Five Minute Chats on Our Presidents

By JAMES MORGAN

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UP FROM OBSCURITY

1837—March 18, Stephen Grover Cleveland, born at Caldwell, N. J.
1854—An office boy in a Buffalo law office.
1859—Admitted to the bar.
1863—Assistant district attorney of Erie county.
1870—Elected sheriff.
1881—Elected mayor of Buffalo.
1882—Elected governor.
1884—Elected President.
1885—March 4, Grover Cleveland inaugurated twenty-second president, aged forty-seven.

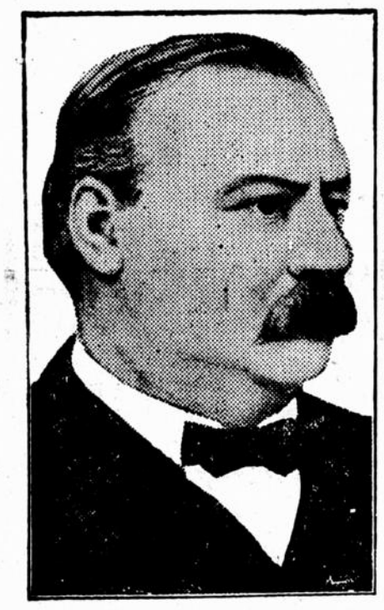
NO OTHER man has stepped so quickly from obscurity to the presidency as Grover Cleveland. When Garfield stood on the steps of the capitol to be inaugurated he never had heard the name of this Buffalo attorney, who was to stand in the same place four years afterward.

At forty-five Cleveland remained unknown outside his county. At forty-seven he was in the White House.

It was a meteoric rise. Yet this man was no meteor. Slow of mind, with a narrow range of reading and of intellectual interests, Cleveland was stolid in manner and without brilliant qualities. But he had a character as rugged and immovable as a mountain. It had been built up in rural parsonages, where his father, a Presbyterian minister, was required to rear a large family and set an example to the community on $600 a year.

For more than a quarter of a century he plodded along in Buffalo, a quiet, trusted, but not distinguished lawyer. Unmarried and without family or a home, he took no part in the social life of his community, where 100 other Buffalonians may have been better known to their fellow-townsmen.

He had been an assistant district attorney of Erie county and also its sheriff. The first that was ever heard of him outside his neighborhood were his sledge-hammer vetoes from the mayor's office only two years before his election to the presidency. The whole state of New York stopped to listen to his resounding whacks and next the whole country took notice.



Cleveland as Sheriff.

The sudden, the theatrical rise of the man was not a mere caprice, a blind stroke of luck. On the contrary, he was nominated and elected president because he was the logical, common-sense choice; because this unknown, unambitious lawyer of Buffalo had become in two swift years the most conspicuous embodiment of the things that the times called for—independence in politics and a higher standard of conduct in office.

Here was a man who was to make his own precedents, a man who was to care for nothing that had happened before he happened. The first president after the Civil war to have had no part in that strife, he was without a political past, and his face was turned wholly to the future.

He struck dismay to the greedy hopes of the Democrats, after their long wandering in a wilderness without spoils, by announcing that he would let the Republican office-holders finish their terms, with the exception of those who had been guilty of "offensive partisanship." When the Republican senate attempted to interfere with such removals as he did make, he objected to the revival of an old statute "after an existence of nearly 20 years of almost innocuous desuetude." This phrase was too much for the senators, and the act was repealed.

At last Cleveland deliberately sacrificed himself for the sake of plain speaking. The prospects of his reelection were bright. His native conservation had made him a favorite in the great financial centers of New York, and the all-powerful business interests of the country were satisfied with him. But on the eve of the election of 1888 he upset the entire situation by sending to congress his sensational tariff message, opening with the now oft-quoted words: "It is a condition which confronts us, not a theory."

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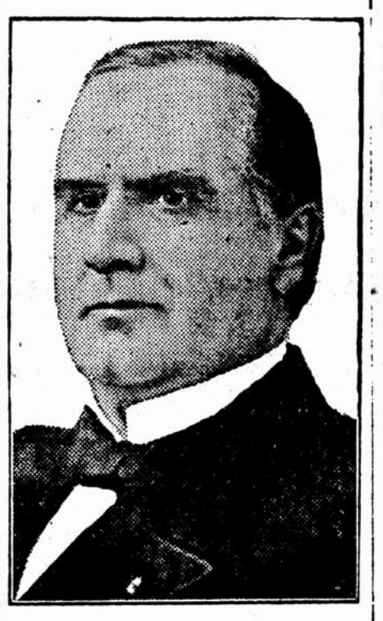
WILLIAM McKINLEY

1897—March 4, William McKinley inaugurated 24th President, aged fifty-four.
1898—Feb. 15, the battleship Maine blown up in Havana Harbor.
April 21, War declared against Spain.
July 7, Hawaii annexed.
Aug. 14, City of Manila captured.
Dec. 10, treaty of peace signed in Paris.
1899—Feb. 4, the Philippine War began.
1900—Aug. 15, the Allied Expedition to Pekin.
1901—Sept. 6, McKinley shot by Leon Czolgosz.
Sept. 14, died, aged fifty-eight.

EVENTS make sport of the schemes of mice and men. McKinley entered the race for the presidency on the tariff issue, was elected on the money issue . . . and the greatest problems that confronted him in the White House were the fate of a chain of islands off the coast of Asia and the destiny of China!

Spain had been engaged for two years in a desolating struggle to hold in subjection the revolting island of Cuba, and two happenings pushed McKinley into the conflict in spite of himself. In a private letter, the Spanish minister at Washington scoffed at the president as a "politicastro"—in plain American, "a peanut politician"—and plainly intimated that the fair promises which the Spaniards were giving him were only a trick to fool the administration and the American people. Within a week of that exposure, the battleship Maine was blown up in Havana harbor, with the loss of 266 American lives.

After withstanding for nearly two months the popular outcry of "Remember the Maine," the president yielded, and war was declared. In ten days Dewey had smashed the enemy squadron in Manila bay; in ten weeks another squadron was sunk or captured off Santiago; in three months and a half poor old Spain threw up the sponge.



William McKinley.

It took twice as long to make peace as to make war. The Philippines caused all the trouble. As we had not captured the islands in the war, many believed that we should let them alone. But McKinley decided to demand from Spain the surrender of the Philippines.

Without waiting for ratification, the president dispatched a military expedition to take over the Philippines, proclaiming to the revolting Filipinos the policy of "benevolent assimilation." The resulting war dragged its unpleasant length for two years before the inhabitants unwillingly bowed to their new master.

It was the strange fortune of a president whose entire public life had been given exclusively to domestic questions to plant the flag in the distant Philippines and to send it to the pink walls of the Forbidden City of China. In the march on Peking for the rescue of the foreign legations from the siege of the Boxers, or Chinese revolutionists, the United States joined other powers for the first time in a military expedition.

Under the high statesmanship of John Hay, the secretary of state, the United States had already, before the Boxer rebellion, laid a restraining hand upon the nations that were looting Chinese territory and had drawn from them pledges to keep an "open door" to trade in the ports they were seizing at the point of the gun. The "open door" has remained ever since the chart of our course in the East. If we will only continue to follow it and should succeed in inducing others to follow it a while longer, until the giant of the Orient awakens from his long slumber and shakes off his foreign despoilers, an emancipated China will be the imposing monument of William McKinley's presidency.

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WAITED HIS TURN

1843—January 29, William McKinley born at Niles, O.
1861-65—In the Civil war.
1867—Became a lawyer in Canton, O.
1869-71—Prosecuting attorney of his county.
1871—Married Ida Saxton.
1877-91—Member of congress.
1892-96—Governor of Ohio.
1896—June, McKinley nominated for president by the Republican national convention at St. Louis. November, elected.

WILLIAM McKINLEY challenged and disproved the old saying that the presidency casts its shadow on no man but once and that if the chance be missed then it will never come again. Twice the Republican nomination seemed to be within McKinley's reach—in the national conventions of 1888 and 1892. Each time he put it away, content to wait his proper turn, when he did not have to shake the tree to bring down the ripened fruit of his patience.

McKinley was beaten for the speakership by Thomas B. Reed in 1889, and he left Washington a defeated congressman only six years before he returned as president-elect. Had he been speaker, and, instead of Reed, incurred the title of "Czar," or had he not been turned out of congress . . . had he won those smaller honors he well might never have won the highest honor. A disappointment manfully borne enlists the popular sympathy, and the author of the McKinley bill entered the contest for the presidential nomination in 1896 as one who had suffered martyrdom in the cause of the protective tariff.

After teaching school a term or so, McKinley was called in the Civil war that hard university which graduated the men who were to lead the nation through four decades. Having gone into the army as a private in the regiment of another president-to-be—Rutherford B. Hayes—he came out at twenty-two a captain, with the brevet title of major.

Mrs. William McKinley.

Becoming a lawyer at Canton, O., again he found himself in the midst of industries in their struggling infancy. And for 14 years he was the spokesman in congress of that industrial district.

The young major, when he came to Canton, was a clean-cut, up-standing figure, genial in his nature, but with a sober dignity. His readiness of speech when on his feet, came from his practice of the art in the debating societies of his school days. His habits also had been properly formed in his boyhood when he joined the Methodist church at ten and grew up a youth who was as careful to keep his tongue as his collar clean.

All doors in the little town naturally swung open with a welcome to "such a nice young man," and a major to boot. Although he was yet poor, when Ida Saxton, the banker's daughter, who had been to school in New York city and who had just come back from Europe, smiled yes to him while they were "taking a buggy ride" the banker smiled, too, and made them a wedding gift of one of the best houses in Canton. It was from the front porch of that honeymoon dwelling that McKinley made his campaign for the presidency in 1896.

McKinley's is one of the best—and one of the most pathetic—love stories in the domestic records of the presidency. With the birth of her second child, the wife was left an invalid. The death of both of her children within five years of her wedding day utterly overwhelmed her nervous organization, and her shattered health remained thenceforth the constant object of her husband's tender care.

Although he never could know from minute to minute when she would pass into a swoon, he made her his companion on his travels. Once when he hurried home from congress, and the physicians had given up hope of saving her, his own ministrations and his prayers through a long night at her bedside recalled her to life.

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WEDDED IN WHITE HOUSE

1864—July 21, Frances Folsom born in Buffalo.
1885—Graduated from Wells college.
1886—June 2, married President Cleveland in the White House.
1913—February 10, married Prof. Thomas J. Preston at Princeton, N. J.

AS THE Democrats had lost power under a bachelor president, James Buchanan, they regained it after a quarter of a century under another bachelor president. That strange coincidence was brought to an end by Cleveland's marriage in the second year of his administration.

From the day Cleveland entered the executive mansion at Albany, gossip busily made matches for him with one after another of the eligible women who appeared at his receptions. A special favorite of those persistent rumors was the pretty widow of one of his old law partners, Oscar Folsom, whose home was one of the few homes in Buffalo where this unsocial person had been in the habit of visiting. It was not suspected that all along his own choice had been the daughter rather than the mother.

Mrs. Folsom and her daughter were guests of the president and Miss Cleveland in their first month at the White House. Even the wiseacres of Washington did not guess that the beautiful young girl who was present at a reception—all in white—would in another year be the bride of her host.

Miss Folsom had graduated and was traveling in Europe when the country was set in a flutter by the announcement of her engagement. She returned home to meet such an ordeal as no other American girl of twenty-two ever has faced. Her name was on every tongue in America; her portrait was in every paper, and the press boats crowded about her ship from which she was smuggled aboard a revenue cutter to avoid the curious crowd at New York dock.

Mrs. Grover Cleveland.

There had been only one marriage of a president, and John Tyler was a widower, which took some of the romance out of the occasion. For the first time a president was to marry in the White House. As Miss Folsom's mother had given up her home and as her grandfather's house was in mourning for his recent death, like the affianced of a sovereign she went to her husband's home to be married.

The wedding in the blue room was extremely simple, the only guests being a few relatives of the bride and groom and the members of the cabinet. After the cake had been cut in the state dining room, the bridal pair succeeded in stealing out the back door under cover of darkness to a waiting train in a switch yard. They had eluded the curious crowds gathered in front of the White House and at the station, but not the ubiquitous press, whose locomotive was under steam and in readiness to pursue them, with a trainload of reporters, to their honeymoon retreat in the Maryland mountains.

The continued attention of a vigilant press wherever the presidential couple went was indignantly resented by the bridegroom, who hotly denounced the "ghoulish glee" with which his family affairs were discussed. More malicious, more cruel were the unprinted tales which were persistently circulated as long as he remained in public life.

Mrs. Cleveland is said on one occasion to have given a pathetic hint of what the strokes aimed at the president through her little ones meant to a mother. With childlike bashfulness a daughter was holding back from the greetings of a small company at the White House, when Mrs. Cleveland said, "Speak up, dear, or the people will be told that you are deaf and dumb."

Mrs. Cleveland herself was spared. At first her girlish charms, afterward her womanly dignity and her maternal devotion made this most youthful the most beloved mistress of the White House.

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THE STRENUOUS LIFE

1858—Oct. 27, Theodore Roosevelt born in New York city.
1880—Graduated from Harvard.
1882-4—Member of New York legislature.
1884-6—A ranchman at Medora, N. D.
1889-95—Member of national civil service commission.
1895-7—Member of New York police commission.
1897-8—Assistant Secretary of the navy.
1898—Colonel of the Rough Riders in Cuba.
1899-1900 — Governor of New York.
1900—Elected Vice President.
1901—Sept. 14 took the oath in Buffalo as the twenty-fifth president, aged forty-two.
1904—November, elected president.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT was the most popular of all our presidents. With the exception of Lincoln, his was the raciest, the most interesting character that we have had in the presidency.

Yet he was born apart from the multitude whom he led and he might have lived and died a stranger to the masses of his countrymen but for one thing: He had not the health to enjoy the life of ease which opened to him at his birth. Roosevelt had to fight for his very breath in his gasping, asthmatic childhood.

Finally he took a post-graduate course in physical culture in the wild West, where the "four-eyed tenderfoot" had to fight the battle of his youth all over again, in a strange world, with entirely different standards for measuring men.

Roosevelt as a Young Man.

Roosevelt cut his eye teeth in political leadership in the corrupt machine-run legislature of New York. He could not have chosen a more thorough school for instruction in the hidden, muddy springs of parties and politics. His experience at Albany put realism into his idealism and made the academic reformer over into the most intensely practical politician we have had in the presidency.

He decided at the outset to act in each office as if it was to be the last that he ever would get, and for nearly 15 years after he left the legislature, Roosevelt could not have been elected to anything in the boss-ridden state of New York. For a long time he was "shelved" on the civil service commission at Washington, until a reform mayor of New York appointed him on the four-headed police commission; but it was soon single-headed so far as the public could see, and that head was full of teeth for police grafters and lawbreakers. At thirty-eight the most he could ask of the Republican politicians, with any hope of getting it, was the assistant secretaryship of the navy. The entire administration sighed with relief when at last he went off to lead his Rough Riders.

In five months he was back from Cuba in the far more troublesome role of a popular hero. The New York machine was in such sore need of a good name to pull it through the pending election that it met him at the wharf and humbly laid at his feet the Republican nomination for governor. But in the governorship, he realized the worst fears of Boss Platt that he harbored, as the boss naively wrote him, "various altruistic ideas," and that he was "a little loose on the relations of capital and labor, on trusts and combinations and . . . the right of a man to run his own business in his own way."

The only thing to do with this wild engine was to turn the switch and shunt it on to the side track of the vice presidency. Roosevelt loudly protested that he wanted to be re-elected governor. And while Platt was trying to push him on to the national ticket, McKinley and Hanna just as earnestly tried to push him back on to Platt. The Republican national convention rose up and roared his nomination, flinging him, in spite of himself, upon the tide that led to fortune.

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WILSON AND THE WAR

1917—Feb. 3, President Wilson broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on her renewal of ruthless submarining.
April 2, read his war message to congress.
1918—Jan. 18, laid before the senate his 14 points.
Nov. 11, the armistice signed with the German revolutionary government.

AS he stood at the clerk's desk in the hall of the house of representatives on the evening of April 2, 1917, President Wilson was the central figure in one of the great moments of world history. Not only his own people but mankind stopped to listen.

The president had been re-elected only five months before because "he kept us out of the war." Alas, the war would not keep out of the United States.

The war took on new fury, with the resumption of ruthless submarining, which Germany had modified the year before at our demand. The president thereupon handed the German ambassador his passports, and next he proposed that we should arm our merchant ships. The filibustering senate failing to give him this authority, he proceeded himself to arm them. But shipping vanished from the sea, with its hidden terror, and at last he called the newly elected congress in extraordinary session to "receive a communication—concerning grave matters of national policy."

No other president in the whole course of his service has had to make so many momentous decisions as Woodrow Wilson has had to make in the solitude of his study at the White House in those anxious days before the assembling of congress. He could not divide the burden of such a heavy responsibility; he had to bear it alone and without a precedent to guide him.

Wilson and His First Grandchild.

Should we give a further trial to armed neutrality? Or should we enter upon an independent naval warfare against the submarine menace to our shipping? Or should we back the allies with money and supplies, but leave them to do the fighting? Or should we join forces with them unreservedly, contrary to the historic policy of America to go it alone?

Those alternatives were in every mind in that bewildering period, and the president had to choose between them in framing the policy to be submitted to congress. He made the bolder choice of going into full partnership with the entente allies, pooling with them all our resources, our man power, our money power and our producing power.

The broad plan which he unfolded and which congress quickly approved assured in advance the success of the great, unparalleled undertaking, and he pushed it through to victory with grim, unrelenting persistence. Americans generally assumed at the start, and the British government agreed with them, that we should not have to send a great army to Europe, if indeed any at all. But when it became an imperative necessity to go at double quick to the relief of the broken line in France, the foundation was so well laid that we rose to the unforeseen emergency, building up in a year and a half an army of 4,000,000 and ferrying 2,000,000 soldiers across the Atlantic.

The brains of the country, all the talents, were mobilized for the war—merchants and scientists, bankers and railroad men, labor leaders and clergymen, each being charged with the task for which his training fitted him.

"It is a race between Wilson and Hindenburg," said Lloyd George, when the big German drive surprised the entente and smashed through its front in the spring of 1918. Well, whoever won the war, Hindenburg lost that race.

The rest—the president's journeys to Europe, the treaty and the battle over it, are history still in the making. Many years must pass before that extraordinary chapter in the story of the presidency will be finished and may be told in the spirit of historical impartiality.