

The
TWENTY-EIGHTH GOVERNOR
of
C O N N E C T I C U T
was
SAMUEL AUGUSTUS FOOTE

Born in Cheshire, and although of delicate health entered Yale College at thirteen years of age and was graduated with honors—He began the study of law as an invalid wearing a bandage about his head in the class room, and, finally driven out of doors, sailed to the West Indies as a supercargo—He later settled on a farm and was elected to the United States Senate where he provoked the great Webster-Hayne debate



Samuel A. Hoole

S A M U E L

A U G U S T U S

F O O T E

THE father of Governor Foote was the Rev. John Foote, a native of North Branford, who afterward removed to Cheshire and succeeded the Rev. John Hall as pastor of the Congregational church in that town. His wife was granddaughter of Governor Jonathan Law. After a life of great usefulness the Rev. John Foote died in Cheshire, August 31, 1831.

His son, Samuel Augustus Foote, the subject of this sketch, was born in Cheshire on November 8, 1780. As a child he was precocious to such a degree that he entered Yale College at the age of thirteen years. Constitutionally delicate, in his early years the boy showed signs of premature decay; but in the face of all this he succeeded in completing his college course, graduating from Yale in 1797, before he had reached the age of seventeen.

He then resided for a few months in Washington, Connecticut, reading law in the office of Daniel N. Burnside, Esq. Deciding upon law as a profession, he entered the Litchfield Law School for a course of study. In his class were Baldwin, Benedict, Day, Griffin, Seymour and Sill—all of whom became famous men.

He remained at Judge Reeve's school probably less than a year, for he began to be troubled with severe pains in his head, which did not yield to treatment. Invariably the young man attended lectures wearing a bandage about his head. As the trouble increased Foote was obliged to relinquish his desire to become a lawyer, and resolved to follow some business which would provide a more active occupation.

After leaving the law school he went to New Haven and engaged in the shipping trade, having an office on Long Wharf. It is said that he went to the West Indies three times in the capacity of a supercargo.

When the war with Great Britain commenced in 1812, Foote, as well as many other merchants of his class, saw his prosperous business entirely wiped out. He took his losses in as good humor as possible, and decided to turn his attention to agricultural pursuits.

Going to Cheshire, he settled on a farm and became very successful. This occupation gave him ample time and opportunity to take an active part in the political discussion of the day.

He entered into politics to such an extent that it was not long before he was known as one of the most zealous anti-Federalists of the state. A majority of the people of Cheshire shared his opinion and sent him to the Legislature in 1817 and 1818, as their representative. While in the House, Foote exerted great power and

was easily its leading member. He was next elected a member of Congress and represented his district for two years from March, 1819. Returning to Connecticut, he was again elected a member of the Legislature and represented Cheshire in the House for two years. In 1823 he was re-elected to Congress and served until May, 1825, when he was again chosen by the people of Cheshire to represent the town in the General Assembly. That body elected him speaker and during the same session he was chosen United States senator to succeed Henry W. Edwards.

His term in the Senate commenced on March 4, 1827, and the latter portion of it was made famous by a debate over one of his resolutions.

It was Senator Foote who introduced the resolution in December, 1829, which provoked the great debate between Senators Webster of Massachusetts and Hayne of South Carolina, lasting the greater portion of three days. This resolution was for the purpose of "inquiring into the expediency of limiting the sales of the public lands to those already in the market, besides suspending the surveys of the public lands and abolishing the office of surveyor-general."

On January 26 and 27, 1830, Daniel Webster delivered his famous "Reply to Hayne," which is considered by John Fiske to be the "greatest speech that has been delivered since the oration of Demosthenes against the crown."

T h e G o v e r n o r s o f C o n n e c t i c u t

Foote was defeated by Nathan Smith for a second term in the Senate, but was elected a member of the National House of Representatives in April, 1833. In 1834 he was nominated for governor by the Whigs of this state, who were opposed to the administration of President Jackson. He obtained a plurality but not a majority; so the choice went to the General Assembly. That body elected him governor, and he resigned his seat in Congress.

He served as chief magistrate for one year, during an uneventful period. Yale College conferred upon him, while governor, the degree of Doctor of Laws. The next year Governor Foote was defeated by Henry W. Edwards, and after that he was never actively engaged in politics.

His domestic and private affairs engrossed his attention the remaining years of his life, and he died in Cheshire, September 15, 1846. "That which specially strikes us," says one writer, "as characteristic of Governor Foote was his integrity, industry, decision and perseverance." His son, Andrew Hull Foote, was a famous naval officer, who, on June 16, 1862, received the thanks of Congress for gallant services in the Civil War and was made a rear-admiral.