As their train approached Washington, President-elect and Mrs. Hayes wondered uneasily how they would be greeted upon their arrival. It was March the second, 1877, just a few days before the inauguration. They must have thought with pleasure and comfort of the fine reception the people of Columbus had given in their honor two nights before and of the many loyal friends and supporters who had gathered at the station to see them off the following morning. Hayes's uncertainty had been apparent in his farewell speech from the rear platform of the train when he reminded them that he might be back in the Governor's chair again within a week, because, as they well knew, the results of the November election -- the only disputed Presidential election in the history of our country -- had not yet been decided. Hayes had vowed that nothing would induce him to leave Columbus until a decision had been reached, but the events of the past few days had given him reason to believe that he would win over his Democratic opponent, Samuel Tilden.

The Hayes party was awakened early on the morning of March 2, as the train came to a stop in the Harrisburg station, with the long-awaited news that Congress at 4:00 A. M. had declared Hayes the 19th President of the United States. No other President has ever been put through such an ordeal in the interim between election and inauguration. He had received countless anonymous letters threatening his life, and a would-be assassin shot at him through a parlor window one night while the family was eating dinner. But throughout the four months, Rutherford Hayes had remained outwardly calm and poised, cheerful and cordial to everyone he met. Those who knew him would have expected him to survive the trial with equanimity because, although he was born in Ohio, Rutherford B. Hayes was a New Englander in blood and temperament.

He was the son of Rutherford and Sophie Birchard Hayes, both of whose families had lived in Connecticut and Vermont since colonial times. He often spoke of his Scotch ancestry on the Hayes side with pride, but the majority of his forefathers were English on both sides.

Four years after his marriage in 1817 Rutherford, the President's father, could no longer resist his desire to migrate westward, so he set out in a covered wagon with Sophie; their two small children; Sophie's younger brother, Sardis Birchard; and an orphan girl relative. Forty days later they arrived at Delaware, Ohio, where they decided to try farming. That life proved to be too rough for the family, so they moved into town, and Rutherford went into the whiskey-distilling business. He soon became prominent in the affairs of the community and church and successful enough in business to own the first brick house in Delaware. Their life was pleasant indeed until, just five years after their arrival in Ohio, Rutherford Hayes contracted typhoid fever and died within a few days. Ten weeks later, on October 4, 1822, Rutherford Birchard Hayes was born. Had it not been for his uncle Sardis Birchard, the Hayeses would have had little security in the years ahead, but Sardis, who never married, immediately assumed responsibility for his sister and her three children. The oldest child, a boy, was drowned a few years after his father's death. To Rutherford, Uncle Sardis became not only a father but a beloved companion and counsellor.
His Mother was a Puritan through and through, and although he was very fond of her he never felt close to her because of her excessive devotion to religion and her austerity.

Most of his youth was spent very happily in the companionship of his adored sister Fanny, who, probably because he was frail and sickly, mothered him and took him wherever she went. To Fanny he owed his lifelong interest in good literature. Together they read every book they could lay their hands on. When she was twelve and he ten, they were reading Shakespeare and Smollett's "History of England". No doubt they derived more benefit from their own studies than from the district schools they attended.

Because his mother and Uncle Sardis had something more than just an Ohio education in mind for him, Rutherford Hayes ventured into the world when he was 12, going to Vermont and New Hampshire to visit relatives. He stayed in New England for the next few years to attend Prep School and then decided to go to Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio from which he graduated as valedictorian of his class when he was twenty.

As Rutherford had decided upon law as his profession, Uncle Sardis suggested that he go to Harvard Law School. After three enjoyable years there, he was admitted to the bar and hung out his shingle in Lower Sandusky, later called Fremont. Without doubt his choosing Fremont was strongly influenced by the fact that Uncle Sardis lived there.

Shortly afterward he was threatened with tuberculosis, so his physician insisted that he take an extended vacation away from the Lake Erie climate. He travelled for nearly a year in New Enland, Canada, and the Southwest.

After this pleasant interlude his health was restored, and he settled down to law again -- this time in Cincinnati, the one big city in the West--the next best thing to Boston. Business was slow, but he found plenty to do as he was always striving for further culture. He joined the "Literary Club" and looked forward eagerly to the meeting each week. He made many contacts and several good friends through it.

Rutherford Hayes had lost most of his midwestern provincialism at Harvard and was now becoming much more a man of the world. He was a clear thinker, if not a profound one; an excellent judge of character; a good listener; and through practice was becoming an effective speaker.

He was a fine looking man of medium stature with deep-set blue eyes and very regular features which in later life were half hidden by a brown full-beard as the style of the day dictated.

His lack of success as a lawyer, he concluded, was due to his quiet and unassuming manner, so he thought that he must somehow make himself known to the people of Cincinnati. He decided, therefore, to crusade for temperance and joined the "Sons of Temperance" whose aim was to abolish the abuse of drinking rather than drinking itself. He was never a prohibitionist and even drank wine occasionally until he entered the White House.
Finally he won an important case to which the Court had appointed him and became a prominent lawyer over night.

Hayes had not been in a financial position to marry up to this point, so it was a good thing that he had waited until now to fall in love with Lucy Ware Webb, the daughter of a Cincinnati Physician. Sophie Hayes had some time before chosen Lucy as the ideal wife for her son. No one was more delighted than she when they were married in 1852. Lucy was an excellent wife and mother; a quiet, but important factor in her husband's success. She was pretty and popular and always had great ambition for Rutherford. Most unusual was the fact that she had attended classes at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware.

Uncle Sardis approved the marriage so highly that he even lent them $4,000 toward the purchase of a house two years later.

Now Hayes seemed to have forgotten his boyhood dreams of military glory and political prominence. He was contented as the proud possessor of a wife and children (eventually seven sons and one daughter) and a home. In addition his business was prospering.

However, the birth of the Republican party at about this time brought an end abruptly to his complacency, and he joined as one of its charter members. Although he felt no indignation on the subject of slavery, which was the foremost issue of the day, he was willing to go along with the party. He knew that to go against it would bring political ruin. When he did receive power, he used it for the good of the public always. As a reward for his work in behalf of John C. Fremont, who was the candidate against Buchanan in 1856, he was appointed City Solicitor of Cincinnati in 1858. He was acclaimed the most honest, most efficient solicitor ever to hold the job and would have run for a second term had not the Civil War intervened.

He entered the war as Captain of a volunteer company comprised of members of the Literary Club. He took part in fifty engagements, was wounded four times and held the rank of Major General at the end of the war. While he was still in the field, he was elected to the House of Representatives. He continued with the army as Congressman-elect until the end of the war.

On November 30, 1865, Hayes entered the House of Representatives at one of its most interesting times. The Republicans were determined to force universal negro suffrage on the South, thus bringing the majority in Congress in conflict with President Johnson. Although Hayes voted with his party, he sat and listened, refusing always to speak. This was his way of showing his complete disapproval of the proceedings.

At the same time he was working quietly in adjusting war claims for Ohio citizens and helping the veterans in many ways, thereby gaining a reputation as the soldier's friend.
Rumors that he was wanted for Governor reached him, and he wrote to his friend and adviser, William Henry Smith, that he found the idea acceptable. He served two terms as Governor and solved most of the problems that came up and also greatly improved the state prisons and mental institutions.

Hayes undoubtedly could have had a third term, but he wanted to retire from public life, he thought. He found, though, that he could not remain inactive with the presidential election of 1872 coming along. He and other Republicans realized what a total failure Grant had been as chief executive, but that he nevertheless should be the Republican’s nominee again. The soldiers loved Grant and the soldiers still controlled the vote. Rutherford Hayes campaigned for Grant and during this period he appeared at his worst, because he made speech after speech upholding the Reconstruction Plan and the 15th Amendment, although he was really opposed to both.

Uncle Sardis died in 1874, leaving the better part of his estate to his nephew. Once again, after Grant’s reelection, Hayes returned to his home “Spiegel Grove” and for a while dabbled in real estate.

The next year the Republicans approached Hayes to run for Governor again. He consented immediately, because, if he could be elected Governor of Ohio a third time, he would surely gain national prominence. He was elected and now he even began to dream of the Presidency, since he had proven that he could carry the state of Ohio, and in order to win in 1876 the Republicans would have to carry Ohio.

By 1876 the United States had felt the effects of the changeover from an agricultural country to an industrial one. Under Grant’s administration, the government—from municipal to national—had become incredibly corrupt; the currency was inflated; and three southern states—Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina—were still under carpet-bagger government. Thinking men throughout the United States realized that the country must turn from war and military government to peace and constitutional government.

These were the thoughts in the minds of the delegates in June 1876 as they gathered for the Republican national convention in Cincinnati. The choice of location was a lucky one for Mr. Hayes.

The Liberal Republicans, a group of intellectuals who had split from the main party, had met at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York a month before and had decided that Grant could not run again. James G. Blaine, Congressman from Maine, and Roscoe Conkling, Senator from New York, were the two most likely candidates; with Oliver Morton of Indiana a close third.

If the balloting had followed right after the nomination speeches, Blaine would have won easily because of the eloquent speech Robert Ingersoll made in his behalf. But it was 6:00 in the evening, and the session was adjourned until the next morning.
All night the other candidates worked feverishly deciding where to throw their votes to defeat Blaine. Conkling was particularly anxious to see Blaine defeated, because they were bitter enemies. Consequently Hayes won on the seventh ballot. Actually he was the only candidate who had a chance to win at the polls, because he had not taken part in the quarrels that had split the Republican party, nor was he in any way involved in the scandals in the government. William A. Wheeler, a second-rate politician, was chosen to run as Vice President.

The Democrats nominated Samuel J. Tilden, a brilliant man, a millionaire publicist, and the greatest reformer in the country. The government would have fared as well under Tilden as under Hayes because their views and beliefs were so similar.

The campaign that followed was bitter, with each party heaping as much abuse as possible on the other's candidate. Hayes remained silent and let an imposing array of orators to the electioneering for him, among them Blaine, Robert Ingersoll, John Sherman, James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, Chauncey dePew and even Mark Twain who amused the country with a humorous speech.

At last November the seventh 1876 dawned. Although it was one of the most exciting elections the country had yet known, it seemed quite peaceful. All the early returns were for Tilden and by midnight, Hayes and the Republican leaders were so discouraged that they gave up and went to bed. As the night wore on, Tilden's lead dwindled, but it seemed apparent that he had won by a small majority.

The first edition of the New York Tribune on November 8 conceded the election to Tilden. Not so the New York Times which had left no stone unturned in the persecution of Tilden during the campaign.

It was a note of uncertainty in a telegram to the Times from the Democratic headquarters that resulted in Hayes's final election. It was received about 3:45 A.M. and read: "Please give your estimate of electoral votes secured for Tilden. Answer at once."

Immediately the four editors of the Times who were there realized that Democratic headquarters had not yet received definite news from some of the states that were supposed to be for Tilden. Then they figured out quickly that if South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida could turn in Republican majorities, Hayes would be elected. And, since the Republicans controlled the canvassing boards of these states, it could easily be accomplished. The first move would be for the Republicans to claim victory and then see to it that the canvassing boards substantiated the claim.

After this bit of rationalization, John C. Reid, one of the editors of the Times, rushed to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, awakened Zachariah Chandler, the Chairman of the Republican Party, who, after listening to what Reid had to say, gave him permission to use his own discretion.
On the morning of November 8, Zach Chandler sent out the famous message: "Hayes had 185 electoral votes (one more than Tilden) and has won the election."

Then the Republicans' efforts to secure favorable results from the canvassing boards were aided by President Grant who issued an order to General Sherman on November 10 to have troops ready to go to the three states in case of trouble -- a warning to the Democrats not to interfere.

But the Democrats, who were as guilty as the Republicans of frauds and acts of violence against the negroes on election day, would not give up without a struggle. The final outcome was that two sets of returns were received by Congress -- one from the Democratic electors for Tilden and one from the Republican electors for Hayes. Oregon, because of some kind of internal controversy, sent a double set of returns.

When Congress met in December, the Republicans claimed all the disputed electoral votes, but the Democrats put in contesting claims. Now the country was faced with a serious dilemma: the election was disputed -- who was to decide the question?

In the Constitution the President of the Senate is given the power to count the electoral votes, but did that mean that he had the jurisdiction to decide which of two election returns should be accepted? Naturally the Republicans said: "Yes." The Democrats said: "No." If both sets of returns were rejected, neither candidate would have a majority and the decision would be left to the House of Representatives. Since the House was Democratic, the Republicans would never have agreed to this course. Congress was deadlocked, because the Senate said Hayes had won; the House, Tilden. The country seemed to be drifting toward war again with federal troops moving back and forth.

Finally an Electoral Commission was set up consisting of five members of the House, five members of the Senate, and five associate judges. Eight of them were Republicans and seven Democrats, so they proceeded to decide every dispute in favor of Hayes.

So much time had been spent in argument that it was now late in February, and a small bloc of Southern Democrats in Congress threatened to hold up ratification of the Commission's findings, because they were so outraged by some of the injustices. It was then that Republican leaders, with Hayes's knowledge and consent, whispered to these Democrats that, if they would let Hayes have the Presidency, he would withdraw all federal troops from the South and let them have their own government again. The bargain was accepted, and thus it was that Hayes was declared President after an all-night session of Congress.

Mr. and Mrs. Hayes need not have worried about their arrival in Washington; they were welcomed just by two old friends, John Sherman and his better known brother, General Sherman.

President Grant gave a state dinner for the Hayeses on Saturday
night, March 3. Shortly before dinner, Hayes, Grant, Chief Justice Waite, and a few others went into the Red Room and there Hayes was sworn in as President. He therefore enjoys the distinction of being the only President to take the oath of office in the White House. The private ceremony was necessary, because March 4 fell on Sunday. It would not have done for the country to have been without a President for a day, so instead we had two for a few hours.

The public inauguration took place on March 5 before an audience of about 30,000. The cheering that greeted the procession as it reached the Capitol was a real relief to Hayes and allayed his suspicions of his welcome in Washington.

Then, with his motto: "He serves his party best who serves his country best" ever in mind, he began his administration. He selected one of the finest cabinets in history, without consulting any of the party leaders. For Post-Master General he even chose a Democrat and an ex-Confederate at that.

For years a small group of Republican Congressmen, the so-called "Stalwarts" had been running the country. They were led by Roscoe Conkling, Thaddeus Stevens, and Oliver Morton. They had defied Lincoln, tried to oust Andrew Johnson, and had created the spoils system which flourished under Grant's administration, not because he was dishonest, but because he was too weak to resist them. Both Morton and Conkling had expected to put their own men in the cabinet, and, of course, were outraged when Hayes completely ignored their wishes. Because of their influence it was one week before the Senate confirmed the appointments.

In accordance with his bargain, Hayes quickly withdrew Federal troops from Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana, thus actually bringing the Reconstruction Period to an end. This move further alienated the Republican group.

Next Hayes, striving for civil reform, attempted to throw Roscoe Conkling's political machine out of New York State by attacking the federal offices there. Against the advice of his cabinet, he asked Chester A. Arthur, Collector of Customs, and A. B. Cornell, Naval Inspector, to resign. Congress at first refused to confirm Hayes's appointments to these positions, but finally he won, thus settling the question of who controlled Federal appointments, the President or Senators of the States. He could never, however, get Congress to pass any civil reform legislation, but at least he paved the way for it.

He had rescued the country from the grip of the worst corruptionists it had known, but, as a result, he was rejected by most of the Republicans and found himself a "man without a party."

He attempted to stop inflation by vetoing the Bland-Allison Act which allowed special, limited coinage of silver. Congress rose up in arms and passed the bill over his veto on the same day.

All kinds of problems arose during his administration such as agitation against the Chinese immigrants in California and a railroad strike
which crippled the country's transportation until he succeeded in breaking it by calling out federal troops.

Although thoroughly despised by the Republicans, as the end of his term drew near, Hayes had so rehabilitated the Republican party that they were in a much stronger position by the election of 1880 than they had been in 1876. Hayes would undoubtedly have liked to run again, but he knew that was impossible, so he made a formal announcement before the convention of 1880 that he was not a candidate. He realized that the party was glad to have profited by his splendid administration but that they had had enough of the reformer.

Both Lucy and Rutherford Hayes were criticized by their enemies because of the change they brought about in the social activities at the White House. Ostentation disgusted them, and they gave as few lavish state dinners as possible. They loved to entertain informally and were so gracious and hospitable that Lucy was sometimes called the "second Dolly Madison." Her kind-heartedness extended to all the servants and clerks of the White House whom she invited there with their families for Thanksgiving dinner. At Christmas she gave presents, which she had purchased and wrapped herself, to the entire staff.

Egg rolling on the White House lawn was promptly instituted by Lucy Hayes after Congress passed a law forbidding it on the Capitol Lawn because it might ruin the grass.

The Hayses were constantly ridiculed and called stingy because of their refusal to serve liquor. Mrs. Hayes was referred to as "Lemon-ade Lucy." At one dinner party the guests thought that the chef had played a clever trick on the President. Oranges filled with a frozen punch which tasted of rum were served. The guests laughed up their sleeves. When the story came out in a newspaper shortly afterward, Hayes said the laugh was on the guests, that there wasn't a drop of rum in the punch -- just rum flavoring. But after this episode, Roscoe Conkling sneeringly spoke of the President as "a hypocrite who took furtive drinks from loaded oranges."

Every day at the White House was started with morning devotions, and after dinner at night the entire family would gather in the Red Room to sing hymns and have family prayers, after which the children would retire to do their homework.

Certainly the Hayses had set a fine example for the families of the country to follow.

The entire family was very happy to return to the spacious home in Fremont at the end of the four years. Hayes devoted himself to reading, keeping up an enormous correspondence, and going over scrapbooks which were a hobby with the entire family.
Before long he was persuaded to serve on various local committees, make speeches, and assist in fund-raising projects. The organized charity movement had just begun, and he supported so many worthy causes that he was in debt when he died. He became President of the National Prison Association and Commander-in-Chief of the National organization of the Loyal Legion, which he considered a real honor.

Hayes snatched at any compliment as to his eminence as a national figure, such as an invitation to the unveiling of the Washington Monument, because, in his old age, he became very sensitive over the fact that his title to the presidency was still in doubt and always would be. He feared that he would be dismissed with just a paragraph in history books.

Lucy Hayes died a few days after a stroke, and Hayes was overcome with grief as he wrote in his diary: "I think of her as the Golden Rule Incarnate."

His daughter Fanny became his companion, and they travelled to Bermuda, to meetings in New York, army reunions, and to Vermont to learn more about his family.

In the last few years of his life, Hayes grew deaf and suffered sudden losses of memory which were extremely embarrassing to him. He had a heart attack in Cleveland station on his way home to Fremont after having spent a day looking after the affairs of Western Reserve University. His son Webb was with him, and at his father's insistence, they took the train for Fremont. He had said: "I would rather die at Spiegel Grove than live anywhere else." He died on January 18, 1893 at the age of 71.

Historians now regard him and his administration more kindly than did his contemporaries. Professor Allan Nevins not only rates him as "good" but states that he might have deserved a rating of "excellent" had he served a second term.

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