

Introduction

This Republic was not created by accident. The "New Order" proclaimed on the Great Seal of the United States did not come into effect automatically. It cannot be sustained automatically. Perpetuation of the American way depends upon general interest in the deeper aspects of what is an essentially co-operative enterprise.

While there are many admirable studies on the development, the institutions, and the political theory of our country, of late there have been surprisingly few attempts to examine the actual significance of this federal union in the long panorama of history. That is what this book seeks to do.

The thought that has been woven into the American pattern of life is not particularly abstruse. It has aspects of sublimity, but that which is sublime is not difficult to appreciate. Indifference is always the chief impediment to understanding. Always the best way to combat indifference is to arouse interest, which becomes vital and permanent if focused on underlying principles. But first these principles must be examined and identified.

Though familiarity does not necessarily breed contempt, it certainly tends to dull the edge of curiosity. So it is natural that foreign observers have long been more interested than Americans in analyzing the differences that distinguish our Republic from any other political experiment of this or earlier times. It has not, however, been the concern of foreigners to point out that if we fail to recognize and value our advantages for ourselves, they will tend to disappear. The more excellent the type of government, the

more subject it is to deterioration. The perpetuation of this Republic can no longer be taken for granted by its citizens.

De Tocqueville, writing in 1832, admitted that "in America I saw more than America." And the same transcendent quality impressed itself on Bryce, who said in 1888 that his endeavor was to trace "what is peculiar" in America "to its fundamental ideas." As both these observers realized, the fundamental ideas of America are decisively different from those that have controlled in Europe.

Anyone who is really interested in the role of the United States in world history will probably familiarize himself with de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and with Bryce's *The American Commonwealth*. But neither of these enduring books, nor any contemporary study in the field of politics, is primarily directed to an examination of the thought whereby the United States has evolved to its present position of majesty. The current tendency of American political analysis is descriptive rather than speculative. This is deplorable for a people who owe so much to the political application of abstract ideas.

Since the days of de Tocqueville and Bryce, and especially since the debacle of European civilization, the necessity of examining the validity of American political philosophy, as such, has become increasingly apparent. The advance of Communism has brought "ideological warfare" into common parlance. But a war of ideas cannot be won on quicksands of intellectual confusion. Our verbal difficulties—with such key words as "liberty" and "democracy"—are illustrative of an appalling lack of certainty in the thought that words are designed to express.

Many of our blunders and much of our apprehension traces to this confusion. Its elimination requires a conscious and sustained effort to separate the basic from the superficial. There is no longer any need to defend the desirability of any honest endeavor to clarify and simplify. But to outline this objective is the easiest part of our undertaking.

A study in American political philosophy must necessarily chart its course between Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, the shallow shoreline of descriptive detail, no matter how interesting or illustrative, must be avoided. On the other hand, the explora-

tion of deep water soon involves us in concealed hazards where the presumptuous pilot is the least reliable.

But we know that the passage is there and the spirit of adventure alone would call us to attempt its intricacies. The navigation of the fifteenth century was primitive and faulty; yet it discovered America. Now America is ready for rediscovery—by Americans. If the voyage charted by this book encourages more skillful navigators to more thorough exploration, it will have served its purpose.

The journey that we shall undertake may seem at times to wander a little, in time and space. If so, it is always with the objective of seeing more clearly what lies ahead. The American tradition cannot be carried forward without appreciation of whence it came, and how it grew. The tradition is strong because its roots run deep and wide. We shall try to trace them. We seek to know the soil that provides our sustenance.

The men who established this Republic thought continually of "posterity." The dream of building a Commonwealth more gracious than any which had gone before was ever in their minds, and was reflected in their acts. The constant aim, as one of them wrote, was to "lay a foundation for after ages to understand their liberty as men and Christians." For this purpose, said William Penn, "we put the power in the people."

To put the power in the people implies faith. It implies that the component individuals are, for the most part, already endowed with self-control. This Republic is grounded in the belief that the individual can govern himself. On the validity of that belief it will stand—or fall.

As our title implies, we seek to examine this dual power—that which the people possess as individuals and that which has been entrusted to them as citizens of this Republic. That endeavor is not the less desirable because, in this age of disintegration, it demands a continuous effort to integrate.

We seek to find whether there is really unity and meaning in the American way of life. We ask whether our generation, in its turn, is thoughtful for posterity, which in time will ask what we have done with the heritage provisionally entrusted to us.