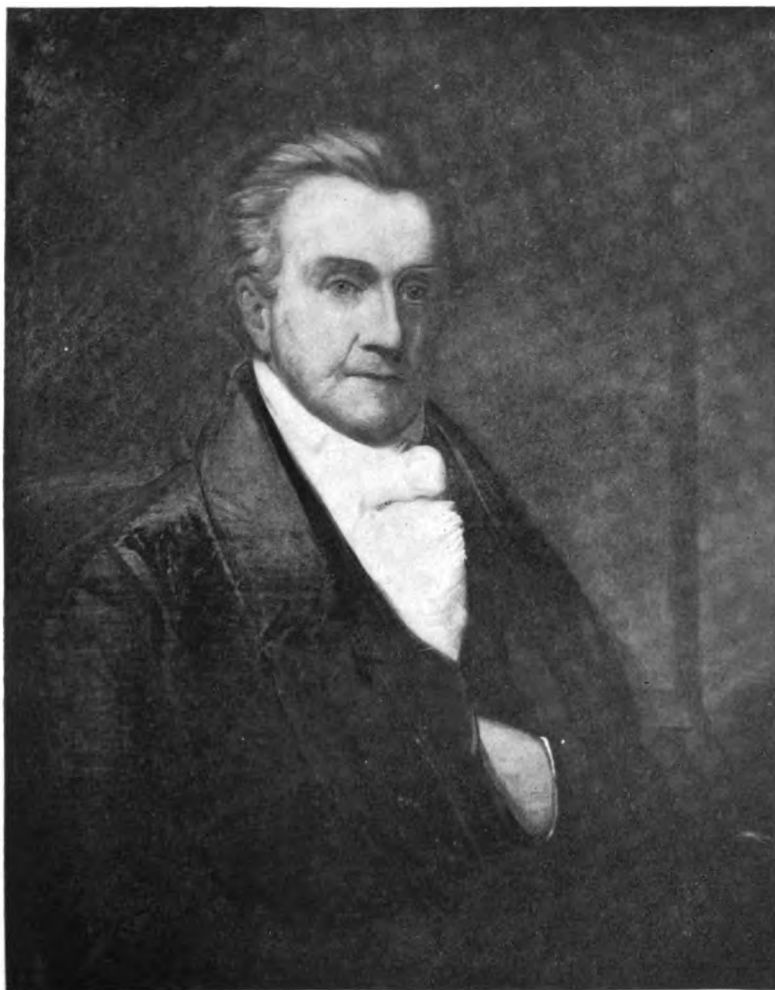


The
TWENTY-THIRD GOVERNOR
of
C O N N E C T I C U T
was
JOHN COTTON SMITH

The last governor of the old régime and an embodiment of many of the traits of the early statesmen of the republic—He was born in Sharon, the son of a clergyman, and reared in the typical New England Household where the law of God is uppermost—His early education was conducted by his mother and after graduation from Yale College he became a brilliant lawyer and statesman



J. C. Smith

J O H N

C O T T O N

S M I T H

THE last governor of the old régime was John Cotton Smith. It has been said that he exhibited many of the striking traits of the founders of this republic.

He was born in Sharon on February 12, 1765, and was the son of a clergyman of considerable power. His mother was the daughter of Rev. William Worthington of Saybrook. Governor Smith inherited the blood of those famous Massachusetts divines — John Cotton and Richard Mather.

The home where John Cotton was reared was a typical New England household where the law of God was uppermost.

His early education was conducted by his talented mother; then he prepared for Yale College under the direction of the Reverend Brinsmade of Washington. Entering college in 1779 at the age of fourteen, he was graduated with honor in 1783. Immediately after leaving Yale, Smith entered the office of John Canfield, an attorney at Sharon, and commenced the study of the law. In 1787

he was admitted to the bar of Litchfield County. When the young man commenced to practice he found himself in the midst of the best legal talent of the state, as the Litchfield County Bar was then famous for its brilliant array of able lawyers.

Success attended his efforts for advancement, and in 1793 he was elected a representative from his native town. He also served as a member of the House of Representatives from 1796 to 1800. In October, 1799, Smith was chosen clerk, and during both sessions of the following year he occupied the speaker's chair.

During his term of service Smith was a strong supporter of the old Federal party, and through the stormy period from then to 1818 he steadfastly opposed the increasing demand for a new constitution.

Elected as a member of Congress in the fall of 1800 he represented his district in the House of Representatives until 1806. While in Congress he was widely known as an accomplished scholar and a man of sound judgment. He was often called upon to preside when such statesmen as Pinckney, John Randolph, Otis, Lee, and Griswold were at the height of their fame. Smith resigned his seat in Congress in order "that he might the better administer to the comfort of an aged father." Returning to Sharon he took charge of the ancestral farm, at the same time engaging in literary pursuits, which his early training and hereditary tastes made very congenial. His townsmen soon returned him to the Legislature where he was made speaker of the House, representing the town in

that body until 1809. In that year Smith was chosen judge of the Superior Court, and his opinions were, to quote Hollister, "among the best in our reports, and are distinguished for their clearness of thought and finish of diction."

In 1809 he was elected lieutenant governor of the state, holding the office one year and seven months. During a large portion of the time that he held this office Governor Griswold was ill and unable to attend to the duties of state. The responsibilities of the chief executive at a critical juncture, fell upon the shoulders of Lieutenant Governor Smith.

Governor Griswold died in 1812, and the same year John Cotton Smith was elected to take his place. He was governor of the state for over four years, during a period that the commonwealth was convulsed by the strained relations existing between the two dominant political parties—the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Governor Smith was not in favor of changing the old form of government for a new one, so when his party was defeated in 1817, and Wolcott, the Anti-Federalist champion, elected governor, he retired from the political arena. Settling once more on his farm of over a thousand acres, at the age of fifty-two years, Governor Smith passed the remaining twenty-eight years of his life.

Many honors came to him in his retirement; Yale College conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions elected him its presi-

dent, in 1826; he was the first president of the Connecticut Bible Society and in 1836 the Royal College of Northern Antiquarians of Copenhagen elected him a member of that body. Governor Smith was also an active member of both the Massachusetts and Connecticut Historical Societies.

“Dividing his time,” says a writer, “between the scholastic studies that had coupled so large a portion of his youth, and the pursuit of agriculture, he lived the life, then almost obsolete, of the Connecticut planters of the seventeenth century. His hospitable mansion was always thronged with the most refined and cultured guests, who, on whatever points they might differ, all agreed that their entertainer was an unrivalled gentleman in the highest and best sense of the word.”

Governor Smith died in his home in Sharon on December 7, 1845, at the age of eighty years.

“His character can be likened to nothing that better illustrates it,” says a historian, “than the warm smiling Sharon valley on a summer’s morning, when the grass sparkles with dew and the bright lakes gleam in the sunshine.”