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## YOUNG MEN IN AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY

### I

If Benjamin Disraeli, himself no mean statesman, twice Prime Minister of England, was thinking of politics when he wrote "Almost everything that is great has been done by youth," he probably did not have the history of the United States directly in mind. He probably was thinking, however, of two brilliant young Englishmen, Charles Fox and William Pitt, who were debating from positions of highest responsibility the relationship of their country to its thirteen American Colonies, and whose decisions profoundly affected the destiny of the new Nation. Both were geniuses, strong-willed and courageous—but there similarity stopped. Fox, born in 1749, at the age of nineteen became a member of Parliament. The prodigy "soon became acknowledged to be the most effective debater in Parliament, of which he was a member for one constituency or another during the remainder of his life."<sup>1</sup> He was a consistent friend of the American Colonies; had his conciliatory policy been followed, there might indeed have been no Revolution.

Of quite a different mind was Pitt. This imperious statesman, always contemptuous of American commerce and resentful of her new independence, prevented any friendship between the new nation and his own. His relentless policy of impressing American seamen for service on British ships in England's war with France, continued after his death, eventually became a great contributing cause to the war of 1812. He was born in 1759; in 1782 he was made Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister the following year at the age of twenty-four!

He and Fox, ten years apart in their ages, and each a mental giant, fought each other during the entire time each was in public life; and both died in the same year—1806—

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<sup>1</sup> 10 RIDPATH, LIBRARY OF UNIVERSAL LITERATURE 291.

Pitt in January and Fox in September. But after all, the real battle for American independence and its preservation afterwards was on this side of the Atlantic—and there were young giants over here, too.

For many years prior to 1776 a feeling of antagonism against England had been growing in the American Colonies. The sturdy pioneers who, largely by their own efforts, had cleared the wilderness, driven back the Indians, set up their own local governments and generally established a christian civilization, keenly resented the imperious manner with which England occasionally exercised its authority over them. But, except for a few men like James Otis,<sup>2</sup> the colonists were inarticulate. They muttered rather than argued. Then in 1776 the Declaration of Independence was written. That document served a triple purpose. It crystallized American sentiment against the oppressive measures of a government thousands of miles away; it expressed eloquently and forcibly a philosophy new in practical politics; and it aroused American patriotism to fever pitch. And the author of this document was Thomas Jefferson, then only thirty-three years old!

If George Washington can be called the father of his country and James Madison the father of the Constitution, then truthfully can Thomas Jefferson be considered the father of the Declaration of Independence, the instrument which first inspired patriots to battle for the one, and later statesmen to draft the other. Born in 1743, Jefferson's public life started at the age of twenty-six with his election to the Virginia House of Burgesses, that stormy legislative body which was the forum for some of the ablest speeches which preceded the Revolution. His talents were so great that in 1775 he was chosen a member of the Provincial Congress and it was as chairman of the committee of five appointed to draw up the Declaration of Independence that he

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<sup>2</sup> Otis was thirty-six when he delivered his stirring arguments against the Writs of Assistance (1761).

earned probably his greatest fame. From then on, his progress was rapid and steady; he was successively member of the Virginia Legislature, Governor of Virginia, Representative in Congress, Special Minister to France, First Secretary of State under Washington, Vice-President and finally President. In each office his accomplishments proved to be lasting; but after all, what every schoolboy remembers about this brilliant democrat is not his championship of religious freedom in Virginia, nor his brilliant arguments with that other distinguished young cabinet member, Alexander Hamilton, nor yet his daring purchase of the Louisiana Territory, but the persuasive, dashing, fiery Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson did not wage the Revolution alone by any means, nor was he a stripling among venerable statesmen. As a member of the House of Burgesses he came in close contact with Patrick Henry, who had been elected to that body in 1765, a few weeks before his twenty-ninth birthday. On that birthday Henry introduced a series of resolutions directed against the Stamp Act. He supported these resolutions by a speech which Jefferson (himself only twenty-two) declared the best he had ever heard. From that moment Henry was the acknowledged political leader of Virginia. He was subsequently elected first Governor of that State, and twice re-elected. Declining re-election for another term, he was succeeded by Jefferson.

Here again is a man remembered not so much for what he did in ripe old age, but for the battles he fought in lusty youth. Patrick Henry was not yet forty when his stirring appeal for war, culminating in his dramatic cry "Give me liberty or give me death" was hurled to his more cautious fellows. And what boy or girl has not memorized that? On the other hand, how many college men recall that thirteen years later he bitterly fought the adoption of the Federal Constitution, as not sufficiently guaranteeing the liberties of the citizen?

A while ago we mentioned Alexander Hamilton, who, like Jefferson, was a member of Washington's cabinet. Just as patriotic as his contemporaries, he was even younger than Jefferson. This genius was born in 1757, and after brilliant conduct as a captain during the early part of the Revolutionary War, was appointed a lieutenant-colonel by General Washington in 1777.<sup>3</sup> He was then twenty years old. The war won, he was elected a delegate to the Continental Congress, and later to the Constitutional Convention. There he met many other young men, and a few old ones.

This Constitutional Convention, which framed a document which is as much a part of our life today as it was of our fathers a hundred and fifty years ago, was composed of young men. But let James M. Beck tell it:<sup>4</sup> "It was a convention of comparatively young men, the average age being little above forty. Franklin, the oldest member, was then eighty-one." (Just imagine how that shot up the average!) "With the exception of Franklin and Washington, most of the potential personalities in the Convention were under forty. Thus, Dayton, of New Jersey, the youngest member of the Convention, was only twenty-seven; James Madison, who had taken such an active part in securing the conference between Virginia and Maryland and the Annapolis convention which grew out of that conference, and who contributed so largely to the plan that he is sometimes called 'The Father of the Constitution,' was thirty-six. Edmund Randolph, who opened the discussion by presenting the Virginia plan, was only thirty-four. Charles Pinckney, who, unaided, submitted the first draft of the Constitution, was only twenty-nine, and Alexander Hamilton, who was destined to take a leading part in securing its ratification by his powerful oratory and his very able commentaries in the Federalist papers, was only thirty."

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<sup>3</sup> Washington was born in 1732. His military career started under Braddock at an early age.

<sup>4</sup> BECK, THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES 54.

These men did not all agree, of course; indeed, the success of the document they framed may well be due to their divergent views. At times these intense, dynamic young men argued so passionately that many thought that no document at all could ever be written. On one occasion an adjournment for three days was taken, as Dr. Franklin expressed it, "in order to let the present ferment pass off, and to afford time for a more full, free, and dispassionate investigation of the subject." But the difficulties eventually were smoothed out, the Constitution was written, and presented to an anxious nation.

The Constitution then became the law of the land; Americans grew under it and some became great. But a political document is not like a detective story, that within two covers presents a problem, works on it and solves it completely, leaving nothing more to be done. It is rather like a reference work, or perhaps a dictionary, that must be kept at hand and used time and again. For the Constitution to be effective it had to be given vitality. The crisis of starting on a right path after taking leave of the "mother country" was successfully met, but that was followed by other crises just as momentous. After all, the trail was not clear, even though the original direction was correct; men still had to trace their steps cautiously, or the whole country would be in chaos.

Here again young men did their part. In all branches of government they courageously took their places, and helped to guide skilfully a country that confidently looked to them for counsel.

Edmund Randolph has already been mentioned as a member of the Constitutional Convention, and the author of the Virginia Plan. He deserves more than passing attention, however, for his talents, like those of most of his colleagues, did not lie dormant afterwards. Indeed, he had a record of great achievements even before the Convention. He had been an aide to Washington in 1775 when twenty-two years

old, and in 1776 became Attorney-General of Virginia. He served in the Continental Congress from 1779 to 1782, and was elected Governor of Virginia in 1786. Elected a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, he was so certain that his own plan was the only worthy one that he refused to sign the final draft. Later convinced, however, that chaos was apt to follow if the instrument was not ratified, he swallowed his pride and ably urged its acceptance by Virginia. As soon as the new Constitution became the law and a government was formed under it, President Washington appointed him Attorney-General — certainly an ambitious job for a man of thirty-six. In 1794, Washington conferred even a higher honor upon him, appointing him Secretary of State to succeed Thomas Jefferson.

Up to this point Randolph's career had been uniformly brilliant and honest. A gallant youth, courageous lawyer and an intelligent patriot, he had done nothing to make him regret his early years. Unfortunately, his public life lasted a little too long. While Secretary of State, he was accused of entering into an intrigue with M. Fouchet, the French Minister, concerning the Whiskey Rebellion. Randolph never was able to establish his innocence satisfactorily, and he retired from office under a cloud. His middle age, and not his youth, undid him.

Before we leave the energetic youths who dominated the Constitutional Convention, we should take a look at Gouverneur Morris, the man who put the final document into literary shape. He was born in January, 1752; before the Convention he had served as a member of the Continental Congress (1777 to 1780) and afterwards was United States Minister to France (1792 to 1794). He was elected to the United States Senate from New York in 1800. One of his tasks that gave him much concern, by the way, was the funeral oration he was asked to deliver for Alexander Hamilton after his fateful duel with Aaron Burr; but that's another story.

While discussing New Yorkers, we should not overlook Edward Livingston. One of the ablest of the early statesmen, he was also the most scrupulous. This political nobleman was born in 1764, and was sent to Congress for the first time in 1795. Claude Bowers<sup>5</sup> says of him: "Edward Livingston was one of the strongest characters of his time, a Nationalist as intense as Webster, who was to pen a document<sup>6</sup> as virile and militant as Webster's speech for the Union—one of the most brilliant, talented, and polished publicists the Republic has known." He left Congress in 1801; in the same year Jefferson appointed him United States District Attorney for New York, and in that year also he was elected Mayor of New York City. While valiantly trying to serve in both capacities, he was stricken by the yellow fever, and upon recovering, found that his assistant in the district attorney's office had embezzled the sum of \$100,000 and squandered it upon wine and women. "Without a moment's hesitation," says Bowers,<sup>7</sup> "he conveyed all his property to a trustee for sale, beggared himself completely, and resigned both his offices. The public protested against his abandonment of the mayoralty, and for two months the Governor refused to accept his resignation, but he knew that the path of duty led to the replenishment of his purse." He went to Louisiana and resumed the practice of law, where he soon achieved the same prominence he had attained in New York. He was elected to Congress, then to the United States Senate, was appointed Secretary of State by Jackson, and served as Minister to France. With not a blot upon his record, he deserved far more than he received—at least in a material way. He was always a champion of democratic principles, a man so disliked by Hamilton that the latter determined he must be destroyed, an end Hamilton did not accomplish. It was Jefferson, Hamilton's chief adversary, who

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<sup>5</sup> BOWERS, PARTY BATTLES OF THE JACKSON PERIOD 134.

<sup>6</sup> The Nullification Proclamation, prepared by Livingston as Secretary of State for President Andrew Jackson.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit. supra* note 5.



had recognized Livingston's masterful leadership in Congress, and rewarded him by the appointment to the position of District Attorney. Later, however, Jefferson, from rather obscure motives, bitterly fought him. Livingston acquired some land in Louisiana abutting on the Mississippi River. From alluvial deposits on the banks the land was extended, and Livingston hoped thus to regain his lost fortune. Jefferson, however, claimed the accretions belonged to the United States, and resisted his efforts to develop the land. Livingston finally prevailed, but did not live long enough to realize its full value.<sup>8</sup>

In his struggle with Jefferson, Livingston sought the aid of the Governor of Louisiana, William C. C. Claiborne, but without success. Claiborne had been appointed by Jefferson, and he evidently believed that the President had first claim to his loyalty. At the present time we are not primarily concerned with Claiborne's duty—he undoubtedly acted sincerely. What does interest us, though, is his age, or rather his youth. Were we not used to being told about the exploits of other cavaliers, the accomplishments of this handsome young blood would indeed be astounding. He was only twenty-eight when he received his Louisiana appointment in 1803, and he already had a background of government service in high positions. He had been a clerk of Congress in his extreme youth, and then after the study of law, developed an extensive criminal practice in Tennessee. Upon the organization of State government there, he had been appointed a judge of the Supreme Court. He was elected to Congress at twenty-one, and served five years. At twenty-six he was appointed Governor of Mississippi, a position he held when Jefferson chose him for Louisiana, an area larger than the whole United States at that time, and whose inhabitants were not yet even sure they wanted to be Americans. His administration was successful, and he never gave either Jef-

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<sup>8</sup> BEVERIDGE, *THE LIFE OF JOHN MARSHALL*, Vol. IV, pp. 102-116.

person or the citizens who championed the purchase cause to regret their decision.

John Randolph of Roanoke, frail, beautiful, temperamental, was another of the young geniuses who came into public life shortly after the Revolutionary War. Born in 1773, he entered Congress twenty-six years later, and at thirty was the brilliant leader of the Jefferson forces in the House. He skilfully managed the fight to approve the purchase of Louisiana, and his indefatigable efforts contributed a great deal towards ratification. He became estranged with Jefferson later, because Randolph wished his friend Monroe to be the next President, and Jefferson seemed to prefer Madison. He then became the leader of Jefferson's opposition, and among other things, bitterly fought the annexation of Florida. Vitriolic always, his sharp language once led him into a duel with Henry Clay, from which, fortunately, both escaped without injuries. Randolph was not an impetuous youth when the duel was fought, nor was Clay. The former was fifty-three years old, the latter forty-nine.<sup>9</sup>

The United States was making rapid strides in the early years of the nineteenth century. A lusty infant, the nation was vigorous and self-assertive. Its representatives, which included some of the Ministers we have already named, did not hesitate to negotiate with such world-wide figures as Talleyrand of France, Pitt of England, and Cevallos of Spain; and their missions were generally signalized by success.

It was a time when the new country was feeling its way, determined at all costs to stay on its own feet. To do this it recognized it must keep on firm ground. Its laws must be clear, they must be strong, and they must be supreme. To those ends judges of ability, honesty and vigor were needed.

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<sup>9</sup> Other youths prominent in Congress during Randolph's early days were Stevens T. Mason, who entered the Senate from Virginia in his thirty-fourth year, and Senator James Bayard from Delaware, who was an able Federalist leader at thirty-five.

Fortunately, such judges were available. Although they did not always agree with the principles espoused by the executive and legislative branches, they nevertheless acted in the way they believed the country required. Foremost among the Justices of the Supreme Court whose opinions are still cited and followed, was, of course, John Marshall. Marshall was not a youngster when he was appointed to the bench, but he certainly was not old, either. He was born on September 24, 1755, and was appointed Chief Justice in January, 1801, serving in that capacity until his death in 1835. His greatest opinion, *Marbury v. Madison*,<sup>10</sup> was written in 1803. But Marshall had been a national figure for many years prior to his elevation to the bench. He served actively during the Revolutionary War, participating in such battles as Brandywine, Germantown and Stony Point, and attained by his military skill the rank of captain. He was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1782, and from that time on was almost continuously in public life, although he frequently stated that he did not relish its responsibilities. He was one of the ministers on the famous "X.Y.Z." mission in 1797; shortly thereafter he was elected to Congress, and then served as Secretary of State under John Adams until he was placed in the Supreme Court.

If John Marshall was not a young man when he became Chief Justice, he soon had two colleagues who were young indeed. One of these was William Johnson, who became an Associate Justice in 1804, at the tender age of thirty-three. He remained a member of the Court for thirty years. Before his judicial appointment he had been a member of the South Carolina Legislature for three terms, and had served as Speaker of the House of Representatives during his last term. Following this experience, he became a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, a post he held when President Jefferson summoned him to take a place on the Supreme Court. He is generally considered to have been a sound and able

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Cranch 137 (1803).

member of the Court, not so nationalistic as Marshall or so extreme as that other gifted young man, Mr. Justice Story. Joseph Story, a native of Massachusetts, was but thirty-two years of age when he was appointed to the Supreme Court on November 18, 1811. Carson<sup>11</sup> declares that Story "was one of the brightest ornaments of his profession and his age." Carson further asserts: "As a logician and a Constitutional judge he must yield to Marshall, whom he far surpassed in general legal scholarship, but as the rival of Stowell in admiralty and the peer of Kent in equity jurisprudence, as the sleepless and persistent force that urged others to the amendment and enlargement of our national code, as the Commentator upon the Constitution, as a teacher and law lecturer without an equal, as a judge urbane and benign, and as a man of spotless purity, he wrought so long, so indefatigably, and so well that he did more, perhaps, than any other man who sat upon the Supreme Bench to popularize the doctrines of that great tribunal and impress their importance and grandeur upon the public mind." Beveridge, too, is fulsome in his praise, declaring: "Handsome, vivacious, impressionable, his mind was a storehouse of knowledge, accurately measured and systematically arranged. His mental appetite was voracious and he had a very passion for research. His industry was untiring, his memory unfailing."<sup>12</sup> Like so many of his contemporaries, Story's political apprenticeship had been served as a member of Congress, but it was as expounder of law that his enduring fame was achieved.

## II

During the period that Marshall and Story and their colleagues were hewing enduring principles of constitutional law, other men were coming upon the scene and other problems arose. One more war was required to demonstrate con-

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<sup>11</sup> CARSON, *THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES*, Vol. I, p. 234.

<sup>12</sup> BEVERIDGE, *THE LIFE OF JOHN MARSHALL*, Vol. IV, p. 95.

clusively that American rights commanded respect, then foreign nations let us alone. A period of domestic expansion began, and sectional jealousies began to seethe. It was the era that produced orators as romantic, as eloquent, and as impassioned as ever stalked their way into legislative halls. Their day began when those Revolutionary heroes who were still alive were writing memoirs and sometimes benignly, sometimes querulously, tendered advice. Clay and Webster and Calhoun, all young men, edged off Jefferson, Claiborne and the Randolphins; and another vast group of youths, some of them just as great, and all of them dashing, came along.

From all these extraordinary men it is impossible to choose the greatest. For the nation, in the days immediately following the War of 1812 was not aligned behind a single champion, but rather divided itself into groups, and advocates for each appeared. Thus, in the heated battles (which were not always settled with words) some statesmen favored slavery, some abolition and others compromise.

Of the many Senators who distinguished themselves in this period that eventually led into the Civil War, one of the first to appear in the arena was Henry Clay. Clay, born in Virginia in 1777, moved to Kentucky at the age of twenty. From that time until his death in 1852 he was active in public affairs. Possessed of rare personal charm, gifted with tremendous oratorical power, a shrewd politician, he soon dominated the stage. His first appearance in the Senate was in 1806, when he was not quite thirty. He took but little part in legislative affairs the first session, however, for he was more interested in defending Aaron Burr against an abortive charge of treason. He soon settled down to hard work in Washington, and became one of the most persuasive of the younger group. In 1811 he transferred the scene of his activities to the House, where he immediately was chosen Speaker. From this commanding position he urged the declaration of War against England. The insulting acts of Eng-

land against our sovereignty had been carried on for years, but the aging Revolutionary patriots had no more stomach for armed resistance; the United States was definitely on the way to loss of self-respect when swashbuckling Clay and his fellows forced the issue, and started the war which confirmed American independence. Clay was then thirty-five years old. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, his chief ally in the House, was five years younger. He had earlier been a member of his State Legislature, and went to the House the same year Clay was elected Speaker. These two, together with William H. Crawford, United States Senator from Georgia, although only thirty-five when he entered that body, were leaders of the "War Party." Great men all, but all were consumed with an ambition none of them was to attain. Each tried desperately to be President, but the Presidency eluded the grasp of them all. Clay became Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams, Calhoun, Secretary of War under Monroe, and Crawford, Secretary of War under Madison; but the curse of sectionalism afflicted them all and denied each the Presidency.

Another young man who began to carve his name in history during this period was Daniel Webster, whose orations are even now models for clear, compact reasoning. A New Englander, he was a thoroughly adequate representative of that section in the forensic battles that were fought almost without cessation in the Halls of Congress. He was born in New Hampshire in 1782, and was elected to Congress from that state in 1812, where he took his seat in 1813, only a short time after the second War with England had begun, (a war, by the way, which he had passionately denounced) and when he had just turned thirty-one. He was re-elected in 1814, but in 1816 he moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where he had to build his political house anew. This did not take long, however, and after he had acquired an extensive legal practice, he was elected to Congress in 1822 and to the United States Senate from Massachusetts in 1827. A thor-

ough-going Federalist, at a time when their numbers were rapidly thinning, his pleas in defense of nationalistic doctrines were emotionally appealing and legally convincing. His epochal "Reply to Hayne" was made in the Senate in 1830, and was generally considered by Northerners as containing all that was needed to put an end to the doctrine of Nullification. Unfortunately, Nullification could no longer be settled by argument. Cold reason, either in defense of secession or of nationalism, could not overcome passion.

Webster had attained the age of forty-eight when his reply to Hayne was made. Hayne himself was not yet forty. Neither was then a young man, but each had been in public life a long time. Robert Y. Hayne (his middle name, appropriately enough, was Young) was born in South Carolina in 1791. He was elected Attorney-General of his native State in 1818, a rather responsible office for a youth of twenty-seven. He was first sent to the Senate in 1823. In 1832, his grateful state elected him Governor, and he went back there to put into practical effect his doctrine of Nullification, thereby precipitating the condition which called into being Jackson's Nullification Proclamation.

Other men too started their notable careers at this time. We have not time for them all, but we shall mention a few. John M. Clayton was Delaware's contribution. That State elected him as its Secretary of State after he had already been in the State Legislature, then sent him to the United States Senate in 1829, when he was thirty-three years old. This seaboard statesman later earned enduring fame as the American negotiator of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, the purpose of which was to prevent dissensions on the subject of canals across the American isthmus, and which remained in force for fifty years, at which time it was superseded by the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty.

Two other members of Congress should not be forgotten. Edward Everett and Rufus Choate were both members of the lower branch of Congress from Massachusetts, and both

achieved enviable reputations as orators in that golden age of oratory. Everett began his political career as Representative in 1824 at thirty, and Choate, at thirty-one, joined him in 1830. Each eventually became United States Senator from his native state. The two were brilliant leaders of the group opposed to Andrew Jackson's policies, attacking bitterly his determination not to renew the charter of the Bank of the United States.<sup>18</sup>

One Congressman of those days deserves more than passing attention. Nathan Clifford, born in New Hampshire in 1803, was elected to the State Legislature in 1830 and served until 1834, part of the time as Speaker. He was then appointed Attorney-General of the State, and after four years in that office, was elected to Congress. He served as Attorney-General of the United States under President Polk, and in 1858 was appointed Associate Justice of the Supreme Court by President Buchanan. Four years later Noah H. Swayne of Ohio joined him on the Supreme Bench. Swayne had also distinguished himself in his youth. Born in Virginia in 1804, he moved to Ohio in 1825, and in 1830 was appointed United States District Attorney at Columbus. His appointment to the Supreme Court was in recognition of his solid legal attainments as well as on account of his ardent support of the newly born Republican Party.

### III

Frequent compromises and forensic arguments could not stave off the Civil War forever. This conflict has often been termed "inevitable," and perhaps it was. There are some authorities, though, who believe that clear-thinking, non-sectional statesmen could have saved the day, and prevented the heavy toll of lives and property. George Fort Milton gives his well-documented work "The Eve of Conflict" the sub-title "Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War," and

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<sup>18</sup> Henry Wise, impassioned Whig from Virginia, was another Congressman who championed the Bank in 1833. He was then twenty-six.



ably develops the thesis that war would have been avoided if Douglas' ideas had been followed. Perhaps so, but men were in an angry mood, and nothing but violence could assuage them.

Stephen A. Douglas deserves a higher place in history than has been accorded him. Without a doubt he was one of the most farseeing, unselfish, genuine statesmen of the pre-Civil War period. Almost his entire political career was devoted to a whole-souled effort to avoid a conflict between the States, and when the firing upon Fort Sumter made all talk of compromise futile, he was broken completely, and he died shortly after the war began, on June 3, 1861. His death terminated his career when he was but fifty-eight, an age when most men in public life are in full vigor; but the shock he received when he realized that men's minds were closed to reason was too horrible to endure, and he succumbed. Unsuccessful though he was in his mightiest effort, he was yet a tremendous power during a long and lustrous career. From early youth until his death he exerted his influence for good. Douglas was born in Vermont on April 23, 1813, but in 1832 he headed west, settling in the small town of Winchester, in Illinois. He was admitted to the bar while still less than twenty-one. Only a few months later, almost before he had tried a case, he was elected State's Attorney. Thenceforward his progress was nothing short of spectacular. This amazing young man was elected to the Illinois Legislature in 1836, was Register of the Federal Land Office at Springfield in the following year, lost an election to Congress in 1838 by thirty-six votes, became Secretary of State of Illinois in 1841 and in the same year was appointed a Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court. He was then but twenty-seven years old! And if we may accept the reluctant testimony of a staunch Whig contemporary, this young Democratic fire-brand "is the ablest man on the bench to-day in Illinois."<sup>14</sup> But Douglas was not yet satis-

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<sup>14</sup> The tribute was made by Justin Butterfield, quoted in MILTON, *EVE OF CONFLICT* 25.

fied; in 1842 he narrowly missed being elected to the United States Senate; in 1847 he did not miss, but was sent to that body in triumph. In the interval between his defeat and his victory, he had twice been elected to the lower House of Congress. From that time on he was a national figure, being three times a Presidential candidate. Now, there *was* a man!

But we must proceed. The War was fought, and the Union was preserved. What debates had been unable to do, bloody battles accomplished. The young Union Generals, Ulysses S. Grant, who was only thirty-seven in 1860, and Phil Sheridan, who came out of the War in 1865 at thirty-four, subdued the opposition with bullets and sabers, and the nation embarked upon another period, one that contained almost as many tragedies as the war itself. Few men emerged from those dark days of reconstruction unscathed by attack or unimpeached in integrity. Gradually, however, common sense resumed its place and a united nation began again to extend its sphere of influence. Civil War heroes faded into the background, and a new generation took the center of the stage.<sup>15</sup> Progressivism was born, struck out, and, espoused by young valiants throughout the nation, prospered.

Probably two of the greatest young statesmen who rescued the country from the excesses of capitalism in which it had become engulfed at the turn of the century, were William J. Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt, who, paradoxically enough, were always battling each other as well as the common enemy. Born within two years of each other (Roosevelt in 1858 and Bryan in 1860), their careers ran almost paral-

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<sup>15</sup> James A. Garfield and his group bridged the gap between the two generations. He was President only a few months, from his inauguration on March 4, 1881, until his assassination in the following July. Not the most brilliant man in history, he had nevertheless had a notable career. He was successively President of a college, State Senator of Ohio, Major-General of the Army of the United States, and Representative-elect to the National Congress, all between the ages of twenty-four and thirty.

lel. The personal magnetism of each was so compelling that many of their respective followers were attracted by sheer force of will.

William Jennings Bryan early demonstrated a flare for politics. According to a biography written by his wife, his political career began at Centralia, Illinois. At the somewhat youthful age of 12 he delivered a speech after listening to the most distinguished democrats in the State of Illinois.<sup>18</sup> His collegiate years were filled with oratorical honors. During his college days he met other future brilliant political leaders who competed with him in oratorical contests. A short time after he started to practice law he moved from Illinois to Nebraska and at the age of thirty he, a Democrat, was elected to Congress in a Republican district. Two years later he had to run in a new district, the state having been reapportioned, and won this time also.

Bryan's national fame came with one speech. It was delivered at the Democratic National Convention in 1896, which Bryan attended as a delegate. It was the year when the Democratic party was torn between the conservative monetary policy of leaders of the Grover Cleveland type and the free silver theories of the western group. The advocates of free silver up until that time had no spokesman who could eloquently portray their beliefs—but in the turbulent convention Bryan hurled to the world his epochal "Cross of Gold" speech. From that time Bryan was undisputed leader of his party for almost twenty years. Men were unable to resist his eloquence and personality, and they followed him time and again—but never to victory.

Theodore Roosevelt, although vigorous and powerful, had been unable to achieve favorable recognition from the leaders of the Republican Party and they nominated him for Vice-President in 1900 to bury him. This man, then forty-two years old, had demonstrated too zealous an en-

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<sup>18</sup> Quotations from the biography written by Mrs. Bryan appear in MARK SULLIVAN, *OUR TIMES*, Vol. I, p. 115 *et seq.*

thusiasm for social legislation to please the "Old Guard." When he had been governor of New York his entire record in politics had been filled with strenuous efforts toward reform. His public life had begun in 1881 when, at the age of twenty-three, he had been elected to the General Assembly of New York, to which he was three times re-elected.

Roosevelt is generally considered as being one of the first public men to advocate the passage of social legislation and to curb the huge trusts and corporations, which, without a doubt, throttled labor, ruined weak competitors and gouged the public. Roosevelt, ably assisted by crusading young senators and other public spirited citizens, started on a path of social reform which, despite frequent efforts at obstruction, the nation has since been taking. Roosevelt ushered in the day when the Pure Food Act and the Meat Inspection Bill were passed. His term was also the time when America's younger leaders were urging the nation to become imperialistic, to extend its power over the entire world.

Prominent among Roosevelt's followers were two Senators, among others, Jonathan P. Dolliver of Iowa and Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana. These were among the insurgent group in the Senate who broke away from the old leadership and attempted to fasten liberal ideas upon the conservative Republican Party. Of these two, Dolliver was the older by four years, having been born in 1858. At the age of twenty-six he was keynote speaker in the Iowa Republican State Convention and his brilliant speech at this time assured his fame. Beveridge was present when the speech was delivered and he was tremendously impressed by this brilliant Iowan. Dolliver was elected to Congress in 1888, where he served six consecutive terms. He was appointed United States Senator in 1900 to fill a vacancy and was elected to that office in 1901 and 1907. Beveridge early gave promise of a successful career. He was elected United States Senator in 1899 at the age of thirty-six. Irritated that

many leaders<sup>17</sup> were chary of his political ambitions because of his youth, he catalogued some of the youths in American history. His list contains several of the men who have been given attention herein.

What of our own day? In the United States Senate at the present time sits Rush Holt of West Virginia. He was elected at the age of twenty-nine and had to wait several months before he was old enough to take the oath; one of his colleagues, Robert LaFollette, Jr., is now forty-two but was elected at thirty.

There are other young men, too, in State offices, in the lower house of Congress and in executive positions. Old lawyers, unable many times to cope with the young lawyers of the governmental agencies, have referred to them somewhat ambiguously as the "bright young men."

There has not been a generation which has failed to produce its share of whole-hearted, ambitious, brilliant youths who are willing to give of their time and energies in a fight for principles. There is no greater folly than to wait for age before attempting a battle for truth. Accomplishments have never depended upon age, but upon ability.

*Clarence J. Ruddy.*

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<sup>17</sup> Among such leaders was Clem Stuebaker of South Bend, Indiana.