

ARISTIDE BRIAND, FRENCH STATESMAN

BY JULES BOIS

I

THE fate of France lies in good hands; the Government, like the Nation, has risen to the heights of the Army, and the Chief of the Government is Monsieur Aristide Briand.

Aristide Briand is a son of the people; he is self-made. Of conciliatory disposition, a man of judgment, of wisdom, of kindness; his will is neither imperious nor aggressive, but calm, patient and firm.

This idealist has maintained and developed his balance, his altruism, his ability for organization through constant intercourse with the toiling and producing classes. He has been selected by the democracy to oppose his serious and pleasing countenance to the autocratic and domineering face of the Kaiser.

I have had the privilege and great pleasure of knowing him for nearly twenty years. He was born on the 28th of March, 1862, at Nantes at 12 rue du Marchix, where his father kept an inn. Perfectly free from severity or sternness, he has always been actively concerned in the problems of the day and in the immediate realities out of which the future is evolved. He has a passion for the sea, for boats, fishing and hunting. His eloquence is always an "action," unceasing and fruitful; thanks to him the people can see clearly for themselves. Politicians have very few real friends, if they have many in appearance. Aristide Briand has often been betrayed, but he never betrayed anybody. His own conduct has always been frank and just. By his charm, his worth, he conquers all with whom he comes in contact.

He once went to spend the summer at a little seaport town in Brittany. Now, who do you suppose was the man

who received the greatest pleasure from the conversation with Briand in this remote maritime village? It was the vicar of the rustic parish. . . . When Briand returned, he was much surprised to see the flag flying from the belfry of the church. The "curé" had raised it to bid him welcome at the request of his fishermen neighbours.

At the age of twenty Briand threw himself heart and soul into Socialism, of which the unselfish ideals tempted him. He founded in his department, or province, the newspaper *La Démocratie de l'Ouest*, which at the beginning was rich only in thoughts. Briand went to Paris, bought a printing press at a bargain, carried it home under his arm, and himself set it up with his own hands. All this did not prevent his playing the violin, singing very well, and wielding a first-class cue at billiards. "Licenciate at Law" Advocate, then journalist, he became in Paris the political editor of *La Lanterne*. Being secretary of the general committee of the Socialist Party, he organized it, extolling with tongue and pen the legal rights of the French labour class. He strove against the preponderance of sectarian spirit. He was even then a statesman.

At political gatherings he discreetly emerged from silence only to give voice to a decisive or at least a useful word. Thus he became an acknowledged authority. In such manner, later, he made himself well known in high public offices: first Minister of Public Instruction, then Keeper of the Seals, then President of the Council, then directing the war against the Germans, acting to attain the end which he believes to be right. His clear eye with its small point of high light in the pupil, calm because he is strong, his intellectual mouth, his vigorous moustache—these

details prove to us that this great man is content to remain a man without needing to appear a personage.

Briand's temperament is a combination of expansiveness, meditation, and simplicity: we cannot be simple by the mere wishing; it requires talent and great sincerity. No one, I am sure, possesses to such a degree the gifts of the orator. His is the voice, the gesture and the style.

He finds the phrases which bring pictures to the mind's eye, and he can at the same time turn long and harmonious periods. Above all, he has to a marked extent the talent for extemporary speaking. In the first place he has no time to prepare himself, at least on paper. Freedom and liberty of spirit are necessary to him to settle the questions of such varied and complex nature that constantly arise. Then, too, he is convinced that words live only when they are self-created, so to speak, in the very company to which they are addressed, and to which in this way they are always adapted.

His memory is prodigious. It is said that during the meetings of the secret committee in the Chamber and in the Senate, he had not a single note before his eyes, when he reconstructed with the exact dates, the entire chain of events since war was declared. In the same way he recited from memory all the figures relating to the manufacture of our guns and ammunition. When I declare that he never prepares himself, I allude only to the surface of things; he does prepare himself, not so much with books as with living proofs. Like Lamartine, he knows how to make competent authorities speak and enlightens himself directly concerning events. If Clémenteau, at his best, seems to follow a rigid line of logic, if Monsieur Ribot pursues principally an oratorical opening, if Jaurès was carried away by the flood of general ideas and the waves of deep feeling, Aristide Briand is inspired by Circumstance and by Reason, and this is just where the orator rises, even above Art and above Inspiration, becomes a

sage, *the sage* who advises, foresees, chides, commands—and, this is his supreme prerogative, conciliates. Waldeck Rousseau knew how to use this power for which one must have authority over others, self-control and experience, but it may be said of him that it was his brain that triumphed, whereas with Briand it is the man's entire personality which conquers, with his gripping voice which clutches his audience while caressing it, with his spirit of sureness, his practical view of problems, his flights of mind, too. Rarely the claw shows or the tooth sinks; but when the emergency arises, "*le grand fauve*," who sleeps confident in his tranquillity, awakes. He is ruthless only toward ideas. We have seen this in his recent oratorical duel with Monsieur Brisson on the subject of Kienthal.

Aristide Briand works out his speeches in the open air; quick of breath, they have a magnetism of the sun, and that wonderful adaptation to surroundings which belongs to water—to the waters of rivers, of pools, of lakes, of the seashore where, before the war, the President of the Council used to fish like the most modest citizen. He never writes his speeches or even makes notes. To use his own expression he "*lets himself go*"; not without having matured his thoughts, and doubtless even his expressions of them which he polishes in that marvellous memory of his.

One of his interviewers has told us how when once he was accused of temporising he replied: "*Let me alone now; I am just on the point of playing a carp.*" And indeed according to the same authority when told that Monsieur Fallières had selected him to form the ministry, his first word was "*There goes my fishing trip! Ruined.*" When his friends tried to console him by citing the example of Waldeck, President of the Council, and at the same time an enthusiastic fisherman, he replied, "*Yes, yes, but as soon as one is in power the fish go over to the opposition!*"

It has so happened that I have had to meet a number of politicians of all

lands; many have impressed me as being the "hollow and resounding vessels" of which Homer tells us, and in which Æolus, the god of the winds, has confined useless or riotous noises. Not so with Briand! While he willingly makes merry, one feels in him that changeless gravity of the truly valiant, the gravity which in this instance frightens no one, because softened by a spirit of kindliness. I have often observed him in the midst of the uproar of Parliamentary proceedings living this deep, inner life, yet hearing and attending but without succumbing to the uproar. The following day he would ascend to the platform with the careless, dragging step of the loungeur, and little by little, his voice, groping at first, would swell, dramatically asserting itself like an orchestra; would become irresistibly winning, and I have realised that this supreme height of eloquence resulted from a store of reflection and strength accumulating in the hours of meditation and silence.

II

As to politics his chief task before the war was to bring about the tolerant law on separation of Church and State. M. Aristide Briand abolished a condition of affairs, dating from the first Napoleon, and no longer in accord with our ideas and customs: the "Concordat," excellent a century ago, has become obsolete. Instead of being *in accord* it was a *discord*, satisfying neither of the two parties to the contract. M. Briand replaced it by a statute against which there was at first some protest, but which, nevertheless, resulted in religious peace. If you were to follow the debates in the Chamber at that time, you would swear that Monsieur Briand collaborated as well with "la Gauche" as the Catholics. With what result? He freed the Church and he freed the State, awaiting the day, perhaps not far distant, when he or one of his successors should establish with the Sovereign Pontiff a new Concordat which would complete the work so well begun.

Liberty is, above all, necessary to the Church. In America it has for so long enjoyed the same sort of separation and has never had cause for regret.

Having been repeatedly President of the Council, Aristide Briand has had to follow a course between the opposition of the advanced Socialists on the one hand and the Reactionaries on the other. Before the war he was the "Apostle of Reconciliation" between the parties. He is an organiser *par excellence*, a conciliator, a reformer; in critical moments he has been able to reconcile the purposes of the parties on national subjects. You remember the famous railroad strikes: he restored order among the men by mobilising them. Patriotism was the chief weapon employed, and it succeeded immediately. In time of peace France was already what she has become in war. It is logical and at the same time happy for all concerned that Monsieur Aristide Briand returned to power. This time, let us hope, permanently; at least, through the course of this fearful war which demands for its good conduct just the rare and necessary qualities which he possesses.

III

Briand is not merely a great statesman and an orator beyond comparison: he is a born diplomat, because he knows the psychology of men and of nations. He is a superior diplomat without belonging to diplomacy, as was another man of royal blood who, coming late into his own, achieved much good not only for his own land, but for France and for Europe. I mean King Edward the VII. He was a great king, because he was a man. He was unconstrained and natural; he gladly left his crown in the vestibule. It was in Paris that Edward the VII, like Briand, learned to handle men; he learned it by living—lenient to the faults of others and knowing how to distinguish their talents. Solidarity is the finest of all schools. It imbues us with the modern spirit of reciprocal concessions and is opposed to

that incomprehensible pride and to those big ambitions which can be realised only at the expense of others and of oneself. Edward the VII had long scented the dangerous project in the mind of his Imperial nephew; from the very first he kept his eyes intently upon Germany, and having a presentiment that one day he would give us trouble, he contrived and prepared the net work for the Alliance which together with our own heroism has saved us to-day.

Briand was able to say not long ago about Verdun: "Here are the walls upon which the supreme hopes of imperial Germany break in pieces. The ruins of Germanic dreams now lie at our feet. This name of Verdun, to which Germany in the intensity of her dreaming has attributed a symbolic meaning, and which must, she believed, soon evoke in the imagination of men the overwhelming defeat of our army, the irretrievable discouragement of our country for the passive acceptance of German peace—this name shines out henceforward for neutral countries as well as for Allies as all that is most beautiful, purest and best in the French soul. It has become spiritually synonymous with courage, patriotism and generosity. And throughout the centuries in all quarters of the globe the name of Verdun will continue to resound like a shout of victory and a hymn of joy, sung by liberated humanity."

IV

That which makes a success of Germany is the co-ordination of all her efforts toward one single end. Monsieur Briand has laboured to create on the side of the Allies a unity of action on the entire front, much more difficult to attain on our part than on the part of our enemies. Geographically speaking, the central powers are already brought together, whereas the Allies have not this great advantage. That is why the conferences at London, Paris and Rome from which M. Briand took the initiative, and which he has revived, have played an important part in the decisions

formed and to be formed. He has realised the co-ordination of all our resources from the military, the economic and the financial standpoints. If the Great Offensive could not repel the Germans altogether from the invaded territory, at least it pushed our own lines further forward, and proved to our soldiers that we have entered upon the third period of the war, which would prove our absolute superiority. In the first period we were forced back to the Marne, where we inflicted upon the enemy, more formidable at that time, a signal defeat. Then came the almost stationary phase of the war in the trenches, when it seemed as impossible to move forward as back. Now we know by experience, thanks to the evergrowing power of our munitions and of our artillery, thanks, too, to our valiant foot-soldiers with their scorn of death, that the obstacles contrived by our adversary—obstacles believed to be insurmountable—have been overcome. English and French, we have pierced the enemy lines at many places. That is an important point achieved, because it gives to our soldiers the assurance of a next victory. We are on the spot and although we are naturally under no delusions as to the difficulties of our undertaking, it is impossible to doubt the ultimate success of our arms, no matter how desperate the resistance.

The taking of Monastir, which on the other front, that is the eastern, also heralded the dawn of victory, is in a large measure due to the perseverance of M. Briand. He was unwilling to abandon Serbia, who, with her army quite reconstructed, maintains a constant menace on the Bulgarian and Turkish side. Our intervention on Serbia's behalf follows the traditions of the aspirations which have characterised French politics for all time. She will be of value in the final attempt which, from all sides, will subjugate the central Empires, and force upon them a just peace, which we shall impose upon their arms; whereas they have imposed upon us an unjust war. It is natural that the same

man who before the war, was the peace protagonist between the parties within, should be the first to formulate conditions of peace without. Even before the note sent to President Wilson by the Allies, the leader of the French Government had already most eloquently formulated the hopes and the vows of our country in accord with those who battle with us for liberty and for civilisation.

"Peace will come out of the victories of the Allies," M. Briand said last year; "It can only come out of our victories. Peace must not be an empty formula; it must be based upon international rights, guaranteed by sanctions against which no nation can take a stand. Such peace will shed radiance upon humanity; it will bring security for those who work and will be evolved according to their own genius; our hands will never again be stained with blood. It is this ideal which makes the grandeur of our task. It is in the name of this ideal that our soldiers fight and give themselves so valiantly to death; it is in the name of this ideal that mothers, wives,

daughters, sisters — mourning — force back their tears knowing that the sacrifice of a son, a husband, father, or brother, will not have been in vain for the country and for humanity. This is the only peace toward which we must reach. It is by this peace that our nation will grow in nobility and in beauty."

The work of justice is always slow, whereas attacks upon right are abrupt and momentarily discouraging. Credit is due to such men as Lloyd George in England and Aristide Briand in France. Their past and their origin testify in their favour. They represent, not the dominating egoism of some foresworn individualities or of a military caste; they represent nations inherently peaceful which have for their standard, in common with America, the rights of the individual and of the people. They work not for themselves; they serve the general good and they work together with that mysterious law of progress which, despite temporary reverses, leads humanity to greater unity, greater equity, more collective labour and thus more dignity and more happiness.

THE RELIGION OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

BY JOHN HAYNES HOLMES

ANY attempt to understand the thought and life of Rabindranath Tagore must begin with the fact that this first citizen of India is an Oriental. But it must not end there! For if there is one thing more than another for which Tagore is remarkable, it is his understanding of the alien civilisation and culture of the western world. He is an easterner of the easterners, as we shall see; but his comprehension of the significance as well as the limitations of natural science, his reliance upon education as a method of social advancement, his sympathy with the aspirations of modern womanhood, his rigorous critique of "the cult of nationalism," his curious appreciation of so characteristic an American literary product as Walt Whitman, all reveal a truly extraordinary understanding of the West. Indeed, it is just in this entrance of so typically eastern a mind into the very heart of western life, that we find the true significance of Tagore. If there is anything permanent in his work as a teacher and reformer, and I believe there is, it is to be found just here in his attempt to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable differences of East and West, and thus give a universal expression to the spiritual aspirations of mankind.

In the opening pages of *Sadhana*, Sir Rabindranath has an illuminating passage on the origins of western and eastern civilisations. In the West, he says, civilisation began in Greece and "was nurtured within city walls." In the East, on the other hand, "when the first Aryan invaders appeared in India, it was a vast land of forests;" and it was in these forests, close to the ground, beneath the shadows of great trees, "surrounded by the vast life of nature . . . that (Indian) civilisation had its birth."

In this accidental relationship to nature, suggested by Tagore, began the separation between the western and the eastern mind; and upon this relationship, as upon a foundation, all late differences were reared. The western man, for example, looking out upon a world which is separated from him and therefore alien, becomes eager to know something about its secrets, and therefore enters upon those activities of exploration and investigation which constitute so large a part of the history of western life. The eastern man, on the other hand, finding himself in the midst of a world which serves his needs, seeks not to know what is hidden, but only to enjoy in quietness and peace that which is so freely given. The western man, starting forth to explore an alien world, soon yearns to subdue it to his purposes. The eastern man, on the other hand, is satisfied to acquiesce in nature, to take what she has to give, be it good or evil, with the result that a kind of fatalism has fallen upon the eastern world like a magician's spell. Again, as another stage of development, the western man, as a consequence of his passion for knowledge and conquest, becomes intensely active, and moulds a life which is supremely one of creative achievement in the outer world. The eastern man, in contrast, turns in upon himself and becomes predominantly meditative. Ethical differences between West and East now begin to make their appearance. Thus, the western man becomes more and more obsessed with the lust of possession; he wants to acquire, accumulate, hold, use for himself, the riches which he finds so abundantly in the natural world. To all this, on the other hand, the eastern man is contemptuously indifferent. He seeks not pos-