

Sater

By Lowrey F. Sater

A stranger entering the office of Claude Meeker in his absence would have recognized almost at a glance the unusual qualities that characterized the man. The arrangement and completeness of the room evidenced a well-ordered and discriminating mind, a love of the beautiful, a familiarity with good literature, an enthusiasm for outdoor life; a wide acquaintanceship with the leading men of the state and nation, the elements of a progressive and intelligent leadership in his chosen field; an intimacy of personal relationships, and a being thoroughly in love with life and enjoying to the fullest all that each day could offer.

No one unacquainted with him, however, could have known how fully and fittingly this fine figure of a man completed this picture. On the other hand, no one, from the humblest to the highest in the land, who knew him in any of the many activities with which the busy years of his life were crowded, could forget the least of these qualities that recommended him so favorably to their consideration.

Whether as a journalist, political leader or successful man of affairs; the counsellor and confident of big business, or the friend of the needy and unfortunate; student, neighbor, friend or gentleman, he grew continuously in the esteem and affection of the people of the community in which he was born and with whom he lived for more than forty years.

It is interesting but idle perhaps, in the case of the man of five talents, to speculate as to what he might have accomplished had he engaged in some other line than that in which he attained distinction. Woodrow Wilson would have been remembered as a great teacher and author, and Herbert Hoover as a great engineer and builder, had the one been content with the classroom and the other with the laboratory. Claude Meeker won for himself a proud place alike in the field of journalism and the consular service before entering upon the work for which his abilities and the acquaintanceship and connections growing out of these earlier experiences so eminently qualified him.

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Like John Hay, Whitelaw Reid, William D. Howells, William H. Taft, Brand Whitlock, James M. Cox, and a host of other eminent sons of Ohio, Claude Meeker was early attracted to newspaper work. Before reaching his majority, he was reporting for The Cincinnati Enquirer, which at that time was not only a great news paper, but under the directing genius of Washington McLean, was recognized as one of the most influential organs of the Democratic Party west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Excepting for a half dozen of the great metropolitan dailies, no paper in the country boasted a more brilliant company of reporters than those who contributed between 1870 and 1890 to the columns of The Enquirer.

Along with the fascination that attracts, there seems to be some subtle influence peculiar to the art of reporting that makes a man out of a boy quicker and with more completeness than almost any other calling. It was neither strange, nor long therefore, notwithstanding the select circle into which he was admitted, that the contributions of Fabius (Meeker's pen name) began to appear along with those of George Alfred Townsend, William C. McBride, S. E. Johnson, William A. Taylor and Allen O. Myers.

From the first Meeker was attracted to politics and he turned to advantage every opportunity that the plans, plots and purposes of the party leaders of the state afforded. He was on friendly terms with Thurman, Pendleton, Halstead and Sherman; with Ewing and Brice; Butterworth, Foster, Hoadly and Foraker. From his post in this city he reported from day to day the activities and ambitions of the great and near great that passed before him. These letters, particularly those having to do with the sessions of the Legislature, might well be likened to a moving picture of the public men and measures that engaged the attention of the people of the state at that time.

His political convictions were strong, but his appraisals were honest and sincere. His judgments were frank and fearless, but generous. His processes were direct and his impulses kind. His style was lively, expressive and vigorous. He could be critical without being caustic and partisan without indulging in personalities.

Most of the men of whom he wrote are gone and but for the occasional research student or some relative "mindful of the unhonored dead" no one is now interested either in what they did or what he said. Jefferson may have preferred 'newspapers without a government to a government without newspapers', but it must be admitted that

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there is hardly anything more ephemeral than the copy that fills their columns. With every respect for the work and worth of our reporters, is there anyone here who has turned back to reread any of the contributions that have appeared in any of our dailies during the year that is hurrying to a close?

The finest piece of reporting that ever came from the pen of Claude Meeker was inspired by a political attachment and a personal affection that is perhaps without an equal in the history of the state. Among the aspirants for political honors that came under his observation during the years of his apprenticeship, he was attracted most strongly to a young captain of Democracy, whose brilliant and repeated victories in an adjoining county evidenced the highest qualities of political leadership.

In acquainting his readers with the merits and achievements of this man, and his unusual abilities as a campaigner, he asserted over and over ^{again} that if he were given the nomination, he would be the next Governor of Ohio. And so it happened that largely through the efforts of Claude Meeker, James E. Campbell was named by his Party in the fall of 1889 to oppose Governor Joseph B. Foraker, who was seeking re-election.

Of the many campaigns that have engaged the attention of the voters of the state since the Civil War, none was more spirited nor is remembered with such vividness as that waged by those two able and distinguished men.

With an enthusiasm and a loyalty that increased as the contest waged, Meeker followed his gallant leader and described in glowing terms the ovations that he everywhere received. The effectiveness of Campbell's speech suffered at no time from the resourcefulness of Meeker's pen. All that he had done to bring about his nomination was commonplace to what he did towards insuring his election. He capitalized every incident that inured to the benefit of his candidate and rejoiced in it all like the proverbial strong man. With the skill of a Belasco, he staged every scene, setting and appearance to the advantage of the leading man. His copy fairly blazed, yesterday with wrath, invective and indignation at the efforts of the opposition, and today with delight

and exultation at their discomfiture and defeat. Nothing more expressive or praiseworthy of his efforts in this remarkable contest can be said than that he was scarcely less resourceful, effective, untiring and successful than was the man for whom he so valiantly fought.

If you would know Claude Meeker, the correspondent, at his best, turn back the pages of The Enquirer and read this stirring chapter of political history as he reported it.

Beautiful and intimate as was the relationship that existed for years between James E. Campbell and Claude Meeker I do not believe I am presuming upon the proprieties in stating to the members of this Club that I should be surprised, as they stroll through the Elysium Fields and their thoughts revert to the things of this world (assuming that they do so), if they did not regard this experience as a bit more pleasurable and delightful than any in which they participated.

The crowning work of the inauguration offered him the opportunity of following and furthering the fortunes of his chief. As the trusted friend, counsellor and confidant of Governor Campbell, he contributed gladly and generously each day of his term to the success of the administration, which is remembered and rated as one of the outstanding administrations in the history of the state. Their retirement from the official position which they had graced and honored was regretted perhaps by none of their immediate associates more keenly than by the genial and gifted gentleman who, in validating the various documents that came to him for authentication from the Executive Office, signed the same "Daniel J. Ryan, Secretary of State".

Another Presidential contest was at hand. Meeker's contacts and acquaintances with the leaders and issues of the Party brought his comment and copy again into prominence through the columns of the New York World, St. Louis Republic, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post and the Times Star. He advocated the renomination, and predicted the election of Grover Cleveland basing his opinion upon facts and information obtained by him from farmers, miners and shopmen rather than from the preferences of the politicians. You will recall, I am certain, that chapter of unwritten history, which he related to us one evening, of the important part that Governor Campbell had in bringing about this result. It was a fitting and proper acknowl-

edgment on the part of President Cleveland, therefore, of the support he had received at the hands of these two admirers, when he announced the appointment of Claude Meeker as Consul at Bradford, England. This Yorkshire town, surrounded by a wealth of historic associations, was the greatest wool and woolen manufacturing center in the world, and at the time, one of the largest of the American Consulates. During the four years that he occupied this position, Mr. Meeker made a careful study of trade conditions, tariffs, labor problems, etc., and his reports and opinions were widely quoted and commented upon in both countries.

But Meeker, the Consul, was at the same time Meeker, the savant, and the reporter throughout the course of those four delightful years kept company with the trade expert. With the rival contenders of York and Lancaster, and with Robin Hood and his merry men, he tramped the fields and familiarized himself with the scenes of their encounters and adventures. He visited the homes of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Ruskin, and reviewed his studies of political economy in the light of the great utterances of John Bright and Richard Cobden to their constituents. He lingered with delight among the hills that Turner had glorified with his brush, and surveyed with reverential awe the Cathedral of York, as he reviewed the great processions of history that had passed that way. But he was attracted particularly to the Village of Haworth and the life story and "the home of the Brontes". With characteristic thoughtfulness and consideration, he shared with us the pleasure of this study, as interesting and beautiful a piece of composition as this Club has known.

In retiring from this service, one of the leading English papers, among other things, said,

"Never has Bradford had the advantages of a better consul, who has ingratiated himself into the esteem and respect of all with whom he has come in contact and has dealt with the important work of the consulate in a masterly style. He has never allowed the interests of the state to suffer, and both in and out of season, has kept his country in the foreground, while he has ever been ready to participate in any movement which has had for its object the cementing of the brotherhood between the English people and the American."

An American always, in the sense that would have gladdened the heart of Webster, this experience and acquaintance, during these four years abroad, impressed him deeply with the desirability and necessity of a close, permanent union between the English speaking peoples of the world. As with Tenmyson, it was with him a case of "all hands round", and in that day of storm and stress when 'war's rude blast again had blown' and our broadsides roared with those of the mother country against the tyrant powers, no one evidenced more clearly than he his faith in the ultimate triumph of the principles of free government for which the Anglo-Saxon has ever battled.

Claude Meeker possessed and enjoyed an abundance of the things of this world, but his richest possessions were not listed on the Board. His interest in the market was always subordinate to his concern for his fellowman. His sympathies were as democratic as his manner, and his sense of social obligation, as acute as his honor was bright.

He helped other people at all times without regard to place, rank, color or creed. Of his contributions to the many civic, social and welfare agencies of the city, the members of all such organizations well know. Of the larger and finer contributions that found expression in personal service, as quiet and unostentatious as they were generous and helpful, only the beneficiaries of his thoughtfulness and his God can ever know.

He was community minded. He was proud of his city. He loved his neighbor. He was devoted to his friends. "He was so unselfish, gracious, thoughtful and kind", as Governor Cox said, "that he exalted the thing we too casually call friendship." He found good in everything and was always of good cheer, - a kind-hearted, courteous, high-minded, cultured gentleman, the like of which we shall not look upon again soon.