

# Warren Harding, the Man

# The Thirtieth President?

By A. R. PINCI

**H**ARDING—The very name has a rugged and simple sound, easy to pronounce, pleasant to the ear, that comes easily to one's lips. To utter it means conjuring up an image, somewhat familiar if not recognizable. It lingers like the name of an old dispersed friend. And strangely enough it is not an image; it is the man, with a befriending and inviting occultism. He rather steals into our minds, regardless of politics, merely because his Americanism becomes manifest at once, which disposes the average person to yield to him now even if in disagreement with his views. Briefly, Harding symbolizes not a party, not a program, not a school of political beliefs, but an all-pervading nationalism superimposing constitutional precepts.

That explains his election; it explains, too, his unparalleled majority. Yet that is not all. It is a warning to the country that supergovernment, in the sense of achieving the marvelous or the impracticable, is not to be expected at his hands. As a statesman he must traverse uncharted routes but in such a way that the people can follow him step by step, thought by thought, dollar by dollar, result by result.

A few days after his nomination he voiced his diffidence in occupying so exalted a position, but such modesty had a distinguished precedent, for both Washington and Lincoln bespoke their hesitation under identical circumstances. This diffidence, however, is not characteristic of the man and his past record, as far back as his boyhood days, reveals instead a strong sense of opportunism. That diffidence intensified after the election, culminating with the painful remark that he was "the center of a veritable web of intrigue" and that there are "very few men" it is safe for him to trust. That remark was variously interpreted and quite erroneously. He is of too sincere a disposition to permit himself to dread his fellow men. Moreover, environment has favored him and throughout the years, certainly up to the hour of his nomination, the circle of trustworthy and unselfish friends constantly grew.

His quarrel was with the inevitable horde of political pharisees who began to trail him and tent upon his grounds from the hour he left Chicago. The last day of the convention he was eating luncheon—alone. Nobody paid any attention to him, even though his name had been among those "also mentioned," and he himself has since admitted that he felt very lonesome while he watched the feverish activities of other diners; even the newspaper men ignored him.

Imagine him, then, a few hours afterward become unexpectedly great—and the target for the most fickle of the human species: the professional politicians. Is it any wonder that even the probationary campaign period could not free him from the pettiness of selfish strangers so insistent upon saving the nation by means of public office? I believe that the process of elimination for a President-elect of the United States is the most irritating and disconcerting duty befalling man.

As I piece together detached recollections that go back to his first days in the Senate, five years or so ago, and they fuse together—meetings separated by time and cause in hours when his personality was at its best, untrammelled by suddenly unescapable popularity—my impression of him is reduced to simple and understandable proportions. To those who have mentally met him through the introduction of a likewise newly-introduced reporter, the picture is apt to be a little blurred; a little too sharp, in some cases, in the sense of the superhuman (in contradistinction to the superman) or a little too shadowy in the sense of small-town modesty.

For these deviations there is the amplest of reasons. It seems unthinkable to depict a President of the United States in terms of unadorned self. Yet the psychology of these variations is the key to the public's accepted belief of the President as an official personality of magic power or limited ability. People have become accustomed, since the war, the world over, to familiarize themselves with the words or deeds of men more or less in the limelight and, for want of a better word, bluntly described as "big." This became a stock adjective. It may have been noticed, however, that the term was never applied to Mr. Harding. Its absence is complimentary and no one is more pleased not to be so described than the President himself.

**T**O PORTRAY our President is not a difficult task if no retouching is attempted—a temptation that is not always successfully resisted. *Reductio ad absurdum* of the acres of newspaper pages or miles of columns printed about him, with their inevitable mixture of fact and fancy, leads to a sharper picture of a typical American.

Biographers and artists have clothed him with the toga of ancient Rome, but none has selected a more befitting garment—the scarlet gown of a cardinal. He would surpass in it any available painting of one, so perfectly does he portray repose and faith. His face is strong in every lineament; it is a composite of the features of George Washington and William Jennings Bryan (a twinship possible only in a perfect democracy like this). It is easy to distinguish the magisterial ardor of the latter and to account for the high-souled nationalism of the former.

By now about everybody knows that he is a well-proportioned man, six feet tall, with well-set shoulders, his hair almost entirely gray, his movements unstudied but impressive. His voice is resonant but well modulated; he smiles readily without evidence of a desire to please. He will converse freely with those who are in his confidence. He likes an anecdote as only an old-time typographer can—and poker equally well. He insists that his success in life is due to one thing—that Mrs. Harding has always been his best bet.

He is not a dynamic individual but of late it has been proved that it is not necessary to be dynamic in order to lead. He possesses all the characteristics of a man who can lead without finding it necessary to whip anybody into line or stand upon a platform in order to look a commanding part.

He has his ears to the ground, but as a mental contortionist, his feet there too. He is alert and has demonstrated his capacity in storing up information, some of it caught on the wings of the wind at a time when the wind was freighted down with it. He is not a great lawyer, but he is a practical newspaper man, and the latter must be one and the other.

It has been repeatedly asserted, since his nomination, that President Harding has incurred no enmities and is free to exercise his own good will as he deems best. The entire assertion, taken singly or otherwise, is open to doubt. He has quite a few enemies which spring up in the wake of any presidential meteor. Enmities, no matter how slight or inconsequential, cannot be averted by the President, and the

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The President and Vice-President.

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**C**ALVIN COOLIDGE, the thirtieth President of the United States! It is a rather startling prophecy on the eve that the twenty-ninth President enters into his new duties at Washington, but both are young, both are active, both have set a big job ahead of themselves, and both intend to finish it.

It cannot be finished in eight years, the time that the wisecracks allot to President Harding, hence prophetic rumblings from mysterious sources which the uninitiated can never hope to understand, happily for their peace of mind, are already busy with his successor.

This is politics. It is no reflection or offense to the incumbent to speak of a successor, but part of the game; preparedness—to use an overworked word. And there may be method in President Harding's desire to include the Vice President in his Cabinet meetings. It looks as though he is teaching Mr. Coolidge his P's and Q's.

Calvin Coolidge, like Theodore Roosevelt in the campaign of 1900, has been the political mystery of the last campaign. He emerged from state politics in 1919—as everybody knows—in connection with the policemen's strike in Boston, and rode for a time on the wave of popularity on the slogan of Law and Order.

But so much was said about law and order that Mr. Coolidge more than ever became concealed from the prying eyes of the people, and to say that politicians were thankful is to put it mildly. For a time so much was said about law and order that a foreigner who did not understand just what had happened while he was at sea believed that forty-seven governors elsewhere in these United States stood for force and disorder.

Vice President Calvin Coolidge is a most taciturn man, if measured along the lines of professional politics, but a most entertaining and interesting man if appraised as a human being who has something to say and on occasions—not always—is willing to say it. He has contributed relatively little to the verbosity of the campaign, but most of his declarations are epigrammatic, concise and self-explanatory.

His entrance into the national arena disconcerted many an ambitious office-seeker, not because Vice President Coolidge is in any way tempted to interfere with patronage prerogatives, but the inclusion of his name in the national ticket acts as a deterrent as it did in Massachusetts. Politicians and office-seekers thrive be-

tween the covers of dictionaries, so full of words are they, but using them at or against a listener who seldom reveals his own ideas is love's labor lost. They feel, and perhaps rightly so, that the Harding-Coolidge administration is going to be a régime of few words, and that automatically locks out the talkers. Even the Senate has adopted the habit of saying little between important speeches.

I believe that Vice President Coolidge will lose some of his reserve after a few months in Washington, where men after his own heart are far more numerous than they would be even in a city like Boston. That will be a good thing, because I believe the country is entitled to know him much better than it does. The most descriptive newspaper accounts about him, faithful to the extreme, do not quite convey to the citizen the personality of the Vice President.

It was my privilege to interview him in Boston last summer. He was unlike any other public official I had ever known, with the probable exception of Senator Henry C. Lodge. Both are typical New Englanders, but Senator Lodge's reserve is somewhat softened, perhaps by the years that even though they sit lightly upon him have reached the Biblical minimum.

Remembering the injunction to "Be Brief" I lost no time. He chatted very pleasantly upon the subjects I queried him about. These were the questions on the more delicate and pregnant subjects of the hour.

But how times have changed! Who would have thought, in the days of Mark Hanna, that a Republican candidate would hide his light under a couple of bushels, as the Irishman explained once, to make concealment doubly sure. Yet that is just what happened, because his views are yielded as sought.

He is a typical New England gentleman—revealing the inflexibility of time-tried precepts by which he governs himself and his family. Which brings to mind the eloquent explanation made by Mrs. Coolidge to a reporter who wanted to know if she "considered her husband fitted for the office of Vice President."

"Judging by the way he governs his family, I should say he was." Of course, she said nothing as to the way she governs him by delicious pies.

**W**HEN he stands he reveals an angular physique, suggestive of compactness, muscular as well as mental. His glance is sharp and quick, like an eagle's, and surveys without strain. No doubt he has the capacity for assimilation, but nothing about him implies submergence. It is more than understood that he has a well-developed sixth sense. He would be pained to believe that he was different from any of the millions of mortals in this country—and yet he is different in two specifications:

First, there are no anecdotes about him, unless they can be turned from epigrammatic sayings;

Second, affording it, he has never owned an automobile, although Mrs. Coolidge has said that some day she hoped to own "a Ford." Just now the government is providing them with a motor car.

One judges the weight at 145 pounds or so, but in Massachusetts they say that he weighs 145 tons politically—a new way of appraising public men. His voice, which is not adapted to public speaking in great halls, brings to mind a story, not told by Mr. Coolidge, who probably doesn't even know it.

It seems that during the campaign for the governorship about three years ago he had occasion to stop at a small town, but not on a political mission. Friends induced him to treat admiring inhabitants to a speech, and upon investigation they found that there were two halls available; one which would hold about thirty-four persons, including standees, and the town hall, which might accommodate one-half of those who would like to hear him.

The local informal committee discussed the merits of each place.

"I'd be for the little place," said one.

"But 'twon't hold the crowd," was the objection.

"Yes, but at least everybody can hear him," the former contended.

"In the big hall—his voice won't fill it."

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