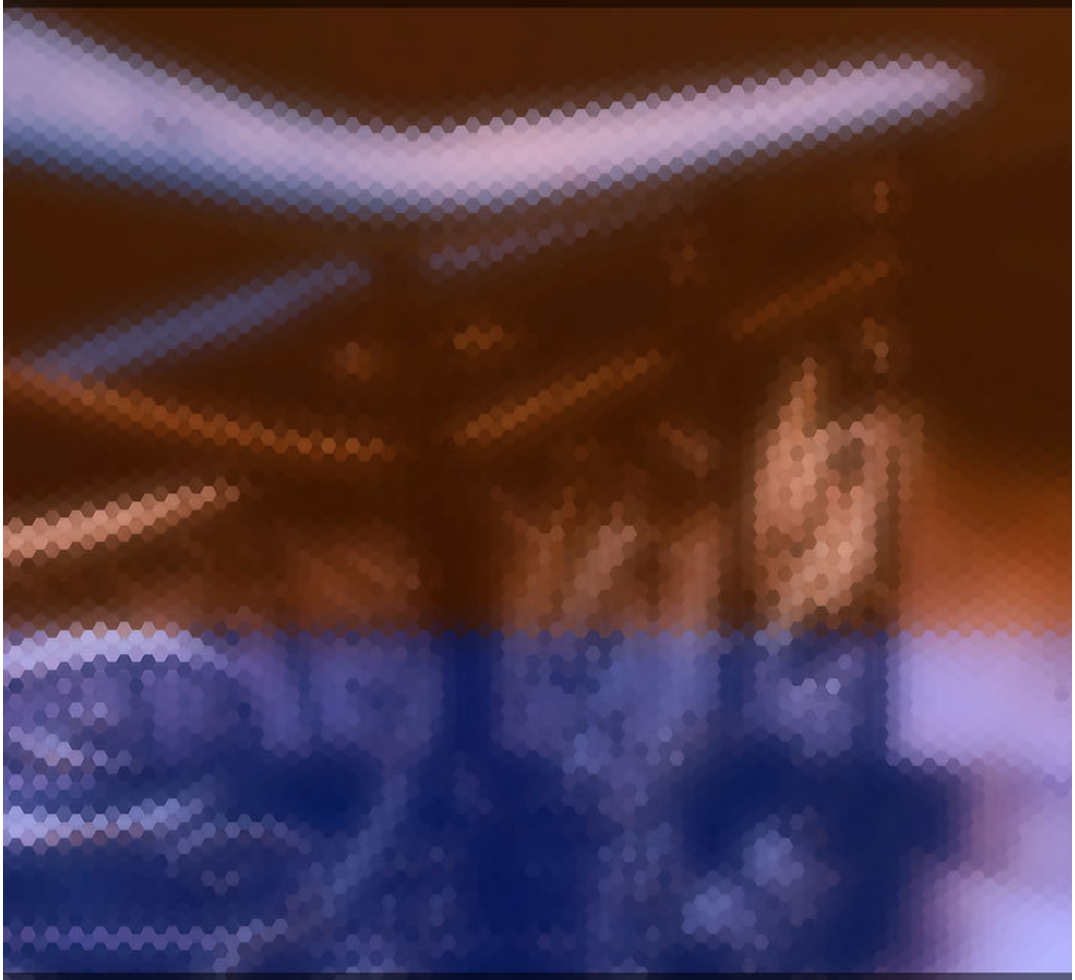
EDWARD STRATEMEYER



THE CHILDHOOD OF WILLIAM MCKINLEY

Edward Stratemeyer

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Published by
MUSAICUM
Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook Formatting -

musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066380809

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PREFACE

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THE life of William McKinley affords a shining example to all American boys of what honesty, perseverance, and a strict attention to duty can accomplish.

The twenty-fifth President of our Nation was born in a humble home, of humble parentage, and had to make his own way in life at an early age. When little more than a boy he taught school for a living, and at the age of eighteen he became a private in the army. He served through the whole of the great Civil War, and so faithful was he and so heroic that he became first a commissary sergeant, next a lieutenant, then a captain, and, finally, left the army a full-fledged major, twenty-two years old.

William McKinley could have remained in the army, and would undoubtedly have risen to a much higher rank had he done so. But this was against his mother's wish, and to please her then, as he had always tried to please her before, he gave up that hope and took to the law. Poor, but persevering, he studied until able to pass his examination, and then set up for himself, in a very humble way, in Canton, Ohio, which from that time on became his home. Here, as a lawyer, he served a term of two years as prosecutor of Stark County, and was a few years later nominated for Congress and elected to that honorable office.

As a congressman McKinley served his State and his Nation well for nearly fourteen years. At the conclusion of that time Ohio wanted a new governor, and McKinley was made such by a large majority of votes. So popular was he that, despite the loss of his private fortune through a friend

whom he had endeavored to help, when he came up for reëlection he was kept in the gubernatorial chair by a majority which was as astonishing as it was pleasing to him.

In all his long political career McKinley had been faithful not alone to his party, but also to his friends and to the public at large. Twice he might have had the nomination for the Presidency, but he had given his word to stand up for others and he would not allow that pledge to be broken.

But at last came the time when he stood free to accept the highest office within the gift of the American people. He was made President amid the good wishes of all members of his party, and later on was elected a second time by an increased vote, which showed that many who had formerly opposed him were now his supporters.

Thus it was that this unknown boy, this humble soldier, this obscure lawyer, climbed the ladder of success from the very bottom to the very top, rung by rung, toiling faithfully, conscientiously, and with a strong religious conviction that as long as he did what was right he had no reason to fear for the future. This alone is a lesson which every American youth will do well to remember.

But there are other lessons of equal importance. When William McKinley became President, his aged mother testified to the fact that her son had always been a good boy, that he had never disappointed her, and that she believed he had never told her a lie. Would that every mother in our broad land could say as much of her boy! And when William McKinley married and settled down, his domestic life was above reproach, and thousands can testify to his loving, tender care of a wife who was an invalid for many years.

A character that is so noble and so spotless is certainly well worth studying, and it is for this reason that the author has written this volume, hoping that its perusal will inspire boys to be true to themselves in the best meaning of that saying, doing, as faithfully as they can, all that their hands

find to do, and growing up into honest, wide-awake American citizens, to enjoy the prosperity which our departed President did so much to establish.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

OCTOBER 15, 1901.

CHAPTER I

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Birth and Birthplace of William McKinley — Ancestry — Early Training — Honesty and Truthfulness — First Days at School

"William was always a good boy. I could always depend upon him. He never gave me a cross word, and I don't believe he ever told me a lie."

Such are the well-remembered words of Mrs. Nancy McKinley, and they were the keynote of success in the life of the son who afterward became the President of our country. He was considerate to the last degree of his mother, his wife, his friends, and the welfare of his nation, and winning the high place that he did for himself, his life is well worth studying by every patriotic American youth.

William McKinley, the twenty-fifth President of the United States, was born in Niles, Trumbull County, Ohio, January 29, 1843. He was the seventh child in the family, and after him came two others, a boy and a girl. His parents were far from well-to-do, and had no influential friends; so it was apparent from the start that if the lad wished to make anything of himself it must be accomplished through his own determination and courage.

Determination and courage he had in plenty, for it was his by birth, coming to him through an ancestry which can be traced back with much interest to the days of MacBeth and MacDuff in the highlands of Scotland. Genealogists tell us that the McKinley or McKinlay family originated in the western part of Scotland, where they joined the Covenanter party and fought bravely against the persecution of the Stuart kings. They emigrated to the north of Ireland during the time of Charles II., helping to colonize the then desolate

fields of Ulster. From Ulster they came to America as part of that large body of Scotch-Irish colonists who did so much toward making this country what it is to-day.

James McKinley, the great-great-grandfather of the future President, came to America in a sailing vessel which, we are told, was not so large as the famous *Mayflower* of Puritan fame. Shortly after landing he took his way to Pennsylvania, and settled in York County, then little more than a wilderness, inhabited by Indians, and overrun with deer, buffalo, and other wild animals. Here, on May 16, 1755, his son David was born, — a rugged, fearless youth, who, when the colonists declared themselves free and independent, hastened to join the army under Washington, fighting with that same courage which distinguished his great-grandson during the Civil War.

Shortly after the end of the Revolution, David McKinley moved westward, first to Westmoreland and Mercer counties in Pennsylvania, and then to Columbiana County, Ohio. His son James moved from the homestead to New Lisbon in 1809, taking with him his two-year-old son William. James McKinley was engaged in the manufacture of iron, being what was commonly called a furnace man. As the son grew up, he too went into the iron business, becoming the manager of a furnace at New Wilmington, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, a position he maintained for upward of twenty years. This furnace was miles from the home of William McKinley, Sr.; but furnace work was not easy to be had in those days, and rather than give up his position, the father of the future President used to drive home every Saturday to see his family, and drive back to work early Monday morning.

In 1829, William McKinley, Sr., married Nancy Campbell Allison, a descendant of English-Dutch stock that came to America with William Penn. Her grandfather was active during the Revolution, and was known as a maker of bullets and cannon. He was a founder by trade, sturdy, stern, and

uncompromising — one of the men who said we must establish our freedom no matter what the cost.

The home in which William McKinley, the future President, first saw the light of day, was a plain, wooden, two-storied affair, having a pitched roof front and back. Downstairs, there was a little parlor, with a porch, where, years afterward, the struggling young lawyer delivered more than one political address. This house was standing up to 1895, although a part of the lower floor had been turned into a store. When the march of improvement demanded that the house be cut in two and part of it be removed, the man who had been born there was running for the Presidency, and some of the timbers of the building were manufactured into canes to be used by the campaign clubs marching in his honor!

In those days the town of Niles was little more than a struggling village, with a score of houses, one or two stores, a blacksmith shop, and a tavern or road hotel. The house stood close to the road, and next to it was a field with some trees, where William McKinley's brothers and sisters were wont to play. The town is nine miles northwest of the city of Youngstown, on the line of several railroads, and is given up chiefly to the iron industry.

The day upon which William McKinley was born was probably not unlike hundreds of other wintry days — cold, blustery, perhaps snowy, making the pedestrians gather their clothing tighter around them and hurry home faster than usual, giving no thought to the fact that in that unpretentious frame cottage a babe had been born whose name was to go down in history alongside that of the immortal Washington and Lincoln, a babe that was to become an earnest, far-seeing man, a soldier bent upon the task of saving this glorious Union to itself, a statesman, a governor, and at last a President who should guide this Nation through a war against oppression, giving to one set

of people their liberty, and to another the opportunities of an enlightened civilization.

William McKinley came into a family of strong religious convictions, and the prayers learned at his mother's knee were never forgotten. The family were Methodists, attending church regularly, also the weekly prayer meetings, and the children seldom missed in their Bible Class or Sunday School work. In fact, so strong was the church tendency of the family that William was in his early youth intended for the ministry.

"William is a good boy," said Mrs. Nancy McKinley. "Some day he may become a bishop. He's already clever at talking." But it was not to be. Instead of entering the theological seminary the youth became a lawyer. But in his mother's eyes he was always the same; for when he was inaugurated President for the first time, and she, straight as of old, but carrying the weight of many years, sat and saw, with honest pride, her son take the oath of office, and saw him receiving the congratulations of thousands, she said as of old: "William was always a good boy. I could always depend upon him. He never gave me a cross word, and I don't believe he ever told me a lie. I'm glad that he is President, for his sake, even though I did used to think he'd make a fine minister." What strong, glorious words for every youth in this broad land to remember: "*I could always depend upon him. He never gave me a cross word, and I don't believe he ever told me a lie*." Would that every mother could say as much of her own son.

And yet, lest some of my young readers may be inclined to think that William McKinley, the boy, was too goody-goody to suit them, let me add that such was far from being the case. He came from hard-working and fighting stock, and lived in a community where disputes were often settled with the fists. As a small boy, those who still remember him say he was a sturdy little fellow, not very tall, but broad of shoulder, and one who did not hesitate to take his own part

if imposed upon. There is no recollection of his having sought a quarrel, but a number of stories are told of his having been in them and come off the victor. But in the majority of cases William tried to act the peacemaker, just as he often acted the peacemaker in later life.

In his boyhood days William McKinley loved to fish, and the story is told that he was very patient and would wait for hours for a bite, sitting on the old wooden bridge which spanned a nearby stream. Once he sat there until dark, and when he got home his mother wanted to know where he had been.

"I was fishing, mother," he replied.

"Fishing?" said Mrs. McKinley. "Where is your fish?"

"I didn't catch any to-day. But I located a big fellow and I'll get him tomorrow."

At this his mother smiled. But he was as good as his word, and brought home the fish for supper.

In those days skates were scarce and cost more money than the average family cared to pay out for half a dozen boys and girls. William had to learn to skate on a pair of skates which another boy owned. This man tells that he used to lend Will the skates in return for being "towed around," and adds: —

"William was a good skater. He couldn't do much at fancy figures, but he could beat lots of the boys when it came to a straight out race. He'd swing along like a steam engine, often with a stick in both hands and a tippet flying from around his neck and under his arms."

William McKinley learned his letters at home, from his big brothers and sisters, but when six years of age he was taken to the village school at Niles, a small, primitive-looking building, with rough desks and hard wooden benches, — a building which has since become the office of a granite company. Here he was instructed in the three R's, — reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. He was naturally of a studious nature, and it is told that seven times out of ten he

was at the head of his class. Thus he learned to read at an early age, and before he was fifteen he had read nearly all the books which came within his reach.

CHAPTER II

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Removal to Poland — Life as a Schoolboy — The Debating Society — His Opinion of a Law Case

As the McKinley family were numerous and the paternal purse by no means large, it soon became a question of what should be done with so many boys and girls. The older ones had outgrown the Niles school, and there was no other school in the neighborhood to which they could be sent.

"We will move to Poland," said Mr. McKinley. "There are more chances there, and I want to do the best I can by the children." And to Poland the family moved when William McKinley was nine years old. Poland was well known for its educational facilities, for it boasted of two good institutes of learning, one controlled by the Methodists and the other by the Presbyterians. Shortly after the McKinley's came to the place the Presbyterian school was burned down, and then both institutions were merged into one, known as the Union Seminary.

Poland is located eight miles south of Youngstown, and is given over to mining and agriculture. The great railroads have passed it by, and consequently it has made scant advances since the time when William McKinley trudged its dusty roads on his way to the Union Seminary. Here his elder sister Annie taught for some years, and here the young scholar made a firm friend of another teacher, a Miss Blakelee, who, after serving the school for many years, left her position to be married. Miss Blakelee was McKinley's favorite teacher, rind when, in 1883, he went to Poland Academy to address the graduating class there, he paid her a glowing tribute for all she had done toward making him the scholar that he was.

In those days there was always plenty of work for William McKinley to do at home. He sawed and split wood, brought water, and did his share of house chores just as other boys have done and are doing to-day. He never shirked, but would get through as quickly as possible, that he might get back to his book or to some favorite problem in mathematics, for he was a lover of the latter study. When there was nothing else to do, he would often listen to the men talking about politics, state rights, and kindred subjects, and on several occasions he travelled to Youngstown with his school chums to listen to some political speakers. These were the days in which the question of slavery was uppermost in all men's minds, and the politicians waxed exceedingly warm in their arguments of what should and what should not be done.

"I'd like to be a politician and spout out like that," said one of the schoolboys one day, after listening to a speech.

"I'll tell you what we can do," answered McKinley. "We can organize or join a debating society. Then we can choose a subject to debate on, take sides, and have lots of fun, and it will be instructive, too."

The subject was broached to the boys and girls the next day and took like wildfire. Some thirty of them formed the club, and they obtained a small room where they might hold their meetings and do their debating. It was decided to call the club the Everett Literary and Debating Society, in honor of Edward Everett, the distinguished secretary of state, senator, and at one time president of Harvard College. In those days Everett was at the height of his fame, and was known from one end of the land to the other for his power as a debater.

The boys and girls were very proud of their society, and it was a happy day for William McKinley when he became its president and sat in the chair on the platform with the gavel in his hand. One cannot help but wonder if he had any

dreams in those days concerning the great and important places he was to occupy in the future.

Unfortunately there are no authentic records of the subjects which were debated by the society at this period, but they probably numbered a great variety. The slavery question was in everybody's mouth, and very likely it came in for a full share of the discussion. But it is a matter of record that William McKinley spoke often, giving the chair up to somebody else for that purpose, and that his manner so charmed those who listened to him that when it came time to vote for one side or the other of the debaters, he was generally found on the winning side.

At first the society room was but plainly furnished, with a small desk-like table, a few common chairs, and half a dozen benches. On the walls were a print of Washington and another of Jefferson, and between them a pair of crossed flags. The floor was bare.

"I think this society ought to have a carpet for the floor," said one of the girl members one day.

"Oh yes, let us have a carpet, by all means!" cried a number. "It would make the room look ever so much nicer."

When the question was put to the boys, some of them were doubtful. A carpet would cost a good deal of money, and besides, what would keep it from getting covered with mud on rainy meeting days? None of the roads around Poland were paved, and when it was wet, the shoes and boots of the members often became thickly covered with mud.

"We'll get a carpet," said the young president. "Let us all save up and contribute what we can, and when we've got it, we'll find some way to keep it clean."

So the society began to save up, and at last had enough money to purchase the carpet. A committee of the girls was appointed, and they went to a local store, where they selected a durable ingrain carpet having a groundwork of green, with red flowers and yellowish wreaths. When the

carpet was tacked down, it looked so new and beautiful that hardly anybody dared to step upon it.

"The boys will spoil the carpet with their muddy hobnailed boots," said one of the girl members.

"I move we make slippers for the boys to wear while attending the meetings," said another girl.

This motion was seconded and carried, and all the girls set to work to knit or embroider slippers for the male members of the society. But alas! by the time the next meeting took place the slippers were far from ready, and it rained in torrents. The boys came as usual, but stood outside in their muddy boots and shoes, not daring to venture a step farther, for fear of spoiling that nice new carpet.

"Let's take off our boots and shoes!" cried one boy. "We can hold the meeting in our stocking feet just as well!" And in a twinkling off came the muddy foot coverings, which the boys placed wherever it was convenient. And thus, in his stocking feet, William McKinley took the chair, and the business of the debating society proceeded.

In his younger years William McKinley had loved not only to go fishing and bathing, but also to go horseback riding, and a story is told of how he once won a race between another boy and himself on horseback between Poland and Youngstown. But as he grew older this love of outdoor sports diminished, although he loved horses and driving as long as he lived. More and more of his time was devoted to reading and studying, until some of his chums got to calling him "The studious William." Whenever there was a case to be tried in court, and he could get there, he went, and sitting in a corner, would drink in every word uttered by the lawyers and the judge.

"Well, what did you think of the case. William?" asked one of the lawyers of him, one day, after court was over.

"I thought it went the wrong way," was the quick answer.

"The wrong way? Why?"

"The defendant didn't bring out his evidence strong enough. He had a good case, it seemed to me. The goods he bought were not as good as they were represented to be, and it wasn't fair to make him pay the full price for them."

At this the lawyer smiled. "I think you are right, William," he said, "and I shouldn't be surprised to see the case appealed."

The case was appealed, and when tried in a higher court the verdict was for the defendant, just as William McKinley said it ought to be. This shows well how judicial was his turn of mind even when a youth.

CHAPTER III

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McKinley enters Allegheny College — A Close Student — Sickness and Return Home — Becomes A School Teacher — The Mutterings of Civil War.

William McKinley was blessed with the best of mothers, a kind, loving woman, who could still be firm when the occasion demanded it, and who did all she could to bring him up a sober, upright, God-fearing, Christian man. We have seen how he attended Sunday School regularly and how he was rarely absent from the McKinley pew in church. When between fifteen and sixteen years of age he joined the Methodist Church, and in this faith he remained to the day of his death. But, as becomes a great statesman, he was broad in his views, and in later life numbered among his friends people of all religious beliefs.

It was a great day for William McKinley when he graduated from the Union School of Poland. He had studied hard to acquit himself well, and if he was not at the head of the class he was very close to it, and he was one of the youngest of the boys and girls at that. It had been decided by his father and his mother, after a long conference, to send him to Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania, and when the youth was examined for admission it was found he had done so well that he was placed in the junior class, thus cutting off a year and more of the regular course.

In those days Allegheny College, which now boasts of Hulings Hall, Wilcox Hall, and other fine structures, consisted of but two buildings worth mentioning — Bentley Hall and Ruter Hall. The first of these, a neat building of brick, located on a hill north of the town, was built in 1820, and the second, also of brick, was built in 1855. Close to the