

## LXV. DEATH OF GARFIELD.

**I**N 1880 there was a new and very exciting election. The different parties were all eager, as usual, to have their candidates elected; but the Republicans had had much trouble in choosing theirs. While some wanted Grant for a third time, others cried, "Anything to beat Grant," because they thought it wrong to let a man serve more than eight years, Washington and Jefferson having both refused to do so. Blaine, who had been Hayes' chief rival in the Republican party four years before, and whom his friends called the "Plumed Knight," was again suggested, but his friend, James A. Garfield, was finally chosen, and when the election was held he was successful.



James A. Garfield.  
*Library of Congress.*

The new President was a great favorite, and everyone respected him very much. Although so poor that he was once a "mule boy" on a canal towpath, Garfield nevertheless managed to educate himself. By dint of great efforts, he became the head of a college, and for this reason he has sometimes been called the "Teacher President." Later on he won great praise in the Civil War. He took part in the battles of Shiloh and Chickamauga, where he shone by his bravery; and he was then elected a member of Congress.

Garfield had barely been inaugurated (1881), when, as usual, office seekers began to make his life a burden. Still, sharing Hayes' feelings, he said he would not remove men who were doing their work well; and he thus made some people who wanted places very angry.

One morning in July, the President's son came bouncing into his room, and, taking a flying leap over the bed, merrily cried, "There! You are President of the United States, but you can't do that!" The President laughed at the boy's challenge, and a few seconds later proved he could not be beaten, even in jumping. That same day, while in the best health and spirits, Garfield set out for a train which was waiting to take him east.

Suddenly, an obscure man who had tried in vain to get a government position stepped up behind him in the depot and shot him twice in the back. Garfield fell to the floor. His

friends rushed to help the wounded President, and carefully carried him home. But, in spite of the utmost skill, the doctors could not save the President, who daily grew worse.

He was such a strong man, however, that he lingered on until the middle of September. All through this long illness Garfield gave a most noble example to the whole country by his patience and courage in great suffering. Hoping that sea air would help him rally, his friends finally carried him to El'ber-



The Attack on President Garfield.

on, New Jersey. Silent crowds collected at every station to see his car speed past, and the bulletin board was anxiously watched to find out how the President was standing the journey, for all hoped he would soon get better. But he was not to recover, and after a little more suffering passed quietly away.

After lying in state in the Capitol in Washington, the body of this "Martyr President"—for Garfield shares that name with Lincoln—was carried to Cleveland, Ohio, where an imposing funeral took place, and where his grave is often visited.

Garfield's murderer was caught very soon after he had fired those fatal shots; and while people were so angry they wanted to lynch him, the police took charge of him and brought him before a jury. There were so many who had seen the crime that he could not have denied it, even if he had wished to do so.

At the trial, people found out that the murderer was such a wicked and stupid man that he fancied it would be a fine thing to commit a crime which would make his name known everywhere and prevent its being ever forgotten. His wicked wish has come true, but his name now stands in our history even lower than those of Arnold and of Lincoln's murderer in the eyes of all good Americans.

It is true that Arnold was a base traitor, but for many years before that he had been a noble patriot, and he lived to repent of the wrong he had done. The murderer of Lincoln

was the vile assassin of a good man, but he had thought so long over the sufferings of the Confederates that he was half insane when he killed the President.

When the murderer of Garfield was tried, his lawyer attempted to prove that this criminal did not deserve punishment because he was out of his right mind; but it was shown that he had been sane enough to plan the murder some time before. When the jury heard this, they decided that the law should take its usual course, and he was hanged.

All through Garfield's illness, Vice President Chester A. Arthur was in a very delicate position. By our Constitution he was to take the President's place only in case of the latter's death, resignation, or inability to discharge his duties. But it was at first impossible to decide whether the President would recover or not, and as no great event took place at that time to make it necessary, Arthur firmly refused to take Garfield's place.



Garfield's Tomb, Cleveland.

But a few hours after Garfield had breathed his last, Arthur, who was known as "the first gentleman in the land," on account of his kind, true feelings and courteous manners, took the presidential oath.

While Garfield lay hovering between life and death, Arthur himself was also taken very ill. For a time it seemed as if the country would be left without any President at all. To prevent such a thing ever happening, Congress made a law (1885) saying that if President and Vice President both died, the President's place was to be taken by a certain member of the Cabinet. Therefore it is only in case the President, Vice President, and seven Cabinet members die, that our country can be without a head.

Congress also said it was high time to put an end to the "spoils system," by which each new President was annoyed by office seekers. So it was decided that a great many of the positions in the government offices were to be given only to such as proved themselves most capable, by passing civil-service examinations (1883).

