

always responded to our appeals for assistance; especially when it meant the increase of our collections.

C. S. B.

CALVIN COOLIDGE

Calvin Coolidge, president of the American Antiquarian Society, died January 5, 1933. Elected to the office in October 1929, he thus served less than four years as the chief administrator of the Society's affairs. This is not the place for a biography of Mr. Coolidge. Many lengthy volumes, not to mention his own Autobiography, narrate in detail the facts of his life. All that will be attempted here is a brief sketch of his career and then a comprehensive account of his connection with the Society.

Calvin Coolidge was born at Plymouth, Vermont, July 4, 1872. He was a descendant in the tenth generation from the colonist John Coolidge, who came from Cottenham, Cambridgeshire, England, to Watertown in 1630. His line came down from the second son, Simon, whereas the Boston Coolidges descended from the sixth son, Jonathan. Mr. Coolidge's great-great-grandfather, John Coolidge, who served in the Revolutionary War, removed from Bolton, Massachusetts to Plymouth, Vermont, about 1781, cleared a farm, and was the father of Calvin, father of Calvin Galusha, father of John Calvin, father of Mr. Coolidge. His grandfather, Calvin Galusha Coolidge, died at Plymouth in 1878, but the widow, Sarah Almeda Brewer, had a great influence on her grandson's early life and lived until 1906. His father, John Calvin Coolidge, married Victoria Josephine Moor who died in 1885, and for his second wife, Carrie A. Brown, who died in 1920. On his mother's side Mr. Coolidge was descended from James Franklin of Swansea, as he himself told me once when inquiring whether there could be any connection of this with the Benjamin Franklin line.

Mr. Coolidge was christened John Calvin Coolidge,

but because of the sameness with his father's name, he was always called Calvin, and at the end of his boyhood the name John was discarded. Strange it is that so many Presidents of the United States have had their names undergo similar transformations—Hiram Ulysses Grant, Stephen Grover Cleveland, Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

Like every other boy brought up on a farm, Calvin Coolidge pursued the routine of constant contact with nature—tapping the maple trees for sugar in the spring, planting the crops, shearing the sheep, harvesting the hay and grain, carting the lumber to the saw-mill in winter, and at all times caring for the livestock. But it was a healthy life, both for mind and body. He was always fond of the country and of the soil. In later life he said: "It was all a fine atmosphere in which to raise a boy. As I look back on it I constantly think how clean it was. There was little about it that was artificial. It was all close to nature and in accordance with the ways of nature. The streams ran clear. The roads, the woods, the fields, the people—all were clean. Even when I try to divest it of the halo which I know always surrounds the past, I am unable to create any other impression than that it was fresh and clean."

His father was not only a prosperous farmer, but also a storekeeper and a magistrate of local affairs. Like his father before him, he was a member of the State Legislature and interested in political events. Therefore the young son could observe first-hand the practical workings of government, of law, and of the meting of justice. The object lessons thus learned in his earliest years were to stay with him through life.

When he was twelve years old, his mother, long an invalid, passed away. In his Autobiography, he described his mother in words characteristically beautiful and imaginative: "There was a touch of mysticism and poetry in her nature which made her love to gaze at the purple sunsets and watch the evening stars. Whatever was grand and beautiful in form and color attracted her. It seemed as though the rich green

tints of the foliage and the blossoms of the flowers came for her in the springtime, and in the autumn it was for her that the mountain sides were struck with crimson and with gold." Her death and that of his loved sister Abbie, at the age of fifteen, made lasting impressions on the boy.

In spite of his work on the farm, even as a child he had considerable opportunity for reading. Although his father read little but the papers, his grandfather Moor and his grandmother Coolidge were well read, and there were many books on the farm that appealed to the young boy. One late summer day in 1931, I visited him at Plymouth and we were looking over some old family books which were in the storeroom back of the homestead. I noticed copies of "Green Mountain Boys" and "The Rangers" and said: "There are two books by Daniel P. Thompson, very popular in their day." "Yes," he replied, "those stories of Vermont in the Revolution are the very first that I can remember. My grandmother read them aloud to me." He picked up a copy of Bancroft's abridged Life of Washington and remarked, reflectively, "It is strange, but the character of Washington never appealed to me as a boy. He was too wise and serene and omniscient. Ethan Allan seemed to me more inspiring. It takes maturity to understand Washington." I should like to own those books that constituted Mr. Coolidge's earliest reading.

His schooling began in the village school at the age of five. By thirteen he had mastered the common school subjects and entered Black River Academy at Ludlow. Here he studied algebra and geometry, the classics, ancient history, civil government, and French, and here he graduated at the age of seventeen, taking as his graduating oration "Oratory in History." Decided upon entering Amherst College, in the fall of 1890 he was prevented by a severe illness which kept him at home until winter, after which he took a spring course at St. Johnsbury Academy in further preparation for college.

The following fall he entered Amherst with the class of 1895, composed of about eighty-five boys. He studied industriously throughout the four years, refraining from college sports but keeping in good health through physical exercise. He continued with Latin and Greek, supplemented by French, Italian, and German, followed mathematics through calculus, took all the courses that were given in history, and toward the end of his course became especially interested in philosophy. Amherst had an excellent faculty, with Merrill E. Gates as president, George D. Olds in mathematics, Anson D. Morse in history, and Charles E. Garman in philosophy. According to Mr. Coolidge's own testimony no teacher influenced him so much as Professor Garman, who taught him to weigh conflicting facts, to place truth above expediency, and to exalt service. With his keen powers of observation and his retentive memory, Mr. Coolidge had the clearest recollections of his college life. Few men thirty-five years out of college could remember so much of the details of their education. In 1895 he was graduated *cum laude* with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

In the autumn of 1895 he decided to study law at Northampton and entered the office of Hammond and Field. In twenty months he was admitted to the bar, and in February 1898 started in practice by himself. He records that his income from the law for his first year was \$500, and the second year \$1400. Through industry and inspiring confidence he acquired an excellent practice. In 1899 he was appointed City Solicitor and in 1903 Clerk of the Courts. On October 4, 1905 he married Grace A. Goodhue, a graduate of the University of Vermont at Burlington, and at the time teaching in the Clark School for the Deaf at Northampton.

His decided interest in public affairs rapidly drew him into political life. His first office was as a member of the Republican City Committee in 1898. After that in quick succession he was elected a member of the Common Council, chairman of the Republican City

Committee, representative in the Massachusetts Legislature, Mayor of Northampton in 1910, a member of the Massachusetts Senate in 1911, president of the Senate in 1914, Lieutenant-governor in 1915, and Governor in 1918. He was highly regarded and invariably ran ahead of his ticket. His adherence to high ideals, his loyalty in keeping promises, his conservatism, and his insistence upon economy all gained him the confidence of the people. His administration was notably excellent and he was re-elected in 1919.

Although widely known in New England, Governor Coolidge was brought to the attention of the nation by a series of events which happened in September 1919. The police of Boston sought to form a labor union, in violation of a rule of their department, and instituted a strike, leaving Boston defenceless and subject for one night to mob rule. Governor Coolidge took charge of the situation, backed the Commissioner of Police and in response to a telegraph from the head of the American Federation of Labor, replied: "There is no right to strike against the public safety by any body, any time, any where." The police strike was a subject of great national interest, and this phrase caught the attention of the nation. Mr. Coolidge took up the issue further in his campaign for re-election as Governor and won by the largest majority to that time cast for the office. President Wilson sent him a telegram: "I congratulate you upon your election as a victory for law and order." Mr. Coolidge immediately became a national figure.

In the Republican campaign for nominations to the Presidency in the fall of 1919, Governor Coolidge's name was strongly advanced in Massachusetts as a candidate. But he thought it unwise to enter into such a contest and announced that he was unwilling to be considered a candidate. In spite of this at the Republican Convention he received thirty-four votes. Senator Warren G. Harding was finally nominated. When it came to the nominations for the Vice-presidency, the State of Oregon placed Mr. Coolidge's name in nomina-

tion, there was almost a landslide in his favor, and he received about three-quarters of all the votes cast.

How the ticket of Harding and Coolidge was elected, how Mr. Coolidge faithfully administered the duties of the Vice-presidency during the trying years of changing over a nation from a war to a peace basis, and how the sudden death of Warren G. Harding on August 2, 1923 elevated him without warning to the Presidency, are well-known matters of national history. The taking of the oath in the little sitting room of the Plymouth homestead and his visit to his mother's grave before starting on his pilgrimage to Washington, both acts so natural to his character, brought him into closer touch with the people and endeared him to their thoughts.

It was but natural that he should be nominated and elected to the Presidency in 1924. The people had confidence in him. They respected his honesty and courage. They valued his advocacy of thrift and industry. The accomplishments of his administration are part of the country's historical record. Perhaps the most lasting result was his influence upon the national mind, inspiring people toward conservatism, honorable dealings, and the seeking for truth. No one ever had a higher regard for the sacredness of public office. To him it was a trust, to be faithfully discharged without consideration of self interest. When the end of his administration arrived and he sent out his famous message that he did not choose to run for another term, it simply meant that he did not think that it was best for the country for him to succeed himself. He therefore retired, with the desire to serve the country again, but as a private citizen. It was a privilege that was given to him for less than four years.

Mr. Coolidge left the White House for Northampton in March 1929. Immediately he was besieged with numerous offers to take up new lines of work or assume the presidency of many kinds of organizations. Friends suggested lecture tours, the presidency of colleges, or lucrative directorships on large business corporations. But all of these he refused, some

because he considered them undignified, some because they were commercial and some because they were burdened with detail. The single exception was his accepting without remuneration a directorship in the New York Life Insurance Company, of which his friend Darwin P. Kingsley was president, and this was chiefly due to his belief in the value of life insurance as a means of encouraging saving and thrift.

When Chief Justice Rugg suggested that Mr. Coolidge might assume the presidency of the American Antiquarian Society after the death of Dr. Charles L. Nichols, most of the officers thought that there was little chance of his considering it. It is true that he had been a member since 1925 and was somewhat familiar with its work. Also because of nearby residence he knew many of its officers. Letters were written to him bringing the matter to his attention. He replied by asking for details regarding the history and work of the Society, in response to which several reports and handbooks were sent to him. Among this literature was a mention of the fact that the Society had numbered eleven Presidents of the United States in its membership—John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Rutherford B. Hayes, Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, Woodrow Wilson, and himself—and President Taft had been a member of its Council. After considering the matter for a fortnight, he wrote signifying his willingness to assume the presidency of the organization. Once I asked him why he had accepted this position when he had declined so many others. He replied that it was partly due to the fact that any request made by Chief Justice Rugg was worthy of the most careful consideration, but that primarily he was anxious to continue personal contacts with his fellow men. He also said that Senator Albert J. Beveridge had told him much about the help which the Society had given him when he was writing his *Life of Lincoln*. It must have been strange to Mr. Coolidge after so many active years in politics, sudden-

ly to be retired to private life and to live in a small New England town where there were few outside contacts except those of his own choosing. He saw some partial relief from this condition in the knowledge that through the Antiquarian Society he would meet several times a year men from various sections of the country, even though they worked in a field with which he was not especially familiar.

The first meeting at which Mr. Coolidge presided was in Boston in April 1930. There he made a graceful speech of acceptance in which he referred to the value of the study of history and his belief in the work which the Society was doing. With a rather personal touch he said that he could still be addressed as "Mr. President" and feel that the phrase was not a misnomer. This particular meeting in Boston was significant in that the two important subjects discussed were connected with the lives of Presidents Washington and Jefferson, that one of the papers was read by the son of President Tyler, and that the meeting was presided over by Mr. Coolidge himself.

Generally speaking, Mr. Coolidge said very little in conducting the meetings of the Society, but attended strictly to the business of the meeting, just as he had done in presiding over political affairs. He rapidly fell into the routine of the Society's work, taking over whatever duties came to him. He wrote and read the Report of the Council in October 1930 and 1931. But in October 1932 he asked to be excused, saying that duties placed upon him in connection with the political campaign then in progress and his connection with the railroad investigation gave him little spare time.

Mr. Coolidge always showed much interest in the Society's collection and frequently sent to the Library books and documents which he thought would be useful. When I visited him at Plymouth in the summer of 1931, he showed me a collection of family books which belonged to his father and grandfather and willingly agreed to my taking many of these for the Antiquarian Society's library. On January 4, the very night before

he died, he mailed to the Society an envelope with several early documents, written by members of the Coolidge family, although not those of his own particular line. On the week of his death I had planned to visit him at Northampton to talk over certain matters regarding the increase of the Library.

Mr. Coolidge did not miss a single meeting of the Council during the three years that he was president. There were four meetings a year and this meant twelve meetings in all. Generally he visited my house in Worcester, arriving just before luncheon, which left half an hour to talk and smoke before the Council meeting. He was an inveterate smoker, preferring mild domestic cigars. At the time of the Annual Meeting in October, that is, in October 1930 and 1932, he stayed over night at my house, and on both occasions sat up until midnight, after the Council meeting, indulging freely in conversation and reminiscence.

Mr. Coolidge has always been called taciturn and silent. This was true of him at public affairs where he was surrounded by groups of men, and especially if these men were not well known to him. When he first met the Society's officers at a luncheon given at the Worcester Club in 1929, he scarcely said a word during the entire meal, apparently preferring to listen, and answered questions only by monosyllables. But when he was alone and chose to talk, he was a prolific conversationalist. Several times while visiting me, he sat with me alone in my library and conversed for over two hours continuously, talking on a great variety of subjects—prohibition, political speech-making, life at the White House, Washington newspaper correspondents, the economic situation, book-collecting, or any topic of the day. He was a great reader, interested especially in history, essays, and biography, although I doubt whether he read current fiction.

He was a man of far greater culture than was generally realized. Even after graduation from college he read much of Milton and Shakespeare and translated into English the orations of Cicero. One night he

asked if I did not have some fine early bindings, so I showed him an edition of Dante which was translated into English in a volume of over six hundred pages. I remarked: "Who could ever wade through this bulky volume!" And to my surprise, he answered: "I once read the whole of Dante in the original Italian." "What!" I replied, "that to me would seem almost an impossibility. Did you do it in your college days?" "No," he said, "it was years after I graduated from college, and I did not finish it until after I was married." Then he continued: "I always liked Italian and French and read many books in the original, but German was considerable of a stumbling-block."

He told me about the building up of his library at the White House. When he first went there, he said that there was little more than a long set of Blackwood's Magazine which he relegated to the attic. Then the books began to pile up until when he left Washington for Northampton, there were forty cases of books, with over four thousand volumes in all. When the homestead at Plymouth was remodelled, place was made for this library, and the planning and filling of the room was a source of great pleasure to him. He said that in practically every volume he had placed his bookplate, the work having been done in Washington by some workers who came over from the Library of Congress. I said: "But what did you leave at the White House?" And he replied: "The set of Blackwood's Magazine!"

Political speech-making was a tremendous bore to Mr. Coolidge and he thought it much overdone. He had made his notable campaign speech in behalf of President Hoover only a week or so before he visited me on October 17. I told him that I thought his speech a remarkably fine document and that it sounded very well over the radio. He said: "I didn't think much of it. I expected that I would have ten days to prepare it, and finally prepared it in three. Writing it in Plymouth didn't give me much time to verify my facts."

I said: "Are you going to make another speech during the campaign?" "No," he replied, "one speech is better than six." During the Tercentenary year in Massachusetts he had over two hundred requests to make speeches at various towns in the State, and he made but one.

One of the most notable characteristics shown by Mr. Coolidge in conversation, as well as in public utterance, was his fairness and impartiality. He could always look at both sides of an argument and seldom did he make up his mind until he had heard all sides. I referred to high wages as a primary cause of inflation. He said: "Don't forget that many employers are responsible for higher wages, for it gives them the opportunity for increased profits." He could see the side of the working man just as readily as that of the operator.

His conversation was frequently punctuated with epigrams or observations containing subtle wit. This even came to the surface during his conduct of a meeting when a Council member was telling of the great value of the Gutenberg Bible and of the magnificent copy which Congress had recently bought from a European collector for a fabulous sum. "Well," Mr. Coolidge remarked with a smile, "I should think that an ordinary copy of the King James version would have been good enough for those Congressmen."

As a writer, Mr. Coolidge possessed a style that was convincing and always grammatically correct. He used short sentences and invariably chose good Anglo-Saxon words. In much of his writing, especially his Autobiography, the description of some event in his life or some general happening ends with a reflective comment, providing a moral or making the narrative of value to the reader. There was a decided imaginative quality in much of his writing. In fact, one of the least suspected sides of Mr. Coolidge's nature was his idealism and his susceptibility to emotional thought—overlooked during his lifetime, but which in due course will come to be considered one of the most impressive phases of his character. It was shown in his love of

poetry, his fondness for children and for dogs, and in the frequent use of imagery in his writings. He once said: "I should not want to think of heaven without children there"; and of his favorite collie dog which had just died, he said: "He was a stately gentleman of great courage and fidelity." What could be finer than the ending of his tribute to his native state of Vermont, "Here I first saw the light of day; here I received my bride; here my dead lie pillowed on the breast of the everlasting hills." And then the inscription in a book which he sent to Edward K. Hall who had recently lost a son, at about the same time as the death of young Calvin Coolidge: "To Edward K. Hall: In recollection of his son and my son, who had the privilege by the grace of God to be boys through all eternity. Calvin Coolidge."

I think that Mr. Coolidge's most outstanding trait was his kindness and his sympathy. He never forgot a friend and had a surprising habit of remembering trivial happenings, if they concerned those whom he liked and trusted. He had the faculty of inspiring a really fond affection from those with whom he was closely brought into contact. His character was so strongly made up of honesty, fairness, adherence to ideals, and courage, that they stood out above other qualities throughout his whole life. Truly, a man with a soul which looked inwards and tried to interpret the mysteries of life, whose own life was given to serve his fellow men, must live forever in the hearts of the people. Like Abraham Lincoln's, his is the common heritage.

C. S. B.

ALFRED JOHNSON

Alfred Johnson, historian and genealogist, died in Boston, January 13, 1933. He was born in Boston, June 28, 1871, the son of Edward and Georgiana Parker (Miller) Johnson. After a preparatory education at Chauncy Hall School and at Phillips Andover, he entered Harvard College in 1891. Although his

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.