

times sees an individual man who fails in life because the different parts of his nature seem unfitted to each other, so that his action, swayed by contending influences, results in nothing definite or effective, so one sees nations whose political institutions are either in advance of or lag behind their social conditions, so that the unity of the body politic suffers, and the harmony of its movements is disturbed. America is not such a nation. There have, no doubt, been two diverse influences at work on the minds of men. One is the conservative English spirit, brought from home, expressed, and (if one may say so) entrenched in those fastnesses of the Federal Constitution, and (to a less degree) of the State constitutions which reveal their English origin. The other is the devotion to democratic equality and popular sovereignty, due partly to Puritanism, partly to abstract theory, partly to the circumstances of the Revolutionary struggle. But since neither of these two streams of tendency has been able to overcome the other, they have at last become so blent as to form a definite type of political habits, and a self-consistent body of political ideas. Thus it may now be said that the country is made all of a piece. Its institutions have become adapted to its economic and social conditions and are the due expression of its character. The new wine has been poured into new bottles: or to adopt a metaphor more appropriate to the country, the vehicle has been built with a lightness, strength, and elasticity which fit it for the roads it has to traverse.

## CHAPTER C

### HOW FAR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS AVAILABLE FOR EUROPE

THERE are two substantial services which the study of history may render to politics. The one is to correct the use, which is generally the abuse, of the deductive or *a priori* method of reasoning in politics. The other is to save the politician from being misled by superficial historical analogies. He who repudiates the *a priori* method is apt to fancy himself a practical man, when, running to the other extreme, he argues directly from the phenomena of one age or country to those of another, and finding somewhat similar causes or conditions bids us to expect similar results. His error is as grave as that of the man who relies on abstract reasonings; for he neglects that critical examination of the premises from which every process of reasoning ought to start. The better trained any historical inquirer is, so much the more cautious will he be in the employment of what are called historical arguments in politics. He knows how necessary it is in attempting to draw any conclusion of practical worth for one country from the political experience of another, to allow for the points in which the countries differ, because among these points there are usually some which affect the soundness of the inference, making it doubtful whether that which holds true of the one will hold true of the other. The value of history for students of politics or practical statesmen lies rather in its power of quickening their insight, in its giving them a larger knowledge of the phenomena of man's nature as a political being and of the tendencies that move groups and communities of men, and thus teaching them how to observe the facts that come under their own eyes, and what to expect from the men with whom they have to deal. A thinker duly exercised in historical research will carry his stores of the world's political experience about with him, not as a book of pre-

scriptions or recipes from which he can select one to apply to a given case, but rather as a physician carries a treatise on pathology which instructs him in the general principles to be followed in observing the symptoms and investigating the causes of the maladies that come before him. So, although the character of democratic government in the United States is full of instruction for Europeans, it supplies few conclusions directly bearing on the present politics of any European country, because both the strong and the weak points of the American people are not exactly repeated anywhere in the Old World, not even in such countries as France, Switzerland, and England. The picture given of the phenomena of America in preceding chapters has probably already suggested to the reader the inferences to be drawn from it, and such application as they may have to Europe. I shall therefore be here content with recapitulating in the most concise way the points in which the institutions of the United States and the methods employed in working them seem, if not quite directly, yet most nearly, to touch and throw light upon European problems. America has in some respects anticipated European nations. She is walking before them along a path which they may probably follow. She carries behind her, to adopt a famous simile of Dante's, a lamp whose light helps those who come after her more than it always does herself, because some of the dangers she has passed through may not recur at any other point in her path; whereas they, following in her footsteps, may stumble in the same stony places, or be entangled in the quagmires into which she slipped.

I. *Manhood Suffrage*. — This has been now adopted by so many peoples of Europe that they have the less occasion to study its transatlantic aspects. The wisest Americans, while appreciating the strength which it gives to their government, and conceiving that they could hardly have stopped short of it, hold that their recent experience does not invite imitation by European nations, unless at least Europeans adopt safeguards resembling those they have applied. With those safeguards, the abolition of property qualifications has, so far as the native population is concerned, proved successful; but in the hands of the negroes at the South, or the newly enfranchised immigrants of the larger cities, a vote is a weapon of mischief.

II. *The Civil Service*. — To keep minor administrative offices out of politics, to make them tenable for life and obtainable by merit instead of by private patronage, is at present the chief aim of American reformers. They are laboriously striving to bring their civil service up to the German or British level. If there is any lesson they would seek to impress on Europeans, it is the danger of allowing politics to get into the hands of men who seek to make a living by them, and of suffering public offices to become the reward of party work. Rather, they would say, interdict office-holders from participation in politics; appoint them by competition, however absurd competition may sometimes appear, choose them by lot, like the Athenians and Florentines; only do not let offices be tenable at the pleasure of party chiefs and lie in the uncontrolled patronage of persons who can use them to strengthen their own political position.<sup>1</sup>

III. *The Judiciary*. — The same observation applies to judicial posts, and with no less force. The American State Bench suffers both from the too prevalent system of popular election and from the scanty remuneration allotted. To procure men of character, learning, and intellectual power, and to keep them independent, ample remuneration must be paid, a life tenure secured, and the appointments placed in responsible hands. There is nothing in the English frame of government which thoughtful Americans so much admire as the maintenance of a high level of integrity and capacity in the judges; and they often express a hope that nothing will be done to lower the position of officials on whose excellence the well-being and commercial credit of a country largely depend.<sup>2</sup>

IV. *Character and Working of Legislatures*.<sup>3</sup> — Although the rule of representative chambers has been deemed the most characteristic feature of well-ordered free governments, as contrasted with those impetuous democracies of antiquity which legislated by primary assemblies, it must be confessed that the legislative bodies of the United States have done something to discredit representative government. Whether this result is mainly due, as some think, to the disconnection of the Executive from the legislature, or whether it must be traced to

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter LXV.      <sup>2</sup> See Chapters XLII and CII.      <sup>3</sup> See Chapters XIV, XIX, XLI, XLIV, XLV.

deeper sources of weakness, it is not without instruction for those who would in Europe vest in legislatures, and, perhaps, even in one-chambered legislatures, still wider powers of interference with administration than they now possess.

V. *Second Chambers.*<sup>1</sup>—The Americans consider the division of every political legislature into two co-ordinate bodies to be absolutely necessary; and their opinion, in this respect, is the more valuable because several States tried for a time to work with one chamber, and because they are fully sensible of the inconveniences which the frequent collision of two chambers involves. Their view is, doubtless, tinged by the low opinion which they hold of the quality of their legislators. Distrusting these, they desire to place every possible check upon their action. In cities it does not appear that either the two-chambered or the one-chambered system shows any advantage over the other; but it is now beginning to be seen that a city council ought not to be conceived of as a legislature, and that city government has altogether been planned and conducted too much on political, and too little on commercial, lines.

VI. *Length of Legislative Terms.*<sup>2</sup>—The gain and the loss in having legislatures elected for short terms are sufficiently obvious. To a European, the experience of Congress seems to indicate that the shortness of its term is rather to be avoided than imitated. It is not needed in order to secure the obedience of Congress to the popular will: it increases the cost of politics by making elections more frequent, and it keeps a considerable proportion of the legislators employed in learning a business from which they are dismissed as soon as they have learnt it.

VII. *Indirect Elections.*<sup>3</sup>—American experience does not commend this device, which, until the establishment of the present mode of choosing the French Senate, was chiefly known from its employment in the Republic of Venice. The choice of the President by electors, chosen for the purpose, has wholly failed to attain the object its authors desired. The election of senators by State legislatures gives no better, and possibly worse, men to the Senate, than direct popular election would give.

VIII. *A Rigid Constitution.*<sup>4</sup>—Although several European states have now placed themselves under constitutions not

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters XVIII, XL, and L.   <sup>2</sup> See Chapters XIX and XL.   <sup>3</sup> See Chapters V, X, and XII.   <sup>4</sup> See Chapters XXIII, XXXI-XXXV, and XXXVII.

alterable by their legislatures in the same way as ordinary statutes are altered, America furnishes in her State governments, as well as in her Federal government, by far the most instructive examples of the working of a system under which certain laws are made fundamental, and surrounded not only with a sort of consecration, but with provisions which make change comparatively difficult. There is nothing in their system with whose results, despite some obvious drawbacks, the multitude, scarcely less than the wise, are so well satisfied; nothing which they more frequently recommend to the consideration of those Europeans who are alarmed at the progress which democracy makes in the Old World.

IX. *Direct Legislation by the People.*<sup>1</sup>—In this respect also the example of the several States—for the Federal government is not in point—deserves to be well studied by English and French statesmen. I greatly doubt if the plan, whose merits seem to me in America to outweigh its defects, would work as well in a large country as it does in communities of the size of the American States. Even in them it is useful less by its own merits than by comparison with the vices of the legislatures. The people are as likely to be right in judgment as are those bodies; and they are more honest and more independent. The institution is a highly democratic one; and in countries which have capable and trustworthy legislatures might work ill by lowering their dignity and importance. It would be an appeal from comparative knowledge to comparative ignorance. This consideration does not apply to its use in local affairs, where it stimulates the activity of the citizen without superseding the administrative body.

X. *Local Self-government.*<sup>2</sup>—Nothing has more contributed to give strength and flexibility to the government of the United States, or to train the masses of the people to work their democratic institutions, than the existence everywhere in the Northern States of self-governing administrative units, such as townships, small enough to enlist the personal interest and be subject to the personal watchfulness and control of the ordinary citizen. Abuses have indeed sprung up in the cities, and in the case of the largest among them have become for-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XXXIX.   <sup>2</sup> See Chapters XLVIII-LII.

midable, partly because the principle of local control has not been sufficiently adhered to. Nevertheless the system of local government as a whole has been not merely beneficial, but indispensable, and well deserves the study of those who in Europe are alive to the evils of centralization, and perceive that those evils will not necessarily diminish with a further democratization of such countries as Britain, Germany, and Italy. I do not say that in any of the great European states the mass of the rural population is equally competent with the American to work such a system: still it presents a model towards which European institutions ought to tend. Very different is the lesson which the American cities teach. It is a lesson of what to avoid. Nowhere have the conjoint influences of false theory, party cohesion and the apathy of good citizens, together with a recklessly granted suffrage rendered municipal government so wasteful, inefficient, and impure.

XI. *The Absence of a Church Establishment.*—As the discussion of ecclesiastical matters belongs to a later part of this book,<sup>1</sup> I must be content with observing that in America everybody, to whatever religious communion he belongs, professes satisfaction with the complete separation of Church and State. This separation has not tended to make religion less of a force in America as respects either political or social reform, nor does it prevent the people from considering Christianity to be the national religion, and their commonwealth an object of the Divine care.

XII. *Party Machinery.*<sup>2</sup>—The tremendous power of party organization has been described. It enslaves local officials, it increases the tendency to regard members of Congress as mere delegates, it keeps men of independent character out of local and national politics, it puts bad men into place, it perverts the wishes of the people, it has in some places set up a tyranny under the forms of democracy. Yet it is hard to see how free government can go on without parties, and certain that the strenuous rivalry of parties will not dispense with machinery. The moral for Europe seems to be the old one that "Perpetual vigilance is the price of freedom," that the best citizens must, as the Americans say, "take hold," must by themselves accepting posts in the organization keep it from falling into the hands

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters CVI and CVII.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapters LIX-LXV.

of professionals, must entrust as few lucrative places as possible to popular election or political patronage, must leave reasonable discretion to their representatives in the national councils, must endeavour to maintain in politics the same standard of honour which guides them in private life. These are moral rather than political precepts, but party organization is one of those things which is good or bad according to the spirit with which it is worked.

XIII. *The Unattractiveness of Politics.*<sup>1</sup>—Partly from the influence of party machinery, partly from peculiarities of the Federal Constitution, partly from social and economical causes, the American system does not succeed in bringing the best men to the top. Yet in democracy more perhaps than in other governments, seeing it is the most delicate and difficult of governments, it is essential that the best men should come to the top. There is in this fact matter for Europeans to reflect upon, for they have assumed that political success will always attract ambition, and that public life will draw at least enough of the highest ability into its whirlpool. America disproves the assumption. Her example does not, however, throw much light on the way to keep politics attractive, for her conditions are dissimilar to those of European countries, where ambition finds less scope for distinction in the field of industrial enterprise, and rank is less disjoined from political eminence.

XIV. *The Power of Wealth.*—Plutocracy used to be considered a form of oligarchy, and opposed to democracy. But there is a strong plutocratic element infused into American democracy; and the fact that constitutions ignore differences of property, treating all voters alike, makes it neither less potent nor less mischievous. Of the power of wealth democracies may say, with Dante, Here we find the great enemy.<sup>2</sup> It has doubtless afflicted all forms of government. But it seems specially pernicious in a free government, because when the disease appeared under despotisms and oligarchies, freedom was deemed the only and sufficient antidote. Experience, however, shows that in democracies it is no less menacing, for the personal interest of the average man in good government—and in a large democracy he feels himself insignificant—is

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters LVIII and LXXIV.

<sup>2</sup> Quivi trovammo Pluto il gran nemico: *Inf.* VI, 115.

overborne by the inducements which wealth, skilfully employed, can offer him; and when once the average man's standard of public virtue has been lowered by the sight of numerous deflections from virtue in others, great is the difficulty of raising it. In the United States the money power acts by corrupting sometimes the voter, sometimes the juror, sometimes the legislator, sometimes a whole party; for large subscriptions and promises of political support have been known to influence a party to procure or refrain from such legislation as wealth desires or fears. The rich, it is but fair to say, and especially great corporations, have not only enterprises to promote but dangers to escape from at the hands of unscrupulous demagogues or legislators. But whether their action has this palliation or not, the belief, often well grounded, that they exercise a secret power in their own interests, exasperates other sections of the community, and has been a factor in producing not only unwise legislation directed against them, but also outbreaks of lawless violence.

To these scattered observations, which I have made abrupt in order to avoid being led into repetitions, I need hardly add the general moral which the United States teach, that the masses of the people are wiser, fairer, and more temperate in any matter to which they can be induced to bend their minds than most European philosophers have believed it possible for the masses of the people to be; because this is the moral which the preceding chapters on Public Opinion have been intended to make clear. But the reader is again to be reminded that while the foregoing points are those in which American experience seems most directly available for European states, he must not expect the problems America has solved, or those which still perplex her, to reappear in Europe in the same forms. Such facts—to mention two only out of many—as the abundance of land and the absence of menace from other Powers show how dissimilar are the conditions under which popular government works in the Eastern and in the Western hemisphere. Nothing can be more instructive than American experience if it be discreetly used, nothing will be more misleading to one who tries to apply it without allowing for the differences of economic and social environment.

## PART VI

### SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS