

Democracy's Appeal to Culture

Speech of Mr. Bryan before the Alumni Association of Syracuse University. (Delivered at Hotel Astor, New York, January 27th, 1905, Mr. Steven B. Ayres, Presiding.)

Ladies and Gentlemen: I am very glad to be here tonight—in fact I have lost no opportunity in recent years to make the acquaintance of the people of the east. Something that I said in 1896 was misconstrued, and I have often been reminded that I called this "The enemy's country." After looking at the returns no one can doubt that, in a certain sense, it might be properly so named—but I would not use any term that might seem to indicate that there is any part of this country in which I do not feel at home, or where any theory that I entertain can justly be considered an unfriendly one. I am especially glad to have a chance to speak on occasions of this kind, where those who are assembled may be said to represent the scholarship of a section of the country—the graduates of the great universities. I am not at all embarrassed by the fact that insofar as this university has denominational leanings it is Methodist. My mother was a Methodist at the time of my birth, though she afterwards joined the Baptist church with my father, and my wife was a Methodist at the time of our marriage, although she afterwards joined the Presbyterian church with me. As my father took one from the Methodist church, and I another, I even things up now by attending a Methodist church with my whole family. I have been attending a little Methodist church near the farm for something like two years. I have thus been preparing myself to associate with the graduates of this college. I have not put great emphasis upon church lines, or church doctrines for I am connected by ties of blood—and by friendship with all the other churches. I find that I am recalling more and more frequently a story which I heard when I was but a boy; it has really had a great deal of influence in shaping my views on church questions. It was in a southern Methodist church that I heard it. The minister said that there was a mill, and that many people brought wheat to the mill by several roads. When they arrived with the wheat—some coming by one road and some by another—some over the hill and some along the stream—the miller never asked them by what road they came, but simply whether the wheat was good?

That was years ago, but I have thought of that story many, many times, and it has made me feel that if we are one in the essentials we can afford to be charitable towards each other in the non-essentials, and all of the branches of the Christian church are one in the great fundamental principles of religion. I like some things about the Methodists; I like their friendliness—the manner in which they stop, when the sermon is over and the congregation dismissed, and shake hands and get acquainted with each other—I like that. And there is one thing about the Presbyterian church that I did not like, but I have had an explanation of it recently that makes me accept that; so I am in a very genial frame of mind so far as churches are concerned. The one thing that I did not like about the Presbyterian church was the doctrine of election. I have had a good deal of trouble with that—religiously, and otherwise—but I heard an explanation of the doctrine of election that has reconciled me to it, and in the hope that there may be some Presbyterians here who can be helped by it, I will tell you this story. Two colored preachers down in Georgia were discussing religion, as they are wont to do sometimes, and the Presbyterian brother was trying to persuade the Methodist, and the Methodist brother hung back on the doctrine of election. The Presbyterian brother said: "It's just this way—the voting is going on all the time; the Lord is voting for you and the devil is voting against you, and whichever way you vote, that's the way the election goes."

It is the best definition of the doctrine of election that I know of.

I am glad to have a chance to talk to you, who represent a great university; I have enjoyed meeting those who stand in positions of prominence in your university. I need not tell you that the name of your chancellor, Doctor Day, has been known to me, and that it is a great pleasure to make his personal acquaintance tonight.

I am here to speak to you, because I have something to say to you; I have a message that I want to bring to you, and I am very much more

concerned about impressing the message upon you than I am about the language in which I shall present it. I am reminded of the difference which some one said existed between Demosthenes and Cicero. "When Cicero speaks," he said, "people say 'How well Cicero speaks,' but when Demosthenes speaks, they say, 'Let us go against Philip,'"—the difference being that the one impressed himself upon his audience, and the other impressed his subject upon his audience. While I appreciate kindly feeling and expressions of confidence and respect, I am very much more anxious that I shall impress my theme upon you tonight, than that I shall impress myself—in fact, I am comparatively indifferent as to what you may think of me, if I can make you think of the subject to which I invite your attention. It is Democracy's appeal to culture. That is my theme; it is a great theme. I shall not attempt to exhaust it but will merely suggest some things that occur to me in connection with it. Let me first say that I do not speak of Democracy in any partisan sense. I am not going to talk politics, although I was tempted to think of politics just once this evening as I looked at the moving pictures of the boat race, and I enjoyed them very much. We were told that one of the characteristics of your crew is that the men "recover quickly." I am satisfied that you have been wise enough to select democrats for your oarsmen. I speak democracy, not in the party sense, but in that broader sense in which democracy means the rule of the people. In every country, according to Jefferson, there is a democratic party; I care not what they may call it; it is a party that draws to itself those who believe in the people and trust the people. In this country, I am glad to say, there is no party large enough to contain all of the democratic spirit—we find its manifestations in all parties—in fact there never has been a crisis where this democratic spirit was appealed to, but what we have found that that spirit was too large to be condensed within the limits of any party. But I want to speak of democracy in even a larger way, and that is as the term describes—the people at work—the common people, if you will. And when I say "the common people" let no one think that I use the term as a term of reproach. The highest compliment ever paid to any class of people, was paid to the common people—for, does not the Bible say, when Christ was upon earth and preaching His doctrines of brotherly love—does not the Bible say that the common people heard Him gladly? What other class has ever been so dignified, so honored? Lincoln said that God must have loved the common people, because he made so many of them. The common people are very numerous, and the uncommon people are not nearly so important as they sometimes think they are. The common people of a nation are its strength; they produce the nation's wealth in time of peace; they are the ones who stand ready to sacrifice themselves for their country in time of war. The common people furnish the students for your colleges. From the ranks of the common people, too, all the occupations and professions of the city are recruited. I want to speak, just for a little while, of the appeal that the people make to culture. Let me suggest that this word "culture" has too limited a definition. Sometimes we speak of culture as if it involved only refinement of manners and the training of the intellect. I want to speak of that broader culture which may be defined as the enlargement of man's capacity for service, accompanied by a willingness to employ that capacity to the full. It is a fault of the cultured people of this age, and of every age, that they have not lived up to their opportunities. And lest you should think that this is a western criticism let me read you what a great eastern orator once said. Wendell Phillips cannot be accused of being a western man; he lived even farther east than you in New York; he lived in the very center of culture, in Boston, and in his address entitled, "The Scholar in a Republic," he said: "Almost all the great truths relating to society were not the result of scholarly meditation, 'hiving up wisdom with each curious year,' but have been first heard in the solemn protest of martyred patriot and the loud cries of crushed and starving labor. When common sense and the common people have stereotyped a principle into a statute, then book men come to explain how it was discovered and on what ground it rests. The world makes history, and scholars write it—one half truly and the other

half as their prejudices blur and distort it." Now, this is the opinion of a great eastern orator in regard to the product of the schools, and what he says is only too true. The scholar does not do his duty to the people today; he has not done his duty to the people in the past. I want to divide what I have to say tonight into three parts, and speak for a moment in regard to each. Democracy appeals to culture, first, for justice, second, for truthfulness, and third, for service. What do you find today? I have been deeply interested in the presentation of one phase of this subject by Professor Ross, of our Nebraska State University. In an address on "The Character of Modern Sin," he takes occasion to point out that while our educated and well-to-do people avoid the old-fashioned sins, such as burglary, assault and battery and murder upon the highway, they are guilty of modern sins that are no less injurious in their character, but sins which are committed without coming into close contact with their victims. Let me call attention to some of the forms of this sin. For instance, the adulteration of foods. Those who are guilty of the adulteration of foods are not only swindling, but they even endanger lives, and yet so great is this adulteration of food that it is an old story to tell you of the injury and injustice done in this way. Professor Ross spoke of an instance in Chicago where the board of health sent out a prescription to be filled at a hundred drug stores. In a third of the cases the prescription filled contained not a single thing that was called for in the prescription. In about a third of the cases it contained a part of that which was called for, and only in a third of the cases was it filled properly. It is necessary to pass laws to prevent swindling, and the injury of people by the adulteration of food. He also called attention to the loss of life that comes from the failure of corporations to use safety appliances. Is it not strange that a Christian man—an educated Christian man—can prefer a large dividend to the care of the lives of those who work for him? And yet I remember that one whole night was spent in congress to compel a vote upon a bill to require railroads to use safety appliances. Deaths were running into the thousands through this neglect, and yet the cost of equipping cars with a safe coupler was sufficient to stand in the way and make it necessary for the members of congress of this great nation to spend a whole night trying to compel the use of a device for the protection of the lives of railway employes. That is not an isolated case—you know that it is true that we have to have the laws in regard to the inspection and care of mines and the employment of children under age. It is necessary for the government to step in and with the strong hand of the law prevent men from actually taking human life and from injuring generations to come because of the profit that can be secured from the working of children when they ought to be in school. This is one of the phases of modern sin. Another, is in the enormous wrong that is done by commercial methods that are sometimes considered respectable. We find great swindling enterprises put upon the market. In this very city you are having an investigation that shows that an official of one of your great banks was connected with a syndicate that was burglarizing the public. What was the purpose of the "wash sales" of stock—to deceive the people into buying the stock in the belief that the stock was worth more than it was! Men engage in these things—men whose minds are trained and who ought to understand moral principles as applied to business. Too often educated and cultured men are found increasing their dividends by methods that must be called criminal when measured by any moral law. It is a common thing nowadays for those who control a corporation to pass dividends, to run down the price of stocks in order to secure more stock at a lower price, and sometimes the officials make more money speculating in the stock of their concern than they make either in legitimate dividends or out of their salaries, and who are the victims? Largely the mass of the people who trust the great names in finance and are ready to invest their savings in stocks that can thus be manipulated by those who can corner and control the market. It seems to me that the people have a right to ask, especially of those who are cultured and educated, that they shall abstain from these indirect methods of wrong—from this criminality that cannot be defended.

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