

CHAPTER LXXIV

TYPES OF AMERICAN STATESMEN

As trees are known by their fruits, and as different systems of government evidently tend to produce different types of statesmanship, it is pertinent to our examination of the American party system to inquire what are the kinds of statesmen which it engenders and ripens to maturity. A democracy, more perhaps than any other form of government, needs great men to lead and inspire the people. The excellence, therefore, of the methods democracy employs may fairly enough be tested by the excellence of the statesmen whom these methods call forth. Europeans are wont to go farther, and reason from the character of the statesmen to the character of the people, a convenient process, because it seems easier to know the careers and judge the merits of persons than of nations, yet one not universally applicable. In the free countries of Europe, the men who take the lead in public affairs may be deemed fair specimens of its best talent and character, and fair types, possibly of the virtues of the nation, though the temptations of politics are great, certainly of its practical gifts. But in two sorts of countries one cannot so reason from the statesmen to the masses. In despotic monarchies the minister is often merely the king's favourite, who has risen by unworthy arts, or, at any rate, not by merit. And in a democracy where birth and education give a man little advantage in the race, a political career may have become so unattractive as compared with other pursuits that the finest or most ambitious spirits do not strive for its prizes, but generally leave them to men of the second order.

This second case is, as we have seen, to some extent the case of America. We must not therefore take her statesmen as types of the highest or strongest American manhood. The national

qualities come out fully in them, but not always in their best form. I speak of the generations that have grown up since the great men of the Revolution epoch died off. Some of those men were the peers of the best European statesmen of the time: one of them rises in moral dignity above all his European contemporaries. The generation to which J. Q. Adams, Jackson, Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and Benton belonged is less impressive, perhaps because they failed to solve a question which may have been too hard for any one to solve. Yet the men I have mentioned were striking personalities who would have made a figure in any country. Few of the statesmen of the third or Civil War period enjoyed more than a local reputation when it began, but in its course several of them developed remarkable powers, and one became a national hero. The fourth generation is now upon the stage. The Americans confess that not many who belong to it have as yet won fame. The times, they remark, are comparatively quiet. What is wanted is not so much an impassioned popular leader or a great philosophic legislator as men who will administer the affairs of the nation with skill and rectitude, and who, fortified by careful study and observation, will grapple with the economic problems which the growth of the country makes urgent. I admit this, but think that much must also be ascribed to the character of the party system which, as we have seen, is unfavourable to the development of the finest gifts. Let us note what are the types which that system displays to us.

In such countries as England, France, Germany, and Italy there is room and need for five sorts of statesmen. Men are wanted for the management of foreign and colonial policy, men combining the talents of a diplomatist with a wide outlook over the world's horizon. The needs of social and economic reform, grave in old countries with the mistakes of the past to undo, require a second kind of statesman with an aptitude for constructive legislation. Thirdly there is the administrator who can manage a department with diligence and skill and economy. Fourthly comes the parliamentary tactician, whose function it is to understand men, who frames cabinets and is dexterous in humouring or spurring a representative assembly.¹ Lastly we

¹ Englishmen will think of the men who framed the new Poor Law as specimens of the second class, of Sir G. C. Lewis as a specimen of the third, of

have the leader of the masses, who, whether or no he be a skilful parliamentarian, thinks rather of the country than of the chamber, knows how to watch and rouse the feelings of the multitude, and rally a great party to the standard which he bears aloft. The first of these has no need for eloquence; the second and third can get on without it; to the fourth it is almost, yet not absolutely, essential; it is the life breath of the fifth.¹

Let us turn to America. In America there are few occasions for the first sort of statesman, while the conditions of a Federal government, with its limited legislative sphere, are unfavourable to the second, as frequently changing cabinets are to the third. It is chiefly for persons of the fourth and fifth classes we must look. Persons of those classes we shall find, but in a different shape and guise from what they would assume in Europe. American politics seem at this moment to tend to the production of two types, the one of whom may be called *par excellence* the man of the desk or of the legislature, the other the man of the convention and the stump. They resemble the fourth and fifth of our European types, but with instructive differences.

The first of these types is usually a shrewd, cool, hard-headed man of business. He is such a man as one would find successful in the law or in commerce if he had applied his faculties to those vocations. He has mostly been, is often still, a practising counsel and attorney. He may lack imagination and width of view; but he has a tight grip of facts, a keen insight into men, and probably also tact in dealing with them. That he has come to the front shows him to possess a resolute and tenacious will, for without it he must have been trodden down in the fierce competition of a political career. His independence is limited by the necessity of keeping step with his party, for isolated action counts for little in America, but the tendency to go with one's party is so inbred there that a man feels less humiliated by waiving his private views than would be the case in Europe. Such compliance does not argue want of strength. As to what is called "culture," he has often at least a suscepti-

Lord Palmerston as a specimen of the fourth. The aptitudes of the third and fourth were united in Sir Robert Peel.

¹ It need hardly be said that the characteristic attributes of these several types are often found united in the same person; indeed no one can rise high who does not combine at least two of the four latter.

bility to it, with a wish to acquire it which, if he has risen from humble beginnings, may contrast oddly with the superficial roughness of his manner. He is a ready and effective rather than a polished speaker, and is least agreeable when, forsaking the solid ground of his legal or administrative knowledge, he attempts the higher flights of eloquence.

Such a man does not necessarily make his first reputation in an assembly. He may begin as governor of a State or mayor of a large city, and if he earns a reputation there, can make pretty sure of going on to Congress if he desires it. In any case, it is in administration and the legislative work which deals with administration that he wins his spurs. The sphere of local government is especially fitted to develop such talents, and to form that peculiar quality I have been trying to describe. It makes able men of affairs; men fit for the kind of work which needs the combination of a sound business head and the power of working along with others. One may go further and say, that this talent is the sort of talent which during the last half-century has been most characteristic of the American people. Their greatest achievements have lain in the internal development of their country by administrative shrewdness, ingenuity, promptitude, and an unequalled dexterity in applying the principle of association, whether by means of private corporations or of local public or quasi-public organisms. These national characteristics reappear in Federal politics, not always accompanied by the largeness of vision and mastery of the political and economic sciences which that wider sphere demands.

The type I describe is less brilliant than those modern Europe has learned to admire in men like Bismarck or Cavour, perhaps one may add, Tisza or Minghetti or Castelar. But then the conditions required for the rise of the last-named men do not exist in America, nor is her need for them pressing. America would have all she wants if such statesmen as I have described were more numerous; and if a philosophic mind, capable of taking in the whole phenomena of transatlantic society, and propounding comprehensive solutions for its problems, were more common among the best of them. Persons of this type have hitherto been most frequently found in the Senate, to which they usually rise from the House of Representatives or from a State legislature. They are very useful

there; indeed, it is they who gained for it that authority which it long enjoyed but is now fast losing.

The other kind of statesman is the product of two factors which give to American politics their peculiar character, viz., an enormous multitude of voting citizens, and the existence of a wonderful network of party organizations for the purpose of selecting and carrying candidates for office. To move the masses, a man must have the gifts of oratory; to rule party committees, he must be a master of intrigue. The stump and the committee-room are his sphere. There is a great deal of campaign speaking to be done at State elections, at congressional elections, above all, in presidential campaigns. It does not flow in such a perennial torrent as in England, for England has since 1876 become the most speech-flooded country in the world, but it is more copious than in France, Italy, or Germany. The audiences are less ignorant than those of Europe, but their critical standard is not higher; and whereas in England it is Parliament that forms most speakers and creates the type of political oratory, Congress renders no such service to America. There is, therefore, I think, less presumption in America than in Europe that the politician who makes his way by oratory is a man either of real eloquence or of vigorous thinking power. Able, however, he must be. He is sure to have fluency, a power of touching either the emotions or the imagination, a command of sonorous rhetoric. Probably he has also humour and a turn for quick retort. In fact, he must have the arts — we all know what they are — which please the multitude; arts not blamable in themselves, but needing to be corrected by occasional appearances before a critical audience. These arts joined to a powerful voice and a forcible personality will carry a man far. If he can join to them a ready and winning address, a geniality of manner if not of heart, he becomes what is called magnetic. Now, magnetism is among the highest qualities which an American popular leader can possess. Its presence may bring him to the top. Its absence may prevent him from getting there. It makes friends for him wherever he goes. It immensely enhances his powers in the region of backstairs politics.

For besides the visible work on the stump, there is the invisible work of the committee-room, or rather of the inner conclave, whose resolves are afterwards registered in the committee,

to be still later laid before the convention. The same talent for intrigue which in monarchies or oligarchies is spent within the limits of a court or a knot of ruling families, here occupies itself with bosses and rings and leaders of political groups. To manipulate these men and groups, to know their weaknesses, their ambitions, their jealousies, to play upon their hopes and fears, attaching some by promises, entrapping others through their vanity, browbeating others into submission, forming combinations in which each partisan's interest is so bound up with that of the aspiring statesman that he is sure to stand faithfully by his chief — all this goes a long way to secure advancement under the party system.

It may be thought that between such aptitudes and the power of effective speech there is no necessary connection. There are intriguers who are nothing but intriguers, of small account on the stump or on the platform of a convention: and such a man does occasionally rise to national prominence. First he gains command of his own State by a dexterous use of patronage; then he wins influence in Federal politics by being able to dispose of his State vote in Federal elections; finally he forces his way into the Senate, and possibly even aspires to the presidential chair, deluded by his own advancement, and by the applause of professionals who find in success sufficient evidence of worthiness. Recent instances of such careers are not wanting. But they are exceptions due to the special conditions of exceptionally demoralized States. Speaking generally, oratory is essential to distinction. Fluent oratory, however, as distinguished from eloquence, is an art which most able men can acquire with practice. In popularly governed countries it is as common as it is worthless. And a link between the platform and the committee-room is found in the quality of magnetism. The magnetic man attracts individuals just as he captivates masses. Where oratory does not need either knowledge or reflection, because the people are not intent upon great questions, or because the parties evade them, where power of voice and skill in words, and ready sympathy with the feelings and prejudices of the crowd, are enough to command the ear of monster meetings, there the successful speaker will pass for a statesman. He will seem a fit man to put forward for high office, if he can but persuade

the managers to run him; and therefore the other side of his activity is spent among and upon the managers.

It sometimes happens that the owner of these gifts is also a shrewd, keen, practical man, so that the first type is blended with the second. Nor is there anything to prevent the popular speaker and skilled intriguer from also possessing the higher attributes of statesmanship. This generation has seen the conjunction both in America and in France. But the conjunction is rare; not only because these last-named attributes are themselves rare, but because the practice of party intrigue is unfavourable to their development. It narrows a man's mind and distorts his vision. His eye, accustomed to the obscurity of committee-rooms, cannot range over the wide landscape of national questions. Habits of argument formed on the stump seldom fit a man to guide a legislature. In none of the greatest public men that have adorned America do we discern the features of the type just sketched. Hamilton was no intriguer, though he once executed a brilliant piece of strategy.¹ Neither was Clay or Webster. Jefferson, who added an eminent talent for party organization and management to his powers as a thinker and writer, was no speaker; and one might go through the whole list without finding a man of the first order in whom the art of handling committees and nominating conventions was developed to that pitch of excellence which it has now reached in the hands of far inferior men. National conventions offer the best field for the display of the peculiar kind of talent which this type of statesman exhibits. To rouse eight hundred delegates and ten thousand spectators needs powerful lungs, a striking presence, address, and courage. A man capable enough in Congress may fail in this arena. But less than half the work of a convention is done on the public stage. Delegates have to be seen in private, combinations arranged, mines laid and those of the opponent discovered and countermined, a distribution of the good things in the gift of the party settled with swarms of hungry aspirants. Easy manners, tact, and suppleness, a reputation for remembering and requiting good turns and ill turns—in fact, many of the qualities which make a

¹ In agreeing that the national capital should be placed in the South in return for the support of two Southern men to his plan for the settlement of the public debt.

courtier—are the qualities which the intrigues of a convention require, develop, and perfect.

Besides such causes inherent in the present party system as check the growth of first-class statesmen in America, there are two springing from her constitutional arrangements which must not be forgotten. One is the disconnection of Congress from the executive. How this works to prevent true leadership has been already explained.¹ Another is the existence of States, each of which has a political life and distinct party organization of its own. Men often rise to eminence in a State without making their mark in national politics. They may become virtual masters of the State either in a legitimate way by good service to it or in an illegitimate way as its bosses. In either case they have to be reckoned with when a presidential election comes round, and are able, if the State be a doubtful one, to dictate their terms. Thus they push their way to the front without having ever shown the qualities needed for guiding the nation; they crowd out better men, and they make party leadership and management even more of a game than the spoils system and the convention system have tended to make it. The State vote comes to be in national politics what the ward vote is in city politics, a commodity which a boss or ring can dispose of; the power of a man who can influence it is greater than his personal merits entitle him to; and the kind of skill which can make friends of these State bosses and bring them into a "pool" or working combination becomes valuable, if not essential, to a national party leader. In fact, the condition of things is not wholly unlike that of England in the middle of last century, when a great borough-monger like the Duke of Newcastle was a power in the country, who must be not only consulted and propitiated at every crisis, but even admitted to a ministry if it was to secure a parliamentary majority. When a crisis rouses the nation, the power of these organization-mongers or vote-owners vanishes, just as that of the English borough-owning magnate was checked on like occasions, because it is only when the people of a State are listless that their Boss is potent. Unable to oppose a real wish of the masses, he can use their vote only by professing

¹ See Chapters XXI., XXV., and XXVI. in Vol. I.

obedience while guiding it in the direction of the men or the schemes he favours.

This remark suggests another. We have noted that among statesmen of the former of the two types described, there always exist ability and integrity sufficient for carrying on the regular business of the country. Men with those still higher gifts which European nations look for in their prime ministers (though they do not always find them) have of late years been rare. The Americans admit the fact, but explain it by arguing that there has been no crisis needing those gifts. Whether this is true may be doubted. Men of constructive statesmanship were surely needed in the period after the Civil War: and it is possible that a higher statesmanship might have averted the war itself. The Americans, however, maintain that when the hour comes, it brings the man. It brought Abraham Lincoln. When he was nominated by the famous convention of 1860, his name was not widely known beyond his own State. But he rose at once to the level of the situation, and that not merely by virtue of strong clear sense, but by his patriotic steadfastness and noble simplicity of character. If this was luck, it was just the kind of luck which makes a nation hopeful of its future, and inclined to overlook the faults of the methods by which it finds its leaders.

CHAPTER LXXV

WHAT THE PEOPLE THINK OF IT

THE European reader who has followed thus far the description I have endeavoured to give of the working of party politics, of the nominating machine, of the spoils system, of elections and their methods, of venality in some legislative and municipal bodies, may have been struck by its dark lines. He sees in this new country evils which savour of Old World corruption, even of Old World despotism. He is reminded sometimes of England under Sir Robert Walpole, sometimes of Russia under the Czar Nicholas. Assuming, as a European is apt to do, that the working of political machinery fairly reflects the temper, ideas, and moral standard of the governing class, and knowing that America is governed by the whole people, he may form a low opinion of the people. Perhaps he leaps to the conclusion that they are corrupt. Perhaps he more cautiously infers that they are heedless. Perhaps he conceives that the better men despair of politics and wash their hands of it, while the mass, besotted with a self-confidence born of their rapid material progress, are blind to the consequences which the degradation of public life must involve. All these judgments one may hear pronounced by persons who have visited America, and of course more confidently by persons who have not. It is at any rate a plausible view that whatever public opinion there may be in America upon religion, or morality, or literature, there can be little about politics, and that the leading minds, which in all countries shape and direct opinion, have in America abdicated that function, and left the politicians to go their own way.

Such impressions are far from the truth. In no country is public opinion stronger or more active than in the United States; in none has it the field so completely to itself, be-