Personality in Politics

Sir Arthur Salter

PERSONALITY IN POLITICS

by the same author

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ALLIED SHIPPING CONTROL
(*Oxford University Press* 1921)

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(*G. Bell and Sons* 1932)

THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE
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(*Allen and Unwin* 1933)

THE FRAMEWORK OF AN ORDERED SOCIETY
(*Cambridge University Press* 1933)

WORLD TRADE AND ITS FUTURE
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SECURITY: CAN WE RETRIEVE IT?
(*Macmillan and Co.* 1939)

PERSONALITY IN POLITICS

Studies of
Contemporary Statesmen
by
ARTHUR SALTER

"The choice and master spirits of this age"
—JULIUS CAESAR, *Act III, Sc.* 1

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PREFACE

This book is designed to illustrate the influence of personality in politics from memories and impressions of dominant public figures of the first half of this century. The earliest and the last chapters discuss the general theme, while between them there is a kind of portrait gallery with an annotating catalogue. The selection of these figures is due to the accident of my personal contacts, mainly as an official, sometimes in national, sometimes in international, service, but later as a Member of Parliament and a Minister.

The official has a special post of observation. He sees public men closely, and with a certain intimacy, but in relation to his own specialized task. He knows one side of their character in minute detail, but his perspective is narrower than that of those who are themselves on the public stage; and he applies a somewhat different criterion of value to qualities and defects. His general outlook on public affairs is usually, though in varying degrees, characterized by a certain myopic particularity of vision. Every specialized experience involves a bias which needs to be assessed and discounted, and the official's among them; but something will still remain as a contribution to truth.

The political leaders here portrayed are, with few exceptions, from the great democracies of the West. I would that I could have added others, especially from the other great country, Russia, on which the fate of the world now so largely depends. But I have confined myself to writing of those whom I have known personally, in the intimate if limited association of public work. To my regret it has never been my fate to visit Russia, and though I have known many

Russians, including the two great Ambassadors, Mr. Litvinoff and Mr. Maisky, I have never worked with them in the revealing collaboration of a common task. Above all I have not known personally any of the present members of the Politburo, on whose complex psychology the future so much depends. Nothing could be of more value at the present time than an intimate knowledge of the interacting motives of apprehension, ambition and suspicion, which animate the guarded and secluded Kremlin Committee who now wield so terrifying a power. There is no adequate discernible reason in any conflict of material interests why Russia should not live in amity with the rest of the world; and to a quite exceptional extent international relations now depend, not upon the mass movement of impersonal forces to which Marxian determinist theory assigns so exclusive an importance, but upon the interacting characters and psychology of a few men.

For similar reasons I have included no studies of the German leaders who were responsible for the recent war. If we are to understand the past, or be forewarned for the future, the personal qualities which enable a would-be dictator to exploit the weaknesses of a free government need to be understood, and it is much to be hoped that those who possess, as I do not, the necessary knowledge and experience, will record their impressions before their memories fade.

Those sketched here include five British Prime Ministers, Balfour, Lloyd George, MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain and Mr. Churchill; two other British statesmen, Bryce and Haldane; two men who greatly influenced political thought without themselves entering a government, H. G. Wells and Maynard Keynes; two American Presidents, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt; the Fascist dictator of Italy, Mussolini; and (drawn on a smaller scale) three Prime Ministers of France, Clemenceau, Poincaré and Briand; the Generalissimo and Prime Minister of China, Chiang Kai-shek and T. V. Soong, with half a dozen other public figures from America, France and China. In one case (that of Neville

Chamberlain) I have drawn substantially on a chapter in my book *Security*, and in a few others have made use of some passages in appreciations written elsewhere at different times. Otherwise what now appears is published for the first time.

In each case my purpose has been, not to write a miniature biography, but to give a general impression of character, with special emphasis on one or two significant qualities, illustrated by incidents which I happen myself to have witnessed. It is hoped that these sketches, taken as a whole, will throw some light on the theme discussed in the opening and the concluding chapters, the relation between personality and history. They illustrate the weaknesses and the strength of a free and popular system in a modern state, and the personal qualities that, in such a system, attract and retain power. And as each of those portrayed took an important part in the events of his time, these sketches may also reflect something of the changing historical scene of fifty crowded years. Contemporary personal impressions of this kind, supported by revealing anecdotes, may perhaps, as I suggest later, claim a real, if minor, place among historical sources.

What is gleaned here is from one individual's limited field of experience. Winnowed from the chaff there may be a few grains worth the saving. But I write too in the hope that even what does not instruct may perhaps entertain.

PROLOGUE

There is a fireside game that all historians, and others whose work requires the appraisal of personal evidence, ought often to play for the good of their souls. The company present, say twenty or so, sit in a row or a circle. The person at one end invents a tale and whispers it to his neighbour on the left; he in turn whispers it to the next one, and so till the last of all, who then repeats aloud what he or she has heard. The original inventor of the tale then also repeats aloud what he had first whispered. The difference reflects the distortion of the intervening memories, with their personal bias and defects. The result is illuminating. It shows the kind of discount which personal evidence needs; and also the bare skeleton of essential fact that usually remains.

Such is a large part, though of course only a part, of what the historian must depend upon. He has as a corrective much documentary and other evidence which is not susceptible to a similar distortion. On the other hand much of the personal evidence which is at the basis of some of his records is subject to a further distortion from which the fireside game is exempt; for those who appear as witnesses are commonly also in some degree participants in the events they speak of and have the special bias that comes from their own rôle.

I once had an experience of personal evidence in relation to a minor historical incident. I resolved that, if I ever attempted to write history myself, I would tell the tale as a warning to myself and others. I shall never now want it for that purpose, but I may perhaps suitably insert it as a Prologue to the series of sketches and anecdotes which are to follow.

Prologue

I will first recite the bare facts, as they are proved by impersonal records and as they remain constant through all the several personal accounts.

After the great Greek disaster in Asia Minor in 1922, when the Turks drove over a million Greeks into the sea at Smyrna, or in hopeless, destitute flight as refugees back to the European homeland of their ancestors, there was a revolution in Athens. The new Government executed their predecessors. This exaction of retribution from a Government for a political and military folly or crime and disaster was more shocking to the civilized western world at that time than it would perhaps be now. In any event, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, was so horrified that, to mark his disapproval, he at once withdrew the British Minister—Mr. (now Sir Francis) Lindley—from Athens. There was no other post immediately available for him, and he was bound to remain for some time 'en disponibilité'. As he would in the ordinary course of events have been staying in Athens till he was transferred to another Legation or Embassy, and was a married man with a family, there was naturally an immediate problem as to where he should live in the meantime. Ultimately, after some delay, a solution was found by placing at his disposal a summer residence associated with the British Embassy in Italy.

So much for the bare facts; now for the somewhat different angle of vision from which they were regarded by those principally concerned.

Shortly after Lindley's recall to England, I was on League of Nations business in Vienna. I called one afternoon at the British Legation to have tea with the British Minister (Mr. Akers-Douglas, later Viscount Chilston). His wife was there, having just returned from England, where she had seen Lindley, a personal friend. Lindley had given her an account of his personal predicament. 'Curzon recalled me at a moment's notice as a political protest. That was all very well for him; but it put me in a hole. I found myself stranded, with a family and without a house. I did my best to make the

Foreign Office realize that, as they'd moved me, not because of anything for which I was responsible, but for a political purpose, it was clearly up to them to find me something else suitable. I could at first get nothing out of them. But happily I had a bright idea. I remembered there was a very pleasant summer residence attached to the British Embassy in Italy, and that at this time of the year it would probably be vacant. I did everything I could to get the Foreign Office to make the necessary request to the Ambassador, Ronald Graham. Happily I succeeded, and he was quite agreeable, so I am just going to take my family out and we shall be all right till I get my next job.'

A few days later I returned to Geneva, and found myself at dinner next to Lord Curzon, who had come across from Lausanne where he had been in a Conference with the Turks. After dinner he began to expatiate on the manifold and complex cares and responsibilities of a Foreign Secretary, so little realized by the public. 'Let me give you a minor example,' he said. 'You know I've just withdrawn Lindley from Athens. You doubtless think that all I had to do was to take the decision, important perhaps but essentially simple, to make this obviously appropriate protest against a shocking act. Not at all. That was only the beginning. I remembered for example that Lindley has a family and that, when withdrawn suddenly in this way, he would probably find it difficult to make satisfactory arrangements for them; and since his withdrawal was my own political decision I felt a personal responsibility in the matter. It was a trivial but not altogether easy problem. Happily, however, a very suitable idea occurred to me. I recollected that there was a summer residence of the British Embassy in Italy and was able to arrange with Ronald Graham to lend it to him. I understand that Lindley is very pleased with the arrangement.'

A few days later I had to go to Rome. I called on the Ambassador. We met in his study which looked out on to a pleasing garden. By way of starting the conversation I said, 'What a delightful garden you have.' 'Yes,' said Ronald

Graham, 'it is pleasant. But it's nothing to compare with the one at my summer residence. I say "my residence", but in fact it's not exactly mine at the moment. You will have seen about poor Lindley being suddenly withdrawn from Athens. Well, when I heard of it I remembered of course that he has a family, and might be in a difficult position while waiting for another job. So I thought it would be a friendly thing to offer to lend it to him. He accepted at once and I believe is very comfortable there.'

Here then were three accounts of the same incident as I remembered them rather more than twenty years later. Two of them were first-hand, the other at one remove. Had I been a historian trying to ascertain the truth from this evidence, I should have noted that the main facts were common to every account, and these I should have accepted. But there were obviously three different angles of vision as to the respective contributions to the final result. The tale had gone through three refracting minds. Where there were differences the account I had received in Vienna was perhaps to be preferred, because, though unlike the other two it was second-hand, it was intrinsically more probable.

But I said 'three refracting minds'. I should have said 'four', for there was mine too, with the bias of a narrator to make the best of a tale. I have done my best to set down exactly, and without distortion, just what I remembered. But I kept no record at the time. Who could tell how far I might have sharpened and distorted the tale in the process of recalling and recounting it? Not I.

I can now, however, carry the tale one step further. I have now for the first time asked Sir Francis Lindley directly for his own account. His recollection is clear and definite, and it enables the bias of the others, including my own, to be assessed and corrected.

At the time of his recall, he tells me, his children had scarlet fever, and he had to leave his family for the moment at Athens. He went himself to Lausanne, where Lord Curzon was at the Conference with the Turks. While there he had