



DEAN ACHESON ON S.S. "INDEPENDENCE"  
New perspectives.

### Privileged Heirlooms

PRESENT AT THE CREATION by Dean Acheson. 798 pages. W. W. Norton. \$12.50 to Dec. 31, then \$15.

Twenty years ago, only a Metternich might have appreciated Dean Acheson, that rarest of all Americans, the model diplomat. Excessively sharp of mind and tongue—and not at all afraid to show the biting edge of either—Acheson was not destined for public popularity as Harry Truman's Secretary of State, particularly in an era when careers could be smashed overnight by little more than whispered innuendoes of "Communist" or "left-wing" sympathies. Present confusions and elapsed time, however, have created new perspectives on the diplomatic problems and achievements of the Truman Administration.

When the guns grew silent in 1945, much of the world had been torn apart. "Only slowly did it dawn upon us," writes Acheson in this, the second volume of his memoirs (1941-1953), "that the whole world structure and order that we had inherited from the nineteenth century was gone and that the struggle to replace it would be directed from two bitterly opposed and ideologically irreconcilable power centers." The title of the book is thus not a rhetorical fancy. As Under Secretary (1945-1947) and later Secretary of State (1949-1953), he was present at the creation of a new world order—and had a considerable role in its formation.

New Left and revisionist historians have argued in recent years that, in fact, Acheson and Truman fired the opening shots of the cold war, that such a policy as the Truman Doctrine was the equivalent of bombarding Fort

Sumter. Acheson is aware of the argument, and like the careful lawyer he is, presents a formidable brief for the defense. Soviet troops had occupied the northern provinces of Iran; to force them out strong American pressure was needed. The Truman Doctrine, which combined military and economic aid, was developed only to counter Soviet designs upon the faltering regimes of Greece and Turkey. To restore a Europe close to economic disintegration, the Marshall Plan was the only possible remedy.

Summing up the immediate results of postwar policy, Acheson writes: "Our efforts for the most part left conditions better than when we found them." The man most responsible, in Acheson's view, was Harry Truman, "the captain with the mighty heart." Acheson is not blind to his chief's faults. Truman, he admits, was guided more by feeling than by reason. His most provocative example is Truman's help in founding the state of Israel, a policy that Acheson felt would produce enduring chaos in the Middle East. Elsewhere, he extols the ex-President's judgment, orderliness of mind and ability to make a decision and stick to it. "If he was not a great man," remarks Acheson, "he was the greatest little man the author knew anything about."

While Acheson did not lack for enemies, his chief villain is not Joseph McCarthy, who constantly barked at his heels during the last three years of the Truman Administration. The aristocratic Secretary dismisses McCarthy as a "lazy, small-town bully, without sustaining purpose." Acheson's real *bête noire* is Douglas MacArthur, whose gigantic ego, he asserts, turned victory into stalemate after the Inchon landing in Korea and transformed a relatively small-scale action into a debilitating war. So certain was MacArthur of his own genius and invulnerability, says Acheson, that the general, ignoring warnings from Washington, advanced toward Manchuria and an almost predictable Chinese military response. When Chinese troops swarmed across the Yalu River, the General was shattered. Yet "what had been shattered," says Acheson, "was MacArthur's dream, the product of his own *hubris*. Unfortunately the Eighth Army was to be pretty well shattered also."

**Scoundrels and Piss-Ants.** Though the former Secretary writes well, he also writes at great length, not neglecting even the war period when, as Assistant Secretary, he was told "almost nothing" about the major decisions that guided U.S. policy.

But many of his stories deserve the place of privileged heirlooms. It is worth nodding through innumerable Foreign Ministers' conferences to learn also that on the day of Pearl Harbor, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, a decorous gentleman from Tennessee, so far forgot himself as to inform the departing Japanese envoys that they were nothing better than "scoundrels and piss-ants."