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DISCUSSION OF PORTRAITS

Aroused by Recent Likenesses of President Coolidge

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Washington, March 11.—Recent portraits in oil of President Coolidge have started a lot of discussion in both the artistic and official circles of Washington. The portraits have renewed the old question, as to whether such works of art should be photographic in their treatment or whether the artist should attempt to weave his own conception of his subject's character into the portraiture.

Some portraits in oil are frankly idealistic. Some of those handed down from previous generations clearly show that the artists have been extremely generous in the treatment of the posers. No one in this day or time can tell just what George Washington really looked like or possibly could recognize Benjamin Franklin from any of the existing oils or engravings.

In more recent years a number of the most famous artists of the world have become realists in their portraits as well as in their pictures composed entirely from fancy. The Swedish painter Zorn is a type of the realist in portraiture. He did a realistic portrait of Theodore Roosevelt.

"At the present moment, however, it would seem that the artists favored by poses from members of the royal families or from chief executives have slipped back into the old school of idealism, or the setting down of a conception rather than a line for line likeness which the critics might term "speaking."

President Coolidge unquestionably is a splendid subject for portraiture. He is an unusual but distinct type. He is the first New Englander to sit in the White House in something like seventy or eighty years. There is something of the ruggedness of the north country about the lines of his figure and his face. The President's friends would like to see these lines of New England character handed down to posterity. But in the canvases which have come from the White House studios in the past two and a half years there has been a certain sleekness which is anything but suggestive of the finely chiseled features, the nose, mouth and chin, of the chief executive. The firmness of the Coolidge physiognomy is lacking.

President Coolidge has been very obliging to the painters who have wished to portray him for one purpose or another, but as yet the artists insist there has been no real portrait developed.

Easier Subject

Mrs. Coolidge is a far easier and more satisfactory subject for the painters apparently, for even in their first sketches they seem to catch the indefinable charm of the first lady of the land. There is a warmth of color and personality to Mrs. Coolidge and it shines forth in her photographs as well as in the paintings, some one of which eventually will grace the walls of the White House for all time, adding one of the most charming of the mistresses of the mansion to the distinguished group already on exhibition.

Mrs. Coolidge has become quite accustomed at last to posing for the moving picture camera, too. Some of the studies which have been made of her recently by the "news reels" have shown a distinct improvement over the first efforts when the first lady was decidedly shy and ill at ease.

Like the amateurs of Hollywood however, Mrs. Coolidge still is too camera conscious. She is inclined to look at the instrument a little too much, thereby spoiling the effect of preoccupation. Naturally the first lady is a much sought subject and has to be careful in granting favors to the horde of "movie merchants" always hovering about the White House ready to start their grinding at a moment's notice.

The camera man is one news reporter who always has to be an eyewitness.