

**MEMORIAL ADDRESS ON  
THE LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF WILLIAM MCKINLEY**

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Memorial Address on the Life and Character of William McKinley by John Hay

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**JOHN HAY**

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HON. JOHN HAY



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## WILLIAM McKINLEY.

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Once more, and for the third time, the Congress of the United States are assembled to commemorate the life and the death of a President slain by the hand of an assassin. The attention of the future historian will be attracted to the features which reappear with startling sameness in all three of these awful crimes. the uselessness, the utter lack of consequence of the act; the obscurity, the insignificance of the criminal; the blamelessness—so far as in our sphere of existence the best of men may be held blameless—of the victim. Not one of our murdered Presidents should have had an enemy in the world; they were all of such preeminent



purity of life that no pretext could be given for the attack of passional crime; they were all men of democratic instincts who could never have offended the most jealous advocates of equality; they were of kindly and generous nature, to whom wrong or injustice was impossible; of moderate fortune, whose slender means nobody could envy. They were men of austere virtue, of tender heart, of eminent abilities, which they had devoted with single minds to the good of the Republic. If ever men walked before God and man without blame, it was these three rulers of our people. The only temptation to attack their lives offered was their gentle radiance: to eyes hating the light that was offense enough.

The stupid uselessness of such an infamy affronts the common sense of the world. One can conceive how the death of a dictator may change the political conditions of an

empire; how the extinction of a narrowing line of kings may bring in an alien dynasty. But in a well-ordered Republic like ours, the ruler may fall, but the state feels no tremor. Our beloved and revered leader is gone; but the natural process of our laws provides us a successor, identical in purpose and ideals, nourished by the same teachings, inspired by the same principles, pledged by tender affection as well as by high loyalty to carry to completion the immense task committed to his hands, and to smite with iron severity every manifestation of that hideous crime which his mild predecessor, with his dying breath, forgave. The sayings of celestial wisdom have no date; the words that reach us, over two thousand years, out of the darkest hour of gloom the world has ever known, are true to the life to-day: "They know not what they do." The blow struck at our dear friend and ruler was as deadly

as blind hate could make it; but the blow struck at anarchy was deadlier still.

What a world of insoluble problems such an event excites in the mind! Not merely in its personal, but in its public aspects, it presents a paradox not to be comprehended. Under a system of government so free and so impartial that we recognize its existence only by its benefactions; under a social order so purely democratic that classes can not exist in it, affording opportunities so universal that even conditions are as changing as the winds, where the laborer of to-day is the capitalist of to-morrow; under laws which are the result of ages of evolution, so uniform and so beneficent that the President has just the same rights and privileges as the artisan, we see the same hellish growth of hatred and murder which dogs equally the footsteps of benevolent monarchs and blood-stained despots. How many countries can join with us