

# WILLIAM McKINLEY.

## A MURDERED PRESIDENT.

**A** STUDY of the lives of successful men almost inclines one to ask what becomes of all the brilliant boys of the world? The truth apparently is, that, however great an aid brilliance may be, it does not, in itself, command success.

Now and again a real genius comes along, who not only dazzles but holds the world for centuries, perhaps for all time. Still, the birth of such a one is rare, and for all practical purposes he is outside the laws of every-day life.

The ordinary man whom the world calls successful, and who makes for himself a name in history, is not necessarily brilliant, nor does it often happen that he possesses any wonderful talents setting him apart from his fellow men. Certain qualities he must have, but, these very same qualities are within the reach of most of us.

Let us take for example the life of the man, who, a short time ago, to the grief, not only of America, but of the whole world, was struck down by an assassin's hand. As he lay dying a mighty nation waited anxiously, hoping that death might yet be turned aside; from thousands of churches earnest prayers went up to heaven for his recovery; kings and princes, and powerful rulers sent messages of grief and sympathy to the stricken man; every phase of the desperate struggle for life was watched with mingled hopes and fears.

His death was lamented in every civilised kingdom; his funeral was a striking pageant, at which numerous thousands assisted in reality, and millions in imagination, while memorial services were held throughout the world.

Now who was William McKinley, who died the loved and respected chief of one of the mightiest nations on the globe?

In the eighteenth century the McKinleys were Scotch farmers, settled or "planted" in the north of Ireland. One branch of the family crossed the Atlantic in 1750, and William McKinley's great-grandfather, having fought during the Revolutionary War, settled down in Ohio.

There, at Niles, Ohio, William was born in 1843. His father was not in good circumstances, and the boy, having left school, found employment as clerk in a post-office. At this time no one, he himself least of all, would have predicted that he would die President of the United States.

There can be little doubt, however, that the boy had ambition, and meant to "get on." He worked for a living during the day, and studied hard at night, knowing that although education might not bring promotion, it would not come without.

When he was 17 years old the terrible Civil War broke out. The country was divided into two hostile camps: North against South: those who would die for the maintenance of the Union and the abolition of slavery, and those who would give their lives freely for the independence of each State.

In the modern annals of the world this devastating war occupies a unique position. The whole country was involved; ruin stalked everywhere, and the volunteer soldiers went to death by thousands.

William McKinley had now a prospect of a fairly successful career. Judging by the records of his life I should not think that military glamour had much attraction for him, but the country called for volunteers, and the boy clerk thought it his duty to respond.

He enlisted as a private, and his regiment had a full share of the terrible fighting which occurred. It is needless to enlarge upon this period of his life, though it was very exciting and in a sense romantic. It is hardly likely that he coveted military glory, yet he gained it all the same, rose step by step from the ranks, was mentioned for distinguished gallantry in the field, was praised by General Sheridan, received his captaincy when he was twenty-one, and before the end of the war was awarded his commission as major. This was rapid promotion, and every step had been faithfully earned by meritorious services, for the youthful volunteer had no influential friends to back him up.

The war ended, as you know, in the success of the North; the huge armies were disbanded, and the great majority of the soldiers returned to civilian life. Among these was young McKinley, now just twenty-four years old, and he settled down at Canton, Ohio, to practise as a lawyer. Here he met, fell in love with, and married Miss Ida Saxton, the charming and highly-educated daughter of a Canton banker, and from that time he began steadily to rise.

Still there was nothing particularly brilliant about him, nothing dazzling or fascinating which marked him out from the crowd. But his friends knew him as a prudent man,



shrewd, quiet, self-restrained, upright, cool, calm, and resolute. His qualities were more for use than for show.

His Ohio neighbours remarked that he was a sincerely religious man, that he was courteous alike to rich and poor, and devoted to his wife. His public actions proved his honesty, and, to those who looked beneath the surface, his quiet determination. In 1876 he was sent to Washington as one of the representatives of his native state. Here he made steady progress, but did not attract much outside attention until 1890.

In that year he became Chairman of Congress, and had a chance to show his mettle. A Tariff Bill was introduced which he had to pilot through the House. This bill was the greatest Protection measure ever drawn up, and it had all McKinley's sympathy. Whether he was right or wrong need not be discussed here; he believed in it, fought for it, worked for it day and night, and finally passed it through Congress.

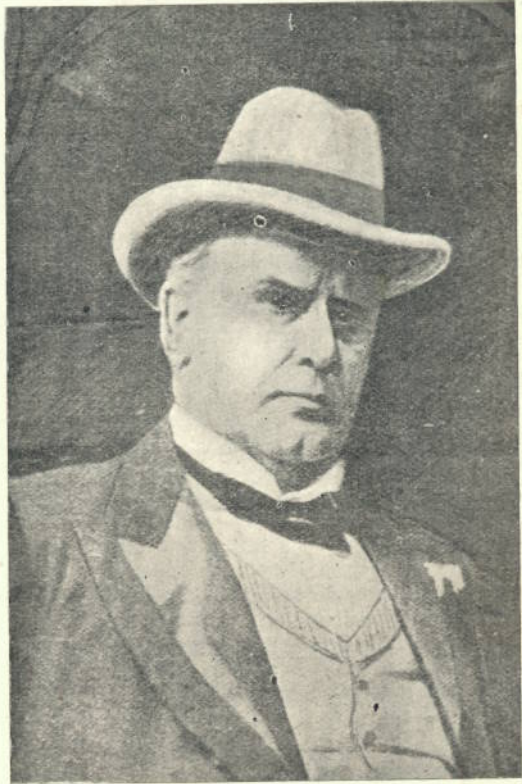
Now mark what happened. In the election which followed, his party was utterly defeated, and he himself lost his seat; the country would have none of the McKinley Bill, as it was called. Most of its supporters fell away, and bowed before the storm. McKinley did nothing of the kind. Believing he was right he stood up for his principles, fought for them tooth and nail, refused to be beaten, and after a severe contest was elected Governor of Ohio.

In a few years people began to alter their minds; they wanted the tariff, and the name of McKinley was on everyone's lips. The more brilliant men were forgotten or passed over, and the Ohio lawyer, who had stuck to his principles, was chosen President of the United States. Beginning almost at the bottom of the ladder he had climbed to the very highest rung.

During his first term of office a serious question arose. Cuba was a Spanish colony, and the natives desired independence. The island, for many years, had been in a frightful state of disorder, and at last the United States decided to interfere. In February, 1898, the United States warship "Maine" was blown up while stationed at Havana, and this increased the bitterness of the American people who, rightly or wrongly, attributed the cruel deed to sympathisers with the Spanish nation.

There is no doubt that Mr. McKinley was very reluctant to proclaim war. As a Christian statesman he earnestly desired a peaceful solution, but the country was in dead earnest, so after long hesitation, he submitted to the will of the nation.

From the American point of view the war was carried through to a successful conclusion; Spain was beaten on sea and land; Cuba and Porto Rico passed under the protection of the United States, and the Spaniards ceded the Philippines on payment



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of 20,000,000 dollars. Thus under the rule of President McKinley the United States launched out as a colonising power.

This military success aroused great enthusiasm among the Americans; the President's popularity increased by leaps and bounds, and in November, 1900, he was triumphantly re-elected to the highest position in the country. Then in September, 1901, at the very summit of his successful career he was stricken down by the assassin's bullet. For a short while it seemed that he might recover, but it was not to be, and the wounded President, still cheerful and undaunted,



passed with perfect faith to his long rest.

Now I think it may fairly be granted that love and honour were not showered on William McKinley because of his brilliant gifts. As a statesman he did not desire to dazzle by any stupendous feats; he was rather what one might call a "safe" man.

There is an old story of a gentleman who advertised for a coachman, and having selected three of the applicants, put to each of them this question: "How near could you drive to the edge of a precipice without overturning the carriage?"

The first man answered that he could drive within two feet; the second was more skilful and declared he would take the carriage half a foot from the edge; the third said he did not care for useless risks of that sort, and he would keep as far off as possible.

"Well," said the gentleman, "as I do not wish to break my neck, I think you will suit me best," and the third candidate obtained the post. I fancy President McKinley would have been a coachman of this type.

In his private life the President was altogether lovable, and it was as a man that he obtained such firm hold on the affections of the American people. His two children died in early infancy, while for twenty years his wife has been a confirmed invalid. During all that time he waited on and tended her with the greatest devotion, lavishing upon her all the attention in his power.

One admirable trait in his character cannot be overlooked; he was, like the majority of the world's foremost men, a loving son. His mother always loomed largely in his eyes. When he was at home in Canton, not a day passed without a visit to her simple cottage. At one time while Governor of Ohio, during a period of great stress and trouble, he could scarcely find time, for nearly a fortnight, to sleep. But every night he sat down to write her a little note, knowing how anxious she would be concerning him.

When, having won the greater prize, he was installed as President at Washington, he kept up the custom. From the White House there went out every day a little note addressed to his mother, and every day there arrived without fail at the Canton Post Office this brief but tender communication from one of the world's rulers to the sweet and simple woman who called the writer her "William at Washington."

Personally I like this beautiful and touching trait in the dead President's character more than any other. There was, according to the world's conception, a tremendous difference between the Chief of the State and a simple woman in a little provincial town. He did not recognise it. Power and honour and glory could not stifle the love he bore for his mother, could not weaken it even, and while she lived he cherished her with his whole heart.

Soon after he became President for the first time he invited his relatives to a dinner at the White House. His mother, you may be sure, was there, almost too happy for words. The dinner was rather a grand affair, very different to what she had been accustomed to in the old home. Noticing the large quantity of cream served with the fruit and coffee, she said to her son, "William, you must keep a cow now."

Some of the younger guests felt rather inclined to smile at her simplicity, but not so the President.

"Yes, mother," said he kindly, "we can afford to keep a cow now, and have all the cream we can possibly use."

President McKinley kept his simple and homely tastes to the last. His friends were fond of saying that he resembled Napoleon, but it could only have been in his outward appearance: otherwise there was little in common between the occupant of the White House, and the man who soaked the fields of Europe with blood.

J.O.E.

