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THE PLACE OF AMERICA IN THE WORLD TO-DAY.¹

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I AM the youngest American here to-day. Less than two months ago in solemn court I lifted my right hand as I swore allegiance to the United States of America, and became one of you. I am an American, therefore, not by an accident of birth but by my free manhood's choice, and I feel that I speak to-day with an appreciation of America's worth and place which I have found too often lacking in many of the native born.

I rejoice in the signal honor which you have conferred on me by asking me to voice your sentiments this day. We could spend a delightful hour in reviewing the life of Washington, in calling attention to the qualities of his manhood, in rehearsing his very human experiences in home, in school, in boyish love affair, in the profession of his young manhood years. I believe, however, there will be more value in leaving aside all that, and discussing with the utmost frankness the heritage he left us, and the use to which we are putting it to-day.

Some of us are apt to think that in Washington and his associates a new conception of the individual man and his ideal organization in politics had its birth. As a matter of fact these ideas had a rebirth in him. But, just as it is more significant that a man be born again than that he be born, the rebirth of ideas, first faintly held, gives to them significance that is real and enduring.

Government by representation and consultation and not by arbitrary personal dictation, government that observes the full values of the individual man, was in the world long before the war of the Revolution. They had it among the Teuton tribes of Germany. It developed in Anglo-Saxon

¹Report of an address delivered in Finney Chapel, Oberlin College, on Washington's birthday, 1921.

England, marking its growth by a Magna Charta, a Habeas Corpus, and a Bill of Rights. Men struggled, fought, died, that it might not perish from the earth.

But this Democracy in government came to its own in America. Here it justified itself to the modern world. Here that which had been born in "an age-long struggle from servitude to self-government" was permanently shaped into a "government of the people, by the people, for the people"—a government that recognized the fundamental rights of every individual "born free and equal before the law."

This has been America's lordliest contribution to mankind. More significant than anything we have done in literature, art, science, commerce, or invention, more significant than the tremendous material contributions which have come from America to the world's life, is this perfected ideal of government.

For a hundred and fifty years this ideal has been as leaven in a world's lump, a ferment in the souls of men. As our traders have searched the corners of the earth they have carried with them this priceless gift to men. Our missionaries for a hundred years have illustrated the source of America's greatness, as, preaching the gospel of the Nazarene, they have reproduced in their simple home life this heart of America. For generations our "new Americans" have been filling the mails with hopeful letters that have carried the message of their opportunities and privileges back to many a hamlet where peasant life was hopelessly bound.

In no small degree America has thus become responsible for much of the world's unrest. That there should be well-nigh political chaos in China, that India should be so disturbed, that a child's killing of a sacred pigeon should make blood to flow like water in the streets of Bombay, that in the measureless north and east of Russia men in the brilliant light of an unaccustomed freedom, should be indulging in wild excess, is in a large measure America's fault.

I have a friend who likes to dig in the odd parts of the world. One summer in the days before the war he found himself in a Siberian village three hundred miles north of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Coming into a peasant hut in whose sod walls there were no windows, he was amazed to find as his eyes became accustomed to the smoky interior that the sole decoration of those four walls was a lithograph of the pale emancipator of men, Abraham Lincoln. He found that out of that hut had gone a lad seized with a desire to see the world. In his wanderings he had come at last to America, and there in a Pennsylvania coal-mining village he had found the opportunity and privilege his soul desired. Eager to send back to his old home that which he had found for himself in America's life, he had sent this picture of Lincoln, feeling that he could find no better expression for the soul of America than that which appears in the gaunt features of America's noblest son. There, week after week Lincoln's picture had become a ferment in the life of that village, stirring vague hopes of a day when the shackles would be torn off and men should come out into that freedom for which they were made.

When the Great War came and that relentless grey host began its devastating march across the fields of Belgium, leaving in its wake terrified thousands facing starvation, it was an American who stood up in London to say that back of him were a hundred million people who would not see innocent millions left to die. At Hoover's call relief ships came from the seven seas, and in a new and striking fashion preached America's message to the world. It was not six weeks until black traders in the palaver houses of African villages were telling the story of a nation dedicated to freedom that was giving itself without reserve to the feeding and clothing of those who were in distress.

As the war continued and prisoner-of-war camps multiplied in every one of the fighting countries, America took a new opportunity to impress its genius on the world, for into these camps, where men were rotting in body and in

mind for lack of occupation, came men in the distinctive uniform of America, bringing with them a resourcefulness in organizing power which, by the establishment of schools and methods of exercise in play, was to keep men sane. Out of those camps, when the war was over, hundreds of thousands of men went home with an entirely new conception of the values of life.

In the progress of the war the day came when America cast her lot with the Allies, and the greatest military crusade of history began. Some of us still remember the thrill that came from being joined with that host of men that were tumbled across the Atlantic, a hundred thousand a week, bringing into the lands of France the last great reserves of civilization and making it certain that "government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish from the earth." On every front and in the billets behind the lines the khaki-clad youth of America preached, through deeds of courtesy and courage, that which had become their heritage through the years, and by their service brought our land into the forefront of the nations. When the armistice was signed the American idea was in commanding position. The opportunity for the moral leadership of the world was in our hands.

I shall never forget the day on which Mr. Wilson came first to Paris. I stood with many another grateful American to see him receive an ovation which has been given to few men in the life of the world. Between long lines of faded blue he came as a grateful French people poured out its heart to him. And that demonstration was not for Mr. Wilson the man, but for Mr. Wilson the representative of that ideal in life and government which had brought America into the war with no concern for material gain, but with utmost concern that that which was the foundation of her own greatness should become the shared possession of the rest of men.

Not many days afterwards a friend of mine stood on the Strand in London, waiting for a similar procession to pass. Beside him stood an English soldier just returned

from three years of life in a prison camp in Austria. As they talked together the Englishman said, "You have no idea how the people in the part of the world where I have been think of Mr. Wilson. They speak of him as they do of God. When he speaks, somehow they seem to hear God's voice." And once again it was not a tribute alone to Mr. Wilson the man, but it was an expression of the conviction that he who gave voice to the real heart of America was speaking as a prophet that which was the deepest yearning of men everywhere, and they were ready to put into the hands of a people whose life was thus expressed the opportunity of leadership. In 1918 the world was ours.

Then came a strange change. An entirely new and un-American idea began to be preached among us. True, it took upon itself the name American as it preached America first and an isolation from the world that should be complete and selfish. It reaped the fruits of the subtle process of education that had begun among us many years before. Those who had robbed Germany of her soul had come among us also, preaching their strange doctrines of law as a makeshift and force as the only ultimate reality. They took away from us our pride in the achievement of the A. E. F. They held us back from assuming a responsibility that was rightfully ours. The world wondered at the spectacle of America continuing to pour her dollars into the healing of wounds whose chief cause was the unwillingness of America to live to that idealism of service which had been fundamental to her growth.

This strange perversion of the American idea manifested itself in many ways. Save Germany alone, no fighting nation had passed an espionage act as stringent as ours. In industry the perverted idea expressed itself in the words "American shop," which do not mean government by representation and consultation as Washington would have meant it, but government by a Prussian type of autocracy which never can be America. This false Americanism is evidenced in a Congress that, refusing to vote a paltry two million dollars for the care of coming motherhood and

prating about the greatest navy that the world has known, is ready to pour nine hundred millions of dollars into the support of armed forces on land and sea. This false Americanism is busy stirring racial hatreds. It casts suspicion upon the attitudes of Japan and England and speaks disparagingly of the militarism of France.

I wish I might speak an adequate word for France, that I might somehow show to you how her present attitude has grown out of fifty years of terror of a clanking sabre in the north. I wish I might show you how France, baring her breast to the storm, gave until she was strained white that our form of government might be sustained.

I sat at dinner one day in a hotel for American officers, of which I was in charge. A young French woman, head waitress of the hotel, was standing beside my table as we together watched a group of American officers having a particularly good time. As they joined in hearty laughter Suzanne turned to me and said, "I like to hear men laugh. It makes me think of my brothers at home."

I said, "How many brothers have you, Suzanne?"

"I had six."

"Were they in the war?"

"Yes, all of them."

"How many have you now?"

"There are two left."

And then I found that besides her four brothers this young woman had lost three uncles, five first cousins, and her fiancé in the war. Two years ago I could look that woman in the eyes and be unashamed. I could not quite do it now, for, after all that France has suffered for us, we are turning a too ready ear to that whining nation, the defeated that seeks now to escape the just punishment of its sin. With Suzanne in mind I say from all my heart that France should have from Germany every last penny that Germany can pay, and when Germany has paid to the last cent she will have returned but little of that which she deliberately stole from the world.

This same perversion of the American idea has made it

possible in recent weeks for the president of an organization of hyphenated citizens to make strange demands upon the chief executive of the United States. With an audacity which is beyond understanding, Mr. Viereck lays down his thirteen points as follows:—

“1. That Americans of German birth should participate equally with their fellow citizens in the government of ‘our country.’

“2. Immediate peace with Germany and the rejection of the ‘infamous’ peace of Versailles.

“3. A protest against the French annexation of the ‘ancient German provinces of Alsace Lorraine.’

“4. Immediate withdrawal of the American forces from the occupied portions of Germany.

“5. Condemnation of British action in Ireland as ‘in violation of the principles for which American blood was shed and American treasure lavished in defense of the British empire during the World War.’

“6. Condemnation of the ‘attempt to embroil this country in a war with Japan for the benefit of Great Britain.’ [I hear again the Hymn of Hate, “We have one foe and one alone, England.”]

“7. Repeal of the Panama canal toll bill, which it has been said would be violation of our treaty with Great Britain. [Another scrap of paper.]

“8. Opposition to entangling alliances, ‘especially any alliance with Great Britain.’

“9. Investigation of the government handling of alien property is demanded.

“10. The immediate release of Eugene V. Debs.

“11. Attacks against citizens of German descent should be resented.

“12. Prohibition is condemned as ‘a breeder of death, corruption and contempt for the law.’

“13. A study of immigration ‘in a liberal spirit’ was urged. Mr. Viereck declared that these requests expressed the consensus of opinion of ‘patriotic and progressive Americans of German blood on vital issues confronting Mr. Harding’s administration.’”

There is much in the above to which every citizen might give heed, but most of it is born of a conception of Ameri-

ca's life and place in the world that is as different from that which has made us great as daylight is from dark. Its brazen attempt to stir racial strife by a lying interpretation of the history of the past and the story of the present demands a condemnation that should be complete. General Dawes in a speech upon another topic said that which is fully applicable here, "May God make the great English people just and considerate. May God make the Irish people just and reasonable. But may God damn the American demagogue of whatever nationality who for political reasons seeks to stir up strife between the two great English-speaking nations in whose joint hands rests the ark of the covenant of human freedom and the cause of civilization for ages to come. This is not profanity. It is a prayer." I should want to push out the limits of this prayer to include all those who in any way are leading us away from the true application of those principles which Washington laid down as fundamental to our national life.

The world looks eagerly to see whether America shall continue permanently in the grip of these who have lost sight of the value of the individual and the glory of a government that is completely democratic, of these who are attempting to perpetuate a selfish isolation that would keep us on the "bloody road" from being the Good Samaritan to the peoples of the earth.

Before us lie two possibilities. We may yield to those who in Europe strangled the early Teuton idea of self-government and become a new and more powerful Prussia — feared, distrusted, hated by the earth — or we may come, as Washington saw we might, into a continued and completer service to the whole world, building through our trade, our education, our missionary endeavor, and our national service, a new earth. One or other of these we must choose. I am a new American but I for one do not hesitate long in my choice.