

# MEN WHO MADE AMERICA

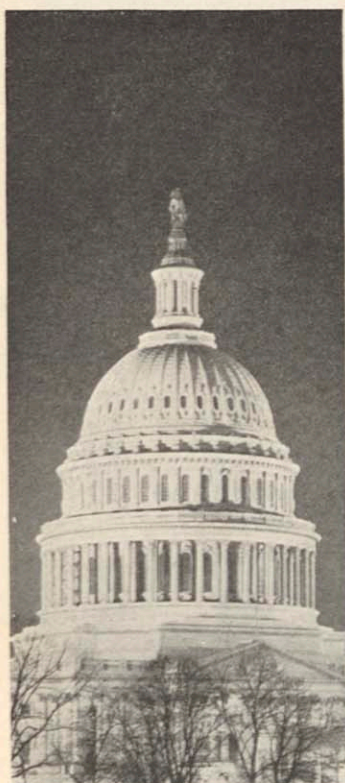
by

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

Challenging the lofty dome of the Capitol in Washington rise memorials to her great men: the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and others. But, in these days of debunking reputations, does the fame of these men survive as solidly as the structures which honor them? Read Dr. Phelps's vigorous reply



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SUPPOSE in all human history there never was a nation so fortunate at its founding as the United States of America; fortunate in having at its cradle so many first-class statesmen. It is often said that a great crisis produces a great man; such a remark would not be true, even if a great man appeared. A crisis never produces a hero; sometimes it reveals a hero.

Among American leaders from 1776 to 1788, were George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, John Adams, James Madison, and other men who would today be conspicuous if they were members of the United States Senate.

Benjamin Franklin signed four important historical documents; the Declaration of Independence, the French Treaty of Alliance, the Treaty of Peace, and the United States Constitution. I believe he is the only American who signed all four of these state papers.

It is in no spirit of belittling the present and praising the past that I compare our times with those. The years 1911-1920 needed more than they needed anything else, statesmen of genius; it is probable that the three greatest men who emerged from the war-time were Nikolai Lenin, Benito Mussolini, and Woodrow Wilson. They changed the course of history. Lenin, single-handed, controlled an enormous heterogeneous country when it was in a condition of disorder and despair. Had he shared the views of Mussolini, Russia would not now be a Soviet republic. In other words, he shaped it to his will.

Had Mussolini been an anarchist or a communist, Italy today would be a Soviet republic, instead of being exactly the opposite. Mussolini shaped the ancient country of Italy at a time when it was at the mercy of any man strong enough to take it, to his own will; even as Napoleon put an end to the French Revolution and to the republic that followed it.

It is difficult to imagine any future time when the writers of history will not give a large place to Lenin and Mussolini, two men whose views were so contrary that they resembled each other only in energy and resolution.

As for Woodrow Wilson, his position in the future is not

so clear and not so sure as that of his Russian and Italian contemporaries. But if the world goes his way, that is, if the League of Nations is joined by the United States of America and becomes an efficient method of preventing war, if secret treaties should be abolished and the old idea of 'balance of power' relegated to the scrap-heap, then the name of Woodrow Wilson will be brighter than it is now.

But does any one believe that during the years 1911-1920 there was any American of the calibre of Benjamin Franklin or of the philosophical grasp of Thomas Jefferson, or of the pure unselfishness and patient ability of George Washington, or of the creative power in public finance of Alexander Hamilton?

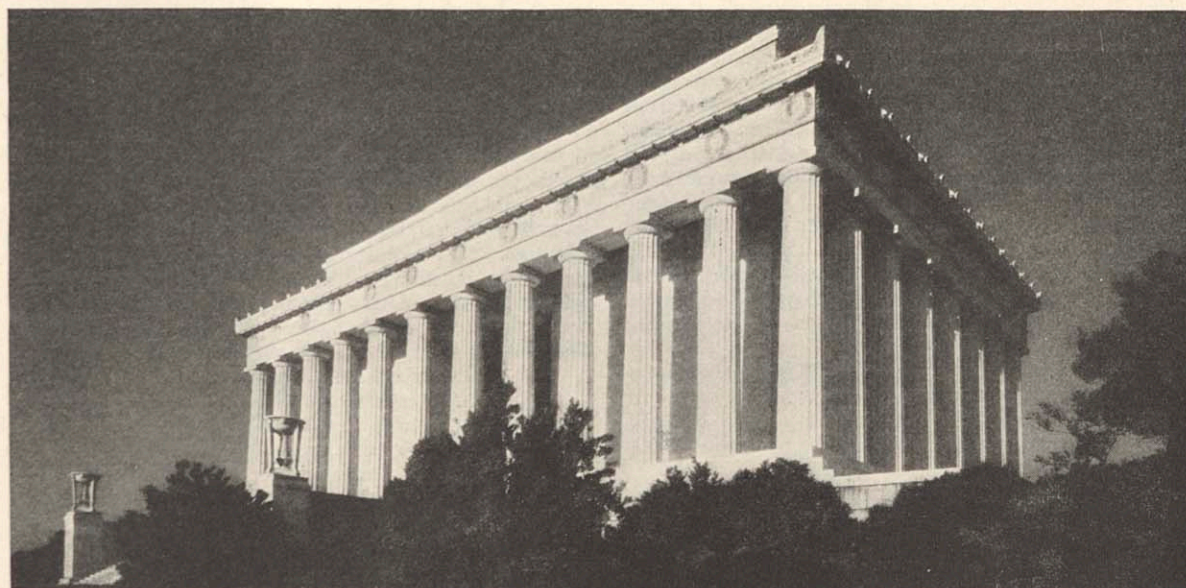
The late Professor William Graham Sumner, in considering the history of the United States, our growth from thirteen colonies along a strip of seacoast, through the acquisition of the Louisiana purchase, through Florida, through Texas, through the California coast, into a solidly secure position between two oceans, with a friendly power on the north and a weaker power on the south, said it seemed incredible that any nation should have had such good luck and such an opportunity; and he believed that with a national folly as great as our national good

fortune, we threw them away by taking Hawaii, the Philippines, and Porto Rico. But that is another story.

I agree with him that our history is almost incredibly lucky; but I would add to our good fortune in the acquisition of land an equal good fortune in having at our birth a half dozen men of genius, actuated by a common purpose.

How great in mind and character was Washington? Any famous man of the past who can survive the fourth decade of this twentieth century must have had the root of the matter in him. These present days are bad for heroes. The heroic figures of history are now being submitted to a scrutiny both searching and ironical. Many of our clever writers of novelized history believe that standards of morality have changed: sometimes the wish is father to the thought. Be that as it may, the attitude toward Washington is similar to that of the Athenian citizen who voted against Aristides because he was tired of hearing him called "the Just." Thus the process of "debunking" goes merrily on; for the surest way to attract attention to oneself is not to exalt Washington and other heroes, but to befool them.

The new chroniclers of times that are past come not to praise a hero, but to bury him. (Turn to page 59)



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