THE WEB OF PRECEDENT.

IT IS INTRICATELY WOVEN ABOUT A PRESIDENT.

He Is One of the Most Powerful Rulers, but on Every Side He Is Restrained by Constitutional and Statutory Laws—Traditional Rules.

[Special Correspondence.]

WASHINGTON, March 7.—The new president and his wife are in the White House, the new cabinet ministers are at their desks and the wheels of government turn round and round as of yore. Here and there one person will leave an official station, another taking his place, but administrations come and go and government methods remain the same. Precedent is almost everything here in Washington. There is a beaten track which but rarely is left untrod. Innovations come infrequently and then are the result of necessity. From president down to janitor the first and chief question preliminary to all actions pertaining to methods, ceremonials or social forms, is, How was this thing done by my predecessor? The inauguration a day or two ago was conducted just as inaugurations have been conducted for half a century. Nothing was omitted, nothing put in. Change the chief actors and substitute certain individual participants for others dead or displaced by the whirligig of time, fate or politics, and one inauguration is just like another.

From the moment he set foot in the city President Harrison has been surrounded with a network of precedents and established customs and expectations. When he arrived in Washington he placed himself in the hands of the inaugural committee just as other presidents did; he was lodged in the hotel where his predecessors were entertained; prominent Republicans called at this hotel and left their cards for him, as prominent party men have called and left their cards on many a similar occasion. The outgoing president followed precedents in calling for his successor inauguration day with the regulation carriage and four prescribed by custom. In the senate chamber, at the east front of the Capitol, down the avenue, on the reviewing stand in front of the White House, at the luncheon given by Mr. Cleveland to President Harrison, at the great ball—everywhere the inaugural procedure was but an echo of former displays.

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In his life at the White House, in his official work, in the organization and even in the personnel of his staff of assistants, the new executive finds a beaten track. Changes he may make, but it is unlikely that he will. There is no office in this country which contains such an amount of repression of individuality as the presidency. Possessed of vast power, the executive finds himself hedged about by constitutional and statutory limitations almost numberless, and by still more powerful unwritten laws and traditional precedents. The first requirement of his station he finds to be a complete merging of the man into the sovereign. Doubtless the elective sovereign of a nation of sovereigns holds the most exalted place in the world, but for four years the man Benjamin Harrison ceases to exist. See what magic there is in the ballot. A few thousand votes cast in a closely contested state calls one man or another to be the civil head of the nation, the commander of its army and navy and of the militia of the states when called into the actual service of the Union. They call him to a place in which all the diplomatic relations of his country with foreign powers are established and carried on in his name. They invest him with the nomination of the vast patronage of the executive and judicial branches of the government, embracing fully 10,000 civil, military and naval officers, whose appointment requires the consent of the senate. The heads of departments whom he calls to his side have power to remove many thousand more servants of the public—fully 150,000 if they choose to exert their prerogatives to the utmost. Yet this man of almost inconceivable power is held under certain restraints set out in the unwritten laws of the land—restraints which to a man of independence of character and habitual freedom of personal movement must indeed be found at times most onerous.

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From the moment of his arrival in Washington President Harrison was almost as much under the shadow of these conventionalities as if he had been already inaugurated. He was forbidden to return calls and to sit at the dinner table of his friends. It was incumbent on him to call on nobody, but on everybody who wished to have relations with the future president to call at his temporary residence and leave their cards. This done, the coming president exercised the sovereign's prerogative of sending for those persons whom he wished to see. To disobey such a summons would be considered an affront to the president, while his failure to send for persons who had left their cards is of no consequence or significance.

President Harrison cannot return any call except the first call of a visiting potentate or member of a royal family or the executive authority of a foreign nation or state. He can give state dinners—indeed, must—but he cannot accept invitations in return except to the house of one of his cabinet ministers. His friends he can invite to dine or luncheon with him at the executive mansion, but he cannot go out to dine with them. This has reference only to his life at the capital. Away from the seat of government he becomes again an individual, and may govern his personal movements in accordance with his wishes. At the capital he is forbidden freedom of intercourse with persons in official or social life. He is practically a prisoner of state in the White House, restrained by the bars of conventionalities and usages set there long before he was born.

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For four years Benjamin Harrison undertakes to repress himself, almost to lose his identity. No longer is he Benjamin Harrison, nor Gen. Harrison, nor ex-Senator Harrison. Officially speaking, he is not President Harrison. He is not an "Hon.," nor an "Esq." but simply "The President." In conversation he must always be addressed as "Mr. President." This is the code, but as a matter of fact, in our free American way, with our fondness for military and judicial titles, he will be often spoken to by those who know him well as "General," as Grant and others were in their day. This is a presumption, but it is tolerated. All official communications are addressed simply "To the President," and this is the form which all letter writers should use. Do not display your ignorance and bad taste by writing on your envelope "Hon.," nor "His Excellency," nor "Benjamin Harrison." "To the President" is sufficient. The letter will be delivered, and will reach the proper hands. From intimate friends variations of the form may be pardoned, but correspondents should in this exercise great caution. The safest rule is to follow the precedent. That is always the safest way in Washington.

The identity of our sovereign's individuality is so completely lost in the environments of his official character that even his wife and other members of his family speak of him always in conversation with others as "the president." A vast majority of the wives of presidents have gone further than this and habitually addressed their august husbands in private life, not by the familiar "James," "John" or "Abraham," to which they had been long accustomed, but by the formal and easy "Mr. President." There have been exceptions to this rule, as, for example, in the cases of Mrs. Hayes and Mrs. Garfield. The one addressed her husband, even in the presence of guests, as "Rutherford," and Mrs. Garfield habitually spoke to her husband as "James." Mrs. Grant was frequently heard to address the general as "Ulysses," and sometimes as "Ulys.," but all three ladies, while speaking to their husbands in this and other familiar ways, invariably spoke of them as "the president."

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Persons living far from Washington cannot understand the seriousness with which matters of form and etiquette are considered here. They think these conventionalities which do hedge the king about are useless and ridiculous. Yet if they will reflect a moment they will see that all these restrictions upon the president's personal and social movements, these forms of speech and address, are wholesome and necessary. There can be no sovereign, elective or hereditary, without a court, and there can be no court without order. At the very beginning of the republic all these questions were gone over and over. Exactly a hundred years ago Washington found himself more embarrassed by social than by official problems. Then there were no precedents, and the people were unaccustomed to social conventionalities beyond those of the most simple character.

Washington himself has related how his house was thronged at all hours of the day by curious crowds, and how no part of his domicile, not even Mrs. Washington's bed chamber, was safe from prying eyes. Washington felt the need of order, and though he was able to manage the government for five months without a cabinet he was sorely perplexed by the problem of forming a court and laws and regulations therefor. In this extremity he called on his friends for advice, and through their counsel the foundations of American court etiquette were laid, substantially as they have remained throughout the century, save during the administration of Jefferson. President Jefferson had some notions of his own, and from his innovations have sprung the common phrase, "Jeffersonian simplicity."

Jefferson was the only president who had the courage to make a vigorous protest against precedents. The first thing he did was to ride his mare to the capital, hitch her to the fence and walk into the senate chamber to be inaugurated. Then he redeclared his famous principle that all men were created equal, and proceeded to rearrange his court on that line. The historians agree that he made a pretty mess of it. With his own hand he wrote: "When brought together in society all are perfectly equal, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office." "No title being admitted here, those of foreigners give no precedence." Differences of grade among the diplomatic members give no precedence. He called his cabinet ministers to practice these and other similar rules, all designed to level mankind, and the result, even in that early day, when there was very little society at the national capital, the city itself being then simply a village, was not wholesome. Society so nearly resembled a mob that the executive ladies protested, and as soon as Madison became president the old order of things was restored. Monroe was the last of the presidents to wear the short clothes and dress sword of the continental fathers, and is thus styled "the last of the cocked hats."

* * *

President Harrison has already given evidence of his desire to maintain all established forms and conform to all usages. He has been known for many years as a man who deeply respects and conscientiously practices the proprieties of life. Scion of an old and famous family, a college graduate, a professional man throughout all his career, a Presbyterian and elder in his church, and, above all, a former senator of the United States, his conservatism he comes by naturally, and even at this early day, before he has scarce unpacked his trunks, it is safe to predict all the forms and customs now well established will be carefully maintained, and that the court, under the leadership of himself and Mrs. Harrison, will be dignified without excess of formality, brilliant without frivolity or unseemly display.

Mrs. Harrison, as first lady of the land, will enjoy greater latitude personally than her husband, the president, though, of course, she takes his rank and enjoys his prerogatives. As head of the society of the Capital City she is not required to return calls, but may go where she likes, and as much as she likes. Certain duties she has to perform, such as gracing the state dinners with her presence, standing at the president's side on levee nights, and holding receptions of her own. She may with propriety entertain guests at the executive mansion, receive her friends as informally as she likes, or be entertained at the houses of others. She may give her patronage to charitable enterprises, and is not by any means a prisoner of state or a slave to conventionalities. A remarkable instance of this was lately seen in the journey Mrs. Cleveland made to Philadelphia, on Christmas shopping bent. That trip she made absolutely alone and unattended, just as any other free and independent American matron travels whither she likes without escort or other protection than that afforded by her own character and the characteristic gallantry of the country.

* * *

As with the president and Mrs. Harrison, so with the members of the cabinet and other high officials of the new administration. In society as well as in office they find their orbits set. Precedents rule everywhere. Down through all the ramifications of executive, judicial, legislative, military and naval business are usages as rock rooted as the constitution itself. In every department, and in every division of departments, are veteran servants of the government who know what these usages are as well as they know their own names, and they see to it that all the old forms and methods are preserved, that they are handed down from administration to administration. They are the governmental machines, and these new men coming in are simply governors, steam indicators and regulators.

Presidents are not above taking advice from mere clerks, and cabinet ministers find wisdom in the counsel of $1,200 a year messengers. Lucky the official who can assume a little brief authority without developing a desire to overturn usages. In some of these government departments a man may gain a reputation for tyranny by enforcing his native ideas concerning the best method of addressing a letter or building a fire.

WALTER WELLMAN.

THEN BUT AN ONLOOKER.

Gen. Harrison at the Inauguration of President Garfield.

[Special Correspondence.]

NEW YORK, March 7.—On the morning of that blustering March day in 1881, when Gen. Garfield was inaugurated president, I was chatting in the lobby of the Riggs house with an old Washingtonian, an ex-member of congress, and a man of very wide acquaintance and of good repute for political shrewdness.

Within half an hour there passed the hotel a number of persons whose fathers or grandfathers were the central figures in the past in just such an event as was to be solemnized that day. First, there strolled by at a leisurely pace a man of 35, short and thick set, dressed like a Frenchman of good breeding and bearing the manner of a man of cultivation and wealth. This young man and his brother have the richest political heritage of any in this country. He was Henry Adams, and his grandfather and great-grandfather had been presidents of the United States—and perhaps 'twas a narrow escape that his father, Charles Francis Adams, had from nomination and election.

Almost on the heels of Henry Adams came a tall, slender, blue eyed young man, auburn haired and gentle mannered. His father, too, had been president, for he was Dr. Tyler, the son of John Tyler.

Then there entered the hotel a stout full bearded young man, black eyed black haired and suggesting neither in appearance nor manner his illustrious father. He was Bob Lincoln, son of Abraham Lincoln, and about to become a member of Garfield's cabinet.

Then came along a thin, spectacled, studious looking youth, who stopped a moment upon the sidewalk that he might point out to a companion the brilliant uniform of one of the companies of military that was to take part in the parade which was to escort Garfield to the place of power held by his father. This one was young Hayes, son of the president whose term was to expire in a few hours.

There went running and rollicking through the toilet lobby two youngsters looking out for fun, and bored because they were stopped and spoken to so often by men who knew that they were the little Garfield boys.

Something was said about the number of the offspring of presidents then in town, and the Washington gentleman exclaimed: "Oh, there are several other children and grandchildren of presidents in town. There is one now," and he indicated a gentleman who was just coming from the hotel dining room complacently using a wooden toothpick, like one who had satisfied a good appetite with a good breakfast.

He was a short man, built something like Phil Sheridan or Gen. Butler, with a big head, set seemingly without the support of a neck upon stocky, square shoulders, a generous abdomen, and short, almost puerile legs, that seemed to have been stunted by reason of the generous gifts nature had bestowed upon the body and head. He had large, grayish blue eyes, with peculiar wrinkles at the outer corners that gave him the suggestion of possessing and enjoying humor; he had the nose of a financier, something like Jay Gould's, but the lower part of his face was concealed by beard and mustache, in which the brown was rapidly turning to gray.

He wore a short tailed business coat, and a pair of trousers of remarkable color, and most prominently bagged at the knees. They were of clayey blue, a delicate but dangerous shade, because they revealed the slightest suggestion of contact with things which soil.

He strolled to the cigar stand and spent a few minutes selecting a brand, half a dozen of which he bought, and lighting one he went to the window and looked out upon the street.

"You say he is a president's son. Who is he?"

"Not a son, a grandson. His grandfather was president just one month. That is Ben Harrison, who is going to be sworn in as a senator today. I don't know whether he saw his grandfather inaugurated or not, but this is the first inauguration he has seen since then, if he did see that one."

Gen. Harrison stood so long at the window that it was evident that he was greatly interested in something he saw outside, and a glance showed that he was watching with keen interest the movements of the military upon the streets.

Nobody in the hotel seemed to know him, or if he was recognized he was not thought of consequence enough to bestow a second glance upon. At last an Indiana office seeker discovered him, and approached and spoke. Gen. Harrison turned with some annoyance, plainly not wishing to have his attention distracted from the military.

The office seeker was persistent, pulled papers from his pocket, the general glancing at them with a bored air, and at last he said, and so distinctly that his words were overheard: "I have just been to breakfast. I haven't had time to turn around yet. But I don't think there is any chance for you. The trouble is, there are too many pegs for the holes, too many pegs for the holes; wait awhile, perhaps there'll be a hole for you. That's a fine company marching by," and he turned and looked again at the military.

A half hour later Gen. Harrison stood on the sidewalk, one of the great throng, hustled hither and thither in the jam, and stretching his head to get a glimpse of the soldiers. For he is fond of the military. He likes good marching, good uniforms and good music. And this inauspicious little man, one of the hundred thousand that looked from the sidewalk at the evolutions of the military, was the same for whom the brilliant scenes of that day are now repeated.

When Gen. Harrison entered the senate chamber a little late that morning, he was known probably to less than a dozen members, and probably not one in fifty of the great crowd in the gallery knew or cared anything about the new little senator from Indiana. Big Joe McDonald, whom he was to succeed in the senate, came to him and took him under his wing, and 'twas an impressive sight to see that giant, with his kindly face, trotting the little man around that he might present his future associates in the senate to him. Soon that other Indiana giant, Dan Voorhees, came in and stood beside them, and there must have been something in the sight that amused Conkling, for he called his friend Thurman's attention to it, and they both smiled.

Gen. Harrison's head barely reached to the shoulders of Voorhees and McDonald, and he was obliged to throw his head back to look into their eyes, but he was grave and of great dignity, while they cracked jokes and laughed heartily, and soon gathered a group around so that Harrison was completely hidden from sight from the gallery. He was, with the exception of George Vest, the shortest man in the senate, a fact upon which Vest congratulated him when they were introduced.

Though the grandson of one who had received the honors then bestowed upon Garfield, Gen. Harrison seemed but little impressed by the ceremonies in the senate chamber after Garfield and Hayes came in. He sat in a chair on the outer row of seats, and far down in it, too, so that his chin seemed almost on a line with the desk in front of him, and glanced with no evidence of interest at the scene which is now repeated with himself at the seat of honor.

But when the great throng of public men had gathered on the platform at the east front of the Capitol to hear the inaugural address and witness the administration of the oath, Gen. Harrison's interest was made manifest. Some of the crowd pressed in front of him, just before Garfield took his place at the stand, and Harrison at once mounted his chair, where he stood watching with the keenest interest the magnificent line of soldiers and the impressive throng of human beings densely packed together on the plaza in front of the Capitol. One company seemed to interest him greatly. He eyed it for some moments and then called the attention of the man who stood next to him to it. When Garfield began to read his inaugural, Harrison sat down in the chair, but it was not possible to hear Garfield distinctly where he sat, and so he, after awhile, gave up the attempt and yielded to his interest in the military.

In the seat in front of him sat a handsome gentleman with head uncovered, although the air was frosty, the model of decorum and a magnificent example of what an American gentleman may be. He was Gen. Arthur, just become vice president. His chair was in a direct line behind Garfield, only Chief Justice Waite sitting between him and the president, and Harrison's chair was next behind his. And in this chance disposition at that time seemed indicated the line of succession to the presidency.

When the inauguration ceremonies were over and Garfield had gone, a little man stood further up the portico watching the evolutions of the troops as they marched away. He was Gen. Ben Harrison, and an hour later I saw him on the avenue again watching the military.

E. JAY EDWARDS.

Schoolgirl's Epitaph.

Though I cannot give you the following epitaph as existing in the marble or on the wood in any church or churchyard, I think it is worth preserving, for it has some not unimportant teaching in it. The lines were given to me as being "funny" or "comic," but it seemed to me that the pathos in them was infinitely greater than the fun. They were written, as I was assured, by a girl who, long overworked in school and workshop, was lying on her deathbed, and knew that her end was at hand:

Oh! weep not for me, friends, for I am a-going
Where there'll neither be reading nor writing nor sewing.
No! weep not for me, for, though we must sever,
I'm going to do nothing forever and ever.

Can we wonder that such was the poor girl's ideal of heaven?—T. Adolphus Trollope in Good Words.

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