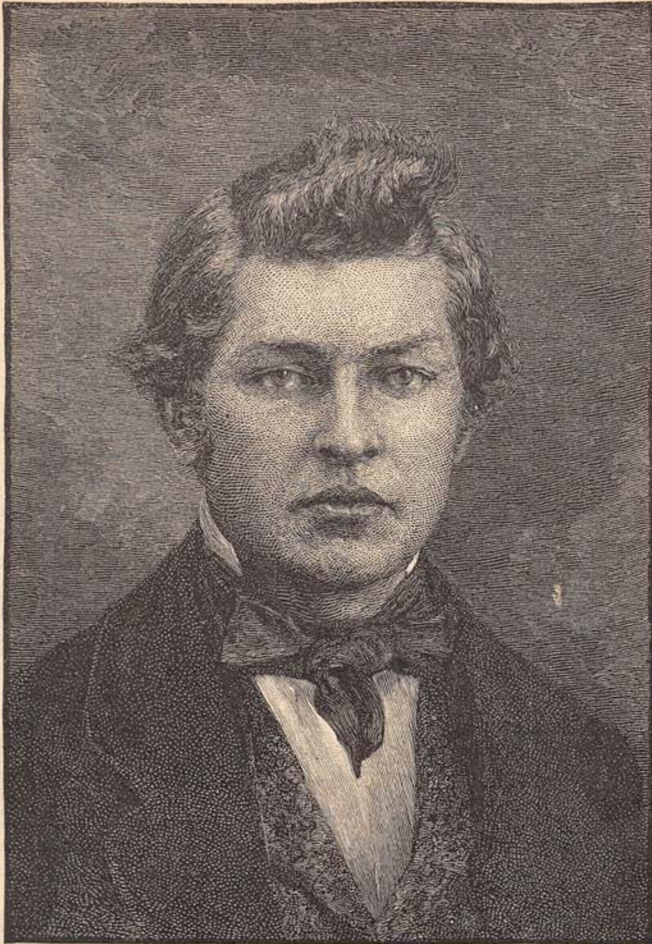
CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESIDENT GARFIELD.

A CRITICAL estimate of the importance and value of President Garfield's public services cannot well be made, until sufficient time elapses for us to see to what extent his busy, fruitful life and tragic death influence our future politics, and how effective his teachings and example prove in molding the thought and purposes of the nation. In this paper I shall only endeavor to sketch the prominent traits of his character, and give a few reminiscences drawn from cherished memories of a friendship of nearly twenty years —a friendship which, on his side, was always faithful, helpful, and sympathetic.

The real secret of General Garfield's success was courageous, persevering industry. He was gifted with a receptive and observant mind, a robust physical constitution, a candid, affectionate disposition, and a reasonable amount of ambition. Hard work did the rest. He was the most indefatigable worker I ever knew. He was never satisfied with the amount of study needed to gain the knowledge he wanted for use in any given direction; he went to the bottom of every subject he took hold of, and having got to the bottom of it, reached out on all sides for all the facts and opinions he could gather relating to it. He seemed to think that to be honest with himself he must be content with no superficial acquirements. When he was at the head of a committee to prepare a bill for taking the ninth census, he studied the history of every census taken in this or any other country about which the Library of Congress afforded information, and then, getting his committee together one hot vacation season, selected a cool room in the basement of the Capitol, and, much to their annoyance, opened what might have been called a school for the study of the science of statistics. What his fellow-members had dreaded as a dry and perfunctory affair, he converted into a symposium of instructive research and discussion. I think they will all agree that the weeks they spent with General Garfield in the census work were among the most valuable and agreeable of their Congressional career. In the Fortieth Congress he was given his first chairmanship, —that of military affairs, then an important position on account of the large amount of war business remaining to be cleared up, and the questions of army re-organization which demanded attention. Some of his colleagues had been volunteer generals like himself; others were civilians. "Let us spend a few weeks gathering information," he said to them, "before we try to legislate." He summoned the leading officers of the army to the committee-room,—all the generals, the heads of the staff corps, and many representatives of the line,—and opened the whole broad question of the future needs of our military establishment: the opportunity for improving its efficiency, the duties and relations of staff and line—ranging in his inquiries all the way from the authority and functions of the general commanding to the dealings of the post-traders with the private soldiers. The immediate result of the investigation was a unique volume of facts and opinions on army matters, of great interest to officers and soldiers, and of permanent value to legislators as a book of reference. Two years later, when put at the head of the Banking Committee, General Garfield pursued a similar system of thorough research, and, two years later still, as chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, he revolutionized the methods of making money grants to carry on the Government, by requiring detailed estimates and studying with conscientious care every object of expenditure.

I doubt whether there was ever a man in Congress who understood so completely all the ramifications of the vast machinery of the Federal Government. I remember a conversation with him soon after he was appointed to the Appropriations chairmanship. "No wheel, no shaft, no rivet in our governmental machinery performs its function without money," he said. "If I find out where every dollar goes, and how it is used, I shall understand the apparatus thoroughly, and know if there are useless or defective parts." He made the committee a class-room for studying the practical workings of all the functions of federal administration. This close scrutiny revealed many extravagances and abuses, and opened the way to important reforms.

It was to political economy and the cognate subjects of currency and the public debt, however, that the late President devoted the most arduous study. While his colleagues in Congress were absorbed in the Reconstruction problem, and in other questions growing immediately out of the war,—matters in which he himself took a strong interest,—he foresaw that the time would come when the management of the huge war-debt, and the redemption of the portion of it which floated as currency, would be the dominant questions in the fields



GARFIELD AT SIXTEEN. (FROM THE PHOTOGRAPH BY J. F. RYDER OF THE DAGUERREOTYPE IN POSSESSION OF THE FAMILY.)

of politics and legislation. In foreseeing these issues and preparing himself to meet them, he showed one of the highest faculties of practical statesmanship. All the time he could spare from his current work in the House and upon committees he gave to studying the experience of other nations with like questions, and particularly that of England after the Napoleonic wars, and to familiarizing himself with the views of eminent authorities, European and American, who had written or spoken on financial topics. In those days the lamp was often seen burning in his study until two o'clock in the morning. It was his practice to copy the statistics and striking passages in his reading which he thought worth remembering, as weapons for use in future debates. In this way he got a vast amount of good material fixed in his mind, and when the long struggle over the debt and currency began, in Congress and upon the stump, he was the best-equipped orator in the country on the bill for the resumption of specie payments and the strict fulfillment of national obligations. The value of his services in this line is not yet fully appreciated, and will not be until the historian shall take up that singular phase of our national life, the contest against repudiation and an irredeemable currency, which began in 1867, and lasted until the resumption of specie payments.

In this contest General Garfield was more than a sound theorist and a persuasive orator —he was a shrewd and far-sighted legislator. When the clamor for "more money" in Congress was too strong and too unreasoning to be put down by argument, and there was danger that the flood-gates would be opened and a torrent of irredeemable greenbacks let loose upon the country, he outwitted the enemy by offering a bill to authorize the issue of fifty-four millions of additional bank-notes.

"If you are right," he said to the paper-money fanatics, "this additional currency will be taken up by new banks and old ones at once, for you say the country is thirsting for more circulating medium wherewith to transact its business. Let us try this experiment, and put off your greenback bills till next session." They walked into the trap, and it was three years before they got out of it, for the new currency was taken very slowly. All that time, when demagogues tried to raise the old cry that the country was suffering for want of currency, General Garfield met it with the question, "Why, then, doesn't it take these new bank-notes?" There was no answer to be made, for the Greenbackers had all along been claiming that banking was a profitable monopoly. As soon as the new bank currency was all taken, the demagogues began afresh to declaim about contraction, dearth of circulating medium, and bank monopoly. Then General Garfield carried through a free-banking bill, permitting any association conforming to the laws for securing bill-holders and depositors to start a national bank. After the passage of that bill, the mouths of the rag-money men were stopped for a time, and when they opened them again they had to abandon their old delusive arguments about a scarcity of money, and make a square issue in favor of irredeemable treasury notes as against bank currency.

It was a fixed idea with General Garfield that whatever honors or public positions he was to have in life would come to him unsought. He got this belief very early, and it was wonderfully confirmed and strengthened throughout his career. One evening, shortly after the Chicago Convention, while I was sitting with him on the veranda of his Mentor farm-house, he told me of this belief, not in a superstitious way, but still in a tone which showed it was a matter of firm conviction. Beginning with the incident of his first school,—when, after seeking in vain employment as a teacher through two townships in Cuyahoga County, and giving up the quest in despair, a neighbor offered him the school that was nearest his home,—and coming down to the nomination at Chicago, he told me how every step forward in his career, from the country school-house to the Executive Mansion, had been prepared for him without his knowledge or effort. When the trustees of Hiram College offered him the presidency of that institution, he was greatly surprised, for, young as he was, he had thought himself fortunate a year before in obtaining a modest professorship. The nomination to the Ohio Senate, which first brought him into political life, came about in a way that was wholly unexpected. He was returning from an Eastern journey, when he was met by two friends in Cleveland, who told him that the gentleman to whom the nomination had been conceded, an old and active politician, had died during his absence, and that, unless he positively refused, the Convention, which was to meet in a few days, would certainly choose him. When the war broke out, he declined the colonelcy of a regiment because of lack of military experience, whereupon the regiment elected him its lieutenant-colonel, and before it went to the field, the colonelcy became vacant, and he was pushed into the place. His first nomination to Congress was made while he was serving with the army in Kentucky, and the news of the action of the convention in the old Giddings district was the first intimation he had of an intention on the part of the Republicans there to make him a candidate. In 1877, he refused an election to the United States Senate, because he preferred to oblige President Hayes, who wanted him to stay in the House, to lead the Republican minority, and, besides, wanted his friend Stanley Matthews to have the senatorship. When elected Senator, it was by the unanimous choice of the Republicans in the Ohio Legislature. Everybody knows how the last great honor of his life came to him unsought, by a quick and unexpected turn in the current of feeling at the Chicago Convention. "Since my experience with the country school," said General Garfield, in the conversation referred to above, "I have never occupied any public position that did not come to me without my seeking it, and I have long felt that if I should try for any place I should not get it." He was not a fatalist in the sense in which Napoleon was, but he believed that the main lines of his life were shaped by the force of his own mental organization, directed by a higher power than his own will.

I do not think it is generally known that Garfield rejected overtures in 1872 to be elected to the Senate by the votes of the Democrats, combined with those of a number of Republicans from his section of Ohio, who were dissatisfied with the caucus nomination of their party. The reason he gave for his course was that the position would not be an independent one, and that he would be placed under obligations to the Democrats, although they asked no pledges. Three times he declined to be a candidate for the Republican nomination for Governor of Ohio, when he had only to consent to let his name go before the Convention to have had the honor conceded to him without a contest. In preferring the House of Representatives to the executive chair at Columbus, he was wise.

His place was in the field of ideas, arguments, and constructive work, and he would have been restive at any post of duty which limited the activity of his intellect, and held him down to the enforcement of statutes made by other men. Indeed, the presidency was foreign to his tastes, except as it gave him opportunities to impress his ideas upon Congress and the country. A few weeks before he was shot, I heard from his own lips an expression of the distaste he felt for the business of deciding between the claims of individuals for office. "I have all my life delighted in conflicts of ideas," he said, "but I never cared for conflicts of persons. Now I am obliged to spend nearly my whole time in hearing arguments and appeals in behalf of individuals." He went on to say that, if he failed of success in his new position, he thought it would be because of his want of liking and training for this important part of executive duties. He found it almost impossible to give his mind to the question whether A, B, or C was the best man to be postmaster at Peoria, or whether D should be turned out of a collectorship to make place for E.

Years ago, it used to be commonly said in Washington that General Garfield was the best-read man in Congress except Charles Sumner. The truth is, Sumner had about ten years the advantage of Garfield, and ten years counts for a great deal in the life of a studious man. Sumner's range of reading was much greater than Garfield's, but not so thorough in special lines. The Massachusetts statesman was better versed in history, *belles-lettres*, and art, while the Ohio statesman had gone much farther than he in political economy, finance, and other lines bearing directly upon his work as a legislator. Garfield was a much busier man than Sumner, spent far more time in plodding Congressional tasks, and, instead of devoting his vacations to rest and reading, gave them almost wholly to the service of his party upon the stump. There was hardly a Northern State in which his voice was not heard; in his own State he spoke in nearly all the counties, and in his own district there was no hamlet or small town unvisited. Taking one campaign with another, and one issue with another, he was, I think, the best stump and platform speaker the Republican party had. A man so much absorbed in political and legislative work could not be at the same time a constant student, but he always kept up with the best literature of the day, and was never out of the current of the progress of scientific discovery and religious discussion. He even managed to get time now and then to keep the classical learning he acquired at college from getting rusty. In 1871 he wrote to a friend: "I am now up to my eyes in the work of the Committee on Appropriations, of which I am chairman, though I do manage to steal a little time from work and sleep almost every day to read over carefully a few lines from Horace, to keep the breath of classical life in my body." In January, 1874, he made a metrical translation of the third ode of Horace's first book, and sent it to the same friend. It was his constant practice to "steal a little time from work and sleep," to round out the processes of his intellectual growth by courses of study and reading quite outside of those pursued for their relations to his labors in Congress. His theory of brain action was that rest was best obtained, not by a cessation of activity, but by giving to the processes of thought a different direction from that which had become fatiguing. Thus what seemed to his friends hard study he regarded as recreation. In the winter of 1875, which was among his busiest seasons in Washington, he took up the study of Goethe and his epoch, and in accordance with his habit of doing some creative work of his own in every special line in which he directed his mind, he wrote a sixty-page paper on the state of literature and art in Europe in the Goethe period. Speaking of this at the time, he said: "I think some work of this kind, outside of one's every-day avocations, is necessary to keep up real growth." As an illustration of the wide range of his reading, I may quote the following passage from a letter written in the summer of 1875, when an illness kept him confined to his house for about three weeks: "Since I was taken sick I have read the following: Sherman's two volumes, Leland's 'English Gipsies,' George Borrow's 'Gipsies of Spain,' Borrow's 'Rommany Rye,' Tennyson's 'Mary,' seven volumes of Froude's 'England,' several plays of Shakspere, and have made some progress in a new book which I think you will be glad to see—'The History of the English People,' by Professor Green, of Oxford." It will be seen that in this list are three books relating to one subject—the gypsies. This was characteristic of General Garfield's method of reading. He was never content with a single work on a given theme. If there were two sides to a question, he wanted to know what could be said on both; and every line of study and research into which his active mind was thrown, he widened out as far as possible. The catholicity and liberality of his thought formed one of his most admirable traits.

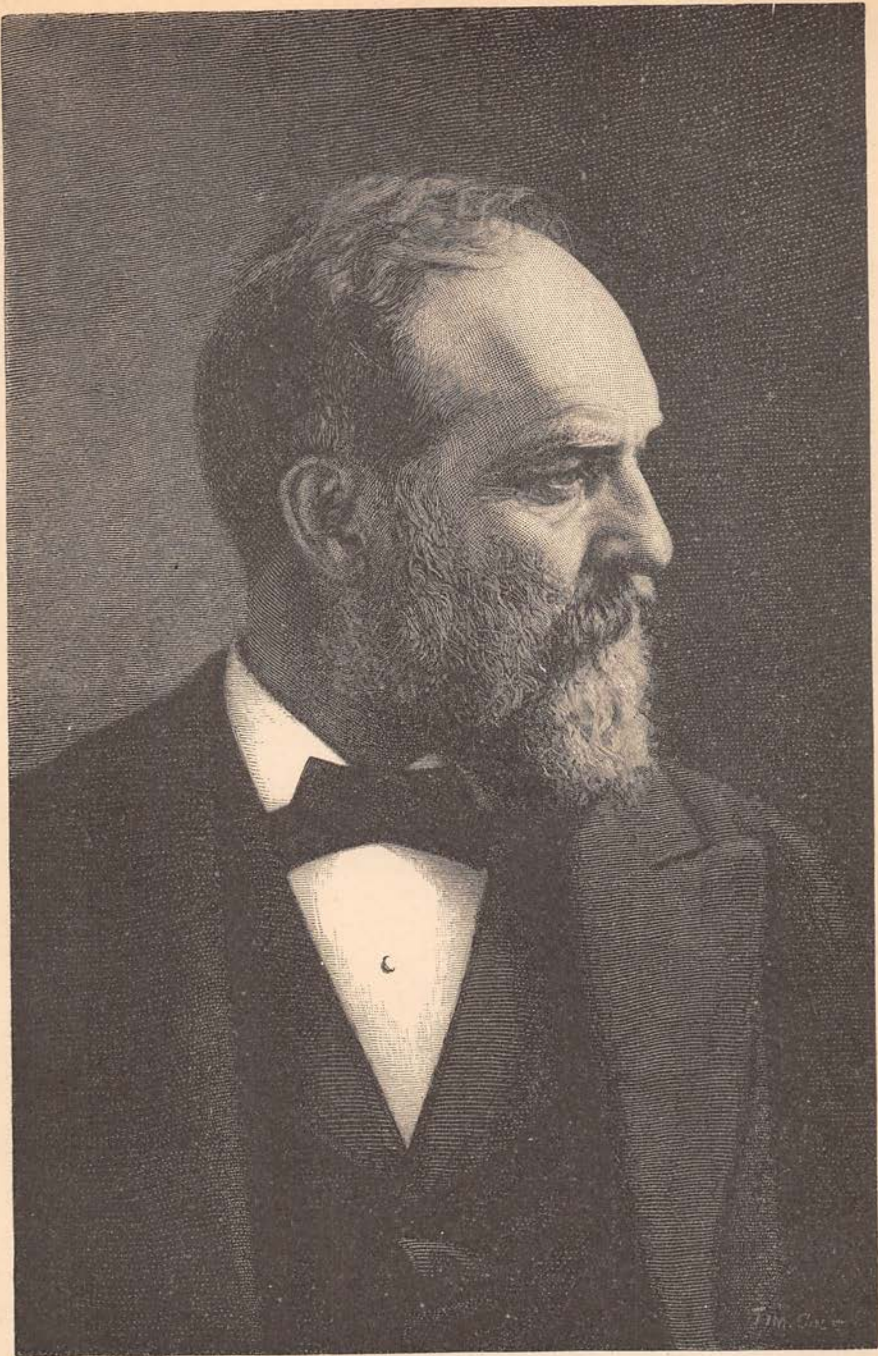
In his teaching days, General Garfield read German easily, made acquaintance in the original with the poetry of Goethe and Schiller, and could converse in the language

fairly well, but, from want of practice, he lost much of the German that he had gained by study. It was always his desire to revive it and to get a good conversational grasp upon it, and he meant, in the golden time of leisure to which he looked forward with pleasant anticipations, to find time for realizing this purpose. French, also studied at school, he did revive some years ago, when he felt the need of knowing what the French economists were writing on questions of currency, banking, and tariff. But he did not speak it much, for want of occasion for practice. With the genius and structure of both languages he was familiar, and, if I am not mistaken, he made occasional excursions into Italian and Spanish. He had a great love for linguistic knowledge, and would often make a half-game and half-study with his children of telling the meanings of words, or detecting errors in pronunciation. Dropping in at his house, one morning in the campaign summer of 1880, just as breakfast was over, I found the family lingering at the table while the General read from a little dictionary of words frequently mispronounced. He would spell the word, and then ask each in turn what the correct pronunciation should be. The elders were about as apt to make mistakes as the children, and a great deal of lively chat and merriment, and not a little instruction, resulted from the exercise. This he kept up every morning after breakfast until the book was exhausted. At another time he read the definitions of words, and the others endeavored to hit upon the exact words defined—not so easy a task as one would imagine at first thought. This was an exercise in which the children greatly delighted. When they came near the right word, the father would say, "Now you are getting warm"; and when they were wide of the mark, he would say "Cold," or "Very cold." He had the natural gift of teaching—the faculty of making a diversion of study, and developing the thinking powers of the student. His family was always a school, and yet there was nothing in the least formal or pedantic in his way of converting the breakfast-table or the evening fireside circle into a class-room. It interested the children more than play. Whether the exercise was an object-lesson, or a study in mathematics or language, or a talk on the science of familiar things, the father so illustrated it with his own fresh thoughts that it became an entertainment.

I have said before that General Garfield was the most effective stump and platform orator of his party. He went directly to the reason of his hearers. There was never any sophistry in his speeches, or any appeal to prejudice, or any trick of suppression or half-statement. He approached his audiences neither in a way of mock deference nor of superiority, but as if he were one of them, come to talk with them on terms of intellectual equality, and desirous only of convincing their minds by a perfectly fair presentation of facts and arguments. He had a strong, far-reaching voice, pitched in the middle key, a dignified, manly presence, and an abundance of the quality which, for want of a better term, we call personal magnetism. His manner in his speeches was first engaging by reason of its frankness and moderation, and afterward impressive by its earnestness and vigor. At the climax of a speech he gathered up all the forces of statement and logic he had been marshaling, and hurled them upon his listeners with tremendous force. His eyes dilated, his form seemed to expand, his voice took on a sort of explosive quality, his language gained the height of simple and massive eloquence, and his gestures became so energetic and forcible that he seemed, at times, to be beating down opposition with sledge-hammer blows, throwing his arguments forward like solid shot from a cannon.

In the debates of the House he was not a ready and skillful fencer, but he was unexcelled in the ability to deal with an important question in all its bearings in a candid, convincing, and masterly manner. When he first entered the House, his speeches abounded in illustrations drawn from his classical studies and his historical and practical readings, and were not liked by the majority of the members, who had little imagination and but a small stock of learning. Later, he cultivated a more unadorned and business-like style, and became a master of the art of clear, condensed, analytical statement. But whether discoursing to vast outdoor audiences, in strains of lofty eloquence, on great questions deeply touching the life of the nation, or explaining to the House the details of an appropriation bill, the real source of his power as an orator was his sincere, truthful, manly nature, which forced people to like him and respect him. He believed what he said, and therefore he made others believe.

By the natural bent of his mind, the late President had a liking for philosophic and religious studies, which was strengthened and gratified during his two terms at Williams College, where a good deal of attention is given to metaphysics, and his subsequent four years of teaching at Hiram; but in his later career the practical questions of life absorbed him so much that he found little time to devote to the domain of speculation and theoretical thought. He read Mill, Comte, and Spencer, however,



J. A. Garfield

(FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY SARONY, AUGUST 7TH, 1880.)

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and was deeply interested in such books as James Freeman Clarke's "Ten Great Religions," and in the current discussions in the English reviews and magazines on new phases of religious belief and criticism. There was nothing of the bigot about him. He welcomed all honest discussion, and was always willing to throw off old opinions if convinced they were erroneous. In his religious views he might have been called a rationalistic Christian. I doubt if he could have passed a successful catechising on the doctrinal points of any orthodox creed, but on such essential matters as a belief in the divine guidance of the universe and the immortality of the human soul, his faith was unshaken. Modern materialism made no impression upon him. The argument that the mind is only a phenomenon of matter he thought a stupid reversal of the truth. The soul or life-principle was the real thing, he maintained, and the phases of matter only its transient and varying expression. The church to which he belonged from boyhood has no written creed and does not question its members as to their theological conceptions; therefore he was not hampered by formal statements of faith in his intellectual growth, and was able without hypocrisy to retain associations which became very dear to him in early life.

The world likes to hear of the personality of its heroes—their habits, tastes, peculiarities, likes, and dislikes. I may be pardoned, therefore, for speaking of things in connection with the dead President which would be of trifling interest, if not an impertinence, if said of one not widely loved and honored. General Garfield had a warm, affectionate nature. The people he liked were very dear to him. He took them to his heart and gave them his full confidence. He would often sit down beside a friend and throw his arm over his neck, or put his hand on his shoulder or knee, as the natural expression of his liking, or in walking would place his arm through that of the friend. He had a way of calling an intimate friend or comrade "old boy" or "old fellow," and once, when Colonel Rockwell thanked him for some kindness, he said, putting his hand on his friend's shoulder, "Old boy! the ties of friendship are sometimes stronger than those of blood!" By the courtesy of Colonel Rockwell I am also enabled to include here one of General Garfield's most characteristic letters. Colonel Rockwell says:

"On the Sunday preceding the election I had sent him a little expression of my confidence in his success, closing, as I remember, with the stanza from Goethe:

"'The future hides in it
Gladness and sorrow.
We press still thorow;
Naught abides in it
Daunting us,—Onward!

"To this, on the eve of election, he sent the following reply:

"'MENTOR, OHIO, Nov. 1, 1880.

"'DEAR JARVIS: The evening mail brings me your letter of the 31st, and I take a moment, in the lull before the battle, to say how greatly glad I am for all the earnest and effective things you have done for me. Whatever may be the issue to-morrow, I shall carry with me, through life, most grateful memories of the enthusiastic and noble work my friends have done, and especially my college classmates. The campaign has been fruitful to me in the discipline that comes from endurance and patience. I hope that defeat will not sour me, nor success disturb the poise which I have sought to gain by the experiences of life.

"'From this edge of the conflict I give you my hand and heart, as in all the other days of our friendship.

"'As ever, yours,

"'J. A. GARFIELD.

"'Col. A. F. Rockwell, Washington, D. C.'"

General Garfield's tastes were all simple. He had no longings for luxury. His home-life was that of the plain New England farmer element from which he sprang, broadened and beautified by culture, but taking little note of the fancies and extravagances of fashion. He liked substantial furniture, good engravings, a big cane-seat chair, an open fire, a simple meal, a wide-brimmed felt hat, and easy-fitting clothes. His table was bountifully supplied with plain, well-cooked food, but he made his meals such feasts of reason that his guests scarcely noticed what they ate. He regarded formal dinners as a bore, and avoided them as much as a famous man well could whose company was much sought by the dinner-giving people in Washington; but he enjoyed lingering at his own table with his wife, his children, his old mother, and two or three friends, and unbending his mind from the strain of the day's work with chat and anecdotes. His memory for anecdotes was almost as good as Lincoln's, but he remembered best such as he got in his reading of biography and history, and were applicable to some intellectual theme he was discussing, rather than the merely quaint and humorous.

There was not, as there was in Lincoln's, an under-current of melancholy in Garfield's nature. Until he was nominated for President, I never saw in him anything like somber-

ness, foreboding, or a disposition to find a sad side in human life. His nature was sound, buoyant, aspiring, and undisturbed by morbid sensibility. He loved men and women, thought the world a good place to live and work in, and believed that when we get through with the affairs of earth we go to a better country. After he was nominated for the presidency, a more serious and at times solemn mood came upon him. He began to like to be alone, which was quite a new thing with him, for he used to want companionship at all times, even when reading or writing, and he got a sad and weary earnestness of expression which he never had before. He did not talk of the future. During the few weeks he spent in the White House, there seemed to be a veil before him which he could not lift. I believe he had a presentiment of the evil that was to befall him. It is remarkable, however, that the last few days before he received his fatal wound were unusually bright ones for him. At Elberon, just before the fatal journey to Washington, he told me he had not felt so well, physically and mentally, since his inauguration. Something of his former habitual freshness and cheerfulness of spirits returned, and he was more like his old self than he had been for a year.

General Garfield was influenced by his domestic ties to a greater extent than are most strong-framed, ambitious men. He was one of the most home-loving men I ever knew. With his children, he was more like a loving elder brother than a stern father. He governed them by kindness, and appealed to their hearts and minds when they committed faults, instead of to their sense of fear, and his tender expostulations were more effectual than any punishment would have been. His wife and mother were strong forces in his life. His tenderness and consideration toward his mother were admirable. In building his new house, the first thought was how to get a room for his mother that should be exactly suited to her taste and convenience. She sat at his right hand at table, and was consulted upon all questions concerning the family and his public career. His wife was his intellectual companion, sharing his reading and studies, as well as the mistress of his home and the loving mother and teacher of his children. Her strong principles and quiet, earnest, self-reliant, tender, and faithful nature were his sheet-anchor in all the troubles of his life.

General Garfield was fond of simple, old-fashioned music. Scotch and English ballads were his favorites, and the hymns he heard in childhood. For instrumental music he cared much less. The drama he liked only for its intellectual side, and not as a mere amusement. He went occasionally to the theater, to hear a good play or see a famous actor. Horace was his favorite among ancient poets, and Tennyson among modern ones. He could repeat many of the odes of the former and whole pages of the poems of the latter. He was not a great newspaper reader, and believed that the tendency in this country is to neglect books and give the time that can be spared for reading too much to the daily journals, a large part of the contents of which are only of passing interest, and have no value for mental training and culture. Habitually, he read one New York daily for general news, a Cleveland daily for the news of Northern Ohio, and a critical New York weekly, and the principal magazines. Of course, he saw a multitude of other periodicals, which came to him with marked articles, or which he obtained when he wanted a broad view of newspaper opinion on special public measures. But he spent little time over them. Cities he disliked. He was a countryman through and through, a lover of orchards, forests, growing crops, cattle, meadows, and wild-flowers. I remember the pleasure he took, after he went to live upon the Mentor farm, in driving a yoke of cattle and in helping his farm-hands in the hay-field. He found he could still swing a scythe with the best of them, and that his old knowledge of soils and seasons of planting, harvesting, and housing crops, gained when a boy, all came back to him. His farm was the first home he had that satisfied his tastes. His house in Hiram, where he lived in the early years after his marriage, was only a little cottage, with a contracted village-lot; his Washington house was a winter dwelling, to be retained while he staid in public life in the capital; but the Mentor farm, bought five years ago, gave him the conditions of a broad, free, natural home-life, which, to his thinking, was possible only in the country. It was in the spring of 1880 that his means enabled him to expand the little story-and-a-half farm-house, with its small rooms and low ceilings, into a spacious, comfortable dwelling. After thirty years of hard work he found himself, at forty-eight, in the possession at last of a home that was the expression of his tastes and desires. Life began to assume a more serene and happy phase, and to promise a peaceful ripening into a contented and harmonious age, in the midst of his intelligent, affectionate family and his admiring, sympathetic friends, when all was changed by the unexpected summons to the presidency, and the entry upon the new path of glory which led but to the grave.