

# Thomas Garrigue Masaryk\*

**T**O the name of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, founder and first President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, attaches one of the most amazing achievements of practical statesmanship in all ages. A fugitive from Austrian "justice" in 1914, he carried against tremendous odds his campaign for the disruption of the Hapsburg empire and the liberation of the Czecho-Slovak people to a triumphant climax by October, 1918. Today he stands out, head of the most democratic and progressive of the Succession States, as the greatest champion of international sanity, of racial reconciliation, of economic reconstruction and social progress on the continent. Yet his brilliant record as a politician is merely incidental to his true greatness. He is the leader of his people not in a political, but in a moral and religious sense.

He spent his life in fighting official Christianity—stereotyped Protestantism as well as Popery. The conventionally religious regard him as the Anti-Christ, the incarnation of rationalism and freethinking. The truth is that Masaryk is perhaps the one real Christian among the practical leaders of contemporary Europe—the one statesman who not only bases his working code on Christian ethics, but who also translates that code into everyday practice.

In one of his writings he asks: "Has there ever been a better, more exalted, more divine life than that of Christ?" And he answers with Rousseau: "If Socrates suffered and died like a philosopher, Christ suffered and died like a God." In the next sentence he gives the clue of his religion. "Christ's whole life is Truth. God's Son is the highest simplicity; he shows purity and sanctity in the true sense of the word. Nothing external attaches to him and his life, no formalism, no ritualism; everything comes from the inner being, everything is thoroughly true, thoroughly beautiful, thoroughly good." Masaryk's life is devoted to the quest of truth as the highest simplicity, the disentangling of the substantial living thing, of reality, from the maze of the external, the incidental; his battle is against that formalism which stifles the essence of life. He calls himself a Realist. The political party which he founded and which ultimately achieved the liberation of his country was called the Realist party—the party seeking the salvation

of the nation through recognition and moulding of realities rather than in glamorous dreams of past and future.

Almost every person carries in his soul the image of some event or other, rising in an uncanny clarity from the mist of childhood's half-memories—a central impression, a kernel around which later experience crystallizes, something that gives color and direction to his whole life. Sometimes it is what Freudians call a complex; but it is not necessarily pathological; sometimes it is a trifling detail that acquires a disproportionate, and to other people often unintelligible, emotional emphasis without being of a traumatic character. Masaryk tells of two such epochal occurrences in his childhood. His father was a gamekeeper on one of the imperial estates in Moravia, and they were very poor. Once in a year the emperor came down with a retinue of nobles and generals and diplomatists, to shoot hares, partridges and pheasants. The company deposited their resplendent cloaks and fur-lined overcoats in the cottage of the Masaryks; and the whole neighborhood, poor peasants all of them, foregathered while the shoot was on, to behold and admire those fabulous garments, every one of which represented an unattainable fortune. Little Thomas alone refused to look at the display. "I did not like to see those things," the President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic once said of this experience of the cottager's boy. "I felt there was something radically wrong. Just what was not clear to me. But such a hate I had! That hatred lasted till today."

The other career-shaping episode happened when he was fifteen. Being barely able to read and write, he was, at the urging of his parents, about to take employment with the village blacksmith. But he disliked the idea. It was not interesting; he yearned to see the world, for knowledge, for adventure. So he packed his little bundle, went to Vienna and became apprenticed to a locksmith. He stood on the threshold of his dreams. He was in the imperial capital; the wide world lay around him; and the trade of locksmiths—how it attracted him! Locksmiths were magicians—they opened doors forbidden to others, doors behind which were stored he did not know what treasures of knowledge—locksmiths solved mysteries wrought in steel and iron. His fancy was aflame. Then came the disappointment. Instead of being initiated into the wizardry of locks he was put by his master to operate a machine of

\* This article is one of a series of contemporary portraits to be published in book form under the title *Eminent Europeans* by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

some sort or another—operate it day and night, twelve, fourteen, sometimes sixteen hours at a stretch. It was one single movement repeated thousands and thousands of times, turning out some minor piece of hardware. At the age of fifteen Masaryk got an object-lesson in modern industrialism which he never could forget, as little as that earlier one in the difference between rich and poor.

Hatred of injustice and hatred of the machine, the soullessness and inhumanity of it, became Masaryk's dominant passion, the pivot around which his Weltanschauung turned. Later in life he fought the Hapsburgs and the Germans because they represented injustice. He fought the Roman church and official Protestantism because he saw in them the incarnation of the machine, the lifeless thing that demands living sacrifice. He fought capitalism because capitalism was the tyranny of the industrial machine; but he also fought Marxian socialism because it proposed to substitute for the injustice of capitalism a justice that also was of the machine, a deadly symmetry that would crush the soul of man. And the quest of his life, the quest of reality, is nothing but the supreme form which his hatred of injustice and of the machine has taken; for he holds that through the recognition of reality, and reality alone, can man free himself from bondage.

The locksmith's apprentice fled from Vienna to his parents' cottage, to the gloomy existence of the village failure. But fate watched over young Masaryk. With the aid of a benevolent priest who perceived the spark that glowed in him he succeeded in acquiring an education. He studied at Prague and at Vienna, later in the University of Leipsic; and, still a young man, he was appointed Professor in the University of Prague.

It is characteristic that the first act which concentrated public attention upon the personality of the future founder of Czecho-Slovak independence was what most people regarded as an attack on Czech patriotism. Mournful over the tragedy that for three centuries had weighed upon the nation, the Czech scholars and poets turned for relief to memories of its glorious past. Greatest among these was the so-called Manuscript of Königinhof, the charter of Bohemia's historic grandeur. Masaryk turned the spotlight of his scholarship on this treasure of national lore, and exposed it as a forgery. All Bohemia was incensed; he was denounced as a traitor, a blasphemer and a German agent. Masaryk stood the fire without wincing. He took the offensive, and ridiculed those who thought it necessary to bolster up Bohemian greatness with unhistoric lies. "A nation that is not founded on truth does not deserve to survive," he

said. From that time onward Masaryk never ceased to pour scorn on romantic nationalism and to preach a realistic conception of national needs and duties. He contrasted patriotism, the living substance, with patrioteering, a mere ritual and empty formalism.

He exhibited the same strain of civic courage, the same contempt for the popular prejudice, the same love for truth as carried him through the Königinhof affair, in the celebrated case of Hilsner, the Jew accused of ritual murder. Everybody in Bohemia believed the charge; all clamored for Hilsner's head. Masaryk alone stood up for the Jew, and proved the accusation of ritual murder absurd in general and Hilsner innocent in particular. This cost him a good deal of his popularity, and one day, when he entered his class, he was received with hooting and catcalls. He faced the turmoil for a moment, then stepped to the blackboard and wrote one word on it—"Work." Silence fell, and Masaryk addressed the students. "Don't drink, don't gamble, don't loaf, but work—that's what the Jew is doing and you have to do it, too, if you want to beat him." Thereupon he proceeded with his lecture.

Never again was he disturbed. When he related this story to me, he added, with his peculiar self-conscious, deprecatory smile, as if forestalling praise: "God knows, I don't like Jews." He meant to imply that he, too, had his prejudices, that he was no better than the rest; it never occurred to him that his very dislike made his attitude all the more admirable.

After all, it was as it should be that the man who restored the Czech nation was not a soldier nor a politician, but a moralist and a philosopher. Nations are known by the heroes they honor; and the greatest and most revered character in Czech history is not a general nor a statesman, but a thinker and a martyr, Jan Hus, the reformer treacherously burnt at the stake, despite the safe-conduct of the Emperor Sigismund, at the Council of Constance, in 1415. His personality stamped forever all that is best in Czech character; and the greatest tribute ever paid to Masaryk was the saying that he was a lineal descendant and re-incarnation of Jan Hus.

The martyrdom of Hus is the climax of Czech history; it was a moral victory as great as the annihilation of the Armada was for England. For Masaryk the Reformation, which in Bohemia assumed the form of Hus's teachings, stands out as the greatest event not only in Czech history, but also in the history of the world. Religion is uppermost in his mind; but religion to him means Reformation. But the Reformation, as he con-

ceives it, is not a definite and finite fact of the sixteenth century. It continues to this very moment. He writes:

History is often called a teacher and a judge. It is, above all, an obligation. The significance of our reformation stamps our entire national being. Every conscientious son of the Czech people finds in the story of our reformation his own ideal. Every son of the Czech people who knows Czech history must decide either for Reformation or for Counter-Reformation, either for the Czech idea or for the Austrian idea . . . Like all genuine reformation, that of our country is still incomplete. Reformation means an incessant re-forming, uninterrupted renewal, a striving for heights, a constant process of perfection; it means growth.

Masaryk's part in the spiritual growth of the Bohemian people has been compared with that of Tolstoy in the evolution of Young Russia. In drawing this analogy, however, one should bear in mind the fundamental difference that separates the two thinkers, a difference that is not merely individual, but also national. It is the difference that defines Russia from the rest of Europe, that is dwelt upon by Masaryk himself in his monumental work on the spirit of Russia, the greatest, perhaps, written on the subject by a non-Russian. It is the difference between the individualistic, activistic West, growing from a subsoil of Roman civilization, Roman law, Roman religion, and the communistic-anarchistic, passive, contemplative East, heir of the Byzantine tradition.

The central concept of Masaryk's religion is the idea of humanity, of universal brotherhood. "Brotherhood was the name and also the ideal of our national Church, the Church of the Bohemian Brethren. The idea of humanity is the fundament of our reformation." There was a Czech philosopher in the fifteenth century, Peter Chelcicky, who preached the idea of humanity. But Chelcicky's humanitarian ideal implied the doctrine of non-resistance; he held that the use of force was evil under any circumstances, even in self-defence. Masaryk tells of the astonishment of Tolstoy when he discovered that his own ideas had been formulated by Chelcicky four hundred years ago. Masaryk's idea of humanity and humanitarianism is different. He defines it as "a fight, everywhere, always and by every means, against evil." His is a religion of action. "Humanity is not sentimentalism—it is just work, and work again."

That utmost tolerance is part of Masaryk's religion need not be pointed out. During the war, when he went about in the world exhorting to battle to the bitter end against German autocracy, he never failed to emphasize that he bears no rancor against the German people. He adopts

Hus's saying, "I love a good German better than a bad Czech." In this, again, he is thoroughly Christian—for true Christianity combines eternal hatred for sin with forgiveness for the sinner. At a mass meeting in Cleveland he indicted Magyar tyranny in a flaming speech whose burden was, *Delenda est Hungaria*. At the end of the meeting he said to me: "Don't think that I hate your people. It is my hope and my conviction that we and the Magyars will be friends yet, and that before long." As President of the Republic he applies the Golden Rule to the complicated racial problems of the country.

Masaryk carries this tolerance into minute details of everyday relationships. A lifelong total abstainer, he disbelieves in enforced prohibition. This latitudinarian attitude of his greatly shocks his wife. Mrs. Masaryk is an American—and one with a New England conscience. One of her sorrows is that her husband, as President of the Republic, is obliged to keep a wine cellar for state functions. She is also very much perturbed over the cigarette ashes that remain after a cabinet council in the sacred precincts of her husband's study.

Which reminds me of a story Masaryk once told about Tolstoy. They were great friends, and many years ago Masaryk visited him at Yasnaya Polyana. It was in the early days of Tolstoy's resolution to live the life of a peasant. He was an inveterate smoker. One day Masaryk said to him: "You have undertaken to live as a peasant—it surprises me that you indulge in an expensive habit which peasants cannot afford." Tolstoy said he had never thought of that before. He put away his tobacco and never used it again.

Masaryk is extremely devoted to his American wife whom he met when, back in the seventies, both were students in Leipsic. Their romance began like so many others—they read together. Once he was asked what they had read. He thought for a moment and said: "Well, it was Buckle's *History of Civilization*"—he smiled, bashfully,—"you know how those things are." *Shades of Paolo and Francesca!*

One of the most liberal and humane of men, Masaryk has his blank spots, too. I remember with what amazement I heard him expound his views on monogamy. He considers monogamy as one of the basic institutions of our civilization. Good. But he carries his conviction to the length, not only of utterly repudiating divorce, but of maintaining that monogamy should not be merely "simultaneous," but also "consecutive"—that for a widower or widow to marry is immoral! This, I thought afterwards, was, of course, the view of

a man who wooed his bride, not over sinful stories of the flesh like Launcelot and Guinevere, but over Buckle's chaste and pompous work.

Yet he would be gravely mistaken who concluded from this that Masaryk is altogether too good to be human, a mere doctrinaire puritan, a slightly overdrawn Hussite saint. There is nothing that visualizes for me the spirit of the man more adequately than the story told to me by a friend of mine, an American scholar who knows Bohemia well. He visited Masaryk at Prague in the summer of 1920. One day they were sitting in the library of the Hradcany, the proud ancient castle of Roman emperors and Bohemian kings, now the presidential palace. Masaryk pointed to the side of the room lined with books on philosophy, and said: "When I was young and stupid I read those books to find out truth, but now I read novels which more exactly interpret the real things, the struggle of man for reality." One of his students tells me that in a course of Practical Philosophy they used for text-book Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

EUGENE S. BAGGER.

## Sent Ashore

The United States Shipping Board has more than 700 steel ships, of more than 3,500,000 deadweight tons, idle.—*News item.*

**C**APTAIN McROBERTS has come back to Our Village, in Maine, where he was born and grew up. The Captain has been afloat thirty years, and is only fifty-six now—a smallish man, smooth-shaven and quiet, with a tanned face but not a whit more so than the average golfing New York banker. For twenty-three years he has been master of his vessel, and has never lost a ship. He has handled sail, too, though naturally, most of his experience has been in steam—tramps down South America way, out to China—oh! everywhere you can mention, or find with a pin in the atlas. He was married for awhile, but his wife died. Our village never saw her—she was English, and lived outside Liverpool while her husband went up and down the world. She made voyages with him, perhaps—Captain McRoberts doesn't say, and Maine folks are not inquisitive. Not with each other, that is; though these summer people are sometimes so very outlandish that we gossip about them, in a thoughtful, ruminative sort of way.

And now here's the Cap'n come home again, silent but rather embarrassed about it, one would say. He turned up in April with \$685 and the

clothes he stood in. His ship has been laid off her run (the West Wind, fruit and miscellaneous cargo, Panama and the West Indies). He's been let out—sent ashore—and the West Wind is now one of sixty tied nose by nose in squads of five, up the Hudson somewhere.

Cap'n McRoberts tried to get another ship, of course. He was in New York six or seven weeks trying it. He told George Kargill, who runs more lobster pots than anybody, (and keeps summer boarders too, of course) that it was terrible. "Streets was just black with 'em," he said. "Masters looking for a berth as mate. Mates who'd sign on as A. B.'s if they could get a chance—but couldn't get it. A. B.'s standing around in front of them employment offices, like cattle. It doesn't take 'em long to give up all hope of gettin' to sea, and then they try for a job ashore. Any job."

George reports that the Cap'n says it don't seem possible that only about four years ago, the government was trying its beatingest to find men to learn navigation and go to sea. "They had schools all around, then," the Cap'n says. "Telling 'em on land how to run a ship at sea. What's become of all the graduates?"

Cap'n McRoberts got a room and board with Mrs. Douglas whose husband went with a Gloucester boat up to the Banks four or five years ago and was lost with his dory in a quick fog. For a week or two he sat, evenings, with the men in the store. Then we suddenly heard that he'd gone up the river to Wixhasset and bought the Mary N.

The Mary N. is a sloop, with the enormous displacement of maybe eight and a half tons gross. She's about as old as the cliffs on Monhegan, and the Cap'n bought her with half of his money. He told us about it next evening when he came into the store. "Going to take the summer boarders out sailin'," said Cap'n McRoberts, sitting up very straight with that sort of military air of his, and looking hard at the stove.

Well, why not? Somebody has to take the summer people out. It's an honest way to earn your living, and it's hard enough, too, with the women getting good and sick whenever it's rough, and the boys wanting to stand out on deck forward of the mast where the jib sheets can throw them overboard when you come about. Cap'n McRoberts sailed nearly every day all summer when it wasn't too stormy, and he did pretty well at it, fifty cents apiece or eight dollars by the party. But he lost some money from those who walked off and forgot to pay him. He just didn't seem to have the heart to ask them for it.