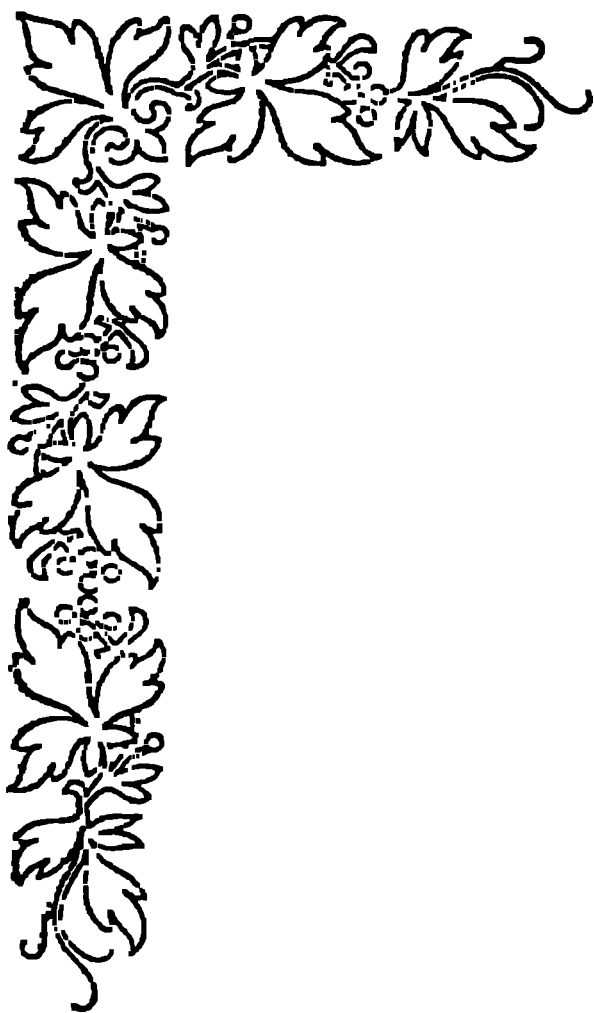


The Taft Kin



THE TAFT KIN*

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT comes from straight New England stock. He himself was born in Cincinnati, but his father was born in Townsend, Vt., and his mother in our own Boston. The various ancestors back to the immigrants were identified in race and religion with old time New England. The Taft homestead is in Uxbridge, Mass., where Robert Taft settled about 1680. The notable reunions of the family take place at the ancient home. Robert Taft, a housewright, appears in Braintree before 1679, owning land, but plying his trade, that is, constructing frame buildings, transporting them to Boston and erecting them. Little is known of Robert Taft in his beginning labors in New England. He

* THE TAFT KIN appeared as a signed article on the editorial page of the *Boston Evening Transcript* of March 4th, 1909. Extra copies can be obtained by addressing the writer, Rev. Anson Titus, 10 Raymond Avenue, West Somerville, Boston, Mass.

was no mean citizen in Mendon from 1680 onward, settling in that part of Mendon which in 1727 became Uxbridge. He had many acres "near the pond," and on each side of the Mumford River. He raised five ~~musky~~ and lusty sons, and they made the farms bring forth harvests, and the waterways to turn wheels. They erected and maintained their own bridge for their own and the town's convenience, and were allowed for the same by the people of Mendon. "The bridge the Tafts built" is a phrase often in town reports and court records. It was not only a landmark and starting point for measuring distances, but was an enterprise which told mightily in developing the new lands of the Nipmuck region. The value of a bridge across a river in a semi-wilderness or in settled towns can scarcely be estimated. It was a bold plan, earnestly executed, and the bridge was maintained at no small annual cost in labor. Robert Taft was a selectman in Mendon in 1680, and in 1704 was one of ten men to purchase the Indian title of the town of Sutton, the same being confirmed by the General Court.

The five sons of Robert Taft were

Thomas, Robert, Daniel, Joseph and Benjamin. These men intermarried with like good stock and reared large families. The son Joseph, born in 1680, was a captain in the Provincial Militia and a man of prominence in town affairs. His wife was Elizabeth Emerson, a granddaughter of Rev. Joseph Emerson, first minister of Mendon. They had sons Moses, Peter, Joseph and Aaron. Rev. Adin Ballou in his history of Milford says: "The Tafts were prolific and famous for large families." Peter Taft, born 1715, married Elizabeth Cheney and had sons Henry, Gershom, Aaron and Peter. Aaron was born 1743. Tradition says he took a partial course at Princeton College. He married Rhoda Rawson and had eleven children. About 1800 he removed from Uxbridge to Townsend, Vt., where he passed away after nine years of toil on the new lands. He was a Minute Man and responded on the alarm from Concord and Lexington. Rhoda Rawson was of excellent descent, from Edward Rawson, a principal founder of Boston, through Rev. Grindall Rawson, whose wife Susan descended from Rev. John Wilson, the first minister of Boston,

and from Rev. John Hooker, the first minister and founder of Hartford, Conn.

Josiah Taft, a grandson of Robert Taft, the immigrant, was at his decease the largest taxpayer of Uxbridge, and the town meeting granted the right of suffrage to his widow during the minority of her son, and she exercised it with credit to her intelligence. On an occasion the Province of Massachusetts Bay laid special requisition for money upon towns for general purposes, possibly for some military emergency, and it was her vote in town meeting which carried the question. She royally displayed her patriotism by her support of the provincial measure.

The military record of the Taft family is excellent. Captain Joseph Taft, in the early part of the eighteenth century, had kinsmen for compatriots. The perils of the wilderness and the ravages of the Indians were constant. In the struggle for American Independence there were at least sixty of the name from Massachusetts in the service. There were two from Connecticut and five from Vermont. Aaron Taft, who settled in Vershire, Vermont, was a Revolutionary soldier, and was one of four

brothers who stood above six feet and weighed over two hundred pounds, resembling their father.

Aaron Taft for long years was town clerk of Uxbridge. From the financial stress following the War of the Revolution he failed to recover himself as he wished, and like many another, with nothing to lose and everything to gain, struck out for Vermont. He may not have replenished his estate as he desired, but he contributed a wealth of character to the new town in a Vermont wilderness. His eldest son, Peter Rawson Taft, born 1785, was a lad of fourteen, and led a cow from Uxbridge to Townsend. The cow was no unimportant factor in a growing family in a season of pinching want. The recuperation of the American Colonies following the Revolutionary War, by opening new lands, and the marvellous harvests which the virgin soil produced, will ever be regarded as one of the wonders of our national life. So with the Taft family as with many another. Stress may have been with them for a few years, but industry and prudence, sharpened by want, amid the bounties which new lands produced, replenished the family fort-

unes. The widow of Aaron Taft survived many years, and Peter Rawson Taft, the son, entered upon the estate of manhood with a generous assortment of mother wit which stood him in need through a long and useful life. He was an educated man, though he was innocent of academic training, but he had the gift of using the knowledge he had, and more was bestowed upon him. He taught school, was a land surveyor, was a trial justice from 1818, judge of probate, 1830-1832, and judge of Court of Common Pleas, 1835 onward. He also was a chief promoter of the Academy at Townsend. Peter Rawson Taft, in 1841, removed to Cincinnati, where his only son, Alphonso, had established himself in the profession of law, and after a busy life he and his good wife, after a married life of fifty-six years, passed forward to the world immortal about 1867. The wife was Sylvia Howard, a daughter of a sturdy pioneer of Vermont.

Alphonso Taft was born in 1810, was reared among the homespun living of practical people, prepared for college at the Townsend Academy, graduated at Yale 1833 with high honors, was an instructor

at Yale and admitted to the Connecticut bar in 1838, removed to Cincinnati, accumulated an extensive practice, was often summoned to serve Ohio, in 1865 became a judge, 1876 a member of President Grant's cabinet, afterwards minister to Austria and Russia, and died in 1891, aged eighty years. The delight of his life was the preparation and delivery of an historical address in 1874 at Uxbridge before a reunion of the descendants of Robert Taft. It gave him pleasure; he found joy in recalling the traditions of his tribe, and the occasion will be long treasured in the annals of the family.

Alphonso Taft married first Fanny Phelps, who was the mother of two sons; and he married second Louisa Torrey, by whom were three sons and a daughter. These wives and mothers were choice women. Louisa Torrey, the mother of William Howard Taft, was the daughter of Samuel D. Torrey, and wife Susan Holman, a daughter of Asa, and a granddaughter of Colonel Jonathan Holman, one of the marked patriots of the American Revolution. Maternal as well as paternal ancestry contributed to place the man

whom the nation delights to honor under great obligations to revere the royal company of men and women of earlier New England.

The catalogues of our colleges reveal that the Taft family have been ambitious for an education. Harvard University registers thirteen before 1905, Brown University registers twenty-six, Dartmouth College five, and Michigan University four. It is for Yale University to claim the honor of training William Howard Taft. Judge Alphonso Taft was a loyal alumnus of Yale. He kept in touch with its traditions, and in its corporation was of influence in moulding its action. His five sons and several grandsons pursued their studies in Yale and won its highest honors. It is not a campus nor buildings which make a college, but its students who turn adversities into victories. Happy Yale that the Taft family turned to its halls of learning.