

# GERTRUDE STEIN VIEWS LIFE AND POLITICS

By LANSING WARREN  
PARIS.

A VISIT to Miss Gertrude Stein in her studio in the Rue de Fleurus is like consulting a Grecian sibyl. But, as Miss Stein says of Avila and Barcelona in her opera, there is a difference. Many of Miss Stein's statements have an irrefutable terseness, though that terseness may conceal mystifying ambiguity such as characterized the sibylline utterances. Here, culled from an hour's conversation with Miss Stein, are some sample dicta to guide the young Aeneas who would descend today into the realms of politics, art, science or literature:

"Building a Chinese wall is always bad."

"Hitler should have received the Nobel Peace Prize."

"Intellectuals are not suited to directing of government. They are deterred by a mental obliquity."

"Government does not matter. It is competition, interest, struggle and activity that counts."

"The best rulers are those who govern by instinct, not by theory."

"The French are just tired—worn out by this process of making and spending money."

"Don't think you can't be senile at the age of 22."

But, again unlike the sibyl, Miss Stein is ready to elucidate. "I say these things," said she, "not from any secret knowledge of what is going on. I speak only from my knowledge of people and what I know about my friends and neighbors."

THE path to Miss Stein's studio is as worn as ever was that to a sibyl's cavern. A host of men and women, some of them now famous, began going to hear what Miss Stein had to say many years before she acquired her present popularity. Miss Stein is not difficult of access, for she receives whoever interests her. The success of her autobiography of Alice E. Toklas and of her opera, "Four Saints," has greatly increased the numbers of her callers. It is possible to obtain audience, too, through the intercession of Miss Toklas, her friend and life companion, who is a very real and efficient personality, despite the doubts that were expressed as to her existence when the autobiography appeared.

Miss Toklas does not, however, as is often the habit of the friends of celebrities, assume the rôle of manager. She is always self-efface, remaining in the background, and signs herself Secretary. This signature has lately got her in for vastly increased duties, for she is obliged to take care of the mail, arriving in ever growing quantities.

One approaches the studio in the Rue de Fleurus through the usual portal of a large, modern Left Bank apartment house, and is directed by the concierge to the interior courtyard. Across that court is a low building, the upper story of which is constructed entirely of glass, suggesting a greenhouse or what it actually is, a workshop for artists who must have light. Miss Stein's door itself is partly of clouded glass, and is opened by an Oriental servant in a white jacket. The entry again is that of a workshop, through which is visible on one side the kitchen, leaving one all the more unprepared when ushered to the other side into the studio.

It is not an eccentric studio such as one imagines, and too often discovers, in typical Parisian bohemian life, with overturned easels and paint-pots mingling with unwashed dishes and cast-off clothing. In fact, there is nothing about the studio, or about Miss Stein herself, with the exception of the phrasing of some of her writings, to suggest the exotic, the bizarre. The whole impression is, on the contrary, one of quiet comfort, neatness and order.

A wide sofa backed to a broad table of equal length, plenty of

## The Cryptic Author, at Home in Paris, Sees No Good in Modern "Chinese Walls" or in Rule by Intellectuals

comfortable armchairs and rows and piles of well-dusted books are the first things that catch the eye. The next things remarked are the paintings. They cover the whole of the upper part of the high walls of the studio, which rises to the top of the two-story building. These pictures are mainly the work of Miss Stein's cosmopolitan painter friends, noted and un-

known, who have been her confidants or her protégés. Again, the impression is not of wild, exaggerated tendencies and aberrations. There are indeed paintings that would be called modernistic, futuristic and even unintelligible, but they do not predominate. They are mingled with examples of all schools of art, and the gallery (for it is a veritable art gallery) conveys the idea of reflective taste. This effect is heightened by the absence of pretentious frames.

Finally the feeling of order and of sanity is confirmed by the presence of Miss Stein herself. Her white poodle, Basket, jumps up from beside her on the couch and makes a great show of what is rather friendly hostility. "Basket is a great watch-dog," she observes,

"when he thinks about it. But he doesn't always remember, and so he has to be all the more demonstrative when he does." \* \* \*

MISS STEIN'S appearance is striking, especially in her calm, self-possessed carriage and in her unusual head. The most remarkable touch is her thick hair, close cropped, which must give

the peace prize," she says, "because he is removing all elements of contest and of struggle from Germany. By driving out the Jews and the democratic and Left elements, he is driving out everything that conduces to activity. That means peace."

Her speech is steady, natural and marked by a strong feeling for the values and the niceties of words.



Gertrude Stein in Her Paris Studio. On the Wall Is a Portrait of Her by Picasso.

strong resistance to a comb. It was black, but is mingled almost equally throughout with gray, and the result intensifies distinction. It also makes her seem masculine, an impression confirmed by her low-pitched voice, her decided features and her energetic manner. Her eyes are dark and large and there is in their forceful expression something of the ascetic, suggesting years of meditation.

She wears a woolen skirt of medium length, a silk overjacket of mixed tone and what would be termed sensible shoes. When she laughs, as she often does at the mental confusion produced in her auditor by many of her remarks, her face and body become mobile, and there is something impish in her expression.

"I say that Hitler ought to have

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It is the Gertrude Stein of the Toklas biography who is talking. You cannot find the faintest trace of "Tender Buttons." That is her experimental, her provocative side, and it does not appear in her everyday life.

Having been absorbed most of her days in psychology, in poetry and in the interpretation and development of art, she looks upon words as materials. She has studied them so long that for her they have come to have character, to have each its individuality quite irrespective of the significance that any distinct combination of words may give. Perhaps some comprehension of this regard for words, which she obviously feels much more strongly than a person of limited vocabulary, may be gained from her explanation of the difference between

the French and the American attitude of mind.

"The French," she says, "are simply tired out. They not only have had the war but they have been through this long period of Americanization, or modernization, if you will—the making and spending of money. They've been forced into doing it, and it doesn't interest them. It wears them out. Americans take their pleasure in physical activity, in rushing about, in getting more and more money, in finding new and exciting ways of spending it. That doesn't interest the French. They are interested in excitement, too. But it isn't physical excitement that they like. It is the exciting sensation of a new idea."

"They want the money question settled and decided as soon as possible in their lives and then put aside for good and all. They don't want to hear about it any more. And then they are ready for the fireworks. Intellectual fireworks are what excite them and what they enjoy. They don't think ever of putting their ideas into practical life as we are continually doing. The practical side does not attract them. That is what they are trying to escape."

Miss Stein as an intellectual, and one who has had a long residence in France, has undoubtedly imbibed something of this mental cast which she perceives in the French. It would seem to explain her experiments with words. She gains mental excitement from examining them in unaccustomed situations, from turning them this way and that and viewing them from the standpoint of their individualities.

But she would not think, any more than the French with their intellectual gymnastics, of putting her word-play into practical application. She would not think of conversing with the first person who came along, her concierge, her butcher or the servant who cooks her meals, after the fashion of the Saints in her opera. She might do it once for an experiment, and some day language may become enlarged and take on new meaning so that her word combinations will become usual. But she wouldn't dream of attempting to make such things general today.

Such things are not for practical life. They are for excitement. Other people may get their excitement by speeding in automobiles, by doing barrel rolls in the stratosphere. Miss Stein's stratosphere is the abstract realm of the written word.

THIS separation of the practical from the intellectual sheds considerable light on many of Miss Stein's otherwise cryptic opinions. Though decidedly an intellectual herself, she has a poor opinion of intellectuals who intervene in practical affairs.

"I always say that intellectuals are not suited to be the directors of government," said Miss Stein. "They have a mental obliquity. By that I mean that they are diverted by their intellects, by their ideas and their theories, from responding to the instincts which ought to guide practical rule. The best governors are always the men who respond to instinct, and in democracies this is more necessary than anywhere else. There really are only two wholly sincere democracies, and those are the American and the French."

"The Saxon element is always destined to be dominated. The Germans have no gift at organizing. They can only obey. And obedience is not organization. Organization comes from community of will as well as community of action. And in America our democracy has been based on community of will and effort."

"When I say government does not matter, I do not mean that it cannot have bad effects. I mean that any form of government may be good, and any form of government

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