

General James Shields in Lancaster

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

JAMES SHIELDS was born in Ireland in 1810. At the age of sixteen, he emigrated to the United States. He studied law and was admitted to its practice in Illinois in 1832. Eleven years later, he was appointed judge of the supreme court of Illinois. When the war with Mexico began, he was appointed a brigadier-general, and served under Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. In 1848, he was mustered out; and in the same year was appointed governor of Oregon territory, from which position he resigned to become a senator from Illinois. It was while serving in the senate, that he visited Lancaster.

The Lancaster Intelligencer of Tuesday, January 1st, 1850, referred to the visit of Senator Shields as follows:

"This distinguished officer of the Mexican War, at present a senator in congress, on Tuesday last [Christmas Day, December 25th, 1849] paid a visit to this place, and remained until Thursday. During his stay, he was the guest of the Hon. James Buchanan, at Wheatland. Previous to leaving, on Thursday, he was visited at Hubley's [White Swan] hotel by crowds of our citizens, of all parties, all appearing anxious to pay their respects to a brave and meritorious soldier, who so bravely assisted in carrying aloft the 'Stars and Stripes' of our country from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico.

"General Shields, it will be recollected, was shot through the lungs, while gallantly leading his brigade at the taking of the heights of Cerro Gordo. The wound, when he fell, was considered mortal; but, contrary to all expectation, he recovered, and participated in most of the subsequent desperate battles fought in the Valley of Mexico, in one of which he received a severe wound in the arm. At the close of the war, and upon the reduction of the army, he retired to private life, from which the legislature of Illinois has recently elevated him to the senate of the United States.

"General Shields is in the prime of life, about the medium height, and has a frame capable of enduring great fatigue. His excellent conversational powers, added to his bland and courteous manners, are well calculated to make a favorable impression upon all who form his acquaintance. He is an Irishman by birth; and has, like many of his countrymen, a willingness to seal his devotion to the land of his adoption by shedding his blood in defense of its honor and its rights."

Upon the expiration of his term as senator from Illinois in 1855, General Shields removed to Minnesota and represented that state in the United States senate in 1858-9. He served with distinction in the Civil War, and died June 1st, 1879.

Doubtless it would be quite impossible to find a more remarkable example of the possibilities open to young men in America than is illustrated by the career of this Irish youth who came here at the age of sixteen, and became a judge of a supreme court; a general in two important wars; a governor of a territory; and a representative of two different states in the United States senate,—and all before he had scarcely passed the age of fifty years. Surely, this is a record that has but few, if any, equals.