

The Herald of Gospel Liberty

February 21, 1929



Ewing Galloway. Artist unknown.

Copyright 1929

PRESIDENT WASHINGTON AND HIS CABINET

PUBLISHED BY
The Christian Publishing Association
DAYTON, OHIO

The Religious Faith of Great Statesmen

BY ARCHER WALLACE

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS once asked this question: "Could Gladstone have swayed England with his fervent eloquence, as the moon moves the tides, if he had been a gambling, swearing, boozing squire?" To ask such a question is to answer it. Although he owed much to his great natural gifts, no one would dispute the saying of his biographer, John Morley: "Not for two centuries has Great Britain produced a ruler in whom the religious motive was paramount in like degree."

In 1818, when he was nine years of age, Gladstone's mother wrote to a friend: "I am quite sure that William has been truly converted to God." His influence for good at Eton was such that there were youths who acknowledged that their decision to study at Oxford was made in order to be near young Gladstone. When he reached the age of twenty-one he wrote in his diary that the greatest ambition of his life was to have the life of God the supreme habit of his soul.

There is no need to write of Gladstone's extraordinary intellectual qualities. His political opponents were as willing to acknowledge these gifts as were his friends. For sixty-five years he was closely associated with many of the greatest minds of his age; yet there are those who would not hesitate to say that, in the richness and variety of his gifts and achievements, he was the peer of all his contemporaries.

The most striking thing about this "Matterhorn of Men" was his strong religious faith. He accepted Christ as his Savior with the simplicity of a little child. All his serious thinking and research deepened his religious faith and strengthened his convictions.

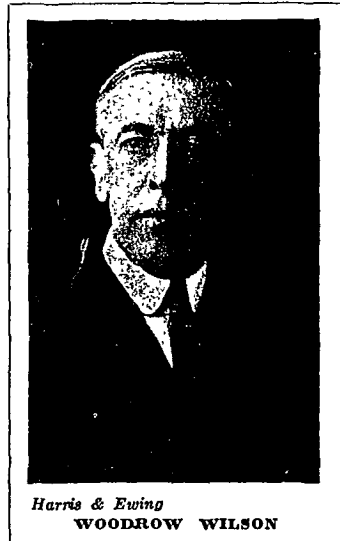
One day a member of the House of Commons said: "You know, Mr. Speaker, we all believe in a God of some sort or another." This flippant remark aroused Gladstone's indignation. He thundered his protest. "I am not willing," he said, "that Christianity shall stand in any place lower than that which is indispensable." Throughout his life, while carrying burdens which might have crushed strong men, he was sustained by his practice of prayer. He said he never could have overcome his extreme nervousness but for the grace of God, and he rarely made an important speech without spending some time in silent prayer.

He died on the tenth of May, 1898. "I knelt by his deathbed," says the Bishop of Saint Andrews, "and received his parting benediction. As I turned away I felt I had been on the Mount of Transfiguration and had seen a glimpse of Paradise through the gates ajar."

John Bright was a contemporary of Gladstone. As a political force in

Great Britain in the middle of the last century, he stands in the first rank. He had a passion for righteous causes which burned at white heat, and, coupled with this, a remarkable gift of oratory. His transparent sincerity was such that, even when he opposed great causes, as, for instance, the Crimean War, all regarded him with a respect which approached reverence.

He was a native of Birmingham, and Rev. R. W. Dale, who was a son of the same city, describes a great meeting in the town hall, at which John Bright was to speak. People were wedged so close together as to be uncomfortable. Bright had been ill, and the meeting was really a demonstration by political admirers to celebrate his recovery. It was at a time when feeling was running high, party passion and bitterness were every-



where, and Bright had many enemies. The vast audience was with him, and expected him to answer and assail his opponents. But when the applause had ceased, he began to speak, in reverent tones, of God's goodness in restoring him to health. His sense of gratitude to God was so sincere that the whole audience was deeply moved as, at first, they had been surprised.

The Australian writer, Rev. F. W. Boreham, says that, "The one long endeavor of John Bright's life was to inscribe the Sermon on the Mount on the pages of the statute book." On one occasion Bright said of himself and his associates, "We have tried to put Holy Writ into an Act of Parliament."

Perhaps no other statesman has ever made such frequent and effective use of the Bible as John Bright. He was no

faddist, but, in a simple, direct, impressive manner, he knew how to draw upon his amazing knowledge of the Scriptures. He belonged to the sect of Quakers, and throughout life acknowledged the absolute supremacy of Jesus. In many respects his life was a troubled one. He sustained a succession of heavy blows, but he bore them with Christian fortitude. His faith sustained him in hours of deepest need.

There is a passage in a letter written by Boswell in which he gives description of the statesman, William Wilberforce: "I saw a shrimp mount the table; but as I listened he grew and grew, until the shrimp became a whale." Wilberforce had serious physical handicaps; so serious that when he was a boy his parents thought of his future with many misgivings. His career is a striking illustration of the soul's triumph over terrible odds. He exerted a great influence over his fellows, and the way in which he championed noble causes made him one of the great moral forces of his generation.

Wilberforce belonged to that class of men who felt the exceeding sinfulness of sin. His own sense of unworthiness was ever with him. His favorite text of Scripture, ever upon his lips, was the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me."

Wilberforce solemnly dedicated his life to God, and he devoted his powers to fight for the emancipation of the slaves. Like Wolfe at Quebec, Wilberforce received the news of victory as he was dying. The end was very near when messengers hurried into his room to tell him that the Emancipation Bill had been passed. What the dying statesman said was characteristic of him: "Thank God that I have lived to see this day." Frail and misshapen, a dwarf in body, Wilberforce was a giant in mind and in soul. And it was his unflinching faith in Jesus Christ that made him great.

The great statesmen of the New World have been, like their fellows across the seas, men of deep religious faith. There is not room here to quote all we would wish of that letter which George Washington wrote to his wife in 1775, but this paragraph reveals how reverently he assumed his responsibilities: "You may believe me when I assure you, in the most solemn manner, that, so far from seeking this employment, I have used every effort in my power to avoid it. . . . I shall rely confidently on that Providence which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return to you in the fall."

Washington had, to a very unusual de-

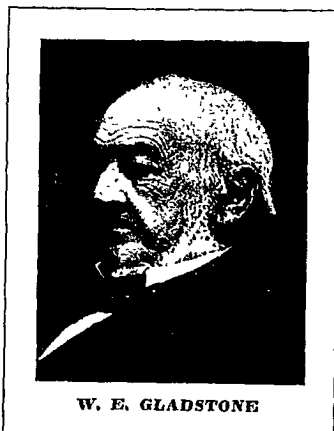
gree, a sense of God's presence wherever he went. There were times when he appeared foolhardy, but it was due to this fact: he believed that God was taking care of him. After a disastrous fight with Indians early in his career, he wrote to his mother: "The Virginian troops showed a great deal of bravery, and were nearly all killed, for I believe that out of three companies scarcely thirty men were left alive. By the all-powerful dispensation of Providence I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation."

When the War of Independence came to a close on October 19, 1781, Washington issued orders for a general thanksgiving to God in these words: "The commander-in-chief earnestly recommends that the troops not on duty should universally attend, with the seriousness of deportment and gratitude of heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing interpositions of Providence demand of us."

If what Plato said is true, that the best rulers are those who rule unwillingly, then Washington's success is not to be wondered at. He did not seek office; he was sought. When he was elected to the President's chair, amid scenes of great enthusiasm, he went to Federal Hall to take the oath of office. There he stood before the throng with his hand upon the open Bible. Was it an accident that his hand rested on the words, "His hands were made strong by the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob"?

It is almost impossible to read any speech of Abraham Lincoln's without seeing the influence of the Bible upon his life. There are very few speeches delivered during the last seven years of his life which do not contain direct quotations from Scripture. Speaking of Lincoln's amazing knowledge and apt use of the Bible, Bishop Simpson said, in his funeral address: "He read his Bible frequently. He loved it for its great truths, and he tried to be guided by its precepts. He believed in Christ as the Savior of sinners, and I think he was sincere in trying to bring his life into harmony with the precepts of revealed religion. I doubt if any President has shown such trust in God, or in public document so frequently referred to divine aid."

On September 7, 1864, a committee of colored people in the city of Baltimore presented Lincoln with a Bible, and in acknowledging the gift, he said: "In regard to this great gift I have but to say: It is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Savior gave to the world is communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare here and hereafter are to be found portrayed in it. To you I return my most sincere thanks for the very elegant copy of the great Book of God which you present." Who could read



W. E. GLADSTONE

this passage from a conversation he had with Bateman without realizing how deep were Lincoln's religious convictions. He said: "I know there is a God, and he hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know that his hand is in it. If he has a place for me—and I think he has—I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God."

President Woodrow Wilson lived too

recently for any true appraisal of his character to have been arrived at. The fires of prejudice and political feeling have not fully died down, but the following letter, pasted on the front leaf of New Testaments distributed to American soldiers and sailors as they left for Europe in July, 1917, was written and signed by President Wilson: "The Bible is the Word of life. I beg that you will read it and find this out for yourselves. Read, not merely snatches here and there, but long passages that will be the road to the heart of it. You will find it full of the things you have wondered about, and been troubled about, all your lives, as men have been always; and the more you read, the more it will become plain to you what things are worth while and what are not; what things make men happy—loyalty, right dealing, speaking the truth, readiness to give everything for what they think their duty, and most of all, the wish that they may have the real approval of the Christ, who gave everything for them. . . . When you have read the Bible you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty." —Copyright 1929.

The Test of Manhood

BY REV. H. H. SMITH

DR. Carl G. Doney, president of Williamette University, sent this fine message to his students who were serving in the ranks of the World War:

Many of God's plans may require the pain of body and the loss of life, but there never was a plan of God that required the loss of righteousness. You are meeting more enemies than those sent out by Kaiser William; they will steal upon you to make you careless, to lead you to excuse, to cause you to justify. Lift up your eyes; see yourselves home again with parents and wives-to-be and fellow citizens. You will be in the church again, fronting the great mysteries and baring your soul to God. Unless you come home pure, with the glory of manhood unsullied, with the white banner of holy purpose undefiled, you will walk for all your years the barefoot, thorn-strewn road of biting self-reproach. That is too great a price for not killing the secret vandals of the soul. God keep you, guard you, make you strong and bring you home again.

The war is past, but the war against sin is never past, and both young and old may profit by this fine message of the college president to his students. How true it is that while God's plan may require the pain of body or the loss of life, his plans can never require the loss of righteousness. And if those who are severely tempted could but see the awful price they must pay if they yield to

temptation—"to walk the barefoot, thorn-strewn road of biting self-reproach"—they would never pay the price.

We may be victorious and overcome the severest temptations. God, who requires righteousness, would never make a world in which sin should be a necessity. It was a matter of great gratification that so many of our young men stood the test of the severest temptation during the World War and came home unsullied. A Y. M. C. A. paper published this incident during the war:

While reading Dr. Exner's little pamphlet, "Friend or Enemy," an eighteen-year-old Michigan boy was jeered at by his corporal, who with a sneer said: "Oh, you'll be going along with the bunch before long." Quietly the lad replied: "That's all right, corporal, I've a mother, four sisters, and a sweetheart back home, and I'm proud of it. Believe me, I'm going back to them just as clean as I came out."

Do not think that such a boy will make a weak soldier,—just the reverse: "His strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure."

"To every man there openeth
A high way and a low;
The high soul climbs the high way,
And the low soul groups the low;
And in between, on misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro;
And every man decideth
Which way his soul shall go."

Ashland, Virginia.