

THE TWO TAFTS

BY CHARLES WILLIS THOMPSON

We have two Tafts, dear,
Two, and yet the same.—ROBERT BUCHANAN
forty years later.

IF WE hadn't, there would be no amiable Chief Justice expanding under the glow of newspaper approval, or, at worst, no more derided than other members of the Federal bench; there would be only the blundering politician who was hurled out of office by the greatest revolt his party had ever known, one that must have consoled the souls of Grant and even Blaine. The queer thing is that all his life Taft had wanted to be a judge, not a politician. Well, circumstances, in the form of Republican votes, as he himself would say, for he has a sense of humor and is honest with himself, decided that his ambition should be fulfilled at last, and there he is on the bench. If ever, on dull days, he hankers secretly for the fleshpots of politics, then he blunders again, for in politics Taft was ever all thumbs.

Taft the blunderer! It seems a strange epitaph for a President and Chief Justice of the United States; yet it is true, at least, of the politician and tells the story of his fall. The energy in him, that made him survive it, was of the judicial kind—and let no man doubt that there *is* judicial energy! Judicial history, in fact, is full of fists pounded on the table, including the Taft fist, which struck a table on the other side of which sat Medill McCormick. In nearly every case the pounding was a blunder, and meant the oversetting of the court, the judge, or, in the long run, the nation; but it must be observed that in the Taft-McCormick case the blow fell after Taft had left the bench and before he re-

turned to it. Therefore, as a blunder, it belongs, like all Taft's blunders, to the political phase of him, not to the judicial. It was merely another proof of his essential sagacity when he used to say, "It's good of you, Theodore, but I'd rather be a judge." It would be going too far, perhaps, to say that that fist-pounding in 1909 turned the Middle West into the Democratic column in 1910 and elected Wilson in 1912, because no one thing did that; but the blunder which it symbolized did the trick, and more too. For example, it set Hiram Johnson at Coolidge's heels to-day.

In the era of his historic blunders Secretary and President Taft was a fat man; to-day, treading the primrose majority path of the Supreme Court he is only the size of every tall man. There was always something that gave promise of that reduction. He was never gross, even when he weighed three hundred pounds. He was always light on his feet; he liked to dance, and the girls said with surprise that he was a lovely waltzer; you did not hear the sound of his coming, as you did the sound of Billy Mason's. His pet amusement was skipping around the country in automobiles and Pullmans and off it in ships. Now he is no longer fat—not nearly so fat, indeed, as most other men of his height. But since Error dies only gradually, paragraphs and editorial writers will go on until the end of time, or of Taft, describing him as a second Daniel Lambert, just as they used to ascribe Roosevelt's misdeeds to the enthusiasm of youth long after he had joined, as he phrased it, the grandfather class.

II

But about those blunders, the celebrated blunders of the political Taft. First, it should be explained that politics was thrust upon him as an Ohio boy and the son of a man so deep plunged in the science as to be himself a Cabinet Minister, Judge Lorenzo Taft. Lanky and yet fat, young William Howard was mixing in politics before he was of age, and even encountered the majesty of the law for dealing pugilistically with a hostile partisan who made unseemly remarks about Judge Lorenzo. (He got out of it, they say, because the committing magistrate was of the Taft faction.) The judge interrogated the youth concerning his ambitions, and found to his sorrow that they lay toward the law rather than toward politics. Some minor judgeships therefore came his way, but in Ohio a judgeship is ever intricately mixed with politics, and so the two Tafts in one just naturally couldn't help running along together.

But gradually the judicial Taft came uppermost, and the judicial Taft, as judges go among us, is a good one—maybe no John Marshall, but that kind of talk tires me. There has been just one John Marshall in the whole world in the last hundred and fifty years. Those who know not what they speak of talk grandly of the dead days of Marshall, Story, Chase, and Kent, apparently unaware that those giants belonged to different eras and places, that Story's greatest fame was won elsewhere than on the Supreme Bench, that Kent is chiefly remembered in his capacity as a State judge, that Marshall was a builder of the Union and that Taney, whom it is heresy to mention at all, was the only other early judge actually in his class. Who knows that Chase was the anonymous plotter whom Drinkwater introduces in his play of "Abraham Lincoln" under an assumed name? Taft is as good a Chief Justice as the last decades have seen, for they are decades that have not required the talents of a Marshall any

more than they have required the talents of a Samuel Adams or a Jefferson.

So, it being seen that Taft was a good judge, he was sent out to the Philippines, where he governed apparently wisely. His duties were quasi-judicial, and he came home with much kudos and became Secretary of War. In that office he also won kudos by doing just what the President, Roosevelt by name, wanted him to do. It is curious that both Roosevelt and Wilson used to require their Cabinets to do just what they, the Presidents, wanted; and that T. R.'s Cabinets used to find great joy in the same—even such dissimilar characters as John Hay, a second Van Bibber, and James R. Garfield, a John Drew in real life—whereas almost all the members of Wilson's Cabinets made mouths over it and mainly resigned, from Crown Prince McAdoo to Garrison and Lansing. It wasn't because Wilson wanted them to do anything disgraceful, either. If Roosevelt had asked them they would probably have done it.

The rest of our hero's history is an open book. In opening it people generally point to the fact that when he ran for re-election in 1912 he carried but two States, Utah and Vermont. Considering that the American public was off on one of its periodical and unreasoning jaunts of hate that Autumn, I regard this as quite an achievement, and should be disposed to compliment Utah and Vermont if it were not that the Mormon machine and not reason pulled Utah through and that it's a capital offense to vote a third party ticket in Vermont. People elsewhere used language about Taft in that campaign that they would have been ashamed to use about the man who shot Petrosino. After the election some of them noticed that after all he was a human being, and said so. This led some newspapers to say that there was a visible reaction in favor of Taft. I was in New Haven during the following Spring, 1913, and mentioned this to Taft himself, with the design of cheering him up.

"Well," said he, with that sterling sense

which ever characterizes him when he is out of office, "you may have noticed that some 350,000 upright Republicans voted for me, even though I did run third. Now, Thompson, whenever I hear that somebody is visibly reacting toward me, I have a suspicion, I know not whence it comes, that the speaker is simply one of that upright and intelligent 350,000."

And as the same thought had passed through my own mind pianissimo before I spoke, I forebore to deny him; the more as he wore a judicial look, and pulled the cat's tail.

III

That general dislike of Taft, which seems so queer a thing when we look back upon it, and which was nowhere so strong as in his own party, rested upon the fact that "he cannot ope his mouth but out there flies a blunder." Often his blunders in those days were not blunders *per se*, but only blunders for a President. For instance, toward the close of his term a reporter asked him, as he got off his train somewhere, what would be the end or outlook of the labor situation, troubled then as now. Mechanically the President answered, as anybody but a President might have answered, "God knows!" This was the champion blunder of his administration. It flew over the United States, was reiterated and twisted, and became the text for a thousand indignant speeches. Yet anyone else might have said it without raising a ripple—save perhaps of approval. Perhaps, now that he is Chief Justice, Taft himself could say it with impunity. But it was one of the obvious, indiscreet things that a President just must *not* say.

He never could learn this difference between a President and a private person. He was for the Payne-Aldrich tariff bill, no doubt because it came from that wing of the party with which he had always been identified. This was bad enough, since the other wing was going to be in control of the party in the next congressional and presidential elections. But that was not

enough for Taft. The Payne-Aldrich tariff muddle was especially unpopular in the Middle West, but the disfavor with which the Middle West regarded it was applause compared with the sentiments which it engendered in the Northwest, and the Northwest might almost be counted as favorable to it compared with the sentiments it inspired in Minnesota. Speaking in favor of it was one of the few things for which a man might legally be lynched there, and the particular town in the State which disliked it most was Winona. Consequently, with unerring skill, when Taft went on his speaking tour in 1909, he chose Winona as the place in which to deliver his eulogy of it. The reaction throughout Minnesota, the Northwest, the Middle West and the United States came in the form of a reverberating roar. The Rocky Mountains stood on their heads, the Great Lakes turned inside out, and the Sierras danced like the hills of Scripture. Even the National Committee saw that something must be done, and so it hastily advised the President to say something that would calm the mountains down and restore the Mississippi to its bed. Taft hurriedly said it; and what do you think he said? What might have been expected. He said he had "dashed off the Winona speech hurriedly between stations!"

Now, you or I might say that, but the President of the United States is supposed to think thunderously, and his utterances are reckoned as revelations of God. Wilson loosed his "too proud to fight" aphorism in a moment of exaltation before he came to realize that fact. The greatness of Roosevelt largely consisted in the fact that although he appeared to speak impulsively, he actually never uttered a word publicly without having before him a mental vision of how it would look in type. "Makes up his speeches between stations, does he?" yelled the infuriated populace. "Is that the sort of President we've got? We've made up our minds how to vote!"

When Roosevelt started after his scalp

in 1912, Taft at first refused to take the stump against him. But as State after State loped into the Roosevelt camp, honking and tom-tomming—and he carried every one in which there was a presidential primary—the urging of Taft's friends led him finally to defend himself, and he fell upon the job. But he felt that such an unusual procedure on the part of a President needed explanation, and so, according to his nature, he gave the worst possible one. "Even a rat will fight when driven into a corner," he said, gloomily—and thus went the last chance he had of getting even a look-in in any presidential primary State! All the Republicans who could vote voted for Roosevelt, save only that gnarled knot up in Wisconsin which LaFollette never takes out of his pocket.

But how did Roosevelt happen to be against Taft? That was some more of Taft's statesmanship. The Lord, to save him, should have created him mute. Roosevelt had made Taft President. The convention which started the business wanted to renominate Roosevelt himself, and so did the party. For a year before the convention Roosevelt was engaged in strangling the Roosevelters. Whenever he heard that a State boss, such as John G. Capers of South Carolina, or Cecil A. Lyon of Texas, was going to bring a Roosevelt delegation to the convention, he would send for that misguided chief and say to him, "Let your delegation be for Taft, Cassio, or never more be officer of mine!" It was a bound and gagged convention, with Roosevelt's friend, Henry Cabot Lodge, running it—Lodge was at the end of a telegraph wire; the other end ran into the White House. At the White House end stood William J. Lee, the quickest telegraph operator in Washington. It was his duty to let Roosevelt know when the stampede tried to put him over and to take Roosevelt's reply, which was to be an unconditional declination. Lodge was to read it. But Lodge worked the game without recourse to this device. When the Jonathan Bourne rooters started a stampede for Roosevelt, Lodge

began calling the alphabetical roll of delegates. Under cover of the uproar the latter voted for Taft inaudibly, and Georgia was being called before the Roosevelt rooters discovered what was going on. They stopped then, and Taft was nominated.

Having thus crushed all opposition and nominated Taft, Roosevelt carried him through the campaign and got him a majority up to that time unprecedented. After the election Roosevelt expected a word of thanks. He got it, somewhat in this form: "I owe a great deal to you, Theodore, and I want to take this opportunity of saying so." Proper expression by Roosevelt. "Yes," continued Taft, "in thinking over the whole campaign, I am bound to say that I owe more to you than to almost anybody else, *except my brother Charley.*"

I do not mean to say that this astonishing remark alone was what made Roosevelt go off to the Potomac meadows and bite his teeth till the blood came, but it was what started it. The finish was put on the business by what happened to Roosevelt's friends, especially Gifford Pinchot, after Taft was in office. Pinchot hurried across the ocean when Roosevelt emerged from Africa to be the first to tell him of all the things that had befallen Garfield, Loeb, and every other statesman whom Roosevelt had specially recommended. Roosevelt, who at that time still did not want to be nominated again, responded vigorously by announcing that he was a strong supporter of Governor Hughes. The rest is history. Taft was hurt and grieved. He did not know then, and probably does not know now, what he had done to break the friendship of a man whom he highly esteemed and, in his way, almost loved. Nor does he know that, human nature being what it is, nine men out of ten would have done exactly what Roosevelt did, though it may be a fact to be regretted.

IV

Practically all of Taft's bitter experiences in office were thus largely of his uncon-

scious making. He was a good President at the wrong time. He was a far better President than McKinley, Harrison or Hayes, and in the eighties or nineties, where he belonged, he would have been reckoned an intelligent Progressive. As a judge his only fault is one which he shares with the majority of the Federal Bench: he believes a little too strongly in the existing order. It used to be said of District Attorney Jerome that he was a splendid prosecuting officer, except that his mind could not take in the idea that a rich man had done anything wrong. As a President, Taft showed something of the same fault. His pardon of Charles W. Morse, based on pleas and arguments that would never have deceived Roosevelt or Coolidge and might not even have deceived Harding, Wilson or McKinley, is a case in point. He fell too easily for such arguments; it was his blind side. On the bench he shows less of it, and certainly seeks to be impartial, though it

is possible to detect evidences of the old Adam still. It is, indeed, natural that his mind should unconsciously make him favor the old order, just as Justice Brandeis' mind unconsciously puts him in the position of a questioner.

He is thoroughly upright; in fact, the man who would question his honor would be laughed at. Even as a politician he always played square. But he should have gone on the bench early in life and stayed there. His incurable tendency to blunder ruined him as a politician. But, at worst, that tendency injured mainly himself. His blunders were disastrous only to Taft and the Republican Party, which needed a drubbing; whereas Wilson's blunders were disastrous to the United States, to Europe, and to remote communities not yet heard of. Taft's blunders are mainly forgotten. Wilson's will never cease to reverberate until the Resurrection morn.

MANSFIELD PARK AND AMERICA

BY ARTHUR BINGHAM WALKLEY

THE Clarendon Press at Oxford has lately done a fine thing. It has published a great edition of Jane Austen's novels, compared with which all other editions are naught but leather and prunella. The British Museum, old Directories of Bath—as Bath was a good quarter of a century before Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller rediscovered it—Guides to the Ball-room, carriage-builders' catalogues, and even an early illustrated copy of Mrs. Inchbald's "Lover's Vows," have been ransacked for contemporary prints, fashion-plates and maps to elucidate the text. That text, hitherto remarkably corrupt, has been collated, emended and conjecturally reconstructed by the Clarendon editor, Mr. R. W. Chapman, with the ingenuity of a Bentley restoring the digamma to Homer or of a Verrall restoring common sense to Euripides. In short, an English classical author has at length been honored with an edition which is at once scholarly and, like Frank Churchill's letter to his stepmother, "handsome."

No doubt, these facts will leave what it is the fashion to call with fulsome flattery the English-speaking world comparatively cold. What, in the name of the Bodleian, asked Mr. Augustine Birrell, has the general public to do with literature? But there are Austenites, I suppose, in both hemispheres. Now that Howells is dead, how many are left in America? I hope my question, coming from an Englishman, is not impertinent. I know that there issue from American universities many learned monographs—diploma-pieces, they seem generally to be, theses or exercises for a degree—on far more rec-

ondite English topics than Jane Austen—for example, Coventry mystery plays, minor Caroline poets and the like. And I see that Mr. Harvey Eagleson, of Stanford University, has furnished the Clarendon editor with a tip about "Northanger Abbey." So there, at any rate, is one.

That there were fervent Austenites in America in our grandfathers' generation is clearly established by a letter (printed in "A Memoir of Jane Austen," by her nephew, J. B. Austen Leigh, 1869) to her brother, Sir Francis Austen, from Miss Quincey, "care of the Hon. Mr. Josiah Quincey, Boston, Massachusetts," asking for his sister's autograph, and dated January 6, 1852. "The influence of her genius," wrote Miss Quincey, "is extensively recognized in the American Republic, even by the highest judicial authorities. The late Mr. Chief Justice Marshall, of the Supreme Court of the United States, and his associate, Mr. Justice Story, highly estimated Miss Austen, and to them we owe our introduction to her society. For many years her talents have brightened our daily path, and her name and those of her characters are familiar to us as 'household words.'"

I have no warrant for supposing that the present generation has fallen from grace; indeed, I imagine (writing from a distance, one must speak with caution) that intellectual curiosity in the United States is keener and more catholic than ever. But this is a matter rather of tradition. Somehow, I mentally picture the tribe of Austenites, always "werry fierce," always thirsting for one another's blood over the choice between "Pride and Prejudice," and