



CHAPTER XXVI.

DEATH OF PRESIDENT MCKINLEY.

Dies Peacefully at 2:15 A. M., Saturday, September 14—Fond Farewell of Husband and Wife—Last Words, "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

PEACEFULLY and gently like the faint flickering of a burned-out candle, President McKinley breathed his last at 2:15, Saturday morning, September 14, 1901. Words of consolation to his wife were the last that passed his lips, and they came after a general "good-by" said to the American people, whom he had loved all his life.

Those present in the room when the President died were: Dr. Rixey, Abner McKinley, Mrs. Sarah Duncan, Miss Helen McKinley, Miss Mary Barber, Miss Sarah Duncan, Lieutenant James F. McKinley, W. C. Duncan, T. M. Osborn, Colonel Webb C. Hayes, Comptroller Charles G. Dawes, Colonel W. C. Brown, Secretary Cortelyou, John Barber, three nurses and three orderlies. Mrs. McKinley was not present. She had taken her

DEATH OF MCKINLEY.

513

last farewell from her husband and had been induced to retire.

Before 6 o'clock the evening before, it was clear to those at the President's bedside that he was dying, and preparations were made for the last sad offices of farewell from those who were nearest and dearest to him. Oxygen had been administered steadily, but with little effect in keeping back the approach of death.

The President came out of one period of unconsciousness only to relapse into another. But in this period, when his mind was partially clear, occurred a series of events of profoundly touching character. Down stairs, with strained and tear-stained faces, members of the Cabinet were grouped in anxious waiting. They knew the end was near and that the time had come when they must see him for the last time on earth.

This was about 6 o'clock. One by one they ascended the stairway—Secretary Root, Secretary Hitchcock and Attorney General Knox. Secretary Wilson also was there, but he held back, not wishing to see the President in his last agony. There was only a momentary stay of the Cabinet officers at the threshold of the death chamber. Then they withdrew, the tears streaming down their faces and the words of intense grief choking in their throats.

At 7:55 o'clock the President recovered con-

sciousness, and realizing that the end was at hand he asked for Mrs. McKinley. She was taken into the room and to her husband's bedside. All left the room, save one nurse, and the husband and wife were practically alone. The strong face of the dying man lighted up with a smile as their hands were clasped.

The President was able to speak faintly as his wife bent over him. What he said only he and she know. Those who know how tenderly and constantly he has cared for her and how great his anxiety has been for her ever since he was stricken down by the anarchist's bullet can hardly speak of that pitiful scene without almost breaking down at the thought of it.

Just before the President lost consciousness Mrs. McKinley knelt at his side. He knew her and said: "Good-by, all; good-bye. It is God's way; not our will, but Thine be done." And then he said faintly, speaking to no one in particular, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." It was a long leave-taking, and, finally, they carried her half fainting to her room. They watched over her anxiously. They feared the effect of the severing of bonds which were so close and upon which she was so dependent. News of what was happening went down stairs and out into the street. It was received everywhere with tears.

"They are saying good-bye to each other," peo-

ple whispered in the streets, all along those crowded blocks near the house. Every one was thinking of what the life of these two had been, of the intense, beautiful devotion each to the other, of what a tender, chivalrous lover-husband he had been.

It was impossible to think of this and then of the scene in that room upon which the thoughts of the whole world were centered, without feeling the eyes grow hot under the lids and a lump come into the throat. In that room it was, for the moment, not the head of the mightiest nation on earth who was dying, it was a husband and lover standing by the dark river and giving the last look of love to that sad, lonely invalid woman, to whom his smile and cheerful words were literally the breath of life.

As the news spread, the hush that was always upon the hundred or more people within the ropes seemed to become deeper. It was like the solemn stillness of a church, so far as those nearest the house were concerned. The only sound was the swift clicking of the telegraph instruments as the news was rushed away to all parts of the country.

The President continued in an unconscious condition to the end. Dr. Rixey remained with him until death came. The other doctors were in the room at times, and then repaired to the front room, where their consultations had been held.

About 2 o'clock Dr. Rixey noted the unmistakable signs of dissolution, and the immediate members of the family were summoned to the bedside. Mrs. McKinley was asleep, and it was deemed desirable not to awaken her for the last moments of anguish.

Silently and sadly the members of the family stole into the room. They stood about the foot and sides of the bed where the great man's life was ebbing away.

In an adjoining room sat the physicians, including Drs. McBurney, Wadsworth, Park, Stockton, and Mynter.

It was now 2:05 o'clock, and the minutes were slipping away. Only the sobs of those in the circle about the President's bedside broke the awe-like silence.

Five minutes passed, then six, seven, eight—

Now Dr. Rixey bent forward, and then one of his hands was raised, as if in warning. The fluttering heart was just going to rest. A moment more and Dr. Rixey straightened up, and with choking voice said:

"The President is dead!"

Secretary Cortelyou was the first to turn from the stricken circle. He stepped from the chamber to the outer hall, and then down the stairway to the large room where the members of the Cabinet, Senators, and distinguished officials were assem-

bled. As his tense, white face appeared at the doorway a hush fell upon the assemblage.

"Gentlemen, the President has passed away," he said.

For a moment not a word came in reply. Even though the end had been expected, the actual announcement that William McKinley was dead fairly stunned these men who had been his closest confidants and advisers. Then a groan of anguish went up from the assembled officials. They cried outright like children. All the pent-up emotions of the last few days were let loose. They turned from the room and came from the house with streaming eyes.

Leaving the stricken circle Secretary Cortelyou left the house and walked down to the ropes where the waiting correspondents stood ready to send the sad news on lightning's wings to the people who had always been uppermost in the thoughts and deeds of the dead President.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the President passed away at 2:15."