

GROVER CLEVELAND

THE MAN AND THE STATESMAN

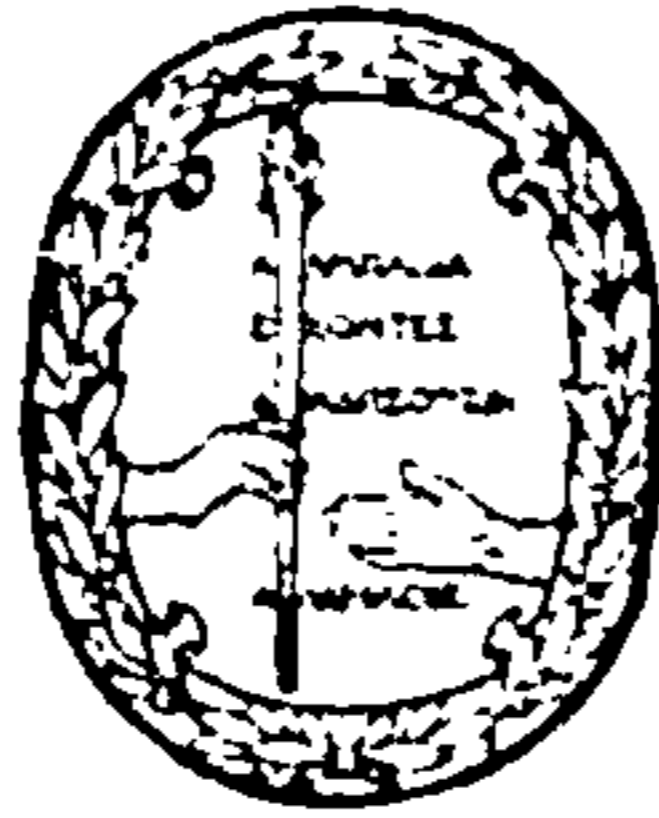
An Authorized Biography

BY

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VOLUME

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GROVER CLEVELAND
THE MAN AND THE STATESMAN

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CHAPTER XIV

SUNSET DAYS

"I have tried so hard to do right."

—GROVER CLEVELAND.

MR. CLEVELAND'S sixty-ninth birthday found him in Florida, seeking the health which never would return. Although not old, he was aging fast. The physical strength which had made possible strenuous days and deliberately sleepless nights was gone, and he dared not face the penetrating dampness of a New Jersey March. To him in his retreat came, as usual, a deluge of birthday letters, some from intimate friends, some from mere acquaintances, and many from admirers who knew him only by his works. Commodore Benedict, in playful vein, sounded the bugle call of the 69th:

Indian Harbor, Greenwich, Conn.

March 12, 1906.

MY DEAR ADMIRAL:—

I am credibly informed that you are to join the Sixty-ninth regiment on the 18th inst., the day following St. Patrick's.

As I shall not be present to extend the glad hand, and, as it was my good fortune to join that disorganization something over three years ago, I have thought, perhaps, you might be interested to hear what I think of it after serving the full term of my enlistment, and what you may expect, based on my experience.

You must not be surprised to find at the very outset that you are the youngest member of the whole shooting match, but advancement is very certain, rapid, and continuous. You will not be obliged to carry the pail at the end of the procession for more than a few moments, so rapidly are younger members admitted. You will not be greeted with a display of shamrocks or shillalahs, the regiment is too busy admitting new members and burying older ones to indulge in such luxuries. Your enlistment will be for one year only, at the end of which, if you survive, you will be a veteran.

Although the memberships of this regiment extend throughout the world, you will be surprised to find how few of them you will meet, and, of them, but very few will be found in good marching order, most of them preferring slippers to seven league boots. Never before did you belong to a club, society, or organization which comprised such a lot of rickety humanity. An atmosphere of spring will be found lingering in some hearts, but the most of them will betray a spring halt in their legs or a movement as if getting ready for winter by practicing on snowshoes. And yet the few little boys you will find to play with, some of whom may have been companions of your youth, will all seem to be on their good behavior. They will flatter one another with all sorts of preposterous assurances of youthful looks and actions, and, after swearing off twenty years or so from each other's ages consult a pedometer and a mirror, with the result that, while each admits a claim to youthful feelings, will all agree that they are pretty good imitations of old people. They will be ever ready to give the latitude and longitude of all their wanderings, and, after touching upon a few joys, such as fishing and hunting—shouldering their guns and rods to show how game

and fish have been won—will lapse into a state of ecstatic agony as they unload upon each other the stories of their various sufferings.

Not the least of the attractions of this regiment is the fair light guard of grandmothers who belong; for women, of course, are not only admitted, but, for the most part, are drafted in spite of many protestations. There will appear to be more of them than men; and then will dawn upon you, if it never has done so before, the fact that, in spite of a few scuttle-bonnet cripples among them, there are a whole lot who are exceedingly fascinating and attractive, a joy wholly denied us in youth, but fortunately reserved for age. So much for the Sixty-niners.

Your year of service ended, without booming of cannon, earthquakes, lightning, or thunder, you will quietly slide into the very aristocracy of age. All your life long you have wondered if you would live out your natural days. How strange it is that we should spend so many years in fear that we may never attain the seventieth birthday, yet always dreading the day when we will do so! However, this question settled, you will find yourself in the ranks of many great men, particularly in Biblical history, like King David; and later, Columbus, and still later, Mark Twain, who made a joke of the event. He must have had in mind the inscription on Gay's tomb in Westminster Abbey:—

"Life is a jest, all things show it;
I thought so once, and now I know it."

Then you can almost consider yourself honorably mentioned in the burial service. Looking back to the Sixty-niners, they appear like a marked down lot at Macy's. I find little depression of spirits on my side of seventy. I am on velvet, as the gamblers say. Besides, many com-

pensations appear, not the least is to be able to walk into the office of the Commissioner of Jurors, as I have done, with my thumb on my nose and my fingers fluttering in the air. Your value as an antique has increased, and bumps of veneration come to your support on every hand and head.

But I am exceeding the objects of this letter. At this juncture in your career you might follow the advice given by the little Sunday School boy (in a story you told me, by the way). You remember when asked by his teacher—"What about hell and the Devil?" he answered, "Wait and see." Meanwhile, uniting with the congratulations of other friends, and, in the language of Robert Roosevelt, let me "wish that you may live as long as you want to and want to as long as you live."

Very sincerely yours,

E. C. BENEDICT.

Grover Cleveland.

Richard Olney avowed the opinion that, "On your 69th birthday you find yourself the object of higher and more general respect and esteem among your fellow countrymen than any other living American."

Mark Twain's tribute revamped the slogan of 1884: "We love him for the enemies he has made."

21 Fifth Avenue

March 6, 1906.

GROVER CLEVELAND, ESQ.

EX-PRESIDENT.

HONORED SIR:

Your patriotic virtues have won for you the homage of half the nation and the enmity of the other half. This places your character as a citizen upon a summit as high

as Washington's. The verdict is unanimous and unassailable. The votes of both sides are necessary in cases like these, and the votes of the one side are quite as valuable as are the votes of the other. When the votes are all in a public man's favor the verdict is against him. It is sand, and history will wash it away. But the verdict for you is rock, and will stand.

With the profoundest respect,

S. L. CLEMENS.

(as of date March 18, 1906)

Woodrow Wilson thus acknowledged his personal debt to the teachings of the Sage of Princeton:

Princeton University
Princeton, N. J.

President's Room

5 March, 1906.

MY DEAR MR. CLEVELAND:—

I should think that a birth-day would bring you very many gratifying thoughts, and I hope that you realize how specially strong the admiration and affection of those of us in Princeton who know you best has grown during the years when we have been privileged to be near you. It has been one of the best circumstances of my life that I have been closely associated with you in matters both large and small. It has given me strength and knowledge of affairs.

But if I may judge by my own feeling, what a man specially wants to know on his birth-day is how he stands, not in reputation or in power, but in the affection of those whose affection he cares for. The fine thing about the feeling for yourself which I find in the mind of almost everyone I talk with, is that it is mixed with genuine affection. I often find this true even of persons

who do not know you personally. How much more must it be true of those who are near you.

With most affectionate regard and with a hope that you may enjoy many another anniversary in peace and honor and affection,

Faithfully yours,

WOODROW WILSON.

Honorable Grover Cleveland,
Princeton, N. J.

Illiterate or literary, commonplace or clever, each birthday tribute received its answer in his own handwriting. To Richard Watson Gilder he wrote: "From the height of sixty-nine, I write to assure you that this is a happy day in my life, and to tell you how happy I am that you have made it so—more by your own loving message of congratulations than by those you have inspired. I have been so deeply impressed by it all, that I have had many struggles between smiles and tears as I read the words of affection and praise that have met me at the gate of entrance to another year. Somehow I am wondering why all this should be, since I have left many things undone I ought to have done in the realm of friendship, and since in the work of public life and effort, God has never failed to clearly make known to me the path of duty. And still it is in human nature for one to hug the praise of his fellows and the affection of friends to his bosom as his earned possessions. I am no better than this; but I shall trust you to acquit me of affectation when I say to you that in to-day's mood there comes the regret that the time is so shortened, within which I can make further payment to the people that have honored and trusted me."

To Andrew Carnegie, he sent the following reply:

Stuart, Florida.

March 20, 1906.

MY DEAR MR. CARNEGIE:

Your exceedingly kind letter of congratulation touched me deeply, and I want to thank you for it from the bottom of my heart. With other like manifestations of good will from friends whom I also hold close in affection, I feel that it compensates not only for advancing age, but for all that has been hard and laborious in the past.

I avail myself of the knowledge of your address which your letter furnishes, to thank you for the package from Scotland which arrived in proper condition some time ago. Despite all fanatical medical advice, I insist upon it that at the age of sixty-nine, a man should know himself of at least one thing that meets his physical condition.

Ever since you told me something of your dear daughter's ailment, I have been exceedingly anxious to hear that you had been relieved of solicitude on her account.

Will you please convey to Mrs. Carnegie my dutiful regards and believe me

Faithfully yours

GROVER CLEVELAND.

Andrew Carnegie, Esq.
The Cottage
Dungeness, Fernandino, Fla.

His acknowledgment to the Rev. Wilton Merle-Smith, D.D., beautifully sums up his own high philosophy of life:

Stuart, Fla., *March 21, 1906.*

MY DEAR DOCTOR SMITH:

You don't know how much good your generous letter of congratulation has done me. It has enlivened my sense of gratitude for what I have been able to do in the past, for the joys of the present, and for such friendship and confidence as yours. I have quite often, lately, found myself longing for the rest of idleness, and the peace of inactivity; and I have sometimes even given entrance to the thought that these were my due. But you have written words to me that will help me to constantly appreciate the fact that God who has blessed me above all other men, and directed all my ways, deserves my service, and every good cause deserves my best endeavor, as long as my life and strength shall last.

I know as no one else can know my limitations, and how fixed and inexorable they are . . . but I shall trust God, as I have in the past, for strength and opportunity for further usefulness.

Yours faithfully,

GROVER CLEVELAND.

Rev. Wilton Merle Smith, D.D.

29 W. 54th St., New York.

His letter to Vilas, the only surviving member of his first Cabinet, he wrote, in reminiscent mood:

Stuart, Fla., *March 24, 1906.*

MY DEAR MR. VILAS,

In this rather secluded place where I have come to seek rest and recreation, many kind congratulations upon my sixty-ninth birthday have reached me. They have all been delightful and comforting to me; but none have touched me so copiously as yours. Twenty-one years is really a long time; and yet without dwelling upon their

actual number how short a time it seems since on the 4th day of March, 1885, seven of the best and most patriotic men in our country joined me in the highest executive work. It would have been strange indeed if the national responsibilities and perplexities of the next four years—nobly shared by all—had not grappled us together by bands stronger and more enduring than steel. It is one of the most impressive thoughts that enter my mind in these days, that of all that circle you and I alone remain.

And so it is, that your letter recalling this, and bringing to my mind our free, frank and trustful association, and manifesting the same unrestrained affection as of old, comes so near my heart. . . .

With thanks for your continued kindly remembrance of me, and its beautiful expression just at this time, I am,

Faithfully your friend,

GROVER CLEVELAND.

Hon. Wm. F. Vilas,
Madison, Wis.

George Allen Bennett, aged nine, received this reply:

Stuart, Florida.

March 30, 1906.

MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND:

I am very glad you wrote me a letter of congratulation and good wishes on my birthday. And I thank you for kindly thinking of me. We ought to be very good friends, if we were born on the same day of the month, though there is a difference of sixty years in our ages. The years seem to pass much more quickly, as a person grows older and when you arrive at the age of sixty-nine,

as I have done, you will wonder at the short distance between nine and sixty-nine.

I think the 18th of March is the best day in all the year to be born on and I hope you do too. I wish for you a great many Happy Birthdays, and that as each one passes, there will be such increase in your mental and moral growth and such improvement in every way that you will be insured a life of honor and usefulness.

Your friend

GROVER CLEVELAND.

Master George Allen Bennett
North Ridgefield, Conn.

Mr. Cleveland loved children and this letter is the result of the natural impulse of that affection. One of his law partners in the old days in Buffalo has recorded the fact that in furnishing his bachelor apartments "his fondness for children was shown in a preponderance of children's pictures in the photographs scattered about." And another friend of early days recalls the fact that, while Governor of New York, he used to walk every day from his residence to the Capitol, and always greeted each child whom he met with "Hello, little one!" Not infrequently he received and always enjoyed the retort: "Hello, little one!" During one of Judge Hornblower's visits to Mr. Cleveland, when Ruth was a very new baby, he drew out from his overcoat pocket and displayed to the ex-President a sadly dilapidated doll which his daughter, Susie, aged five, had asked her father to take to little Ruth when she heard that the latter was ill. The conversation then turned to other matters, and when the Judge returned home he carried the doll with him, forgotten. The next day he received from Mr. Cleveland the following letter: