On American Character and Culture: A British Appraisal

Denis W. Brogan of Cambridge University has attempted to interpret America in the 20th century as his countryman, Lord Bryce, did in the later 19th century and as Alexis de Tocqueville did in the earlier 19th century. In his 15 essays, republished under the title **American Aspects** (Harper and Row, New York, 1964. 207 pp., $4), Brogan does not confine himself to the 20th century, although the essays, originally published from 1946 to 1963, focus on that period.

Perhaps the most interesting essays are those that deal with the American Civil War; they are not intended to throw new light on that war but to appraise its effect, continuing to the present day, on the American character. Brogan believes that war was the great experience of American history, leaving its mark on both the South and the North—in the South, bitterness, especially because of the failure of the Union to "bind up the wounds," as Lincoln had hoped it would, and in the North, revolutionary change from a political to a business state. There was no "restoration" of pre-Civil War America as many hoped (p. 54), but the dominant Republican party, although it began in 1856 as a moral protest against the expansion of slavery, was taken over by business and maintained the dominance of business over government until the great depression of 1929.

Brogan's emphasis on this "revolution," subordinating the state to business, suggests that it might be compared to the great revolutions of the 17th century, culminating in the Thirty Year War that subordinated the Church to the state (*Cuius regio eius religio*), and that it may have been no less important than the American (1776), French (1789), and Russian (1917) revolutions, which sought to subordinate the state to an ideology. In all revolutions, however, in time there is at least a partial "restoration"—*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—and the "restoration" after the Civil War may be exhibited in the reassertion of politics over business by the "New Deal," the "Fair Deal," and the "Great Society," and in the reassertion of the Union by the collaboration of all sections of the country in the Civil War Centennial just coming to an end.

The British people, Brogan notes, did not properly appraise the American Civil War; many of them, like Brogan himself in his youth, favored the South because of its chivalry. British statesmen of the time, harrassed by disturbances in Italy, Poland, Germany, and China, thought it of relatively little importance, although they considered intervention to establish Confederate independence until the Union victory at Antietam convinced them that such a policy "was not safe and so not right" (p. 40). He mentions that Karl Marx (then in England), John Bright, and British labor opposed slavery and therefore favored the North, but he does not mention the thesis advanced by the American historian and diplomat William E. Dodd that Lincoln issued the preliminary emancipation proclamation in September 1862 to convince the British Government and people that the war was against slavery, which British opinion generally opposed, no less than to save the Union, and thus to make it impossible for Britian to intervene on the side of the South.

Brogan emphasizes the "civil" character of the "war between the states" in that members of the same family often fought on opposite sides and that Robert E. Lee had the unique distinction of having each side offer him the opportunity to be its commander-in-chief. He does not notice that Ulysses S. Grant was dissuaded from going with the South by the eloquence of Stephen A. Douglas, who, after his defeat for the presidency in 1860, urged Democrats to get behind Lincoln to preserve the Union. He does notice that Douglas kept "Black Jack" Logan on the Union side (p. 30). Incidentally, Brogan agrees with many Americans that the event which made the war inevitable was the rejection of Douglas by the Southern Democrats in the Charleston Convention of 1860. It was the conflicts of loyalties as well as the heavy casualties that made the war so traumatic in American experience.

The essays, which were first published in such diverse publications as the *Saturday Review*, the *Times Literary Supplement, Harper's*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* and as an introduction to a new edition of *The Education of Henry Adams*, are of varied style and merit. The author notes that he selected them from a large assortment which included an unpublished speculation, made in November 1948, on President-elect Dewey's cabinet. The ephemeral character of some are illustrated by the first, on the American Presidency, which was inspired by the assassination of President Kennedy, and the last essay, a review of President Eisenhower's "Mandate for Change" which, in Brogan's opinion, omits the most interesting episodes of the Eisenhower administration and illustrates the General's "amiable innocence" in the political arena. There is a rather uninforming appreciation of Theodore Roosevelt and an analysis of the political influence and literary quality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and of its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, whom Lincoln addressed as "this little lady who made this big war" (p. 178), and about whom Brogan writes that, like all the Beechers, she was ". . . passionate, unstable, indiscreet, and uncritical" (p. 185). Henry Adams, according to Brogan, discovered in his life-long education that being a Bostonian, and an Adams, was not enough to adjust him to the rapidly changing world, but Brogan suggests that he may have contributed more to America by his writings than he would have if he had become President like one grandfather or a millionaire like the other (p. 139).

More subtle and significant are Brogan's efforts to analyze the American character and culture. The American people, he believes, have suffered from an "illusion of omnipotence" which makes them confident that they can make the world as they want it and convinces them that such events as Soviet expansion and the Communist take-over in China must have been

due to the incompetence or treason of some American (p. 17). This illusion has existed, particularly with respect to technology, and has made it difficult for Americans to understand how the Soviets could have got ahead of them in outer space as indicated by the first "Sputnik" in 1957 (p. 101).

Brogan notes the declining belief in Europe, after the Civil War, that America was the liberator of oppressed peoples, as it manifested imperialistic tendencies in the Spanish American war and the Canadian reciprocity proposal (1911), which Senator Champ Clark said would lead to the annexation of Canada. The British, however, conceived the United States as an ally, if not a semicolony, up to World War I and were embittered because it entered that war too late and abandoned responsibility for the peace too soon after it was over. Franklin Roosevelt, however, changed that attitude, to the surprise of some American conservatives, and Brogan believes that close Anglo-American relations have been assured since World War II. The British, although sometimes fearful that an unconsidered American initiative may mean to them "annihilation without representation," appreciate that, for their security, there is no alternative to the American Alliance.

Brogan notes the common interpretation of the American personality of 1776 as that of a man who had escaped the burdens of a historic past and was destined to establish a "new order of the ages" (p. 155), contrasted with the common interpretation of 20th-century Americans as interested only in affluence and security, without the spirit of adventure. He considers both interpretations exaggerated. Early Americans were influenced by their historic origin, and modern Americans, like all moderns, find it difficult to adjust to the speed of change and the hazards of the atomic age. Americans in all periods, he thinks, have been characterized by more egalitarianism, optimism, and uncritical belief in democratic institutions, and by less envy of, and resentments against, other nations than is usual in the European nations (p. 158). American culture, in the broad anthropological sense, he thinks, is insufficiently mindful of culture in the narrow sense of discrimination of excellence in literature, the arts, and society. He lectures Americans, rather pedantically, on the need to improve education in this field, as he does on the need for a greater sense of the responsibilities of citizenship in the state, the Nation, and the world: these lectures precede a discussion of the position of Catholics in the predominantly Protestant American Republic (p. 128).

Among the most interesting essays is that in which Brogan compares America at the time of his first visit in 1926 with America in 1956. The similarities outweigh the differences, but the later period was characterized by the greater importance of the armed services; the greater control of business by government; the revived interest in religion, conceived as an aspect of Americanism (differing from the skepticism manifested in 1926 after the Tennessee "Monkey trial"); and the developing interest, especially among members of the younger generation, in family, society, education, and the pursuit of excellence (p. 90 ff).

The reader of these essays will be convinced that Brogan is a sincere friend of America, that his interpretation is on the whole accurate, that it will contribute to international understanding, and that he has something useful to tell Americans about themselves.

QUINCY WRIGHT
Charlottesville, Virginia

Academic Administration

The Administration of Academic Affairs in Higher Education. Robert L. Williams. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1965. 208 pp. $6.

In this treatise on academic administration in American colleges and universities, Robert Williams writes from the background of an educational psychologist who has been a registrar, director of educational research, assistant to the provost, assistant dean of faculties, and, since 1958, administrative dean at the University of Michigan. The preface states that the author's plan is neither to present a case history of administration in a particular institution nor to offer an outline of procedures. As it turns out, however, the book departs from the announced disclaimers.

Twelve chapters deal successively with these topics: the faculty, academic appointments, academic personnel administration, appointment of nonteaching personnel, promotions, faculty salaries, teaching load, instructional costs, budget planning, space utilization, planning, and administrative red tape.

Williams begins with the truism that the faculty is "the heart of an educational institution." Few would disagree, but is it likely, as he goes on to assert, that able administrators view their main role as being simply to "smooth the way of their faculty"? Although it may be true that "all of the ten universities which show the highest quality of achievement would also show the most decentralized administration in academic affairs," this hardly is proof that the "greater the degree of faculty control, the greater is likely to be the intellectual superiority and distinction on the part of the whole university." In short, it does not follow that a scheme which works well at Harvard or Michigan will work equally well in making a lesser place into a distinguished university.

Although it is not clear for whom this monograph was intended, it should be useful to the uninitiated in explaining the role of a faculty senate, how academic and nonacademic positions may be classified, the meaning of tenure, mechanisms for handling promotions in grade and in salary, and a variety of other matters having to do with orderly governance. At times we may need to remind ourselves, as Robert Hutchins once remarked, that many academicians prefer anarchy to any form of government in their own affairs.

Some of the information given (for example, on salaries) is neither the latest nor the most comprehensive available to the author before the book went to press. Supporting detail is excessive in some chapters (teaching load, space utilization) and skimpy in others (planning, administrative red tape). In general, the treatment is long on procedures and short on insightfulness of the kind required by departmental chairmen, deans, provosts, and presidents to handle really knotty administrative problems. Since the natural inclination in many places is to approach such problems on an *ad hoc* basis, the procedural guidelines set forth by Williams should be widely useful. Administrative ground rules or procedures are structural rather than functional in their main import, however, and everybody needs to realize that they are the beginning rather than the end of effective educational leadership.

LOGAN WILSON
American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.