

NATIONAL CHARACTER AND THE CHARACTERS OF NATIONAL STATESMEN

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT



AMONG the notable volumes of studies on social subjects which have appeared within the last year or two are Lord Acton's "History of Freedom and Other Essays," and Frederic Harrison's "National and Social Problems." The points of view of the two writers are very different in some regards, and it is not necessary to sympathize with every position which either of them takes; but running through both volumes is a vein of noble purpose which renders it worth while to read them both. Each writer is actuated by an intense scorn of what is base and cruel and unjust, without regard to whether it be successful or unsuccessful; each stands for true liberty, for social justice, for detestation of tyranny, whether of a despot, an oligarchy, or a mob; and, finally, the creed of each is based on a broad and deep ethical foundation, and tells us to believe in what is right because it is right, and bids us do right without regard to our own ultimate fate simply because an honest and upright man can do no less. Each of these men speaks with fiery and burning wrath of the successful criminals of history—the men who are worshiped by the admirers of mere success, no matter what brutality, greed, and cunning, what oppression of others and disregard of others, that success may represent.

They feel this healthy indignation alike for the unscrupulous plutocrat, the man of swollen wealth who exploits and ruins others to add to his own vast fortune, and for that other man, a no less sinister figure, who panders to the ignorance and envy of poor and unfortunate men, who excites class feeling and revels in mob violence, all to achieve his own wicked purpose. They abhor these men in social life, and they abhor their representatives in public life. They see clearly that the unscrupulous des-

pot and the unscrupulous mob leader are at heart one in their purposes, in their wickedness, in the far-reaching evil they bring about, though they must fight under banners nominally antagonistic. Louis XV and Marat represented each in his own person certain despicable human qualities, and each stood for selfish and brutal oppression of certain people by certain other people, of one class by another class; though by the accidents of their positions it happened that the classes they represented were not the same. Many a king, many a popular demagogue, though coming far short of such iniquity as that of those men, has yet each by his actions lowered the ideals of men within his own country; and as a corollary has lowered the ideals that men should have as to the way in which one country should treat another. One of the prime merits in the books both of Lord Acton and of Frederic Harrison is their clear recognition of international, no less than individual, morality and duty. Their writings are those of stanch patriots, stanch lovers of their own country, of far too virile fiber to shrink from righteous war if their country is wronged, but no less bent on seeing that their country wrongs no other.

A nation must be judged in part by the character of its public men, not merely by their ability but by their ideals and the measure in which they realize these ideals; by their attitude in private life, and much more by their attitude in public life, both as regards their conception of their duties toward their country, and their conception of the duty of that country, embodied in its government, toward its own people and toward foreign nations.

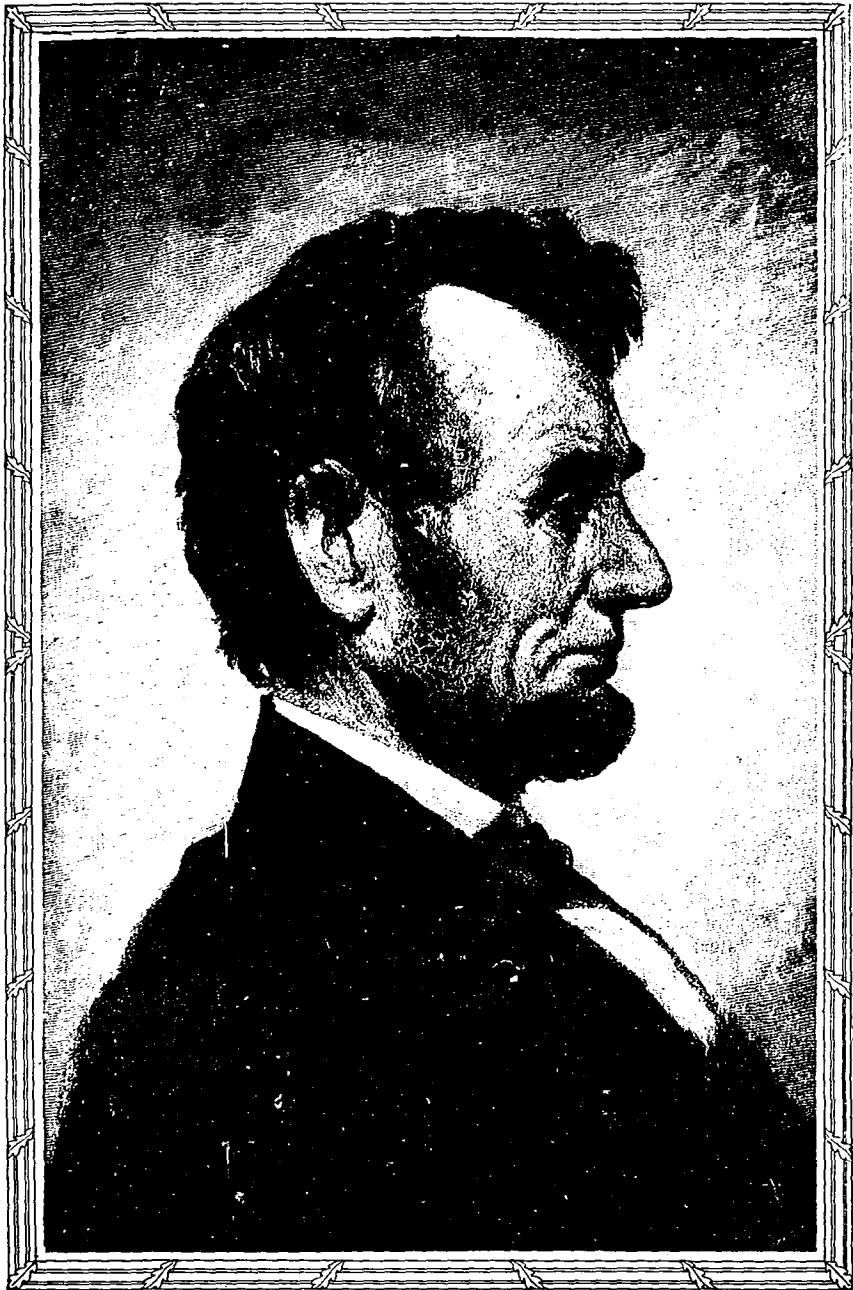
While the private life of a public man is of secondary importance, it is certainly a mistake to assume that it is of no importance. Of course excellence of private conduct—that is, domestic morality, punctuality in the payment of debts, being a



GEORGE WASHINGTON

From a portrait in the possession of the Hon. Oscar S. Straus, Secretary of Commerce and Labor

Charles Henry Hart, one of the best living experts on Washington portraits, says: "Charles Polk, or, as he sometimes signed his name, Charles Peale Polk, was a nephew of Charles Willson Peale, the patriotic historical portrait painter of the Revolution, who painted Washington's portrait fourteen different times. Polk was born in Maryland in 1767, and died in 1822. In 1787, during the sittings of the Convention to Frame a Constitution for the United States, Charles Willson Peale painted a head of Washington 'to make a mezzotinto from,' which was universally accepted as being an admirable likeness. Polk, who studied under his uncle, made several copies of this portrait, in one or two instances enlarging it to half length, as in the canvas under consideration. Among the Washington MSS. in the Library of Congress (Vol. 75, No. 302) there is a letter from Charles Peale Polk to Washington, dated New York, August 6, 1790, asking for a sitting to finish a portrait 'he has prepared with that design.' He adds that 'he has in the course of the last year executed fifty portraits, though his advantages were not what he wished.' This portrait is signed on the back 'Cs. Polk—No. 50.' From Washington's well-known complacency in granting sittings to artists for his portrait, and his particular friendship for Charles Willson Peale, Polk's uncle, there is little doubt that Washington granted the request, and from the canvas being specially ear-marked with 'No. 50,' there is as little question that this is the identical portrait that was completed from life, which view is strengthened by the inherent quality of the painting, which is the best by Polk I have ever seen, and is in excellent condition. I consider it an extremely interesting contemporary portrait of Washington."



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

From a portrait in the possession of the Hon. Oscar S. Straus, Secretary of Commerce and Labor

Mrs. Annie E. Bryden writes of this portrait: "The accompanying portrait of Abraham Lincoln was done by my father, William Willard, at Washington, in 1864, from actual sittings from life. I have often heard my father speak of incidents which occurred while Lincoln was posing for him, and he especially spoke of this portrait, which he kept for himself, as one of the most cherished specimens of his work."

good husband and father, being a good neighbor—do not, taken together, furnish adequate reason for reposing confidence in a man as a public servant. But lack of these qualities certainly does establish a presumption against any public man. One function of any great public leader should be to exert an influence upon the community at large, especially upon the young men of the community; and therefore it is idle to say that those interested in the perpetuity of good government should not take into account the fact of a public man's example being something to follow or to avoid, even in matters not connected with his direct public services.

But of course the public services themselves furnish the real test. The first duty of a general is to win campaigns. The first duty of a statesman is efficiently to work for the betterment of his country and for its good relations with the rest of the world. He must have high ideals, and in addition he must possess the practical sagacity and force that will enable him measurably to realize them. If he does not possess the high ideals, then the greater his ability the more dangerous he is and the more essential it is to hunt him out of public life. Sagacity, courage, all that makes for efficiency—these are of use only if the man's character is such that he will use them for good and not for evil. On the other hand, fine aspirations, no matter how good, are useless if a man lacks either strength and courage, or else the practical good sense which will enable him to face facts as they actually are and to work with his fellows under existing conditions, instead of confining himself to complaints about the conditions, or to railing at the men because they are not other than he finds them.

It is the peculiar good fortune of the United States that in its two greatest citi-

zens, Washington and Lincoln, it has developed men whose ideals were lofty, not only as regards their conduct toward their fellow-citizens within the borders of their own land, but also as to the way in which their country should behave in dealing with other countries. These men were the greatest of their type, the type of Timoleon and Hampden, and it is no small honor to America that this, the highest type of statesmanship, should have here received its highest development. The fundamental difference between this type of public servant, the Washington-Lincoln type, and other types of public men as strong, as forceful, and as effective, is that the men of this type clearly recognize the fundamental principles of morality as applying among men and as applying among nations. They acknowledge moral obligations as of supreme force, and as binding them not only in their relations to their fellow-countrymen, but in their relations to all mankind. Both Washington and Lincoln were devoted Americans, devoted patriots. Each was willing to pour out the blood of the bravest and best in the land for a high and worthy cause, and each was a practical man, as far removed as possible from the sentimentalist and the doctrinaire. But each lived his life in accordance with a high ideal of right which forbade him to wrong his neighbor, and which when he became head of the State forbade him to inflict international wrong, as it forbade him to inflict private wrong. Each left to his countrymen as a priceless heritage the ennobling memory of a life which achieved great success through rendering far greater service, of a life lived in practical fashion for the achievement of lofty ideals, of a life lived in accordance with a standard of duty which forbade maltreatment of one man by another, which forbade maltreatment by one nation of another.