

1-8

William Howard Taft

It is not only of the man now in the White House and the hair shirt we have been thinking this month. The death of Chief Justice Taft has turned our thoughts to his presidency. Anyone who remembers his four years and the refusal to give him a second term knows that the public put a very annoying hair shirt on him - one that if he had not been fundamentally one of the most kindly, modest, humorous, philosophical of human beings, would have soured him for life. But no criticism - no ingratitude - no public storm of disapproval - no injustice ever embittered that great friendly nature.

When Mr. Taft was buried in Arlington in March, his old pastor recalled that he loved and often quoted this verse from the Bible:-

"What doth the Lord require of thee, but do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

There you have the man - one who tried to do justly - who loved mercy, and who walked humbly.

2

We women, who are interested in the permanent Peace of the World, owe a great debt to Mr. Taft for his valiant efforts to convince the public that peace meant union with other nations, continuous co-operation to settle difficulties at the Council table, rather than on the battle field.

I don't know that any man in our history, after serving a term in the Presidency has taken on a more difficult and wearing task than Mr. Taft. For months and months he went about the country lecturing on, what was then called, the League to enforce Peace. It was my business, as a speaker, to follow Mr. Taft in certain Lyceum lecture courses and I shall never forget the impression of confidence, respect and friendliness, that he had made on his audiences. They might or might not have been convinced by his arguments that a League to enforce peace was the wisest thing for the country, though I think that the greater number were everywhere - they spoke of him as a great citizen - loving his country and wanting to serve all mankind.

In his social relations Mr. Taft was the simplest and friendliest of men. I shall never forget how, he once re-assured me, when I found myself in that position which was causing me real alarm. I had had the honor to be invited to a Cabinet dinner - one of those dinners where a member of the Cabinet entertains the President. It was a great affair in my winter and I was pleased and excited that I was to be seated at the same table with the President of the United States and his wife - even at the foot, where I belonged, since I represented nothing but myself. Late in the afternoon of the day of the dinner, my hostess called me to say that the distinguished lady, who was to have been at the right of Mr. Taft had wired her that a sudden bereavement would prevent her presence. Who was to take her place? It was the business of the State Department to decide. My hostess flew to them. What was she to do? I suppose the necessity of having a perfectly innocuous person politically and diplomatically beside the President, was the reason that I was assigned the place.

I shall never forget my alarm - my feeling of insufficiency. Who was I that I should sit in such a position? But the State Department had spoken and I found myself at the proper hour placed in this position of honor.

I had not been there two minutes before any embarrassment had disappeared. This was a friendly gentlemen. He wanted everybody

to have a good time at his party and he certainly was having one himself. There was something very lovable in the way that the President talked of his election - not at all of any pride or pleasure he had in taking this place, but at his joy that it had brought pleasure to his mother - pride to her. That was, I think, satisfaction enough to President Taft, for any scratching of the hair shirt, which the public had already pulled over his head.