that Bill Hard wrote about him, exposing him as a thunderer in public, who had "made more acres of public men acutely miserable, per unit of circulation, than any other editor alive," but a sunny story-teller in private, almost enjoying his own embittered indignations. Hard even burst into verse:

When Oswald isn't following his employment—
  his employment
Of devastating all the public scene,

His capacity for innocent enjoyment—
  cent enjoyment
Would make the joyous public man turn green.

We cussed him and loved him, listened and learned. The Nation of the nineteen twenties was a great school—for its editors and for America. What "Main Street," "Winesburg, Ohio," and "Spoon River" were in other fields of literature, The Nation was to journalism. It still is.

"Free Inquiry and Free Endeavor"

BY I. F. STONE

To UNDERSTAND The Nation's past one must understand Edwin Lawrence Godkin. Godkin was more than the founder of The Nation. Though many other able and brilliant men contributed regularly to its pages, The Nation for more than thirty years was synonymous with Godkin and Godkin with The Nation. His approach to economic problems, that of a laissez faire liberal, still dominated The Nation at its fiftieth birthday, thirteen years after his death. Godkin's moralistic approach to politics and politicians, which made him seem a Jeremiah to his admirers and a cantankerous perfectionist to his critics, was also Oswald Garrison Villard's and may still be found in the pages of The Nation. Godkin's most admirable characteristic as an editor was his independence, and this is still The Nation's ideal.

Godkin's independence was part of the atmosphere in which he was reared. His father was a Presbyterian minister in Catholic Ireland, but one whose devotion to Home Rule cost him his pulpit. Godkin's basic ideas on economics and society were acquired in the '40's. He entered Queen's College, Belfast, in 1846, and there, as he wrote many years later, "John Stuart Mill was our prophet, and Grote and Bentham were our daily food." These writers, fast becoming little more than names, were once new windows on the world. To a generation brought up on the history of Greece as written by Whig or Tory to illustrate "the dangerous turbulence of democracy," Grote's "History," with its glamorous picture of Athenian self-government as seen through the eyes of a philosophical radical, came as an inspiring revelation.

The outlines of a collectivist future that Godkin always regarded as the shadow of outworn fallacies rather than of coming truths were already visible in positivism and the first writings of socialism, in Mill's own budding doubts, and in the very rationale of utilitarianism itself. But to the young men of the British middle classes in Godkin's student days, and for many years after, laissez faire liberalism was almost a religious faith. The complex of ideas that now provides the toothless apologetics of an American Liberty League was then a rich and blooming hope. Like Marxism later, it seemed to promise an end of tyranny, poverty, ignorance, and war; and like Marxism it seemed no utopian dream but a body of inescapable conclusions from the observed facts of history and human nature. The visible embodiment of these ideals, the proof of their practicability, the guaranty of their ultimate achievement, was America, as Soviet Russia was to be for many radicals in our time. "I have said," Godkin wrote, "that John Stuart Mill was our prophet, but America was our promised land. To the scoffs of the Tories that our schemes were impracticable, our answer was that in America, barring slavery, they were actually at work." Their knowledge of America, as he recorded it, was drawn largely from de Tocqueville, and they could have had no better guide, for the latter's vision was distorted neither by millennial delusions nor by aristocratic antipathy.

These were the sources of the ideals and preconceptions with which Godkin, after turning down the editorship of the Belfast Whig, came to America in 1856, "on the eve of the Presidential election. The air . . . full of the discussion about slavery. The excitement . . . tremendous." Three months after Appomattox he launched The Nation, its name the product of a boyhood admiration for a weekly of the same name established in Dublin in 1842 and described as "remarkable for its talent, for its seditious tendencies, and for the fire and spirit of its political poetry."

When the first issue of The Nation appeared, on July 6, 1865, Godkin was thirty-three. He was to change little, but America much, before he relinquished the editorship in 1899. The Nation and its founder started under certain initial disadvantages. Their idealism could have found no more incongruous setting than the America of the Gilded Age. The laissez faire that The Nation was to preach, though one of the favorite optical illusions of American politics and constitutional law, was never really
a dominant American philosophy. Business men opposed
government aid to workers and farmers, and workers and
farmers opposed government aid to business. But neither
opposed government aid to themselves.
If Cobden symbolizes British capitalism, Hamilton
symbolizes American, and Hamilton, with his plea for
protective tariffs and subsidies, and his frank manipula-
tion of governments' devices to encourage enterprise, was
no follower of Adam Smith. Free trade itself began to
seem a device for maintaining British industrial supremacy;
French and German policy alike soon turned Hamiltonian
to build up national industries. Our business inter-
ests have always found their political vehicle in parties
which never permitted lip service to laissez faire to inter-
fare with aid to business—the Federalists under Hamil-
ton, the Whigs under Clay and Webster, the Republicans
through McKinley to Hoover. The Jeffersonians, it is
ture, believed that government best which governs least,
but our parties of the lower middle class, whether under
Jefferson, Jackson, Wilson, or Franklin D. Roosevelt,
were as ready as the Hamiltonians to use state power,
when in office, for the advancement of their own class
interests and economic welfare. Our early working-class
movements, as far back as the 1830's, were socialist,
and if British middle-class intellectuals in the '40's read
Mill, American middle-class intellectuals in the '60's grew
up in the shadow of Brook Farm, discussed Fourierism,
and encountered socialism in Horace Greeley's Tribune.
Out of power each of the two major parties was wont
to denounce the other for using the state for its own
purposes, and laissez faire slogans came to be more and
more strongly used to combat social legislation from the
'70's on. Charles A. Dana set the fashion of preaching
rugged individualism to workers while advocating higher
tariffs for the manufacturers and bigger land grants for
the railroad promoters. But to advocate laissez faire con-
sistently and honestly, as The Nation and Godkin did,
was to adopt a lonely and ineffectual attitude—hostile
to the capitalist trend toward monopoly, hostile to the agricu-
tarian cry for regulation of railroads and business, hostile
to the workers' attempts at collective action. In England
the advocate of laissez faire marched in the triumphant
ranks of the merchants and manufacturers; in America
he sought a hopeless rear-guard action in the retreating
forces of small business men, rentiers, and the Adams
family. The Nation under Godkin attacked the Grangers,
the Populists, the trade unions; the single-taxers, and the
Socialists, as well as the trusts, the railroad barons, the
tariff log-rollers, and the stockjobbing financiers. But the
second group was to transform our economy and the first
our politics until laissez faire liberalism, once a revolu-
tionary and liberating force, became the slogan of reaction-
aries. The Nation, which was always liberal, thus grew
less and less progressive. Finally, separated from the
genteel and enlightened free-trade conservatism of the
pre-war New York Evening Post, The Nation from 1917
on was to become what its founder would have termed
"communistic."

SCOLARS AND GENTLEMEN

Godkin and his pre-war successors labored under an-
other disadvantage. They were not merely intellectuals;
they were also gentlemen. They were fastidious to begin
with, and history in the making is sadly unrefined. At
their worst they grew querulous, and seemed to scold
rather than instruct. Wendell Phillips Garrison, Horace
White, Rollo Ogden, Harold de Wolf Fuller, Paul Elmer
More, Hammond Lamont were all what it was once cus-
tomary to term men of good family. Some of them, like
Godkin himself as he grew older, tended to be snobbish.
The pages of the old Nation are full of amusing illus-
trations of this tendency. It was always calling men it
disliked "vulgar," and Dana found no better way to
make Godkin write than by referring to him in print as
"Larry" Godkin. To Godkin commenting on the Com-
mune in Paris, "perhaps the most striking incident of the
crisis" was that "veritable workingmen sit in council in
the gilded saloons of the Hotel de Ville and are waited
upon by lackeys in livery," Godkin could be more Tory
than the Toties in his social prejudices. In 1900 we find
him mourning the fact that since Peel's day the English
upper classes "have never been content with a states-
man of their own order" but had picked in Dinsmire "a
Jewish literary adventurer" (this was snobbery, not anti-
Semitism) and in Joseph Chamberlain "a dealer in
screws." Godkin wrote of Mill, "He suffered in his treat-
ment of all the questions of the day from excess of cul-
ture and deficiency of blood"; but the judgment applies
far better to Godkin and his pre-war successors than to
Mill, for Mill's humanity in later years overcame his
preconceptions and led him first to disavow the wage-
fund theory and then to move toward socialism. It was
easier for Godkin and his associates to see the absurdities
than the strength of the new men and movements com-
ing up about them: on the one hand the get-rich-quick
vulgarians of capitalism, and on the other a procession of
characters that seemed monstrous to The Nation—
Powderly and Debs, Donnelly and Bryan, a Coin Harvey
and a Sockless Jerry Simpson.

Certain pages in the old Nation make strange reading.
The Nation felt in 1865 that if the movement for an
eight-hour day were successful, "the time is not far dis-
tant when all things will be in common and grass grow
in Broadway." "Last winter," The Nation said in 1874
of the Granger movement for railroad regulation, "the
Grangers came to the conclusion that what they wanted
was reduction of the rates; next winter their fancy may
take another turn, and they may think that each passenger
ought to have a car for himself, with meals along the
route furnished gratis by the company." In 1878 The
Nation was worried because many newspapers, though "troubled by the growth of communism among the working classes in this country," yet favored the income tax. The Nation accused these newspapers of "forgetting that communist ideas were started by the Western farmers in the Granger movement, and that nothing is more natural than that the doctrines about property which were promulgated passionately by persons who simply wished to impose on others part of the burden of carrying their goods to market, should have found expression in pillage and arson two or three years later among suffering operatives." In 1884 The Nation attacked the platform committee at that year's Republican convention for "catering to the tastes and dogmas of the Communists" because it proposed to bar contract labor, oppose acquisition of large tracts of land by corporations or individuals, and enforce the eight-hour law on government work. The Nation's advice on the Anarchist movement in 1887 was not to "be afraid of making 'martyrs' of their leading scoundrels by hanging them." Debs Desperadoes it named the Pullman strikers in 1894, and it called Altgeld "boorish, impudent, and ignorant" for objecting to the use of federal troops to break the strike. In Coxey's Army that same year it saw only "loafers and tramps." It defended Briand against Jaurès in 1911 after the former broke the French railway strike by martial law, and it disapproved when Lloyd George introduced a bill for sickness and unemployment insurance. It termed Theodore Roosevelt "reckless, cruel, and incendiary" in his attacks on the courts and supported Wilson in 1912, only to be disappointed when he surrendered to railroad labor's demand for the eight-hour day in 1916. It thought the appointment of Louis D. Brandeis to the United States Supreme Court a mistake. The Nation felt that he had given no proof of possessing "the true judicial habit of mind."

**Godkin Said—**

We expect always to advocate a strict adherence to the Constitution, but not a strict construction of it. . . . No human wisdom could frame a detailed plan of government that would not at some period suffocate the nation if strictly construed.

The world has always been, is now, and ever will be ruled by brains, and the fight between progress and conservatism is to decide, not whether sloppy sentimentality or selfish tyranny shall get the upper hand, but what order of ideas brains shall serve. The reason why the whiskey ring is so powerful among us is that they have applied brains to the business of stealing and swindling, and good people have opposed to them nothing but rhetoric.

There has not been a single war of this century, not strictly defensive, which is not now condemned by the leading actors in it, and the public judgment every year follows more and more rapidly on the event, because the people in every country are every year less and less influenced by enthusiasm.

Aristocratic government was tried up to 1830, and that period was pronounced a failure. It converted the nation into an athlete of prodigious force, a bruiser of incomparable dexterity, who distributed black eyes and bloody noses over the whole earth but left his wife and family in squar and misery. Middle-class government has now been tried ever since, and the result is a full and well-to-do merchant, whose muscle has all run to blubber, whose credit on 'Change is immense, but whose movements are so slow and uncertain and whose will is so feeble that his servants do not obey him and his neighbors laugh at him and his miserable work-people clamor every day more and more loudly for a share in his profits. [On English government.]

**Laissez Faire Purity**

Labor didn't like the old Nation, but neither did Wall Street. The very first issue contained both an advertisement inserted by the leading financier of the time, Jay Cooke, and a criticism of him. In 1866, to those who would limit the franchise to men of property, it replied, "Wealthy men control our railroad corporations; what has been the degree of honor and regard for the public good with which these institutions have been managed?"

Long before Matthew Josephson's "Robber Barons," The Nation was talking of our railroad magnates in the same terms. "No generation of feudal barons in the fourteenth century," The Nation said in 1868, ". . . ever . . . lived more openly or undisguisedly by force or fraud than do the railroad men of our time." Striking coal miners in 1871 seemed to The Nation to be engaged in an attempt to "corner" the public. But "the business of 'cornering' the public," The Nation pointed out, "that is, of extorting money from it by the sudden production of artificial scarcity for the benefit of one class or body, was first begun by capitalists for their own benefit, and they carried it on with the aid of legislation in nearly every civilized country for centuries, without admitting laborers to any share of the profits, or booty, whichever one pleases to call it." When Senator Hoar wrote Coxey that "5,000 or 10,000 men have no right to dictate to the other 65,000,000" in their demands for jobless relief, The Nation commented in a similar vein. "It is a pity," it said, "Senator Hoar did not find out sooner that he acted for a majority of the entire people, and not for 5,000 or 10,000 men. Since 1861 there have been twenty-two changes made in the tariff, all increases. Now nearly every one of these changes was made, not at the request of 65,000,000 people, but of small parties of men, sometimes solitary individuals."

[The quotations from Godkin on these pages are taken from editorials in the earliest volumes of The Nation.]
In 1911 *The Nation* applauded when Justice Hughes for the Supreme Court held an Alabamapeonage law unconstitutional, and when President Taft refused to pardon a rich man sentenced to prison for violation of the law. "Fines are not effective against men of wealth," *The Nation* declared, "imprisonment is necessary." In 1913 it attacked "our blatant Navy League" as formed in the interest of "battleship builders, organizers of ship trusts, and producers of nickel steel," and in a long editorial called attention to the revelations being made by "Dr. Liebknecht" in Berlin as to the part played by munitions makers in fomenting international ill-will. That same year, when the government opened its attack on George W. Perkins and the Harvester trust, *The Nation* dealt scornfully with the defenses customarily put forward by the trusts. "Out of court," *The Nation* commented, "the trust advocates never tire of inveighing against the outworn, medieval theory of competition in contrast with the new and 'inevitable' law of combination. In court they usually argue that there is no such thing as monopoly, and that equality of opportunity in business flourishes under the stimulus of scientific cooperation; cooperation being that principle of business by which George W. Perkins, instead of competing with his rivals, works harmoniously with himself."

The one public figure the old *Nation* really admired was Grover Cleveland, though it did not hesitate to criticize him sharply in the Venezuela incident. It stood as he did for a low tariff, economy, and clean government. In respect to this last issue *The Nation* was a little more than merely "goo-goo." It saw farther than the civil-service reformers with whom it went forth to battle against crooked politicians. It was not enough to place good men in public office. It was also necessary to strike at the causes of corruption. "The remedy," *The Nation* said after the Credic Mobilier scandal, "is simple. The government must get out of the 'protective' business and the 'subsidy' business and the 'improvement' business and the 'development' business. It must let trade, and commerce, and manufactures, and steamboats, and railroads, and telegraphs alone. It cannot touch them without breeding corruption."

**THE OLD AND THE NEW**

*The Nation* after the World War, though still an organ of middle-class intellectuals, came more and more to draw its strength from contact with and sympathy for the labor movement, and to seek a counterpoise to big business in social legislation and in the organization of farmer and worker instead of hoping for a return to laissez faire. The old *Nation* applauded the hanging of the Chicago Anarchists; the new fought for Sacco and Vanzetti. The old denounced Debs; the new, in 1920, urged its readers to vote for him or Christensen. The old *Nation* saw in social legislation a reversion to a medieval world of fixed prices and wages; the new *Nation* saw in it the beginnings of a new society.

But between the old *Nation* and the new there are also many bonds. One of the principal purposes for which *The Nation* was founded was to defend the interests of the newly freed Negro. It consistently opposed American imperialism and spoke in behalf of the Latin American and Filipino peoples we have from time to time oppressed and exploited. It never permitted loyalty to party or person to outweigh loyalty to truth. It always resisted jingoism and war. The yellowing pages, with their vigor, their learning, their wit, their irony, can still inspire as well as exasperate. Godkin and his associates hated cant, falsity, tyranny, buncombe. Godkin dedicated *The Nation* to the defense of "free inquiry and free endeavor." "Free endeavor," in the sense that Godkin understood it, is no longer *The Nation*'s ideal; but "free inquiry" still is its language, in 1940 as in 1865.

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**Godkin Said—**

If the devil himself were on trial, and it was found that the prosecutor was using his own weapons against him, the place of good and wise men would be on the devil's side. The devil is nothing in such a case, the maintenance of the principles against which he wars is everything. [On Johnson's impeachment.]

Well-informed and honorable men, knowing the difficulties of the work of government and fearing the consequences of error, hasten slowly and doubt intelligently at every step. They are, consequently, no match for bold and ready demagogues, unless they have public opinion behind them, like . . . "a strong wind blowing aft."

If there is one thing which experience is teaching modern nations more thoroughly than another, it is the comparative worthlessness of all political arrangements on paper, whether constitutions, treaties, or legislative acts.

The sin by which modern as well as ancient society has been most beset has been the sin of oppression, of indifference to human suffering. The political system of nearly every country in the civilized world, down to our day, has been based on the principle that the few ought to have power over the many, and ought to use it for their own benefit.

In these days, if the doors of the future are once thrown open to what are called "the masses," and they catch even one glimpse of the splendid possibilities which lie within it, it is in vain to close them again. The vision never leaves their minds.

When women vote we drop our aspirations. In that day how shall he run for the White House who wears overshoes and a bad hat and has the asthma slightly and carries an umbrella? Old stagers may there as well consider themselves razed from the book of honors, and look on photographs as a vain expense.

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