

Calvin Coolidge—Twenty Years After

BY CLAUDE M. FUESS

IN 1925 the Honorable Calvin Coolidge was elected a member of this Society. This is not astonishing, for eleven Presidents of the United States have been among our members, including even Andrew Jackson, whose acquaintance with scholarly lore must have been limited. But Mr. Coolidge was later, in October, 1929, chosen as our President, by the customary unanimous vote, and thus continued to be addressed in some quarters, and with accuracy, by his former title. He was suggested for the position by his friend, Chief Justice Rugg, and accepted it, on his own declaration, because he "was anxious to continue personal contact with his fellow men." Since I was not myself a member until April, 1933, after his death, I had no opportunity of observing him in action; but Mr. Brigham, in his vastly interesting memoir, has recalled that he did not miss a meeting during his incumbency, and that he even wrote and read the Report of the Council in October, 1930 and 1931. He conducted meetings, I am told, with dignity and firmness and with no undue levity.

A proper pride in our fellow member led some of us to be concerned when we read last August some newspaper gossip about the neglect of Coolidge's grave in Plymouth, Vermont. The simple, upright tombstone in the village burying ground offers a striking contrast with the ornate memorial in Marion, Ohio, to Warren G. Harding, which Coolidge, as ex-president, reluctantly helped to dedicate in June, 1931.

It is showy, large, and costly, while the Coolidge monument is in perfect taste—inconspicuous, unassuming, and inexpensive. If it is not well-kept—which seems improbable—something should be done about it, although Coolidge himself would not wish to have this done at the expense of the federal government. He was against all needless expenditure of the taxpayers' money. Furthermore he knew enough about American political history to be aware that its verdicts are uncertain and that the size of tombs means nothing. In the year 1924 he was elected to the presidency by the largest Republican plurality on record up to that time, with a larger popular vote than his two opponents, Davis and La Follette, together. At the time the *Boston Transcript* announced truthfully, "Calvin Coolidge was the issue, and to the President belongs the victory." The evidence indicates that if he had chosen to run in 1928, he would have won an even more decisive victory than Herbert Hoover. And now, not quite thirty years later, his grave is said to be neglected! One can only repeat, "*O tempora! O mores!*" Mr. Coolidge would have appreciated the situation's dramatic irony.

The 1930's, when the New Deal was at its height, were a poor time to form a just estimate of Mr. Coolidge, who would have been the stalwart opponent of the entire Roosevelt philosophy. The tendency to poke fun at Mr. Coolidge as a blind and stupid reactionary was not easy for Bright Young Men to resist. He had never posed as a Great Lover or a Great Actor or a Great Sinner. Without any trace of Bohemianism, he was a man of slow pulse, restrained impulses, and guarded emotions. As time went on, and a scapegoat was required, he was portrayed as the villain of the Big Bust of 1929, and the sins of speculation committed by millions of Americans were blamed on him. Before long the man who had been one of the two or three most remark-

able vote-getters in American history was being pictured as a troglodyte, the symbol of a bygone age. Even now, when the New Dealers are out, it may still be too early to pass a fair judgment on him and his career, but at least a tentative reappraisal may be made.

Some outstanding figures in American public life, like Elihu Root and Henry L. Stimson and Bernard M. Baruch, never held an elective office. Calvin Coolidge, on the other hand, was chosen by his fellow citizens to every position he held. Some significant quality he must have possessed to make him popular. In December, 1898, when he was only three years out of college, he was elected as one of three Councilmen from Ward Two, in Northampton, and from that date on he was never defeated at the polls until 1905, when he was beaten for School Committeeman. His rise on the political ladder was sure and seldom interrupted. In succession he was Representative to the General Court, Mayor, State Senator, President of the Senate, Lieutenant-Governor, Governor, and Vice-President. His accession to the presidency in August, 1923, was, of course, accidental, but he was elected in his own right (and very decisively) in 1924. He retired as President, of his own volition, in 1929.

In thirty years, then, Calvin Coolidge rose by regular stages from City Councilman to President of the United States, without suffering a reverse. So far as I know he is the only American President with this record. Franklin D. Roosevelt, it is true, served in the New York Legislature and as Governor before becoming a candidate for President in 1932, but for considerable periods he had to return to private life, and he was once badly defeated for the Vice Presidency. Dwight D. Eisenhower and William H. Taft held no elective offices before reaching the White House, and the same is true of Herbert Hoover. The fact is that Coolidge had had more experience in practical politics than

any man who ever held the office of President. This means that all along the road he had won the trust of the voters, both in a small city and in the Commonwealth and nation. That this is a considerable achievement hardly needs to be emphasized.

During all this period when he was under the most piercing scrutiny not one of his opponents uncovered a blot on his record, and his integrity remained unblemished. One of his political enemies once declared, "The damned fool is immaculate!" He was so unspectacular that he was constantly underestimated. In his quiet fashion he did the day's work, and was content to serve the interests of his constituents. With him duty was an obsession.

Despite all this, the charge that Coolidge was naïve is unsupported by the evidence. With some strange instinct he remembered all the little details which count so much in politics. He was loyal to his superiors and helpful to his subordinates. Judge Henry P. Field, who sponsored him in his early Northampton days, has written, "As a neighbor he was conservative, close-lipped, and solitary. Men respected him, but he did not encourage their friendship. His greatness did not lie in his contacts with men. But as a politician he was brilliant. He seemed to know what people were thinking and how they would act." Chief Justice Taft wrote of him, "He is nearly as good a politician as Lincoln." Even as a fledgling statesman, he understood how to keep party workers cheerful and enthusiastic, and never neglected to give the chairman of each Republican town committee a word of commendation. And all this he did without making any embarrassing commitments. He had a genius for keeping his fences mended and his adherents satisfied.

Coolidge could be assailed because he was a Republican, but personally he was invulnerable. Even his opponents

had to confess that he had been an efficient Governor. His conduct during the Police Strike was at the time regarded as patriotic and was praised even by President Woodrow Wilson. It has now become fashionable among historians to disparage his part in quelling the strike. But no one who saw, as I did, the terror that stalked the streets on that Wednesday night in September, 1919, is likely to forget the stimulus which came from his ringing words to Samuel Gompers, "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time." Years later one of the striking policemen, then the steward of a well-known country club, said to me, "The Governor was right, and we were badly advised and led!"

In international policies he was no isolationist. On February 15, 1919, the text of the Covenant of the League of Nations was published in American newspapers, and such conservative Senators as Moses, Borah, Penrose, Johnson, Smoot, and Lodge at once indicated their disapproval of what they were pleased to call "the evil thing with the holy name." But when President Wilson landed at Boston a few days later, Governor Coolidge, after reading perfunctorily a prepared address of greeting, dropped his manuscript and turning to the President with one of his rare smiles, said extemporaneously, "We welcome him as the representative of a great people, as a great statesman, as one to whom we have entrusted our destinies and one whom we are sure we will support in the future in the working out of those destinies, as Massachusetts has supported him in the past." This generous tribute was in sharp contrast to the partisan attacks of Little Americans at the moment when Wilson needed support. Coolidge's attitude towards the League of Nations was that of Taft, Root, Stimson, and other liberal-minded Republicans.

Coolidge was always seriously concerned over the needs of the destitute, the disabled, and the infirm. As Governor

of Massachusetts he not only displayed an exceptional interest in what is called "social" legislature but he also earned the respect of labor leaders for his sense of justice and fair play. His conscience was certainly no less sensitive than that of many a well-advertised reformer of a later generation. With him, however, it was partly a question of method. Those who, through no fault of their own, were poverty-stricken or under-privileged should be cared for by their own communities, by their more fortunate neighbors. He saw grave danger in teaching people to rely on the Federal government instead of on themselves. Having read in history of the consequences of the Roman policy of "panem et circenses," he was afraid of what might happen to the morale of a people debilitated by governmental subsidies. He did not wish parasites to take the place of pioneers.

Some of Coolidge's attributes, especially his physical appearance, made him easy to ridicule. When Dorothy Parker, told that Calvin Coolidge was dead, asked, "How could they tell?", people laughed, as they did when the caustic Mrs. Longworth declared that he must have been weaned on a pickle. After all, the enemies of Abraham Lincoln had called him an ape and a baboon. Coolidge certainly was not an impressive figure, like Warren G. Harding, with his magnificent façade and leonine head. Franklin D. Roosevelt, with his athlete's torso and profile like that of Mars, acted the part of a world leader. But Coolidge looked insignificant, like Harry S. Truman—a fellow who would have been ignored in a crowd. Nobody who did not already know him would have recognized him as a very important person. Furthermore his voice, with its nasal twang, had none of the sonorous emptiness of the professional "ward heeler." Somebody once remarked that Coolidge moved on and up by breaking all the rules for

achieving political success. Nobody running for office ever talked less "bunk" or resorted less to flattery.

Coolidge was much a typical Yankee as Sir Winston Churchill is an unmistakable John Bull—and as easy to caricature. He could truthfully be described as silent, economical, provincial, and inartistic—and these are not expansive or romantic virtues. The truth was that he was temperamentally shy and found it difficult to make new acquaintances. The marvel is that he made his reticence very useful as a political asset. Valentine Williams, the writer of "whodunits," said, after an interview, "Whether Mr. Coolidge's taciturnity was instinctive or deliberate, there was poise and authority behind it—you realized that as soon as he began to speak." His successor in the gubernatorial chair, Channing H. Cox, once complained that he had to spend more time in his office than Coolidge had done. "Ah!", remarked the latter, "You talk back!" About the Coolidge silences there was, to those confronting them for the first time, something disconcerting, indeed almost unnerving. An ambitious and aggressive office seeker, eager to present his cause, would burst into voluble solicitation, only to observe that his vis-a-vis was as unresponsive as a mummy. But in due season a reputation for keeping his own counsel became a part of the Coolidge legend and perhaps an important political asset. His associates discovered that he had a positive genius for concealing his estimates of others and seldom made foes by repeating gossip. In all my conversations with him I never heard him utter a disparaging word about more than two or three of his contemporaries.

The Coolidge frugality, also a Yankee trait, was basically an abhorrence of waste, inculcated early in a family the members of which had to earn a living the hard way. Until Coolidge became President, he had very little money to

spend, for his salary in public office had never been large and he had then no accumulated or inherited property. The difference between his childhood on a Vermont farm and that of Franklin D. Roosevelt on an estate in the Hudson River Valley is nothing short of astounding. Indeed the whole contrast between the cocksure, animated, gregarious "FDR," and the reserved, impassive, and shy "Cal" is a rare study in personalities. The fact that both were astute politicians and that each through much the same route became President of the United States is a phenomenon difficult for a foreigner to understand.

Although the Vermont country lad completed his formal education at Amherst College, this did not much broaden his provincialism. As compared with Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, with Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose travels were extensive, Coolidge had for years a limited outlook. He never travelled outside the United States except on a battleship to Havana, and he was deplorably ignorant of capitals and boundary lines. It was easy for sophisticated globe-trotters to laugh at the story of the time when the Dean of Lincoln Cathedral dined at the White House and the President opened the conversation by inquiring, "Where is Lincoln?" Well informed though he was in history and biography, certain fields of knowledge, like poetry and physics, were outside his range. But on the same basis of judgment both Abraham Lincoln and Grover Cleveland would have to be branded as "provincial."

Nor can the charge that he was impervious to beauty be disputed. He never understood music, either as a performer or a listener, and rarely attended a concert except as a White House duty—and then with the appearance of complete boredom. I can find no instance of his having visited an art gallery for pleasure, and his taste in the theater was un-

discriminating. He did not even, like the scholarly Woodrow Wilson, have a fondness for vaudeville and musical comedy. Although he seems to have had a nostalgic feeling for the hills of Vermont, the grandeur of mountains and the delicacy of flowers evoked from him no comment. The primrose by the river's brim was really to him nothing but a primrose—and of no special importance.

Coolidge had never been a prude or a "kill joy," and he had no objection to other peoples' "cakes and ale." After all, he had mingled with Boston politicians and was acquainted with their manly weaknesses. But his critics ridiculed him as definitely not "one of the boys," and one of his biographers has called him "A Puritan in Babylon." Undoubtedly he was different from his immediate predecessor in the White House. With the permission of a friend, an accurate reporter, I am able to present what might be called a minor but first-hand footnote to history. In the summer of 1922 President Warren G. Harding, accompanied by three senatorial golf companions, took a vacation trip to New England, and it was announced in the press that they were proceeding on a certain date from Portland, Maine, by automobile to Lancaster, New Hampshire, where they expected to spend a few days with Secretary of War John W. Weeks. The proprietor of one of the most distinguished hostelrys in the White Mountains—whom we may safely call Mr. Adams because that is not his name—hearing of the proposed journey, invited the President and his party to stop off at his place for lunch, and the invitation was courteously accepted. Two hours before the party was expected to arrive, an advance guard—whom I will call Colonel Prescott—drove up to the hotel and talked with the proprietor, ostensibly to confirm whatever arrangements had been made. During the conversation he asked casually, "I suppose you have plenty of liquor?" "Why, no,"

answered Mr. Adams, "These are Prohibition days. But if you must have it, I suppose I can send up to the Canadian border and try to get some." "Don't bother about it," was the reply. "I think I have a couple of cases in my automobile." That ended the matter, so far as Mr. Adams was concerned.

The proprietor had thoughtfully assigned Mr. and Mrs. Harding to his own private cottage on the hotel grounds, and when the party arrived, the President was at once escorted there. In a few minutes a messenger came to Mr. Adams, with an invitation to join the President. As Mr. Adams entered his own bedroom in response to a jovial "Come on in!", he found Mr. Harding sitting on the edge of the bed, in his shirt-sleeves and suspenders, pouring a very generous "slug" of Scotch whiskey into a glass. After greeting Mr. Adams warmly, he started towards the bathroom, asking, "I suppose this water's all right to drink?" "Yes," replied the proprietor. "It's clear and cold and pure—right out of the mountains!" In the background was Brooks, the colored White House valet, assisting in the libations. Colonel Prescott, who was also present, then mixed highballs for himself and Mr. Adams, and they drank a toast to the President, after which the latter said, "Charlie, tell Adams that yarn about the drunken Irishman." Prescott then related with gusto a vaguely amusing story of the bar-room type which seemed to delight the President immensely. The whole scene was incredibly sordid—the chief executive of a great nation *en deshabile* in his host's bedroom, breaking the law of the land, with his dignified colored servant in the background, and listening with satisfaction to a "smutty" story. Mr. Adams's whole reaction to this procedure was censorious, and Republican though he is, he still continues to hold in low esteem the character and habits of our 29th President.

From all this disgraceful atmosphere, Calvin Coolidge, respectable, law-abiding, and clean-living, redeemed us as a people. Within twenty-four hours after he entered the White House, the spirit of the place had altered. No grafter or vulgarian entered the doors. No liquor was served. The poker games, with the President's wife mixing the drinks, ceased abruptly. The Ohio Gang vanished like dead leaves before an east wind. The accidental but fortunate advent of Calvin Coolidge came just in time to save the Republican Party from disgrace and the American people from shame.

The Harding administration, so eloquently sponsored at first by honorable men, culminated in 1923 in a succession of nauseous scandals. Fortunately in August a new President took things in charge—a man of such scrupulous integrity that the more high-minded Republicans breathed sighs of relief. After the absurd eulogies of Harding had been delivered by men who should have known better, the American people settled back, confident that all would be well. Corruption and the flagrant misuse of office were revealed and punished. The Republican Party cleaned itself up. An honest man, by his mere presence, changed the whole trend of government administration from laxity to responsibility. Let this not be forgotten!

What about his record as President? No crucial international issues arose during his administration. Realizing the prevailing mood of his own party, he soon declared that the matter of a League of Nations was closed. He did, however, favor our participation in a permanent World Court, and he opposed the unfortunate Japanese Exclusion Act. After long search, I have been unable to find the occasion when Calvin Coolidge, referring to the war debts owed to the United States by European nations, remarked, "They hired the money, didn't they?" He could have said it without being inconsistent with his own philosophy, but I suspect

that this "wise-crack," like many others, was created by some newspaper man—possibly "Bob" Washburn—bent on ornamenting the Coolidge myth. In any case, Coolidge was disposed to regard these debts as obligations which might be adjusted on the basis of "the present and probable future ability of each debtor to pay." He strongly supported the Pact of Paris—commonly known as the Kellogg Pact—by the terms of which sixty-two nations promised to renounce war as a means of settling disputes, and he was greatly pleased when it was ratified by the Senate before his administration closed.

While the foreign policy of the United States under Coolidge presented no spectacular problems requiring immediate solution, we did preserve a friendly attitude towards other nations, and helped to spread the important doctrine that arbitration, not armaments, should settle disputes between independent powers. The successive acts of aggression by Japan, Italy, and Germany, violating the spirit and text of the Kellogg Pact, took place after Coolidge was dead. That the President was interested in promoting international peace was evident in many of his official acts. That his good intentions brought no lasting results was due to forces over which neither he, nor any other leading American, had control.

Coolidge brought into public life several men of exceptional ability, including Henry L. Stimson, Harlan F. Stone, and Dwight W. Morrow. He summoned Stimson, a member of the liberal wing of the Republican Party, to Washington in 1927, at a moment when the internal affairs of Nicaragua were in confusion. A brief conference with Secretary Kellogg left Stimson with a feeling that the administration was vague and indefinite in its policies, and later in the day, when he conferred with the President in the White House, he asked, "What do you really want?"

Do you wish me to be simply your eyes and ears and come back to report to you?" "No, no," answered Coolidge impatiently, "I want you to be a lot more than that. Just go down there, and if you can see a way to clean up that mess, I'd like to have you do it. And back up whatever you think is right." Stimson, thus left a free agent, did a fine job in securing a settlement between rival factions which allowed the Nicaraguans, in a fair election, to choose their own President. Later Colonel Stimson said, "I have never received more intelligent and complete support than I had from President Coolidge."

In 1927 also Coolidge appointed as Ambassador to Mexico his college classmate, Dwight W. Morrow, who softened hatreds and introduced a conciliatory spirit into our relations with Latin America. Here again the President gave our representative a free hand, with most gratifying results. Neither Stimson nor Morrow ever spoke of Coolidge except with respect. Each man had later to deal with President Hoover, and each felt that Coolidge was not only an easier chief to work for but also had a broader grasp of what was needed in international diplomacy.

On Memorial Day in 1926 Mr. Coolidge lamented the decay of American individualism, saying, "What we need is not more Federal government, but better local government. . . . From every position of consistency with our system, more centralization ought to be avoided." In this speech also he declared himself opposed to state socialization and federal bureaucracy. In June of that year he talked to a group of administrative officers charged with preparing the national budget, and deplored the increasing tendency to turn to Washington for aid towards projects which should be paid for by the individual states. If Coolidge in his messages did not discuss unemployment, child labor, old-age pensions, slum clearance, and the relief of the under-

privileged, it was because his philosophy led to the conclusion that such problems should be settled by local communities. Before his death he was to see the national government, under what had once been the party of state rights, adopting policies directly contradictory to the old American theory of rugged individualism.

A tendency developed in the 1930's to blame Coolidge for not foreseeing and preventing the stock market collapse of 1929 and the ensuing economic depression. His relentless insistence on a balanced national budget, on thrift and honest management, were unquestionably contributory to the "prosperity" of his administration. But the speculative mania which began about 1925 was something beyond his control. Men ordinarily conservative, staid, and cautious helped to create a form of hysteria, and everybody at the same time was trying to get something for nothing. For this strange manifestation of mob psychology no satisfactory explanation has ever been offered.

What could the President have done? Assuming that he had a prophetic sense denied to such financiers as J. Pierpont Morgan and Andrew W. Mellon, what would have happened if he had raised his voice in warning to his fellow citizens over a nation-wide radio hookup? He would have been denounced by everybody who had a few shares of stock "on margin" and might have precipitated an even worse disaster. As it was, he watched the mad carnival with many misgivings, hoping that all might yet be well. The truth is that, as economists are now aware, forces were operating beyond the control of any one man or group of men—forces which even experts are still attempting to explain. Something was defective in our social and financial structure, but something was also wrong with the minds and hearts of the human race. For these weaknesses Coolidge was not in any sense responsible. And I will venture

the opinion that even Franklin D. Roosevelt, if he had been President during that decade, would have been both unwilling and unable to interpose his authority.

It was indeed ironical that Calvin Coolidge who had been taught that the only road to fortune was through hard work should have been our Chief Executive during a period when gambling, open or concealed, was as natural to most Americans as breathing. His temperament and his entire upbringing had made him thrifty; he had never made a bet in all his life and had placed all his savings in banks or high-grade bonds; and he cared nothing for the luxuries which money makes possible. By disposition he was far removed from the stock market manipulators who were piling up profits which later vanished like thistledown in a gale. It was his bad luck as a statesman that, by his own personal example, he should have been exemplifying one type of living in an hour when the trend was in another direction. In his farewell message, on December 4, 1928, he warned the American people against extravagance; and on February 1, 1929, at Mountain Lake, in Florida, he counseled his fellow citizens, then seemingly intent on financial gain, to pay more attention to moral and spiritual values.

Ex-President Calvin Coolidge, physically not very well, emotionally much disturbed by the troubles of the Hoover administration, passed from this earthly scene at a moment when twelve years of Republican rule were drawing sadly to a close. During the campaign of 1932, under pressure from despondent party leaders, he made one speech at Madison Square Garden and gave a radio talk for fifteen minutes over a nation-wide hook-up on the evening before election. The defeat of Hoover left Coolidge very gloomy, and he said on December 14, to his old friend, Henry L. Stoddard, "I have been out of touch so long with political activities that I no longer fit with these times. . . . When I read of the new-

fangled things that are now so popular I realize that my time in public affairs is past. I wouldn't know how to handle them if I were called upon to do so. . . . We are in a new era to which I do not belong, and it would not be possible for me to adjust myself to it." Talking to his classmate, Charles A. Andrews, on New Year's Day, 1933, Coolidge declared, "The world is in a sad state, and I don't know what's going to come out of it. There's really nothing permanent except religion, which fortunately outlasts elections and depressions." While he was aware that a change was imminent with the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt as President, he had no idea how completely his own ideals and policies would be repudiated, even obliterated, and how soon in many quarters he would be regarded as almost as extinct as the great auk. Within a week after his dejected utterance he was dead.

In character, Coolidge stood out as the embodiment of certain fundamental virtues—faithfulness and carefulness and integrity. No gang of "five-per-centers" would have been tolerated in his day around the White House. To him, duty and loyalty and responsibility were more than words in a dictionary. They were infallible guides to conduct. Mark Sullivan once described Coolidge as a man who had come to be the head of a great corporation by starting as an office boy—"but an office boy with his eye fixed, from the very first day, on the big mahogany desk of the president with the definite intention of going upward step by step." With this interpretation of Coolidge's career I cannot agree. He had plenty of ambition and pride, and even vanity, as his strange *Autobiography* proves. But I see him from the beginning doing resolutely each day's work, true to his own conscience and false to no man, playing politics with the astuteness of a master and slowly winning the confidence of a wider and wider area. That unimpressive physique, that

thin, pinched countenance, that unresponsive smile, that chilly manner—these should have handicapped him. The miracle is that, in spite of them, in defiance of all the advice how to win friends and influence people, he rose to the highest office in the land. Writing to his father, Colonel John C. Coolidge, on January 1, 1926, he said, "I suppose I am the most powerful man in the world, but great power does not mean much except great limitations. I cannot have any freedom even to go and come. I am only in the clutch of forces greater than I am." This combination of pride and humility is typical of Calvin Coolidge's attitude towards life.

It is, in my judgment, a misreading of history to blame on Calvin Coolidge either the stock market collapse of 1929 or the extended depression which followed it. On the other hand, confronted with the calamities which Herbert Hoover faced throughout his administration, Coolidge would have done no better than his successor. The truth is that Coolidge during his career displayed very little constructive imagination. "When things are going all right," he said once to Frank W. Stearns, "it is a good plan to let them alone." He possessed plenty of what might be called negative courage, which enabled him to block unwise legislation in Congress at moments when he was warned by his advisers not to allow Senators and Representatives to get out of hand. In vetoing the Bonus Bill and the various McNary-Haugen Bills, he deliberately defied two formidable groups—the veterans and the farmers. But he did not initiate positive legislation of any significance.

Frankly I do not discover in his speeches any evidence of broad vision stretching into the shadowy future. He believed in playing the game safe, in letting sleeping dogs lie—in fact in any number of cautious proverbs—and he was far better adapted to do the day's work than to plan

a program for tomorrow. A columnist who knew both men well told me that Coolidge, on trips, always wanted to come back the same way he went, while Franklin D. Roosevelt took a different route each time. Coolidge was a conservative in the true sense of that much abused term, in that he wanted to preserve tested values. His task as President was to keep the Ship of State on an even keel, so far as possible before a favoring wind—not to reconstruct the hull or install new motive power or alter the course. His range was limited, and he was incapable of planning Utopias.

Has the time arrived for rendering a final verdict on Coolidge's place in American history? Probably not, for the reaction against his political philosophy has not yet spent its full force, and it is difficult for either New Dealers or Fair Dealers to judge him without prejudice. We can be sure that he will not be remembered as a great dynamic and constructive statesman, like Washington and Jackson and Lincoln and Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. It is equally obvious that he does not belong with the weaklings—with Pierce and Buchanan and Grant and Harding. Two or three years ago a group of American historians rating the presidents on the basis of their ability and achievement placed Coolidge very low on the list. I am prepared to defend the thesis that he belongs with John Quincy Adams and Rutherford B. Hayes and Grover Cleveland—with men of strong character and intellect who had during their administrations few great issues to meet but whose integrity and general record have made them stand out more for what they were than for what they did.

I express this opinion with some diffidence, knowing that it will not be accepted by certain historians whose judgment I very much respect. Within a quarter of a century the administration of the government of the United States has

become very much more complicated, very much more exacting, than it was in the days when Calvin Coolidge could take a nap of two hours every afternoon and when no momentous decisions had to be made suddenly, as happened to President Truman when the North Koreans invaded the southern peninsula. At times, according to reliable witnesses, Mr. Coolidge actually had time hang rather drearily on his hands. Whether he could have stood up under the strain of international rivalry, economic instability, and constant threats of war is a question which his critics are entitled to ask. I can only reply very briefly as I close that he dealt intelligently with the problems which he did have to face; that he called able associates into high government positions; and that he set a worthy example to his countrymen in resisting the general social and moral deterioration of the decade. Nothing in his private or public life offered encouragement to the flagpole sitters and mah jong players, the jazz musicians and the bathtub gin drinkers, the girls in flapping overshoes and the boys in coonskin coats, the Red Hot Mammams and the Flaming Youths all around him. And at any rate, we have no right to judge him for the failures he might have made if he had been faced with the necessity for different and more difficult decisions. What is important for the purposes of biographical accuracy is that in his family life, in his private and personal conduct, in his attitude towards morals and religion, in the political ideals which he upheld he is deserving of our respect and even of our admiration.

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