

RUTHERFORD BIRCHARD HAYES.

BY GEORGE F. HOAR.

Rutherford Birchard Hayes was born in Delaware, Ohio, October 4, 1822. He died at Fremont, Ohio, January 17, 1893. He was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society, October 21, 1890. He married, December 30, 1852, Lucy Ware Webb, the youngest child and only daughter of Dr. James Webb and Marie Cook Webb. Mrs. Hayes was born August 30, 1831, and died June 25, 1889. Of this marriage there were eight children, of whom five survived their parents.

Mr. Hayes was appointed by Governor Dennison, major of the Twenty-third Ohio Volunteer Infantry, June 7, 1861. He was appointed, September 19, 1861, by General Rosecrans, Judge-Advocate of the Department of Ohio. He discharged the duties of that office about two months. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, October 24, 1861. March 13, 1865, he was promoted to the rank of brevet major-general, "for gallant and distinguished services during the campaign of 1864 in West Virginia, and particularly at the battles of Fisher's Hill and Cedar Creek, Virginia."

He was severely wounded in the left arm, below the elbow, at the battle of South Mountain, September 14, 1862. He was four times wounded in battle. It is stated by Adjutant-General Hastings that General Hayes was under fire sixty days in 1864. He was undoubtedly exposed to death at least one hundred days during the war.

He was elected a member of Congress, from Ohio, in the autumn of 1864, serving for a single term. He was chosen governor of Ohio in 1867, 1869 and 1875; was nominated

as the Republican candidate for the Presidency, at Cincinnati, in 1876, in which office he served for one term. Before his election, he declared his opinion that the President of the United States should not be re-eligible, and steadfastly refused to be a candidate for re-election.

It was the fortune of President Hayes to hold office under difficulties which never beset any other President. It was the task of Washington to inaugurate the government when the Constitution was an untried experiment, and every public department,—legislative, executive and judicial,—had to follow new and untrodden paths. Lincoln encountered a gigantic rebellion, and was obliged to discover in the arsenal of the Constitution weapons of offence and defence which had been unused and unknown until his time. But each of these presidents had the support of a people who understood perfectly that the life of the country was staked on the success of his administration. Each had great allies. Each could call upon every patriotic citizen for any sacrifice he should reasonably demand. But President Hayes was nominated against the wishes of both the great factions into which his own party was divided. His election came from their sulky acquiescence. When he was inaugurated, he could rely on the hearty support of no great national leader of his own party. The other party denied the validity of his election. Many of them refused him the courtesy of the ordinary use of his official title in common intercourse. The House of Representatives which preceded his inauguration was in the hands of his political opponents, and refused to make the customary appropriations for the support of the government. During his first two years, the House of Representatives contained a majority of the opposing party, and a minority of his own party who were hardly less hostile to him. In his last two years, both Houses were against him. Yet with all these disadvantages, he conducted the government with such quiet courage, with such unfailing wisdom, with an eye for

the public good, so single and sincere, that it has come to be the general verdict of his countrymen that his four years were as brilliant and successful and prosperous as any like period in our history. He had difficult questions to deal with in our foreign policy, in finance, and in civil administration. Under his direction, specie payments were resumed, the public debt was largely diminished, and manufacturing, commerce and agriculture flourished as never before. A new and humaner Indian policy was inaugurated. Difficult questions in our foreign relations were triumphantly settled, and such was the public satisfaction that he handed over the administration to a successor of his own political faith.

The records of this Society are not the place for a discussion of the great questions with which President Hayes and his counsellors had to deal. Perhaps it may not be deemed a violation of good taste if the present writer, to whom the Council has assigned the task of preparing this brief memoir, puts on record his own opinion,—based upon an intimate personal knowledge, and upon a friendship in which there was on the part of Mr. Hayes, as the writer believes, no veil or concealment,—that no more honest, disinterested, sincere man ever filled high public station in the service of the American people, and that few persons ever brought to a task of extraordinary difficulty a judgment sounder or a wisdom more unerring. All parties, as the writer believes, have now come to see that any other decision of the grave question on which the title of President Hayes depended than that which the Electoral Commission reached, would have led to the overthrow of this government within a generation. All parties now agree that the measures which the administration of President Hayes inaugurated to remove a large part of the civil service of the country from the arena of partisan strife were beneficent and healthy. All parties will now agree that the resumption of specie payments contributed largely to

the marvellous prosperity which this country has enjoyed. The student of our diplomatic history who reads the discussions of those four years will be struck alike by their far-sighted wisdom and ability, and the utter absence of any attempt at display, or getting from them any temporary popularity.

President Hayes had an able and efficient cabinet, one of them a highly valued and beloved member of this Society. But he largely impressed upon his administration his own personal quality.

One of the most gratifying facts disclosed by the experience of this country of popular government, is that the wives of the American citizens who have been called to the highest places in the republic have been found, with so few exceptions, equal to all the public and social demands of their exalted stations. It is very rare indeed, even when the husband has been raised from poverty and obscurity, and the marriage has taken place in early life, and both parties were of equally humble origin, that the wife has seemed out of place in the highest company.

Neither Mrs. Hayes nor her husband would properly be described as of humble origin, although nothing in the birth or education of either would have led them to expect, or prepare for in youth, anything but the simple and frugal life of American citizenship in an ordinary country home. She was born in Chillicothe, Ohio, where her father, Dr. James Webb, had been long in practice. He was a Kentuckian, and had lived in Lexington, Kentucky, where he died of cholera. He was visiting Lexington to complete arrangements for sending to Liberia slaves which were set free by himself and his father. After his death, his children freed them without condition.

The beauty, grace and uniform kindness of Mrs. Hayes made her an ornament of every company into which she came. Her kindly courtesy when she was mistress of the White House welcomed and rendered happy every visitor.

A smile, a grasp of the hand, the gift of one of the flowers in the cultivation of which she was an adept, constituted one of the pleasantest memories of American citizens, especially of women or young children, who went to the Executive Mansion, on what was perhaps the only visit to Washington they ever made. No ornament of costliest painting or sculpture ever lent a charm to the proudest European palace like that which abides in the White House from the memory of her sweet and gracious presence.

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