

THE STATE OF THE UNION

By ALBERT JAY NOCK

Liberals Never Learn

THERE is no question that the Liberals and Progressives are in the political saddle at the moment, fitted out with bucking-straps and a Spanish bit, and are riding the nation under spur and quirt. Liberalism became the fashion in 1932, so for six years every esurient shyster who was out to rook the public has had to advertise himself as a Liberal and a Progressive. None other need apply. Hence we now have a hundred-per-cent Liberal Administration backed up by Liberal State, county, and municipal placemen, and a solid nation-wide Liberal bureaucracy running close to a million, all frozen tight to their jobs. One would hardly believe there could be as many Liberals in the world as are now luxuriating with their muzzles immersed in the public trough. They are a curious assortment, too, differing widely in race, color, and previous condition of servitude, but they are all Liberals. Mr. Farley is a Liberal, Governor Murphy is a Liberal; so is Mr. Ashurst, Mr. Ickes, Mr. Wagner, Mr.

La Follette, Mr. Black, Mr. Wallace, and over all — God save us! — stands the smiling figure of Liberalism's Little Corporal in person.

It is an impressive array, if you don't mind what you look at, but nothing to waste words on. We have seen its like before. When Mr. Taft left the Presidency in 1912, political Liberalism descended on the country with a leap and a whistle, under the banner of Mr. Wilson, who being a North-of-Ireland Scotch Presbyterian pedagogue, was ideally fitted by birth and training to give a first-class demonstration of Liberalism in action; and believe me, he gave one. It was the first chance the country ever had to see the real thing in Liberalism, and we certainly saw it dished up with all the modern improvements. When Uncle Sam finally staggered out from under that experience with genuine old-vatted, eighteen-carat, stem-winding, self-cocking Liberalism, most of us thought the poor old man had had enough of it to last him all his life, but in 1932 he was back at the

nut-factory again, clamoring for more.

But as I say, speaking seriously, all this is not worth wasting words on, because as everybody but Liberals and unborn children might be presumed to know, a jobseeker's professions of Liberalism are simply so much in the routine work of electioneering. They are a routine device in the general technique of what my friend Mr. Mencken calls boob-bumping. Hence when Liberalism is in the saddle, as at present or as in 1912-1920, you get substantially the same thing that you get from any other stripe of professional politics: *i.e.*, you get it in the neck, and get it good and hard. Liberalism gives you a little more exalted type of flatulence, a more afflictive self-righteousness, and in its lower reaches you get a considerably larger line of zealous imbecility; but otherwise the public gets about as much and as little for its money from political Liberalism as it gets out of any other species of organized thievery and fraud.

What I do think is worth looking into for a moment is the working of the Liberal mind as displayed by persons in private life; persons, that is, who are not jobholders or jobseekers, but who have an interest in public affairs—such persons, let us say, as are likely

to be found in the Foreign Policy Association or who expound the Liberal point of view in the correspondence columns of the press. I have known many such in my time, and the curious workings of their mentality always interested me profoundly. They were, and are, excellent people, and their public spirit is admirable. They are sincere, as far as their intelligence, or their lack of it, permits them to be; that is to say, they are morally honest, their motives and intentions are impeccable; but intellectually they are as dishonest a set of people, taking one with another, as I ever saw. Chiefly for this reason I have long regarded them as the most dangerous element in human society; and it might be worth a reader's while to let me specify a little, by way of showing cause for this belief.

In the first place, I never knew a Liberal who was not incurably politically-minded. Those whom I have known seemed to think not only that politics can furnish a cure for every ill the social flesh is heir to, but also that there is nowhere else to look for a cure. They had an extraordinary idea of the potency and beneficence of political remedies, and when they wanted some social abuse corrected or some social improvement made, they in-

stinctively turned to politics as a first and last resort.

The upshot of this addiction is that the Liberal is always hell-bent for more laws, more political regulation and supervision, more jobholders, and consequently less freedom. I do not recall a single Liberal of my acquaintance who impressed me as having the least interest in freedom, or a shadow of faith in its potentialities. On the contrary, I have always found the Liberal to have the greatest nervous horror of freedom, and the keenest disposition to barge in on the liberties of the individual and whittle them away at every accessible point. If anyone thinks my experience has been exceptional, I suggest he look up the record and see how individual liberty has fared under the various régimes in which Liberalism was dominant, and how it has fared under those in which it was held in abeyance. Let him take a sheaf of specifically Liberal proposals for the conduct of this-or-that detail of public affairs, and use it as a measure of the authors' conception of human rights and liberties. If he does this I think he will find enough to bear out my experience, and perhaps a good deal more.

Being politically-minded, the Liberal (as I have known him) is convinced that compromise is of

the essence of politics, and that any conceivable compromise of intellect or character is justifiable if it be made in behalf of the Larger Good. Hence he does not reluct at condoning and countenancing the most scandalous dishonesties and the most revolting swineries whenever, in his judgment, the Larger Good may be in any way served thereby. He assents to the earmarking of a large credit of rascality and misfeasance, upon which jobholders may draw at will if only they assure him that the improvement or benefit which interests him will be thereby forthcoming. Thus, for example, he tacitly agrees to the debauching of an entire electorate — to the setting up of an enormous mass of voting-power, subsidized from the public treasury — because it will insure the election of Mr. Roosevelt, and electing Mr. Roosevelt will in turn insure the triumph of the Larger Good.

Consequently, in his unreasoning devotion to the Larger Good and his inability to see that this kind of service really produces nothing that he expects it to produce, the Liberal is always being taken in by some political peruna that anyone in his right mind would know is inert and fraudulent. This gullibility is perhaps the trait

which chiefly makes him so dangerous to society; he is such an incorrigible sucker. He whoops up some political patent medicine, say the Wagner Act or the AAA, gets other unthinking persons to indorse it, and when its real effect and intention becomes manifest, he learns nothing from his disappointment, but flies off to another synthetic concoction, and then again to another and another, thus keeping himself and his whole entourage in an unending state of befuddlement. He was keen to Save the World for Democracy; he was strong for the War to End All War, self-determination of nations, freedom of the seas, the rights of minorities, and all that sort of thing. He was red-hot for the League of Nations, and now he is all in favor of The More Abundant Life, social security, and soaking the rich in order to uplift and beatify the proletariat. He does all this as an act of faith, according to the little Sunday-scholar's definition of faith as "the power of believing something that you know isn't so"; for if he would listen to the voice of experience alone, it would tell him in no uncertain tones that such stuff is but the purest hokum, and that taking any stock in it merely puts him in line for another brisk run of dis-

appointment precisely like the many he has incurred already in the same way.

The typical Liberal not only puts his confidence in bogus political nostrums and comes to grief; he puts it also in the Pied Pipers who devise those nostrums, and thereby he regularly comes to grief again. For some inexplicable reason he persists in believing that a politician who is enough of a linguist to talk the clichés of Liberalism fluently, one who knows the Liberal idiom and has its phrase-book pretty well by heart, is trustworthy. He has the naïve expectation that such a politician will act as he talks, and when he finds that he does not so act, he is very sad about it. Thus the Liberal fell for Roosevelt I; he fell for Woodrow Wilson; he fell for Ramsay MacDonald and even for Lloyd George; he fell for Roosevelt II; and as one after another of his gonfaloniers turned out to be cotton-backed, he lifted up his voice in lamentation and great woe.

I read an article by Mr. Walter Lippmann some time ago, which faithfully reflects this naïve and inveterate trait of the Liberal. It was printed in the New York *Herald Tribune*, and by an odd coincidence it appeared in the issue of April 1—All Fools' Day—though

too much probably should not be made of that circumstance. Mr. Lippmann rehearses in detail his support of Mr. Roosevelt's various candidacies, and his indorsement of almost all the New Deal policies. In the Summer of 1935, however, he saw signs that Mr. Roosevelt "had acquired the habit of emergency action; that he was not disposed to relinquish his extraordinary personal powers and restore the normal procedure of representative government". As time went on, these signs multiplied; "expenditures and subsidies did not decline" and "vested interests had been created which the Administration could not or would not resist". Then came the Supreme Court proposal and the Administration's "tolerant silence" about the sit-down strikes; and these appear to be the last two straws that broke the back of Mr. Lippmann's confidence. He goes on in a despondent strain to say, "So what I see is a President establishing the precedent that his will or the will of the party in power must prevail, and that the law may be manipulated to carry out their purposes."

Sancta simplicitas! One reads this with amazement. Is it possible that Mr. Lippmann actually *expected* Mr. Roosevelt to relinquish voluntarily any personal power

that could be made to come his way? Did Mr. Lippmann actually suppose that Mr. Roosevelt, any more than any other professional politician, cares two straws about "the normal procedure of representative government" or would turn his hand over to restore it unless and until it were politically expedient so to do? Why, really, did Mr. Lippmann think there was the faintest possibility that expenditures would decline and bureaucratic vested interests be resisted by the Administration? If it were quite urbane to do so, one might ask what Mr. Lippmann thinks the Administration is there for. As for "establishing the precedent" that Mr. Lippmann cites, the answer is that Mr. Roosevelt is establishing that precedent because he can get away with it, or thinks he can, and it is simply silly to suggest that he might have any squeamishness about imposing his will upon all and sundry — the more, the better — or any shadow of compunction about manipulating the law to carry out his purposes. Mr. Lippmann's article, in short, is based on the assumption that the commonly-accepted codes of honesty and decency are as applicable to professional politicians as they are to folks; and while this does great credit to Mr. Lippmann's qualities

of heart, one must say in all conscience that it does precious little credit to his qualities of head.

But of such pre-eminently is the kingdom of Liberalism. Mr. Lippmann says he is "deeply disquieted", not because he apprehends the dictatorship of either Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Lewis, or the rise of an organized Fascism. What he sees in the present state of the Union is "the makings of a fierce reaction against Mr. Roosevelt and the whole Liberal and Progressive movement, and against all Liberal and Progressive ideas. That is what I dread." I can not share Mr. Lippmann's sentiments; indeed, I hope he may be right. What I have seen of the Liberal and Progressive movement gives me no wish for its continuance—far from it—and if it disintegrated tomorrow I should be disposed to congratulate the country on its deliverance from a peculiarly dangerous and noisome nuisance. With regard to "all Liberal and Progressive ideas", I have never been able to make out that there are any. Pseudo-ideas, yes, in abundance; sentiment, emotion, wishful dreams and visions, grandiose castles in Spain, political panaceas and placebos made up of

milk, moonshine, and bilgewater in approximately equal parts—yes, these seem to be almost a peculium of Liberalism. But ideas, no.

P.S. — As the foregoing goes to press, Mr. Lippmann comes out with another article in the same vein, in the *Herald Tribune* of June 26. In the course of his writing he says:

I wish I could recover the belief that the President really is interested in democratic reforms and not in the establishment of irresistible power personally directed. It is not pleasant to have such fears about the Chief Magistrate of the Republic. But for many long months nothing has happened which helps to dispel these fears. Many, many things continue to happen which accentuate them.

I have no wish to bear hardly on Mr. Lippmann, for his conclusions in both the articles I have cited are sound and true, and I wish the country would heed them. Nevertheless the sentences just quoted are probably, I think, entitled to the first prize as an exhibit of the Liberal's imperishable naïveté. Why, one must ask, should any vertebrated animal ever have entertained the fantastic belief which Mr. Lippmann has lost; and having lost it, why should he wish to recover it?

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*A Great American, Forgotten*¹

BY JOHN W. THOMASON, JR.

THE case of the late General of the Armies of the United States, Winfield Scott, is singular, even for a nation notoriously addicted to forgetfulness. I cannot call to mind any individual who served the Republic in high station over so immense a span of years, or who rendered services of more outstanding value. Born in 1786, when the loose association of colonies was struggling toward something definite in the way of constitutional government, he was a brigadier in 1812 against the British, conducted the Mexican War, and laid the broad bases of the Union's successful struggle against the Confederacy. He died in 1866, already passed from any large public notice. It was not that he was a soldier — in a nation which wrote its abhorrence of the Regular into its Declaration of Independence: his work in the diplomatic field was notable, both at home and abroad; and he was an influence in the pol-

itics of his day and generation also. In fact, Winfield Scott, born in Petersburg in Virginia of the Tidewater gentry, was always and in all things an American; and one of the first of them. Therein may lie the answer: the endurance of fame in these United States is and has been very largely a matter of section. Winfield Scott outgrew his section.

Everything about him had glamor. His emigrant grandfather was a Jacobite, and fled out of Scotland with the mournful glory of Culloden about him, receiving sympathetic welcome in the Tidewater counties of the ever-loyal Virginia Colony. His father, William Scott, married into the great Mason family, and the name Winfield is of the Masons, awarded, you conceive, in the expectation of an inheritance from that important connection which young Winfield was not to realize. For he was a second son, and Virginia in those

¹ *Old Fuss and Feathers*, by Arthur D. Howden Smith. \$4.00. Greystone Press.