

THE PRESIDENT AND HIS FAMILY

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Mrs. Taft.

MOST of our Presidents have been called from the shadows of a secluded family fireside or the slight eminence of a local "stump" to the office of Chief Executive of the nation; their wives stepping from plainest domesticity to struggle with the social intricacies of White House rule. So that President Johnson's daughter voiced the trepidation of not a few of her predecessors and those following her as hostess in the White House in her remark on the threshold, "We are plain people from the mountains of Tennessee. You must not expect much of us."

But the election of Mr. Taft brought an element of worldwide experience into the White House, and a régime of rigid formality; an adoption of modified court etiquette would not have been illogical—it was thought. For had not Mr. Taft been the first ruler to succeed Spanish absolutism in the Philippines, had he not been set to govern there an order of civilization that recognized authority only by its regal pomp? Moreover, he and Mrs. Taft had been favored guests in European courts, received by the Dowager Empress of China and by the Pope in Rome, enjoying hospitality in the throne circles of Russia and Germany. It would not have been unnatural for the point of view regarding leadership in our Republican Court to have been tinged by these experiences. At least no "hominism" in White House management could be expected.

Yet the morning before inauguration Mrs. Taft appeared, short skirted and businesslike, in Center Market, that red brick shelter rambling over several blocks in Washington's business district and spilling over into huckster trade and old "Virginny Aunty" stands along its edges, which is three days in the week the Mecca of all good housekeepers.

Mrs. Taft had with her the housekeeper she had engaged for the White House, and there followed an initiation into the methods and means of marketing that Mrs. Taft had always practised during their Washington residence in other official capacity. The housekeeper, Mrs. Jaffray, learned where the best stalls for different supplies were located, and with great care were indicated the particular cuts of meat, the variety of fruit and vegetable, preferred by Mrs. Taft.

This practical action on Mrs. Taft's part is significant of the attitude toward family life in the White House under this administration. There is still to be a Taft household, with certain traditions of unpretentious routine and close relationship preserved, outside that absorbing demand for social generalship in public entertainment that comes with the occupancy of the White House.

After Something to Eat

SOMEWHAT after the opening of Government office hours one morning not long ago, when the Taft children had returned for the holidays, a member of the executive corps of stenographers was seen walking rapidly across the park in front of the White House and headed away from that building.

"Aren't you going the wrong way, or playing hooky, or something?" queried a jocular Senator.

"No, I'm just going home to get something to eat. I've been working with the President since five o'clock."

The Senator whistled his astonishment. "Is the

President putting the 'daylight hours' scheme to a personal test?" he asked.

The clerk smiled. "Whenever he has anything important to get off, he does this. He says he doesn't like to go to the breakfast table worried," he returned, as if a President who gave up sleep to appear interested and carefree at the morning meal with his family was a matter of course. It is—in the Taft administration.

And this quiet regard of inner household courtesy is reflected in President and Mrs. Taft's attitude toward the people as merely a large family circle. Mrs. Taft's one touch in substituting her colored butler for "plain clothes" officials at the front door of the White House gives the visitor at once the impression of entering a home, and not an institution.

To have grasped immediately this one telling point as expressive of the President's and her own feeling of hospitality was characteristic of Mrs. Taft.

Contrast of the Family

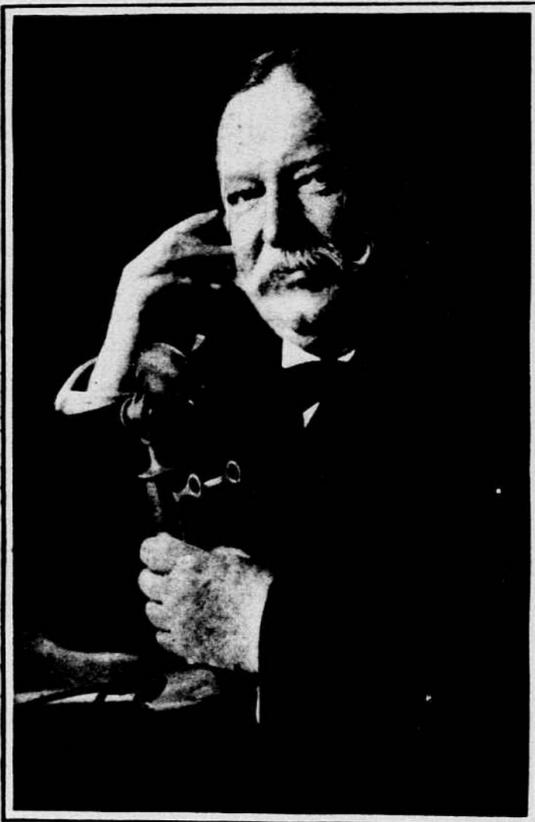
AND here a word or two regarding the contrast of temperament in this most successful partnership may not be amiss. Mr. Taft's nature is vivid and impulsive. "He takes to the colors in life" an army officer traveling with him remarked, and, once out of range of the call for calculating, weighing, processes in legal matters, and affairs of state, he is spendthriftly generous, magnetically unreserved, and compellingly optimistic.

Against this Mrs. Taft's character on first acquaintance appears rather austere. And though much of her apparent restraint had its origin in diffidence, which she has overcome as constant appearance in public brought self confidence and interest in her husband's career awoke determined effort to express cordiality, still, the wife of the President is natively introspective, rather than radiant.

The practical phase of things makes foremost appeal to Mrs. Taft, and she has a ready grasp of utilitarian details and a cautious eye for results. She is a splendidly adequate, never aggressive, supplement to President Taft's nature.

Whenever congratulated upon his administration of the Philippines, the President's incisive reply is, "Mrs. Governor General is fifty per cent. of the rule over there." And certain incidents bear at least contributive testimony to that effect.

The shocking rate of infant mortality in the islands at once claimed Mrs. Taft's appalled attention, and she took it as her problem. Gradually she persuaded the native women to accept medical attendance and proper food for the babies. When she saw what might be done, she took the matter to Mr. Taft and suggested official organization in the work. As a result there is now a far reaching charitable society known as The Drop of Milk which dispenses sterilized milk and has accomplished wonders in the physical regeneration of young Filipino children. So, when several years after Mr. Taft's governorship they returned and Mr. Taft stood in the great hall



The President in His Office.



Miss Helen Taft

calling by name the Governors of all the provinces who had journeyed to Manila to greet "Santa Taft," at the same time scores of native women were seeking out Mrs. Taft, bringing, as to a devotion, the children her work among them had saved.

Then, too, in lighter diplomacy Mrs. Taft is a practical helpmate. The idea of a Venetian Carnival to be given in the Governor's palace at Manila was an inspiration of Mr. Taft; but it was Mrs. Taft who developed the suggestion into the brilliant fête from which the annual Carnival of Flowers now held in the river and canal crisscrossed islands is an outgrowth. The guests, following directions, approached the palace by the river, and lords and ladies, peasants and queens, stepped from twinkling launches and lantern-strung barges up the marble steps, to be met by host and hostess in wonderful Venetian costumes of the fourteenth century. Mr. Taft as the "Doge of Venice" was an absolute reproduction of that historic portrait, even to the whiskers, and the Taft children considered this a triumph of diplomacy on their mother's part, since there has never been any masquerading as Santa Claus by Mr. Taft in all the family history of many very, very merry Christmases.

An apparent triviality that gave the Taft régime a strong impetus forward in the estimation of native official society in Manila was the introduction at the Governor's receptions of the "rigadon," a famous Filipino dance on the order of the minuet, but of much more complicated steps. Mr. Taft was learning the dance because it afforded an exercise adapted to the Tropics and because he, for all his weight, can make of any dance a most artistic performance and the rigadon he found particularly interesting. Mrs. Taft, witnessing a lesson, saw the possibility of a tactful adaptation of his accomplishment.

"I will learn the rigadon, too," she said, "and we will dance it together at our next entertainment." And they did, Mr. Taft afterward choosing partners for this dance from his native guests. The compliment deeply impressed this people, to whom chivalry and courteous consideration make a strong Old World appeal.

Tribute to a Wife

BUT no graceful incident so well illustrates the basic helpfulness of President Taft's domestic partnership as his own tribute to Mrs. Taft's management. Everyone knows how easily his magnetic nature has always won and held valuable friendships, how his sense of justice and his stalwart principles have carved his name in public confidence; yet he says quite simply in regard to his personal affairs, "Mrs. Taft has always kept my feet on the ground." In their early married life, when Mr. Taft was on a small salary, it was Mrs. Taft who guarded the balance of income and outgo, that no flights of impulsive expenditure might come to settle back with black wings over the home.

A short time ago some one was offering sympathy to President Taft on the discouraging way in which the Philippine legislators seemed bent upon bringing to naught all his efforts for their industrial salvation; but he said:

"No; all we need is patience. Did you ever watch