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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GEN. WM. O. BUTLER OF KENTUCKY.

BY FRANCIS P. BLAIR.

In memoirs of individuals of distinction, it is usual to look back to their ancestry. The feeling is universal which prompts us to learn something of even an ordinary acquaintance in whom interest is felt. It will indulge, therefore, only a natural and proper curiosity to introduce the subject of this notice by a short account of a family whose striking traits survive in him so remarkably.

General Butler's grandfather, Thomas Butler, was born 6th April, 1720, in Kilkenny, Ireland. He married there in 1742. Three of his five sons who attained manhood, Richard, William, and Thomas, were born abroad. Pierce, the father of Gen. William O. Butler, and Edward, the youngest son, were born in Pennsylvania. It is remarkable that all these men, and all their immediate descendants, with a single exception, were engaged in the military service of the country.

The eldest, Richard, was lieutenant colonel of Morgan's celebrated rifle regiment, and to him it owed much of the high character that gave it a fame of its own, apart from the other corps of the revolution. The cool, disciplined valor which gave steady and deadly direction to the rifles of this regiment, was derived principally from this officer, who devoted himself to the drill of his men. He was promoted to the full command of a regiment some time during the war, and in that capacity commanded Wayne's left in the attack on Stony Point. About the year 1790, he was appointed major-general. On the 4th of November, 1791, he was killed in Gen. St. Clair's bloody battle with the Indians. His combat with the Indians, after he was shot, gave such a peculiar interest to his fate, that a representation of himself and the group surrounding him was exhibited throughout the Union in wax figures. Notices of this accomplished soldier will be found in Marshall's *Life of Washington*, pages 290, 311, 420. In Gen. St. Clair's report, in the *American Museum*, volume xi, page 44, appendix.

William Butler, the second son, was an officer throughout the revolutionary war, rose to the rank of colonel, and was in many of the severest battles. He was the favorite of the family, and was boasted of by this race of heroes as the coolest and boldest man in battle they had ever known. When the army was greatly reduced in rank and file, and there were many superfluous officers, they organized themselves into a separate corps, and elected him to the command. General Washington declined receiving this novel corps of commissioned soldiers, but, in a proud testimonial, did honor to their devoted patriotism.

Of Thomas Butler, the third son, we glean the following facts from the *American Biographical Dictionary*. In the year 1776, whilst he was a student of law in the office of the eminent Judge Wilson, of Philadelphia, he left his pursuit and joined the army as a subaltern. He soon obtained the command of a company, in which he continued to the close of the revolutionary war. He was in almost every action fought in the middle States during the war. At the battle of Brandywine he received the thanks of Washington on the field of battle, through his aid-de-camp Gen. Hamilton, for his intrepid conduct in rallying a detachment of retreating troops and giving the enemy a severe fire. At the battle of Monmouth, he received the thanks of Gen. Wayne for defending a defile, in the face of a severe fire from the enemy, while Col. Richard Butler's regiment made good its retreat.

At the close of the war he retired into private life, as a farmer, and continued in the enjoyment of rural and domestic happiness until the year 1791, when he again took the field to meet the savage foe that menaced our western frontier. He commanded a battalion in the disastrous battle of November, 1791, in which his brother fell. Orders were given by General St. Clair to charge with the bayonet, and Major Butler, though his leg had been broken by a ball, yet on horseback, led his battalion to the charge. It was with difficulty his surviving brother, Captain Edward Butler, removed him from the field. In 1793 he was continued in the establishment as Major, and in 1794 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel commandant of the 4th sub-legion. He commanded in this year Fort Fayette, at Pittsburgh, and prevented the deluded insurgents from taking it—more by his name than by his forces, for he had but few troops. The close of his life was embittered with trouble. In 1803 he was arrested by the commanding general (Wilkinson) at Fort Adams, on the Mississippi, and sent to Maryland, where he was tried by a court-martial, and acquitted of all

the charges, save that of *wearing his hair*. He was then ordered to New Orleans, where he arrived, to take command of the troops, October 20th. He was again arrested next month; but the court did not sit until July of the next year, and their decision is not known. Col. Butler died September 7, 1805. Out of the arrest and persecution of this sturdy veteran, Washington Irving (*Knickerbocker*) has worked up a fine piece of burlesque, in which Gen. Wilkinson's character is imitatively delineated in that of the vain & pompous Gen. Von Poffenburg.

Percival Butler, the fourth son, father of Gen. William O. Butler, was born at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1700. He entered the army as a lieutenant at the age of eighteen; was with Washington at Valley Forge; was in the battle of Monmouth, and at the taking of Yorktown—being through the whole series of struggles in the middle States, with the troops under the commander-in-chief, except for a short period when he was attached to a light corps commanded by La Fayette, who presented him a sword. Near the close of the war he went to the south with the Pennsylvania brigade, where peace found him. He emigrated to Kentucky in 1784. He was the last of the old stock left when the war of 1812 commenced. He was made adjutant general when Kentucky became a State, and in that capacity joined one of the armies sent out by Kentucky during the war.

Edward Butler, the youngest of the five brothers, was too young to enter the army in the first stages of the revolution, but joined it near the close, and had risen to a captaincy when Gen. St. Clair took the command, and led it to that disastrous defeat in which so many of the best soldiers of the country perished. He there evinced the highest courage and strongest fraternal affection, in carrying his wounded brother out of the massacre, which was continued for miles along the route of the retreating army, and from which so few escaped, even of those who fled unincumbered. He subsequently became adjutant general in Wayne's army.

Of these five brothers, four had sons—all of whom, with one exception, were engaged in the military or naval service of the country during the last war.

1st. General Richard Butler's son William, died a lieutenant in the navy, early in the last war. His son, Captain James Butler, was at the head of the Pittsburgh blues, which company he commanded in the campaigns of the northwest, and was particularly distinguished in the battle of Mississinewa.

2d. Colonel William Butler, also of the Revolutionary army, had two sons; one died in the navy, the other a subaltern in Wayne's army. He was in the battle with the Indians in 1794.

3. Lieut. Col. Thomas Butler, of the old stock, had three sons, the eldest a judge. The second, Col. Robert Butler, was at the head of General Jackson's staff throughout the last war. The third, William E. Butler, also served in the army of General Jackson.

4th. Percival Butler, captain in the revolutionary war, and adjutant general of Kentucky during the last war, had four sons; first, Thomas, who was a captain, and aid to General Jackson at New Orleans; next, General William O. Butler, the subject of this notice; third, Richard, who was assistant adjutant general in the campaigns of the war of 1812. Percival Butler, the youngest son, now a distinguished lawyer, was not of an age to bear arms in the last war. Of the second generation of the Butlers, there are nine certainly, and probably more, engaged in the present war.

*His First Campaign.*  
This glance at the family shows the character of the race. An anecdote, derived from a letter of an old Pennsylvania friend of the parents, who transplanted it from Ireland, shows that its military instinct was an inheritance. "While the five sons," says the letter, "were absent from home in the service of the country, the old father took it in his head to go also. The neighbors collected to remonstrate against it; but his wife said, 'Let him go! I can get along without him, and raise something to feed the army in the bargain; and the country wants every man who can shoulder a musket.' It was doubtless this extraordinary zeal of the Butler family that induced Gen. Washington to give the toast—"The Butlers, and their five sons," at his own table, whilst surrounded by a large party of officers. This anecdote rests on the authority of the late Gen. Findley, of Cincinnati. A similar tribute of respect was paid to this devoted house of soldiers by Gen. La Fayette, in a letter now extant, and in the possession of a lady connected with it by marriage, La Fayette says, "When I wanted a thing well done, I ordered a Butler to do it."

From this retrospect, it will be seen that in all the wars of the country—in the revolutionary war, in the Indian war, in the last British war, and the present Mexican war—the blood of almost every Butler able to bear arms, has been freely shed in the public cause. Major General William O. Butler is now among the highest in the military service of his country; & he has attained this grade from the ranks

—the position of a private being the only one he ever sought. At the opening of the war of 1812, he had just graduated in the Transylvania University, and was looking to the law as a profession. The surrender of Detroit, and of the army by Hull, awoke the patriotism and valor of Kentucky; and young Butler, yet in his minority, was among the first to volunteer. He gave up his books, and the enjoyments of the gay and polished society of Lexington, where he lived among a circle of fond and partial relations—the hope to gratify their ambition in shining at the bar, or in the political forum of the State—to join Captain Hart's company of infantry as a private soldier.

Before the march to join the northwestern army, he was elected a corporal. In Wayne, which was invested with hostile Indians. These were driven before the Kentucky volunteers to their towns on the Wabash, which they destroyed, and the troops then returned to the Miami of the lakes, where they made a winter encampment. Here an ensign's commission in infantry was tendered to the volunteer corporal, which he declined, unless permitted to remain with the northwestern army, which he had entered to share in the effort of the Kentucky militia to wipe out the disgrace of Hull's surrender by the recapture of Detroit. His proposition was assented to, and he received an ensign's appointment in the 17th infantry, then a command of Gen. Winchester. After enduring every privation in a winter encampment, in the wilderness and frozen marshes of the lake country, awaiting in vain the expected support of additional forces, the Kentucky volunteers, led by Lewis, Allen, and Madison, with Well's regiment, (17th U. S.) advanced to encounter the force of British and Indians which defended Detroit. On leaving Kentucky, the volunteers had pledged themselves to drive the British invaders from our soil. These men and their leaders were held in such estimation at home, that the expectation formed of them exceeded their promises; and these volunteers, though disappointed in every success which they had reason to anticipate—wanting in provisions, clothes, cannon, in everything—resolved, rather than lose reputation, to press on to the enterprise, & endeavor to draw on after them, by entering into action, the troops behind. It is not proper here to enter into explanations of the causes of the disaster at the river Raisin, the consequences of this movement, nor to give the particulars of the battle. The incidents which signalized the character of the subject of this memoir alone are proper here.

There were two battles at the river Raisin—on the 18th, the other on the 22d of January. In the first, the whole body of Indian warriors, drawn together from all the lake tribes for the defence of Upper Canada against the approaching Kentuckians, were encountered. In moving to the attack of this formidable force of the fiercest, and bravest, and most expert warriors on the continent, a strong party of them were described from the line with which Ensign Butler advanced, rushing forward to reach a fence, as a cover from which to ply their rifles. Butler instantly proposed and was permitted, to anticipate them.— Calling upon some of the most alert and active men of the company, he ran directly to meet the Indians at the fence. He and his comrades outstripped the enemy; and, getting possession of the fence, kept the advantage of the position for their advancing friends. This incident, of how ever little importance as to results, is worth remembrance in giving the traits of a young soldier's character. It is said that the hardest veteran, at the opening of the fire in battle, feels, for the moment, somewhat appalled; and Gen. Wolfe, one of the bravest of men, declared that the "horrid yell of the Indian strikes the boldest heart with affright." The strapping student, who, for the first time, beheld a field of battle on the snows of the river Raisin, presenting in bold relief long files of those terrible enemies, whose massacres had filled his native State with tales of horror, must have felt some stirring sensations. But the crack of the Indian rifle, and his savage yell, awoke in him the chivalric instincts of his nature; and the promptitude with which he communicated his enthusiasm to a few comrades around, and rushed forward to meet danger in its most appalling form, risking himself to save others, and to secure a triumph which he could scarcely hope to share, gave earnest of the military talent, the self-sacrificing courage, and the soldierly sympathies which have drawn to him the nation's esteem. The close of the battle of the 18th gave another instance in which these latter traits of Gen. Butler's character were still more strikingly illustrated. The Indians, driven from the defenses around the town on the river Raisin, retired fighting into the thick woods beyond it. The contest of sharp shooting from tree to tree was here continued—the Kentuckians pressing forward, and the Indians retreating—until night closed in, when the Kentuckians were recalled to the encampment in the village. The Indians advanced as their opposers withdrew, and kept up the fire until the Kentuckians e-

merged from the woods into the open ground: Just as the column to which Ensign Butler belonged reached the verge of the dark forest, the voice of a wounded man, who had been left some distance behind, was heard calling out most piteously for help. Butler induced three of his company to go back in the woods with him, to bring him off. He was found, and they fought their way back—one of the men, Jeremiah Walker, receiving a shot, of which he subsequently died.

In the second sanguinary battle of the river Raisin, on the 22d of January, with the British and Indians, another act of self-devotion was performed by Butler.— After the rout and massacre of the right wing, belonging to Well's command, the whole force of the British and Indians was concentrated against the small body of troops under Major Madison, that maintained their ground within the picketed gardens. A double barn, commanding the flat of ground on which the Kentuckians stood, was approached on one side by the Indians, under the cover of an orchard and fence, the British on the other side, being so posted as to command the space between it and the pickets. A party in the rear of the barn was discovered advancing to take possession of it. All saw the fatal consequences of the secure lodgment of the enemy at a place which would present every man within the pickets at close rifle shot to the aim of their marksmen.— Major Madison inquired if there was no one who would volunteer to run the gauntlet of the fire of the British and Indian lines, and put a torch to the combustibles within the barn, to save the remnant of the little army from sacrifice. Butler, without a moment's delay, took some blazing sticks from a fire at hand, leaped the pickets, and running at his utmost speed, thrust the fire into the straw within the barn. One who was an anxious spectator of the event we narrate, says, "that altho' volley upon volley was fired at him, Butler, after making some steps on his way back, turned to see if the fire had taken, and not being satisfied, returned to the barn, and set it in a blaze. As the conflagration grew, the enemy was retreating from the rear of the building, which they had entered at one end as the flame was ascending in the other. Soon after reaching the pickets in safety, amid the shouts of his friends, he was struck by a ball in his breast. Believing from the pain he felt, that it had penetrated his chest, turning to Adjutant (now General) McCalla, one of his Lexington comrades, and pressing his hand to the spot, he said, 'I fear this shot is mortal; but while I am able to move, I will do my duty.' To the anxious inquiries of his friend, who met him soon afterward again, he opened his vest, with a smile, and showed him that the ball spent itself on the thick wadding of his coat and on his breastbone. He suffered, however, for many weeks.

The little band within the pickets, which Winchester had surrendered, after being carried himself a prisoner into Proctor's camp, denied his powers. They continued to hold the enemy at bay until they were enabled to capitulate on honorable terms, which, nevertheless, Proctor shamefully violated, by leaving the sick and wounded who were unable to walk, to the tomahawk of his allies. Butler, who was among the few of the wounded who escaped the massacre, was marched through Canada to Fort Niagara—suffering under his wound, and every privation—oppressed with grief, hunger, fatigue, and the inclement cold of that desolate region. Even here he forgot himself, and his mind wandered back to the last night scene which he surveyed on the bloody shores of the river Raisin. He gave up the heroic part, and became the school-boy again, and commemorated his sorrows for his lost friends in verse, like some passionate, heart-broken lover. These elegiac strains were never intended for any but the eye of mutual friends, whose sympathies, like his own, poured out tears with their plaints over the dead. We give some of those lines of his boyhood, to show that the heroic youth had a bosom not less kind than brave.

*THE FIELD OF RAISIN.*  
The battle's o'er! the din is past,  
Night's mantle on the field is cast;  
The Indian's yell is heard no more,  
And silence broods o'er Erie's shore.  
At this lone hour I go to tread  
The field where valor vainly bled—  
To raise the wounded warrior's crest,  
Or warm with tears his icy breast.  
To treasure up his last command  
And bear it to his native land.  
It may one pulse of joy impart  
To a fond mother's bleeding heart;  
Or for a moment it may dry  
The tear-drop in the widow's eye.  
Vain hope, away! The widow ne'er  
Her warrior's dying wish shall hear.  
The passing zephyr bears no sigh,  
No wounded warrior meets the eye—  
Death is his sleep by Erie's wave,  
Of Hain's snow we heaped his grave!  
How many hopes his murdered hero—  
The mother's joy, the father's pride,  
The country's boast, the foe's man's fear,  
In wilder'd havoc, side by side,  
Lend me, thou silent queen of night,  
Lend me awhile thy waning light,  
That I may see each well-loved form,  
That sunk beneath the morning storm.

These lines are introductory to what may be considered an succession of epitaphs on the personal friends whose bodies he found upon the field. It would extend

the extract too far to insert them. We can only add the close of the poem, where he takes leave of a group of his young comrades, in Hart's company, who had fallen together:

And here I see that youthful band,  
That loved to move at Hart's command;  
I saw them for the battle dressed,  
And still where danger thickest pressed,  
I marked their crimson plume wave,  
How many fill this bloody grave!  
Their pillow now—no shroud most meet!  
The night snow—no shroud most meet!  
But wherefore do I linger here?  
Why drop this unavailing tear?  
Where'er I turn some youthful form,  
Like flower broken by the storm,  
Appeals to me in sad array,  
And bids me yet a moment stay,  
Till I could fondly lay me down,  
And sleep with him on the cold ground,  
For thee, thou dread and solemn plain,  
I ne'er shall look on thee again:  
And spring, with her effacing showers,  
Shall come, and summer's mantling flowers;  
And each succeeding winter throw  
On thy red breast new robes of snow;  
Yet I will wear thee in my heart,  
All dark and gory as thou art.

## His services at the Battle of N. Orleans.

Gen. Jackson's sense of the services of Butler in this memorable campaign, was strongly expressed in the following letter to a member of the Kentucky Legislature:

HERSHTAGE, Feb 20, 1844.  
My Dear Sir: You ask me to give you my opinion of the military services of the then Captain (now Colonel) William O. Butler, of Kentucky, during the investment of New Orleans by the British forces in 1814 and 1815. I wish I had sufficient strength to speak fully of the merit and services of Colonel Butler on that occasion; this strength I have not. Suffice it to say, that on all occasions he displayed that heroic chivalry, and calmness of judgment in the midst of danger, which distinguish the valuable officer in the hour of battle. In a conspicuous manner were those noble qualities displayed by him on the night of the 23d December, 1814, and on the 8th of January, 1815, as well as at all times during the presence of the British army at New Orleans. In short, he was to be found at all points where duty called. I hazard nothing in saying, that should our country again be engaged in war during the active age of Colonel Butler, he would be one of the very best selections that could be made to command our army, and lead the eagles of our country on to victory and renown. He has sufficient energy to assume all responsibility necessary to success, and for his country's good.

ANDREW JACKSON.  
General Jackson gave earlier proof of the high estimation in which he held the young soldier who had identified himself with his own glory at New Orleans. He made him his aid-de-camp in 1816, which station he retained on the peace establishment, with the rank of Colonel. But, like his illustrious patron, he soon felt that military station and distinction had no charms for him when unattended with the dangers, duties, and patriotic achievements of war.

## Retires to Private Life.

He resigned, therefore, even his association with his veteran chief, of which he was so proud, and retired in 1817 to private life. He resumed his study of the profession that was interrupted by the war, married, and settled down on his paternal possession at the confluence of the Kentucky and Ohio rivers, in the noiseless but arduous vocations of civil life.— The abode which he had chosen made it peculiarly so with him. The region around him was wild and romantic, sparsely settled, and by pastoral people. There are no populous towns. The high, rolling, and yet rich lands—the precipitous cliffs of the Kentucky, of Eagle, of Sovern, and other tributaries which pour into it near the mouth, make this section of the State still, to some extent, a wilderness of thickets—of the tangled peavine, the grape vine, and nut-bearing trees, which rendered all Kentucky, until the intrusion of the whites, one great Indian park. The whole luxuriant domain was preserved by the Indians as a pasture for buffalo, deer, elk, and other animals—their enjoyment alike as a chase and a subsistence—by excluding every tribe from fixing a habitation in it. Its name consecrated as the dark and bloody ground; and war pursued every foot that trod it. In the midst of this region, in April 1791, Wm. O. Butler was born, in Jessamine county on the Kentucky river. His father had married in Lexington, soon after his arrival in Kentucky, 1782, Miss Hawkins, a sister-in-law of Col. Todd, who commanded and perished in the battle of the Blue Licks. Follow the instincts of his family, which seemed ever to court danger, Gen. Pierce Butler, as neighborhood encroached around him, removed not long after the birth of his son William, to the mouth of the Kentucky river. Through this section, the Indian war-path to the heart of Kentucky passed. Until the peace of 1794, there was scarcely a day that some hostile savage did not prow through the tangled forests and the labyrinth of hills, streams and cliffs, which adapted this region to their lurking warfare. From it they merged when they made their last formidable excursion, and pushed their foray to the environs of Frankfort, the capital of the State. Gen. Pierce Butler had on one side of him the Ohio, on the farther shore of which the savage hordes still held the mastery; and on the other, the romantic region through which they hunted and pressed their war enterprises. And here, amid the scenes of border warfare, his son William had that spirit which has animated him through life, educated by the legends of the Indian-fighting hunters of Kentucky.

To the feelings and taste inspired by the