

# DALADIER: Premier And Average Man

Portrait of an average Frenchman who rules France with greater powers than any other of her recent leaders

Summarised from an article in "Current History" by  
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**E**DOUARD DALADIER, Premier of France, who rules the country with full powers of a sort unparalleled in recent French history, lives in a modest four-room apartment on the Rue Anatole des Forges, a few moments from the Arc de Triomphe. The neighbourhood is divided sharply between a fashionable sector and one not so fashionable. M. Daladier lives on the non-fashionable side.

M. Daladier is an average man. This is a central point for understanding his character. And he lives in an average French neighbourhood.

## A Peasant

He is short and stocky, with big shoulders and heavy hands. His eyes are a bright blue, below uncombed eyebrows that dart upward. The forehead is broad, the hair sparse. He smiles almost continually when he talks: a quick, perceptive smile, punctuated by short bursts of rather hard laughter. His conversation is quick and to the point. He likes badinage, but doesn't waste much time on it. He can lose his temper easily.

I asked one of Daladier's close collaborators what aspect of France the Premier most clearly represented. The answer came that Daladier, a peasant born of peasant stock, above all represented the land—the soil—the good earth—of France. As a peasant Daladier believes unalterably in private property, in personal ownership of land. As a peasant, too, he stands for hard work, for tenacious cultivation of his soil. He wants to hold what he has. Again as a peasant he is both an individualist and a democrat. He stands for himself; he stands also for equality with his fellow-men. Finally, like most peasants, Daladier is a bit ingrown, a bit suspicious. He buttons his collar close, as the French say.

He worked a hard day as a child; he works a hard day now. He arrives at his office early. He goes home to lunch, returning to the office in mid-afternoon and staying at his desk till perhaps nine o'clock in the evening. He is not always easy to work with; when fatigued he may ride his associates hard.

## No Social Life

Daladier sees comparatively few people. He has no social life at all. He isolates himself at home or in his office. Diplomats find it difficult to see him, except the American Ambassador, William C. Bullitt, who he likes and trusts deeply. Few people know him well.

Daladier has no interest in money. He lives on his salary, and has never been touched by financial or other scandal. He likes good food and lots of it. He smokes moderately, mostly a pipe. He drinks as any normal Frenchman drinks. He likes to walk, ride, and swim. Even during his first term as Premier, in 1933, he would leave the office, get his bicycle, and pedal across Paris or out into the country. His chief intellectual exercise is reading, especially on military affairs and on the history of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

## Marriage

His wife was Mademoiselle Laffont, daughter of a scientist, who had been his *Marraine* while he was in the trenches, *Marraine* being the name given to girls back home who regularly correspond with a soldier. Immediately after demobilisation Daladier looked up this girl whose letters had helped carry him through four brutal years of war but whom he

had never met. He fell in love with her and married her. Her death about eight years ago was a terrible blow and he has been a lonely man ever since.

## A Baker's Son

Edouard Daladier was born in Southern France, at Carpentras in the department of Vaucluse, in 1884. Not only was his father the village baker, and his grandfather before that; his mother too was the daughter of a baker in a neighbouring village, and one of his brothers still carries on the family business. Daladier has no false pride concerning his background. He is still a frequent visitor to Vaucluse and his native village, and knows every stick, stone and person by heart.

## Interested In The Army

During his early career Daladier travelled a good deal, something that most Frenchmen don't do. In the 'twenties he visited the Soviet Union, Great Britain and Germany, always with an eye open for army matters. By 1923 or 1924, he had become the Radical party's best spokesman on army affairs. He cultivated the acquaintance of army officers, and was Minister of War as early as 1925. In 1933-34, when Minister of War for thirteen months, he grasped a real opportunity to overhaul the French army, revitalise it, and above all mechanise it. He is called France's best War Minister since Maginot. Maginot built the fortified line; Daladier built the tanks, the armoured cars, the caterpillar trucks behind it. That the French army is to-day the best in Europe is partly Daladier's work.

## His Appeal

It is difficult to sum up the sources of Daladier's power. He is no genius. He is no demagogue. He



PREMIER EDOUARD DALADIER

lacks magnetism or political "oomph." He is no titan, no born leader of men. He is certainly not a "great" man, as Clemenceau was. Probably he is not even as strong a man as Poincaré. But he speaks the language of the average Frenchman; that is his secret. Like the average Frenchman, he is resilient, and individualist, shrewd, not particularly ambitious, packed with common sense, rational, and moderate. He has the incomparable advantage of being arch-typical of the people he represents. Therefore the people like and trust him. They understand his every accent. He is one of them.

I asked one of his best friends what Daladier's central faith was, what he believed in most. The answer came, "Three things." I asked what they were. "France. The small man. And himself."

## "THE PLAY'S THE THING" IN FRANCE

**T**HE French have always been a play-going nation. For them, even more than for us, "the play's the thing."

The French theatre proper came into being when Cardinal Richelieu conceived the ambition of making the finest national theatre in Europe; to this end he has built a special model theatre for the display of changing scenes. In the French Academy members ceaselessly debated the theories of dramatic art.

A glance through the section devoted to theatre in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* shows the astonishing activity put into theatrical enterprise in the eighteenth century. Forsaking the few simple pulleys and wheels which had served to change scenery in the Greek and early Italian theatres, a highly complicated system of machines for the staging of vast spectacles was evolved. The actual stage itself was full of trapdoors.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the *Comédiens Français* acted in the *Théâtre de la Comédie Française*, the shell of which still stands, later the company shifted quarters several times.

By 1812 Paris had many hundred theatres. Napoleon, by his *Decrét de Moscou*, gave the city two weeks in which to close them, leaving eight alone to be thoroughly developed. The clauses of the famous decree still, with little amendment, govern the theatres of France. The celebrated *Théâtre Français* is a reconstruction made after a fire in 1900.

In 1887 André Antoine, one of the most able men of the theatre in France founded the *Théâtre Libre*, which saw the production of plays by the serious writers of the time.

One of the standard French works on acting is Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, which was prompted by the earlier work, *Garrick, ou les Acteurs Anglais*. The work enlarges the idea that, while inferior players are poor puppets whose strings are pulled by the playwright, the fine actor is a collaborator and contributes qualities undreamed of by the author.

Curiously enough it was a dancer who made many people aware of the significance of mime in the theatre — Isadora Duncan. Auguste Rodin, Henri Lavedan, and Eugene Carrière are among the Frenchmen who paid tribute to her unique power. Yvette Guilbert also demonstrated basic dramatic principles. She proved that an artist of the theatre may be creative, deriving from literature and other arts, but forming an utterly distinct art.

In this century the French theatre is still in the forefront. In the theatre generally great advances and experiments have been made. In Russia, in Germany, even in England, *regisseurs* and producers are constantly trying new forms of dramatic expression. Thus Paris to-day sees a wide variety of plays—from Molière, Racine and Corneille at the *Théâtre Français* to light things such as Giradoux's *Ondine*, from orthodox theatre to surrealist theatre.