

## Plunkitt's Way

GEORGE WASHINGTON PLUNKITT was one of the wisest men in American politics and by a stroke of genius on the part of a good newspaperman, William L. Riordan of the New York *Evening Post*, much of his wisdom was packed into a single small book called "Plunkitt of Tammany Hall." Unfortunately, that book is out of print and rare; but now that Plunkitt is dead it should be republished in large editions and handed to every student of politics, to every organizer of new parties and movements, to every first voter. For in this small book of political sermons, Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, leader of the Fifteenth Assembly District, practical politician and political philosopher, tells all that needs to be told about American government.

He tells why reformers have been only morning glories that "looked lovely in the mornin' and withered up in a short time, while the regular machines went on flourishin' forever like fine old oaks"—a chapter full of post-election thoughts for progressives. He told of the dangers of dress suits and high-priced cars in politics almost twenty years before the defeat of Ramsay MacDonald in England. He explained the difference between honest and dishonest graft in terms so ingenious and yet so simple that Harry Daugherty might have learned a straighter or at least a safer road to wealth and power had he read them; there are no little black bags in the philosophy of George Washington Plunkitt.

He even tells how the Democratic Party can survive. His advice was given in 1905 and in detail may be considered obsolete; but the thought behind it is as good as new and may be applied to 1928 as aptly as to 1908.

The trouble is [he said] that the party's been chasin' after theories and stayin' up nights readin' books instead of studyin' human nature. . . . You can't get people excited about the Philippines. They've got too much at home to interest them; they're too busy makin' a livin' to bother about the niggers in the Pacific. . . . There's just one issue that would set this country on fire. The Democratic Party should say in the first plank of its platform: "We hereby declare, in national convention assembled, that the paramount issue now, always, and forever is the abolition of the iniquitous and villainous civil-service laws which are destroyin' all patriotism, ruinin' the country, and takin' away good jobs from them that earn them. We pledge ourselves, if our ticket is elected, to repeal those laws at once and put every civil-service reformer in jail." . . .

I see a vision. I see the civil-service monster lyin' flat on the ground. I see the Democratic Party standin' over it with foot on its neck and wearin' the crown of victory. I see Thomas Jefferson lookin' out from a cloud and sayin': "Give him another sockdolager; finish him." And I see millions of men wavin' their hats and singin' "Glory Hallelujah."

Forms change but the fundamental issue remains: enough jobs and enough money to go round. The party that can actually deliver a full dinner pail or the party that promises it convincingly gets the votes. Honesty doesn't matter; efficiency doesn't matter; progressive vision doesn't matter. What matters is the chance of a better job, a better price for wheat, better business conditions. The same issue holds in national elections and in ward politics. General principles, as Mr. Plunkitt says, are all right to work into the platform but they are always going to be side issues.

Reformers who doubt this are bound to be defeated and disillusioned. They must learn somehow to apply the human knowledge that Tammany Hall and George Washington Plunkitt have used for their own ends to the pressing job of salvaging a derelict civilization. They must learn in the first place that politics is a full-time job just like any other business, not a gentlemanly avocation outside of office hours. They must learn that it is a profession requiring training and technique—not merely virtue or indignation. They must learn that it means getting into close, helpful, daily touch with thousands of individuals. "If there's a family in my district in want," said Plunkitt, "I know it before the charitable societies do, and me and my men are first on the ground. The consequences are that the poor look up to George W. Plunkitt as a father, come to him in trouble—and don't forget him on election day." Reformers could learn many a lesson by studying "Plunkitt of Tammany Hall."

Plunkitt worked for himself and for his friends and for his organization. The rest of the people, let us assume, were mulcted by his activities. But they didn't feel it and didn't know it—until he told them. And then they didn't care, because they could understand a cheerful and honest grafter who made no pretense of virtue but did practical good right and left every day in the week, better than they could a seventh-day reformer who talked of the public welfare and did nothing tangible for anybody.

Plunkitt is dead, but the system he believed in and grew rich by is certainly still a fine old oak. If it is to be hewed down, if the system of private patronage is to be changed to one of honesty and a fair deal all round it will only be by Plunkitt's own method—"You must study human nature and act accordin'."

## The Indispensable Century

THERE are signs that the eighteenth century is about to be discovered again. "The Beggars' Opera" has been revived with remarkable success, and in the wake of that success, or perhaps only contemporaneously with it, dozens of literary persons have returned from excursions into the world of Queen Anne or the first three Georges with the information that it is a world of ineffable charm. Anthologies almost by the dozen have been made of fugitive eighteenth-century verse. One of them is entitled "Byways Round Helicon," and the compiler has picked his posies with exactly the same beguiling devotion that was expended a generation or two ago upon the minor versifiers of the seventeenth century. Another selection has the even more significant title of "Rogues in Porcelain." There we have the note of naughtiness thought just now to be essential in the new-found century, combined with the note of artificiality which, to be sure, professors of literature have long been in the habit of saying was there. Certain other manifestations of the rage are more impressive. David Garnett in England has produced two admirable if fantastic short novels which are hailed as being in the manner of Defoe, and Elinor Wylie in America dresses up a later period in something brilliant which she calls a "sedate extravaganza." But all of the manifestations thus far have been manifestations of interest in comparatively trivial aspects of the century.

No genuine admirer of the century can resent this for a moment. Triviality was something like an art in those

days, and the admirer will not be inclined to forget his Gay, his Horace Walpole of Strawberry Hill, his Journal to Stella, his Twickenham grotto, his Rape of the Lock, his Sterne, his letter-writing Cowper, his wigs and patches, and his numberless anecdotes of poodles and pet hares. When eighteenth-century poetry dealt with little things, as it often did, the purpose was not to dignify these little things and prove that after all they were indexes to the great mysteries—that suspicious function was reserved for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—but to set them forth in the exact quality of their littleness and so see how precious or amusing they intrinsically were. Greatness has a way of going out of fashion, and it was far from being the fashion for Pope when he wrote an epic about a young lady who lost a lock of her hair, for Gray when he wrote an Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat, for Goldsmith when he wrote an Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog, or for Cowper when he composed a poem On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in His Cage. The eighteenth century cannot be other than charming to one who is intimate with it, and too much cannot be done today in the way of discovering its charm.

Yet the intimate and the admirer in question will just a little resent that word “discovery.” How, he will ask, can anything be discovered which is already here? For the eighteenth century is one of the inescapable things, not merely in the sense of being so close behind us that if we turn we stumble upon it, but in the more important sense of being an ineradicable part of ourselves. Leave institutions out of account—republicanism in government, philanthropy in social science, propriety in manners—and take only literature. There is the matter of language to begin with, and prose style. We learned to write in the eighteenth century, when journalism came into its own. Dryden, Swift, Addison, Steele, Defoe, Fielding, and Dr. Johnson invented and fixed a syntax which we shall not abandon soon. To be sure they are our “classical writers,” and at their most official moments they are somewhat heavier than we like to be; yet catch them at their average, or when they were having a really good time with literature, and they can get over the ground as swiftly and as smartly as the proudest modern. We speak their language; we are theirs.

Then how can it be said that we have discovered a century which left us among other books “Robinson Crusoe” and “Gulliver’s Travels,” books whose vogue has been uninterrupted since their first great days and which now we can hardly escape reading twice, once in children’s editions and once when we are grown and are curious to see what more is there than meets the juvenile eye? They are built into our minds as few books are. So, within necessarily narrower limits, is “Tom Jones”; so in general is the eighteenth-century novel. Dickens, undoubtedly the most popular novelist of the century which followed, was brought up in his father’s house on Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, and Sterne; Thackeray frankly went to school to Fielding. Modern fiction through these two has caught the full stream of the eighteenth-century mind, as modern life has inherited eighteenth-century institutions, and as modern prose has inherited eighteenth-century style. All of which is not to say that “The Beggars’ Opera” should never have seemed a fetching discovery, but to say that no mysterious continent behind that bright headland cries out for recognition.

## Senator Borah’s Opportunity

THE most important result of Senator Lodge’s death is that Senator William E. Borah becomes chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. There is no more strategic position for him to occupy, and there is certainly no abler man in the Senate to fill the place. Not unnaturally all who are interested in the relations of this country to the European situation are busily at work speculating as to what the change will mean. So far as the League of Nations is concerned there will be none. Senator Borah remains as opposed to our entrance into it as was Senator Lodge. But unlike the latter, Senator Borah is definitely committed to a number of proposals that are constructive, in which he should have the widest possible support. He is in deadly earnest in his advocacy of the policy of outlawing war and in demanding that the United States shall take the lead in calling an economic and a disarmament conference for the settlement of the European situation. He is, moreover, devoted to the movement to bring about recognition of Russia, and it is well known that he looks with disfavor upon American conquests in the Caribbean and the governing of little countries by means of our marines. As for the World Court, Senator Borah is, we understand, of the opinion that the United States should not enter it without specific reservations despite the fact that most people agree that as at present constituted the World Court can and will accomplish very little.

Obviously Mr. Borah is in a position to accomplish a great deal and powerfully to affect the foreign policy of the United States. On the Russian question at least there should be a battle royal between the Senator and Secretary Hughes, if the latter should remain in office—which heaven forbid. But, England and France having recognized Russia, Senator Borah has stronger cards in his hand than ever before—he has even the threat of continuing his investigation of our Government’s Russian policy to play with. If the British continue to trade with the Soviet it will be hard to convince our business men that we should not.

As for the European situation, England has definitely postponed early consideration of the protocol for disarmament and peace. France is falling in line, and the Belgian proposal that the discredited three-Power alliance of France, England, and Belgium be revived is proof positive that M. Hymans and other Belgian leaders place little faith in the League or its proposals. But that, as Senator Borah is quoted as saying, merely gives additional opportunity to President Coolidge to call the international conference he has at least twice declared that he wishes to summon. Our Government has lost opportunity after opportunity to take the lead abroad; it has alternately pretended to have nothing to do officially with the Dawes settlement and then sought to take all the credit for it. Now is the chance to make the European nations once for all declare whether they are for peace or for the destruction of the world in the next great war. Senator Borah, to whom President Coolidge has made a number of advances—he tried to have him nominated as Vice-President and has repeatedly consulted him—is in a most fortunate position now to make his views felt and to demand that this Government lead toward the outlawry of war for which the whole world longs. We do not doubt that he will rise to the opportunity to serve well his country and the world.