

# A PREFACE TO LIPPMANN

## 2. *Education of a Commentator*

By JOHN MASON BROWN



MUCH has been made of Walter Lippmann's Socialism at Harvard by those who contend he walked out on it to become a conservative. His link with Socialism was in the nature of a flirtation not a courtship, and a brief one at that. It amounted to little more than a stolen kiss or two with the rector's daughter in the guise of Fabianism, and was never a passionate embrace of the rowdy moll of Marxism. According to Lippmann's recollection, the affair was over before he left Cambridge. For all its seeming daring, this short dalliance with revolutionary ideas was only in the conventional pattern of that period.

In his first speech to freshmen last fall Harvard's new president, Nathan M. Pusey, wisely pointed out to his youthful hearers who might be disillusioned or cowed by recent history, "It will be a tragic lack, and a very unwise kind of 'wisdom,' if your generation feels no compelling urge to make the world over after its own heart's desire." By common acceptance in times less intimidating and intimidated than the present, colleges used to be places where young men proved their health by having "scarlet" fever early. That is, if these young men had consciences, eyes, and minds instead of hopes of squeezing through, making the right clubs and friends, and then heading for Wall Street. Lippmann recognized this as an undergraduate. In the *Monthly* he said, "Men who are 'orthodox' when they are young are in danger of being middle-aged all their lives."

The Harvard Lippmann entered in

1906 influenced him in ways apparent even now. He was just seventeen when he went there, and his recent hope had been to become an art critic like Ruskin. Harvard soon changed that hope and gave him new interests and ambitions. Colleges have their fat years and their lean. The four during which Lippmann was in Cambridge were among Harvard's best. Its faculty, especially in English and Philosophy, was Olympian; its undergraduate body exceptional. Over both, Lippmann recalls, President Eliot "loomed like Zeus himself, stiff but not unpleasant."

As all colleges do, Harvard attracted students of every kind but, being Harvard, prided itself on making no attempt to fuse these different kinds into a type. There were poor boys and rich boys; those favored because they were Brahmin-born and others penalized because they were not. There were insiders and outsiders, clubmen and mavericks, young men who yearned to succeed at letters and young men whose sole ambition was to win them. Although there was the usual quota of nobodies, the number who would become somebody was phenomenal.

Lippmann's classmates included Heywood Broun, Alan Seeger, Carl Binger, Stuart Chase, John Reed, Robert Edmund Jones, and T. S. Eliot. While Lippmann admired Eliot's poetry, he remembers him as "an exquisite young man—too refined for this world." Among Lippmann's contemporaries in college were Edward Sheldon, Van Wyck Brooks, Samuel Eliot Morison, John Hall Wheelock,

Ernst Hansftaengel, H. V. Kaltenborn, Francis Biddle, Lee Simonson, Hermann Hagedorn, Conrad Aiken, Kenneth Macgowan, Frederick Lewis Allen, and Robert Benchley.

If the number of undergraduates destined to become well known was impressive, so was the number of faculty members already secure in their fame. In the English Department, for example, were Kittredge, Bliss Perry, Barrett Wendell, William Allan Neilson, George Pierce Baker, Irving Babbitt, and Copeland. With Baker, Lippmann took a survey course in the history of the drama. He was at first repelled by Babbitt, the archfoe of Rousseau and Romanticism and champion of the New Humanism, because of the arrogance of his defense of Classicism, but later conquered by the brilliance with which he stated the case of restraint, order, and the mind as master of the emotions. His fondness was genuine for "Copey," that big little man, part ham, part magician, so self-indulgent in his oddities, so sincere in his love of literature and amazing in his ability to create in his students a respect for writing.

**I**T WAS, however, the "greats" among the philosophers at Harvard—James, Royce, and Santayana—who cast the most abiding spell on Lippmann. Platos and Aristotles they were not, yet they came as close to being so as members of a faculty are ever apt to. Better shepherds to philosophy one could not ask for than these men, so different in their beliefs and characters. They were not only outstanding philosophers themselves, but James, and even more particularly Santayana, were artists whose mastery of language equaled their command of ideas. They led Lippmann straight to the core of philosophy, accustoming him to think in terms of basic concepts and making him aware, as Plato was and certainly Santayana, of the disparities between the ideal republic and the demagogic dangers of democracy in action. Only Frederick L. Thompson, who fired Lippmann's interest in history and became a second father to him, and Graham Wallas, the British sociologist then a visiting lecturer at Harvard, had as teachers so strong an influence on him.

To this day Lippmann recalls with understandable pleasure how one November afternoon when he was only nineteen he answered a knock on his door in Weld Hall to find there a bearded, compact, alert elderly gentleman. It was William James. He had just read in the *Illustrated Monthly* a blistering review by Lippmann of Barrett Wendell's "The

Privileged Classes." He was in full agreement with the attack on Wendell's snobbism and wanted to meet the critic. Though Lippmann never took courses with James, who had retired the year before, he thereafter saw him almost once a week at his home on Irving Street.

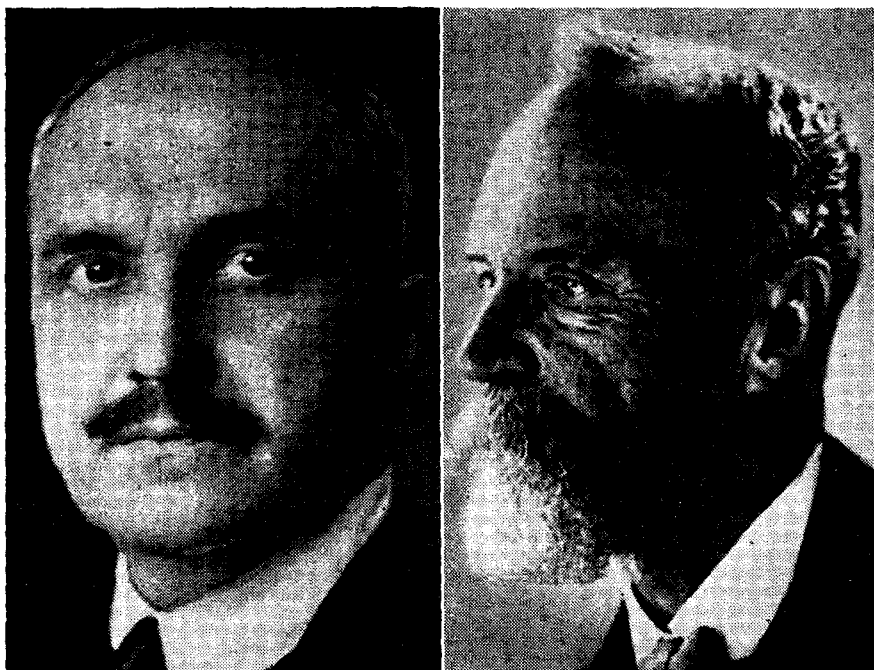
He responded to the warmth of James's "come-hither" personality. Indeed, as he once said, he "almost worshiped him." He admired the flexibility of James's vigorous thinking, and was delighted to find a philosopher who was a poet and an intellectual who was truly a democrat. Two years later, after James had died, Lippmann wrote, "He was the most tolerant man of our generation. He would quote Mr. Dooley on God to make himself understood among men."

Lippmann completed his undergraduate work in three years and during his fourth year, while working for a Master's degree, assisted Santayana in a course on the History of Philosophy. Although he saw him once a week and often had tea with him, Lippmann never felt the same affection for Santayana that he did for James and was never close to him. This was not surprising. All that was warm, friendly, and human in James was cold, disdainful, and detached in Santayana. There was about him nothing of the democrat and everything, at least in attitude, of the grandee. Born in Spain, of Spanish parents, he appeared always in his lectures, according to Simonson's recollection, to be "gazing over our heads as if looking for the sail that was to bear him home."

A cynic and a misanthrope who found much to criticize in others, Santayana seemed to feel his own superiority beyond question. His word for his approach to life was "dis-intoxication." His spiritual sneer did not keep his prose from being intoxicating in its wit and irony, its clarity and music. No champion of reason was more persuasive than this man of the marble-cold mind who, regardless of his subject, created beauty whenever he wrote. His effect on Lippmann was profound and would have been just as great, Lippmann says, if he had never known him. It was Santayana who kept him, in spite of his fondness for James, from becoming a pragmatist, and he who in "The Life of Reason" wrote what Lippmann still considers the finest philosophical work produced in America.

The abstract problems of philosophy were by no means the only problems which ignited Lippmann's mind as an undergraduate. Government, economics, and sociology came to have an increasing hold on him. As a volunteer at Hale House in Boston, he had a welfare worker's introduction to the poor. But he was to see poverty plain and human misery at its most pitiable when, with some other Harvard men in 1908, he struggled for days in the slums of Chelsea to assist the survivors of a major fire that had broken out on Palm Sunday. Shocked by what he had seen, he joined the recently formed Socialist Club, of which he was later to become President. He also started to write articles about

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—Bettmann Archive.

Santayana and William James—"the most abiding spell."

# UNIVERSITY PRESS ISSUE



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**T**HE SATURDAY REVIEW publishes this, its Twelfth Annual University Press Issue, on the eve of the annual convention of the Association of American University Presses, meeting at White Plains, New York, May 2 to 4.

In its University Press Issue last year [April 4, 1953], SR advanced the proposition that many of the ideas, much of the information, and a large part of the attitudes of the intelligent man in the street a generation hence are being developed on the campuses of American colleges and universities today. In the dissemination of these ideas and attitudes within the intellectual community and among the lay public, one of the chief roles is being played by the American press.

Last year SR published reports by scholars on the investigations now going on in seven fields (American history, European history, international law and politics, literature and criticism, philosophy, economics, and anthropology) which the university presses are helping to make part of the layman's consciousness.

This year, on this and the following pages, SR publishes reports on half a dozen other fields. Because of considerations of space, the surveys do not attempt to cover their fields exhaustively, but the examples they offer are all representative and significant.



## Our Asian Destiny

By HAROLD H. FISHER, *chairman of the Hoover War Library; professor of history, Stanford University.*

**O**N THE day the Geneva conference on the Far East met to consider, among other things, how to stop or how not to stop the war in Indochina, the Stanford University Press published "The Struggle for Indochina," by Ellen J. Hammer, prepared under the auspices of the Institute of Pacific Relations. University presses are not expected to time their books as perfectly as this. One naturally wonders, in these

murky days, whether this is the result of astute planning, a lucky coincidence, or a sinister plot. Regardless of how this question may be answered by reviewers or by Congressional committees, it is surely significant that today a serious book about Indochina is important and timely for all thoughtful citizens.

In the past ten or twelve years, probably more Americans have been on military or peaceful missions to Asia than in the remainder of our entire national history. They have been serving, in one fashion or another, our "national interest," which becomes increasingly difficult to define.

We Americans have also had to pay taxes because of what has happened in these lands. Years ago, historians used to speak of the age of discovery, the growth of commerce and colonization as the "Expansion of Europe." Not so long ago books were being written on the theme of the "awakening of the ancient East." Now we are experiencing an "Expansion of Asia" and an awakening of the complacent West in the sense that what Asians believe, think, say, and do, greatly concerns us and the rest of the Western world and may, in fact, decide the fate of our institutions.

In the preface to Miss Hammer's