

# **MODERN ENGLISH STATESMEN**

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Modern English statesmen by G. R. Stirling Taylor

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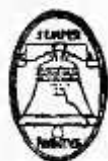
**G. R. STIRLING TAYLOR**

**MODERN ENGLISH  
STATESMEN**



*MODERN ENGLISH  
STATESMEN*    ❁    ❁

*By*  
G. R. STIRLING TAYLOR



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# MODERN ENGLISH STATESMEN

## CHAPTER I

### STATESMEN AND STATESMANSHIP

**I**T is one of the unsolved problems of history whether great statesmen rule their country or whether they merely register the desires and opinions of their age, their race and their nation. It is the question whether great men govern or obey. It is no answer to produce a royal proclamation or a chancellor's ruling, or even the statute book of an elected parliament. The fundamental mystery still remains, whether any man or parliament, however despotic or however wise, has ever made a people do anything that was outside the tradition of the race. It is the problem whether racial or national tradition is not altogether more powerful than the orders of the most masterful government that ever existed. Did Augustus order the Roman people to obey him as their emperor, or did the united impulse of the republican citizens order Augustus to organize them as an Empire? Would it not be near the truth to say that the people of Rome had already made themselves into a despotism long before they allowed Augustus to act so openly? Did the late German Emperor rule the Germans, or did he carry out the imperious will of that race? Were they servile to him, or was he servile to them? Did Chatham

force the English people to build an Empire, or did he merely act as their organizing agent? Do statesmen express their own will, or the will of those who seem to be their subjects? The problem is put into the balance almost every time that we weigh a historical fact.

The question may never be answered in any absolute way; and this for the very good reason that there may be no conclusive answer. It is only the timekeeper and the drill-sergeant who have rigid rules of life. Nature, being neither a pedant nor a bureaucrat, has a happy way of doing the best with each case as it comes along. Sometimes the autocrat has his will for a time; and then the rising of a people will toss him away as easily as a wave tosses a cork. There is a continual giving and taking between a people and those who govern them. It is impossible to make a case for the victory of one side which quite excludes the other. Nevertheless the evidence would seem to point to the ultimate supremacy of national tradition—which is national will—over the will of the statesman. A governor can survive for a time; it may be that for a whole lifetime he may impose his rule against the wishes of his subjects. There are cases where a series of despots have ruled against the will of a race; but sooner or later, the racial command pushes its way through the weight of authority above. Nevertheless, the argument again (with the uncertain indecision of Nature once more) moves across to the other side, when we have to admit that although a nation usually has the power to overthrow an autocratic statesman—be he king or banker—yet, since there cannot be cause without effect, the nation that emerges is not quite the same that it would have been had it never been submerged under the

despotism. To that extent the great autocrats win. But, again, in the final summing up it is probable that the effect of the personal ruler is as the blowing of a contrary wind against an ocean tide: it blows the breakers into whiter foam; it cannot stop the irresistible flow. A book on statesmen is, after all, merely a book on foam and not on tides. But if they are foam, they are the result of tides; and, to that extent, they are symbolic.

It is not generally recognized that the action of a statesman may be very spectacular on the page of history, and yet he may have done nothing but touch the surface of the national life. The vast bulk of human life, in a broad sense, has been almost untouched by the laws and ordinances declared by ruling men and representative assemblies. One talks loosely of despotism, but it may be very blatant and yet not go very deep. An Englishman who knew Russia under the autocratic Czar said that there was more individual liberty in that country than in England. There was probably a touch of paradox in that statement; but there was certainly more than a touch of truth also. For the greater part of its career the human race progressed without much of what we should call "government" to-day. Government is a comparatively modern idea; and to that extent statesmanship is only a modern trade. It is a trade that has been growing since the Renaissance with alarming speed; and perhaps already it is untrue to say that it does not affect the fundamentals of human existence; but it is only recently that it has become untrue. Even in the eighteenth century the Chathams and the Burkes and their kind could make mighty displays in the Houses of Parliament and yet have comparatively little effect on the lives of the citizens in