

ALTON B. PARKER

A Close Range Personal Study of the Man, by James Creelman—His Early Life as Farmer Boy, School-teacher and Law Clerk—On the Supreme Court Bench at Thirty-three—His Farm at Esopus—His Methods at Work and Play—Strong, Simple, Practical and Thoroughly American—Grave Dignity Which Suggests Great Reserve Power.

JAMES CREELMAN, the famous special correspondent, recently prepared for the New York World the following close range personal study of Judge Alton Brooks Parker, chief justice of the New York state court of appeals and one of the leading Democratic presidential possibilities:

While the country is calling for information about Chief Judge Parker, to whom millions of Democrats are turning for safe leadership in the struggle for control of the nation, the politicians of both parties who swarm over the hill on which the capitol of New York stands, the agents of corruption, rascals in and out of office, leaders of the bar and noisy pettifoggers, all have daily sight of him as he strides through the streets of Albany between the Hotel Ten Eyck, in which he lives, and the court of appeals, over which he presides.

Even in this center of political and legislative intrigue, where the weaknesses and selfish ambitions of public men are so soon searched out, this strong, brave, modest man has not an enemy. At the top of the Albany hill he sits, black robed, on the bench. At the foot of it is the law office from which David B. Hill is directing the campaign to make him president of the United States. Yet men of all parties, including his associates on the bench, bear witness that Judge Parker, in the face of exceptional flattery and against the pressure of a thousand influences, has maintained the highest traditions of his great judicial office by his consistent aloofness from politics, his simple, unpretending dignity and his devotion to his public duties.

It is not that he is colorless or without ambition. There is no more warm blooded or aggressive man in the country. And he is known to be deeply attached to his party. His silence is the result of self discipline and a conception of judicial propriety which nothing can shake. It is not a political posture, but a deliberate line of conduct, which he has followed for nineteen years.

The kindly looks turned upon him in the streets, the deference paid to him wherever he moves, without respect to party, and the frank admiration expressed when his name comes up in private conversation in this cynical and suspicious neighborhood show how fully his sincerity, breadth of mind and modest independence have impressed themselves upon those who have him under daily scrutiny.

Kindness of heart, firmness of will, charity in the judgment of others, constancy in friendships, love of work for its own sake, neighborliness, a quiet scorn for demagoguery, self righteous attitudes or spectacular methods—these are his recognized traits. He is never a boaster, and his sense of humor will not permit him to be pompous. It would be hard to find a man of more simple and wholesome manners—a cultivated jurist who has always been and still is a successful practical farmer.

A Man of Giant Strength.

Judge Parker is six feet tall and a man of giant strength. His shoulders are broad and his chest deep. His muscles, developed by hard work on the farm and by daily horsemback riding, are the muscles of an athlete. He slopes perfectly as a man should, from his shoulders to his feet, and in spite of his nearly fifty-two years and his weight of 196 pounds his step is as light as a boy's, and he can vault into the saddle with ease.

His face is that of a country bred man, strong and full of color. The eyes are large and of an agreeable brown; lionlike eyes but for the kindly expression. One notices the eyes first and then the immense jaws and formidable round chin. The lower part of the face is heavy, but not brutal. It has a powerful line and outward thrust that suggest tremendous will power. The mouth is large and masculine, with a thick lower lip. The upper teeth are big, flat and white. The lower teeth are smaller. The coarse, tawny mustache goes well with the brilliant brown eyes and the reddish brown hair.

The judge's nose is aquiline. He has high cheek bones, but the characteristic is not marked. His high, broad forehead slopes back without a bump. It is a singularly symmetrical brow, showing penetration, observation, ambition and energy. The black head is not large and is somewhat straight, so

that it does not balance with the great jaws and the fighting chin.

Nowhere in the face or head is there a suggestion of craft. Nor is there anything sly or sly in the eyes. They look at you straight. The practical and logical dominate the imaginative qualities—impulse is a slave to will. The lack of wrinkles between the eyebrows and the smooth forehead indicates a man who can concentrate his mind without the great effort which contracts the facial muscles.

Judge Parker dresses well and always in dark colors, usually grays. His ordinary attire is a cutaway coat of rough gray cloth and gray trousers. He wears a standing collar and a simple black cravat, held by a small pearl. Few men are more decorous or careful in their dress. In spite of his passion for work and his many pressing duties he usually dresses three times a day—for riding, for business and for dinner. And his clothes fit him, which cannot be said of most men in public life.

Dignity Suggests Great Power.

There is a grave dignity as well as a suggestion of immense power in Judge Parker which goes well with his black silk robe when he presides in the court of appeals. He is the youngest man in the row of judges. He is attentive to argument and keeps his eyes steadily on the lawyer who may be pleading. His courtesy to lawyers is well known. When he makes a ruling he does not waste words. It is useless to argue; the thing is done. All his associates say that he does everything in his power to save them from unnecessary work, and it is indicative of his nature that he is the only member of the court of appeals who is always present when the court is open. The other judges take their weeks off regularly, but Judge Parker serves every day of the session, so that there shall always be some one on the bench familiar with every ruling or agreement made in court.

As the judge sits high up in the great oaken hall of justice, with its bronze statue of Livingston and its paneled portraits of dead jurists, John Jay in his crimson university robes high above them all, he can see through the windows the Hudson river, which sweeps the shore of his beloved farm at Esopus, sixty miles away, where his family, his crops and his herds await him at each week's end. However deeply his mind is immersed in the complex problems of his great office, his heart is always in his farm, for he was born a farmer and will be one till he dies. This familiar and practical knowledge of farming and farmers is of great value to the court in dealing with agricultural cases.

Judge Parker's Working Traits.

Considering the fact that within a few months Judge Parker is likely to be the Democratic candidate for president it is worth while noticing his working traits as a public officer. He goes at his task without nervousness. It is hard to imagine a less nervous man. He works with method and deliberately. Unlike President Roosevelt, he does not lurch at things in a fury of energy, but makes progress in an orderly and calm mood. After dictating an opinion he goes over the sheets and strikes out everything unnecessary or rhetorical. But his corrections ordinarily relate merely to details; he does not have to pull his work to pieces. Nor is there any one who ever heard him speak discourteously or in anger to a subordinate. His tact and natural kindness make things move smoothly. Yet there is an iron firmness about him.

His Farm at Esopus.

At the end of every week and during the summer vacation Judge Parker is to be found on his picturesque farm at Esopus, which overlooks the Hudson river. He has three farms in New York state—one of 150 acres at Cortland, another of 150 acres at Accord and still another of 90 acres at Esopus. He manages these three farms and makes them, on the whole, pay. He is no dilettante stranger to the country, playing with agriculture as with a toy, but a real farmer, who directs the work, superintends the plowing and, in harvest time, goes out in his shirt sleeves to work with his men in the hay and sorghum.

A careful estimate of Judge Parker's wealth places the value of all his possessions at about \$30,000. This property he has acquired mostly by saving and good business judgment. His farm at Cortland came to him from his father. He was born on it and worked along its furrows as a boy.

Of Old English Stock.

On his father's side the judge comes of old English stock. His great-grandfather, John Parker, was born in 1761

at Worcester, Mass. He was a hard-working farmer. When the war for Independence broke out he left his plow and served as a private under Washington until the American republic was established. Little is known of him except that he was a man of pluck and independence and was greatly respected by his neighbors. His son, John Parker, was an intelligent man, highly educated and public spirited. In 1803 he came to New York state and bought a farm at Cortland, the same farm which his distinguished grandson owns and cultivates today. He had a large family, and when his health broke down the burden fell heavily upon his son John, the father of Judge Parker. Those who remember the judge's father say that he was a man of studious habits. In spite of his bitter struggle for life on the farm he read widely and deeply. He was especially fond of committing rare passages to memory, and every spare moment found him poring over a good book.

On his mother's side Judge Parker derives good New England blood. His white haired mother, who lives at Derby, Conn., is a woman of refinement, education and strong character. In the summer time she spends the judge's vacation with him at Esopus. She is a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance union. The giant sits before his mother while she solemnly lectures him on temperance, and, being an abstemious man, he smiles and promises to be good. Her constant aim is to warn him against ambition. When the newspapers grow loud in his praise he is sure to get a letter from his mother exhorting him to be humble.

Farmer Boy and Schoolteacher.

The judge was born on the farm near Cortland almost fifty-two years ago. He attended the village schools and worked about the farm. When sixteen years old he taught school in a country schoolhouse and established his authority by thrashing the school bully. Then he taught school at Binghamton. Presently he was a teacher at Accord, in Ulster county, at \$3 a day. He intended to go to Cornell university and was saving money for that purpose, but his father's necessities drew from his slender income, and his hopes of a university course failed. He moved to Kingston and entered the law office of Schoonmaker & Hardenbergh as a clerk. Then he entered the Albany Law school, and upon graduating he returned to Schoonmaker & Hardenbergh. Within a few months he took a partner named Kenyon and opened a law office at Kingston.

For twelve years the young lawyer practiced his profession in Kingston. He had a good income and won several important cases. During that time he was quite free from the control or influence of large corporations.

In 1877 he was elected surrogate of Ulster county and was afterward elected for a second term. That was his first experience of public office.

His entrance into politics was due simply to his love for his old employer, Judge Schoonmaker, who had been driven out of politics. He believed that the judge had been wronged and set out to restore him to popular favor. So earnest was his campaign that his heart became a recognized political factor in Ulster county, being a favorite of Mr. Tilden and Mr. Manning, who trusted and consulted him. In 1885 he was induced to become chairman of the Democratic state executive committee, and in the campaign which he managed David B. Hill was elected governor. Mr. Hill appointed him to a seat on the supreme court bench when Justice Westbrook died.

Honors Came Early.

When Judge Parker was thirty-three years old he was unanimously nominated for the supreme court bench by the Democrats. The Republicans would not nominate an opponent. Not a vote was cast against him. He served on the supreme court bench until his election as chief judge of the court of appeals in 1897 by a plurality of about 60,000 votes.

During his nineteen years on the bench he has ignored politics. In 1896 and 1900 he voted for Mr. Bryan, but it was well understood that he was a sound money man and merely accepted the will of the majority in his party.

Judge Parker's wife was Miss Schoonmaker of Accord, a woman of rare refinement and good Dutch Revolutionary blood. Their daughter married the Rev. Charles M. Hale, rector of an Episcopal church at Kingston, which is within easy driving distance of Esopus. The judge's son died two years ago.

It is on the farm at Esopus that Judge Parker's personality has full swing. Here he writes his most important judicial opinions. Here, too, he works in his fields, prunes his trees and cares for his thirty registered Red Poll cattle, his full blooded Poland-China pigs and fine flock of Shropshire sheep.

Rosemont, for so the farm is called, is a beautiful place, all up and down hill, fronting the Hudson and extending on either side of the rocky road that sprawls in from the village of Esopus. Across the great river is seen one of the new Vanderbilt houses. In the other direction are the lovely wooded mountains leading toward the Catskills.

His Home Life.

The judge's house is a modest but comfortable wooden structure, standing on the stone foundations of a Dutch house of colonial times. It is set on the side of a hill among shade trees and fronts the river. It is the

room of hospitality and refinement, the typical home of an American gentleman. The pictures, the books, the furniture, the wide hall and glowing fireplace, the sunny library and the dining room, with its long mahogany table, all show evidences of intelligent tastes that were not developed in one generation.

Here Judge Parker walks among his bulls and cows, in top boots and pea jacket, the incarnation of strength and virility. He strides through the sorghum and hay fields, visits the great barn, tends the sick cow or fondles the latest calf and helps his men to clear up the leaves or stubble. His cheeks glow, his eyes shine, and he swings his arms like a boy, drinking in great drafts of the pure air or whistling a merry tune.

None of his eight farm hands knows half as much as he does about the trees, the crops, the cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, turkeys or ducks. Whether in the peach or apple orchard, in the cow pasture, barn or sty, he is the master of all in knowledge as well as in energy. He will ply his pitchfork or put his shoulder under a heavy load with the best of them, and it is a good man who can keep up with him. He is modest enough, save when he stands among his great Red Poll cattle, the pride of his heart. Then he swells with conscious comradeship, for they are like him—big, strong and genuine. There is no finer sight in that part of the country than Judge Parker in the middle of his herd, calling to his great bulls and laughing as they come to him.

There are a tall silo and a cold storage house, built on the judge's plans. In the storage house are apples, pears, etc., and all manner of good things to eat, mostly the product of Rosemont. Thrift, orderliness and energetic management are everywhere in evidence.

In his home the gentle, lovable traits of the austere chief judge reveal themselves. To his wife, the inspiration of his mature life, he is always like a boyish lover. To his venerable mother he is the dutiful son, smiling at her stern sermons on temperance and humility, but proud of her noble character.

He takes his little redheaded grandson by the hand and swings around the veranda with him like another child. He catches up his baby granddaughter Mary in his arms and dances up and down the wide hall, whistling the while. And when his name is mentioned to her she always purses her rosy lips and tries to whistle.

He drives his family to his son-in-law's church at Kingston every Sunday and sings heartily, so that strangers in the congregation are apt to turn their heads. Nor does he forget to have his domestic servants, who are Roman Catholics, driven to their own church regularly.

The judge is a vestryman in the Kingston church and, although a man of very moderate means, he is probably the wealthiest man in the congregation. He is the practical pillar of the church and takes an active interest in its charities, its cooking and sewing and dancing schools, its physical culture class and its basketball games for boys. He is also a contributor to the funds of the local orphan asylum and is one of the managers of the Kingston city hospital.

His neighborly usefulness is to be seen on all sides. He is even the freight agent of a steamboat company, so that the little private dock on his farm may be used for the convenience of the community, and there the fastest steamboats of the Hudson touch on their way to and from New York.

Likes Magazines and Novels.

He is a confirmed magazine reader, delighting in such periodicals as Harper's and the Outlook. He seldom reads poetry, but is fond of good novels. Mrs. Parker is always on the alert for a good new story for her hard-working husband. But his natural taste is for Dickens, Thackeray and Scott. He delights in the vigorous out of door atmosphere of "The Scottish Chiefs." Jefferson is his favorite political writer. Any book or article on agriculture or cattle breeding is sure to interest him.

His daughter, Mrs. Hale, is an accomplished musician and used to sing in a choir at Kingston. The judge took her to Germany to study music, but Mrs. Parker's health failed suddenly, and her daughter insisted on returning to the United States. Mrs. Hale plays the piano for her father, and he occasionally sings. His musical tastes are very simple, and classical compositions are apt to bore him.

After he has spent a morning working on his judicial opinions—hours of grave concentration, when no one is permitted to interrupt his quiet—and when he is waiting for lunch his secretary, Arthur MacCausland, will sit at the piano while the judge in a sweet tenor voice sings old fashioned ballads or hymns, "I Feel Just as Young as I Used to Be," "Only an Armor Bearer," "Hold the Fort," and so on.

It is all very simple and natural in that house, and hospitality is the first law. Indeed, the judge carries hospitality to an extreme. All his neighbors are his friends. When he sits at the head of the long mahogany dining table with his wife, mother, brother, daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren, with one or two guests and perhaps a neighbor visitor, he is the life of the scene—gentle, dignified, helping the conversation, but never forcing it, a rare gift in a man of strong mentality.

A Day With Judge Parker.

It seems a small thing to write about a man's private habits, yet they throw some light upon his character, and, in

the case of this farmer chief judge, who has shrunk so long from public notice, a description of his ordinary day is suggestive of his type. Nothing in the life of a candidate for president is unimportant.

He rises usually at half past 6 o'clock in the morning, takes his cold plunge, shaves and dresses himself in thirty minutes. His riding dress is a brown corduroy jacket and breeches, cloth cap and leather leggings. After taking a cup of coffee without sugar he is ready for his ride.

Then he mounts his big bay saddle horse and rides at a hard trot for an hour over the country roads. The whole region is full of historical interest, and the judge knows every house and story. Now and then an early rising farmer sees him riding at a full gallop, talking to his horse and sometimes throwing up his arms in sheer excess of animal spirits.

After his daily ride, which he takes, whether in Albany or at Esopus, regardless of the season, he dresses for business and eats a hearty breakfast, usually of fruit, oatmeal porridge, beef-steak or sausages or bacon and eggs, with buckwheat cakes, maple syrup, hot corn bread and two cups of coffee.

When breakfast is over he goes to court for consultation, if he is in Albany, or works on his opinions, if he is at Esopus.

An Abstemious Man.

His ordinary lunch consists of thin soup, tea without milk or sugar, fruit and custard or pumpkin pie.

Then he goes to court and sits on the bench until 6 o'clock, or, if he is on the farm, he divides his time between his cattle, crops and judicial writing.

He always puts on evening dress for dinner. That meal is generally made up of soup and a roast, such as beef, lamb or spare ribs, principally of his own killing, followed by a salad and fruit or pie. His one abomination is "butter milk pap," a beverage which his wife delights in, but seldom serves when he is present.

The judge usually drinks water with his dinner, save when he has guests, and then Mrs. Parker sets forth wine. He occasionally takes a whisky highball with his meal. Altogether he is a strongly abstemious man. He smokes after dinner, but never before.

Sleeps Only Six to Seven Hours.

Notwithstanding the early hour at which he rises and the steady vigor with which he works, Judge Parker does not retire before 11 o'clock or midnight. He sleeps soundly and is up again, clear eyed and smiling, at 6:30 o'clock. He averages less than seven hours in bed.

To understand the judge's business capacity and his common sense way of dealing with difficult situations it is necessary to know how he saved the Ulster County Savings institution. In September, 1891, this important bank, which had deposits of \$2,500,000, closed its doors in consequence of embezzlements by the treasurer and assistant treasurer of sums which, with the dividends due, amounted to \$400,000. This wiped out the supposed surplus and left the institution with a deficiency. The usual action was taken by the attorney general to wind up the business and distribute the assets, and a temporary receiver was appointed.

It was found that it was impossible to wind up the affairs of the bank in the ordinary way without substantially destroying the market value of the real estate of the bank. This was so because the institution had invested about \$1,900,000 in real estate mortgages, one-half of which were on farms. To throw so many farms on the market would have caused a crash in their values.

Among the trustees of the bank were Judge Parker, General Sharpe and Judge Kenyon. Judge Parker was on his farm at Accord when he got a hint that there was something wrong. He left his fields, hurried to Kingston, made a quick investigation and had the assistant treasurer lodged in jail that night.

To save the depositors from loss Judge Parker took the leadership. He tried to get some strong institution like an insurance company to take an assignment of the mortgages, with some local bank as discount agent. No institution willing to take the assignment could be found. It looked as if the mortgages would have to be foreclosed to pay the debt, which meant a destruction of values and little assets for the depositors, who were in a state of terror and confusion.

Worked Night and Day.

Judge Parker began to look about for an honorable and wise way to save the institution and its depositors. He got a number of the old trustees to assist him.

His scheme was a new one in New York state. The idea was to ask the equity court to substitute in place of the temporary receiver twenty-five prominent citizens to act as trustees. The judge worked day and night urging the strongest men in the county to his aid in saving the bank. He got presidents and cashiers of banks and other business men enlisted. Everything else was thrown aside until the twenty-five trustees were secured.

Fortunately for the institution, Charles M. Preston, the state superintendent of banking, who lived at Kingston, gave Judge Parker's bold plan his official support. The legal battle was before Justice Fursman in the special term of the supreme court at Troy. It resulted in a decree substituting the twenty-five trustees for the temporary receiver and scaling down the amount due to each depositor to his *pro rata* share of the assets. The

court also enjoined the depositors from drawing out more than 25 per cent of their deposits till further judicial orders were made.

Stopping a Panic.

And now a tremendous excitement was stirred up in consequence of local political disturbances. The leading newspaper of Ulster county, to embarrass the bank and thus injure some of the original trustees, advised the depositors to draw out their allowable 25 per cent as soon as the bank's doors opened, as it would probably be all they would ever get.

A frantic crowd of depositors stormed the bank. The "run" meant ruin. But when the doors opened there was Judge Parker, with a bag of money which he had obtained in New York. He was determined to prevent a panic. Leaping on the treasurer's desk, with flashing eyes he faced the white faced, excited crowd, and, flinging a roll of money down, he cried: "Come on! We are ready to pay. Come on! Do you think we would waste our time on a broken bank?"

Instantly the panic ceased. Judge Parker had saved the day. The depositors departed, and only 11 per cent of them drew out their money. That saved the Ulster County Savings institution, which has since worked out of its difficulties.

The general term of the supreme court and the court of appeals both sustained Judge Parker's novel plan as sound in law. The judge never rested till the fleeing treasurer and assistant treasurer were sent to the state prison, where they both died.

After awhile Judge Parker was asked to become president of the bank. He declared that he would only accept the position on condition that the salary should be abolished. This was agreed to, and he was elected president. He did not retire until the deposits of the bank were several hundred thousand dollars greater than they were before its doors were closed.

The rescue of this savings bank and its depositors is the achievement of which Judge Parker is proudest. It is the most stirring incident of his private life.

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