

# FROM PAUPER'S SON TO GOVERNOR



HIS MOTHER TOOK IN WASHING WHICH HE CARRIED TO AND FROM.

FROM Pauper's Son to Governor, was the title of a magazine article published a few years ago, when John A. Johnson was first elected governor of the state of Minnesota, and, despite its startling significance, it was indeed a true epitome of the life of this now famous executive, says the New York Times.

Handicapped by odds that would have proved insurmountable obstacles for a boy or man with less stamina and direct ambitions, he defied scientific theories of heredity and literally fought his way from poverty in a drab, dingy home to the elegantly appointed executive chamber of the marble palace which the people of Minnesota have constructed for a capitol. Although a Democrat, he has twice been chosen by an overwhelmingly Republican state to occupy that chamber, and his second victory was a more decisive one than his first.

It is a matter of record that during his first gubernatorial campaign every quarter of the state of Minnesota blossomed with placards vilifying his father and mother, and similar transgressions were carried in the parades. Some of these urged the people to vote against John A. Johnson because "His Father was a Drunkard" and "His Mother Took in Washing." Mr. Johnson's managers began to get frightened. Some of his supporters requested him to make a strong, sweeping denial. "I cannot," he replied.

## Abuse Elected Him.

The allegations were true, but he met them with the same spirit and vigor which have characterized his actions when, as a boy, he had, on numerous occasions, found it necessary to get down the basket of washing he was carrying to or from the home of his mother to that of a patron, and prove upon the bodies of toptoty young persons that he was not responsible for his father, and that he was proud of his mother. And he it to the credit of the voters of Minnesota that they delved deeper into the man's past and uncovered that part of his life which showed self-sacrifice, devotion to duty, and a tender care of his little brothers and sisters and his overburdened mother.

The revelation was tremendous against the opposing candidate. In the election that followed Minnesota gave Roosevelt a majority of 18,464, while Johnson ran 52,455 ahead of his ticket, and was elected by a majority of 7,882. In the gubernatorial campaign last fall, the Republican candidate for governor was scarcely "in the running," although the remainder of his ticket was chosen and there were few actual contests worth mentioning.

Such is the hold that Gov. Johnson has taken upon the heart of the people of Minnesota. When asked, "How do you account for your success?" he replied, "In the simple and direct way which is peculiarly characteristic of the 'I tried to make good'."

He said so with no sign of exultation. If he had indulged in some internal feeling of satisfaction, it might have been forgiven him. He had been talking about his life—not a very long life, for he is only 46—and the opportunities for contrasts had been plenty. He must have been less than human, when he thought of the little shack in the outskirts of the village of St. Peter, Minnesota, in which he was born amid a poverty that was at once sordid and hopeless, had he not also thought of how he had reached the marble palace in the hands of the Johnson household while it was still in the hands of the Johnson household.

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GOVERNOR JOHN A. JOHNSON



LEARNING PHARMACY WHILE CLERKING IN A DRUG STORE.

MRS. JOHNSON'S BOY CAN HAVE A JOB HERE IF I HAVE TO QUIT MYSELF.

the future of the present governor of Minnesota was still unforeseen only by the gods. The bitterness of it was in the soul of the boy at an age when other youngsters have no thought but for play. In his case it made the boy father to a man of whom a state is proud.

The governor's father, Gustaf, born in Sweden of the peasantry, was a strong-handed, hard-drinking blacksmith. In 1888, or thereabout, he tried to divorce himself from his habit of drinking by changing his surroundings. He came to America to find that environment has little influence over appetite, and that the whiskey of the Minnesota frontier was as potent for evil as the alcohol of his native land. It is said that he did strive for a time against temptation, and during a rather protracted sober period met and married an immigrant girl from Sweden. Caroline Carlson Hayden gave up the hard life of a hired girl on a farm to be the wife of Gustaf Johnson, a dipsomaniac, and to become the mother of a governor.

## Father Downed by Drink.

Gustaf took his wife to St. Peter, built the two-room cottage in which the future governor was born, opened a blacksmith shop, prospered for a few years, then took to drink, and thereafter figured only as a tremendous and sometimes brutal handicap to his wife and the six children who were born to them. He became a nuisance about the town, and was eventually disposed of by the authorities who, in order that he might not remain a burden upon the struggling woman whose efforts to take care of her little brood had attracted the attention of the town people, legally declared him a pauper and sent him to the county poorhouse. His wretched end would not appear to have anything in it that might go to the making of a governor, but it had.

Young Johnson was then about 13 years old. He had an insatiable thirst for learning, and had already reached high school, but he made up his mind that his mother had done the work of

the family long enough. He sought a place in a general store. The man to whom he applied said: "Mrs. Johnson's boy can have a job here if I have to quit myself." After that day his mother did no more work for hire.

How the family lived on the meagre earnings of the boy was known only to the breadwinner and his mother. He spent months trying to get employment in a drug store. The job there would pay as much money as he obtained for the manifold jobs he did around the general store.

## Clerk in a Drug Store.

Eventually securing the coveted drug store job, he absorbed such wisdom as fell from the mouths of the oracles that gathered round the barrel stove of the establishment, and drew his own conclusions. He worked four years and studied books behind the prescription case and men in front of it. He wanted to take a course in pharmacy, but there was always the family to take care of. The ordinary expenses of the household ate up everything. Then, when death came, as it did three times during the minority of the future governor, there were heart-breaking times. It is recorded that the only credit the Johnson family had was the fact that the sons ever accepted after John became his head was from the undertaker, and for five years that gloomy personage, by reason of the three funerals, took what might be pinched out of the money needed for the living expenses of the family.

It was to meet this extraordinary demand on him that young Johnson put aside his ambition to study pharmacy, and took a place in a general store, where the work was harder but the wages higher.

But he was not to be thwarted in his

desire. He worked in the general store only long enough to get even with the world, then went back to the drugist and managed by some means to obtain a certificate, and registered under the state law.

"My certificate was No. 13," he said, "but I never believed much in hoodlums."

## Pays Off Mortgage.

At times he got an idea that he might do better away from St. Peter. There was always in his boyish mind-away in the background—the shadow of the alcoholized patient in the almshouse. Not a night passed but that the thought came to him of how much easier it might be to make his way if he could start even. That thought stiffened his back and helped square the chin that protrudes so pugnaously. He would stay in St. Peter and fight it out with all the handicaps. He was tempted once, however, by the promise of higher wages, to take a position in Iowa. He did not remain there long, only a few months. At another time he was made assistant paymaster by a firm he could be security for the debt which he would incur, and that it was not an obligation that would embarrass him.

So John A. Johnson became (and still is) a Democratic editor of a country weekly in a territory fiercely Republican. He continued to make good. He wrote—and still writes—with the directness that characterizes his speech. He did not write much, but what he wrote was to the point. In five years he was secretary of the State Press association. In three years more he was president of that organization. Twice Johnson ran for office as state senator and was defeated. The third time he ran he was elected. "There is nothing like now knowing when to quit," said the governor in telling about it. He took to himself a wife, a charming little woman who has helped to make his administration popular by her tact and beauty.

When Governor Johnson talks of him-



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