

HIGH IDEALS HAVE ALWAYS MARKED LIFE OF WM. H. TAFT

Personal Estimate of the Man by One of America's Greatest Journalists.

By "Raymond."

From Chicago Tribune, June 19th, 1908.

The first time I saw "Bill" Taft was in a pretty little scrimmage on the grammar school lot in New Haven. It was an impromptu rush, and I felt safer in that affair because of the burly fellow who tramped next to me in the front line. We were freshmen at Yale. I knew the big boy opposite me only by an extremely scant reputation, because this was the first night the class had been thrown together.

Some of the upper classmen, probably desiring to rub it into us or else to size us up in preparation for the annual rush at Hamilton park a week or so later, had egged us to a promiscuous battle with the sophomores on the grammar school lot, just within the shadow of the university.

We were all hopelessly green to college life, but there was from the start one general of the irresponsible freshmen. He was a big, thick necked, sturdy giant who had come from the Woodward high school in Cincinnati. His reputation had preceded him. He was the fellow the rest of us were looking after to point the way, to do the spectacular part of the fighting, and to help us to hold our own against the sophomores we had been taught to believe were nearly invincible.

At His Best in Boyish Scrimmage.

It was after the crush of this preliminary rush and during the hand to hand fight which followed as an inevitable result of such a disorganized encounter that I first saw Taft at his boyish best. The onset of the rush had been checked, the affair had degenerated into a pitched battle, in which little rounds of contestants were engaged. We, as freshmen, scarcely knew each other, and it happened during the evening that after a hard struggle it was found we were plying into some of our own fellows.

But I never shall forget Taft as I learned to know him that night. It was a boys' affair, because we were all youngsters ranging from 17 to 20 years of age. Still at the same time it was a thing which had all the bitterness and all the viciousness of actual battle. There was the big boy from Cincinnati, almost at my elbow, and he was carrying on no child's play of a fight. When he hit he hit to put his opponents out of business. He was determined, grim, visaged and anxious for the supremacy of his class, but with it all in the midst of the battle there was an eternal good humor, a sort of man's knowledge of the fact that in spite of the blows and the bloody noses it was all play.

It was there I heard for the first time the famous Taft laugh, and that laugh came when the grim warriors had stopped their fighting and a wrestling bout proposed.

Athletic Champion of Class '78.

Those sophomores never knew that this Yale class of '78 had in it from the date of its organization the best wrestler who was ever to become famous in the athletic annals of the university. They found it out before long and the morning after that impromptu scrimmage on the grammar school lot William Howard Taft was the acknowledged athletic champion of the Yale class of 1878.

From that day on he grew in the estimation of his classmates, and when you come to think of it there is not a better test on earth than this. College boys, in the first instance, are essentially fair and democratic. They recognize literary, intellectual, or athletic capacity for what it is. It makes but little difference, at least in the early days of a college career, who a man's father was or what class of society he came from. The first baseman on the university nine is never selected because of his ancestor, and it is a self-evident fact that the leading scholar in a university is not made so by professors who are influenced by his wealth or his social standing.

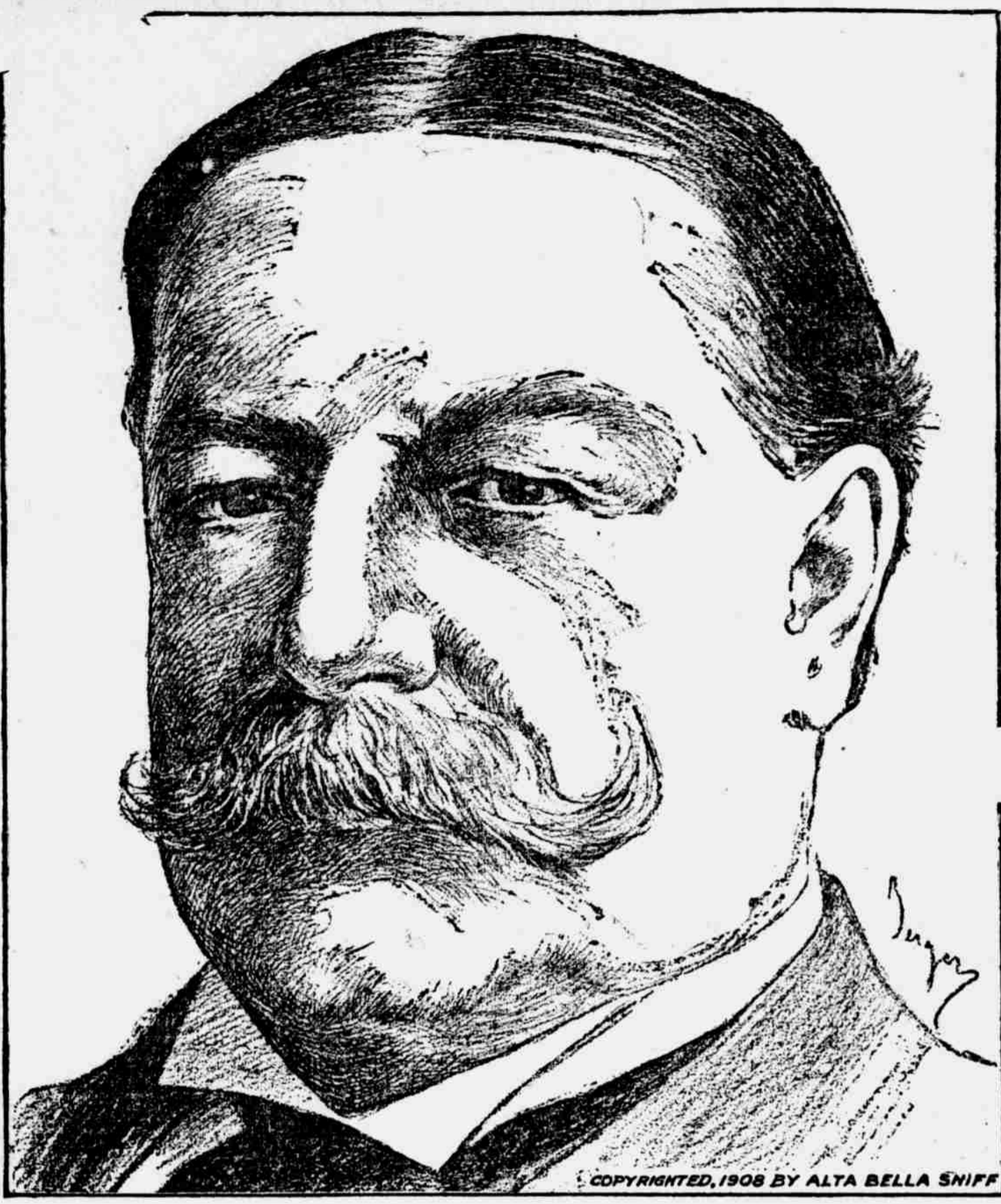
One of the best things about Taft as I remember him as a boy was his extreme fairness. It soon came about that we recognized in him not only a natural leader of men who was destined to real success in life but a friend who played no favorites. Even at that early point in his career he possessed the judicial capacity to an extraordinary degree. I know that if there was a dispute in one of the freshmen secret societies, or if there were rival political machines in class politics, or if two men who ought to be friends were not so, it was always Taft who was appealed to as an adjudicator of the difficulty.

Honesty Never Was Questioned.

It is a pretty good testimony to his honesty and to his boyish integrity that no one ever seemed to question these informal decisions. He still was a headless boy, but he had the makings of an ideal judge about him. He would listen to the stories of the contestants, weigh the evidence, and give his opinion with what was manifestly absolute fairness. He was not always right by a long shot and neither he nor any other man always will be right in the more serious affairs of life.

Yet it was true, as I remember it, that every one of his fellows got into the habit, when a dispute arose of any seriousness, of saying: "Let's leave it to Bill Taft," and I do not remember that the fairness of the decision ever was brought into controversy afterwards, although there were many times when it seemed that he had made a mistake.

As the weeks and the months went by in our college career, Taft only strengthened the good opinion which his associates had of him. He became the most popular man in the class. This was not merely because of his enormous strength or because he appealed to the brutal side of the boys through his supremacy in athletics,



WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT.

but because they recognized in him an unusual combination of the qualities which boys adore.

Best Wrestler in the University.

In the first place, as I have said, he became the best wrestler in the university. No one, so far as I know, ever threw him in a fair contest, although the giants of our own and all other classes frequently attempted the impossible. As I recall it, he was a rattling good first baseman, or at any events played somewhere in the infield on the class nine in the scrub games. Down on the river there was no lustier our than that of Big Bill. In the gymnasium he was nothing short of a holy terror and later on, in junior year, when old Bill Dole used to put the gloves on with members of the class, the Cincinnati athlete had lost none of his strength and none of his agility. There was no one who liked a long walk better, no one who sang louder or laughed harder on the fence, and none more social.

Before we were half way through our freshman year it got to be a habit with the fellows when they had any really good class honor to bestow to offer it first to Taft, and then, if he did not want it, to distribute the prizes around among the rest of the class.

Studied While Others Played.

Stories have been told of Taft's athleticism at the opening of his college career similar to those I have just dictated. In point of fact, during the first two or three years of his college career he did not participate in college athletics at all. I still remember the wistful way in which he used to say he would like to row on the university crew or try for a chance on the university nine. He always explained that his father, Attorney General Taft, had determined that he should excel in his studies and had positively forbidden him to take part in any of the official athletics of the class.

It was this same stern but extremely wise parental order which took Taft away from the rest of the fellows early in the evening. After a jolly dinner at one of the boarding clubs the big, bull necked student would stroll down to the fence and participate in the usual songs of jollifying which were the inevitable accompaniments of mere presence in that historic and sacred place. Then might come a stroll down the street and a half hour or more in some of the various resorts then affected by the students.

There were evenings when half an evening would be passed at "Mory's," but every one knew that long before the crowd started back towards the college Taft would manage to disappear, and by the time the late songs were sung on the fence every one could see the rim light of his student lamp and knew that he was grinding for the morrow's lessons.

Young Taft was not one of our brilliant students. That is to say, everything that came to him came from hard work and I believe that has been the dominant characteristic of his whole life. There were other fellows one of whom is a bank president, I think, in Boston and the other I know is a clever lawyer and a third the head of a great trust company in New York, who snatched knowledge quickly. They could learn things in half the time Taft took. It was necessary for him to go at a thing laboriously and even tirelessly. He studied until late at night and his recitations in the class were conducted with an ab-

sence of brilliance, showing that it was no offhand effort.

Thorough in All His Work.

On the other hand, there was a solidity, a permanence about the knowledge that he acquired through his studies which always was recognized by the other fellows and by all of the students. He wrote out carefully the most elaborate summaries, made painstaking analyses, and would with great labor personally corroborate the correctness of long chemical formulae.

There was nothing frothy, nothing dashy, but nothing obscure. If he had an essay to write, it was almost wholly lacking in literary gracefulness but one could depend upon it that it was full of meat. Logic was his strong point and he was almost as irresistible in a debate as in a wrestling match, being prepared for both. It is no idle task to set for yourself the goal of the valedictory address in a hustling Yale class. It means constant effort, the hardest kind of work and the sacrifice of ambition in other directions. It meant Taft giving up the ball nine and the crew, at least during his earlier years, and he had to devote a lot of time to patient study which he, as a young fellow, would much rather have spent on the athletic field or at the boathouse.

He graduated salutatorian. That is to say he was second in a class which wound up with something like 150 members. That would be honor enough for most men, but during his course he took prizes and at the time of his graduation was unquestionably the most notable all round student and athlete who had been in the university for many years.

Head of a Famous Class.

It was no collection of weaklings, that famous Yale class of '78, as their subsequent careers have shown. Taft's friends have crossed and criss-crossed since then with a dozen different men who were his classmates in the olden days, and many of them have reached unusual distinction in public life.

John Addison Porter was secretary to McKinley. Harry Hoyt is now solicitor general of the United States. "Billy" Hunt was governor of Porto Rico. John Proctor Clark is a famous judge in New York state. Ed. Whitney was assistant attorney general under Olney. Paul Charlton is law officer of the insular bureau. Howard Van Buren was known to all European travelers as United States consul at Nice. Herbert Bowen defended the consulate at Barcelona against a Spanish mob and later on was minister to Venezuela.

Howard Hollister was a common pleas judge in Cincinnati, and there have been a dozen others more or less famous in athletics, business, medicine, the church, and social life. To be at the head of a class of hustling young Americans, graduating second, with a splendid athletic record and unbounded personal popularity means the beginning of a great career.

It was during his early days in Cincinnati immediately following his graduation, so Secretary Taft told me one evening as we walked in the dusk around the Washington monument, that he got the real foundation of the sound legal knowledge which has made him famous in his profession, aside from all political position.

Learned Law as a Reporter.

He had a year as law reporter on two of the Cincinnati papers imme-

diately following his admission to the bar. Then he was made assistant prosecuting attorney in January, 1881, because that was at the time when the people of Cincinnati were engaged in a spasmodic effort to reform the judiciary and clean up the court machinery generally.

"I had to learn law," the secretary said, "because I had to prepare every case for myself. I learned then the foundation of trial jury, and through-out all my work on the bench I found that the two things which seemed to help me most were first of all my experience in digesting law cases for the newspapers and secondly my hard work as an assistant prosecuting attorney, where I had to depend upon myself and no one else to win a case and had to be thoroughly acquainted with the facts and with the best means of getting them before the jury."

People in Cincinnati never are tired of telling the story of how not long after he came back from college a member of the family was libeled in a daily newspaper and how the young student, without saying much at home read the offending article, dropped down town, hunted up the editor, and promptly pounded him to a jelly.

Many people might get the idea from this that the young lawyer who has now become the republican candidate for the president was or is of a quarrelsome disposition. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He was powerfully built, strong as an ox, but I never knew of his allowing himself to be forced into a quarrel of any kind unless there was ample justification for it. He was the peacemaker, not the trouble breeder, and I do not believe the man lives who can say that Taft used his great strength at any time in an unfair way.

Fairness a Dominant Characteristic.

This characteristic has followed him throughout his whole life. Fairness in his treatment of other men is the constant characteristic of William Howard Taft. It is hard to swerve him to the right or left if he thinks there is duty ahead. It is practically useless to appeal to him to do a wrong thing because of choice of friendship or of political policy. He is not at all stern, sees what is best to do in a political way with extraordinary vividness, but never can be persuaded to compromise what he considers an essential principle of life. He would be a daring man who would go to Secretary Taft today and proposes to him to do a thing he knew to be radically wrong, merely because it would help his election.

Most people do not expect a man who has been successful as a judge to be equally so as an administrative officer. The general idea is that the man on the bench deals with abstractions, with theories of law, with elemental principles, and that he is on that account absolutely unfitted for administering ordinary business affairs. In the case of Taft exactly the contrary has proved true. That he was successful as a judge no one will think of denying. That he has been a marvelous administrator has more recently developed to the surprise even of his own friends.

The secretary once told me how it was that this executive capacity was developed while he was still on the bench, so that when he came to undertake the work in the Philippines he

found it was not nearly as strange as he expected it to be.

Business Training on the Bench.

At the time when he was on the federal bench his circuit extended over Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. This covered the period from March, 1892, until he went to the Philippines. That was the time of the panic. A good deal of northern capital had been invested in Kentucky and Tennessee, and when the hard times came, one corporation after another went to pieces.

Almost before he realized the situation the young judge found he was expected to administer the affairs of railroads, coal mines, grocery corporations, banks, tobacco plantations, stock farms, and almost every kind of enterprise in which northern capital could be induced to enter. They were all in proceedings which obliged the federal judge to appoint receivers and to assume general direction of multitudinous business affairs.

"Do you know," said the secretary, during a casual conversation at his house regarding the details of his professional career, "that when I went to the Philippines the thing which disturbed me most was whether I could possibly learn how to administer purely executive affairs. I was astonished more than anybody else when I discovered that the process of running a government was exactly like that of conducting a big corporation. There were hundreds and thousands of new situations to be met, but the same thing occurs in business life. I found that executive experience had come to me while I was on the bench owing to the hard times. If it had been a prosperous period the chances are I would have been unfamiliar with the general executive work, because there would have been fewer receiverships and bankruptcies, and the federal court, as usual, would have concerned itself largely with matters of theory."

Has High Ideals of Duty.

Speaking of the Philippines here is the real story of just how Mr. Taft came to go to those islands.

Part of it was told to me by Mark Hanna, part by Secretary Root, and the rest by Mr. Taft himself. I think I have written the story before, but it is worth doing it again because it illustrates better than anything else I know the keynote in the career of William Howard Taft, a note with which the American people are certain to become proudly familiar during his administration if the republicans win the election in November. This is the subject of himself to his ideals of duty. It began when he was a boy in college. He recognized the wisdom of the will of his father in insisting that he should not waste time on college athletics and he devoted himself laboriously to his studies when all the instincts of the man carried him out across the green fields and over the dancing waters of New Haven bay.

During the year which followed the ratification of the treaty of peace between the United States and Spain there was a constant warfare in the islands. Aguinaldo was on the war path and it required a great many soldiers to hem him in.

Teaching a Lesson to the Natives.

Actual civil government was impossible, and yet President McKinley and Elihu Root, the secretary of war, with the constant assistance and advice of John Hay, secretary of state, began to plan for the time when it would be possible to put a civilian in charge and give the natives, at least of Luzon, a taste of real free government.

All three of the men held, in spite of the advice of some distinguished army officers, that the best way to pacify the Filipinos and to render the use of an army unnecessary, was to set up a form of government independent of the military and give the natives a chance to see what an honest form of government was like.

It was determined to send out to the islands a commission to be headed by some unusually good man, who would co-operate with the military authorities at first, and who at the earliest possible moment would become the first civil governor of the Philippines.

The country was canvassed and the name of one public man after another was suggested. To Mark Hanna and to McKinley came almost at the same time the suggestion of Judge Taft. Both of them knew him, knew his integrity, knew his ideals, and believed that his experience on the bench was just what was necessary to fit him for the strange duty across the Pacific. It was finally decided to tender the office to Taft, but it was scarcely believed he could be induced to accept. He was young, ambitious, with a good future before him at home, holding a life position from which he could retire in his old age with full pay. Moreover, there was good ground to believe he was not particularly in sympathy at the outset with the proposition to take and hold the Philippines. It was evident that it would take strong arguments to shake this man loose from his Ohio surroundings and transplant him across the sea.

Appeal of Secretary Root.

To Elihu Root, then as now the best special pleader in this country, was assigned the task of persuading Judge Taft to give up his professional career and undertake the new work in the Philippines.

Secretary Root, with rare insight into the secretary's argument of his life, He talked to Taft substantially as follows:

"Judge, you are in a good position now and apparently have a brilliant future before you. The president has concluded that you are the only man in the country and, in fact, the only man to send to establish civil government in our new possession of the Philippine islands. There are two

courses open to you, and I want to put them both fairly before you.

"In the first place," said the secretary, "there is the easy way. You are a young man, you are on the federal bench, and have progressed where you are recognized as a leader in the Circuit Court of Appeals. You have made a success and are likely to make other successes. The people and the party have been liberal with you. You have an ambition to go to the United States Supreme bench, as every good lawyer has, and I believe the chances are all in your favor.

"You have a life position, and when you grow old you may retire on a full pension, so that you are in fact carrying a governmental life insurance for your old age. No man could blame you if you would refuse to accept the office which the president now tenders you. It would not be dishonest or disloyal. You are comparatively a poor man and you would be doing the right thing by your family to hold on to your position on the bench and to look only for honors in the line of your own profession. That is the easy way for you to live the rest of the years of your life.

Points Out the Difficulties.

"Now, here is a hard way. We want you to go out across the ocean to the Philippine islands, a place where few Americans ever have been. We have undertaken new burdens of government out there which we scarcely understand ourselves. The islands are in insurrection. Armed bands of natives resist our authority. It will be difficult to establish civil government and it may be impossible, but some man must make the attempt, and the president believes you are the man. If you go out there you may make a success or a failure. No one can guarantee what you will do, and you cannot possibly know yourself. You may make a real success and yet the people may fail to recognize it. You may work hard over there, and yet come back, to be neglected and forgotten.

"For the time being at least, and possibly forever, you will have to give up your ambition, with which I fully sympathize, to go on the bench of the supreme court of the United States. You will have to resign your life office and undertake one which may be terminated at any time, and which has no old age insurance or possibility of retirement. It is an unfamiliar climate, and you will work among a strange people. You may be taken with a fever, or you may be assassinated.

"That is the hard way for you, Judge Taft. The president of the United States calls upon you to take the hard way, and he asks you to make a decision for the sake of those brown people across the ocean, whether you will live your easy life as you have been living it, or take up the hard life as I have honestly pictured it for you."

Taft Chose the Hard Way.

It is a fact, although I have paraphrased the language, that Secretary Root with characteristic cleverness, painted the dismal duty of the far off islands in the blackest possible colors and laid stress upon the easy life Judge Taft would have by remaining home. The point he made was that duty required that the work should be undertaken which held little prospect of preferment. He knew accurately the frame of mind of the man he was talking to, and that kind of argument won where none other would.

Judge Taft accepted the responsibility of establishing civil government in the Philippines with his eyes wide open to the fact that in all probability he would receive scant reward for his labors. It was once more the dominant note in his character, and he gave up his pleasant home life in Cincinnati to go into the governor's palace in Manila just as he used to leave the river or the base ball field and go back to his room to dig out a translation from Tacitus or an optional problem in the differential calculus.

Like a Dream to Taft.

One day recently Secretary Taft and his brother Charles, the Cincinnati editor, were chatting about the progress of the campaign.

"Charles," said the secretary, "doesn't this whole thing seem strange to you?"

"Not so very," said Brother Charles, "because I have been so hard at work trying to look after your interests that the whole thing has grown upon me gradually until it seems perfectly natural."

"Well, you know, Charlie, it seems a great big dream to me. Sometimes I wake up in the night and think that it is still a dream, and I have to go over actual events in my mind to realize that I have become a presidential possibility. I never thought of doing more than getting on the supreme bench, and I was working for that to the best of my ability. I am sure it never occurred to me when I went to the Philippines that the work there would lead to a presidential nomination. It always takes me some time in the morning before I realize that the whole thing is true."

It must seem like a dream, and yet it is an ordinary story of the possibilities of American life. Taft came awfully near being cut off with no greater place in history than that of a pretty good federal judge, who in a time of national disturbance had been selected to establish a civil government in a faraway group of islands. He nearly broke down within a short time after he went to the Philippines.

Seriously Ill in 1901.

When he returned to this country for an operation in December, 1901, less than two years after his first appointment and only five months after he became the first civil governor of the islands, his condition was a good deal more serious than the public ever understood. He had been ill in Manila for two months and it seemed as if his work for the little brown men was surely over.

They tell the story that when he was at his worst and while several of his official friends were in the room the governor reached under his pillow, pulled out a volume of Kipling's

poems, and read that significant rhyme of the east, which winds up:

And the end of the fight is a tombstone white.

With the name of the late deceased: And the epitaph dear, "A fellow lies here."

Who tried to hustle the east." But Kipling was wrong. The end of the fight was no "tombstone white" but a nomination for the presidency by the dominant political party at home. Marvelous experiences have intervened for this man, who has carved out his own destiny from the solid rock by patient endeavor. He has lived to see a legislative assembly opened in Manila and meanwhile has reconstructed a republic in Cuba, helped to avert war with Japan, and organized the construction force of the Panama canal.

When he has a "tombstone white" its epitaph will not be "dear." It will tell the story of a man "who tried to hustle the east" and—hustled it.

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