

INAUGURATION SCENES AND INCIDENTS.



FROM the first the American people elected to make of the inauguration of a President a great national festival. They did this spontaneously, and in quiet disregard of all efforts to prevent them. Washington desired to be installed as first President without pomp or parade, as was natural in a man who looked upon his consent to serve as the greatest sacrifice he had ever been called upon to make, and who entered upon his task with a most unfeigned reluctance, and with a real diffidence, for which he did not expect to receive credit from the world.¹ Yet his journey from Mount Vernon to New York, which he wished to make as private as possible, was converted by the people, overflowing with veneration and gratitude, into an unbroken triumphal progress, which culminated in a series of public demonstrations and ceremonies that surpassed anything of the kind yet seen in the young republic. Each succeeding inauguration of a new President has been celebrated in much the same way, with a steadily increasing multitude of spectators, and a swelling measure of pomp and pageantry. In outward appearance there has been much similarity in these recurring quadrennial demonstrations; but each has had a distinct individuality shaped by the personality of its central figure and by the forces which prevailed in the election.

So long as Washington was on the scene he dominated it completely. He came much nearer to having his own way at his second inauguration, in Philadelphia, than he had been able to at his first, in New York, chiefly through the desire of his political rivals to prevent a fresh demonstration of the popular adoration for him. Jefferson's immortal devotion to republican simplicity had its origin in this desire; for he favored the abolition of all public exercises at the second inauguration, and wished to have the oath of office administered to Washington privately at his house, a certificate of it to be deposited in the State Department. Hamilton took the same view, but other members of the cabinet favored exercises in the open Senate-chamber, and their opinion prevailed. There was as large

an attendance as the hall would hold, but no parade or other popular demonstration. The people went on worshipping their hero with undiminished fervor, however. They celebrated his birthday with such honors, and in so general a way, that his rivals were more distressed than ever, and began to see in this infatuation a menace to the republic, a threat of monarchy.

The chief sufferer from this condition of affairs was John Adams when the time came to inaugurate him as Washington's successor. He is the only President we have had, with the possible exception of Mr. Van Buren, who can be said to have played a secondary part at his own inauguration. The people had no eyes for him; they saw only the stately figure of Washington passing forever from the scene. The ceremonies were held in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, in the House of Representatives. Washington drove to the hall in his coach and four, and was lustily cheered both outside and inside the building. He passed quickly to his seat, as if eager to stop the applause. Adams entered a few minutes later, dressed in a light drab suit, and passed slowly down the aisle, bowing in response to the respectful applause which greeted him. He took the oath, and then delivered his inaugural address. He described the scene subsequently as a solemn one indeed, made more affecting by the presence of Washington, whose countenance was as serene and unclouded as the day. There was a flood of tears, which he sought in various ways to explain, though no explanation was necessary. There was, he said, more weeping than there had ever been at the representation of a tragedy; but whether it was from grief or joy, whether from the loss of their beloved President or from the accession of an unbeloved one, or some other cause, he could not say. He suspected that the novelty of the sun setting full-orbed, and another rising, though less splendid, may have had something to do with it. For several days after the exercises he was still bewailing the tendency to weep. Everybody was annoying him by talking of tears and streaming eyes, but nobody told him why; and he was forced to believe that it was all for the loss of their beloved. Two or three had ventured to whis-

¹ Letters to Benjamin Lincoln and Samuel Hanson.

per in his ear that his address had made a favorable impression, but no other evidence of interest in him had reached him. One thing he knew, and that was that he was a being of too much sensibility to act any part well in such an exhibition.¹

If the tears at the inaugural exercises made Mr. Adams unhappy, what followed must have added greatly to his sufferings. When, at the close, Washington moved toward the door, there was a precipitate rush from the gallery and corridors for the street, and he found a great throng awaiting him as he emerged from the door. They cheered him, and he waved his hat to them, his countenance radiant with benignity, his gray hair streaming in the wind. He walked to his house, followed by the crowd, and on reaching it turned about for a final greeting. His countenance assumed a grave and almost melancholy expression, his eyes were bathed in tears, and only by gestures could he indicate his thanks and convey his farewell blessing.²

No inauguration myth has been more tenacious of life than that which pictured Jefferson, attired as a plain citizen, riding on horseback to the Capitol, hitching his horse to the palings, and walking unattended into the Senate-chamber to take the oath as President. To have done this would have been in accordance with his previous utterances, for he had strongly condemned as savoring of monarchy all public ceremony at the swearing in of a President. When the time for his own inauguration arrived, however, the case seems to have looked different to him. Whether it was because he was to be the first President inaugurated at the new Capitol, or because of an unwillingness to disappoint the large numbers of his friends and partisans who had assembled to honor him, is not clear; but the fact is that he did permit a considerable display at the ceremonies. He was met at the door of his boarding-house, which was only a stone's throw from the Capitol, by a militia artillery company and a procession of citizens, and, escorted by these, he went on foot to the Capitol. The horseback story, or "fake," as it would be denominated in modern journalism, was the invention of an Englishman named John Davis, who put it in a book of American travels which he published in London two years later. In order to give it an air of truthfulness, Davis declared that he was

present at the inauguration, which was not true. A veracious account of the ceremonies was sent to England by Edward Thornton, who was then in charge of the British legation at Washington; and in this Jefferson was described as having walked to the Capitol. These facts, together with a great mass of interesting matter about Jefferson's inauguration, are set forth in detail by Henry Adams in his "History of the United States," and leave no doubt that the Davis version was a pure fabrication.

On reaching the Senate-chamber, in which he was to be inaugurated, Jefferson became a member of one of the most striking groups ever gathered in a public place. On one side of him stood John Marshall as chief justice to administer the oath, and on the other Aaron Burr, who was to be sworn in as Vice-President. As described by his contemporaries, Jefferson was very tall (six feet two and a half inches in height), with a loose, shackling air about his slender figure, a very red freckled face, and neglected gray hair. He was clad in a blue coat, a thick, gray-colored, hairy waistcoat with a red under-waistcoat lapped over it, green velvet breeches with pearl buttons, yarn stockings, and slippers down at the heels—his appearance being very much that of a raw-boned farmer. Marshall, as described by Joseph Story in 1808, was tall and slender, not graceful and imposing, but erect and steady, with black hair, small and twinkling eyes, and rather low forehead, plain and dignified in manners, and very simple and neat in dress. Burr was rather small in stature, but dignified and easy in manners, and dressed with aristocratic care. The three men were alike in one respect: they distrusted and disliked one another thoroughly. Jefferson both feared and hated Marshall, saying of him that he had a mind of that gloomy malignity which would never let him forego the opportunity of satiating it on a victim. Marshall said of Jefferson, shortly before the inauguration, that by weakening the office of President he would increase his personal power, and that his letters had shown that his morals could not be pure. Both Jefferson and Marshall looked upon Burr as a political and social adventurer who was living up to his own creed, "Great souls care little for small morals." The outgoing President, Mr. Adams, was not present at the exercises; but he undoubtedly took a grim pleasure in the presence of Marshall, whom he had made chief justice, greatly to the wrath of Jefferson, only a few weeks before. After the ceremonies the new

¹ Letters of John Adams to his wife.

² Personal recollections of Wm. A. Duer, once president of Columbia College.

President proceeded to the Executive mansion, or «the Palace,» as it was then styled, in the same manner as he had gone to the Capitol.

Washington set the example, which has been followed at frequent intervals by new Presidents even to our day, of wearing at the first inauguration ceremonies clothing of American manufacture. He was dressed in a suit of dark cloth made at Hartford. I have been able to find no mention of the nationality of the «light drab suit» which John Adams wore. Jefferson was inaugurated in his «every-day clothes,» which may or may not have been exclusively American; but before the end of his service as President he appeared at his New-Year reception dressed in an entire suit of homespun. Madison carried the matter a step further; for, as he passed down the aisle of the House of Representatives to be inaugurated, he was spoken of as a «walking argument in favor of the encouragement of native wool.» His coat had been made on the farm of Colonel Humphreys, and his waistcoat and small-clothes on that of Chancellor Livingston, all from the wool of merino sheep raised in the country. John Quincy Adams says in his Diary that the house was very much crowded, and that its appearance was magnificent, but that Mr. Madison read his address in a tone so low that it could not be heard. Contemporary descriptions of Madison picture him as a small, modest, and jovial man. Washington Irving spoke of him in 1812, at the time of his second election to the Presidency, as «a withered little apple-john,» and an English observer as «a little man with small features, rather wizened, but occasionally lit up with a good-natured smile.» He was habitually neat and genteel in his appearance, says another writer, dressed like a «well-bred and tasty old-school gentleman.» American wool seems, therefore, to have made its first appearance as a «walking argument» under favorable conditions.

Monroe's inauguration, in 1817, was remarkable chiefly for being the first one held out of doors since the seat of government had been moved to Washington. There had been out-of-door exercises when Washington was installed in New York, but all his successors till Monroe had been inaugurated within doors. It is said by some authorities that the proposal to change to the open air in 1817 was the outcome of a long and bitter wrangle between the two Houses as to the division of seats in the House at the ceremonies. Agreement being apparently impossible, some one

suggested that by going out of doors room enough could be found for everybody, and the idea was acted upon joyfully. An elevated platform was erected for the occasion under the unfinished portico of the Capitol, and from this Monroe delivered his inaugural address to the largest assemblage that had yet been gathered there. The day was balmy and beautiful. There were no outdoor exercises at Monroe's second inauguration, the weather being stormy, rain and snow falling throughout the day. The attendance on this occasion did not exceed two thousand persons. John Quincy Adams was also inaugurated indoors four years later, and it was not till the advent of General Jackson, in 1829, that the outdoor exercises became the established custom.

Jackson's entry upon the Presidency has been likened repeatedly to the descent of the barbarians upon Rome. It was accompanied with a huge multitude of people from all parts of the land, and by an amount of uproar altogether unprecedented. Webster wrote from the capital, several days before the inauguration, that the city was full of speculations and speculators, there being a great multitude, too many to be fed without a miracle, and all hungry for office. «I never saw such a crowd before,» he added. «Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger.» They surged through the streets shouting, «Hurrah for Jackson!» They swarmed about Gadsby's tavern, where the general lodged, in such masses as completely to hem it in and make access to his presence nearly impossible. When inauguration day arrived, fully ten thousand people gathered about the eastern portico of the Capitol, which was to be used for the first time for these ceremonies, and a ship's cable had to be stretched across the long flight of steps, about a third of the way from the top, to keep the portico clear. It was with great difficulty that the procession which escorted the general was able to reach the Capitol. He went first to the Senate, as usual, where the chief justice and other dignitaries joined him to proceed to the outdoor platform.

An eye-witness, who took a somewhat jocose view of the day's events, wrote that the most remarkable feature about Jackson as he marched down the aisle of the Senate with a quick, large step, as though he proposed to storm the Capitol, was his double pair of spectacles. He habitually wore two pairs, one for reading and the other for seeing at

a distance, the pair not in use being placed across the top of his head. On this occasion, says the eye-witness, the pair on his head reflected the light; and some of the rural admirers of the old hero were firmly persuaded that they were two plates of metal let into his head to close up holes made by British bullets. When he appeared on the portico, we are told that the shout which arose rent the air and seemed to shake the very ground. The ceremony ended, the general mounted his horse to proceed to the White House, and the whole crowd followed him. «The President,» says a contemporary writer, «was literally pursued by a motley concourse of people, riding, running helter-skelter, striving who should first gain admittance into the executive mansion, where it was understood that refreshments were to be distributed.» An abundance of refreshments had been provided, including many barrels of orange punch. As the waiters opened the doors to bring out the punch in pails, the crowd rushed upon them, upsetting the pails, and breaking the glasses. Inside the house the crush was so great that distribution of refreshments was impossible, and tubs of orange punch were set out in the grounds to entice people from the rooms. Jackson himself was so pressed against the wall of the reception-room that he was in danger of injury, and was protected by a number of men linking arms and forming a barrier against the crowd. Men with boots heavy with mud stood on the satin-covered chairs and sofas in their eagerness to get a view of the hero. Judge Story wrote that the crowd contained all sorts of people, from the highest and most polished down to the most vulgar and gross in the nation. «I never saw such a mixture,» he added. «The reign of King Mob seemed triumphant. I was glad to escape from the scene as soon as possible.»

The outgoing President, Mr. Adams, was not present. He and his father have been the only outgoing Presidents, alive at the time of the inauguration of their successors, who did not attend the ceremonies. The reason why the younger Adams did not was stated tersely in «Niles's Register» of March 27, 1829: «It is proper to mention, for the preservation of facts, that General Jackson did not call upon President Adams, and that Mr. Adams gave not his attendance at the installation of President Jackson.» This conduct must have been a cause of grief to the editor of the «National Intelligencer,» for four years earlier he had written, when describing the scene which followed the in-

auguration of Adams: «General Jackson, we were pleased to observe, was among the earliest of those who took the hand of the President; and their looks and deportment toward each other were a rebuke to the littleness of party spirit, which can see no merit in a rival and feel no joy in the honor of a competitor.» General Jackson was very conspicuous at the inauguration of his successor, Mr. Van Buren. The two rode side by side from the White House to the Capitol, and back again after the ceremonies, in a carriage made of wood from the frigate *Constitution*, presented by the Democrats of New York. But the general was at all moments the central figure; the crowd along the route and at the Capitol paid only slight attention to the new President.

Of the inauguration of General William Henry Harrison in 1841, John Quincy Adams says in his Diary that it was celebrated with demonstrations of popular feeling unexampled since that of Washington in 1789. It had more of a left-over campaign flavor than any other inauguration either before or since. The great «Tippecanoe» canvass, with its log cabins and hard cider, its enormous processions, its boundless enthusiasm and incessant uproar, got under such headway that it could not be stopped with election day. Enough of it was still in motion in March to make the inauguration of the general a virtual continuation of it, so far as the procession was concerned. The log cabins were brought to the capital for the occasion, and many of the clubs came with their regalia and banners. A magnificent carriage had been constructed by his admirers, and presented to General Harrison, with the expressed wish that he ride in it to the Capitol; but he declined to do so, insisting upon riding a horse instead. The crowd of visitors along the avenue from the White House to the Capitol was the largest yet seen in Washington. The procession created such enthusiasm that the novel expedient was put in operation of having it march and countermarch several times before leaving its hero at the Capitol. For two hours it went to and fro in the avenue before the spectators were supposed to have their fill of it. Mr. Adams, who saw it from his window, under which it passed, describes it in his Diary as a mixed military and civil cavalcade, with platoons of militia companies, Tippecanoe clubs, students of colleges, school-boys, a half-dozen veterans who had fought under the old hero in the War of 1811, sundry awkward and ungainly painted banners and log cabins, and without car-



THE CRUSH AT THE WHITE HOUSE AFTER JACKSON'S INAUGURATION.



DRAWN BY G. WRIGHT.

A SCENE AT WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON'S INAUGURATION.

riages or showy dresses. The *coup d'œil*, he adds, was showy-shabby; and he says of the general: «He was on a mean-looking white horse, in the center of seven others, in a plain frock coat or surtout, undistinguishable from any of those before, behind, or around him.» The day was cold and bleak, with a chilly wind blowing. General Harrison stood for an hour exposed to this while delivering his address, and at its close mounted his horse and returned to the White House with the procession again as an escort.

The inauguration ball dates from the very beginning. There was a ball when Washington was inaugurated in New York, but owing to the pressure of other demands upon his time, it did not take place till the evening of March 7. Washington attended, and performed a minuet with Miss Van Zandt, and danced cotillions with Mrs. Peter Van Brugh Livingston, Mrs. Maxwell, and others. There was no ball at his second inauguration because of its extremely quiet character, and there was none when Mr. Adams came in because of the general grief over Washington's departure. I can find no mention of a ball when Jefferson was inaugurated, but there was one when Madison came in, and since then there has been no break in the custom. There were two when Polk was inaugurated, and two when Taylor succeeded him—an administration and an opposition ball on each occasion, both very well attended. The crush was so great at the Taylor administration ball that many persons narrowly escaped injury, and there were loud complaints because of the inadequate supply of refreshments.

The crowds at Polk's inauguration were said to be the largest yet seen at the Capitol, which was undoubtedly true; for as the country has advanced in size, the number of people going to Washington to witness the advent of every new President has steadily increased. Evidence that the outdoor custom had become firmly established in Polk's time is furnished by the fact that, although rain fell steadily throughout the day, he delivered his address from the portico to a wide, moving sea of umbrellas, with no protection save an umbrella which was held over his head. The crowds amused themselves during the progress of the procession along Pennsylvania Avenue by repeating the favorite cry of the opposition in the preceding campaign, «Who is James K. Polk?» Roars of laughter always followed this somewhat worn but always amusing query. An interesting contemporary note of this inauguration is the following: «Professor Morse brought out his

magnetic telegraph to the portico platform, close to one side of it, from which point he could hear everything that went on, having under view all the ceremonies performed, transmitting the results to Baltimore as fast as they transpired.»

There was little that varied the now well-established monotony of inauguration cere-



DRAWN BY IRVING R. WILES.

THE APPROACH TO THE CAPITOL DURING POLK'S INAUGURATION. (BASED ON A CONTEMPORARY PRINT.)

monies when Franklin Pierce came in in 1853, and James Buchanan in 1857. Pierce was one of the most buoyantly self-poised men who ever entered upon the Presidency. He made the journey from the White House to the Capitol standing erect in the carriage beside President Fillmore, and bowing constantly to the cheers with which he was greeted. At the Capitol he distinguished himself by being the first President to deliver his address without notes, speaking in a remarkably clear voice, and arousing great enthusiasm by his handsome appearance, dignified bearing, and somewhat unusual oratorical powers.

Lincoln's inaugurations have been so fully described in recent years in the columns of THE CENTURY that it is unnecessary to say much about them now. Perhaps the most dramatic phase of the first inauguration, always ex-



DRAWN BY IRVING R. WILES.

FROM A CONTEMPORARY PICTURE IN "HARPER'S WEEKLY."

BUCHANAN'S INAUGURATION.

cepting the address itself, was that described in Dr. Holland's «Life of Lincoln,» when the new President stood on the portico to take the oath of office, with President Buchanan, Chief Justice Taney, author of the Dred Scott decision, and Stephen A. Douglas prominent in the group about him, and the latter, his famous rival in debate, holding Mr. Lincoln's hat while he was delivering his inaugural address.

The chief characteristic of later inaugurations has been the steadily rising number of people in attendance. At both inaugurations

of General Grant the crowds were enormous; but those which have gathered every four years since have shown no diminution from the standard of bigness then fixed. That standard, which stood at from five to eight thousand in the early years of the century, will have passed one hundred thousand before the century closes. The managers of President McKinley's inauguration predict the finest pageant and the greatest throng ever seen in Washington, and doubtless their prediction will be verified.

Joseph B. Bishop.