

Gentleman from Geneva



“Albert Gallatin: Jeffersonian Financier and Diplomat,” by Raymond Walters, Jr. (Macmillan. 461 pp. \$7), is a biography of a Swiss immigrant who made important contributions to American political and social life during the first half of the nineteenth century. Professor Samuel Flagg Bemis of Yale, who reviews it, has won two Pulitzer Prizes, one of them for his book *“John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy.”*

By Samuel Flagg Bemis

IT is noteworthy in a country so devoted to the writing and reading of biography that two such eminent Americans as John Quincy Adams and Albert Gallatin should have lingered so long for full treatment of their lives and times. In the case of Adams the biographer awaited release of his papers from family impounding; in the case of Gallatin the family papers, long since reposing in the New York Historical Society, awaited their biographer.

Three-quarters of a century ago, Gallatin's descendants commissioned no less a person than young Henry Adams, grandson of John Quincy Adams, to write their ancestor's biography out of this collection of some twenty thousand papers. Three hastily prepared large volumes of published “Writings,” accompanied by a single-volume “Life,” itself a series of letters and documents held together by a skeleton narrative, reveal too little of the life or personality of this famous American, born and schooled in the Geneva of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire—Europe's first great contribution to American naturalized citizenship. Today it remains the historian's repository, hard to come by in the book trade and yearly more expensive. A short volume by John Austin Stevens, of family connection, published in the old American Statesman Series at the turn of the century, did not fill the historical bill.

Raymond Walters, Jr., has picked up this wonderful opportunity and has presented us, after years of arduous study both in America and in Europe, with the first picture of Gallatin that approaches full length.

Certainly it is one of the most important biographies of the year.

This Swiss immigrant Albert Gallatin (1761-1849), adopted son of the Pennsylvania frontier, Antifederalist opponent of the Constitution, spokesman and moderator of western discontent in the days of the Whiskey Rebellion, conspicuous radical representative in the Pennsylvania legislature, member of Congress when the two great national political parties were crystallizing, took to American politics like a duck to a western lake. Under the banner of Jeffersonian democracy he developed a career as one of America's greatest public servants during a long life at home and abroad.

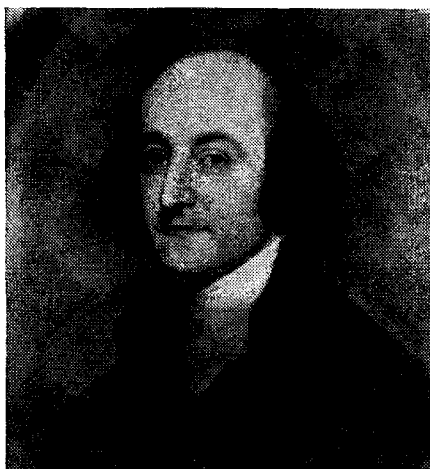
Gallatin was the only Jeffersonian who comprehended state and national finances and who could stand up to Alexander Hamilton on issues of fiscal policy. As Hamilton furnished the administrative talent and large political advice for President Washington when the new national government of the Constitution was on trial, so Gallatin stood out as the financier and principal administrative counselor of Presidents Jefferson and Madison. As a Jeffersonian in responsible power Gallatin, when Secretary of the Treasury from 1801 to 1814, took over many of the Hamiltonian policies and devices which he had opposed when in opposition—all except the idea that a national debt was a national blessing. Gallatin's prudent, sound, and skillful administration of the United States Treasury sustained the national credit,

provided the funds for the Louisiana Purchase, withstood the strains of Embargo days and the War of 1812, and generally kept the country on its Hamiltonian feet and built higher the fiscal scaffolding that was to enable the nation to pay off its debt within twenty years after the war.

As a financier Gallatin was the peer rather than the disciple of Hamilton. It is hard to see what the United States would have done without him in those difficult years. Dr. Walters's study is at its best, perhaps, when it takes us behind the scenes of domestic politics with many an illuminating light into the darker corners of Jeffersonian politics.

Gallatin had already left the home stage when the political issues between Jeffersonian Democracy and Hamiltonian Federalism faded into the National Republican one-party regime. President Madison had appointed him spokesman for the Administration on the commission nominally headed by John Quincy Adams, which negotiated the Peace of Ghent. From then on Gallatin's principal services lay in the field of foreign affairs, as Minister of the United States to France and to Great Britain, and as member of special commissions and arbitral boards. He became America's ace diplomat in the field when John Quincy Adams, succeeding to the Secretaryship of State and Presidency, stood out as America's greatest diplomatist.

In later life Gallatin referred to his early representations in behalf of the Whiskey Rebellion as his one great political mistake. There was another in his maturer years, what Mr. Walters terms “the sorriest episode in Gallatin's public life.” Coming back for an “American interlude” from the foreign service in 1823, and out of touch with the drift of American politics, he allowed himself, by now a strong nationalist and anti-slavery man, to be put forward by friends of William H. Crawford of Georgia as candidate for the Vice Presidency in the Presidential contest of 1824. John C. Calhoun easily beat him out for the nomination right in Gallatin's own Pennsylvania, at the Harrisburg state convention. (It is an interesting academic question to speculate on: What would have been the constitutional status of Gallatin, born in Switzerland,



—Portrait by Rembrandt Peale.

Albert Gallatin—“awaited a biographer.”

if he had been elected Vice President and Andrew Jackson had died in the White House?)

Following Jackson's election Gallatin, with slender financial resources of his own after a long public service, hankered after another diplomatic appointment but got none. He rounded out a long life as a New York bank president, elder statesman, and patron of letters. Not exactly a man of letters, his numerous pamphlets on financial and foreign problems always commanded wide public attention, and ethnologists today will give credit to his distinguished study of the American Indians as the pioneer work in that field.

It is difficult to state that any biography is definitive: later treatment of Gallatin may vary in structure, interpretation, texture, tone, or narrative, but I doubt if any will give better insight into the personality of this illustrious American. Dr. Walters brings Gallatin to life and puts him where he belongs: in the galaxy of patriotic public servants who laid the foundations of American nationality in an era of natural-born statesmen.

A WORD might be added to this review, about an important contribution which Dr. Walters makes, in the current number of the *American Historical Review*, showing up the spurious composition of a work edited and published by Count Gallatin (a European descendant) in London and New York in 1914: "A Great Peace Maker: The Diary of James Gallatin." Lord Bryce, then British ambassador to the United States, a historian and student of government venerated on both sides of the Atlantic, presented this book to the English-reading public with a most eulogistic introduction. It purported to be a diary of the boy, James Gallatin, who accompanied his father to the negotiation of peace at Ghent in 1814, closing the War of 1812. Count Gallatin spiced up the alleged diary for the readers of that day with piquant playboy passages and pictures, interlarding it with some authentic documents long since printed. I suspected the reliability of this diary when it mentioned a secret meeting between Gallatin and Lord Castlereagh, British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, behind the back of Gallatin's colleagues at Ghent, at a time when Castlereagh, as proven by his own letters and papers, could not possibly have been at Ghent or anywhere near that place. Dr. Walters's fine job of demolition on this dummy diary is likely to remain a showpiece of historical criticism, but he only refers to it in an overly modest footnote and has not drawn on it in writing the present book.



—Karsh.

Bernard Baruch—"I am not overly modest."

Young Midas

"Baruch: My Own Story," by Bernard Baruch (Holt. 337 pp. \$5), is the memoir of the man often described as "the adviser to presidents," most of it concerned with the days in which he concentrated on piling up great wealth. C. Vann Woodward, author of *"The Origins of the New South,"* reviews it.

By C. Vann Woodward

IN THE HEROIC age of American finance, when the elder Morgans, Rockefellers, and Harrimans were in their prime, a group of Southerners began to make their presence felt on Wall Street. Deservedly or not, they were sometimes called "carpetbaggers in reverse." Among them were Thomas Fortune Ryan of Virginia and James Buchanan Duke of North Carolina. Bernard Mannes Baruch of South Carolina, born in 1870, was a late arrival. He was fourteen years younger than Duke, nineteen younger than Ryan, and more than thirty the junior of Morgan and Rockefeller, but he came to know and have dealings with them all. "Watching them and hearing of their exploits," he writes, "I thought to myself, 'If they can do it, why can't I?' I tried my best to emulate them . . ."

Young Baruch responded in a powerfully compensatory way to two handicaps: being a Southerner and being a Jew. His father came to South Carolina from Germany in 1855, received some training in medicine, and served as a surgeon in the Con-

federate Army. He married into a good family of the Carolina Jewish community, but he suffered the disasters common to the defeated South. Bernard's first experience with anti-Semitic prejudices came after his family moved to New York in 1881. He later instructed his children to regard such prejudices as he had, "as spurs to more strenuous achievement."

Beginning as an office boy at nineteen, he became a Wall Street partner at twenty-five, and had put away a fortune of \$3,200,000 "in cash" by the time he was thirty-two. The great bulk of "Baruch: My Own Story," a volume of memoirs just published, is devoted to his financial exploits and speculations down to the First World War. "I felt the surge of empire welling within me," he wrote of a killing he made in 1898 after Admiral Schley defeated the Spanish fleet. "I was repeating on a small scale the financial feat which legend ascribed to Nathan Rothschild at the Battle of Waterloo." History was something written on ticker tape. "A chance to become something of a Cecil Rhodes" was opened up by King Leopold of Belgium, who interested Ryan and Baruch in Congo rubber. The hospitable dictator Diaz of Mexico opened the way to mineral empire below the Rio Grande. The young titan speculated in Alaska gold mining, in Texas sulphur, and Colorado copper. He operated in a large way with "Buck" Duke in tobacco-trust building and with the Guggenheims in Western mines.

Baruch collected celebrities with the same acquisitiveness that he collected fortunes. He loved to cut a dashing figure in New York of the 1900s. Bob Fitzsimmons congratulated him for knocking out an opponent in the ring. Lillie Langtry admired him for his physique. "Diamond Jim" Brady gave him a dinner and displayed all thirty sets of his costume jewelry. At the old Waldorf-Astoria, where the Empire State Building now stands, Baruch hobnobbed with Mark Twain, Lillian Russell, Jim Corbett, Admiral Dewey, Mark Hanna, "and countless presidents of banks and railroads." It was there that he sat in on a game of baccarat in which "Bet-a-Million" Gates bet one million dollars on the turn of a card.

"I AM not overly modest," writes Mr. Baruch in one of his rare understatements. The truth is that he had little to be modest about, at least in a material way, and in the display of his acquisitions he was a true child of his times. He took delight in the sensation he created by presenting a check for a million dollars. His second auto-