

Northern Kentucky
Views presents . . .

General William Orlando Butler

BUTLER, GEN. WILLIAM ORLANDO, Lawyer, Soldier, and Farmer, was born April 19, 1791, in Jessamine County, Kentucky. His father, Capt. Percival Butler, who was long Adjutant-General of Kentucky, was one of the five patriotic and brave brothers of whom Gen. Lafayette said, during the Revolution, that, "when he wanted a thing done well, he ordered a Butler to do it." Gen. William O. Butler was the second son of Gen. Percival Butler, and was educated at Transylvania University, where he graduated, in 1812; and at once entered upon the study of the law, under Robert Wickliffe; but postponed his law studies to enter the army, as corporal, in Hart's celebrated company, known as the Lexington Light Infantry, and at once marched to the relief of Fort Wayne. In the course of two months, he was appointed ensign in the regular army; in six months, was promoted captain; took part in the two battles of the river Raisin, as ensign, and greatly distinguished himself for gallantry; was slightly wounded and taken prisoner in the second engagement, January 22, 1813; was paroled, in the following month, at Fort Niagara; returned, by a perilous march, to Kentucky; recruited a company, with which he joined Gen. Jackson, and again distinguished himself, in the attack on Pensacola, his company being attached to the Forty-fourth Infantry, under Col. Ross. He took a conspicuous part in the battles of New Orleans; and, in the night fight, commanded four companies, constituting the left wing of Gen. Jackson's army; and, in the de-

cisive battle of January 8, 1815, commanded his own company. For his ability and bravery at New Orleans, he was most flatteringly mentioned by Gen. Jackson; and, for gallantry in the night battle, was brevetted major. He subsequently became aid-de-camp to Gen. Jackson, in place of his brother, Major Thomas L. Butler, who had resigned. In 1817, greatly against the will of Gen. Jackson, he quit the army, with the rank of major. Gen. Jackson predicted a brilliant career for him as commander of the army, should the country ever need his services; and his attachment for the hero of New Orleans, which was unbounded from the first acquaintance in the army, has increased throughout his life. Soon after returning home, he finished his law studies, and began the practice of his profession at Carrollton, then known as Port William, where he had settled with his father, over twenty years previously. He continued the practice of the law, with great success, until the opening of the war with Mexico. Without solicitation, he was elected to the Kentucky Legislature, in 1817; was re-elected at the close of his term; was again elected in 1821; in 1839, was elected to Congress; and was re-elected to that body, serving four years. In 1844, he was Democratic candidate for Governor of the State, and was probably the most able and popular man the Democracy had ever run for that office; and, although defeated by William Owsley, he reduced the Whig majority from twenty-eight thousand to less than five thousand. [At the beginning of the war with Mexico, he was appointed Major-General of Volunteers; was wounded in the battle of Monterey, in 1846, and compelled to return home for a time; in the following year, he rejoined Gen. Scott, at the City of Mexico; and, in 1848, succeeded that officer to the chief command of the army, which position he held until the treaty of peace with Mexico. In 1848, he was the Democratic candidate for Vice-President, on the ticket with Gen. Cass, but took no part in the contest. In 1861, he was a delegate to the "Peace Convention" at Washington. After returning from the war with Mexico, he never resumed the law practice, but has mainly devoted himself to the interests of his farm, to which he had previously given considerable attention. After the close of the Mexican War, he received two beautiful and costly swords; one from the people of Kentucky, and one from the Congress of the United States, bearing the following inscriptions on their massive scabbards: "Presented by the people of Kentucky to Maj.-Gen. William O. Butler, in testimony of his daring gallantry in leading his brave division in the desperate charge against a battery, in the battle of Monterey;" and "Presented by the President of the United States, agreeable to a resolution of Congress, to Maj.-Gen. William O. Butler, in testimony of the high sense entertained by Congress of his gallantry and good conduct in storming Monterey.

Resolution approved March 2, 1847." A number of years ago, Gen. Butler connected himself with the Presbyterian Church; has always been a man of exemplary, exact, and admirable habits; and has given himself, with a warm heart, to the various interests and wants of his friends, and the community which has formed around him through three-quarters of a century. Although he was probably never a brilliant orator, he was a refined, dignified, and able speaker, and a chaste and elegant writer. In his earlier days, especially, he wrote a great deal of poetry of real merit, much of it published in the newspapers of the times. He now resides in Carrollton, in an unpretending one-story house, built in 1819, overlooking the Ohio river; and there it was, long before the days of steamboats, that he wrote,

"O boatman! wind that horn again,"

in "The Boatman's Song," one of his finest poems. General Butler is a man of singularly military, dignified bearing, six feet in height, slender, but powerfully built; is yet perfectly erect and active in his movements; has attractive and marked features, a massive forehead, in his whole face and appearance, much resembling General Andrew Jackson. He was married, April 17, 1817, to Eliza J. Todd, daughter of General Robert Todd, of Fayette County, Kentucky. She died, in 1863, without children. The following is selected, among the vast number of General Butler's poetic productions, as probably the most widely known, and was first published about 1835:

"THE BOATMAN'S HORN.

"O boatman! wind that horn again,
 For never did the list'ning air
 Upon its lambent bosom bear
 So wild, so soft, so sweet a strain!
 What, though thy notes are sad and few,
 By every simple boatman blown,
 Yet is each pulse to nature true
 And melody in every tone.
 How oft, in boyhood's joyous days,
 Unmindful of the lapsing hours,
 I've loitered on my homeward way
 By wild Ohio's bank of flowers,
 While some lone boatman from the deck
 Poured his soft numbers to that tide,
 As if to charm from storm and wreck
 The boat where all his fortunes ride!

Delighted Nature drank the sound,
 Enchanted Echo bore it round,
 In whispers soft and softer still,
 From hill to plain and plain to hill,
 Till e'en the thoughtless frolic boy,
 Elate with hope and wild with joy,
 Who gambled by the river's side,
 And sported with the fretting tide,
 Feels something new pervade his breast,
 Change his light steps, repress his jest;
 Bends o'er the flood his eager ear
 To catch the sounds far off, yet dear;
 Drinks the sweet draught, but knows not why
 The tear of rapture fills his eye.
 And can he now, to manhood grown,
 Tell why those notes, simple and lone,
 As on the ravished ear they fell,
 Bind every sense in magic spell?
 There is a tide of feeling given
 To all on earth, its fountain heaven,
 Beginning with the dewy flower,
 Just ope'd in Flora's vernal bower—
 Rising creation's orders through,
 With louder murmur, brighter hue—
 That tide is sympathy! its ebb and flow
 Give life its hues, its joy and woe;
 Music, the master-spirit that can move
 Its waves to war, or lull them into love—
 Can cheer the sinking sailor 'mid the wave,
 And bid the warrior on! nor fear the grave;
 Inspire the fainting pilgrim on his road,
 And elevate his soul to claim his God.
 Then, boatman, wind that horn again!
 Though much of sorrow marks its strain,
 Yet are its notes to sorrow dear;
 What, though they wake fond memory's tear!
 Tears are sad memory's sacred feast,
 And rapture oft her chosen guest."