

# The Story of The Presidents

By Albert Payson Terhune

## NO. 35.—CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR.

*Twenty-first President (1830-1886), very tall, strongly built. Strikingly handsome. Large dark eyes, regular features, mustache and side whiskers.*

**C**HESTER ALAN ARTHUR is spoken of as a New Yorker. But he was born in Vermont; nor did he come to New York City until he was twenty-three. His father was a clergyman. Chester was the eldest of his nine children. Clergymen's salaries in those days were small, and the Arthur family was large. Life was not always pleasant for the future President nor education easy to acquire. Yet he managed to enter the sophomore class at Union College in 1845, when he was only fifteen. There he showed first the wonderful qualities of popularity and personal magnetism that were later to help so greatly in making him a political leader.

He worked his way through college by teaching school during vacation months and by giving lessons in penmanship. At one district academy he met with an adventure much like that which marked Garfield's start as a teacher. Arthur wrote of this in later years as follows:

"My school commenced. It was composed of motley races of brats. \* \* \* There was but one battle. A strong farmer's boy endeavored to overthrow your humble servant, and his authority, at the same time. But, thanks to agility and gymnastic practice, there was a triumph for the teacher."

At eighteen, Arthur was graduated from college and took up the study of law, eking out a living meantime as tutor for boys about to enter college and as school principal. In 1853, having saved \$500, he moved to New York and entered a law office. As soon as he was admitted to the bar he went West, and wandered from State to State looking for a good place to practise his profession. But the West did not suit him and he came back to New York. Here, almost at once, he met with success as a lawyer. He was member of a firm engaged to fight for the rights and freedom of slaves whose masters had brought them to New York on the way to and from slave States. Arthur's firm won the case.

Soon afterward a negro Sunday school teacher was shoved off a Fourth avenue horse car, as the New York City lines did not allow negroes on their cars. The teacher appealed to Arthur, who brought suit for damages and won a verdict for \$500. This decision forced all local transit companies to accept negroes as passengers. It also did much to establish Arthur's fame as a shrewd lawyer.

Soon after the outbreak of the civil war Arthur was appointed Quartermaster-General for New York. On him rested the duty of preparing, equipping and forwarding to the front the State's quota of troops. The work was hard, but Arthur accomplished it with a brilliancy and thoroughness that won universal praise. As Inspector-General (with military rank of Brigadier-General), in 1862, he did equally valuable service. Leaving the army on the last day of that year he went back to his New York law practice. For ten years he was prominent not only as a lawyer but as a Republican political leader. He belonged to the "Stalwart" wing of his party and was an ardent Grant man.

Appointed Collector of the Port of New York in 1871, he brought to his new duties the same thoroughness and ability that had marked his military career. President Hayes, in 1878, removed him from office, in spite of an almost general protest. An investigation of his work as Collector was ordered. This inquiry served merely to prove Arthur's splendid ability and honesty in the high position. The Republican convention of 1880 nominated him for Vice-President. In that office he exerted his influence for Conkling and the other "Stalwarts" in their opposition to Garfield. The latter's untimely death on Sept. 19, 1881, put an end to the clash. On Sept. 20, Arthur privately took the Presidential oath in his home at No. 123 Lexington avenue, New York, and went at once to Washington, where the oath was again administered.

Arthur's three and a half years in the White House were marked by no especially memorable historic features. He was a dignified, polished President and performed his state duties conscientiously. He opposed public extravagance and acted with wise firmness in regard to the Indian question and the suppressing of polygamy among the Mormons. During his administration the price of letter postage was lowered from three to two cents, and other important postal improvements were made.

In 1884, at the Republican convention, his name was brought forward for re-nomination. But on the fourth ballot James G. Blaine was nominated. Arthur returned to New York at the close of his term, where, on Nov. 18, 1886, he died suddenly from a stroke of apoplexy.

There are several interesting points in common between Arthur's career and Roosevelt's. Both had military and civic records. Both were residents of New York City when nominated for Vice-President. Each succeeded to the Presidency through the murder of an Ohio President who was an ex-civil war officer and former Congressman.

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