

# WHAT IS A STATESMAN?

BY CHARLES A. BEARD

WHAT are the qualifications or characteristics which mark the statesman off from the great horde of more commonplace persons who concern themselves with government? What is it that gives him distinction and enduring fame? This is a question which has received little consideration at the hands of those who have written on the evolution of political society. Carlyle, it is true, stormed a great deal on the subject and ended with the general conclusion that the statesman is a genius, a hero, a sort of divine messenger sent now and then to set the weary world aright. The Marxians at the other end of the pole dismiss the statesman with a scoff as a mere automaton produced by a complex of economic forces. But neither of these answers is an answer. Each is a sort of categorical imperative: believe or be damned. Neither satisfies the requirements of the scientific spirit any more than the Miltonic account of creation or the Japanese myth of the Sun Goddess.

Trouble begins when inquiry is made as to who are the statesmen of any nation. At the very outset many of Carlyle's heroes and statesmen are dismissed by the special and the general as no heroes or statesmen at all, but mere evanescent windbags. It also appears, if popular esteem be taken into account, that the same person is a statesman to some part of the public and a demagogue and charlatan to the remainder. Still more curiously, a man who is celebrated as a statesman by one generation is dismissed from the school books and biographical dictionaries with a scant bow by the next generation. Are there not times when Napoleon the Great is the hero of

France and other times when Pasteur receives the homage of the people? Was not John C. Calhoun the orator, statesman, and philosopher of the Far South and the incarnate demon of the Garrison-Phillips school? Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, the maker of modern Germany, the successor of Frederick the Great, was a towering figure in the history books written between 1890 and 1914. He flouted the talkative members of the Frankfort Assembly—those loquacious professors, who sought to make a national constitution out of paper instead of iron and blood. He dismissed the windy Liberals of the Prussian Diet and built up a Prussian army in spite of their protests. He waged war on Austria and cleared that troublesome member out of the German Union. He made a constitution that gave Hans and Fritz a delusive representation in a national parliament. He outwitted Napoleon the Little in diplomacy and war; he created an Empire on the spot where Louis XIV once disported himself. Having launched the new state he guided its destinies until William the Small dismissed the safe pilot and ran the ship on the rocks. Surely here was a maker of great events out of his own wisdom and will. So it seems.

Yet there are many now who have grave doubts about the majesty of Bismarck, after all. If he had helped the Frankfort professors instead of kicking them down stairs, he might have made the transition to a constitutional democracy less tragic for the German nation. If he had picked no quarrel with Napoleon III, there would have been no *revanche*. With a characteristic gesture of omnipotence, he sought to si-

lence Socialists first by clapping them into jail and then by stealing their thunder with social legislation. In vain. When puny big men had run his ship ashore in the Autumn of 1918 it was only the hated Socialists who were prepared to take the hulk and keep her from pounding to pieces. In the light of cruel disillusionment, where does Bismarck stand?

Now take Gladstone. If all the school children throughout the English-speaking world were called upon to name two English statesmen of enduring fame, the Sage of Hawarden would be one of them. Yet how many who instinctively choose Gladstone could associate with his career one monumental achievement? What modern Liberal in England bases his appeal on the policies of Gladstone? In theological and scientific controversies he was a pigmy. In classical disputes he was approved principally by those who knew no Greek. He was a formidable debater, and yet to the Tories he was a man "intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity." Liberal, humane, and evangelical, even when dealing with the Turk, Gladstone was idolized by those English bourgeois who refused to read a Sunday paper. Nevertheless in foreign and domestic policy, how far did he foresee the fate of England and prepare her for it? Even in his own sphere of Liberalism, it must be remembered, Disraeli dished him in 1867 by granting the suffrage to the working classes of England and later by formulating many enlightened measures of social legislation. The empire over the minds of men, which Gladstone built up in many long decades, vanished at his death. He left no heritage to his party, except that of defeat. And when the Liberal machine rose again to power in 1906 it was not his party but the party of the Welsh prestidigitator with his famous budget and his still more famous war. What and where is the Gladstone tradition? Even the friendly and facile Morley with three big volumes at his disposal could not create it. Read the speeches and books of young Liberals and see how few even refer

to Gladstone,—much less take inspiration from him.

Those who have carried on a long flirtation with the changeful Clio can readily show how fickle is the fame of any statesman. An ingenious mannerist like Strachey can even make the non-conformist conscience crackle with merriment over the downfall of the choicest gods. Indeed, the process has been carried forward with such zeal in every historical quarter that the satirist, Philip Guedalla, is driven to the conclusion that the fate of a politician depends upon the character of his exit from the stage of his labors! If he goes off with banners flying, orchestra thundering, and crowds roaring, his niche in history is likely to be secure. If he is shot by the villain in the last act, and the curtain goes down to soft music, with the heroine bending low over him, then he is sure to take a place among the national gods. But if, after a thrilling display of the histrionic arts, he catches his toe on a torn rug and falls flat on his face amid jeers and tears—of laughter—he is promptly shot into the lumber room.

Illustrations of Mr. Guedalla's ingenious theory may be taken from any historical arsenal. One trembles to think of what would have happened to the gentle and majestic Lincoln if he had lived through the grewsome days of Reconstruction, the Credit Mobilier, and the Star Route frauds, and spent his declining years, toothless and bald, tottering around the streets of Springfield, Illinois. How much poorer in spirit the American nation would be! One is dismayed in trying to imagine Roosevelt, full of zeal and ambition at the age of seventy, beating his restless soul against the iron bars of circumstance and commonplace with Coolidge and Daugherty grinning in the background. Suppose the would-be assassin who shot at Clemenceau during the Peace Conference had done the victim to death; imagine the funeral cortege of the Tiger passing under the Triumphal Arch, the tears of a grateful nation, and the orations by the saints of the *Action Libérale*!

Still, it is well to remember that many politicians and princes have been shot without winning a place on the honor roll. A president of France was assassinated a few years ago. Who remembers his name? Could all the stage managers in the world, from the age of Euripides to the age of Charles Chaplin, fix up a more tragic setting for the exit of a political leader than the immortal gods arranged for Maximilian of Mexico? A scion of royalty who, under the tutelage of Napoleon III, was to restore the balance of the world by setting up an empire is shot by a firing squad and his unhappy princess is swept down the stream of sixty years a hopeless maniac! There is something in exits, but not much. Drums and funeral notes die away with unseemly haste and the rude janitor sweeps out the faded flowers.

If it is not the exit that makes the statesman, is it brains? Not brains alone. A man may be well equipped with powerful engines of logic and controversy and well stocked with knowledge, and yet, if he runs against the current of the long time, he passes away as grass that withers. How many read Bossuet now? And yet Bossuet was infinitely superior in intellect to Rousseau. Madison was one of the brainiest men in our Homeric Age; how many regard him as a statesman? In supercilious Boston he is more often remembered as the author of Mr. Madison's War which prevented business from going on as usual.

If not brains, then is it morals? Well, Mr. Bryan's character is above reproach. Would anyone put him higher in the scale of fame than Benjamin Franklin, whose morals, to speak softly, were marred by a certain carelessness? Is it ideals clung to unflinchingly until death? For every martyr who achieves fame there are a thousand cranks stoned by the mob and consigned to oblivion.

After this negative review, let me hazard a guess. The statesman is one who divines the long future, foresees the place of his class and nation in it, labors intelligently to prepare his countrymen for their fate, combines courage with discretion, takes risks, has good luck, exercises caution where it is necessary, and goes off the stage with a reasonable degree of respectability. He must have brains—some, at least. He must have morals—some at least. He must have ideals—but only those which are justified in the economy of Providence. He must be able to reconcile himself without complaining to the inexorable movement which the skeptical call the grand *pis aller* and the devout the divine plan. He must not only see; he must appear to be achieving in the current of things. Above all, he must be justified by events, that is, by good fortune. Perhaps beyond reason and understanding both Carlyle and Marx may be reconciled, a little bit. Meanwhile the mystery must not be entirely cleared up. Otherwise the game of politics would lose its savor.

# LILLIAN GISH

BY JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

It occurred to me, gazing apprehensively at Lillian, that it might be wise to take a drawing-room on the New York train. We had been in West Chester, and we were standing on the station platform at West Philadelphia. Everyone who passed, or, rather, who approached, forgot what he might be doing, where he had been going, and regarded her from short distances. There wasn't a crowd, it was too bitterly cold for the casual; but no one on the platform was lost to us. Lillian had just been telling me that she hated a lot of clothes and was never cold. A fur coat, practically speaking, was almost all she needed between her and Winter; and she went on to explain how mistaken it was to refer to her as fragile. The fragility, it seemed, was more apparent than actual: I got the impression from her that when she was making "Way Down East" her favorite position was lying on natural ice with her loosened hair in the water of the river. An insurance company, called upon to protect Mr. Griffith against the risk of such scenes, would only chance its money on Lillian and her soundness. She told me this, more than once, I think, with a great deal of pride. As she said it she looked at me with the wistfulness, the drooping delicacy, of a young weeping willow at dusk.

The drawing-room to New York we got; and, finally, rid of the Pullman conductor and the train conductor, after assuring the porter once more that he had neglected nothing, I bolted the door on a public acting as though the car had been sharply tilted in our direction. I fastened the door, but, before I could sit down, a

firm knock fell on it. I hope you don't mind, I said to Lillian; but I'll be damned if I hear it! She was a little startled at the damned, but at the rest she smiled. The knocking, however, grew continuous; and in the end, I was forced to recognize it. Two men at once entered as though they had been comically propelled from behind. The first was vaguely familiar, but there was nothing vague in his greeting of me: he had gone to school with me—thirty years ago, that would have been—his memory of those days held nothing happier than me, and he saw me again, after so long, with a deep pleasure. . . . During this his intentness on Lillian was romantically complete.

The individual with this faithful friend of my childhood elbowed himself into view, and, prompted by their names, I introduced them to Miss Gish. I then explained that we were engaged in planning a moving, a very moving, picture, and they reluctantly withdrew. Lillian, sitting facing me, was turning over the pages of *Vanity Fair*; and I reflected that I was in a Pullman drawing-room, going to the city of New York, with, perhaps, the loveliest girl known. This surprised me in that I was surprised at my lack of surprise. If it had happened to me fifteen years before, if, at any time between twenty and thirty, I had taken Lillian from one place to another, I would have been in a state of incredulous delight. At the idea alone! But now—though no one in the world better appreciated her loveliness—I had a calm and very complete, almost a detached, view of her. The truth was that I was filled with the desire to use her beauty