

# ECHOES OF GREATNESS

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## William McKinley



The Barbers Vied with Each Other to Make it Pleasant for the Major

ONE of the first men with whom I became acquainted when I entered the House of Representatives was William McKinley, then called Major McKinley by all his associates, and it came about in this way:

At the close of the war, a gentleman named Louis Schaefer, a resident of Canton, Ohio, opened a correspondence with my father. Mr. Schaefer was one of the best men I ever knew. He was a German. Although he resided in Ohio, he thoroughly sympathized with the South throughout the war, and now that she was defeated he expressed himself as anxious to contribute out of his abundance to the relief of her poverty. Soon after the war ended he and his wife visited Richmond for the sole purpose of meeting my father personally. At his home Mr. Schaefer was universally regarded as a public-spirited citizen, and although his views antagonized the Union sentiment about him, and he no doubt made enemies by the boldness with which he expressed his opinions, he nevertheless commanded the respect of his community and a great deal of affection. My father was interested in an asylum for the care of orphans of Confederate soldiers. Mr. Schaefer made a handsome contribution to that object. He was always actively interested in politics and corresponded voluminously with my father on that subject. About 1870 he induced my nephew, after his graduation in law, to go to Canton to practice, and he became a member of Mr. Schaefer's household during several years' residence there. I may mention incidentally that one of Mr. Schaefer's daughters afterward married a young attorney named William R. Day, who subsequently became Attorney-General and Secretary of State under McKinley, and is now an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

When my nephew, the former protégé of Mr. Schaefer, was married about 1871, Mr. Schaefer came to his wedding, near Richmond, and we had a jolly time together. It is needless to add that Mr. Schaefer was a rabid Democrat and that in those days he hated Republicans and Republicanism. I doubted, when I became a Republican, whether I should have the support of my father's old friend, but one of the first letters of congratulation which I received was from Mr. Schaefer, who added that he was particularly anxious I should meet his Representative, Major McKinley—"the only Republican I support." I was naturally anxious to know one whose personal attractiveness could overcome such prejudices as I knew Mr. Schaefer felt.

It was not difficult to find Major McKinley. He was studiously present at all sessions, a clean-shaven, sweet-faced, approachable man, who seemed to have as many

Editor's Note—This is the fifth of a series of personal reminiscences of celebrities by John S. Wise.

friends on one side of the House as on the other. Our seats were near together. I first met him in the barber-shop of the House, where the barbers vied with each other to make it pleasant for the Major. He was lolling back in a chair when I walked up to him, told him of our common acquaintance and introduced myself. McKinley was a genial soul, and, when pleased, had a peculiar light in his eyes. He was fond of Mr. Schaefer and appreciated the exception to political prejudices which the German-American had made in his favor. From that hour we were good friends.

One day while the Fitz-John Porter case was under discussion in the House, McKinley in the cloak-room gave us an interesting account of how, although he was a Union soldier and resident of Ohio, he became a Mason in the lodge at Winchester, Virginia, during the war. He said he was stationed at Winchester in the winter of 1864, and that Judge Richard Parker, a citizen of the town, was conspicuously active in alleviating the suffering of the people. This brought him into frequent contact with the Federal authorities. They all conceived a fondness for the old gentleman which he, in turn, soon reciprocated. One of the Federal officers was a prominent Mason and discovered that Judge Parker was Master of the Winchester lodge. The lodge-room had been dismantled and was

probably occupied by Federal troops, but the faithful Master had all the paraphernalia in his possession. The Federal officer proposed to him to reopen the lodge. At first, as a loyal Confederate, he opposed the idea, but at last yielded to the argument that Masonry was a universal brotherhood, and that its teachings would be peculiarly available then and there to mitigate the hardships of war. So the lodge was reopened, and a number of Masons in the Federal army attended its meetings. Masonry became a fad among the uninitiated in Winchester, and McKinley, among others, joined.

McKinley was a great peacemaker. He discouraged all kinds of acrimony in the debates. I am afraid I cannot say the same for myself. I think, and have always thought, that it is a good thing now and then to tell a political opponent just what you think of him.

One day I had a royal tilt with a peppery old member from Indiana, who threatened that, when my contest was reached, I should be unseated. McKinley, after it was all over, took occasion to give me some friendly advice. "Don't allow them to draw you into such controversies," he said. "No good can come of them. You may provoke them into turning you out. I have a contest. But you never hear of that. I go on about my business and I am not even ashamed to make myself useful by working hard on their committees. You ought to do the same. I like you and don't want to see you turned out, but if you taunt them and defy them, as you do, you will tempt them to unseat you."

One day toward the close of the session, Mr. Turner, of Georgia, chairman of the Committee on Elections, a saturnine man as cold as an iceberg, called up the contested election case of Wallace vs. McKinley, and after a brief debate, in which no sort of mercy or consideration was shown him, McKinley was unseated. His defeat did not amount to much, for his term was nearly ended, and he was reelected; but he took it very solemnly. I was sorry for him, but could not resist a little badinage. I passed by his desk where he was tying up his papers and preparing to depart with the resigned air of a Christian martyr.

"Old fellow," said I, "I feel awfully about this, but you brought it all upon yourself. You would not listen to my advice. If you had gone along quietly and had not attracted attention to your case by wrangling and abusing your political opponents, you might have finished your term undisturbed. Look at me! Why did you not follow my example?"

McKinley had big, sad eyes when he was depressed. Turning them toward me with a pained expression, he saw no joke in what I was saying and contented himself by replying:



"I think that sort of thing is, under the circumstances, very unkind."

When the sting of his defeat wore off, he enjoyed the way I had turned the tables on him and fully forgave me.

In the National Convention of 1888 I saw a great deal of McKinley. After his indignant rebuke of those who tried to spring a nomination upon him, when he was instructed for Sherman, I went over and sat beside him. Said I: "I never felt so proud of you as when you spurned that sort of double dealing. Your chance will come. But this is not the time. You could not afford to take such a nomination."

He thanked me, took my Virginia badge off my breast, and pinned his in its place. It gave me an idea. I went about the hall and procured the badges worn by numerous leaders from different States, and took them home with me for my wife to make a crazy-quilt of them. That was the passing fad of that day among ladies. But, although I still have the badges worn by McKinley, Secretary Thompson, of Indiana, Senators Quay, Allison and others, they have not been worked up into a quilt.

At that time there was intense rivalry among the factions in Ohio. One of the Ohio leaders saw McKinley and myself talking together. He perhaps tried to eavesdrop. He probably caught the words: "This is not the time." I may mention as illustrative of political meanness that he went about whispering that the demonstration in favor of McKinley had been planned, and was known in advance to McKinley, and that he heard me apologizing for its miscarriage by telling him it had not been started at the proper time.

I was in Columbus, Ohio, the day of McKinley's inauguration as Governor. He was exceedingly kind to me and invited me to accompany him, but I could not do so. On the twenty-second of February, 1894 or 1895, however, McKinley, William J. Bryan and myself were the speakers at the banquet of the Union League Club, Chicago. McKinley never was an ornate orator. I heard him on many occasions, and his speeches, with the exception of those on the tariff, concerning which he was always interesting, and one speech I heard him deliver to veterans at a reunion in Buffalo, were not very attractive. Of course, the glamour of the Presidency makes ordinary speeches sound fine and read well, but I repeat that McKinley was no orator. And the speech made that night by William Jennings Bryan was below, rather than above, mediocrity. It was a distinct disappointment and he said himself that it was a failure. I had heard so much of him that I was sorely disappointed. Since then he has undoubtedly made many stirring appeals, but that was the only speech I ever heard from Bryan from beginning to end until I heard him speak at the Gridiron Club in Washington, in 1905, when he made a speech that was a model of good taste, good temper and kind feeling. If anybody feels interest enough in the subject to refer to it again, I will leave it to some one else to tell what a poor speech I made.

During the two years prior to his nomination for the Presidency, McKinley was frequently in New York. He usually stopped at the ill-fated Windsor Hotel and I saw a great deal of him. I remember, particularly, one visit that he paid to my house.

Henry Irving had been civil to me when I was in London. Some time in the winter of 1894-95 he was playing in New York. I was anxious to entertain him, but the only way to get at him was to have him after the theatre. I lived at that time in a small house in Forty-fourth Street. I had some Chesapeake Bay terrapin, Virginia hams and Old Plantation oysters. Irving and his right bower, Bram Stoker, a prince of good fellows, agreed to come, and my first idea was to have half a dozen friends to meet them. But the party grew until I think we had twenty-seven men present, and it was a remarkable gathering. I do not recall them all, but Elihu Root, General Horace Porter, John W. Mackay, Colonel Tom Ochiltree, Joe Jefferson and William J. Florence were of the party, and in the midst of it came



The Interview Opened by McKinley Telling Me How Much Attached to Me He Was

When the time came for the Presidential Convention of 1896, Senator Platt tried to secure a solid delegation from New York in favor of Governor and ex-Vice-President Morton. For some reason he did not want McKinley, and used Morton as a pretext for his opposition. He announced that he would have a solid Morton delegation, but six McKinley delegates contested. As I recall them, they were Cornelius N. Bliss, Colonel S. Van Rensselaer Cruger, General Anson G. McCook, General C. H. T. Collis, William Brookfield, and one other. I was selected as the lawyer to present their case at the Convention. Mr. Bliss and Colonel Cruger came to an agreement to divide with Howard Carroll and William Barnes, their opponents and friends, but the other four were seated on contest. I also represented two contestants from Virginia, who were given half seats. We had a jolly good time in St. Louis, and, as I was not a delegate and as my work was done, I left before the Convention completed its work. The last man I saw was Hobart, who was nominated Vice-President. He was a very attractive fellow.

On my way home I stopped at Canton to see McKinley. He welcomed me most cordially and I spent some hours in his home in very intimate communion with him. Among other things he showed me the draft of the gold plank in the Republican platform, which had been drawn by Mr. Kohlsaat, of Chicago, a week before the Convention met. It was substantially the one adopted and had already been approved by Senator Lodge, who was intrusted with the preparation of that feature of the platform. This fact is worth mentioning, as the friends of Senator Platt, of New York, circulated a report after the Convention that he, upon his arrival in St. Louis, had compelled the framers of the platform to adopt his views about the gold standard. In point of fact, the matter was settled long before his arrival, and Senator Platt had nothing to do with it. He had very little influence in the Convention.

Some time before his inauguration, McKinley invited me to visit him at his home in Canton. He discussed quite freely the numerous people he was considering for his Cabinet. Among other things, he said he wanted a Southern man in his Cabinet. He was kind enough to say that he had been considering me as a probability for Attorney-General, but that the trouble in my case was that I lived in the North and that Southern Republicans would not be satisfied with me as a representative of the South, while New Yorkers would fear that I would be charged to the New York quota.

I interrupted him jocularly by telling him he need not discuss that subject further; that I could not afford to be Attorney-General on the salary; that, if I should take the place, by the end of my term the Marshal of the District of Columbia would have his hand on my collar for debt. At that time McKinley was considering Judge Nathan Goff, of West Virginia, but I think he was unwilling to accept. We lunched together, and Mrs. McKinley was present. She was a sweet, pathetic little invalid, and her husband's tenderness to her was touching. I remember saying at the table something to McKinley about his tenure of his new office being more secure than that in Congress when Wallace turned him out. Mrs. McKinley interrupted by inquiring something, with a surprised look, which showed she did not altogether understand what I meant when I spoke about Wallace. Her husband adroitly turned the subject, and I verily believe that through consideration for her health she had never been allowed to hear of his defeat.

The President-elect asked me what position I wanted. I told him I was like Beverley Tucker, when Stephen A. Douglas said to him: "Bev, what shall I do for you when I am President?" Tucker was a fellow of infinite jest. "Stephen, old boy," he replied quickly, "when you are President just walk down Pennsylvania Avenue with me, your arm about my neck, and call me Bev—and I will do the rest." The joke pleased McKinley immensely and I

Governor McKinley and his staff. On his staff were the present Governor of Ohio, Myron T. Herrick, and Colonel James H. Hoyt. My poor little house was crowded to overflowing, and we found it necessary to place card-tables in the drawing-room to accommodate some of the party. It was a literal go-as-you-please entertainment, but the fare was good and the company took it good-naturedly. McKinley particularly enjoyed it.

It was an all-night affair. Irving, who is a night-owl, stayed until five o'clock in the morning. Some one who heard of it jocularly asked him why he did not remain for breakfast. With a look of perplexity and a characteristic grimace he said with a drawl: "How could I? The hot water gave out. We could not drink cold Scotch whisky after daybreak."

On many occasions afterward McKinley referred to the hilarity and fun of that night, for while he himself was not much of a fun-maker he enjoyed bright company.

heard of his repeating it afterward. I did, however, tell the President-elect frankly, as our intimacy and his inquiry justified, that I wanted to be United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. At first he inquired who were the other aspirants. Then he said that unless some new and unforeseen contingency arose he would nominate me. But I saw that something was on his mind. At last it came out.

"Is Senator Platt for you?" said he.

"Of course not," said I. "Have I not been fighting him to seat delegates for you? You know Platt. How can you expect me to secure his indorsement? Are you going to penalize your friends because they cannot secure the indorsement of those they have antagonized fighting for you?"

He mused a moment and said: "Yes, I know. But—you know the deference paid to Senatorial indorsements for offices like this. You know how the success of any Administration depends upon the support of the Senate. You know what a narrow margin I shall have in the Senate. I cannot afford to have another Garfield row. We only have a majority of two or three in the Senate. Even if Platt will not indorse you, can you not make him agree not to fight you if I name you?"

I told him I would see what could be done.

Senator Platt's attitude seemed to give McKinley great concern. Platt had opposed his nomination, but supported him for election, and since the election nothing had



Irving, Who is a Night-Owl, Stayed Until Five o'Clock in the Morning

been heard from the New York Senator. McKinley commissioned me to call upon Platt on my return and give him to understand that the President-elect cherished no sort of resentment for his opposition to his nomination; that his feelings were altogether kindly; that he desired his advice and cooperation in regard to New York matters and was prepared to show him all the consideration to which the Senator from the greatest State in the Union was entitled. At the same time, I was to find out Platt's attitude toward my own aspirations.

I saw Platt and he met the President's overtures in the kindest spirit. As to myself, he said he was fully committed to another, but that, if the President saw fit to nominate me, he would not oppose my confirmation. I reported the result of my visit to McKinley. It was not long before I found out that I had brought the two together so effectually that I had squeezed myself out, for McKinley needed Platt as badly as Platt needed McKinley, and both were political traders. The appointment was delayed a long time. In the summer of 1897 I met the President at a Grand Army reunion at Buffalo. We saw a good deal of each other. He made a fine speech at the banquet, the best I ever heard from him. I was an "also ran," and spoke after him. My train left about eleven o'clock at night, and I was compelled to go. As I edged my way out behind those seated on the dais I passed the President and, looking up to say good-by, he pulled me down to him and said something very kind about my speech.

"Thank you," I replied. "I wonder if it was good enough to pull off that attorneyship I've been expecting so long."

"Have you secured Platt's support?" asked McKinley. The reply nettled me and I said: "No. Did you secure it when I made him my opponent fighting your battles for you? Seems as if I ought to have sided with him in order to have you for a friend."

McKinley took the rebuke kindly, and said he wanted to see me in Washington soon. I was not surprised, therefore, when, some time later, I had a request to visit him in Washington. Meanwhile, Mr. Platt had said to me that

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Went About Whispering that the Demonstration in Favor of McKinley Had Been Planned



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he told the President just what he had promised me he would say.

My meeting with the President was in what is known as the Red Room. Secretary Alger was present. The interview opened by McKinley telling me how much attached to me he was, and how everybody knew it. Then I knew what was coming. He went on to say that I must know his decision did not depend on his relative liking of Senator Platt and myself; that he had been my friend for many years and that he had been prejudiced against Platt, although since he had met him he esteemed the New Yorker highly. But that he felt bound, he continued, not to antagonize Platt in the matter of this attorneyship—his margin of support in the Senate was too narrow to justify it.

I interrupted to inquire: "Did Mr. Platt not write to you that, while he had supported another, if you chose to nominate me he would not complain?"

"Oh, yes, maybe he did," said McKinley, "but I have seen Platt and I know what he feels, and I know I cannot jeopardize the party by fighting Platt. I believe you are too good a friend to ask me to do that."

"Mr. President," said I, rising to go, "your decision is not a surprise to me. I release you from all obligations. I have long since learned how friendship is sacrificed in the game of politics. Platt has something you want. You have something Platt wants. Go ahead with the arrangement. Next time I want something and you and Platt are wrangling I will support Platt if I prize what I want more than I do your friendship. A man is a fool who is sentimental in politics."

"Now you are mad and losing your temper," said McKinley in a grieved way.

"I never was less mad in my life," I replied. "I am only describing coolly what I see."

McKinley talked kindly and said something about there being other ways in which he could attest his friendship, and Secretary Alger said a word or two about what he knew of McKinley's attachment, and I left in no very pleasant temper.

Platt's man received the appointment. Some time afterward McKinley gave me a very handsome special appointment, but he knew just what I thought of him. It was this:

He was naturally an amicable man, but exceedingly ambitious—so ambitious that he had no idea of imperiling any personal interest for friendly inclinations. If it was necessary to sacrifice a weak friend to propitiate a powerful enemy, he would not hesitate for one moment to sacrifice the friend. To his powerful friends, on whom he was dependent, he was loyal to the point of doing anything they required, even things which his judgment or his conscience did not approve, but that was only another form of selfishness. His natural inclination to weaker friends was kindly, and when he might assist them without danger to himself he did so with a show of great generosity. But when doing so called on him to imperil any selfish interest he did not hesitate to leave them in the lurch. Secretary Alger himself experienced this. No man was ever more loyal to McKinley, and he was an excellent Secretary of War, but when McKinley found that there was a public clamor against Alger he did not stand by his Secretary as he should have done: he sacrificed him for his own benefit without a qualm. In a word, McKinley was nothing like as unselfish a man as he has the reputation of having been; he was much more of a trading politician than he has the reputation of having been; he was not so high as the public estimate places him. Although he was a kind-hearted man, he was a very timid, calculating person, and although, personally, not corrupt, he was under many bad and venal influences. What saved McKinley and will pass his name down to history as a much greater man than he really was is that he had a singularly able coterie of men about him, and presided over the destinies of this Nation when our people were more prosperous, more virile, more ready to work out their own destiny and achieve their own glory, than they ever had been before or may ever be again.

McKinley was naturally of a cautious and a timid nature. The swift rush of



events after the blowing up of the Maine alarmed him. Well it might. The country was not prepared for war in any way. With a more powerful adversary than Spain, the precipitate way in which our people forced the war might and probably would have produced a great disaster. It was this, doubtless, that alarmed McKinley and brought forth his desperate appeals for delay. But the rashness of the populace proved to be a true inspiration, and the victories we won so rapidly were little short of miracles in their bloodlessness and their completeness. The rapidity of the formation of our armies and navies, the thoroughness of their equipment, the celerity and precision of their work, while due to the work of a thousand master minds, product of our whirling period of activity, will always redound to the credit of McKinley and give him higher rank than as a man he was entitled to. He was never a vindictive man. His kindness and his amiability disarmed to a great extent resentment for his shortcomings.

When the war broke out my three boys went wild. The oldest was in the army, and the next two were graduates of the Virginia Military Institute. McKinley promptly commissioned the two latter as Captain and First Lieutenant in Colonel Pettit's Fourth Regiment of Volunteer Infantry. My oldest son he made an Assistant Adjutant-General with rank of Captain, after Santiago, and afterward Major in the Forty-seventh Infantry Volunteers. My second son he made Major in the Fourth. He even offered me a Brigadier-General's commission.

The last time I saw McKinley was at Bluff Point. I was chairman of a committee appointed to call on him and invite him to attend a great celebration of Dewey's victory, in New York. The place is beautiful and we reached it on a lovely day. After our task was performed, I was about to withdraw, when McKinley, who knew how I felt about the United States Attorneyship, approached me in his most seductive way. He knew my weak point.

"Well," said he, calling me by my first name, "how are *our* boys?"

"Very well, I thank you, Mr. President—one in the Philippines and two in Cuba. All very well."

"And how is Mrs. Wise?" he added. "I expect that anxiety about all those boys in the army has made her lose the girlish appearance she had when we were frolicking that night with Irving."

I thanked him and made some reply. Running his arm through mine, as he often did in the old days, he drew me aside and said: "Where is the little chap that made photographs of the Spaniards as he charged them in the Ninth Infantry at San Juan Hill?"

"Why, he has rejoined his regiment and is serving in Northern Luzon."

"Now I want him to be a Major in one of the new regiments we are recruiting," was the President's quick reply.

Whatever lingering resentment I may have felt against McKinley was surely disarmed by this considerate remembrance of my oldest son. Turning to him and grinning I said: "Mr. President, is this business or conversation? Platt has no nominee for this place, has he?"

He in turn said: "There you go again. Still harping on that old matter. No, I want that boy appointed. You write to Root and tell him I want it done, and I will write, too."

Shaking his hand cordially, I went off and wrote at once to Secretary Root, one of the best friends and truest men I ever knew, and within a week received a telegram from him, saying: "Congratulate Major Hugh D. Wise on his appointment to the Forty-seventh Infantry." I little thought, when I last looked into the kindly eyes of Mr. McKinley, that summer day at Bluff Point, that we should never meet again. He was so full of life and hope and health that a long career seemed stretched out before him.

Poor McKinley! He deserved a better fate. The criticisms I have passed upon him above, although they were deserved, do not destroy or materially weaken a feeling of affection which I always felt for him, and although his friendship failed me once on a pinch, he showed me many times his kindness of heart, friendly interest, and desire to serve me, when he did not have to endanger himself. That was his nature and he could not change it. On the whole, it was a nature far above the average of mankind in sweetness and kindness, and not a whit below the average in selfishness, perhaps, when men are subjected to the test.