Grant—Successful Failure


BIRTHPLACE OF GEN. GRANT

CAPT. U. S. GRANT III


GEN. F. D. GRANT

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

APRIL 27 of this year marks the one hundred fifth anniversary of the birth of a remarkable American. He is remarkable in the sense that his life story is the paradox of a failure who succeeded, not once, but many times. W. E. Woodward, author of "George Washington: The Image and the Man," recently announced that he is at work on the "reconstruction of another great American historical figure, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant." From other statements of his it is evident that he is approaching his subject from the "successful failure" angle.

"Grant's career was one of the most dramatic in our history," he says. "At the age of thirty-eight he was an obscure and beaten man, sitting silently around the stove in a country store. His opportunities were all apparently behind him. He had left the army under the charge of drunkenness and had found himself unable to make a living in business. Who would have dreamed, at the beginning of the Civil war, that this seedy, discouraged failure was to become the great leader of the Union armies and to be President for two terms?"

It is because Grant's career was a dramatic one and because his life story has in it so many dramatic elements that he is such an interesting figure. There is the "farm boy who became President" element and, despite the failures in his career, it has, in its general outlines, all the elements of the "success story" of which Americans seem to be particularly fond. As a military genius it is doubtful if he was the equal of half a dozen other generals in the Union and Confederate armies. But Grant, the soldier, was a picturesque character and it is easy to understand how the picture of this stocky, dark, taciturn man, chewing upon the inevitable cigar, would appeal to the imagination of a people so soon to become wedded to a gospel of efficiency and a tradition—intensified, albeit, by the movies—of a "strong, silent man" as an ideal.

Then there is the matter of epigrammatic utterance. We Americans are fond of laconic speech, of our "great sayings by great men," catch-words, slogans and the like. So why should we not remember the man who said "Let us have peace!" and whose brief "unconditional surrender" message to the general of an opposing army could by an identity of initials make it easy to read "U. S. Grant" as "Ulysses Simpson Grant" or "Unconditional Surrender Grant" or "United States Grant." One other element is the fact that the manner of his becoming President followed historic tradition so closely. The tradition was established when the new Republic made the victorious George Washington its first President. The tradition was perpetuated after the war of 1812 in the gift of the Presidency to Andrew Jackson, hero of the Battle of New Orleans, and a little later to William Henry Harrison, the "Old Tippecanoe" hero of another battle in that conflict. Zachary Taylor, the "Old Rough and Ready" of Mexican war fame, was similarly rewarded by his country. So why should not the victorious general of the war between the states be elevated to the Presidency as soon as the opportunity offered? That question was answered in 1868 when General Grant became President Grant.

Grant, the President, is rather a dim, vague figure in our minds. It is Grant, the soldier, who is remembered, and for 300 years those two words have been synonymous. Ulysses Simpson Grant, was eighth in descent from Matthew Grant, who came to Massachusetts in 1630 and was surveyor of Connecticut for more than forty years. Although there is no direct evidence of the fact, it is not unlikely that Matthew Grant had a part in the Indian wars in New England and thus established the line of military Grants. At any rate the soldier strain cropped out early for Noah Grant, Ulysses' great-grandfather, and Solomon Grant, his great-granduncle, held British commissions during the Seven Years or French and Indian war (1756-1763) and both were killed in the same campaign. Noah Grant, his grandfather, joined a Connecticut company in the Continental army and served throughout the Revolution from Bunker hill to Yorktown.

Whether or not a Grant of this line served in the War of 1812 is not recorded, but Ulysses S. Grant, who served in the Mexican war and the Civil war, his son, Gen. Frederick Dent Grant, who served in the Indian campaigns, in the Spanish-American war, and in the Philippines, and his grandson, Capt. Ulysses Grant III, who served in the World war, were true to their soldier heritage and carried on the tradition of military service by successive generations of Grants.

After the Revolution Noah Grant emigrated to Pennsylvania and in 1799 he continued westward to Ohio. General Grant has recorded in his memoirs that "Noah Grant was not thrifty in the way of laying up stores on earth" and financial reverses as well as the death of his wife in 1805 broke up the family. Jesse Grant, the father of the future President, was given a home by Judge Tod of Ohio and he remained with Tod until he was old enough to learn a trade and strike out for himself.

At Ravenna, Ohio, Jesse Grant established a tannery and later moved to Point Pleasant, Clermont county, Ohio. There, on April 22, 1822, a son was born and given the name of Hiram Ulysses. Grant was appointed to West Point in 1839 and it was at that time that "Hiram Ulysses" became "Ulysses Simpson." In the course of making the appointment, Congressman Hamer of Ohio was obliged to give the full name of his protege. Knowing that the boy's name was Ulysses and his mother's maiden name was Simpson, at a venture he wrote it down "Ulysses Simpson Grant." And so it remained through the remainder of Grant's life. While his career at the military academy cannot be called a failure, at least it was far from a success. The fact that his classmates distorted "Ulysses" into "Useless" has some significance. Except for his superior horsemanship, and proficiency in mathematics, he was never squarely at either end of the class, front nor rear. Mediocrity is perhaps the most fitting characterization of Grant, the West Pointer. His class standing was so low that he served his fourth year as a private and at the age of twenty-one he was graduated with a ranking of 21 in a class of 39.

His interest in horses, both as a boy in Ohio and as a cadet at West Point, had crystallized into a desire to obtain a commission in the cavalry upon graduation. Instead he was appointed a second lieutenant in the Fourth infantry. If this was not Grant's first "failure," it was at least his first frustration, which is so nearly the same thing. He was ordered to Jefferson barracks in Missouri and while there his dissatisfaction with army life became so pronounced that he determined to resign and seek a professorship in mathematics in some college. He applied for an appointment as assistant professor of mathematics at West Point, but again he was frustrated. There was no such position open then. Before one occurred, the Mexican war broke out and Grant was a soldier on active instead of academic service. And this young lieutenant, "fed up" on garrison life and seeking an escape, was the man who a few years later was to become commander of the greatest army ever assembled on American soil and the first American officer to be given the rank of general after that grade was created by act of congress!

During the Mexican war Grant was promoted to first lieutenant for gallantry at the battle of Molino del Rey and brevetted captain for his conduct at Chapultepec. In 1853 he was commissioned a captain, but by this time he was convinced that he could not support his family on a captain's pay.

So in 1854, much to the consternation of his family and his friends, he resigned from the army. In the words of one biographer:

> The next seven years of Grant's life were anything but rosy and satisfactory. Having a wife and child to support, it was necessary to get to work as quickly as possible after quitting the army. His father-in-law helped him out by putting him on a small farm he owned in Missouri. Here Grant plowed and harrowed, fed and curried his horses; built, with his own hands, a log house for his family; cut down trees, and converted them into cordwood, and then hauled it to the nearest village where he tramped around the town hunting up customers, who usually purchased on credit—which proved eternal. Upon these wood-hauling trips, the man who later became the greatest military figure of the world, and President of the United States, was dressed in a very shabby old felt hat, a patched blouse coat, and pants shoved in the tops of the boots that had seen much wear. Not being able to make a living at farming and wood cutting, Grant next tried his hand in an endeavor to sell real estate and collect rents in St. Louis. This venture was no more successful than the previous one. From St. Louis he moved to Galena, Ill., where he became a clerk in a leather and hardware store owned by his father.

Thus a failure as a farmer and a business man was added to his record.

The opening guns of the Civil war brought him out of his obscurity, but again he seemed destined to failure. He offered his services to the government, but, despite his West Point training and his Mexican war record, no one in authority paid much attention to him. Finally Governor Yates of Illinois offered him the colonelcy of the Twenty-first regiment of Illinois infantry, and on June 15, 1861, he assumed command of that regiment. From then on his rise was rapid until the end came at Appomattox, and, as the successful general in one of the greatest conflicts the world has ever known, he reached one of his greatest triumphs.

If Grant, the soldier, was a great success, Grant, the politician, was equally a great failure. His two terms as President proved that. Although there was much that was commendable in his record as the Chief Executive, in the memory of most Americans this is overshadowed by the scandals, resulting from misplaced confidence in his friends, which marred his eight years in the White House. But through it all Grant, the man, emerged with reputation unsullied. From this failure he went to the second great triumph of his life—his trip around the world during which he was honored by other nations as few men before or since have been honored.

He returned to this country in 1880 to find his name proposed as a candidate for the Republican nomination for President and he was not an unwilling candidate. During the exciting days of the Republican convention the greatness of Grant, the man, and the weakness of Grant, the politician, flashed forth again. There was a deadlock with neither Grant, Blaine, Sherman nor Garfield able to muster enough votes to get the nomination. Then the Sherman supporters proposed to throw their strength to Grant if he would agree to make Sherman a member of his cabinet. This was Grant's reply, "It was my intention, if nominated and elected, to appoint John Sherman secretary of the treasury. Now you may be certain that I shall not. Not to be President of the United States would I consent that a bargain should be made." So James A. Garfield became the nominee and President.

He was destined to know one more failure and one more triumph before the end of his career. He became a partner in a business firm which failed and he was left almost penniless. The country came to his rescue and congress, by a special enactment in 1884, placed him on the retired list of the army, as general with full pay—a position he had resigned to become President. Urged thereto by enterprising editors, he set about the task of writing his memoirs, the sale of which he hoped would take care of his family. With the shadow of death hovering over him he persisted in his work and finished it a few days before the end came. He died July 23, 1885. The magnificent tomb in Riverside park, New York city, is more than the last resting place of Ulysses Simpson Grant, general and President. It is a national shrine, symbolical of American genius for succeeding through failure.

CAP AND BELLS

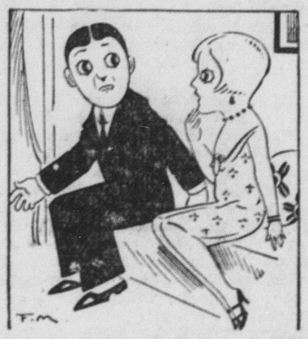
HOW IT WORKED

A druggist who wanted to sell electric waffle irons was advised to employ an attractive young woman to cook waffles in the store. He was assured that the scheme would boost sales.

"How did it turn out?" asked his adviser.

"A smart gink married the girl the first week."

THEN HE WENT



He (at midnight)—I feel all wound up this evening.

She (wearily)—Your main spring must be broken, or you'd surely go.

The Young Lawyer

"And if, my son," the lawyer said,
"My shoes you wish to fill,
Remember that I got my start
By working with a will."

Just to Do Something

Dentist's Wife—We must give the maid a little treat of some sort for her birthday.

Dentist—All right. I'll extract some of her teeth free.—Berlin Nagels Lustige Welt.

Fitting

She—I wonder why marriage is called "an institution?"

He—Because it is so hard to escape from, I suppose.—New York Central Lines Magazine.

Realism in the Movies

"Your star shivered most naturally in that scene."

"Had to."

"Heh?"

"We put her on ice."

Why Worry?

Dyer—Too bad about Niblick losing all his money.

Gowfe—He should worry! He made the course in two under par yesterday.

Rather Big-Hearted

Jerry—Is there only one cake of soap?

Bellhop—Sure!

Jerry—Tell the night clerk I'll take another room. I must wash my face.

GREATEST GOLD FIELDS

"What are the world's greatest gold fields."

"The big cities—you'll find gold diggers in every street."

Landing a Passenger

Ruth rode in my new cycle car
In the seat in back of me;
I took a bump at fifty-five,
And rode on ruthlessly.

How Boy Friend Knew

Daughter—You know, dad, he always said he'd never marry until the right girl came along.

Dad—Well, how does he know you are the right one?

Daughter—Oh, I told him I was.

His Favorite Brand

Dave—Have you another cigar like the one you gave me yesterday?

Rod—Yeah.

Dave—Fine. I want to break my brother of the habit of smoking.

Reciprocate or Retaliate

"I must begin buying my presents," said Mr. G. "You know, Cousin Ellie gave us that big blue vase last year, we ought to reciprocate."

"Reciprocate?" answered Mr. G. "For that vase! You mean retaliate."—The Outlook.

Meow!

Willie—Pa, how old are kittens when they get their eyes open?

His Father—I'm sure I don't know, my son, when they do get married.