GENERAL GRANT'S LAST DAYS

In conversing even on the most serious subjects, Lincoln appeared to forget all ordinary conventionalities in the earnestness of his purpose. When sitting he had the habit of resting his legs over the arm of a chair and swinging his feet while talking. At other times, when squarely seated, he would clasp his flexed and upraised knee, and gently swing himself, while intently surveying a petitioner. Lincoln often said that an apt story was the readiest argument against a threatened over-persuasion by a chance caller. It was a surprise to me to learn from Grant that Lincoln never laughed at his own stories—at least at those he told the General. At most there was a mere twitching of a corner of the mouth and a merry twinkle in the watchful eye.

The plainness of manner of General Grant was the result of a natural disposition probably inherited from his mother. He showed it in all his doings. He had accustomed himself to look at his life work from the serious aspect of untiring and concentrated effort. It was doing the thing rather than talking about it. Such men, appreciating their responsibilities, are modest, reserved, thoughtful, and reticent. The one who holds his tongue is always an enigma. Such proved to be the case when, after his great battles, everybody was wondering what he had to say for himself. But the results needed no discussion. His natural shyness was beyond the temptation of vainglory. In all his lesser work he was always the same quiet and unobtrusive person.

There was a natural antipathy against display of any kind. Dress parade never appealed to him. In his ordinary dress he was the plainest of men. Although always neat in person, he never affected anything but the simplest attire. His aim was for ease, not show. In most of his portraits there is a conspicuous absence of military primness. His coat is usually open, and even his waistcoat is partly unbuttoned. The standing collar is conveniently bent and flared to allow of ease of flexion of his short neck, and his cravat is a mere ribbon with a carelessly tied bow-knot. Except for his sturdy build, firm jaw, and resolute mouth, there was nothing particularly soldier-like in his appearance. In the ordinary dress of a well-to-do citizen he might have been taken as readily for a successful merchant or a prosperous gentleman farmer as for a great man of affairs. He was accustomed to assume easy attitudes while seated. It was relaxation rather than erectness. His favorite sitting posture was bent and lounging, with
hands on the arms of the chair, one leg crossed over the other. When in deep thought he would sometimes rest his bent elbows on the arms of the chair and steady his hands on the tops of his fingers. In writing, he would sit at the table sidewise and to the right, so that he could accommodate himself to his favorite cross-legged position. Although his delicate hand would hold his pen with easy suppleness and graceful poise, his handwriting was by no means a work of art. It was inclined to be rapid and jerky, as if the mechanical execution was irksome. Thus he would often omit crossing his t's, and dotting his i's, and would occasionally spell incorrectly. He evidently preferred a lead-pencil to a pen as giving him less trouble, and as obviating the constant interruption of dipping for ink.

His methods in composing were also exceedingly simple. Environment had no influence on him. He could write anywhere and anyhow, with pad on knee, against a tree, or on a camp-chest. So at home, wherever he might be, no accessories were essential. He wrote his memoirs on an extemporized table which had folding legs, and could be easily moved from one part of the room to another. All he needed was his pad, his notes, and a few sheets of plain manila paper. He was a slow and painstaking composer, his aim being to make himself clear to the reader. After a long and studied effort in framing a descriptive sentence, he would read it to his friends with all the modesty of a

Facsimile of a conversational note from General Grant to Dr. Shruby. (See page 68)
school-boy reciting a lesson. A pertinent question from them would give him the hint he required.

At times he could work with ordinary rapidity, but often would devote hours to a short description of a complicated battle. He often referred to Sherman's "Memoirs," refreshing his memory on points that he might have missed in relating his own story. It was fortunate for him that early in his sickness he became thoroughly absorbed in authorship. It opened to him an entirely new field for diversion, and enabled him to get away from himself and for a time to forget the advance of his relentless malady.

His style was simple, terse, and devoid of pedantic ornamentation, and was founded in a literary way on the practice of writing military orders and reports, short, sharp, perspicuous, and to the point. Now and then there was a stroke of humor in his references, but even this lacked the suppleness and art of a practised touch. Not that he did not appreciate humor; but he was not always happy in giving it a graceful turn. It was the man speaking for himself without special training in literary work. In this respect his modest narrative holds a distinct place in literary history. His aim was to make every reader understand what he meant to say. That the composition of the book was peculiarly his own no one can doubt.

With those who understood him, General Grant was always frank,
courteous, and unassuming. In conversation he was a considerate and patient listener. His comments were brief and modest, but showed a ready grasp of the subject in hand. It was seldom that he branched into any extended discussion, being more inclined in his terse way to dissent from or agree with the views of others rather than to volunteer any new phase of the question. He apparently weighed matters quite deliberately from his own point of view as a man accustomed to plan for himself. While he was ready to admit there was another side to an argument, his own position was well guarded. As in the fighting of his battles, this was the developed caution of judicious antagonism. Even when pleasantly chided for his apparently stubborn attitude, he had in reserve a ready answer for the disputer.

An amusing illustration comes to mind in this connection. Mrs. Grant was on one occasion mildly complaining of the General’s inconsistency and want of forethought when matters purely domestic were to be considered. “When President Garfield was shot,” said she, “we were living at Long Branch, New Jersey. The General insisted that I should move the entire family to New York without delay and suggested the possibility of its being done within two days. When I told him of the impossibility of such a procedure on such short notice, he rather tantalizingly said that he did not see why there should be much difficulty in the matter as he had moved at least twice that number of people in half the time.” The General, who was listening to this illustration of his thoughtlessness, while keenly amused at the humor of the situation, was apparently quite contented tacitly to acknowledge the playful rebuke.

He was earnestly sympathetic, without being effusively sentimental. Always considerate of the rights and privileges of others, there was in him an unassuming way of acknowledging them. For children he had an almost affectionate regard, and was always pleased to meet and chat with them. There was something in their innocence and playfulness that appealed to him. Of boys he was especially fond, and would talk to them in a kind, frank, and fatherly way. On one occasion the young son of Dr. Titus Munson Coan, who had been a Navy surgeon, was introduced to him. The lad was six years old, and his father had solicited the introduction through a friend of the Grant family. While the youngster was waiting in the reception-room below, word was sent to him to come to the sick-room. He was shown upstairs, and was greeted by the General as courteously and deferentially
as if he were one of the great men of the time. Sick as he was, the invalid rose from his chair and with extended hand and pleasant smile walked nearly half-way across the room to meet his young visitor, who was overawed, and bereft of all power of speech.

Facsimile of a conversational note from General Grant to Dr. Shrady. (See page 71)

"I am glad to see you, my little man," said the General. Philip Coan timidly responded to the greeting and murmured a "Thank you," as he stared at the kindly face that was bent over him. "What are you going to be, my son, when you are grown up—a soldier or a doctor?"

To the question there was no answer, and the General, fully understanding the bashfulness of the boy, took his hand and gently smoothing his head bade him call again. For the younger it was a thing long to be remembered; for the plain man in his yellow gown it was the display of a simple and fatherly feeling which was his habit and delight.

His consideration for young people was also strikingly illustrated by his courteous and cordial reception of my daughter Minnie, then a mere girl, and whom he had expressed a special desire to see. Before she was ushered into his room he rose to change his wrapper for his frock-coat, being determined to be presentable when, as he naïvely said, "young ladies called" on him. When I protested that this was entirely unnecessary in such a case, he insisted upon having his way. In referring to the fine weather he asked her, with mock seriousness,
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if she did not think her father was cruel in keeping him confined to his room and in exercising on him such a domineering spirit, pleading that she should use her influence to have the sentence mitigated. This at once placed the young visitor on an easy conversational plane, and the expected embarrassment of the occasion was happily dispelled. "However it may be," he remarked, "I have always been used to obeying the man in command."

Although General Grant had the reputation of being more than trustful with his friends, his other relations with men and affairs impressed him at times with the desire of many to use him for their own purposes. In spite of his habitual shyness, he was forced by circumstances to admit that he was a public character and that all his doings were measured in the exacting balance of propriety and policy. This thought kept him more or less on his guard with strangers. He was thus forced to question the usual motives that governed the appeals of outsiders, and was often surprised at the comparatively trivial circumstances that governed them. On one occasion an importunate army veteran succeeded in gaining an audience with him in his sick-room on the plea of inquiring about his health and of bringing a message from an army comrade. In the course of the conversation the General asked in a friendly way concerning his visitor's occupation, when he was informed of a wonderful meat extract for which the man was an agent. True to the instincts of the vendor, the article was produced, and the usual samples were thrust upon the patient.

Many other agents, however, were not so fortunate in introducing their wares. Many samples were sent by express to the house, accompanied by absurd stories as to their virtues. To gratify a craze for notoriety, numbers of people who had no personal acquaintance with the sick man would ostentatiously call, and after leaving their cards at the door, would yield to the eager questioning of the reporters.

Always considerate for others, Grant was inclined to be more than charitable in his interpretation of apparently interested motives. As a public man he was accustomed to meet the ordinary place-hunter with a *quid pro quo*. From such a point of view he had abundance of opportunities for studying human character when it was actuated by purely selfish interest. Modest in his own claims, he was slow to be impressed with the person who lauded his own superior fitness for position. Thus it soon became known that he selected his advisers and those closest to him in official capacity by his own estimate of their
merit. He picked his men as a skilled workman would his tools. And the public was not slow in crediting his capacity and discernment for such purposes.

At one time several of his political enemies opprobriously termed him the "gift-taker," so numerous were these apparently friendly offers made to him, and frankly accepted in good faith, as evidences of personal esteem. After a while he began to interpret intentions from an entirely different point of view. In this connection I recollect his reference to a gift from a gentleman in Chicago that was so purely a friendly one that the donor had neither before nor after asked him for a favor.

While always studiously courteous to strangers, acknowledging their respectful salutes and ever ready to show them polite attentions, he not infrequently resented any ill-bred attempts at familiarity. He was so considerate in this regard himself that he would not tolerate any breach of ordinary etiquette by others. On one occasion, while on a ferry-boat crossing the river from Jersey City, he was quietly enjoying his cigar in the smoking saloon when an impudent and loud-speaking young man sat down by him and said familiarly: "Good morning, General. I'm glad to see you looking so well." The salutation was returned in a studiously formal manner. "You still like your smoke, I see." A look, but no answer. "Say, General, can't you give a fellow a light?"

The General, surprised and annoyed, handed his cigar to the stranger, who in due time returned it, much the worse for the fumbling it had received. Whereupon the General, on receiving it, looked at it for a moment, and then quite unconcernedly threw it out of a window at his back.

Grant's love for the horse was a veritable passion, and dated from boyhood. At West Point, Cadet Grant was the best rider in his class. In after life to own a trotter was always a temptation. After he became famous, and his taste was known, he had many opportunities for testing his skill in driving noted animals, as when Mr. Vanderbilt's "Maud S." was lent to him for a spin. "The finest mare I ever drove," Grant would say. On one occasion, at least, he met a driver who valiantly vindicated the rights of the road in a way that quite astonished him. While spending a summer in Long Branch, the General would take a daily drive behind a noted trotter. By courtesy, although often against his wish, he was always given a free and open course.
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One day while quietly jogging along he noticed in a casual way a farmer and his wife who, with single horse and errand-wagon, were just ahead, evidently returning from market. On attempting to "draw alongside" and pass the couple, there was a race on in a moment. The farmer simply chirped in a peculiar way, and his horse squatted into a long-gaited and easy trot. Altogether it was a veritable surprise to the other driver, with his "professional trotter" and light road-wagon. But the farmer kept the lead in spite of Grant's efforts to overtake him. Occasionally through the dust he could see the farmer's wife look back to note their relative positions. Finally, after a mile heat, the farmer "slowed up" a little to allow the General to come within hearing distance.

"Did he know who it was, General?" Grant was asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "The man simply said, 'General, you've got a good one,' and then I allowed him to go on."

In referring to courage in battle, Grant was inclined to believe that it was a cultivated quality rather than an inherent trait. The instinct of self-preservation was inborn, and was governed by natural impulses. There was always a great difference between foolhardiness and a dutiful effort to face danger in any form. A genuine scare was the first and the best lesson. There were few men who were not inclined to run when they heard whistling bullets for the first time. The fear of being called a coward was then the main thing that held them. The courage that lasted was that which thoroughly appreciated danger and boldly faced it. He confessed to this as a personal experience. His first engagements were matters of discipline in this regard. The only comfort was in the hope that the enemy might be the one who was more afraid than he was, and would decamp first. He realized such a possibility in his early military career, and always afterward kept it in mind when in a tight place. A man was often like a skittish horse: he must first be made to see and approach the object of his fear; and thereafter he might "duly exercise his horse sense."

The story of General Grant's sick-room was, as all the world knows, a sad one. With no desire to display the harrowing side of his physical suffering, I still wish to describe the manner in which he bore his trials under the many adverse circumstances which tested to the utmost his remarkable fortitude, stubbornness of will, and Christian philosophy. His wonderful self-control, which seldom deserted him, not only made him the least complaining, but the most dutiful, of
General Grant and family on the piazza of the Drexel cottage at Mount McGregor

Mrs. Neillie Grant Sartoris stands between Mrs. Grant and General Grant, who are seated; Colonel (now General) Frederick D. Grant stands by his father's chair; Jesse Grant, the General's third son, stands by the post. The persons seated on the steps, from left to right, are Ulysses S. Grant, Jr.; Colonel Grant's daughter Julia (now Princess Michael von Hauzenberg); Mrs. F. D. Grant, her son Ulysses (now Lieutenant Grant), and Mrs. Jesse Grant and her little daughter.
patients. The study of his different moods in his long wait for death was a revelation in resignation which could never go unheeded. To fit oneself to the burden of sickness requires time and patience. It was at first hard for him to submit to the inevitable. View the situation as he might, there was still the ominous shadow over his immediate future. The willing submission to fate strains the strongest philosophy. Still, like others under like circumstances, he resolved to face the enemy, and trust to adapting himself to new conditions. This explained his deep gloom when the real nature of his malady was first announced to him. It was this discipline that was necessary for the few working days left to him. The only relief in the situation was to make the most of the remaining opportunities, and stubbornly persist to the end. Then came the reaction that readjusted the burden. Becoming more used to the mental depression, it was the more easily borne. He admitted the fact, and bravely trudged along under heavy marching orders. This desirable change for the better was duly noted by those around him, and every effort was made by them to divert his mind into new channels of thought. It thus became his necessity to devote himself afresh to the completion of his memoirs.

In spite of the calm manner in which he would discuss his fate, it was evident that he resolved to be prepared for every emergency. He seemed more eager than ever to do things on the spur of the moment, in order that nothing should be left undone toward the last. This disposition was illustrated in him when he was asked for a picture of himself with his autograph. This particular instance may be worthy of special record, inasmuch as it may be associated in times to come with another incident of historical interest in his own family. Although still feeble from his recent set-back, the General walked at once to the adjoining room, sat down at his table, turned to Colonel Grant, who was near, and said, "Bring me one of the Marshall pictures for the Doctor." The selection of the particular engraving proved his preference for it. Whenever he presented a picture of himself to any of his close friends, it was always a copy of the engraving by William E. Marshall.

I then suggested that the General might sign one for each of the other members of the medical staff—Doctors Douglas, Sands, and Barker. This he accordingly did, the Colonel carefully arranging them on the table for the signatures to dry.

When the General was about to rise, the son in a quiet and impres-
sive manner said: "Father, I would like you to sign this also," at the same time handing him a letter. This was a letter to some future President, asking him to appoint the General's grandson, Ulysses third, to West Point. Without dipping his pen in ink again, the General attached his name to this letter. It was done quietly, but in view of the circumstances, the action was dramatic. Young Ulysses, the son of Colonel Grant, was then a mere boy. We all knew that when the letter should be presented, General Grant would have been many years in his grave. It was only a question of months, perhaps weeks, when the hand that held the pen would be stilled forever. Altogether it was a situation that had in it much pathos. It meant a benediction for the future soldier. I believe the others must have been equally impressed, for after the scratching of the pen had ceased there was absolute silence in the room while Colonel Grant carefully folded the letter and gently led his father away.