HON. PHILANDER CHASE KNOX.

By

EDWIN W. SMITH.

The boy, who was afterwards known as Philander Chase Knox, was born on the 6th day of May, 1853, at Brownsville, Fayette County, Pennsylvania. He was a son of David S. Knox and the grandson of the Rev. William Knox.

His grandfather came from County Tyrone, Ireland, to the United States in the year 1797. He was a Methodist preacher and when he came to this country joined the Baltimore Conference of that Church. The Western part of Pennsylvania was within this Conference. It is said that he had, at one time, charge of the Smithfield Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh. He was married three times and had twelve children. Miss Mary Smith of Connellsville was his second wife. At the time of this marriage he was preaching at Connellsville. Later the family moved to Cadiz, Ohio. He died there in 1851 being eighty-four years old.

David S. Knox was the son of his father's second wife, Mary Smith. He was born at Connellsville on the 19th day of May, 1805, and was seven years old when the family moved to Cadiz. He left school when he was fifteen years of age. He came back to Connellsville to visit relatives and stayed there. In 1829 he married Sarah Francis, a daughter of Dr. James Francis, who was a surgeon in the army of the Revolutionary War. It is said that Dr. Francis was a close friend of Washington and was with him through the winter at Valley Forge. There were three children of this marriage: William F. Knox, afterwards Dr. Knox of McKeesport; Sarah J., afterwards Mrs. Miller, and Isabella, who died in infancy. David Knox's first wife died in 1833 and about three years later he married Miss Rebecca Page of Connellsville. The children of this marriage were Thomas, Samuel, Richard, Mary, Caroline, Alfred, Narcissa,
Philander and Harriette. Thomas was afterwards a druggist at Santa Barbara, California; Samuel, a physician at the same place; Mary was Mrs. Graff of Omaha, Nebraska; Alfred is a Vice President of the Mellon National Bank, and Harriette is living at Brownsville. David Knox moved with his family to Brownsville in 1836. He first lived in a house which he rented on Front Street but afterwards bought another house on Front Street where Philander and Harriette were born and where Harriette still lives.

David S. Knox was of Scotch-Irish descent. He had learned the printing trade when a boy, had taught school and had been for a time editor of the *Uniontown Democrat*. Shortly after his second marriage, he moved to Brownsville. It is not known whether, at that time, he knew that there was a vacancy in the Monongahela Bank. He learned of it and made an application for the position. He was called before the Board of Directors and was asked for his recommendations. His answer was: "I am the son of a poor Methodist preacher and have made my own way in the world since I was fifteen years old. This is my only recommendation." He was employed as teller and held this position for six years. Not seeing much chance for advancement, he resigned and made preparations to return to Connellsville. All of his household goods were packed on wagons and just about the time that he was to start he was sent for to appear before the Board of Directors of the Bank and was offered the position of cashier, which he accepted and remained.

A characterization taken from a newspaper account published at the time Knox was appointed Attorney-General is somewhat as follows: For many years, David S. Knox was the bank itself. Everybody had implicit confidence in him. He knew all the people in that part of the country. He was strong and self-reliant. He was a kind man with pleasant manners although rather stern of face. He was the friend of every man in Brownsville and the financial adviser of nearly all the people. It is said when the first war loan was offered to the people of the United States, at the time of the Civil War, the bonds went begging. The people were afraid that the country was going to be wrecked in the conflict that was to follow. David S.
Knox's advice was sought and he told everybody to take the bonds and stand by the government. As a result, the people of Brownsville and vicinity subscribed for over $2,000,000 of the bonds.

The Monongahela Bank was one of the earliest banks west of the mountains. It was the depository for a very large part of Fayette County and it is said that it never suspended specie payment.

David S. Knox died in 1872. In best of spirits and in apparent good health he retired and before morning he was dead.

It would be interesting to know something more about Knox's grandmother than we do. She had the good sensible name of Mary Smith. At least, this we know. Rebecca Page, her mother, was of English descent and the daughter of Jonathan Page and Rebekah Budd. She was a woman of extraordinary force of character, very well read, with a great love of poetry which she was fond of committing to memory and repeating to her children.

Philander Chase Knox received his name from a Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church. His father and mother were both members of the Methodist Episcopal Church and adhered to that Church all their lives. The boy showed the precocity that many children possess. He is said to have made a little speech in public at a church entertainment when he was five years old. In this connection a part of an interesting letter to his sister, Harriette, may be quoted:

"April 6th, 1901.

Dear Duchess:

I will pull your ears when I see you for furnishing fairy tales and pictures to the reporter.

Mrs. Charlie Speer called me up this morning and said she wanted me to be sworn in on a Bible Louisa Dawson gave me as a prize for repeating 900 verses of the Bible. I don't remember a thing about it and told her so, but she said you probably had it about the house or the little one Mother used to use. Now don't say anything about this to any one as I have no desire for further youthful brilliancy to be exploited, but if you have either of the Bibles send them here so I
can have them by Monday."

His first instructor was George Osborne in the public school at Brownsville. One winter he attended the private school of Joshua Gibbons, who had a great reputation as an educator and some fame as a mathematician. Knox's brother, A. C. Knox, writes:

"One of his teachers was old Joshua Gibbons, who was a teacher for many years in Brownsville. He taught every one of our family from the oldest to the youngest—10 children.

"He was also at one time the teacher of James G. Blaine.

"One time when Phil. was with him and he was misbehaving, he went over and picked him up by the nape of his neck holding him up at arms length carrying him across the school room setting him down and saying nothing—giving Phil., of course, a good fright. Gibbons was a very large man and powerfully built."

Robert Fulton was another of his teachers and later another was a man named Gilchrist.

After he went through the public school at Brownsville, he went to Morgantown, West Virginia. This school has since become the University of West Virginia. There is a tradition that Knox left Morgantown at the request of the faculty. A life-long friend of his, from college days down to the time of his death, said that Knox had told him that he was expelled because he played billiards which was against the rules. At any rate, he went to Mount Union College, which is located at Alliance, Ohio. He spent two years there and graduated in 1872.

There is one characteristic of Knox that seems to appear in all that is written and said about him now in connection with his life as a boy and that is his quality of leadership. Everywhere he went he carried an unusual influence. When at Morgantown, it is told that he was put forward in the case of some conflict between the faculty and the students and that by the force of his argument changed the attitude of the faculty. His standing in his studies seem to have been good wherever he went to school. He was popular with his fellows and had the respect of his teachers. He seems to have been given to pranks.
There is a story that one winter, during the skating season, at Brownsville, he dressed up like a girl, but after a time of attention and flirtation from the boys he was discovered and had difficulty in making a safe escape, climbing over a fence with skirts and skates on being a hazardous task.

His father died soon after his graduation. The fall and winter after his father died, Knox was in the Monongahela Bank on a small salary. He had early made up his mind to study law. It is said that he told his parents that he intended to do so when he was not more than ten years of age. At that time he probably knew nothing about the practice of the law but he had been a great admirer of Hon. John L. Dawson, Congressman from that district, a friend of his father, who was one of the leading members of the Bar of Fayette County, and lived just across the street. It was his father's wish that he should be a lawyer. In August of 1873, he went to Albany and entered the Law School there. He was taken sick before the end of the first week and came home. One account says that he was homesick but this was not likely the reason. When he got home he found two of his sisters sick with the typhoid fever. He was stricken, and Rebecca and Caroline died from this disease.

He studied law in Brownsville, for a time with Seth T. Hurd, a lawyer and editor and owner of the Brownsville Clipper. In November of 1873, he came to Pittsburgh and entered the office of H. Bucher Swope, the United States District Attorney, upon the recommendation or by the influence of Judge William McKennan of the United States Circuit Court. Mr. Swope was a man of striking appearance, great ability, wonderful oratorical power and splendid voice. Knox's associate in this office was George C. Wilson, who is now one of the leaders of the Allegheny County Bar. Mr. Swope died on the 15th day of February, 1874. The records of the county courts show that Knox was registered as a student of law on April 14, 1874, with David Reed, who had been appointed to succeed Mr. Swope as United States District Attorney. He was admitted to practice in the county courts on January 14, 1875. This was less than a year from the date of his registry. George C. Wilson says that both he and Knox had studied law be-
fore they came to Pittsburgh and that upon the petition of their preceptor, David Reed, they were given credit for the time they had studied before they were registered, by Judge James P. Sterrett, who was the President Judge of the Common Pleas Court of Allegheny County. On February 27, 1875, Knox was admitted to the United States Courts before Judge William McKennan of the Circuit Court and Judge Wilson McCandless of the District Court. This must have been by a special allowance because at that time the rules of the United States Courts required that a lawyer should have been admitted to practice for two years in the county courts and be a member of the Supreme Court of the state before he could be admitted to the United States Courts.

On March 3, 1875, Wilson and Knox were appointed Assistants to the United States District Attorney. Mr. Wilson says that they alternated during the sessions of the Court—one week one of them would take the work before the grand jury and the other would help the District Attorney in the jury trials, and the next week they would change. In June of 1876, David Reed was succeeded by H. H. McCormick as District Attorney. Knox resigned at this time and took an office on Fifth Avenue in the first story of a building standing where the Carnegie Building now is, four doors from Scrip Alley. Wilson and Knox had formed a partnership to carry on their civil law business and this kept up for a time but was dissolved about the time of Knox's resignation.

James H. Reed, a nephew of David Reed, and a student in his office, had been helping to look after his uncle's private business, although he had not yet been admitted to practice law and was thus thrown into close relations with Knox. David Reed died in 1877 and the firm of Knox & Reed was formed shortly after his death. The nephew held some of his uncle's clients. Knox, as Assistant United States District Attorney, with offices in the Federal Building adjoining the United States Clerk's offices, had built up an admiralty practice representing the seamen who came for redress into the United States Clerk's office, who sat as Commissioner in those cases. In this way he met many of the owners of the boats, and among the most
valuable clients of those early days were these steamboat-
men. Both of these young men had influential connections
which brought them business. They won and acquired suc-
cess from the start. With them there was not the long
period of waiting for clients. Their practice grew and it
was not many years until there were enrolled on the list
of their clients many important men and corporations.
It is not strange that they should have won success which
was continuous and that year by year the volume of their
business increased. They were both industrious and
capable.

The record of lawyers cases is not very interesting—
even not always to other lawyers. A lawyer's methods,
however, may be interesting. Knox was a student of his
cases, not so much a student of the law generally. He
knew the importance of the facts of every controversy.
His application of the law to the facts was usually unerring.
He did not care to give much attention to the details of his
office practice. He liked rather to select cases which were
important and interesting to him. On them he worked.
He had help but the final results were his own. He studied
carefully the authorities upon which he relied and under-
stood them. When the case was ready for trial no lawyer
was ever better prepared than he. It is doubtful if he ever
was taken by surprise by anything that occurred in the trial.
His influence upon judges was quite remarkable. The
clearness of his thought and the correctness of his judg-
ment were recognized by them. He tried a case well before
a jury, but his strength was really in the argument of ques-
tions of law before a court. Until 1901 he was in active
practice, but after he went to Washington he was engaged
in very few cases. He closed up some litigation which was
in the office by an argument in the Supreme Court of the
state soon after his appointment as Attorney-General. His
last case was one for his old friend, H. C. Frick, in which
he appeared before the Public Service Commission and in
the Superior Court with his former firm on the other side.
This case was ready for argument in the Supreme Court
when he died.

Knox's personal characteristics were interesting. He
was very companionable and a most delightful office asso-
ciate. He was never captious and seldom irritable. He was rich in humor. It is safe to say that he enjoyed and got a great deal of pleasure out of his life. He had many intimate friends. He was easily approachable. Those who knew him stood in no awe of him. He was a big man in his relations with others, generous and ready to grant indulgence and to give credit. His amusements were varied. He liked reading and music and the drama. He was fond of the outdoor sports, a good fisherman and a fine horseman. He kept fine horses and owned at one time a pair called Dr. Leek and Wert. With this team he broke the amateur record at Brunot Island driving himself in a light wagon. There is an incident in connection with this. A case, to which reference has been made before, was brought into the office by a new client, who, it was said, did not care so much about Mr. Knox as a lawyer, but he wanted the man who had broken that record.

One day a party went to Sewickley to take dinner with a lawyer friend. Among them was Knox. During the afternoon there was a drive out over the Sewickley Heights in a four-horse drag. Knox was on the box seat with the driver and after awhile was given the reins. At a very sharp turn on a steep grade he asked the driver to take the lead lines. The driver, an Englishman, and, of course, a professional, was asked afterwards by the host what kind of a driver Mr. Knox was. The answer was: “Very good for an amateur.”

On July 9, 1896, Knox was elected President of the Pennsylvania Bar Association. He was the third President. His predecessors were Judge John W. Simonton of Harrisburg and Samuel Dickson of Philadelphia. He presided at the meeting of the Association held at Cresson, Pennsylvania, beginning on June 30, 1897. His annual address was upon “The Law of Labor and Trade” with the text “The right to labor is a necessary consequence of the right to live” and “the freedom of contract is inviolable.” This address was an extremely good one and is found in the report of the Association for the year 1897. In it he advanced the thought that was frequently the subject of his talk that the common law was sufficient to protect the rights of labor and to restrain all unlawful combinations of
either labor or capital.

Knox's political career was remarkable. Never openly active in politics and probably never a delegate to any political convention, he had never held any office but that of Assistant to the United States District Attorney until he was appointed Attorney-General of the United States by President William McKinley on April 9, 1901, near the beginning of his second term. While at Mount Union, Knox had met and known McKinley, who was the District Attorney for Stark County, Ohio, and the friendship had been maintained.

After the assassination of President McKinley, Knox was again appointed Attorney-General by President Roosevelt and served until June 30, 1904. On June 10, 1904, Governor Pennypacker appointed him Senator to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Senator M. S. Quay, and he was afterward elected for the term from 1905 to 1911. In 1907 he resigned his seat in the Senate to become Secretary of State in President Taft's cabinet, which position he retained until the end of the administration on March 4, 1913. In 1916, upon the retirement of Senator George S. Oliver, he was again elected to the United States Senate for the term from 1917 to 1923. Thus it was that he held seats in the cabinets of three successive Presidents and was once appointed and twice elected Senator.

His work as Attorney-General was most useful and effective. Perhaps the most important case that he had was what is known as the Northern Securities Case. The Northern Securities Company had been organized as a holding company to take over the stocks of certain railroad companies evidently in an effort to evade the provisions of the Acts of Congress. Under Knox's direction, a bill in equity was filed in the District Court of Minnesota. It was there heard by a full bench of three Circuit Judges particularly designated to hear the case. Knox retained David T. Watson, Esq., of the Allegheny County Bar, to try this case in the Circuit Court and it was won. Upon appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States, Knox argued the case and it was again won. The effect of this decision was extremely important. It sustained the power of the government against the strong unlawful com-
bimations of corporations. During Knox's term as Attorney-General, he had charge of the business involved in the acquiring by the United States of the ownership of the Panama Canal from its French owners. The transaction involved a consideration of $40,000,000, and Knox, without the aid of any outside lawyers, carried that transaction through. After having sent some of his subordinates to Paris, he followed them, passed upon the title of the French ownership and completed the transaction.

In a book called "Mirrors of Washington," published anonymously, it is said by the author:

"Mr. Knox began his public career by attacking the Northern Securities merger, against the judgment of some of the highest paid lawyers of the country. The Supreme Court sustained him. It was the greatest victory the government ever won under the Sherman law. Thereafter Mr. Knox, who had been labeled a corporation lawyer, was proclaimed a trust buster. By the time he was fifty he had become the greatest Attorney-General in a half century. Certainly the mark he set has never been reached by any of his successors."

A very interesting incident in relation to his appointment as Secretary of State by President Taft is told by the Honorable James Francis Burke in a speech which he delivered at a memorial meeting of the Allegheny County Bar Association upon the death of Knox. After it had been announced by Taft that Knox would accept the position of Secretary of State in the cabinet, a Washington correspondent called upon Knox and, during the conversation, suggested to him that under a constitutional provision he was not eligible to the office as the salary of Secretary of State had been increased while Knox was in the Senate. Knox said with a smile: "You are right. I am ineligible and I confess that you are a more alert constitutional lawyer than either the President or myself, because neither one of us have thought of it." Mr. Taft was notified and sent the following telegram to Mr. Burke:
9:47 P. M.
HON. JAMES FRANCIS BURKE,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D. C.
I sincerely hope that Congress will pass bill to remove any doubt of Knox's eligibility. I have no doubt that an act to repeal the bill increasing the salary of the Secretary of State will effect this purpose. I sincerely hope that it will pass. I should regard the loss of Senator Knox from the first place in my cabinet as a public misfortune.

WM. H. TAFT.”

Mr. Burke in his address said:
“The suggestion in that telegram was carried out and the Congress reduced the salary of Secretary of State to the former level, in order that Mr. Knox might be made eligible for the highest place in the Cabinet. Thus the constitutional obstacle was removed and two unprecedented situations arose.

“For the first time in the history of the American Government, the Congress had virtually legislated a man into the President's Cabinet, and second, for a long time thereafter the highest ranking officer in the President's Cabinet received the lowest salary of them all.”

There would be no purpose in attempting to enumerate the things that he did as Secretary of State. His administration was recognized as most useful. He tried to organize a body in the diplomatic service of the United States of men who were young enough and capable enough to make the service efficient and respected. Along this line he did something that was worth while.

As a Senator, he was early recognized as one of the ablest men and as one of the best constitutional lawyers in the body. It is said that he drafted the declaration of war against Germany. He originated the idea that Congress had the right to make peace with Germany after the failure of the adoption of the League of Nations, and this
idea was subsequently made effective by an Act of Congress. His attitude against the participation of the United States in the League of Nations was irreconcilable. He is reported to have said that if he was the only man in the Senate to do so he would vote against the approval of the Treaty of Versailles which included the League of Nations. He early took the position that it was futile to impose upon Germany such indemnities as would be destructive of that nation. These views did not make for his popularity. Probably no man cared as little for popularity as he did. Right or wrong, the people of the United States later came to adopt his principles in relation to the League of Nations.

It is said that he twice was offered and declined the position of Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Twice he was seriously mentioned as a candidate for the Presidency of the United States.

The University of Pennsylvania gave him the degree of Doctor of Laws in 1906, Yale University in 1907 and Villa Nova in 1909.

He died suddenly at his home in Washington on the evening of October 12, 1921, in his sixty-ninth year. He left to survive him his widow, Lillian Smith Knox, the daughter of Andrew G. Smith of Pittsburgh, whom he had married on February 29, 1876, three sons and a daughter.

He had established a beautiful home at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania, which he left by his will to his daughter, Mrs. Rebecca Knox Tindel.

This is the short record of a useful and successful life. In recent years no son of Pennsylvania has left a record so marked by the luster of personal ability and by the splendor of achievement.