

## The Man Who Walks Like a Tank

By PHILLIP GRANT

ANY MAN who should complain to a restaurateur that he found no baseball bat in his club sandwich nor a ranch house in his cottage pudding would be suspected of being somewhat on the unbalanced side. And rightly so. One shouldn't put too much faith in words or names.

Yet most of us — especially those of us so lacking in humility as to dare classify ourselves among the intelligent — are generally more influenced by the name of the thing than we are with the thing itself. We should know better, for all of us have either read or heard Aesop's warning: "Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow." (That was the story about the dog that carried a bone in his mouth across a bridge, looked over the side, saw his reflection in the water below, thought the reflection another dog carrying a bone, barked greedily at it, and thus lost the real bone.)

Of course Aesop is kid stuff, and hardly worthy of the superior intelligence of the adult. So it might be well to simplify his warning for the adult's benefit: *Don't mistake the symbol for the thing it symbolizes.* To do so is far more dangerous than most of us think. For example, the average man in the street expects all members of the Democratic party to be democratic; all Republicans to believe in free enterprise; all Communists to believe in communism; all Liberals to be liberal in their thinking; and so on down the list. But, anyone who takes the trouble to examine any of these ideas is soon disappointed to learn that there is actually no relation between party names (symbols) and the essential philosophies these symbols represent. Under examination, we shall find that Republicans and Democrats are often more socialistic in their thinking than the Socialists they pretend to detest, that the Communist wouldn't tolerate a pure communist state for a minute, and that there is seldom anyone less liberal than a Liberal.

It isn't only among politicians that we find the symbol being passed off for the essential idea it symbolizes. Take the Statue of Liberty, for instance. Most immigrants, seeing that lady, torch held high as she stands proudly in New York Harbor, actually believe that she guarantees liberty to all who live in our country. While it is undoubtedly true that they will enjoy far less enslavement here than they might anywhere else on earth, they certainly won't find absolute liberty; for we have long grown accustomed, even in a free country, to do as we're told. I don't know whether that is good or bad.

Certainly, everyone is familiar with the figure of Mars, the unshaven big-toothed giant, all dressed up in his iron panties and vest, his broadsword dripping with blood. He's the symbol of War. Most of us, having learned to ac-

cept Mars as war and war as Mars, without being fully aware of it, have also accepted the idea that it is only natural for Old Man Mars to get restless every now and then and roam over the planet, thus causing people to fall to butchering, crippling and dropping explosives on each other wherever the shadow of the armored giant happens to fall. Strangely, although few of us would admit it even to ourselves, we do harbor the idea in the back of our heads, that war is just that accidental—that it's just a matter of where Mars' shadow happens to fall; just a matter of chance or luck that a tyrant crops up every generation or so—never in our own country, thank goodness—and, through some strange magic gets all of his countrymen to go out shooting at their peaceful neighbors for no sensible reason. But that's what comes of mistaking the symbol for the thing it symbolizes.

Actually, we know — or at least should suspect — that there must be a real underlying cause for this periodic butchery, a cause much more real than the fanciful figure of Mars. For everything, everything we know anything at all about, does have a cause; and there's no reason to believe that war is different — that it, of all things, just happens. I can't profess to know whether war is a curse or a blessing in disguise as Tom Malthus believed; whether people hate it as much as they say or enjoy it for the jobs it creates for the past-forty citizen; but I do know that it does have a cause, that the mythical figure of Mars is merely a symbol.

It isn't easy to separate the symbol from the thing it represents. We constantly confuse money, the symbol, with the wealth we think it represents, and invariably think of it as capital even though we know that it, in itself, is not productive. We often think of a mortgage as the house for which it is merely the pawn-ticket. Monopolists are often referred to by "experts" (who should know better) as *capitalists* or *big business*, simply because we are misled by the mental image of a big, bloated, diamond-studded hulk of a figure, introduced to us by cartoonists as a symbol of the idea of the employer of labor and owner of much wealth and power.

While it isn't easy to separate the symbol from the real thing—the real bone from the reflection in the water—we must force ourselves to try. For until we do learn the difference between substance and shadow in all things—economic, political and spiritual—we shall continue to behave as confusedly as we do, forever. We shall continue to see multitudes, mad with hunger, on a planet bursting with food, driven by their misery to butchering each other for the right to wear the chains of one tyrant or another.