

Chapter Seven

COOLIDGE PROSPERITY

BUSINESS was booming when Warren Harding died, and in a primitive Vermont farmhouse, by the light of an old-fashioned kerosene lamp, Colonel John Coolidge administered to his son Calvin the oath of office as President of the United States. The hopeless depression of 1921 had given way to the hopeful improvement of 1922 and the rushing revival of 1923.

The prices of common stocks, to be sure, suggested no unreasonable optimism. On August 2, 1923, the day of Harding's death, United States Steel (paying a five-dollar dividend) stood at 87, Atchison (paying six dollars) at 95, New York Central (paying seven) at 97, and American Telephone and Telegraph (paying nine) at 122; and the total turnover for the day on the New York Stock Exchange amounted to only a little over 600,000 shares. The Big Bull Market was still far in the future. Nevertheless the tide of prosperity was in full flood.

Pick up one of those graphs with which statisticians measure the economic ups and downs of the Post-war Decade. You will find that the line of business activity rises to a jagged peak in 1920, drops precipitously into a deep valley in late 1920 and 1921, climbs uncertainly upward through 1922 to another peak at the middle of 1923, dips somewhat in 1924 (but not nearly so far as in 1921), rises again in 1925 and 1926, dips momentarily but slightly toward the end of 1927, and then zigzags up to a perfect Everest of prosperity in 1929—only to plunge down at last into the bottomless abyss of 1930 and 1931.

Hold the graph at arm's-length and glance at it again, and you will see that the clefts of 1924 and 1927 are mere indentations in a lofty and irregular plateau which reaches from early 1923 to late 1929. That plateau represents nearly seven years of unparalleled plenty; nearly seven years during which men and women might be disillusioned about politics and religion and love, but believed that at the end of the rainbow there was at least a pot of negotiable legal tender consisting of the profits of American industry and American salesmanship; nearly seven years during which the business man was, as Stuart Chase put it, "the dictator of our destinies," ousting "the statesman, the priest, the philosopher, as the creator of standards of ethics and behavior" and becoming "the final authority on the conduct of American society." For nearly seven years the prosperity band-wagon rolled down Main Street.

Not everyone could manage to climb aboard this wagon. Mighty few farmers could get so much as a fingerhold upon it. Some dairymen clung there, to be sure, and fruit-growers and truck-gardeners. For prodigious changes were taking place in the national diet as the result of the public's discovery of the useful vitamin, the propaganda for a more varied menu, and the invention of better methods of shipping perishable foods. Between 1919 and 1926 the national production of milk and milk products increased by one-third and that of ice-cream alone took a 45-per-cent jump. Between 1919 and 1928, as families learned that there were vitamins in celery, spinach, and carrots, and became accustomed to serving fresh vegetables the year round (along with fresh fruits), the acreage of nineteen commercial truck vegetable crops nearly doubled. But the growers of staple crops such as wheat and corn and cotton were in a bad way. Their foreign markets had dwindled under competition from other countries. Women were wearing less and less cotton. Few agricultural raw materials were used in the new

economy of automobiles and radios and electricity. And the more efficient the poor farmer became, the more machines he bought to increase his output and thus keep the wolf from the door, the more surely he and his fellows were faced by the specter of overproduction. The index number of all farm prices, which had coasted from 205 in 1920 to 116 in 1921—"perhaps the most terrible toboggan slide in all American agricultural history," to quote Stuart Chase again—regained only a fraction of the ground it had lost: in 1927 it stood at 131. Loudly the poor farmers complained, desperately they and their Norrises and Brookharts and Shipsteads and La Follettes campaigned for federal aid, and by the hundreds of thousands they left the farm for the cities.

There were other industries unrepresented in the triumphal march of progress. Coal-mining suffered, and textile-manufacturing, and shipbuilding, and shoe and leather manufacturing. Whole regions of the country felt the effects of depression in one or more of these industries. The South was held back by cotton, the agricultural Northwest by the dismal condition of the wheat growers, New England by the paralysis of the textile and shoe industries. Nevertheless, the prosperity band-wagon did not lack for occupants, and their good fortune outweighed and outshouted the ill fortune of those who lamented by the roadside.

§ 2

In a position of honor rode the automobile manufacturer. His hour of destiny had struck. By this time paved roads and repair shops and filling stations had become so plentiful that the motorist might sally forth for the day without fear of being stuck in a mudhole or stranded without benefit of gasoline or crippled by a dead spark plug. Automobiles were now made with such precision, for that matter, that the motorist need hardly know a spark plug by sight;

thousands of automobile owners had never even lifted the hood to see what the engine looked like. Now that closed cars were in quantity production, furthermore, the motorist had no need of Spartan blood, even in January. And the stylish new models were a delight to the eye. At the beginning of the decade most cars had been somber in color, but with the invention of pyroxylin finishes they broke out (in 1925 and 1926) into a whole rainbow of colors, from Florentine cream to Versailles violet. Bodies were swung lower, expert designers sought new harmonies of line, balloon tires came in, and at last even Henry Ford capitulated to style and beauty.

If any sign had been needed of the central place which the automobile had come to occupy in the mind and heart of the average American, it was furnished when the Model A Ford was brought out in December, 1927. Since the previous spring, when Henry Ford had shut down his gigantic plant, scrapped his Model T and the thousands of machines which brought it into being, and announced that he was going to put a new car on the market, the country had been in a state of suspense. Obviously he would have to make drastic changes. Model T had been losing to Chevrolet its leadership in the enormous low-priced-car market, for the time had come when people were no longer content with ugliness and a maximum speed of forty or forty-five miles an hour; no longer content, either, to roar slowly uphill with a weary left foot jammed against the low-speed pedal while robin's-egg blue Chevrolets swept past in second. Yet equally obviously Henry Ford was the mechanical genius of the age. What miracle would he accomplish?

Rumor after rumor broke into the front pages of the newspapers. So intense was the interest that even the fact that an automobile dealer in Brooklyn had "learned something of the new car through a telegram from his brother Henry" was headline stuff. When the editor of the *Brigh-*

ton, Michigan, *Weekly Argus* actually snapped a photograph of a new Ford out for a trial spin, newspaper-readers pounced on the picture and avidly discussed its every line. The great day arrived when this newest product of the inventive genius of the age was to be shown to the public. The Ford Motor Company was running in 2,000 daily newspapers a five-day series of full-page advertisements at a total cost of \$1,300,000; and everyone who could read was reading them. On December 2, 1927, when Model A was unveiled, one million people—so the *Herald-Tribune* figured—tried to get into the Ford headquarters in New York to catch a glimpse of it; as Charles Merz later reported in his life of Ford, "one hundred thousand people flocked into the showrooms of the Ford Company in Detroit; mounted police were called out to patrol the crowds in Cleveland; in Kansas City so great a mob stormed Convention Hall that platforms had to be built to lift the new car high enough for everyone to see it." So it went from one end of the United States to the other. Thousands of orders piled up on the Ford books for Niagara Blue roadsters and Arabian Sand phaetons. For weeks and months, every new Ford that appeared on the streets drew a crowd. To the motor-minded American people the first showing of a new kind of automobile was no matter of merely casual or commercial interest. It was one of the great events of the year 1927; not so thrilling as Lindbergh's flight, but rivaling the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Hall-Mills murder trial, the Mississippi flood, and the Dempsey-Tunney fight at Chicago in its capacity to arouse public excitement.

In 1919 there had been 6,771,000 passenger cars in service in the United States; by 1929 there were no less than 23,121,000. There you have possibly the most potent statistic of Coolidge Prosperity. As a footnote to it I suggest the following. Even as early as the end of 1923 there were two cars for every three families in "Middletown," a typical

American city. The Lynds and their investigators interviewed 123 working-class families of "Middletown" and found that 60 of them had cars. Of these 60, 26 lived in such shabby-looking houses that the investigators thought to ask whether they had bathtubs, and discovered that as many as 21 of the 26 had none. The automobile came even before the tub!

And as it came, it changed the face of America. Villages which had once prospered because they were "on the railroad" languished with economic anæmia; villages on Route 61 bloomed with garages, filling stations, hot-dog stands, chicken-dinner restaurants, tearooms, tourists' rests, camping sites, and affluence. The interurban trolley perished, or survived only as a pathetic anachronism. Railroad after railroad gave up its branch lines, or saw its revenues slowly dwindling under the competition of mammoth interurban busses and trucks snorting along six-lane concrete highways. The whole country was covered with a network of passenger bus-lines. In thousands of towns, at the beginning of the decade a single traffic officer at the junction of Main Street and Central Street had been sufficient for the control of traffic. By the end of the decade, what a difference!—red and green lights, blinkers, one-way streets, boulevard stops, stringent and yet more stringent parking ordinances—and still a shining flow of traffic that backed up for blocks along Main Street every Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Slowly but surely the age of steam was yielding to the gasoline age.

§ 3

The radio manufacturer occupied a less important seat than the automobile manufacturer on the prosperity bandwagon, but he had the distinction of being the youngest rider. You will remember that there was no such thing as radio broadcasting to the public until the autumn of 1920,

but that by the spring of 1922 radio had become a craze— as much talked about as Mah Jong was to be the following year or cross-word puzzles the year after. In 1922 the sales of radio sets, parts, and accessories amounted to \$60,000,000. People wondered what would happen when the edge wore off the novelty of hearing a jazz orchestra in Schenectady or in Davenport, Iowa, play “Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean.” What actually did happen is suggested by the cold figures of total annual radio sales for the next few years:

1922—\$ 60,000,000	(as we have just seen)
1923—\$136,000,000	
1924—\$358,000,000	
1925—\$430,000,000	
1926—\$506,000,000	
1927—\$425,600,000	
1928—\$650,550,000	
1929—\$842,548,000	(an increase over the 1922 figures of 1,400 per cent!)

Don't hurry past those figures. Study them a moment, remembering that whenever there is a dip in the curve of national prosperity there is likely to be a dip in the sales of almost every popular commodity. There was a dip in national prosperity in 1927, for instance; do you see what it did to radio sales? But there was also a dip in 1924, a worse one in fact. Yet radio sales made in that year the largest proportional increase in the whole period. Why? Well, for one thing, that was the year in which the embattled Democrats met at Madison Square Garden in New York to pick a standard-bearer, and the deadlock between the hosts of McAdoo and the hosts of Al Smith lasted day after day after day, and millions of Americans heard through loud-speakers the lusty cry of, “Alabama, twenty-four votes for Underwoo—ood!” and discovered that a political convention could be a grand show to listen to and that a seat by the radio was

as good as a ticket to the Garden. Better, in fact; for at any moment you could turn a knob and get "Barney Google" or "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More" by way of respite. At the age of three and a half years, radio broadcasting had attained its majority.

Behind those figures of radio sales lies a whole chapter of the life of the Post-war Decade: radio penetrating every third home in the country; giant broadcasting stations with nation-wide hook-ups; tenement-house roofs covered with forests of antennæ; Roxy and his Gang, the Happiness Boys, the A & P Gypsies, and Rudy Vallee crooning from antique Florentine cabinet sets; Graham McNamee's voice, which had become more familiar to the American public than that of any other citizen of the land, shouting across your living-room and mine: "*And he did it! Yes, sir, he did it! It's a touchdown! Boy, I want to tell you this is one of the finest games . . .*"; the Government belatedly asserting itself in 1927 to allocate wave-lengths among competing radio stations; advertisers paying huge sums for the privilege of introducing Beethoven with a few well-chosen words about yeast or toothpaste; and Michael Meehan personally conducting the common stock of the Radio Corporation of America from a 1928 low of 85¼ to a 1929 high of 549.

There were other riders on the prosperity band-wagon. Rayon, cigarettes, refrigerators, telephones, chemical preparations (especially cosmetics), and electrical devices of various sorts all were in growing demand. While the independent storekeeper struggled to hold his own, the amount of retail business done in chain stores and department stores jumped by leaps and bounds. For every \$100 worth of business done in 1919, by 1927 the five-and-ten-cent chains were doing \$260 worth, the cigar chains \$153 worth, the drug chains \$224 worth, and the grocery chains \$387 worth. Mrs. Smith no longer patronized her "neighborhood" store; she climbed into her two-thousand dollar car to drive to the red-

fronted chain grocery and save twenty-seven cents on her daily purchases. The movies prospered, sending their celluloid reels all over the world and making Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, and Clara Bow familiar figures to the Eskimo, the Malay, and the heathen Chinese; while at home the attendance at the motion-picture houses of "Middletown" during a single month (December, 1923) amounted to four and a half times the entire population of the city. Men, women, and children, rich and poor, the Middletowners went to the movies at an average rate of better than once a week!

Was this Coolidge Prosperity real? The farmers did not think so. Perhaps the textile manufacturers did not think so. But the figures of corporation profits and wages and incomes left little room for doubt. Consider, for example, two significant facts at opposite ends of the scale of wealth. Between 1922 and 1927, the purchasing power of American wages increased at the rate of more than two per cent annually. And during the three years between 1924 and 1927 alone there was a leap from 75 to 283 in the number of Americans who paid taxes on incomes of more than a million dollars a year.

§ 4

Why did it happen? What made the United States so prosperous?

Some of the reasons were obvious enough. The war had impoverished Europe and hardly damaged the United States at all; when peace came the Americans found themselves the economic masters of the world. Their young country, with enormous resources in materials and in human energy and with a wide domestic market, was ready to take advantage of this situation. It had developed mass production to a new point of mechanical and managerial efficiency.

The Ford gospel of high wages, low prices, and standardized manufacture on a basis of the most minute division of machine-tending labor was working smoothly not only at Highland Park, but in thousands of other factories. Executives, remembering with a shudder the piled-up inventories of 1921, had learned the lesson of cautious hand-to-mouth buying; and they were surrounded with more expert technical consultants, research men, personnel managers, statisticians, and business forecasters than had ever before invaded that cave of the winds, the conference room. Their confidence was strengthened by their almost superstitious belief that the Republican Administration was their invincible ally. And they were all of them aided by the boom in the automobile industry. The phenomenal activity of this one part of the body economic—which was responsible, directly or indirectly, for the employment of nearly four million men—pumped new life into all the rest.

Prosperity was assisted, too, by two new stimulants to purchasing, each of which mortgaged the future but kept the factories roaring while it was being injected. The first was the increase in installment buying. People were getting to consider it old-fashioned to limit their purchases to the amount of their cash balance; the thing to do was to “exercise their credit.” By the latter part of the decade, economists figured that 15 per cent of all retail sales were on an installment basis, and that there were some six billions of “easy payment” paper outstanding. The other stimulant was stock-market speculation. When stocks were skyrocketing in 1928 and 1929 it is probable that hundreds of thousands of people were buying goods with money which represented, essentially, a gamble on the business profits of the nineteen-thirties. It was fun while it lasted.

If these were the principal causes of Coolidge Prosperity, the salesman and the advertising man were at least its agents and evangelists. Business had learned as never before the im-

mense importance to it of the ultimate consumer. Unless he could be persuaded to buy and buy lavishly, the whole stream of six-cylinder cars, super-heterodynes, cigarettes, rouge compacts, and electric ice-boxes would be dammed at its outlet. The salesman and the advertising man held the key to this outlet. As competition increased their methods became more strenuous. No longer was it considered enough to recommend one's goods in modest and explicit terms and to place them on the counter in the hope that the ultimate consumer would make up his mind to purchase. The advertiser must plan elaborate national campaigns, consult with psychologists, and employ all the eloquence of poets to cajole, exhort, or intimidate the consumer into buying,—to "break down consumer resistance." Not only was each individual concern struggling to get a larger share of the business in its own field, but whole industries shouted against one another in the public's ear. The embattled candy manufacturers took full-page space in the newspapers to reply to the American Tobacco Company's slogan of "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet." Trade journals were quoted by the *Reader's Digest* as reporting the efforts of the furniture manufacturers to make the people "furniture conscious" and of the clothing manufacturers to make them "tuxedo conscious." The salesman must have the ardor of a zealot, must force his way into people's houses by hook or by crook, must let nothing stand between him and the consummation of his sale. As executives put it, "You can't be an order-taker any longer—you've got to be a *salesman*." The public, generally speaking, could be relied upon to regard with complacency the most flagrant assaults upon its credulity by the advertiser and the most outrageous invasions of its privacy by the salesman; for the public was in a mood to forgive every sin committed in the holy name of business.

Never before had such pressure been exerted upon salesmen to get results. Many concerns took up the quota sys-

tem, setting as the objective for each sales representative a figure 20 or 25 per cent beyond that of the previous year, and putting it up to him to reach this figure or lose his employer's favor and perhaps his job. All sorts of sales contests and other ingenious devices were used to stimulate the force. Among the schemes suggested by the Dartnell Company of Chicago, which had more than ten thousand American business organizations subscribing to its service, was that of buying various novelties and sending them to the salesman at weekly intervals: one week a miniature feather duster with a tag urging him to "dust his territory," another week an imitation cannon cracker with the injunction to "make a big noise," and so on. The American Slicing Machine Company offered a turkey at Christmas to every one of its salesmen who beat his quota for the year. "We asked each man," explained the sales manager afterward, "to appoint a child in his family as a mascot, realizing that every one of them would work his head off to make some youngster happy at Christmas. The way these youngsters took hold of the plan was amusing, and at times the intensity of their interest was almost pathetic." The sales manager of another concern reported cheerfully that "one of his stunts" was "to twit one man at the good work of another until he is almost sore enough to be ready to fight." And according to Jesse Rainsford Sprague, still another company invented—and boasted of—a method of goading its salesmen which for sheer inhumanity probably set a record for the whole era of Coolidge Prosperity. It gave a banquet at which the man with the best score was served with oysters, roast turkey, and a most elaborate ice; the man with the second best score had the same dinner but without the oysters; and so on down to the man with the worst score, before whom was laid a small plate of boiled beans and a couple of crackers.

If the salesman was sometimes under pressure such as this, it is not surprising that the consumer felt the pressure, too.

Let two extreme instances (both cited by Jesse Rainsford Sprague) suffice to suggest the trend in business methods. A wholesale drug concern offered to the trade a small table with a railing round its top for the display of "specials"; it was to be set up directly in the path of customers, "whose attention," according to *Printer's Ink*, "will be attracted to the articles when they fall over it, bump into it, kick their shins upon it, or otherwise come in contact with it." And *Selling News* awarded one of its cash prizes for "sales ideas" to a vender of electric cleaners who told the following story of commercial prowess. One day he looked up from the street and saw a lady shaking a rug out of a second-story window. "The door leading to her upstairs rooms was open. I went right in and up those stairs without knocking, greeting the lady with the remark: 'Well, I am here right on time. What room do you wish me to start in?' She was very much surprised, assuring me that I had the wrong number. But during my very courteous apologies I had managed to get my cleaner connected and in action. The result was that I walked out minus the cleaner, plus her contract and check for a substantial down payment." The readers of *Selling News* were apparently not expected to be less than enthusiastic at the prospect of a man invading a woman's apartment and setting up a cleaner in it without permission and under false pretenses. For if you could get away with such exploits, it helped business, and good business helped prosperity, and prosperity was good for the country.

§ 5

The advertisers met the competition of the new era with better design, persuasively realistic photographs, and sheer volume: the amount of advertising done in 1927, according to Francis H. Sisson, came to over a billion and a half dollars. They met it with a new frankness, introducing to staid

magazine readers the advantages of Odo-ro-no and Kotex. And they met it, furthermore, with a subtle change in technic. The copy-writer was learning to pay less attention to the special qualities and advantages of his product, and more to the study of what the mass of unregenerate mankind wanted—to be young and desirable, to be rich, to keep up with the Joneses, to be envied. The winning method was to associate his product with one or more of these ends, logically or illogically, truthfully or cynically; to draw a lesson from the dramatic case of some imaginary man or woman whose fate was altered by the use of X's soap, to show that in the most fashionable circles people were choosing the right cigarette in blindfold tests, or to suggest by means of glowing testimonials—often bought and paid for—that the advertised product was used by women of fashion, movie stars, and non-stop flyers. One queen of the films was said to have journeyed from California all the way to New York to spend a single exhausting day being photographed for testimonial purposes in dozens of costumes and using dozens of commercial articles, many of which she had presumably never laid eyes on before—and all because the appearance of these testimonials would help advertise her newest picture. Of what value were sober facts from the laboratory: did not a tooth-powder manufacturer try to meet the hokum of emotional toothpaste advertising by citing medical authorities, and was not his counter-campaign as a breath in a gale? At the beginning of the decade advertising had been considered a business; in the early days of Coolidge Prosperity its fulsome prophets were calling it a profession; but by the end of the decade many of its practitioners, observing the overwhelming victory of methods taken over from tabloid journalism, were beginning to refer to it—among themselves—as a racket.

A wise man of the nineteen-twenties might have said that he cared not who made the laws of the country if he only

might write its national advertising. For here were the sagas of the age, romances and tragedies depicting characters who became more familiar to the populace than those in any novel. The man who distinctly remembered Mr. Addison Sims of Seattle. . . . The four out of five who, failing to use Forhan's, succumbed to pyorrhea, each of them with a white mask mercifully concealing his unhappy mouth. . . . The pathetic figure of the man, once a golf champion, "now only a wistful onlooker" creeping about after the star players, his shattered health due to tooth neglect. . . . The poor fellow sunk in the corner of a taxicab, whose wife upbraided him with not having said a word all evening (when he might so easily have shone with the aid of the *Elbert Hubbard Scrap Book*). . . . The man whose conversation so dazzled the company that the envious dinner-coated bystanders could only breathe in amazement, "I think he's quoting from Shelley." . . . The woman who would undoubtedly do something about B. O. if people only said to her what they really thought. . . . The man whose friends laughed when the waiter spoke to him in French. . . . The girl who thought filet mignon was a kind of fish. . . . The poor couple who faced one another in humiliation after their guests were gone, the wife still holding the door knob and struggling against her tears, the husband biting his nails with shame (When Your Guests Are Gone—Are You Sorry You Ever Invited Them? . . . Be Free From All Embarrassment! Let the Famous *Book of Etiquette* Tell You Exactly What to Do, Say, Write, or Wear on Every Occasion). . . . The girl who merely carried the daisy chain, yet she had athlete's foot. . . . These men and women of the advertising pages, suffering or triumphant, became a part of the folklore of the day.

Sometimes their feats were astonishing. Consider, for example, the man who had purchased Nelson Doubleday's

Pocket University, and found himself, one evening, in a group in which some one mentioned Ali Baba:

"Ali Baba? I sat forward in my chair. I could tell them all about this romantic, picturesque figure of fiction.

"I don't know how it happened, but they gathered all around me. And I told them of golden ships that sailed the seven seas, of a famous man and his donkey who wandered unknown ways, of the brute-man from whom we are all descended. I told them things they never knew of Cleopatra, of the eccentric Diogenes, of Romulus and the founding of Rome. I told them of the unfortunate death of Sir Raleigh (*sic*), of the tragic end of poor Anne Boleyn. . . .

"'You must have traveled all over the world to know so many marvelous things.'"

Skeptics might smile, thanking themselves that they were not of the company on that interminable evening; but the advertisement stuck in their minds. And to others, less sophisticated, it doubtless opened shining vistas of delight. They, too, could hold the dinner party spellbound if only they filled out the coupon. . . .

By far the most famous of these dramatic advertisements of the Post-war Decade was the long series in which the awful results of halitosis were set forth through the depiction of a gallery of unfortunates whose closest friends would not tell them. "Often a bridesmaid but never a bride. . . . Edna's case was really a pathetic one." . . . "Why did she leave him that way?" . . . "*That's* why you're a failure," . . . and then that devilishly ingenious display which capitalized the fears aroused by earlier tragedies in the series: the picture of a girl looking at a Listerine advertisement and saying to herself, "This *can't* apply to me!" Useless for the American Medical Association to insist that Listerine was "not a true deodorant," that it simply covered one smell with another. Just as useless as for the Life Extension Institute to find "one out of twenty with pyorrhea, rather than Mr. Forhan's famous four-out-of-five" (to quote Stuart

Chase once more). Halitosis had the power of dramatic advertising behind it, and Listerine swept to greater and greater profits on a tide of public trepidation.

§ 6

As year followed year of prosperity, the new diffusion of wealth brought marked results. There had been a great boom in higher education immediately after the war, and the boom continued, although at a somewhat slackened pace, until college trustees were beside themselves wondering how to find room for the swarming applicants. There was an epidemic of outlines of knowledge and books of etiquette for those who had got rich quick and wanted to get cultured quick and become socially at ease. Wells's *Outline of History*, the best-selling non-fiction book of 1921 and 1922, was followed by Van Loon's *Story of Mankind*, J. Arthur Thomson's *Outline of Science* (both of them best sellers in 1922), the Doubleday mail-order *Book of Etiquette* and Emily Post's *Book of Etiquette* (which led the non-fiction list in 1923), *Why We Behave Like Human Beings* (a big success of 1926), and *The Story of Philosophy*, which ran away from all other books in the non-fiction list of 1927.

There was a rush of innocents abroad. According to the figures of the Department of Commerce, over 437,000 people left the United States by ship for foreign parts in the year 1928 alone, to say nothing of 14,000 odd who entered Canada and Mexico by rail, and over three million cars which crossed into Canada for a day or more. The innocents spent freely: the money that they left abroad, in fact (amounting in 1928 to some \$650,000,000), solved for a time a difficult problem in international finance: how the United States could continue to receive interest on her for-

eign debts and foreign investments without permitting foreign goods to pass the high tariff barrier in large quantities.

The United States became the banker and financial arbitrator for the world. When the financial relations between Germany and the Allies needed to be straightened out, it was General Charles G. Dawes and Owen D. Young who headed the necessary international commissions—not only because their judgment was considered wise, and impartial as between the countries of Europe, but because the United States was in a position to call the tune. Americans were called in to reorganize the finances of one country after another. American investments abroad increased by leaps and bounds. The squat limestone building at the corner of Broad and Wall Streets, still wearing the scars of the shrapnel which had struck it during the 1920 explosion, had become the undisputed financial center of the world. Only occasionally did the United States have to intervene by force of arms in other countries. The Marines ruled Haiti and restored order in Nicaragua; but in general the country extended its empire not by military conquest or political dictation, but by financial penetration.

At home, one of the most conspicuous results of prosperity was the conquest of the whole country by urban tastes and urban dress and the urban way of living. The rube disappeared. Girls in the villages of New Hampshire and Wyoming wore the same brief skirts and used the same lip-sticks as their sisters in New York. The proletariat—or what the radicals of the Big Red Scare days had called the proletariat—gradually lost its class consciousness; the American Federation of Labor dwindled in membership and influence; the time had come when workingmen owned second-hand Buicks and applauded Jimmy Walker, not objecting in the least, it seemed, to his exquisite clothes, his valet, and his frequent visits to the millionaire-haunted sands of Palm Beach. It was no accident that men like Mellon and Hoover

and Morrow found their wealth an asset rather than a liability in public office, or that there was a widespread popular movement to make Henry Ford President in 1924. The possession of millions was a sign of success, and success was worshiped the country over.

§ 7

Business itself was regarded with a new veneration. Once it had been considered less dignified and distinguished than the learned professions, but now people thought they praised a clergyman highly when they called him a good business man. College alumni, gathered at their annual banquets, fervently applauded banker trustees who spoke of education as one of the greatest American industries and compared the president and the dean to business executives. The colleges themselves organized business courses and cheerfully granted credit to candidates for degrees in the arts and sciences for their work in advertising copy-writing, marketing methods, elementary stenography, and drug-store practice. Even Columbia University drew men and women into its home-study courses by a system of follow-up letters worthy of a manufacturer of refrigerators, and sent out salesmen to ring the door bells of those who expressed a flicker of interest; even the great University of Chicago made use of what André Siegfried has called "the mysticism of success" by heading an advertisement of its correspondence courses with the admonition to "DEVELOP POWER AT HOME, to investigate, persevere, achieve." . . . The Harvard Business School established annual advertising awards, conferring academic *éclat* upon well-phrased sales arguments for commercial products. It was not easy for the churches to resist the tide of business enthusiasm. The Swedish Immanuel Congregational Church in New York, according to an item in the *American Mercury*, recognized the superior-

ity of the business to the spiritual appeal by offering to all who contributed one hundred dollars to its building fund "an engraved certificate of investment in preferred capital stock in the Kingdom of God." And a church billboard in uptown New York struck the same persuasive note: "Come to Church. Christian Worship Increases Your Efficiency. Christian F. Reisner, Pastor."

In every American city and town, service clubs gathered the flower of the middle-class citizenry together for weekly luncheons noisy with good fellowship. They were growing fast, these service clubs. Rotary, the most famous of them, had been founded in 1905; by 1930 it had 150,000 members and boasted—as a sign of its international influence—as many as 3,000 clubs in 44 countries. The number of Kiwanis Clubs rose from 205 in 1920 to 1,800 in 1929; the Lions Clubs, of which the first was not formed until 1917, multiplied until at the end of the decade there were 1,200 of them. Nor did these clubs content themselves with singing songs and conducting social-service campaigns; they expressed the national faith in what one of their founders called "the redemptive and regenerative influence of business." The speakers before them pictured the business man as a builder, a doer of great things, yes, and a dreamer whose imagination was ever seeking out new ways of serving humanity. It was a popular note, for in hundreds of directors' rooms, around hundreds of conference tables, the American business men of the era of Coolidge Prosperity were seeing themselves as men of vision with eyes steadfastly fixed on the long future. At the end of the decade, a cartoon in the *New Yorker* represented an executive as saying to his heavy-jowled colleagues at one of these meetings: "We have ideas. Possibly we tilt at windmills—just seven Don Juans tilting at windmills." It was a perfect bit of satire on business sentimentality. The service clubs specialized in this sort of mysticism: was not a speaker before the Rotarians of Waterloo, Iowa,

quoted by the *American Mercury* as declaring that "Rotary is a manifestation of the divine"?

Indeed, the association of business with religion was one of the most significant phenomena of the day. When the National Association of Credit Men held their annual convention at New York, there were provided for the three thousand delegates a special devotional service at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and five sessions of prayer conducted by Protestant clergymen, a Roman Catholic priest, and a Jewish rabbi; and the credit men were uplifted by a sermon by Dr. S. Parkes Cadman on "Religion in Business." Likewise the Associated Advertising Clubs, meeting in Philadelphia, listened to a keynote address by Doctor Cadman on "Imagination and Advertising," and at the meeting of the Church Advertising Department the subjects discussed included "Spiritual Principles in Advertising" and "Advertising the Kingdom through Press-Radio Service." The fact that each night of the session a cabaret entertainment was furnished to the earnest delegates from 11.30 to 2 and that part of the Atlantic City Beauty Pageant was presented was merely a sign that even men of high faith must have their fun.

So frequent was the use of the Bible to point the lessons of business and of business to point the lessons of the Bible that it was sometimes difficult to determine which was supposed to gain the most from the association. Fred F. French, a New York builder and real-estate man, told his salesmen, "There is no such thing as a reason why not," and continued: "One evidence of the soundness of this theory may be found in the command laid down in Matthew vii:7 by the Greatest Human-nature Expert that ever lived, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.'" He continued by quoting "the greatest command of them all—'Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself'"—and then stated that by following such high principles the Fred F. French salesmen had "immeasurably

strengthened their own characters and power, so that during this year they will serve our stockholders at a lower commission rate, and yet each one earn more money for himself than in nineteen hundred twenty-five." In this case Scripture was apparently taken as setting a standard for business to meet—to its own pecuniary profit. Yet in other cases it was not so certain that business was not the standard, and Scripture complimented by being lifted to the business level.

Witness, for example, the pamphlet on *Moses, Persuader of Men* issued by the Metropolitan Casualty Insurance Company (with an introduction by the indefatigable Doctor Cadman), which declared that "Moses was one of the greatest salesmen and real-estate promoters that ever lived," that he was a "Dominant, Fearless, and Successful Personality in one of the most magnificent selling campaigns that history ever placed upon its pages." And witness, finally, the extraordinary message preached by Bruce Barton in *The Man Nobody Knows*, which so touched the American heart that for two successive years—1925 and 1926—it was the best-selling non-fiction book in the United States. Barton sold Christianity to the public by showing its resemblance to business. Jesus, this book taught, was not only "the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem" and "an outdoor man," but a great executive. "He picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world. . . . Nowhere is there such a startling example of executive success as the way in which that organization was brought together." His parables were "the most powerful advertisements of all time. . . . He would be a national advertiser today." In fact, Jesus was "the founder of modern business." Why, you ask? Because he was the author of the ideal of service.

The Gospel According to Bruce Barton met a popular demand. Under the beneficent influence of Coolidge Pros-

perity, business had become almost the national religion of America. Millions of people wanted to be reassured that this religion was altogether right and proper, and that in the rules for making big money lay all the law and the prophets.

Was it strange that during the very years when the Barton Gospel was circulating most vigorously, selling and advertising campaigns were becoming more cynical and the American business world was refusing to exercise itself over the Teapot Dome disclosures and the sordid history of the Continental Trading Company? Perhaps; but it must be remembered that in all religions there is likely to be a gap between faith and works. The business man's halo did not always fit, but he wore it proudly.

§ 8

So the prosperity band-wagon rolled along with throttle wide open and siren blaring. But what of the man on the driver's seat, the man whose name this era bore?

He did not have a jutting chin, a Powerful Personality, or an irresistible flow of selling talk. If you had come from Timbuctoo and found him among a crowd of Chamber of Commerce boosters, he would have been the last man you would have picked as their patron saint. He had never been in business. His canonization by the hosts of quantity production and high-pressure salesmanship was a sublime paradox—and yet it was largely justified. Almost the most remarkable thing about Coolidge Prosperity was Calvin Coolidge.

He was a meager-looking man, a Vermonter with a hatchet face, sandy hair, tight lips, and the expression, as William Allen White remarked, of one "looking down his nose to locate that evil smell which seemed forever to affront him." He was pale and diffident. In private he could be garrulous, but in public he was as silent as a cake of ice. When his firm-

ness in the Boston police strike captured the attention of the country and brought him to Washington as Vice-President, not even the affable warmth of the Harding Administration could thaw him. The Vice-President has to go to many a formal dinner; Coolidge went—and said nothing. The hostesses of Washington were dismayed and puzzled. "Over the Alps lay Italy, they thought, but none of them had won the summit and so they couldn't be sure that the view was worth the climb," wrote Edward G. Lowry. Coolidge became President, and still the frost continued.

Nor did this silence cloak a wide-ranging mind. Coolidge knew his American history, but neither he nor his intellect had ever ventured far abroad. Go through his addresses and his smug *Autobiography*, and the most original thing you will find in them is his uncompromising unoriginality. Calvin Coolidge still believed in the old American copy-book maxims when almost everybody else had half forgotten them or was beginning to doubt them. "The success which is made in any walk of life is measured almost exactly by the amount of hard work that is put into it. . . . There is only one form of political strategy in which I have any confidence, and that is to try to do the right thing and sometimes be able to succeed. . . . If society lacks learning and virtue it will perish. . . . The nation with the greatest moral power will win. . . ." This philosophy of hard work and frugal living and piety crowned with success might have been brought down from some Vermont attic where *McGuffy's Reader* gathered dust. But it was so old that it looked new; it was so exactly what uncounted Americans had been taught at their mother's knee that it touched what remained of the pioneer spirit in their hearts; and Coolidge set it forth with refreshing brevity. So completely did it win over the country that if the President had declared that a straight line is the shortest distance between two

points, one wonders if editorial pages would not have paid tribute to his concise wisdom.

He was not a bold leader, nor did he care to be. He followed no gleam, stormed no redoubt. Considering the fact that he was in the White House for five years and seven months, his presidential record was surprisingly negative. But it was just the sort of record that he preferred.

In its foreign policy, his Administration made little effort to persuade the American people that they were not happily isolated from the outside world. Bankers might engage in determining the amount of German reparations, unofficial observers might sit in on European negotiations, but the Government, remembering the decline and fall of Woodrow Wilson, shrewdly maintained an air of magnificent unconcern. Coolidge proposed, as had Harding before him, that the United States should join the World Court, but so gently that when the Senate eventually ratified the proposal with reservations which the other member nations were unable to accept, and the President went out of office without having achieved his end, nobody felt that his prestige suffered much thereby. A second naval conference was held at Geneva in 1927, but ended in failure. A Nicaraguan revolution was settled—after considerable turmoil and humiliation—with the aid of the Marines and of Henry L. Stimson's plan for a new election under American supervision. An even more bitter dispute with Mexico over the legal status of oil lands owned by American interests was finally moderated through the wisdom and tact of Coolidge's Amherst classmate and ambassador, Dwight W. Morrow. But the most conspicuous achievement of the Coolidge Administration in foreign affairs was the leading part it took in securing the Kellogg-Briand Treaty renouncing war as an instrument of national policy—a fine gesture which every nation was delighted to make but which had very little noticeable influence on the actualities of international re-

lations. Aside from the belated solution of the Nicaraguan and Mexican difficulties and the championship of this somewhat innocuous treaty, the policy of the Coolidge Administration was to collect the money due it (even at the expense of considerable ill-feeling), to keep a watchful eye on the expansion of the American financial empire, and otherwise to let well enough alone.

Coolidge's record in domestic affairs was even less exciting. He was nothing if not cautious. When the Harding scandals came to light, he did what was necessary to set in motion an official prosecution, he adroitly jockeyed the notorious Daugherty out of the Cabinet, and from that moment on he exhibited an unruffled and altogether convincing calm. When there was a strike in the anthracite coal mines he did not leap into the breach; he let Governor Gifford Pinchot of Pennsylvania do it. On the one burning political issue of the day, that of prohibition, he managed to express no opinion except that the laws should be enforced. There was dynamite in prohibition; Calvin Coolidge remained at a safe distance and looked the other way.

He maintained the *status quo* for the benefit of business. Twice he vetoed farm relief legislation—to the immense satisfaction of the industrial and banking community which constituted his strongest support—on the ground that the McNary-Haugen bills were economically unsound. He vetoed the soldier bonus, too, on the ground of its expense, though in this case his veto was overruled. His proudest boast was that he cut down the cost of running the Government by systematic cheeseparing, reduced the public debt, and brought about four reductions in federal taxes, aiding not only those with small incomes but even more conspicuously those with large. Meanwhile his Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, ingeniously helped business to help itself; on the various governmental commissions, critics of contemporary commercial practices were replaced, as far as possible, by

those who would look upon business with a lenient eye; and the serene quiet which lay about the White House was broken only by occasional flattering pronouncements upon business and assurances that prosperity was securely founded.

An uninspired and unheroic policy, you suggest? But it was sincere: Calvin Coolidge honestly believed that by asserting himself as little as possible and by lifting the tax burdens of the rich he was benefiting the whole country—as perhaps he was. And it was perfectly in keeping with the uninspired and unheroic political temper of the times. For the lusty business men who in these fat years had become the arbiters of national opinion did not envisage the Government as an agency for making over the country into something a little nearer to their hearts' desire, as a champion of human rights or a redresser of wrongs. The prosperity band-wagon was bringing them rapidly toward their hearts' desire, and politics might block the traffic. They did not want a man of action in the Presidency; they wanted as little government as possible, at as low cost as possible, and this dour New Englander who drove the prosperity band-wagon with so slack a rein embodied their idea of supreme statesmanship.

Statesmanship of a sort Calvin Coolidge certainly represented. Prosperity has its undeniable advantages, and a President who is astute enough to know how to encourage it without getting himself into hot water may possibly be forgiven such complacency as appears in his *Autobiography*. There is perhaps a cool word to be said, too, for the prudence which deliberately accepts the inevitable, which does not even try to be bolder or more magnanimous than circumstances will safely permit. The great god business was supreme in the land, and Calvin Coolidge was fortunate enough to become almost a demi-god by doing discreet obeisance before the altar.