

AMERICAN POLITICS: A CHINESE VIEW

BY YUA-LING CHIN

IT HAS been said repeatedly that in America there is hardly any difference between a statesman and a politician. A statesman is simply a politician in office; a politician is a statesman out of office. Facetious as this statement may sound, it contains some element of truth. Office seems to be the chief, if not the only, aim of the American statesman and the American politician alike. Few, if any, play politics without some connection or other with political patronage. Where are the American Brailsfords, the Angels, the Hobsons, the Keyneses, or the Wallases? Outside of a few publicists who indulge in drum-beating in the suburbs of the political arena, and a handful of professors who become administrative officials of no political importance, there is hardly any American of political influence without some kind of organization or group interest back of him. The venerable Charles Eliot, of Harvard, is at best a feeble exception to the general rule of political indifference among the intellectual classes.

Yet it can not be said that there is no difference between the American statesman and the American politician. The difference is not, however, one of office, since both want to get it either directly or indirectly; it is rather rooted in differences between types of men. A statesman in America becomes a statesman through environment, while a politician is a politician by nature.

A statesman in America is generally well-to-do, thoroughly conventional, somewhat educated in the American sense, almost always versed in law, sufficiently respectable to move in society with ease,

and sufficiently poor and humble to start with to be acceptable to the people. He may never have heard of the Periclean Age or the Renaissance, but he can generally quote with facility either from the Bible or from Abraham Lincoln. It is not true that he is always in office. He is often out of it. When out of it, he organizes relief committees, presides over meetings, and floods the newspapers with his wisdom. When in, silence becomes his chief virtue. On week-days he goes to his office, and on Sunday he sits in one of the front pews in his church, worshipping God and the Constitution.

He is a solid and substantial citizen. Generally he is neither ostentatiously rich, nor frankly poor, for ostentatious wealth is just as disastrous to an American statesman as actual poverty. He may not be attached to the soil where he was born and bred, but he is very likely to have a homestead with closed doors and shuttered windows. As long as he has an income, the source of it does not bother him any more than it bothers others; and as a last resort he can always practice law. His personal appearance is the incarnation of respectability. He wears a Chesterfield overcoat in Winter, and a cutaway all the year round. If in office, he sometimes wears a top hat, and when on an official mission to Europe, he wears spats.

It now remains to sketch the leading mental traits of this American statesman. To start with, foreign observers are apt to deny him intelligence. Most people, in using this term, do not know exactly what they mean, and the writer of this article does not claim to be an exception. Cer-

tainly, it is capable of various interpretations, and in using it indiscriminately many of us are doing injustice to the poor statesman. If by intelligence one means the ability to calculate, on behalf of the interest one serves, the advantages and disadvantages of propositions based upon such fundamental premises as that "everyone desires to be wealthy," or that "success is the ideal or goal of life," then the American statesman is a very intelligent person. He may not be so intelligent in this respect as the American business man, but to expect more of him seems to be mere optimism.

If, however, the word intelligence is interpreted in any other sense the American statesman is not a person to whom it can be applied. He is usually dull and uninteresting, and often narrow and bigoted. Accustomed to a rigid process of calculation all his life, he has never had any opportunity for any kind of thinking. To him superficialities are profundities, and platitudes are oracles. Very often it is not his fault that he is so boring. He remembers that, after all, politics is his profession, and that, being in the last analysis a politician in a republic, he has to play to his audience. Like most other public speakers he supplies what that audience is supposed to demand, and, rightly or wrongly, it is never supposed to demand what in rare cases he may be able to supply. On occasion, a really intelligent American statesman may be obliged to become a fool.

He is in general, what Americans call a practical man. He is not interested in order and progress, but in law and prosperity. Here it is probably desirable to account for the fact that lawyers always thrive in politics. In the first place, there is in America a wide-spread respect for law, fostered by centuries of tradition. In the second place, there are so many laws that the whole legal system becomes a complicated machine of wheels within wheels, which can only be turned to advantage by an experienced hand. American society, in other words, is so ridden with laws that people's hands are tied, and it is only with the help

of lawyers that things can be kept going. Politics in such a country is necessarily almost indistinguishable from law, and consequently a statesman is generally a lawyer.

Sometimes he makes laws, sometimes executes them, and if he is doing neither, he interprets them in the capacity of judge or attorney. He makes his living out of law, he achieves his reputation through law, he owes his position to law, he fights by law, and he stands for law. His mind is a strictly legal one. Its rigid training makes him blind to any kind of influence outside the narrow procedure of centuries. He believes in the doctrine of *Stare decisis*, and worships precedents. The American Constitution may or may not enact Herbert Spencer's "Social Statics," but the Common Law certainly embodies Blackstone's "Commentaries." The mind of the American statesman is thus hide-bound in tradition. In his moments of passion he attempts to legislate Darwinism out of politics, and in his moments of alleged enlightenment he tries to make of the author of "The Man Versus the State" a modern Aristotle.

II

The American politician belongs to a totally different class. A well-known English philosopher said only recently that biologically there must be as many intelligent people in the United States as anywhere else. If he meant to say obliquely that there are actually very few intelligent people in the United States he must have overlooked the American politicians. Some of them deserve to be ranked among the greatest generals known to mankind. They would have long ago gained a significant place in the standard histories if standard historians paid less attention to standards and more to realities. After all, did not Mark Hanna play just as significant a part as Hannibal? True, they were different, but is it not also true that both were great?

The highest development of the American politician is exemplified by the boss.

The American boss is painted as a cunning, brutal, revengeful and underhanded person who schemes bribery, corruption, and political chicanery of all sorts behind closed doors for his own benefit. Such a man, in reality, can become only an ash-cart politician or a precinct leader; he never becomes a boss. Genuine bosses belong to a race of whom it may be said, as it was said of Lloyd George by Maynard Keynes, that they have "an unerring and almost medium-like sensibility." They can watch people "with six and seven senses not available to ordinary men, judging character, motive and subconscious impulse, perceiving what each was going to say next, and compounding with telepathic instinct the argument or appeal best suited to the vanity, weakness, or the self-interest of the immediate auditor."

There are different grades of bosses, culminating in the boss of the State. There never was a national boss, save transiently. The President of the United States, in some situations, may be so described, but his power is legal and his position official. The nearest approach to a national boss was undoubtedly Mark Hanna, but he appeared on the political horizon like a comet, and like a comet he disappeared. The campaign he dominated involved real and not merely apparent issues, the choice of which by the electorate meant far-reaching consequences for what is now called Big Business. Money poured in from mysterious sources, and Hanna had complete control over it. But his rule was temporary, and his power was derived from a unique situation. Making allowance for all the special circumstances that favored his ascendancy, we cannot help recognizing in him a natural leader of men. If intelligence means quickness of perception, the skilful manipulation of human motives, the facility with which one deals with people of all kinds and every description; if intelligence means the instinctive adjustment to one's delicate psychological environment; if it means the ability to hold one's own against all odds, then

such men as Hanna are highly intelligent.

However, there never was a national boss for any long period of time. Some State bosses have risen to that position during national campaigns, but that has been only temporary. Their position was due to the emergency of the moment, and their power was by no means supreme. It was the State bosses who in their day formed dynasties. Theirs was a list of names which some Americans hate and others adore, but which, from the point of view of an outsider, was none the less illustrious. Who is not eager to know something about Platt, Conkling, Quay, and Penrose? An Alexander could impose upon his soldiers in wartime the discipline to which they were accustomed in peacetime. The risk of mutiny was great, and the punishment, when mutiny failed, was certain. But American bosses head an army of officers and soldiers who can assert their independence whenever they wish, and the forces that lead them to do so are many and various as well as recurring. The risk of a revolt is small and the chances of its success are great. It is far more difficult for the boss to command his fellow voters than for a general to control his army.

The qualities essential to an American boss are those of a primitive but superman. In addition to a clear head, an indomitable will, and extraordinary caution and courage, he must possess an exceptional memory, quick perception, skill in negotiation, and capacity for decision on the spur of the moment. He must be sociable and, above all, free from prejudice. A humble business man may scoff at the Four Hundred, a scrubwoman may manhandle an intellectual, a door-keeper may refuse admission to the President of the United States, and a shoe-black may discriminate against the gods of Olympus. But a boss must open his arms at all times to everyone alike. He may be as humble as a Uriah Heep or as firm as a Cromwell; he may do or be a thousand and one things; but he must always be ready to take a glass of home-brew with his fellow citi-

zens. He may not entertain any prejudice against any voter—except possibly an American professor, and even that is open to doubt.

Once a professor in the University of Pennsylvania told me a story about the late Senator Penrose which may serve as an example of the exact memory and quick perception through which a boss gains the admiration of the politically unthinking, but otherwise serious-minded citizen of the community. The professor presided over a meeting to which the senator was invited to discuss some topic of current interest. After the discussion came to an end, the senator was to receive some of the members present. A clergyman who had not been at the meeting came up to the professor, asking to be introduced to the boss. He was an other-worldly type of man, evidently absent-minded; for although he must have seen the senator a number of times in Philadelphia he still failed to recognize him. Catching sight of this dreamy man of God, the senator extended his hand before the professor had had time to speak, and calling out the clergyman's name, said that he had the subscription in mind, and that he would attend to it that very afternoon. Dumbfounded, the pastor went away with his vote safely deposited in the senator's hands.

Crediting the bosses, as I do, with all that is their due, I still do not by any means think that they are fit leaders of a democracy. While it would be unjust to regard them as totally unprincipled, it would be dangerous to trust the principles they stand for. Their desires, instincts, and passions, and the secret yearnings of their hearts are essentially those of tribe leaders. They are powerful because the members of their tribes are as yet incapable of any other allegiance. The city, the State, and the nation in the abstract are to them quite devoid of any concrete meaning. They may have such virtues as candor, fair-play, and loyalty in personal relations, but they are not on that account trustworthy. Their ethical values are not adapted to the re-

quirements of civic responsibility and democratic citizenship.

If bosses are thus not fit rulers for a democracy, they are also unfitted to be its subordinate agents. There was a time when people regarded them as practical men with sufficient magnetism to lead others to their will. All one had to do was to give them an idea, or a programme, and they would drive it to achievement. Time, however, has brought with it disillusionment. Bosses are not only devoid of ideas and vision; they are also incapable of receiving or retaining them. They accept an idea for what it is worth to them—that is to say, if it helps them to win an election, to put their friends in office, or to increase their power or influence in any way. They have no use for any idea *per se*. Give them one, and it is not the idea that is served. It simply means that they have an additional instrument to use to their advantage, or that an idea is lost forever through the misuse it has suffered.

III

It seems, therefore, that neither the typical American statesman nor the typical American politician of today is a fit leader for the American people. The days of Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and James Madison are over. The Quincy Adamses of today, shy and sensitive, indulge in history writing or yacht racing rather than political wire-pulling. In their place, we find crude men without training, trained men without refinement, and refined men without culture, engaged in the futile effort to work smoothly with hard men who know what they want and run away with it before anyone is aware. American politics is thus not only uninteresting; it has become unimportant. It is now something in the nature of issuing marriage licenses to young lovers whose proposals and acceptances are made elsewhere. It is nothing more than sound and fury in which pigmies are magnified into giants.

A consideration of the type of men who

run politics in America leads one to pondering the fundamental possibilities of a democratic republic. These men seem to be dangerous to the democratic ideal, and yet they are by-products of the democratic practice. If they are not the by-products of the democratic practice anywhere else, they are at least so in America, where such measures as the direct primary and multiple elections are taken to be means of realizing the democratic ideal. As has been pointed out before by a number of writers, these are precisely the devices by which American politicians, including statesmen, thrive and prosper.

We have here, then, a fundamental problem in political thought. Is the democratic ideal a valid ideal? Or is it a degrading dogma? Objections to it have been raised in the past, and are being raised now, and though we cling to it as an ideal, or a belief, or a dogma, or a rallying symbol, like the Star Spangled Banner, or the Union Jack, few of us are convinced of its validity, or necessity, or convenience. The ideal is of course capable of many and various interpretations, and each can interpret it in a way suitable to its own taste. But no matter how it may be interpreted, it has concomitant elements which to some minds at least are liable to be uninviting. The doctrine of equality as enunciated in the Gettysburg Speech is what some people would call a denial of a plain fact.

It is useless to pretend that every Athenian was a Plato, or that every American is a William James. Some are capable of great intellectual achievements; others are born with great emotional powers. If idiots and geniuses actually share the solitude imposed upon them by sociological graphs, the government of the majority is a government which some people would call commonplace, while the late President Harding would describe it as normal. But whether commonplace or normal, it has no room for either idiots or geniuses.

But the democratic ideal is hardly a subject for discussion in these paragraphs. It is taken for granted as something that is

almost universally desired. Whether or not it is philosophically valid, it has become a historical dogma. The problem is therefore one of working out practical measures calculated to bring politics to the level of the ideal, whether or not that ideal is valid. These practical measures can only be framed with first-hand knowledge of American politics. An outsider who looks in from afar can only make suggestions of a theoretical nature. He is not in touch with all the interests at work, and does not generally keep in mind that what is meant by "practical" in a democracy is in the last analysis a capacity for compromise. Even if he is so bold as to suggest practical measures, they are not likely to be found practicable.

However, one or two fundamental considerations may be raised. One is the separation of the intellectual class—and there *is* an intellectual class in America—from society on the one hand and from politics on the other. Neither the American statesman nor the American politician has anything to do with the intellectual class. In this respect, the example of England is worth noting. A large number of the English parliamentarians are educated and even cultured men. There may have been an eternal struggle in Mr. Gladstone between education and Eton, in which Eton was said to have won, but the point to be remembered is that while education lost, it at least struggled. The Eminent Victorian was not the last of his tribe. Few of us, perhaps, admire today either the Earl of Balfour or the Earl of Oxford, but most people will admit that they are at least subtler, more cultured and understanding than their fellow politicians in America.

Oxford may be totally different from Cambridge, but both are nurseries of the British aristocracy. Thus in England, society, politics and formal education are united. The writer is not enamored of English politics. Not being an Englishman, he is not expected to be. But compared with politics in America, it is prob-

ably the less objectionable. Conservatism in England means mere harmless tranquillity, but in America it means reaction. Progressivism in England means a more or less definite social programme, while in America it means gyroscopic disturbance.

The second point to be noted is that even if education were part and parcel of the American politician's character, it would not make him a desirable leader. The only result would be an increase in the number of American statesmen. Nothing is gained, but a great deal may be lost. Though a college man, Senator Penrose was not educated. Had he been, he might have been just as colorless as the late Senator Lodge, whose like could be found by the dozens along the back benches of the Unionist party in the House of Commons. The problem seems to be one of the kind of education the politicians can get. Liberal education in America leaves a great deal to be desired. It may or may not be something that has happened in colleges and universities, as Mr. Wells has somewhere described it, but it is certainly much less of an integral part of a man's character than education should be.

Take, for instance, the late ex-President Wilson. In the American sense, he was probably one of the best educated among the American Presidents. He was a college professor, the kind of man to whom tradition and fiction in America have attributed some kind of profound scholarship. He had studied history and politics, and in his university days was known as a scholar. But as a President in his discharge of state affairs, he was essentially an uneducated man. The haughty disdain of a Southern pseudo-aristocrat and the headstrong blindness of an American pioneer seemed to have been unaffected by the supposedly liberalizing and humanizing influence that is claimed for the colleges and universities. It is not quite impossible that the American war President had qualities of greatness. There are people today who consider him a martyr to the preponderating prejudice in America for aloofness and

isolation. If, however, he did possess greatness, it was certainly not the kind that flows out of the refinement, the cultivation, the painstaking effort in character building of a liberal education.

IV

It is, therefore, not out of place to say a word or two about American education. To start with, an outside observer is confronted with a peculiar phenomenon: while there are a great many American lawyers, there are very few jurists; while there are a great many inventors, there are comparatively few scientists; while there are a large number of professors of philosophy, there are few philosophers; and while there are mongers of literature, there is yet to be discovered a literary man of the first merit.

Possibly in business the creative, poetic and imaginative side of the professions is combined with the technical, but certainly in no other sphere is that happy union a noticeable phenomenon. What seems to be wanting is the desire to take education at its own worth. The acquisition of knowledge, when regarded as a discipline, is often taken to be an investment, and when regarded as a life work, it is sometimes indulged in from external compulsion. In most cases, it is a means of gaining a comfortable livelihood. It emphasizes the practical rather than the theoretical, the technical rather than the creative. Such being the goal, public and private instruction becomes more or less specialized at an early age. Specialization in higher education has its advantages, but in schools and colleges it has its undesirable aspects. One becomes an expert before one is a person of refinement and culture.

The fundamental fact is that America is still a country of high economic promise. The imagination of its youth is still centered in business. The typical hero is a Ford, an elder Morgan, a Harriman, or a Rockefeller. The writer has no intention of belittling these men. They were or are great in their field, but the desire to follow

their example diverts human energy away from the less spectacular but more sustaining achievement of individual development in all respects, with broad and human sympathies.

The advertising section of such a paper as the *New York Times* reveals an incessant call for salesmen. There is column after column in which the same tale is told: men are wanted to sell on a commission basis almost everything under the sun. Whether or not there are such quantities of different commodities to be sold, whether or not profits can be made out of them, whether or not commission can be gained as promised, are questions for the economists, with which I am not here concerned. The fact or the illusion, at any rate, is there. People believe in the possibilities of fabulous wealth. The country is still largely uninhabited. Rockefeller is said by some to be a phenomenon of the Nineteenth Century, impossible to be repeated in the Twentieth. But before this idea becomes an articulate thought, the example of Henry Ford challenges its validity. The average American—if there is such a man—is not likely to be endowed with less than his share of human vanity; in the secret places of his heart he is likely to think that with love, labor, and the help of Providence, he too will some day become a millionaire.

The popular philosophy of the country is wholly a philosophy of success. Of course, few people know what the term

success actually means, and if Americans do not, a foreigner is hardly expected to. But the doctrine seems to be that everyone is capable of it, if only he has or cultivates the virtues of thrift and industry. Work your way through the straight and narrow path, and you will some day have a home on upper Fifth avenue, an office in Wall Street, and your biography in the *American Magazine*. Even serious philosophy bears a commercial stamp. Professor Dewey, indeed, has somewhere defended William James against a charge of commercialism—which was never made. Few will descend to the level of so crude an accusation. But without saying anything about Pragmatism as a philosophical doctrine, one may inquire as to why it is that it has flourished more in America than in any other country.

America is still simply a gigantic business corporation. Its activities are still primarily economic activities. Its captains, hidden from public gaze, carry on enormous business transactions of which the liveried door-keeper, the uniformed messenger boy, and the stiff-collared clerk have no notion whatsoever. But whereas the liveried door-keeper, the uniformed messenger boy, and the stiff-collared clerk are not taken to be the guiding spirits of the billion-dollar corporation, the Cabinet members in Washington, the ambassadors, and the top-hatted gentlemen who deliver public speeches are taken for the guiding spirits of the American people.

THE CURVE OF SIN

BY GERALD W. JOHNSON

ONE may easily find a chart, in these days of passionate statistics, whereon is outlined the rise and fall of the georgette waist business as compared with the pig-iron industry in the last quarter of the year 1924. In terms of pig-iron one may follow, too, the boot and shoe trade, and the manufacture of hair-nets. There is, indeed, no commodity of general call without a chart comparing its market price with that of pig-iron, the norm and ideal of all human trafficking. Nor is this growing popularity of learned picture-writing monopolized by sordid commercialists. There are graphic illustrations of the economic standing of learning and the fine arts, presenting graceful and instructive representations of the relative value in the open market of a pig of iron and a bishop, a bushel of wheat and a chiropractor. No values are too minute to be commensurable by modern science.

But there is one curve untraced, one chart never drafted, even tentatively, despite the fact that its existence would be a tremendous commercial gain to the country. That is the economic curve of sin. Perhaps the thaumaturgists who manufacture charms and amulets for modern business are at a loss because their guide, philosopher and friend, the iron pig, cannot easily be employed for such a purpose. Yet minds as ingenious as those of such warlocks ought not to find an insuperable obstacle in that. Some other standard of measurement could easily be substituted. Bank deposits, for instance, immediately come to mind. Allowances would have to be made for local variations from the norm, of course, but they could be appended to

the chart with ease. That, in fact, would be in line with the existing practice, for the incantator always furnishes copious programme notes with his score.

The value of such a series of charts, if they could be prepared, would be obvious. No traveler whose business forced him into intimate contact with the various and unequal civilizations that prevail in the Republic would be without one. Sewing machine agents, shoe drummers and Mormon missionaries alike would be spared losses, hardships and perils innumerable if they were armed with graphs showing the moral as well as the economic condition of the territories they were preparing to invade. Somewhere out in the Great American Desert there is a State where it is, or was until recently, illegal to smoke a cigarette. Even as close to the civilization that hangs precariously along the coast-line as Tennessee, it is illegal to buy one. Contrariwise, in the Maryland Free State and in Kentucky, bootlegging seems to be regarded as an honorable vocation and even as an adjunct to statecraft. But if a wandering evangelist undertook to still his own in Kansas or North Carolina, it is doubtful that even his sacred office would save him from the fury of the Prohibition enforcement agents.

As things are, the seller of idealism has to depend upon the highly inefficient method of trial and error to determine his line of approach, whereas if he were equipped with properly prepared charts he would know that he is liable to be put in jail if he damns the Constitution in North Carolina, and liable to be suspected of having voted against Blease if he doesn't