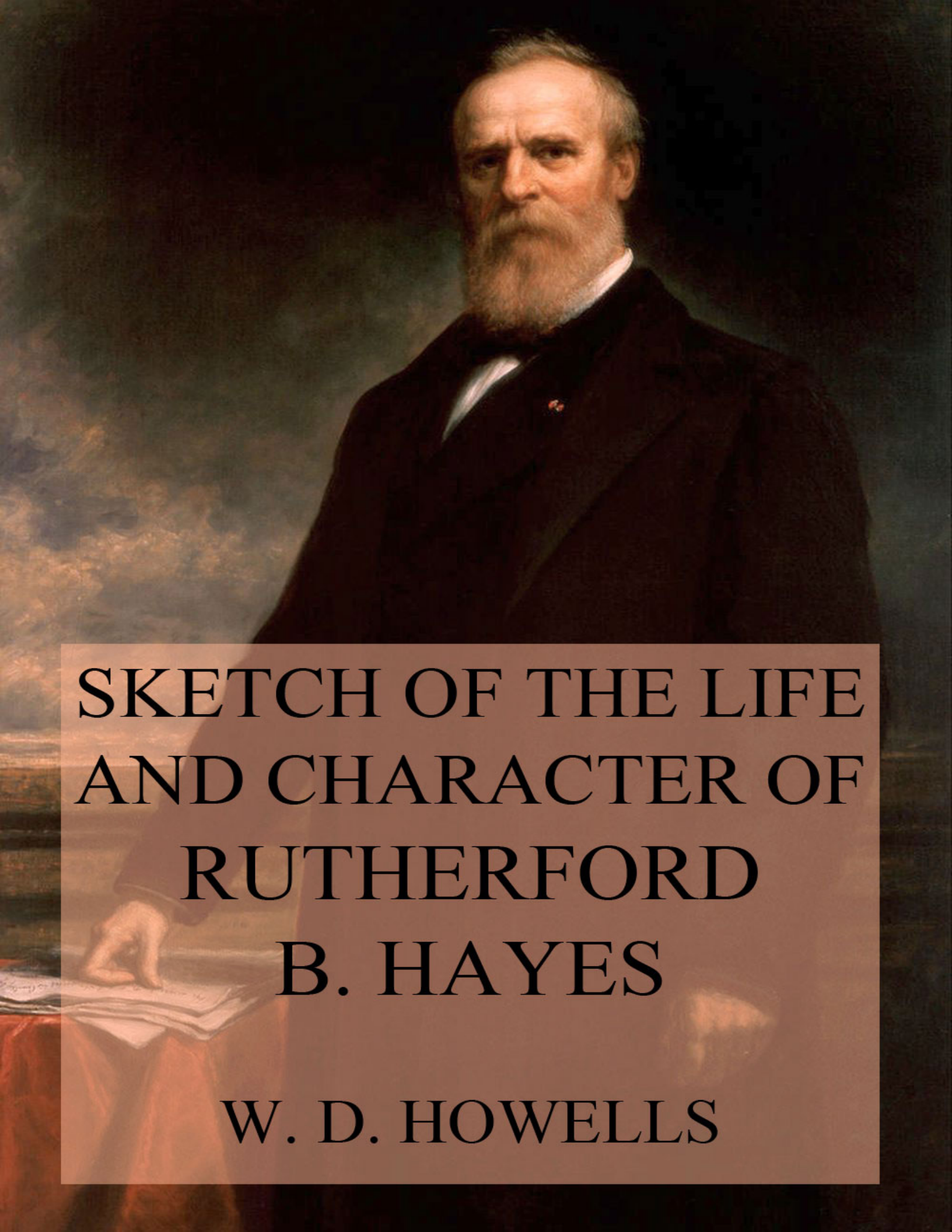

SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF RUTHERFORD B. HAYES

W. D. HOWELLS

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PREFACE.

This book is my own enterprise, and has been in nowise adopted or patronized by the man whose life and character I have tried to portray.

It differs chiefly from the biographies already before the public, in the large use made of original letters, diaries, note-books and scrap-books placed at my disposal without restriction and without instruction. In this use I have been guided solely by my own sense of fitness and my respect for the just limits of personality, on which I hope not to have trenched, though I might have printed every word of his, and only the more commended Rutherford B. Hayes to the honor and affection of the people.

Written within four weeks after the material came to my hand, the book has, I know, very many faults of haste; but it was not in the power of any writer, however hurried or feeble, wholly to obscure the interest of that material; and whatever is the result of the political contest, I cannot think that people will quickly forget the story of a life so true, and high.

I wish distinctly to say that General Hayes is responsible for no comment or construction of mine upon any word or act of his; and whatever is ambitious, or artificial, or unwise in my book is doubly my misfortune, for it is altogether false to him.

W. D. HOWELLS.

Cambridge, September 7, 1876.

CHAPTER I. ANCESTRY AND CHILDHOOD.

"The name of Hayes began by valor," wrote Mr. Ezekiel Hayes, of New Haven, scythe-maker, sometime in the last century; and he goes on to tell how once, in a fight with the Danes, the retreating Scots came upon a husbandman and his two sons at work in the fields. '' Pull your plow and harrow to pieces and fight!" said the father, and with this timely succor — more remarkable for quality than quantity — the Danes were beaten; and lands were bestowed upon the father for his bravery. "This man (my father's grandfather, George Hayes)," continues the too zealous genealogist, " went from Scotland to Derbyshire, in England, and lived with his uncle. He was anxious to see London, whither he went. Having received some account of America, he took passage and came to this country."

It was in 1682 that George Hayes settled in Windsor, Connecticut, at which time, according to the irreverent computations of a modern descendant of Mr. Ezekiel Hayes, the veteran must have been some seven hundred years old, since the battle in question took place about 980. But the brave tradition is well found at least; it was heartily accepted as part of the family annals by the early Puritan Hayeses of Connecticut, and its veracity ought not to be impeached because of their confusion of mind respecting dates. It is, however, of small importance to us who hope to elect General Hayes President of the United States, how his name began in Scotland so long ago. It continues in valor, no matter how it began, and a man of his good New England ancestry has nothing to crave of the Herald's College. We hold rather by the Connecticut Hayeses than

by those of Scotland, and we need but briefly concern ourselves with any of the forefathers of a man who is himself ancestor in the Napoleonic sense.

Little is known of George Hayes, who emigrated in 1682, beyond the fact that he settled first at Windsor and afterwards removed to that part of Simsbury which is now Granby. His son Daniel was taken by the Indians about the year 1712, and carried captive to Canada, whence he was ransomed by act of the Colonial Assembly appropriating " seven pounds to be paid out of the public treasury" for that purpose. What claim, if any, he had upon the colony's consideration, by reason of civic prominence or military service, is not asserted even by so ardent a genealogist as his son Ezekiel, whom we have already quoted; probably he was a plain, brave farmer, fighting in defense of his home, and was ransomed according to a general custom of the time, upon his " praying for some relief." It is known that he came home to Simsbury, and died there in 1756; but his son Ezekiel removed to New Haven, where the first Rutherford (*The surname of an ancestor on the female side, who came to New Haven in 1643, and from whose daughter's marriage proceed the New Haven Trowbridges*) Hayes, grandfather of our candidate, was born. This Rutherford was in due time apprenticed to a blacksmith, and, removing from New Haven first to New Hampshire and then to West Brattleborough, Vermont, he wrought at his trade there many years in a forge which the people built to welcome him, and became a man of substance, a farmer and innkeeper, dying in 1836, the father of eleven children. The fifth of these, Rutherford, was an active and enterprising spirit, and he was already a thrifty farmer and merchant when, in 1817, the West, which was even then beginning to be the Great West, tempted his energies. He emigrated to Delaware, Ohio, bought land, established himself in prosperous business, and five years later died of a typhoid fever, leaving a wife and two children. Some three months

after, on the 4th of October, 1822, a son was born to him, and the widow called the child's name Rutherford Birchard Hayes, in memory of the father whose loss was yet so terribly new, and in grateful affection for that most loving brother (*Sardis Birchard, who died a few years since, at Fremont, Ohio. He had lived unmarried, and in the course of a long life had amassed a large property, which General Hayes inherits. He was a man not only of good heart and of great practical force of character, but of the best public spirit and of cultivated tastes. He gave a library and a park to the town of Fremont, and left to his nephew a gallery of pictures including works by some of the best American and modern French and German painters*) who thereafter a tender and devoted guardian of her fatherless children.

It is of this Rutherford Birchard Hayes that the present sketch treats, with an inadequacy which the reader may feel, though he cannot know the keen regret of the writer, whom the rich material in the family records, the letters, and the diaries placed at his service tempts to a work far beyond the scope and limits of this.

The Hayeses of the colonial times, from whom we have here traced Rutherford B. Hayes's descent in the direct line, were a strong, brave, simple race, following the plow, wielding the hammer, and hewing out their way as plain men must in a new land. After the first emigrant, George Hayes, of Scotland, who may have been of a less rigid faith, they seem to have taken the prevailing tint of Connecticut Puritanism — always less blue than it has been painted; and thereafter, till Rutherford's time, the evangelists, and the judges, the prophets, and the kings of Israel supply the serious names of their Daniels, Ezekiels, Aarons, Joels, Marthas, Zilpahs, and Rebeccas; there was, indeed, one Silence Hayes of the third generation, but the concession to imagination in her name is not in the liveliest spirit, and, considering that she was a woman, might appear a stroke of that grim irony which the austerest faith permits itself.

So far as we can learn, the Hayeses were never in public station and never enjoyed uncommon social distinction. But they had qualities of a sort apt, in an honest and thrifty stock, when the moment comes, to flower into greatness; and they had the gift, not yet extinct in their line, of winning superior women for their wives, through whom they united themselves with families of worth, learning, and piety. Ezekiel married a Russell, of those Russells who, first sojourning in Cambridge after their emigration from England, followed the Reverend Mr. Hooker into the Connecticut wilderness, when its first church troubles distracted our good town. They remained men of character and of a consideration which their Connecticut descendants still enjoy; but none has so distinct a claim upon our honor as that son of the original emigrant who concealed the fugitive Regicides at Hadley many years, and of whom it is written by the town historiographer, " He feared not to do what he thought to be right."

In his turn, Rutherford, the son of Daniel, wedded Chloe Smith, the daughter of Israel Smith, originally of Hadley, Massachusetts, but at the time of his daughter's marriage a principal citizen of Southwestern Vermont. The first of the family out of England was Leftenant Samuel Smith, who left his native town of Ipswich in 1663 and settled in Connecticut, where he was for twelve years a member of the Colonial Assembly. After his removal to Hadley, where he died in great esteem, he held many public trusts and was often chosen to the General Court. The family was always one of local distinction and unusual culture, and in a later generation one of Chloe's uncles went from college to preach to the Indians in Pennsylvania. He and one of his brothers, from becoming Sandemanians (" I don't know as there is any such in the country now," confesses Chloe Hayes in her diary, " nor do I know what their belief is") became loyalists, and fled to Nova Scotia at the outbreak of the Revolution; but Chloe's father, Israel, was a staunch

Whig and served under Washington, by whom he was entrusted with the arrest of certain Tories of that day, suspected of intriguing with the British in Vermont. He had lands specially granted him for his services, and he was one of three commissioners appointed to take charge of the property of refugee Tories; he was also a prominent partisan of the State of New York in her disputes with the new State of Vermont; he was employed on much public business connected with that now forgotten controversy, and he and his son-in-law both received lands from the grateful elder commonwealth.

Chloe Smith was the eldest of nine children, and, becoming the mother of eleven, lived to so great an age as to have left upon the memory of many surviving grandchildren and great-grandchildren the personal impression of her strong and resolute character, and her rugged Puritan virtues, tempered and softened by aesthetic gifts amounting almost to genius. It is to her that her posterity are fond of ascribing in vast measure whatever is best in their hereditary traits, and she certainly merits more than passing notice in the most cursory characterization of her grandson. Above all and first of all she was deeply religious, after the fashion of the days that we now think so grim, and she set her duty to God, as she knew it, before every earthly concern and affection. With a devotion almost as deep, she dedicated her days to incessant work, and her toil often saved the spirit that faltered in its religious gloom. She rose early and wrought late, as the wife' of a farmer and innkeeper, and the mother of eleven children, must, and as a woman of her temperament would; and she was as intolerant of idleness in others as in herself. Even the great-grandchildren had their tasks set them in their visits to this inveterate worker, who could not rest from her labors after eighty years. She was a famous cook, and the triumphs of her skill at Thanksgivings and other sufferable holidays were no less

her own pride than the solace of her guests. But she shone even more in needle-work and the now obsolete arts of the wheel and loom. "She knit more stockings, mittens, and gloves, wove more rag carpets, spun and wove more cloth, elaborated more wonderful rugs, lamp-mats, and bags, than any other woman of her generation," writes one of her grandsons; and the reminiscence of a granddaughter, at once touching and amusing, gives the color of the Puritanism which steeped in fear and misgiving the indulgence of such love of beauty as she permitted herself. "I spoke of her passion for worsted work. I have heard her say that Saturday afternoon she put it all into her workbasket, and pushed it under the bed as far as she could; then, taking out her prosy knitting-work, she tried to get it all out of her mind for Sunday!" Yet she was a true artist in this passion; her devices in worsted were her greatest delight, and she studied them from nature, going into her garden and copying the leaf or flower she meant to embroider. (*Most of her grandchildren inherited her artistic skill; among her great-grandchildren are Larkin G. Mead, the sculptor, and his brother, John Mead, who died in his Junior year at Harvard, and had already given promise in art. A series of lithographs illustrating student life were published after his death*) She had an almost equal passion for flowers, for which, doubtless, she suffered the same qualms. In her old age she kept a diary, which remains to her descendants and completely reflects her stern, resolute, duteous, God-fearing, yet most tender and loving soul. In a sketch of family history, with which she prefaces her journals, she laments, with a simple pathos which no words can reproduce without the context, her possible error in setting work and duty before some other things. "My husband .... would sometimes say,' The horse is standing in the barn, doing nothing. We will go and ride; it's no matter whether we stop anywhere.' But I would say,' I can't leave my work.' So he would not go, or go alone. Oh,

now I would say to every woman that has a good husband, Enjoy them while they are spared to you, or it will grieve you to the heart when it is too late — when all is over!" But this cry of regret, in a sorrow as keen as if the husband she had lost had been cut off in his prime, and not in the fullness of his eighty years, is almost the sole expression of misgiving in a diary to which she confesses everything, commits every hope, fear, doubt, and imparts every mood of her soul. The faded pages, recording so vividly a type of high character which has passed away with the changing order of things, are of almost unique interest, but this is not the time or place to explore them. Work, faith, duty, self-sacrifice, continual self-abasement in the presence of the Divine perfection, are the ideal of life which they embody — the old New England ideal. It was a stern and unlovely thing often in its realization; it must have made gloomy weeks and terrible Sabbaths; but out of the true stuff it shaped character of insurpassable uprightness and strength. It is to the indomitable will, the tireless industry, the rectitude, the whole, ever-vigilant conscience, which it fostered in his austere ancestress, that this man of our choice doubtless owes the virtues on which our hopes rest. From other progenitors come the genial traits, the fine and joyous humor, the quick cordiality, the amiable presence, which a superficial observation has mistaken for the whole man ; but from her the keen sarcasm, the active intellect, the ever-present sense of duty, the immovable purpose, the practical religiousness, now no longer bound to creeds but fully surviving in the blameless and useful life.

The mother of General Hayes was Sophia Birchard, whose family had removed from Connecticut to Vermont near the close of the last century. She too has left a diary, in which we recognize many of the same religious traits so strongly marked in her mother-in-law. The circumstances of her widowhood, in the strange new country (Mrs. Chloe Hayes, on her daughter's departure for the West, speaks of

her "leaving her native land," as if "the Ohio," so called in that day, were some unattainable foreign strand) whither she had followed her husband, no doubt tended to deepen the sad aspects of her faith at the expense of those happier hereditary instincts which in her brother became a strong love of art. She and her husband united with the Presbyterian Church, — the Western Puritanism,— and their children were reared in that faith, but the sole survivor of her family is not now a member of the sect in question, nor of any other, though a regular attendant, with his wife, at the Methodist services. Not many years after her husband's death, their oldest son was drowned, and there remained to the widowed mother only two of her children: a brother and sister, who grew up in a friendship most tender and affectionate on her part, and of passionate reverence and admiration on his. In a manuscript memoir of this adored sister, which must be sacred from more than a passing allusion, General Hayes recorded, shortly after her death, the simple facts of their early childhood in Delaware. It is now a pretty town of some eight thousand souls, seat of a Methodist college, and deriving its prosperity chiefly from one of the richest farming regions of Central Ohio. Its situation on the borders of the Olentangy is charmingly picturesque, and the painter Griswold drew his first inspirations from the surpassingly lovely country in which it lies. At the early period of which the memoir treats, the land was yet new, though the pioneer period had quite passed. Mrs. Hayes dwelt in a substantial brick house in the village, and drew a large part of her income from a farm left her by her husband in the neighborhood. Besides the guardianship of her brother, she had in the care of her children and house the help of one of those faithful friends whom it is cruel to call servants, and whom in this case the children both regarded with filial affection. But life in that time and country was necessarily very simple; this early home was in no sense an

establishment; when the faithful Asenath married and set up for herself in life, the mother and the sister did all the work of the household themselves. The greatest joys of a happy childhood were the visits the brother and sister made to the farm in the sugar season, in cherry time, at cidermaking, and when the walnuts and hickory-nuts were ripe; and its greatest cross was the want of children's books, with which the village lawyer's family was supplied. When their uncle Birchard began in business he satisfied their hearts' desire for this kind of literature, and books of a graver and maturer sort seem always to have abounded with them. They read Hume's and Smollett's English history together; the sister of twelve years interpreted Shakespeare to the brother of ten; they read the poetry of Mr. Thomas Moore (then so much finer and grander than now), and they paid Sir Walter Scott the tribute of dramatizing together his "Lady of the Lake," and were duly astonished and dismayed to learn afterwards that they were not the sole inventors of the dramatization of poems, — that even their admired "Lady of the Lake" had long been upon the stage. The influence of an elder sister upon a generous and manly boy is always very great; and it is largely to this sister's unfailing instincts and ardent enthusiasm for books that her brother owes his life-long pleasure in the best literature. She not only read with him; she studied at home the same lessons in Latin and Greek which he recited privately to a gentleman of the place; she longed to be a boy, that she might go to college with him; in the futile way she must, so remote from all instruction, she strove to improve herself in drawing and painting. One of their first school-masters was Daniel Granger, " a little, thin, wiry Yankee," of terrible presence but of good enough heart, whom "the love he bore to learning" obliged to flog boys of twice his own bulk, with furious threats of throwing them through the school-house walls, and of making them "dance like parched peas," — which dreadful behavior and

menaces rendered "all the younger children horribly afraid of him," and perhaps did not so much advance the brother's and sister's education as their private studies and reading had done: that is frequently the result of a too athletic zeal for letters on the part of instructors. The children were not separated for any length of time until the brother's fourteenth year, when he went away to the Academy at Norwalk, Ohio, and after that they were little together during his preparation for college in Middletown, Connecticut, and his college years at Kenyon College, Ohio. But throughout this time they wrote regularly to each other; she took the deepest interest in all his studies, their devoted affection continued in their maturer life, and when her death parted them it left him with the sorrow of an irreparable loss.

CHAPTER II. COLLEGE DAYS.

It was the wish of his preceptor at Middletown that Hayes should enter Yale College. "I was educated there myself," writes the worthy Mr. Isaac Webb, in a letter to the boy's mother, most commendatory of her son, " and feel a strong attachment to the institution; and I know its advantages He says he has perhaps given you an exaggerated idea of the expenses of Yale College. The necessary expenses, including everything except clothing and pocket-money, range from $150 to $200 only," — which the frugalest mother would not think very exorbitant even now. Then the writer adds testimony on a certain point in which our candidate has been painfully contrasted with the agricultural simplicity of Mr. Tilden: "I tell Rutherford that plain, decent dress is as much respected at New Haven as anywhere else; and a dandy is as much despised, and as great an object of ridicule and contempt, as he is in Ohio. I think Rutherford is judicious in his taste, and has as little ambition to be a fop as any of the rest of us." That such a man should in after life abandon himself to the excesses of fashion would, if true, be a fact really regrettable, except as the sole refuge of opponents who have found nothing else to allege against him.

It was settled, however, that Hayes should enter college in his native State, and he was therefore examined for the Freshman class at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, in November, 1838. Possibly because of his fitness for entering an institution of severer requirements, he records his passing the examination, and considers his Freshman studies at Kenyon with a coolness approaching

nonchalance; and his fellow-students of that day remember his overflowing jollity and drollery more distinctly than his ardor in study, though his standing was always good. Even in the serious shades of Middletown his mirthful spirit and his love of humor bubbled over into his exercise books, where his translations from Homer are interspersed with mock-heroic law-pleas in Western courts, evidently transcribed from newspapers, and every sort of grotesque extravagance in prose or rhyme. The increased dignity of. a collegian seems to have rebuked this schoolboyish fondness for crude humor: a common-placebook of the most unexceptionable excerpts from classic authors of various languages records the taste of this time, and the reflections on abstract questions in young Hayes's journals are commonly of that final wisdom which the experience of mankind has taught us to expect in the speculations of Freshmen and Sophomores. They are good fellows, hearty, happy, running over with pranks and jests, and joyous and original in everything but their philosophy, which must be forgiven them for the sake of the many people who remain Sophomores all their lives. Hayes was a boy who loved all honest, manly sports. He was a capital shot with the rifle, and he allotted a due share of his time to hunting, as well as fishing, — to which he was even more devoted, — swimming, and skating. Shortly after he went to Kenyon he records that he broke through the ice where the water was eight feet deep, and "was not scared much." His companions helped him out "without much trouble," and he adds, with something like indignant scorn, " I could have got up without any help." At Christmas time he walked forty miles home to Delaware in twelve hours, and after Christmas walked back to Gambier in four inches of snow.

There are few incidents, and none of importance, set down in these early journals. What distinguishes them from other collegian diaries, and gives them their peculiar value in any study of the man, is the evidence they afford of his

life-long habit of rigid self-accountability and of close, shrewd study of character in others. At the end of his third year he puts in writing his estimate of the traits, talents, and prospects of his fellow-students; and in a diary opened at the same time he begins those searching examinations of his own motives, purposes, ideas, and aspirations without which no man can know other men. These inquiries are not made by the young fellow of nineteen in any spirit of dreamy or fond introspection; himself interests him, of course, but he is not going to give himself any quarter on that account: he has got to stand up before his own conscience, and be judged for his suspected conceit, for his procrastinations, for his neglect of several respectable but disagreeable branches of learning, for his tendency to make game of a certain young college poet who supposes, himself to look like Byron; for his fondness, in fine, for trying the edge of his wit upon all the people about him. Upon consideration he reaches the conclusion that he is not a person of genius, and that if he is to succeed he must work hard, and make the very most of the fair abilities with which he accredits himself. He has already chosen his future profession, and he is concerned about his slipshod style, and his unreadiness of speech, which will never do for an orator. He is going to look carefully to his literature, and he takes an active interest in the literary societies of the college; about this time also he is one of "a few select friends" who found a club having for its stately object " the promotion of firm and enduring friendship among its members," and though he doubts whether the friendships thus systematically promoted will endure much beyond the graduation of the allies, he will do what he can for the club. He has to accuse himself at the mature age of nineteen of being still a boy in many things; even after he is legally a man, he shrewdly suspects, the law will have somewhat deceived itself in regard to him. He also finds that he is painfully bashful in society, but that great relief may be