger for the old hero. Thereupon he returned the Colonel his sword with the remark: 'There, Colonel, that will do, I leave you to manage the rest of the manoeuvring,' and retired from dress parade."

But Houston's health soon began to fail. His splendid constitution, which had withstood his wounds, his hardships, and his excesses without giving way, began to feel the effects of old age. His old wounds renewed their pains, and he was obliged to walk with a crutch and a cane. He was attacked by painful and wasting illnesses, and at one time in the fall of 1862 he was very near death. His friend, Mr. Hamilton Stewart, gives the following account of the occasion:—

"While he was living at Cedar Point the word came down that he was dying. I took the next boat up, and found Mr. Houston was very sick with the fever. I remained for some days, doing all I could. The house stood in a grove of cedars. The time was the fall of the year. The wind blew and the rain fell. The surroundings were about as desolate as could be. A young doctor, who had n't had much experience, was attending Mr. Houston. One night he came up and called me out. He said he thought the end was near, and asked me to tell Mr. Houston. I did n't much like the duty. After thinking it over I went into the room where Mr. Houston was lying, and told him what the doctor said. He did n't make

any reply for a few minutes. Then he turned to me, and said, 'Call the family.' I went out and aroused Mrs. Houston and the children. After they came in Mr. Houston said, 'Call the servants.' All gathered about the bedside. Mr. Houston proceeded calmly and slowly to give detailed instructions about what he wanted done. He had some advice for each one present. When he had finished he called for the Bible and had a psalm read. Turning to two daughters he asked them to sing a hymn, which he designated. The girls began, but broke down sobbing. Mr. Houston took it up and finished it. After that he sent them all to bed again. He was very low, but he did not die at that time. When he became better I returned to Galveston. As I bade him good-bye he sent an expression of his kindest feeling to all of his friends. Then, warming up, he said, 'Tell my enemies I am not dead yet.'"

His mind, afflicted with the calamities of the country, and doubtful of the success of his section, reacted upon his bodily strength. He became melancholy and despondent, and in a measure lost his hold upon life. To his old friends he spoke doubtfully of the success of the South, and looked beyond to the results which would follow the restoration of the Union. To one of them he said that the immense fortunes which were being made in the North during the war would seek an outlet as soon as it was over, and that within less than fifteen years the cars would be running through Texas to the City of Mexico and

to San Francisco. At times the old spirit flashed out. The military officers of the Confederacy had established a very stringent system of martial law in Texas, by which all the male inhabitants over sixteen years of age were required to register themselves, and obtain passes from the provost-marshals. Houston paid no attention to the order, and at one time was halted by a superserviceable official, who demanded his pass. The old man waved him aside with a frowning countenance, and replied, "San Jacinto is my pass through Texas." He wrote a letter of earnest protest against the proclamation of martial law, issued May 31, 1861, by General P. D. Hebert, commanding the Department of Texas, to Governor Lubbock. He charged General Hebert with the abrogation of the principles of individual liberty, and appealed to the governor to maintain the rights of the people. The decrees of banishment against Union citizens, and the system of oppression and intimidation, were carried out in the most harsh and vindictive manner, and Houston revolted against the needless tyranny. His letter to the governor was not published until six months after it was written, and made a profound impression upon the people, discouraged by the reverses to the Confederate armies, and indignant at the military rule of the Confederate officers in Texas. But Houston was still firm for resistance to the North. After the recapture of Galveston by the Texan forces on January 1, 1863, he wrote a congratulatory letter to General

Magruder, in which he thanked him for "driving from the soil a ruthless enemy," and said that he would have paid him his respects personally, but that he had just risen from a sick-bed. The Federal soldiers, captured at Galveston, were treated with great harshness, and confined in prison like common criminals. Houston was indignant at this unmanly conduct on the part of the Confederate authorities, and applied in person to the superintendent of the penitentiary to remove the officers and men from convict cells to quarters more appropriate to prisoners of war. The superintendent did so, and took them into his own house, where they remained until they were exchanged.

Houston's last speech was delivered in the city of Houston March 18, 1863. The animosity and bitterness with which he had been regarded for his course in opposing secession had died away, and a feeling of respect for his venerable age, and a consciousness that he had been right in his prediction of the evils which would follow the attempt to dissolve the Union, added to the consideration due to his history and achievements. He was listened to with respectful attention, and spoke with much pathos of his age and the approaching end of his life. He said:—

"Ladies and Fellow - Citizens: With feelings of pleasure and friendly greeting I once again stand before this, an assemblage of my countrymen. As I behold this large assemblage, who, from their homes and daily toil, have come once again to greet the

man who has so often known their kindness and affection, I can feel that even yet I hold a place in their high regard. This manifestation is the highest compliment that can be paid to the citizen and patriot. As you have gathered here to listen to the sentiments of my heart, knowing that the days draw nigh unto me when all thoughts of ambition and worldly pride give place to the earnestness of age, I know you will bear with me, while with calmness and without the fervor and eloquence of youth, I express those sentiments which seem natural to my mind in the view of the condition of the country. I have been buffeted by the waves as I have been borne along time's ocean, until, shattered and worn, I approach the narrow isthmus which divides it from the sea of eternity beyond. Ere I step forward to journey through the pilgrimage of death, I would say that all my thoughts and all my hopes are with my country. If one impulse arises above another, it is for the happiness of these people; the welfare and glory of Texas will be the uppermost thought while the spark of life lingers in this breast."

He spoke hopefully of the probabilities of the success of the Confederacy. He pointed out the favorable chances of the interference of France in behalf of the South in the support of its Mexican scheme; spoke of the dissatisfaction caused by the depreciation of the greenback currency in the North, of the dangers of the drafts to the Federal authority, and the weariness of the Northwest with the war. His voice

was still for prolonged and desperate resistance. He said:—

“Thus, although I do not look with confidence to these results, nor do I advance them as more than mere probabilities, they certainly indicate that there is discord and discontent at the North, and these always will embarrass its cause, and endanger its success. Yet I do not trust to these things, nor would I have you do so. Let us go forward, nerved to nobler deeds than we have yet given to history. Let us bid defiance to all the hosts that our enemies can bring against us. Can Lincoln expect to subjugate a people thus resolved? No! From every conflict they will arise the stronger and more resolute. Are we deprived of the luxuries which our enemies possess? We have learned how little necessary they are, and it is no privation to do without them.”

But his darker forebodings of the fate of the Confederacy were destined to be fulfilled. On the 4th of July, 1863, Vicksburg fell, and Houston must have realized that it was the death stroke to the cause of the South. He was then on his death-bed. His bodily forces had gradually failed him, without any sharp attack of illness. He spent much of his time in reading the Bible, and in prayers for his country and his family. He received the ministrations of a Presbyterian clergyman, with whom he had previously been in antagonism, but with whom he was reconciled by the touch of death. All his family were about him, except his eldest son, Lieutenant Sam Houston;

who was wounded and a prisoner in the hands of the enemy. "The day before his death," his daughter writes, "he fell into a comatose state from which we could not rouse him; but during the next forenoon we heard his voice in a tone of entreaty, and, listening to the feeble sound, we caught the words 'Texas! Texas!' Soon afterward my mother was sitting by his bedside with his hand in hers, and his lips moved once again. 'Margaret,' he said, and the voice we loved was silent forever. As the sun sank below the horizon his spirit left this earth for a better land." He died July 26, 1863, aged seventy years, four months, and twenty-four days. He left a widow and eight children, some of whom have since distinguished themselves in the political and professional life of Texas. His will was peculiar and characteristic. After bequeathing his property to his family, he said in regard to the education of his sons: —

"My will is that my sons should receive solid and useful education and that no portion of their time be devoted to the study of abstract science. I greatly desire that they may possess a thorough knowledge of the English language, with a good knowledge of the Latin language. I request that they be instructed in the Holy Scriptures, and next to these that they be rendered thoroughly in a knowledge of geography and history. I wish my sons to be taught an entire contempt for novels and light reading, as well as for the morals and manners with whom they may be associated or instructed."

He bequeathed his sword to his eldest son in these terms:—

“To my eldest son, Sam Houston, I bequeath my sword, worn in the battle of San Jacinto, to be drawn only in defense of the constitution, the laws and liberties of his country. If any attempt be made to assail one of these I wish it to be used in vindication.”

The will was dated the 2d of April, 1863. His remains were buried at Huntsville, with a plain slab, bearing the inscription, “General Sam Houston. Born March 2, 1793. Died July 26, 1863;” and he sleeps beneath the tangled vines and grass, after a life of tumult and vicissitude such as falls to the lot of few mortals. At the winter session following his death the legislature adopted resolutions expressing regret at the extinction of so great a light in the dark hours of the nation’s existence, and paying tribute to his unblemished patriotism and untiring regard for the people of Texas. It afterward appropriated \$1700 to Mrs. Houston to pay the salary for his unfinished term as governor. The mourning of the people of Texas was deep and sincere for one who, with all his faults and all the antagonisms he had aroused, was regarded as the national hero, and detraction was silent in the sense of loss, and the gratitude and reverence for one who embodied the popular pride and typified a heroic history.