

Henry Kissinger: Metternich Flummoxed

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Many believe that what the learned and immensely complicated Dr. Henry Kissinger really thinks of it all would make an engrossing tale. Surely he has seen many marvels: stormtroopers in old Fürth, crestfallen stormtroopers in Allied Occupied Germany; Harvard; the Council on Foreign Relations; and, in the fullness of time, the White House—in whose mess he fattened so prodigiously that he became a hazard to revolving doors and a challenge to Air Force One. Dr. Kissinger has seen all this and more: He has seen the doe-eyed Daniel Ellsberg whipped into a shameful anti-Communist frenzy, and he has had wet kisses planted on both his cheeks by Egypt's President Anwar el-Sadat. There were clandestine missions to Paris, Moscow, Peking, and to the Georgetown quarters of the inscrutable Miss Barbara Howar. All around the world he has passed *le sel et le poivre* to our era's greatest notables. Yet he was a scholar, one with a world view, and when he articulated that view, snatches of Wagner could be heard, occasionally even the *Missa Solemnis*. Surely behind today's drollery and politesse stands a man who could disclose some astounding truths! I doubt it.

The author of *A World Restored* and *The Necessity for Choice* knew something once, but once is not enough. One does not sweat and smile, turning one's whole life into a media event, and return with one's *Weltanschauung* intellectually in blossom. It is a melancholy but well-researched truth that modern America confers celebrity and power most frequently on poseurs, quacks, and halfwits. The biography of Dr. Kissinger is the chronicle of how Bismarck was made presentable to Shirley MacLaine and David Susskind, how Metternich was made comprehensible to Walter Cronkite, and how Castlereagh was transformed into a mercurial buffoon. In the end such acts grow tedious. Henry's Spenglerian-Hegelian whim-wham may make Georgetown debutantes weep, but grown-ups become restless.

Must public life as it is lived today stultify all who populate it? Obviously many of our national worthies are simply jackasses. They did not have to detune their cerebrums and take to amphetamines to render themselves acceptable to *People* magazine or to network television. Their fevered asininity was with them at birth. But Heinze Alfred Kissinger was different. Born with a brain and the good sense to use it, he, in his salad days, had held to sound ideas, however ploddingly expressed. He saw the Marxist conjurers for the cutthroat plunderers they were and

always must be. He warned that they would keep the world in a pothole, and that there are in life dilemmas invincibly resistant to the therapies of social science. He recognized the Soviets as a tribe of pathological liars, and the world's meliorists made him laugh. Dr. Kissinger found wisdom in history and philosophy, and throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s he propounded sensible suggestions for scotching the Soviets' mischief. How many other public persons could claim as much? But Dr. Kissinger liked to eat.

From the day he graduated from Harvard Henry relished nothing so much as vichyssoise with the greats, and if the greats tended to drone on about palpable nonsense, so what? Henry could always concentrate on the Oysters Rockefeller or the Corton Charlemagne. It was to Henry's immense benefit that when he arrived in Washington prandial anthropology had already become a matter of vast consequence in our capital's political struggles. Upon leaving government eight years later he was fifty pounds too much for his shoes. Numerous chins overwhelmed the knot in his tie, and cardiologists all over the eastern seaboard were sending him their business cards. All Washington idolized him, and those who had worked for him were either keeping their mouths shut or filing law suits against him. His smiling presence had become as ubiquitous as Cubans in Africa, Soviet naval vessels in the Mediterranean Sea or the Indian Ocean, Red flags in Southeast Asia, and "Yankee-cough-up" diatribes at the UN. How did he accomplish all this? How had Henry become the most celebrated Secretary of State in modern times and the least effective? He understood the complexity of modern American public life.

Henry lied to practically everyone in our nation's capital and with a style transcending FDR at the height of his powers. Foreign dignitaries collected Kissingerian whoppers as proof of their country's geopolitical significance. Native Washingtonians took his dissemblings as manifestations of his debonaire brilliance. In a city devoted to deception Henry came to be its most warmly esteemed artist of flimflam. Washingtonians revered his charms, and it is suggestive of the complicated minds that flourish along the Potomac that many of them actually grew to trust him. One columnist wrote a sagacious appraisal of the man, advancing the difficult proposition that Henry was: a) one of the town's most notorious liars and b) a uniquely trusted world figure. How can such con-

tradictory claptrap issue from a stalwart of America's illustrious fourth estate? Probably he is a genius: one of those giants of modern America who perceive uncommon wisdom, liberality, and farsightedness in that which less sophisticated observers dismiss as mere trumpery, plausible but hollow beyond measure.

Washington is a city abundant with such giants, and one can never come to appreciate the sad stultification of Henry without understanding their mores and folkways. Some of the giants, naturally enough, are pols and bureaucratic mullahs, but many are above the fray. Some are journalists, well-known to the American public thanks to the frequency with which they award each other TV appearances and prizes for journalistic daring. Others are lawyers, or super-lawyers as the muckrakers are given to calling them. These number into the hundreds, for there are more lawyers per square foot in Washington than in Allenwood, Pennsylvania, Danbury, Connecticut, or Lompoc, California. Still others are simple intellectuals, do-good lobbyists, militant heiresses, respected interior decorators, and people who seem to do nothing but attend Washington cocktail parties—a very solemn function indeed, as our embattled President has discovered. The Wonderboy and his down-home clods had hardly unloaded their mules at Union Station when the *Washington Post's* learned Miss Sally Quinn delivered up a brisk treatise on the importance of the Washington cocktail party to American statecraft. It was but the first of many public-spirited attempts to inform the Wonderboy of the serious nature of highballpolitik. Yet the Baptist yokel is untutorable; his assistant presidents remain locked in the White House, available only for special appearances at stock-car races and cow-chip heaves. It has been estimated that for every cocktail party the administration has failed to attend one hundred thousand votes have been lost nationwide, along with choice pieces of legislation. The patriots at Sans Souci have thrown up their hands.

Washington's giants compose a kind of informal oligarchy duly overseeing power and celebrity throughout the city and defining the various formulae for acceptable style. Many are the kind of people given to describing themselves as compassionate, decent, and liberal, but that is not to imply that they are ideologues. Rather they are drawn together by a very modern sophistication, a worldly sensibility celebrating life and success and survival

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Peregrine Worsthorpe

The Nixon Memoirs: Some Points the Others Missed

A special book review essay of *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (Grosset & Dunlap, \$19.95).

The first time I became fully aware of the existence of Richard M. Nixon was during the 1952 presidential election campaign, which I was covering for the *London Times*. It was the night of his famous, or notorious, Checkers speech, which I listened to on one of the campaign trains, in the company of a number of American journalists, including Walter Lippmann, who at that time was the reigning pundit with unrivalled dominion over the American conscience. Nixon had been accused of receiving improper campaign funds and ended his defense with the tearful admission that he did receive one gift after the nomination—"a cocker spaniel dog, Checkers, and whatever they say we are going to keep her."

Being young and inexperienced I naturally wanted to know what the great pundit had thought of the performance. Did he think that it would get Nixon off the hook, etc.? I remember Lippmann's reply very well, since it landed me in a lot of journalistic trouble. "That man," Lippmann pronounced, "has no future in American politics. Even Eisenhower will refuse to swallow so much half-baked corn." Thankful to have the word from on high, I duly filed my dispatch informing British readers that it seemed almost certain that Richard Nixon would be dropped as vice-presidential candidate.

Needless to say, my prediction proved disastrously wrong. The speech was a resounding success, and my London editors could not understand how I had come to make such a foolish error of judgment. Although this was temporarily embarrassing, the experience taught me a useful lesson: never again to be talked into underestimating Richard M. Nixon by the East Coast establishment. When it came to politics he clearly knew more than they did. From that day forward I have always looked on the man with some respect, and on his critics with some suspicion, on the principle of once caught, twice shy. So when I read the almost universally dismissive and contemptuous American reviews of *RN*, written by the successors of Walter Lippmann, I vowed to take their criticisms with a pinch—even a bucketful—of salty skepticism.

And how right I was to do so, since the memoirs turn out to be deeply impressive. In the first place, they are surprisingly well written in a spare, lean prose which gallops along at a spanking pace, relatively unhandicapped by cliché or platitude. This is not, alas, to say that such familiar blemishes are entirely absent; only that they are much less frequent than in the copy of many distinguished American journalists, and the editors of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* would be well-advised to instruct their staffs to take a leaf out of this splendidly readable book. But in

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the second place, they are also remarkably persuasive. As apologies go, this book could hardly go further; for it does explain Watergate and much else besides. Explain, but not explain away, since there is no attempt to deny guilt for the cover-up. There is a disarming frankness about this book that is very rare in the memoirs of a public man. Finally, and most important of all, there is a dimension of true drama and real tragedy which raises it to the realm of literature.

This is a judgment on the book, not on the man or the President. As a man or a President, Nixon may deserve all the condemnation that he has received. But as an author he deserves much more praise than has yet come his way. My guess is that posterity will come to acclaim this work as a political classic. For it succeeds in giving a picture of political life that has the ring of reality. Being already disgraced, the author does not need to romanticize the past. Indeed, this particular author has a need to do the opposite, since only by exposing the depth can he pinpoint his own level, which is not nearly so low as people suppose.

Because he knows that there is no point in posing as a noble statesman, the emphasis has to be on demonstrating that he was no worse than others. Thus one gets a degree of honesty unique in books of this kind. Most statesmen are anxious to show themselves as angels. Mr. Nixon is compelled to be content to show that he was not the Devil Incarnate. In other words, having recognized that no amount of whitewash could possibly cover up his sins, Mr. Nixon has had to rely for his defense on a brutal exposure of public life in the raw. The resulting picture is not pretty. But compared to the chocolate-box sentimentality of most political memoirs, it has all the authentic vitality of a genuine masterpiece.

Who else but Nixon, for example, would coolly write as follows:

The next morning [April 30, 1954] I met with Eisenhower and General Robert Cutler, his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. Cutler reported that the NSC planning board had been discussing the possibility of telling our allies that if we went into Indochina, we might use the atom bomb. Eisenhower asked me what I thought of this idea; I said that whatever was decided about using the bomb, I did not think it necessary to mention it to our allies before we got them to agree on united action.... Eisenhower turned to Cutler and said, "First, I certainly do not think that the atom bomb can be used by the United States unilaterally, and second, I agree with Dick that we do not have to mention it to anybody before we get some agreement on united action."

Mr. Nixon does not pause in his narrative to comment on this passage, which is just part of a general account of his vice-presidential activities. Here we see President Eisenhower and his Vice-President calmly considering the possibility of using atom bombs to relieve the beleaguered French army at Dien Bien Phu. Because