

THE NEXT PRESIDENT

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NO five Americans have ever been more different than our last five Presidents, — Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Harding, and Coolidge. Judging by the record of the past quarter of a century, it would seem that the one thing the American people want is a complete change, and as often as is constitutionally possible. Very probably there is no one living can tell who will be the next President, but the writer of this article, a political observer of experience and acumen, tells us who, or rather what, he will not be.

THOUGH some of us of late may have been worried, still almost any mother's son, or daughter (there is nothing in our Constitution that bars the daughter), has the proverbial chance of being the next President.

The only ones not eligible are Yankees, — all New Englanders will have had their turn, for the first time in a century, in the person of President Coolidge; residents of Ohio, —

whence came President Harding; of Virginia and New Jersey, — President Wilson's native and his adopted States; and of New York, — President Roosevelt's State.

Nor shall we want as our next President a dirt farmer, because most of us think of President Coolidge as a kind of graduate dirt farmer; nor a newspaper man, — President Harding was a newspaper man; nor an educator, — President Wilson was an educator; nor a lawyer, — President Taft personified lawyers; nor a Rough Rider.

Simply, reasonably, and even logically, our next President will *not* be in any major aspect like any of the Presidents we have had in twenty-five years, which is the limit of popular memory in America, if there is anything in my present theory.

My hypothesis is that we Americans are so insatiably enamored of incessant change that it is in us, more decidedly than ever before, to demand that each succeeding President shall be as much a contrast as is achievable to all of his predecessors of a quarter-century, and that we shall have a new one as often as possible.

President Coolidge will not be re-elected, if this hypothesis is sound, unless there arises in 1928 a great national emergency of some sort such as confronted us when President Wilson, — the only President who recently has served eight years, — was re-elected.

Moreover, I doubt if any President in our time will be re-elected to serve a second full four-year term, unless there exists a supreme emergency of some sort, or our relation to the huge entity, Big Government, is somehow profoundly altered.

In other words, it may not necessarily be that President Coolidge will have failed in the consistent performance of his difficult rôle, nor that his successor, or any other, will not have done his duty and played his part as well, for instance, as the directors of any corporation might reasonably expect their executives to play theirs. It goes deeper. It is a seemingly instinctive hunger, even a passion, in us for movement, progression, growth, change, — a passion which defies all that any President can do and, in the long run, makes the Presidency more and more untenable. It is an impelling and insatiable urge in us, — a rather unreasoning urge that is not a respecter of persons and may in a measure be a reflection of the intensity with which we live, — which certainly manifests an increasing resentment against any suggestion of rigidity or permanence. It has operated with increasing intensity against each of the last four Presidents and will undoubtedly manifest itself against President Coolidge, as skilful as he is, when the early honeymoon days of his own administration are over.

Because these last five Presidents of ours have doubtless been as worthy a succession of five as any other group of five that the nation has had, because our passion for change and for contrast has nevertheless appeared to increase rather than to diminish in intensity, it may well be that this passion is stimulated by new factors. And certainly there is the central factor which must have point: the changed relation between us as individuals and our Government that has come with its vast increase in size and reach into all aspects of our lives.

Since the beginning of the Roosevelt Administration the direct contacts between us and our Government have been increased hundredsfold. Our Government has become highly centralized. Because of its great size, reach, and centralization it has encouraged the establishment and strengthening of social and economic groups, which operate politically as pressures upon it, and these pressures are highly articulate, potent, and demonstrative of their resentments against Presidents and other public men.

Largely by way of resisting these pressures or succumbing to them, we have, in these last twenty-five years, amended our Constitution four times, — as many times as we had previously amended it in a century, — enacted an unconscionably large number of laws, revealed the inability of Congress to run our huge Government without scandal and other cause of disquietude, and in other directions made the plight of our Presidents more difficult. If we will but take the trouble to list horizontally across a great sheet of paper the issues anent which any President must sooner or later express his views and policies, then vertically, up the left-hand of this cross-word puzzle that is his, list the conflicting groups intent on having their way, we can see at a glance that it must be only a question of months when each new President has less than a majority of us whole-heartedly ready and able to give him our support.

At any rate, — let the causes of our passion for change and contrast in our Presidents be what they may, — my thesis is interestingly sustained by study of each of our last five Presidents in contrast with the rest. For no one, so far as I know, — not even one of the long procession of the observers of us from abroad, — has made the point that our last five Presidents have been as totally different from one another as five Americans could possibly be.

Look at them, — Presidents Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Harding, and Coolidge. Surely the contrasts between them would come out sharply if you could seat them at your dinner table. Then you might well apprehend difficulty in leading their conversation to any subject, with the possible exception of government, in which they would all have any real native interest, and I doubt that they could agree easily about government. Certainly, if you talked about sport, the most innocuous of subjects, President Roosevelt would without question do nearly all of the talking. If you talked about big business, President Roosevelt would without question do nearly all of the talking. If you talked about travel and natural history, President Roosevelt would without question do nearly all of the talking. And if, in desperation, you at last talked about dirt farming, President Coolidge would, without question, have very little to say.

So, remembering that there were real personal differences

between Presidents Roosevelt and Taft, Roosevelt and Wilson, and Wilson and Harding, and knowing, as host, that it would be the part of social wisdom to supply to your other guests some advance information as to our Presidential contrasts and differences, doubtless you would instruct your social secretary to prepare briefs about them.

These briefs, or gentle reminders, might run like this:

President Roosevelt: A vigorous, even strenuous man with the most amazing universality of interests. Habitual conversationalist. Can talk entertainingly about anything, — *anything!* — and will follow up talk with letters-of-record, — delightful letters, devised to assist historians. Will talk about his ancestors from the valley of the Rhine if he thinks you are German, about his French ancestors if he finds that your mother is French,¹ about his Dutch ancestors if he thinks you are Dutch, and so on. Is a popular blend of Dutch, French, German, North and South Irish, English, and Georgian. Was born in New York City, which produces fewer great natives than any other of our large population groups. Father a rich merchant. Gave journalism as intended profession while in Harvard; would no doubt have made a great newspaper editor; is lovingly referred to as Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. Dutch Lutheran by religion. Traveled extensively and heroically; even ventured into law and couldn't stand it. A great exhibitionist of self and of government. Discovered the American people; in serving them did most to start our Government snowballing for size. He wrote, "No President ever enjoyed himself in the Presidency as well as I did . . . but . . . the people as a whole are heartily tired of me and of my views." Was typically thought of and loved as Rough Rider in politics.

President Taft: Lawyer, son of lawyer and Attorney General. Scholar. Divided first honors of class in Cincinnati Law School; was second in class of 1878 at Yale, — whereas President Wilson was thirty-eighth in his class, 1879, of only 130, when at Princeton, and President Roosevelt was twentieth in his class, 1880, of 120, when in Harvard. Ran for office only once before running for Presidency. Unitarian. Admits he was "miserable" in the White House, — misjudged to be a Falstaff following a Pe-

¹This skill was demonstrated in the last interview the writer had with the Colonel not long before he died.

truchio. In second campaign therefore, got vote of only Utah and Vermont, both negligible politically.

President Wilson: Son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers,—the third son of a minister to enter White House, Presidents Arthur and Cleveland being the others. Virginian, educator and historian by profession. Democrat. Virtually nothing in common with his predecessors and successors. Is best described by his favorite poem, Wordsworth's "The Character of a Happy Warrior" (the poem read at the last rites for President Cleveland, incidentally). Was a crusader with an evangel of his own. Was a war President like Abraham Lincoln. Remember: Lincoln's assassin expected applause, and the liverymen and teamsters of the City of Baltimore refused to move the martyred President's poor body from one station to another, when it was on the way to the grave.

President Harding: Rather typically a small-townsmen. Baptist. Newspaper man and public speaker by training. Resident of Ohio, active in Ohio politics, unlike Mr. Taft who served mainly elsewhere. Less than a year in college. Prevailing attribute: love for fellow creatures manifested by zeal to make life richer and more alluring for every living thing about him. Was loved too much, rather than well, in return, and like President Wilson collapsed while in office, and died a somewhat embittered and disillusioned man.

President Coolidge: Second New England President since the second Adams. Congregationalist, villager, farmer by inheritance. As self-contained, implicit, and thrifty as President Harding was expansive, genial, and generous.

And these briefs would not so well suggest the profound contrast between these men as would a few hours of personal contact and intimate observation of them. They would greet you differently: President Taft might whack you on the back benignly, whereas President Coolidge might welcome the parting and speed the coming guest, while President Harding might invite you to sit down and smoke, President Wilson might seek to discover your intellectual attainments, and President Roosevelt might categorize you as another Ananias. They would display different ways of making friends, and making friends is just as determinate a trait as any other. You would find them of different views of virtually everything: Imagine President Roosevelt replying to an

invitation to kill bears in Colorado "I have no interest in killing bears!" Of different reading also; President Coolidge, alone of the group, might be found to be a steady reader of the New England poets. Likewise of different intellectual attainments. And of different social origin, though the same old melting-pot produced them all.

A biologist might write a whole book about any one of them in contrast with the others. A psycho-analyst might write another book, and there might be enough remaining interest for him to find a publisher for it. A playwright might find the stuff of great drama in the relations of President Roosevelt and that "good Yale man", his successor: Its third act might show the climax of the Colonel's war on his old-time friend, a shot, a cry, "*That* for men who seek a third term!" the Colonel's concluding denunciation with a bullet in his body; then, in its fourth act the casual meeting in a hotel of these two men and Roosevelt's exclamation afterward, "I was never so happy in my life. By Jove, that was splendid of Taft!"

In fact, all of the academes of Columbia University could work their respective droning gears all through a whole semester about these last five Presidents.

Clearly, contrast has been the prevailing note in our choice of Presidents. Indeed it would seem that almost mysteriously, as if the ways of Americans are not to be understood, contrast has been the *imperative* note. The fact that we have President Coolidge in the White House best makes the point. Vermont, his native State, like Massachusetts, his adopted one, had long been considered negligible so far as the sublime strategy of national parties and politics is concerned. It would have seemed to be easier and more likely for a son of immigrants on New York's East Side to overcome natural barriers and native handicaps, to struggle up the long trail and to attain the Presidency than for a Vermonter to do all that. The odds were a billion or so to one against him, yet he won through by the accident of the death of President Harding, and then by one of the many curious manifestations of that *abracadabra*, — public interest in America, — he won overwhelmingly, against uncertain and even unprecedented odds, in his own right.

Certainly President Coolidge would not have won in his own

right were he in any profound or even superficial way like President Harding, and it is doubtful if he would have won were he at all like Presidents Wilson, Taft, or Roosevelt.

Therefore since these last five Presidents of ours have no doubt been as worthy a succession of five as any that the country has had, there are a great many conclusions to be derived from the contrasts between them.

For one thing, we are ruled by sentiment, as one President informally pointed out, rather than by our minds. The French philosopher, Henri Bergson, might find gratification in that, — his *Creative Evolution* argues that human beings are bigger than their minds.

For another thing, clearly we do not select our Presidents as we select the executives of our corporations. In the business world there has come to be a kind of science of employment management, which is dominated by solemn-eyed, tough-minded experts of hiring and firing, who investigate each applicant's past performance and future promise "scientifically". These experts are not much interested in contrast, novelty, or the gifts of sustaining public interest. They care very little whether an applicant comes from one State or another, or whether he is skilled with press, party, and what may be called public technique. He is selected for his prowess in organizing enterprises, increasing production, or otherwise facilitating the business of making money. His skill must reflect itself in tell-tale instrumentalities called balance sheets; and there are no balance sheets in government. Having to do with the welfare of millions of people, government does not afford definitely ascertainable facts footing up in totals of thus and so many millions of dollars in the coin of the realm. Our prosperity counts, surely, often unduly, quite disproportionately in relation to the part in it that our Presidents have. President Coolidge's penchant for thrift has more appeal than it would have had before the advent of direct taxation, and before our Government went in for size and came to have direct participation in nearly every aspect of our social and economic welfare; still I think it is important in point of his prestige largely because it is a revelation of a President of a new kind. That is what the policies, acts, sayings, and habits of a President mainly are for, — to reveal him to ourselves. What he actually

accomplishes is by no means so important as what he seems to stand for. Thus President Roosevelt, probably the most universally loved and influential President we have had, achieved relatively little in legislation and as an administrator, in contrast with the impress he otherwise made. On the other hand, it is altogether possible for a second-rate business executive to seem to succeed gloriously in a public office, while a first-rate one of proven worth seems to fail though he actually accomplishes more than the other.

All of this is simply to say that our Presidents answer to measurements other than those applied in business life.

These measurements in the main are three. In other words, if you would now nominate the next President and would have him prosper well, it would be the part of wisdom to select a man as far different in every way possible from those of the last twenty-five years, and to judge him largely by his skill in dealing with the press, the parties, and the public taken generally.

You would find, then, that the Executive Offices of our Presidents are organized to deal almost exclusively with these three aspects, have only forty employees altogether, and do not at all function in the manner and by the means used in the executive offices of a great corporation. You would find that, since government, in the nature of things, lacks tell-tale balance-sheets such as justify or evict corporation executives, the main barometers of a President's success are afforded by the mirrors of press, public, and party, — in fact, our numerous insurance actuaries would do well to organize these barometers scientifically! You would find, too, that President Roosevelt's amazing popularity was reflected in these measurements; that the "popularity curve" of President Taft would graphically display his inherent inability to "sell himself", as the saying is, to the press, to dramatize himself before the public, to dominate his party. You would find, too, that the Wilson curve mounted steadily to unprecedented height, then, from Armistice Day on, fell off sharply as if the great majority of us, for all manner of reasons, abruptly withdrew our support from him.

Then, too, there are other considerations which suggest the indubitable importance of a President's skill in relation to press, public, and party. Obviously a President, or a candidate for the

Presidency, can feel complete assurance if he is able "to sell himself one hundred per cent" to the press, to dramatize his personality equally well before the public, and to exercise supreme influence in his party. Just as obviously: there is trouble and failure impending if, or when, the President's temperature, as it were, reflects itself badly on the fever-chart of his record, — i.e., when support of him by the press drops to sub-normal, when the public loses its warmth, when his party in Congress bolts, like an uncertain and erratic nurse. Yet, by the way, it is a significant thing that President Coolidge has been able best to rally the press and the public with him by openly opposing Congress or by being opposed by it.

It is just as well to conclude, thus, that the Presidency is like married life, and that we are the "new" relatives.

"He is our President!" — so we feel at first, when we are relieved of the apparent necessity of scrutinizing and criticizing his predecessor. "We elected him! Give him a chance, — he's always been a good provider!" At first, in other words, we are invariably interested in the new folk in the White House; they seem like newly-weds — benedicts — a word that suggests, "Speak kindly of them, folks!" Then, a little later, when the honeymoon days are over, sometimes with secret glee we watch Congress, perhaps we encourage Congress, perhaps we even bring pressure to bear on Congress, while it brings its guerrilla warfare into play. At the end of two years, no matter how hard a President strives for general support, no matter how hard he tries to please everybody, no matter how skilfully he essays to keep up the appearance of doing much and doing it well as our Chief Executive, often, — usually rather, — we are ready to increase the opposition to him. And then, at the end of a full four-year term, generally we are ready to join in the long howl, "We want change! We want change!"

And then?

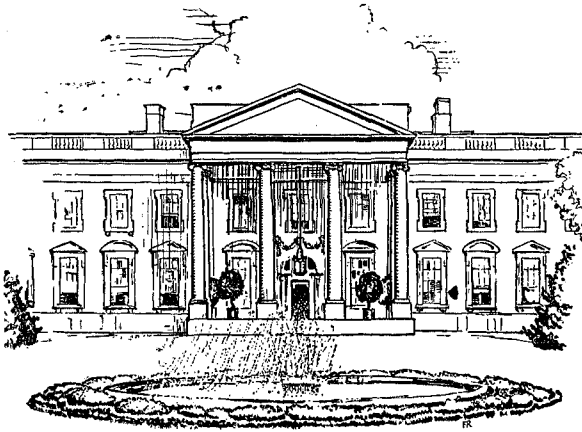
Then, by processes of sentiment that in themselves are eloquent, — so it must seem to the historians of this period in which we live, — we solemnly go about the business of discovering candidates whose essential qualification is that they are different in every possible way from all the Presidents that have in a quarter-century gone before. It is as if instinctively

we work by the rule of contrast rather than by the rule of example.

So now, if there is anything in my thesis, when 1928 comes around, it is altogether likely that we shall contentedly conclude: "Let's give 'em all a chance! We've had a kind of graduate dirt farmer who has done New England proud! We've had a newspaper man, an educator, a lawyer, and a Rough Rider. We've had a Yankee, a resident Buckeye and also Mr. Taft, a Southerner living in New Jersey when elected, and a New Yorker who lived in the cow country for a while. But we haven't had a Westerner. We haven't had a business man, and since we've had or are bound soon to have hard times, it might be well to try one to see what he can do. We haven't had an engineer. We haven't had a diplomat. Nor a woman either, — and Ma Ferguson might be entertaining!

"Now, then, what'll we have?

"Nominations will be in order!"



THE WEATHER AND OUR FEELINGS

THE FORUM proposes a thorough investigation of the suspected mysterious effects of the weather on the health and happiness of mankind.

ONE of the most mysterious things about our daily lives is the way in which one day differs from another. On perhaps three mornings of the week we arise with energy and enthusiasm enough for a dozen tasks. On the other four mornings we are indifferent, apathetic; it is with difficulty, perhaps, that we drag our lazy bodies out of bed at all.

We explain these things by saying that we feel well or ill. That means nothing. *Why* do we feel well or ill? Is it always something individual and essentially accidental, as, for example, an over-night indiscretion of diet or a cold that has not quite broken out audibly? Or is there some deeper cause, some cause that is affecting everybody in the neighborhood at the same time and in the same general way?

There is some evidence of this. Men who handle traffic on the streets or manage the crowds in great railway terminals or who watch the stock market or the attendance at baseball games report that there are "nervous" days; days when almost everyone is "keyed up", on edge, anxious. Other days are quiet and calm. An even larger crowd will make less trouble.

Many students of these matters have guessed that these mysterious and instinctive reactions of our human units are due to something in the weather. They cannot be blamed on such obvious things as rain or humidity or heat or cold. Many tests have shown that such things do not explain the kind of human variability that we are talking about, although these obvious aspects of the weather do have, of course, their own well-known reactions on mankind. Dr. Ellsworth Huntington has shown, too, that such things as temperature and humidity do affect the working capacity of both laborers and intellectual workers. The effects are complex but they are demonstrably existant.

The thing we are talking about is even more subtle; probably even more complex. Another example of it is "grandpa's rheuma-