

[18 MAR. 1937]

Grover Cleveland

By

Charles S. Hamlin

I gladly join in this tribute to the memory of Grover Cleveland, who was born 94 years ago today, - March 18, 1837, and who died nearly 23 years ago - on June 24, 1908.

I had the good fortune to know him when I was a comparatively young man, as he spent his summers on the shores of Buzzards Bay in Massachusetts where I also had a summer home.

Later I had the privilege of serving under him as Assistant Secretary of the United States Treasury during his second term, from 1893 to 1897, and from that time on until his death, I kept more or less in touch with him and with his family.

Mr. Cleveland was the son of a Presbyterian Clergyman, and spent most of his boyhood days in New York, largely in Fayetteville and Clinton.

It was his earnest ambition to receive a college education, but he found this impossible as he was obliged to work to help those dependent upon him. In this connection, it is interesting to note that his first employment was in the village store at Fayetteville, where he received the munificent sum of \$50 a year salary together with his board. By hard work and strict saving, he was enabled to continue his studies, and finally obtained admission to the Bar and practised law in Buffalo, N. Y. He was a sound adviser, and his abilities were generally recognized.

He was elected Assistant District Attorney of Erie County, New York, and later was elected Sheriff of the same County. After that he was elected Mayor of Buffalo, and the following year Governor of the State of New York.

In 1884 he was elected President of the United States after a most exciting campaign. In 1888 he was defeated for reelection by Benjamin Harrison; in 1892 he was reelected President, taking office in 1893.

On June 2, 1886, he married Miss Frances Folsom, who presided over the White House during the remainder of his first term and during his second term. She endeared herself to all by her charm, courtesy, and kindness.

Mr. Cleveland's life was typically that of a reformer. He was a reform Mayor, a reform Governor, and a reform President. He was bitterly opposed by all those who sought special privileges, by political rings and spoils politicians, - in short, by all those who opposed reform.

During his first term, he developed the Civil Service Law, extending it to many offices previously beyond its scope. He favored earnestly arbitration in disputes between capital and labor. He protected the Indians as wards of the United States. He signed the Interstate Commerce Act creating the Interstate Commerce Commission. He vigorously asserted the independence of the Executive against what he considered undue demands of the United States Senate interfering with the Executive power of removal from office, and several Presidents since have relied upon the precedent which he established. He fought courageously for lower customs taxes, and his insistence on this reform was one of the principal causes for his defeat in 1888 by President Harrison, but proved to be a stepping stone for victory in 1892.

His second administration was a memorable one. In it occurred the famous Pullman strike in Illinois, which for a time effectually closed the highways of interstate commerce to the passage of the United States

mails. Mr. Cleveland appealed to the courts, and later ordered out the United States troops, and he opened those highways and brought to the American people the realization that the laws of the United States are supreme, and applicable to every foot of territory of the country. The Supreme Court of the United States later fully sustained Mr. Cleveland.

Shortly after the beginning of his second term occurred the panic of 1893, - a world-wide condition of distress similar to the conditions from which we are now slowly emerging. There was a special reason for uneasiness in the United States growing out of the purchase of silver bullion under the so-called Sherman Act of 1890, and the issue of legal tender Treasury notes against the purchases of this bullion. It should be remembered that India had closed her mints to the free coinage of silver early in 1893, and there was fear that the continued purchase of silver by the United States under the Sherman Act might expel our gold from the country and bring us to a silver basis.

Mr. Cleveland, with great clearness and courage, pointed out the danger of further purchases of silver under this Act, and under his leadership the purchasing clauses of the Sherman Act were repealed, members of both parties assisting him in this effort.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution to the country was Mr. Cleveland's successful effort in maintaining gold payments during the early years of his second administration. Under President Harrison's administration the surplus cash in the Treasury had been drawn down by the purchase of United States bonds in the open market at very high premiums. The Tariff Act of 1894 did not produce revenue sufficient to meet the needs of the Government, largely because one of its provisions

- the income tax - was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States. The fear that the United States might be forced off the gold basis caused the presentation of Government notes known as greenbacks for payment in gold. Inasmuch as the Government was not balancing its budget, these greenbacks, after redemption, had to be reissued in payment of the ordinary expenses of the Government. Then they were re-presented for payment in gold, and an endless chain was established which threatened the ability of the Government to continue payment of its obligations in gold. Mr. Cleveland had to meet the difficulty by issuing bonds of the United States. In doing this, he really merely reissued the bonds which the previous administration had purchased at high premiums. Although his efforts were bitterly opposed, he was successful, and he had the satisfaction of maintaining the standard of gold payments, overcoming almost insurmountable difficulties.

I think all today realize the value to the country of the Federal Reserve System. If we seek the bedrock upon which this System was founded, we should have to bore down and first reach the Act of 1900 which made gold the monetary unit, and effectually disposed of the danger of gold withdrawals through presentation of the greenbacks. This Act, however valuable as it was, is not the bedrock of the structure represented by the Federal Reserve System. We must bore down deeper, but when we reach the second administration of Grover Cleveland we realize that his successful effort in maintaining gold payments was the very bedrock and foundation for the Federal Reserve System upon which our country now so depends.

Foreign affairs did not occupy as important a position in our national life in Mr. Cleveland's time as they do today. We were then

relatively an isolated country, and a debtor country. Times, however, today have greatly changed. We are no longer isolated from the body of nations, and we stand forth as the great creditor country of the world. To show how we have developed, we should remember that the gross income of the American people in 1928 was greater than the total wealth of the country in 1890. In addition, as I have stated, we were relatively in a position of isolation. Mr. Cleveland's ideas of foreign policy, however, represented the highest standard. In one of his messages to Congress, he stated as follows:

"I mistake the American people if they favor the odious doctrine that there is no such thing as international morality; - that there is one law for a strong nation and another for a weak one\*\*\*\* The law of Nations is founded upon reason and justice, and the rules of conduct governing individual relations between citizens or subjects of a civilized state are equally applicable as between enlightened nations."

In practice he faithfully carried out these principles.

During his first administration, he successfully blocked Germany who, through Bismarck, was attempting to secure control of Samoa.

In his second administration, he had the courage to pull down the flag of the United States in Hawaii, as he believed that the revolution there had been instigated by American residents with the assistance of the American Minister. He had no objections to annexation, as such, but he felt that it should come from the free will of the people.

In the latter part of his second administration came the famous Venezuelan message in which he laid down and expanded the principles of the Monroe Doctrine, showing a courage which all our people now recognize.

He was a man of great courage, indomitable strength of will - a veritable Rock of Gibraltar, and in my opinion, will easily rank as one of the great Presidents of the United States.

I have not time to say much in the way of personal recollections of Mr. Cleveland. He was an ardent fisherman, and used to go out into Buzzards Bay almost every day, often with his friend, Joseph Jefferson, the actor, returning late in the evening.

I remember so well the early summer of 1893 when the country faced the peril of suspension of gold payments. Mr. Cleveland called an extra session of Congress for August, 1893 for the purpose of repealing the silver purchasing clauses of the Sherman Act. The country did not then know of the perilous condition of Mr. Cleveland. Immediately after calling the extra session, he was operated on for a malignant growth in his mouth. The operation was performed in Long Island Sound on the yacht of a friend, and was kept from public knowledge, fearing that it might precipitate a panic. He ultimately recovered perfect health. Ten days after the operation I had to visit him at Buzzards Bay to bring him some statistical material, and I shall never forget the impression he made on me. His mouth was packed so that he could scarcely speak. He seemed to be in much pain, but he quietly discussed financial questions as if he were in the best of health.

He was an indefatigable worker. He told me that one night he was working on some veto messages when he looked up and saw the clock pointing to 11 p.m. He said it would be disgraceful for him to give up work as early in the evening as that, although he felt rather tired. Later he said

he looked up again and found the clock still pointing at 11 p.m. and realized that it had long since stopped. Looking at his watch he found it was 2:30 in the morning, and he then regretfully went to bed.

I shall never forget the many pleasant days I had at the White House and the many courtesies I received from his beautiful wife, still, I am glad to say, living at Princeton, N. J. I think, looking back, all will agree that she was one of the most charming hostesses of the White House.

Nor shall I ever forget one irate spoilsman who once called upon me, and incidentally told me how he hated President Cleveland. He said, "I hate that man. I hate him so, - that I don't even think his wife is pretty!" This certainly was the superlative in the way of hatred!

One day last June I went with my wife to Princeton as the guest of Mr. Cleveland's widow. It was a day filled with delightful reminiscences. Later I went to the cemetery and placed some flowers on Mr. Cleveland's grave, and I said to myself, "Here lies the body of one of the really great men and great Presidents of the United States. Our children and our children's children will rise up and call his memory blessed."

-----