

The American MERCURY

THE REAL FRANCE SPEAKS

BY EDOUARD HERRIOT

Former Premier of France and Mayor of Lyons

NOTE: We are proud to publish this memoir — the first article written, since the armistice, by a democratic French statesman residing inside France. Sent, as M. Herriot says, “from the depths of his solitude,” it carefully avoids direct discussion of the current tragedy. But it is significantly vibrant with love of America, England and the way of life that has been snuffed out in France. The world will recognize this article as an act of courage and patriotism. — THE EDITORS.

ON February 23, 1939, Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia of New York, inviting me to participate in Mayors' Day at the World's Fair, wrote:

This invitation is extended to you as Dean of Mayors of the entire world. Your great record and the policy which you established during the long period that you have been mayor of your city entitles you to this distinction, and the American mayors are anxious to express publicly their admiration and appreciation of your inspiring leadership in the field of municipal government. . . . I do hope that the situa-

tion in France will permit you to attend and to give us the pleasure and honor of having you with us.

I was deeply touched by this letter and I have kept it as something very precious. True, Mr. LaGuardia made it much too laudatory; but it contains one point that cannot be denied. I was Mayor of the city of Lyons for 35 years, from November 1905 to September, 1940. I was suspended from my activities on the anniversary of the first French Republic. In 1939

I was unable to accept the cordial invitation of the Mayor of New York. Already we had begun to hear the rumblings of war. Accepting today the call of an American publication, I have the feeling that I have received a compensation. I seized with alacrity the opportunity offered me to "come" to my friends in the United States. It is a matter of pride with me that I have always remained faithful to them. The most beautiful moment in my public life was when in December, 1932, I sacrificed a government over which I presided, in order to respect the signature of France and not to betray our common memories of the last war.¹

I am aware that I must choose carefully from among my many memories. The very democratic function of mayor — I have often said this in international congresses — is such that in every country in the world his obligations are the same. To record and to protect the birth of children; to watch over their infancy and the destinies of their mothers; to assure them of the best methods of instruction and education; to put at the disposal of his men establishments well equipped for health and sport; to

solemnize marriage in the name of the law; to create hospitals for the sick in line with the progress of science; to open asylums for the weak; to assist the aged; to watch over the poor. Even death does not break the tie which binds the citizen to his city, since the mayor is the protector of his grave. Thus, while the heads of governments control interests often dissimilar or hostile, the mayor is the steward of human obligations. Therein lies the greatness of his office.

Among the memories which fill my journal, the most precious to me in these tragic days we are living through are the ones which bring back the beginnings of my cordial relations with two nations for which my admiration is today more fervent than ever — Great Britain and the United States.

It happened that the Mayoralty of Lyons had the great honor of collaborating in the formation of that Entente Cordiale which, in consequence, guided my policies when I was in the Cabinet or Head of the government. This is how it occurred: I had had the privilege of meeting and appreciating a man for whom I almost immediately conceived the highest esteem — Sir Thomas Barclay. A confirmed pacifist, already at the beginning of the century he believed *that the*

¹ He resigned as Premier on the issue of the French debt to the United States. — Ed.

union of France and Great Britain was one of the best means of protecting free civilization. He suggested to me the idea of making an official visit, with a delegation from my City Council, to several cities in England and in Scotland. I agreed eagerly. So at the end of May, 1906, I started out for Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and some other cities. I still possess the program of events showing the French and British flags intertwined. One of these programs was adorned with the following prayer:

For these and all Thy mercies given
We bless and praise Thy name, O Lord;
May we receive them with thanksgiving,
Ever trusting in Thy word.
To Thee alone be honour, glory,
Now, and henceforth, for evermore.

The journey, which took us as far as the country of Rob Roy, made a deep impression upon me. I may be permitted to tell you some of its amusing sides. When we reached Manchester we were met at the station by a delegation of leading citizens. Hardly had we left our car than the crowd greeted us with a terrible volley of whistles. We were dumbfounded! In France — I have had the experience more than once! — whistling is the sign of deep disapproval. So naturally I thought that the people of Manchester were protesting against the

invitation which had been extended to us by the city. But someone quickly reassured me by explaining that in England such a demonstration is an expression of cordiality.

My second anecdote is more philosophical in intent. Before we left Lyons, we had discussed at length whether we ought to take an interpreter or two along with us. But several Esperanto fanatics who were in the party assured us that all the contacts would be satisfactory, and I was simple-minded enough to believe them. Now here we were in Manchester. His Excellency Mayor Thewlis gave a magnificent reception for us in the Town Hall. Perfect cordiality. Only one obstacle — the barrier of language! At this point I decided to round up the Esperantists from all sides. Alas, this only added to the confusion! I am sure these gentlemen were all using the very same words, but each had his own manner of using them. That evening I understood that in order to bring men together, it is not enough to teach them the same language if they have not the same pronunciation.

I learned many other things too. In her passion for liberty Great Britain gives to her towns the right of self-government, which

French centralization often curtailed or suppressed completely. I admired the institutions born of local initiative — the care given the problem of homes for workingmen; the tender regard for children; the desire to take advantage of everything that science has to teach. I verified what I had learned from my reading; what, even in the eighteenth century, Voltaire was describing to the French people — the inviolable attachment of the English to freedom. The feeling was not born in England the same way as in France. In our country it broke out just before the French Revolution. It was carried out in the principles of 1789. At times it has been abolished, but it has always been restored. In Great Britain, love of liberty has its roots in the very depths of the nation's history. It penetrates everything, extends to everything, dominates everything. The King himself places his honor in being the protector of the liberties of every citizen. After this journey, I was completely won over to these principles. From then on, *I have been convinced that Great Britain and France are two complementary nations destined together to defend liberty, human individuality, human justice. I believe it today in 1941 just as I believed it in 1906.*

As was natural, we invited our English and Scotch friends to return our visit. They did so, and remained with us for five unforgettable days in May of 1907. We wanted to make their visit coincide with that of the President of the French Republic, Fallières, and with two expositions, one of Agriculture, the other of Public Health. Our guests paid visits to our great silk and dyeing factories; to the Conditioning House for Silk, that establishment so peculiar to Lyons, whose role is "to let manufacturers and dealers know the exact quantity of water contained in raw materials, to fix for each transaction the normal condition of moisture in the goods, and thus to fix the true marketable weight." They visited one of the first hydroelectric installations, the Honage Canal. We showed them one of the oldest schools of technology, the Institute de la Martinière, which "was created by royal ordinance on November 20th, 1831, in virtue of a legacy left to his native city by Major General Martin, who was born in Lyons in 1735 and died at Lucknow in 1800, in the service of the Indian Government." Our guests also visited our universities, our schools, our hospitals.

When we were in Glasgow I had

been invited to plant a young tree in the park. What has become of it now? I took our dear visitors to see our horticultural collections, our Parc de la Tête d'Or. Lyons is the City of Roses.

In the theatre, the great Coquelin gave a performance of the charming comedy, *The Romantics*, by Edmond Rostand, for our English and Scotch friends. Do you remember the story of that play? Sylvette, daughter of Pasquinot, and Percinet, son of Bergamin, meet on either side of the moss-covered wall separating their fathers' parks. He reads to her one of the most touching scenes in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. They sympathize with the young lovers deeply, because they are in love themselves and their fathers are unfortunately sworn enemies. . . . As soon as they have gone, the two fathers climb up the wall, shake hands and congratulate each other on the success of the scheme which they imagine has caused their children to fall in love. Soon the wall is taken down and henceforth the parks form but one property. . . .

Today in 1941, this tale seems to me symbolic. The friends of other days will know how to tear down another wall, the wall of misunderstanding.

II

My visits to Great Britain in 1906 secured for me excellent relations which have never been broken. There is nothing more delightful than having an English friend. I have had many proofs of this. I was particularly attached to Sir Daniel Stevenson, provost of Glasgow. Of my relations with England in my capacity as Mayor, I want to recall just one experience because it reveals so much about the English character.

I had decided to organize in Lyons a great exposition for the year 1914. Near the end of 1913, I realized that it would be the part of wisdom to insure my enterprise against possible deficit, and decided to apply to Lloyds of London. I took advantage of the short respite that the New Year holiday brought me. When I arrived in London, a friend introduced me to Lloyds and to their director, Mr. Heath. I laid my plans before him. When I saw Mr. Heath smile, I was tempted to excuse myself and withdraw. "Don't go," he said, "I was amused hearing you talk, because every time anyone proposes to me to insure an exposition, he promises wonders, brilliant successes, exceptional profits; and each time I am faced with

a deficit. However, that's of no importance. Here is a pencil and a slip of paper. Write down the amount for which you wish to be guaranteed. I will deduct the premium to be paid; then the deal will be closed."

If I remember correctly, I asked for a guarantee of 3,000,000 francs. I promised to pay a premium of 250,000 francs. The whole thing was drawn up in a single sentence — in lead pencil, I repeat — and signed then and there. I was very happy for my city. The people of Lyons have the taste and the feeling for greatness, but also they cherish economy. The symbol of Lyons is Madame Récamier, who, although very beautiful and desired by the great men of her time, never really gave herself to any of them — all her life she paid from her dividends but never cut into her capital. I felt reassured.

"Now then," I said to Mr. Heath, "where shall we go to find a lawyer to transform our contract into a legal document?"

Again he laughed. "Will a lawyer be more honest than we are? Put your slip of paper in your pocket and when you get back home put it into your safe deposit box. And sleep well."

A few months later came the war. My exposition opened at

last — late, like all or almost all expositions. But it met with every kind of bad luck. A tempest soaked the buildings; a sudden rising of the Rhone carried away the bridge that led to the fair grounds; strikes raged. What, I wondered, was to become of me? Full of anxiety, I wrote in the autumn to the good Mr. Heath. I had an answer back at once: "I am unable to do anything for you at this moment, because of the concern which the coming of the Zeppelins over London is giving me. Wait just a few days longer."

Very shortly after arrived from London a Lloyds confidential man, Mr. Prince. In a few hours Mr. Prince had verified my accounts. Then in the elegant flourish with which one offers a flower to a lady he handed me the check which freed me. Early the next morning he left for London. As my City Treasurer was about to deposit the check, he found that in reckoning the exchange Mr. Prince had made a mistake to his own disadvantage of 25,000 francs. I cabled immediately, and immediately I had back an answer: "Give money to a French War charity." The verification of this little story may be found in the archives of the city of Lyons.

Then I realized what it meant —

an English signature. Later I was able to make comparisons. When the French government with M. Tardieu at its head accepted the substitution of the Young Plan for the Dawes Plan, that is to say when the Allies decided to rely upon the signature, freely given, of Germany, certain men, especially the Commission of Reparations, were alarmed to see us relinquish our guarantees. I kept a memorandum of the indignant protest to the Reichstag by the then German Chancellor. Everyone knows what happened. . . .

During the War of 1914-1918 affairs of state or of the city of Lyons took me several times to England. Here again I should like to cite only one fact. On the day after the Italian disaster of Caporetto, I found myself either in Manchester or in Liverpool, I do not remember which. English newspapers, freer than the French, published ghastly details of the size of the catastrophe.

On the very day of my arrival, it was announced that Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer, was holding an important meeting and I was invited to attend. I knew Mr. Law very little. I had seen him once in Paris playing chess at the Café de la Régence. An Englishman playing chess is not a man

open to impressions. But knowing the Minister's reputation I was curious to hear him. I went. An immense crowd. I was invited to a seat on the platform. I even said a few words in disreputable English, but the crowd was too courteous to laugh at me. Mr. Law spoke. I remember distinctly the contents of his speech.

"I am convinced," he said to his fellow countrymen, "that in spite of the difficulties of the present moment, England is going to win the war; for there is not a single instance of a war she has waged that she has not won. But I am going to tax you just as though you were going to be beaten."

"Careful there," I said to myself, "I know countries where that kind of talk would be dangerous." But the huge audience sat quiet, perfectly attentive, taking his every word. "The outburst," I thought, "will come at the close of the speech."

He finished. There was a moment of profound concentration. Then, from somewhere at the end of the hall, the organ began to play *Rule, Britannia*. The crowd took up the strains of the national anthem and sang it out as in one great chorus. You could no longer distinguish the individual: it was one immense unity, overwhelmed by the same

passion. The song rolled over that huge mass like wind over the ocean. With one violent drive, it swayed under the rhythm of that song like a superb ship about to take to the open sea. . . . *Then I understood that such a people was invincible when it let itself be guided by love of country and the inspiration of freedom.*

III

I did not know the United States until very much later, in 1923. With several others I had created the International Exposition at Lyons, and I had crossed the ocean to get some information and to seek advice. With the cooperation of a gifted architect whom America knows well, Tony Garnier, I was building some slaughter-houses and I wanted to inspect the stock-yards in Chicago.

In the United States, as in Great Britain, what charming courtesies were shown to a Frenchman! When I visited the Marshall Field department store in Chicago, they had the tact to drape my country's flag across the entrance. In Cleveland my very dear friend, Myron Herick, whose memory remains among us crowned with respect and gratitude, detained me on my journey and invited me to his fine estate

which he modestly called his "little farm." I visited the Etienne Girard Foundation in Philadelphia. I noticed that of our philosophic creed of the eighteenth century the United States has retained not only the liberal spirit which is the basis of the political constitution of that country, but also the science of mechanical professions incited by the great effort of the Encyclopedists of the time, Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot. And I admired the ceaselessly growing appetite of the Americans for pure science, in accordance with Emerson's pregnant thought, "The spring must always be higher than the fountain."

I paid a visit to Samuel Gompers. I see him now — short, thick-set, compactly built. He is sitting at his desk completely surrounded by telephones in the little room with wide windowpanes through which I look out on the parks of Washington. I admire that small, powerful head, entirely bald; that expression of vigor, those eyes never still; those strongly marked features. He looks straight into his listener's eyes. The extended finger accentuates his arguments. Behind the gold-rimmed glasses, he fixes you with his big grey eyes. From time to time, Gompers pounds the table with a clean stroke, and interrupts himself. He relights his cigar, takes

up his discourse again, continually gesturing with his hands. In his secretary's office, I notice a photograph of M. Foch. Gompers speaks of my country. "The workers in France," he says, "are losing their economic power by reason of their political dissensions." I do not protest.

If I was able to build many houses for workingmen in Lyons, it was possible largely because of the comfortable workmen's homes I saw in the United States.

I remember also the New York Public Library, which, in its garment of pure marble, stands like a symbol between Fortieth and Forty-second Streets and bears in its lobby the following inscription: "On the diffusion of education among the people rests the preservation and perpetuation of our institutions." In the Art Gallery of the Library I saw the portraits by Gilbert Stuart, who, having painted George Washington, gave the General's features to all his other sitters. I should like to have been able to reproduce in my own city that charming children's library with its low chairs and tables, where the very young are admitted the moment they are able to write their names.

In a corridor at Harvard University I bent respectfully over

that sacred list, the Roll of Honor, where I found the names of the aviator, Victor Chapman, of André Cheronnet, of Champollion. And I reflected under the moving fresco by John Sargent. Dear city of Boston, whose voice reaches us even in these cruel times and stirs us to the depths of our soul! I remember seeing near the Community House, in front of King's Chapel and the old cemetery, an inscription to the memory of the knight, Saint Sauveur, adjutant of the French fleet, who died in 1778 after having risked his life for the United States. The words were chosen by Count d'Estaing, commander of the first fleet of ships sent out by France. It reads: "*May the efforts anyone would dare to make to separate France from America always be fruitless.*"

I left the United States with greater ambition to modernize the city of which I was Mayor. In America I had learned the value of minutes and that the motto of the man of action is not "time is money" but that "time is time." Unlike those travelers who talk to us only of American technique, I came away with the conviction that in the United States moral purpose is the motive of all activity.

During the war of 1914-1918

I had been called to collaborate in Lyons with many American men and women of great hearts. Several traces remain of that collaboration. The most beautiful bridge in Lyons, completed during the War, was named on my suggestion, Wilson Bridge. A humorist said of our city that three rivers run through it—the Rhone, the Saône and Beaujolais wine! Of these three the first is by all odds the most violent. In spite of the widening of the river bed from its source in the Alps, it is still more like a torrent than a river. Victor Hugo wrote, "The Rhine is a lion, the Rhone, a tiger." It is famous for its periodic floods.

I had decided to furnish Lyons with a fine wide bridge. In Paris I was made to understand that the capital was content with narrower constructions. I humbly asked permission to build my bridge longer than those over the Seine. After many appeals I was given the authority. I consulted a famous French specialist, M. Auric. He was a fine scholar, an enthusiastic mathematician, and tried to convert me to geometry in the n th dimension. I decided, for our bridge, to be content with a work of three dimensions, of a new type, the platform resting simply on the walls. I shall never forget the open-

ing of the bridge by a detachment of men from the American army, General Alexander cutting the three-colored ribbon which symbolically prohibited access to it. The Star-Spangled Banner was the first to wave over the Wilson Bridge in Lyons.

The United States is associated with another Lyons construction. Our hospitals are famous. But did you ever notice that hospitals become more famous the closer they draw to decay? Our old city hospital, illustrious for that school which is honored to have enrolled Ollier and Carrel, is proud of its connections with the most distant past. When, as a young Mayor, I visited it, I was reminded of this as a youthful physician put into my hand a medal which he traced back to King Chilperic and Queen Ultrogothe.

"I ask the pardon of these two authentic Merovingians, but I shall do away with their noble house," I said.

"And the tradition, sir?"

I made bold to answer, "Tradition represents today what was progress in the past. Now let us have *our* turn at progress. Thus we shall create a tradition for the future." As a matter of fact, some men build for progress, others for tradition, without perceiving that

these are two sides of the same idea.

With the assistance of the great Garnier, of whom I have already spoken, we decided to build a new hospital on a broad site with plenty of sun and air on all sides. The basic idea was given us by the Pasteur Hospital in Paris. Before deciding on final plans, we inspected the famous hospitals of foreign lands. Those in Denmark seemed to us especially interesting. It was several years before the building was finally completed; those who profit by it and those who have inspected it will readily admit its advantages. But the hospital finished, one thing was lacking: the Faculty of Medicine remained in the heart of the town because we had not the money to remove it. The Rockefeller Foundation came to the aid of the University of Lyons. Thanks to its generosity we were able to supply Lyons with a completely modern Health Center organized for scientific research as well as for the care of the sick. The same Health Center protects another institution, the Franco-American Foundation for Visiting Nurses.

Before completing these memories, I should like to explain briefly two charities to which I was especially attached — the Free Municipal Restaurants for Nursing Women, and the Maternity Home.

The Municipal Restaurants, to the number of three, function under a very simple plan. They open twice a day for women who are awaiting children and for young mothers. It is forbidden to ask these women for the slightest information concerning their nationality, their economic condition, or their religion. "You are hungry, eat." That is the charity's only principle. Only one official paper is required — a certificate of vaccination, if the woman is accompanied by a child. I take the liberty of recommending this kind of institution to all those who believe in sound principles of help.

The Maternity Home is run on the same principles. Any woman about to become a mother may be admitted without regard to race, creed or economic situation. All she need do is to present herself to the Institution's doctor. He alone, bound by the obligations of professional secrecy, will know her name, her position, her origin. Then he sends her to the Home under the name which he gives her, and it is under this name that she is received as a guest. She is constantly observed. If she is able to work, the product of her effort will be carefully conserved, and, in the form of savings, given back to her when she is ready to leave. Inso-

far as possible advantage is taken of the opportunity to offer these women instruction and education.

Of my various organizations, the Maternity Home is the one from which I most regret being separated. How many dramatic situations I have seen there! What letters I have received! What confidences under the pledge of secrecy I have listened to! The Home has welcomed thousands of women, has seen thousands of babies brought into the world. Its mortality rate is very low. I learned there the truth that in order to save a child it must be cared for not at its birth, but before its birth, in the person of its mother. And I learned, too, that a woman who has borne a child need never be separated from it. I like to think that that Maternity Home has contributed in large part to the result that Lyons is one of the few cities in France whose birth rate is higher than its death rate.

At this point I bring my memories to a close. As will be readily admitted, they represent only a

small portion of an official city life covering a period of 35 years. I wanted to show that I was bound and always will be bound to Great Britain and to the United States.

I decided not to allow myself to tell anything about the role I played in the life of the nation. That would be another matter. It would lead me to recall my second visit to the United States in 1933 when I had the privilege of talking with that splendid leader who presides over the Republic, Franklin D. Roosevelt. In him I found combined all the qualities which give a man true nobility: loyalty, justice, courage. I shall never forget the talks we had in the White House. I would not bring this article to a close without addressing to him an expression of my warm admiration, and without sending from the depths of my solitude my greetings to the great people of the United States, where differing opinions may be freely expressed and where every one, whatever his political group, cherishes a respect for the human being and for moral law.

(Translated by Morris Bentnick)

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► *Floor shows, hillbillies and free money in a hot Senatorial race.*

SCREWBALL ELECTION IN TEXAS

By JACK GUINN

TEXAS has just finished a star-spangled, bull-fiddle United States Senatorial race that would shame the efforts of a battalion of Hollywood gagmen. In a far-flung political circus, complete with side-shows and topped off with threats of Federal investigation, the Texas boys ran their little shindig wide open. When it was all over, the voters discovered they had chosen their twice-elected Governor, Wilbert Lee "Pass the Biscuits Pappy" O'Daniel, the Kingman, Kansas, lad who made good as a Texas hillbilly band leader, flour salesman, radio spieler and firm believer in the Golden Rule and the Folding Green.

O'Daniel defeated Congressman Lyndon Johnson, who enjoyed the blessing of President Roosevelt and whose campaign was cluttered with New Dealers. Johnson ran O'Daniel neck and neck and crowded him on the turns. Where the Governor had a hillybilly band and a special brand of cleverness, the Congressman had a swing band, dancing girls, blackface comedians, a well-

rehearsed floor show, super-super-patriotism and, on top of all that, gave away free money. At political rallies, Johnson drew the crowds by handing out national defense bonds and stamps, thereby demonstrating his patriotic fervor and simultaneously proving that he was a handy man to have around between pay-days.

Johnson's endorsers included, besides the President, Vice-President Henry A. Wallace, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, Under-Secretary of Agriculture Grover Hill, Under-Secretary of the Interior Alvin Wirtz and sundry others. Nevertheless, O'Daniel ran over him by 1311 votes. Of course, the Governor had the advantage of two enthusiastic blocs of votes: the people who loved him dearly and the citizens who wanted to get him out of the state. Up to the last minute, Johnson led O'Daniel by about 5000 votes, but the final, though unofficial, returns showed that "Pappy" had fiddled himself in.