



THE FRANCKLYN COTTAGE AT ELBERON,
WHERE PRESIDENT GARFIELD DIED.

A NOBLE LIFE.

BY NOAH BROOKS.

NO EVENT of modern times has created so deep and wide-spread a sorrow throughout the civilized world as the death of James Abram Garfield, late President of the United States. When he was struck down by the bullet of a wicked man, everybody was filled with amazement and alarm. There was no reason why such an attack on the President should be expected or looked for. He was a peaceable and kindly man, full of generous feelings, and with a friendly interest for all men. And when it was told to the country that this large-hearted, and upright, and honest Christian gentleman had been shot, people could hardly believe the tale. An assault like that seemed utterly causeless.

When it appeared to be possible that the President might recover, there was much relief felt throughout the length and breadth of the land. Wherever there were people dwelling, whether in the crowded cities of the Atlantic sea-board, or in lonely hamlets and camps afar in Western wilds,

men, women, and children waited and watched with great anxiety for the latest news from the wounded President. It was a remarkable sight, this waiting of a great nation around the bedside of a smitten president. From lands beyond the sea, too, came many messages of affectionate inquiry. Kings and queens, great men and the common people of every land, hoped and prayed for the recovery of the President. The powerful rulers of Europe seemed to forget for a while their ambitious schemes, and they sent word to their representatives in this country that they desired the very latest news, day by day, from the White House, where Garfield lay betwixt life and death. For eleven weeks, it may be said, the whole civilized world watched for some sign of hope that the President might live and not die.

This hope was not to be realized, although it did seem at times that the long suspense was over and that the beloved chief magistrate was on a fair road to health. At last, and suddenly, the news was

flashed all abroad that Garfield was dead. Never before, probably, did ill news fly so fast and so far. Gradually, there had seemed to be less and less hope that the noble sufferer could live, and so people were partly prepared for the worst. The brave and gentle spirit of Garfield passed away at half-past ten in the evening, and before the clocks struck twelve at midnight, the bells were tolling in every city in the United States, saying to all the people that the long-suffering, much-enduring President lay dead by the margin of the great sea that he loved so well, and on whose shining waves his last dying glance had lingered.

Everywhere, men went about with saddened faces and dejected mien. It seemed as if there was mourning and lamentation in every house in the land. As soon as people could rally from the first shock of grief, they began to hang out the emblems of sorrow on every hand. It was as if men and women, not being able to go and weep by the death-bed of the good President, did what they could to show their real sorrow for what was now beyond the help of man. From the first, as it now appears, there was no possibility that the President could ever really recover. But this was not known certainly until after his death, and so long as news came that he was still alive, the people prayed to the good God for his restoration to health. For weeks, millions of men and women in all lands, Christians of every sect, Israelites, Greeks, and those of strange faiths, daily offered up prayer to God that this precious life might be spared. So, when he died, they who had hoped and prayed for him were exceeding sorrowful, and they showed their sadness in many ways. The whole republic may be said to have been clothed in mourning. There was never such a sight in any country as on the day of the funeral of Garfield, when many of the larger cities and towns of the United States were completely draped in the emblems of mourning, and every flag drooped at half-mast. From beyond the sea came sympathizing messages from the great ones of the earth and from friends of America in foreign parts. The good Queen of England sent loving and tender words for herself and her children, and directed the British envoy at Washington to lay on Garfield's bier a memorial of her, with a kindly message which she sent. And then, with mourning and lamentation all over the broad land, the mortal remains of the President were carried back to Ohio, and were buried on a height from which one may look over the sparkling waters of the great Lake Erie.

This man, whose tragic sickness and death were lamented as a personal grief by many millions, and at whose burial the noblest and the best of

Christendom, here and in foreign lands, sincerely mourned, was, at the beginning of his public career, only a modest American citizen. He served his country with distinguished honor in the war and on the floor of Congress, and when he was elected President, many thousands of citizens rejoiced in the belief that his character and statesmanship gave promise of an unusually wise and brilliant administration. But he had been in office only four months when he was shot; he had not been long known to the people of other countries, and he had not had time, as president, to show how wise and how able he would be. Nor did he come of any lofty or ancient race of men, whose deeds of prowess or renown could be found carved on monuments and in noble temples. In his boyhood, he had been very poor, and had worked at humble callings for the sake of earning a livelihood, and securing a good education. Why, then, was there all this lamentation, sorrow, and spontaneous display of grief abroad and at home?

The career of James A. Garfield was thoroughly American. His character was worthy of all imitation. In his poverty when a young boy, he might have gone to school for two years before the time when he did enter the school-house, but that he had no shoes to wear; and this same needy lad, who afterward drove the horses of a canal-boat, lived to be the president of the United States. He carried into his high office a manliness of character, a Christian courage, and a sincerity of purpose that are more to mankind than the highest honors that can be heaped upon our fellow-man. Every American boy has heard, at some time, that he may live to become the president of the United States. But the life of Garfield, and the remarkable spectacle afforded by the last days of that life, very clearly show that it was the man, rather than the office, which men honored when the tragical end of his career drew to a close. The death of a president of the republic, and especially a death so purposeless and cruel, would have excited the sympathy of the world. But the history of Garfield's life is a beautiful example of what may be achieved by a loving heart, a generous nature, and a high purpose. In that life the boys of America have a noble model, and one which they may safely follow. Better than being president is to be honest, brave, true, manly, tender to one's mother, courageous for the right, and a friend to the weak and those who have no helper. All this, Garfield was, and this is why, when he fell a victim to the shot of an assassin, and when he was borne to his last resting-place, a wave of sorrow swept around the globe.

We are nowhere told that Garfield had aimed at being president before he was nominated to that

high place. There is no evidence that he had made any plans for his elevation to the great office that he occupied when he died. But the reward of a life of honest endeavor in the path of the right came to him unexpectedly and without his seeking for it. And I dare say that, if he had never been chosen president, he would have reaped full reward in some other way. For him, at least, it was better to be right than to be president. And while to possess by the vote of the people the highest office of the Republic is an honorable ambition, the example of Garfield shows that it is far better to win a good name and to build up a character that shall stand when all other things perish. We do not now so much lament a dead president as the tragical taking away of a high-minded man, an affectionate father, son, and husband, and a sincere patriot.

Nevertheless, the nation has suffered a calamity in the death of Garfield. He had the qualities which would have made him a good president. If his life had been spared, it seems most likely that the country would have highly approved of his administration of its affairs. Then, too, it is a sad thing that any man should be called to die for his country as Garfield was. He was not killed for himself, but because he was the president. If he had never been chosen by the people to the place he filled, he would have been alive to-day, as far as we can know. So there is a feeling of indignation and anger under all the mourning and sorrow for Garfield. The nation has been hurt as well as the family. It is a matter for profound sorrow that the life of a man is put in jeopardy because he has been chosen president by a free people. It is our boast that, in this country, every man has a chance for himself, and nobody is kept down by circumstances which are peculiar to any class, or sect, or social condition. Garfield was a shining example of what may be achieved by well-directed labor, and we are greatly grieved that his life, so admirably calculated to illustrate the force of character and the width of the ways to distinction in which an American boy may walk, should end in a manner so undeserved and so untimely.

When a boy, Garfield was lively, quick, and restless. His teacher complained that the lad was "perpetual motion." He could not study, even when great sacrifices had been made by his mother and his brothers to get him ready for school. When this was reported to his mother, her heart sank, but she could only say, "Why, James!" The tone of sorrow and disappointment went to the boy's heart, and he fell on his knees, and, burying his face in her lap, cried out that he would keep still in school, and that he would learn. He kept his word. From that day, he stuck

manfully to his work, and, whether he was riding on the canal tow-path, hammering away at carpentering, plunging into book-keeping, or toiling in the hard position of school-teacher, he seemed to be forever pushed on by the thought that he had promised to do his best. It was evident that he believed that the best preparation for the duties and responsibilities of to-morrow is the faithful performance of the labors of to-day. No idle dreamer, he went right on with his work, whatever it might be, doing his best. He waited for no applause, and he was not stimulated in his labors by the hope of reward. With a clear conscience, a ready hand for those who needed help, a large heart throbbing for the poor and the distressed, and with a sincere belief in the goodness of God's government of the world, Garfield filled up his days with honest industry and faithful service to his country and to his time.

Does any boy ask what good can come of all this, now that the man has died, and has been cut off, too, before he had arrived at the end of the natural term of human life? Garfield has, indeed, lived in vain if we can not find in his life and character something worthy of imitation. He has lived in vain if the influence of his example is not felt, for generations, upon the forming characters of the lads who are to be the future rulers and law-makers of this republic. The President is dead, but the record of his life can not die. And when we think of the pathetic figure that he made when he went out of this life, and of the untimely end of his career, which seemed to be just about to be at its best, we can recall with comfort the truth that

"In the wreck of noble lives
Something immortal still survives."

Nor need we lament for him who has gone up higher. Even those who were so near and dear to this warm-hearted and loving man in his lifetime do not mourn with a sorrow that can not be comforted. If it is true that, in future ages, the American youth shall be taught the goodly lesson of the lives of great men who have gone before, it is true that such an example as Garfield's can not perish. And if this is true of the life that endures upon the face of the earth, as men come and go, we can with our thought follow into shining realms the admirable and lovable man just now gone from among us. What he did lives after him. And although when he went away the land was filled with lamentation and weeping,

"He passed through glory's morning gate,
And walked in paradise."