

Prefatory Note

The election of General Grant to the Presidency by the people of the United States was another instance illustrating the gratitude of a republic to a successful soldier. But for the great civil war no one supposes he would ever have been elevated to this exalted post. His services in that heroic struggle were such as to win the highest encomiums from his countrymen, and naturally at the first opportunity after the closing of the war when a Chief Executive was to be chosen they turned their eyes to the most conspicuous figure in that war and made him President of the United States. This volume, the seventh of the series, comprises his eight years and the four years of his successor, Mr. Hayes. During this period of twelve years—that is, from March 4, 1869, to March 4, 1881—the legislation for the restoration of the Southern States to their original positions in the Union was enacted, the reunion of the States was perfected, and all sections of the land again given full and free representation in Congress. Much of the bitterness engendered by the war, and which had been left alive at its closing, and which was not diminished to any appreciable extent during President Johnson's term, was largely assuaged during President Grant's Administration, and under that of President Hayes was further softened and almost entirely dissipated:

It will be seen that President Grant in his papers dwelt especially upon the duty of paying the national debt in gold and returning to specie payments; that he urged upon Congress a proposition to annex Santo Domingo; that during his Administration the "Quaker Peace Commission" was appointed to deal with the Indians, the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States was proclaimed, the treaty of Washington was negotiated, and, with a subsequent arbitration at Geneva, a settlement was provided of the difficulties relating to the Alabama claims and the fisheries; that in 1870 and frequently afterwards he urged upon Congress the need of reform in the civil service.

His appeals secured the passage of the law of March 3, 1871, under which he appointed a civil service commission. This commission framed rules, which were approved by the President. They provided for open competitive examination, and went into effect January 1, 1872; and out of these grew the present civil-service rules. One of his most important papers was the message vetoing the "inflation bill."

The closing months of his public life covered the stormy and exciting period following the Presidential election of 1876, when the result as between Mr. Tilden and Mr. Hayes was so long in doubt. There is very little, however, in any Presidential paper of that period to indicate the great peril to the country and the severe strain to which our institutions were subjected in that memorable contest.

The Administration of Mr. Hayes, though it began amid exciting scenes and an unprecedented situation which threatened disasters, was rather marked by moderation and a sympathy with what he considered true reform. Some of his vetoes are highly interesting, and indicate independence of character and that he was not always controlled by mere party politics. One of the most famous and best remembered of his messages is that vetoing the Bland-Allison Act, which restored the legal-tender quality to the silver dollar and provided for its limited coinage.

Other papers of interest are his message recommending the resumption of specie payments; vetoes of a bill to restrict Chinese immigration, of an Army appropriation bill, of a legislative, executive, and judicial appropriation bill, and of the act known as the "funding act of 1881." It was during Mr. Hayes's Administration, when the Forty-fifth Congress met in extraordinary session on March 18, 1879, that for the first time since the Congress that was chosen with Mr. Buchanan in 1856 the Democratic party was in control of both Houses.

JAMES D. RICHARDSON.

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