

**FRANKLIN PIERCE
AND HIS
ADMINISTRATION**

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Franklin Pierce and His Administration by Sidney Webster

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Charles R. Conning

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BY

SIDNEY WEBSTER

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THE two monographs of this pamphlet were originally published in *The New York World*,—one of them more than twenty years ago and the other quite recently. They are now, with few modifications, reproduced together as a contribution to the beginning of a true and candid history of the politics of the United States from March, 1853, to March, 1857.

The first of them may be of especial interest to those who are not students of political history, but are interested, as so many yet are, in whatever—no matter how trivial—concerns the work and fame, the life and death, of Nathaniel Hawthorne, for therein are given, by the only person able to write from his own personal knowledge, the details of the last days of one whose genius will forever keep for him a foremost place among American novelists.

245 EAST SEVENTEENTH STREET, NEW YORK.

March 4, 1898

FRANKLIN PIERCE AND HIS ADMINISTRATION.

(From The New York World of October 12, 1869.)

THE obsequies of the fourteenth President of the United States will be celebrated at Concord, New Hampshire.

FRANKLIN PIERCE was born, November 23, 1804, in Hillsborough County, of that State—the native county of General Stark, Daniel Webster, Levi Woodbury, Jeremiah Smith, General Miller, General McNeil, Charles G. Atherton, and many other illustrious men. His father, Benjamin Pierce, volunteered as a private soldier at the outset of the Revolutionary struggle; served through the war; was finally discharged at West Point, in 1784, a commander of a company; was elected in 1789 a member of the Legislature of New Hampshire, and retained that position for thirteen consecutive years, until chosen a member of the Governor's Council; and was elected Governor of the State

in 1827, and re-elected in 1829. Two of his sons and one son-in-law (General McNeil) served with distinction as officers in the War of 1812.

Franklin Pierce was graduated at Bowdoin College, Maine, in the year 1824. At the age of twenty-three he was admitted a member of the Hillsborough bar. At the age of twenty-five he was elected to the Legislature of New Hampshire, and served in that body four years, during the last two of which he was Speaker. When twenty-eight he was elected a member of the Lower House of Congress, and continued in that office two terms. At the age of thirty-three he was chosen to the Senate of the United States, but before his term had expired he resigned in order to take up the practice of his profession in his native State. Subsequently he was tendered by the Governor of the State an appointment to fill a vacancy in the Federal Senate, which he declined. At the age of forty-two he was offered by President Polk the position of Attorney-General, which he did not accept. At about the same time, and when a nomination was equivalent to an election, he was nominated for Governor of New Hampshire by the Democratic Convention, but his acquiescence could not be obtained. At the age of forty-three he was commissioned by President Polk to be a brigadier-general in the Army of the United States, and served in Mexico to the end of the war with that country, giving up his commission as soon as the treaty of peace was signed. Immediately after

the splendid victory which placed the city of Mexico at the mercy of General Scott, an armistice having been proposed by Santa Anna with a view to peace, the General-in-Chief appointed General Pierce one of the American commissioners on our part, together with Generals Persifer F. Smith and John A. Quitman, to arrange the terms. At the age of forty-six he was, by an almost unanimous vote, elected president of a convention to revise the Constitution of New Hampshire; and, at the age of forty-eight, was elected President of the United States by the votes of every State except Massachusetts, Vermont, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Thus, within the brief space of twenty-three years, he had accepted or declined the most important of all the posts of honor within the bestowal either of his native State or of the nation. Such a record of continuous, unchecked, and rapid advance from the position of a member of the State Legislature, through nearly all grades of service in peace or war, to the highest possible office in the United States, is rare! In all this bright career, Franklin Pierce never stooped to get an office, nor found it necessary ever to practice the arts which too often, in these days, bring a man to elevated public positions with self-respect compromised and power of independent action gone.

President Jackson had entered upon his second term of office when Pierce began his congressional career, in the winter of 1833. His first political faith was pledged to that great leader of

the new Democracy, who inspired his party with new ideas and purposes, removed the masses from the despotism of the classes, and began the beneficent reign of the "fierce Democracie" of the land, which at first so terrified the worshipers at the idols of conservatism and deferential politics. Pierce declared himself very early, in the first candidacy of Jackson in favor of the illustrious soldier, whose military prowess was destined to be eclipsed by the most powerful civil administration that has adorned our annals. This early devotion to President Jackson, on the part of the then much-talked-of young man from New Hampshire, had preceded his arrival in Washington, and secured for him a cordial and flattering reception at the White House. The old hero took Mr. Pierce at once into his confidence; their intercourse was frequent and free, and the relations of mutual confidence and trust then begun were never lost. Mr. Pierce, during his service in Congress, made no effort to be conspicuous in debate, and display his exceptional powers of cogent extempore speech. He did not aim at that kind of personal display. He had no need of it to fortify himself at home, and he had the quick sagacity to perceive that speech-making was not the true way for a young man to acquire real weight in such a body. In the drudgery of the committee-room he did his full share of labor. During these four years in the House of Representatives he impressed his contemporaries as a

young man of sound sense, strong political convictions, patient observation, inherent tact and skill, and most charming as well as brilliant manners.

In 1837 he took his seat in the Senate of the United States—the youngest member of that body. Calhoun, Webster, Clay, Benton, Silas Wright, Woodbury, Buchanan, Walker, and Linn were members. It was the commencement of the presidency of Mr. Van Buren. In this highest field of political labor he pursued substantially the same course as in the Lower House. The youngest member, he did not attempt distinction by open controversy or competition with these great figures to whom alone the country looked, and upon whose wisdom its hopes were hung. He made himself, however, a diligent member of the various committees to which he was appointed, and soon obtained an enviable reputation for a thorough mastery of every subject assigned to his charge. By the defeat of Mr. Van Buren in 1840, the administration of the Federal Government, for the first time in twelve years, fell to the Whigs, who had a majority in both branches of Congress. It was the purpose of the party in power, under the leadership of Mr. Clay, to overthrow all the great measures which the Democratic party, under the administrations of Jackson and Van Buren, had placed upon the statute-book. It was in this great encounter that Mr. Pierce first became conspicuous among the Democratic Senators, and laid the foun-