FRANK M. PIXLEY DEAD

San Francisco Call, Volume 78, Number 73, 12 August 1895

The Veteran Editor Succumbs After a False Rally.

HIS END WAS PEACEFUL.

May Have Been Accelerated by the Death of a Favorite Niece.

A CAREER OF BUSY INTEREST.

Brief Sketch of a Life That Helped to Make California History. *

Frank M. Pixley died at his residence, on the corner of Union and Steiner streets, last night at 11:10 o'clock, sinking calmly away, apparently without suffering.

He began to fail yesterday afternoon at 2:15 o'clock, and in a short time the anxious watchers at his bedside knew that the veteran jurist, statesman and editor was passing. Dr. Rosenstirn, the family physician, from time to time held the pulse of the dying man and felt the circulation grow weaker.

There were present Mrs. William Pixley, wife of a deceased brother, and Mrs. H. E. Topping, his sister, and her family. Mr. Pixley had been suffering for a long time from a complication of ailments and it was well known that the end was not far off. He had long since given up his editorial and literary work and confined himself to his residence and to the care of the physicians.

Toward the last he was given to long spells of silence and would sit on the veranda and look thoughtfully away over the distant hills. It is believed that the recent death of his favorite niece, Mrs. Weller, from an overdose of morphine, had much to do with hastening the end of life.

Mrs. Pixley, who has herself been seriously ill, sustained the shock of her bereavement with fortitude, and according to the physician's accounts, was resting easily at a late hour.

Prominent Features in the Career of the Dead Journalist. Frank Morrison Pixley was born at Westmoreland, a small village in Oneida County, N. Y., January 31, 1825. He came of an old English family which settled in Bridgeport, Conn., in the seventeenth century. His grandfather settled in Oneida County, N. Y., in the early part of the present century. It was here that his father married one of the daughters of Judge Roderick Morrison. Mr. Pixley's mother died in giving him birth, and Frank was brought up by neighbors' wives.

He received his early education at the village academy and then spent two years at a Quaker school at Skaneateles. Afterward he prepared for entering a law office under the instruction of a private tutor, a graduate of Hamilton school. This was in 1847, and a year afterward he was admitted to the bar of Michigan in the law office of Hon. William Hale. He had gone on to Michigan by the advice of his father, who presented him with a law library and 160 acres of land. He was naturally a bright man of quick perceptions, and was quite successful at his practice. ln1848, though, Mr. Pixley hearing of the finding of gold in California, sold his books and land and started westward. He stopped with an uncle in Missouri for some months, and then in 1849 started on muleback across the plains.

He arrived in El Dorado County in September, 1849, and wintered at Weaver Creek. In the spring he went to the North Fork of the Yuba and worked three years in the mines. He tired of a miner's life and 1851 found him in San Francisco. It was here that he met a maternal uncle, Roderick N. Morrison, on the bench. The latter took an interest in the young man, and together with other young lawyers whom the Judge patronized soon had a lucrative practice built up. It was in 1856 that Mr. Pixley and his lawyer friends who were friendly to Judge Morrison became involved in difficulty with the managers of the San Francisco Herald, which was making daily attacks on Judge Morrison. Among those of the Herald were Hon. Edmund Randolph, John Nugent and William Walker, the "gray-eyed man of destiny," who became the Central American filibuster. The affair culminated in a duel between Graham and Walker. Mr. Pixley acted as Graham's second, and the affair culminated with the wounding of Walker.

Soon after this Mr. Pixley was elected City Attorney of San Francisco, and he filled the office with credit to himself and advantage to the City. The late United States Judge Sawyer was an assistant in the office, and for some years he and Mr. Pixley practiced law in partnership.

In 1858 Mr. Pixley began to move in politics, and he became a Republican. As such he was elected to the State Assembly, and distinguished himself by the zeal and activity with which he opposed the Parsons bulkhead bill, which was defeated that year mainly through his influence and exertions. He formed one of a trio of Republican orators, the other two being E. D. Baker, afterward Senator for Oregon, and Mr. Tracy. The Republican party prospered in the State, and with it the political fortunes of Mr. Pixley. In 1861 he was nominated for Attorney General on the ticket which had Leland Stanford as the gubernatorial standard-bearer. Mr. Pixley made a brilliant canvass, and the entire ticket was elected by an average plurality of 10,000. At the end of his term the fusion of the so-called Douglas Democracy and the election of John Conness to the United States Senate resulted in defeating Mr. Pixley for re-nomination. He made a brilliant showing in the nominating convention, and succeeded in breaking the Conness slate, but it was after the nomination for Attorney-General/ had been made.

During the Rebellion Mr. Pixley went East and spent three months at the front with General Grant in Virginia. He was present at several engagements as a civilian. In 1868, when General Grant was nominated for the Presidency, Mr. Pixley. was the Republican nominee for Congress from the Eighteenth District, comprising the City of San Francisco and all the southern counties of the State. The district was strongly Democratic though, and Mr. Pixley was defeated with the rest of the ticket in the district.

When President Grant took office he appointed Mr. Pixley United States District Attorney for California, and he held office until 1869, when seeing that his political enemies, George C. Gorham and A. A Sargent, were determined to defeat his confirmation he resigned. That was the last political office which he held. In 1870 Mr. Pixley and his family spent a year in Europe, and he saw considerable of the Franco-German war. He was among the first foreigners to enter Paris after the seige with the family of the American Minister, Hon. E. B. Washburne. He remained there long enough to witness the reign and destruction of the commune.

Soon after he returned to America, and, in 1872, became a candidate for Presidential Elector on the Greeley ticket. The bitterness engendered by the continued success of his enemies, Sargent, Gorham and others, in controlling the Republican party machinery, seemed to give him no alternative but to follow his old party leader, Horace Greeley, but there was no real affinity between him and the Democratic party. Directly after that campaign was over he once more resumed his place in the Republican ranks, and he remained staunch to the party to the last. In his political career, Mr. Pixley, through his unyielding clinging to certain principles, made many bitter enemies, and in several campaigns the rival leaders dealt each other resounding whacks with all the powers of eloquence which they could command. George C. Gorham, the leader of one wing of the Republican party, himself a brilliant orator, was particularly bitter in denunciation of Mr. Pixley, and his political methods, while Mr. Pixley held his ground ably against the attacks. It was in 1877 that Mr. Pixley tired of the turmoil of politics. Factional feeling ran high and he concluded to withdraw from actual participation in the campaigns. He decided to follow out a plan which he had had in contemplation for some time. That was the establishment of a newspaper in which he could give vent to his personal convictions in that strong and fearless style for which he was noted.

It was more for this purpose than to make money that the Argonaut was launched on the journalistic sea. He went into the matter with energy, and as in other ventures in which he had embarked before it was a success from the start. To his own surprise the circulation of the paper went beyond his anticipations. The paper was an impress of his strong individuality. His style of writing was terse and incisive, and what he wrote commanded attention. For a number of years, too, he had written editorials for the Chronicle. It was the success of the Argonaut that induced Mr. Pixley to inaugurate a novel feature in the way of a daily paper. It was to publish a journal containing the news of the day in a

condensed and epigrammatic form. In fact, he called the paper The Epigram. It was short-lived, though, and even the sparkling editorial squibs which he contributed to it could not force it into popularity. The paper died before a month had expired. Mr. Pixley then devoted all his energies toward improving his pet— the Argonaut— and for years his caustic comments and scintillating editorials made that journal one of the foremost weeklies of the Pacific Coast.

When in 1879 General Grant returned from his tour of the world and arrived in this City Mr. Pixley was made chairman of the committee of citizens appointed to receive and tender the hospitalities of the City to the distinguished soldier and ex-President. This he did in a way that placed General Grant entirely at home from the moment that he set foot in California.

Recently Mr. Pixley began to feel the advance of years, and the strain upon his energies was so strong that he decided to retire from active work in journalism. So he sold his interest in the Argonaut, and since then the journal has ceased to be a reflex of the rugged opinions of its founder.

During his years of activity Mr. Pixley accumulated a fortune, and the estate which he leaves is reckoned a valuable one. He owned the family homestead on Union and Steiner streets, which occupies a square block. Besides other City property he owned a fine ranch in Marin County.

The last two or three years of his life Mr. Pixley spent quietly with his family, either at the Union Street home or at the ranch. He was in every way a home man, and loved to surround himself with all that art and nature can produce. As a man he was loved by many who had enjoyed his charity and bounty. His purse was always open, and whatever be dispensed was done in a hearty, unostentatious manner. His home was the abode of lavish hospitality to friends and relatives. His family there consisted of his wife, two adopted children and the widow of his brother, who was burned to death on the Marin County ranch during the raging of a forest fire.