

The Commoner

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AMERICA FIRST

On another page will be found a speech delivered by the president in New York on April 20th at a luncheon by the Associated Press. It is one of the most important speeches made by President Wilson since he entered upon the duties of the chief executive. The occasion was such as to call out an important utterance—being the annual meeting of a great news association whose influence extends beyond the confines of the country. The time was propitious also—the man and the hour met.

While the address is full of meat and abounds in seed-thoughts, there are three ideas which stand out as of special importance.

First: The necessity for a REAL NEUTRALITY:

"The basis of neutrality, gentlemen, is not indifference; it is not self-interest. The basis of neutrality is sympathy for mankind. It is fairness, it is good will at bottom. It is impartiality of spirit and of judgment.

"I wish that all of our fellow citizens could realize that. There is in some quarters a disposition to create distempers in this body politic. Men are even uttering slanders against the United States, as if to excite her. Men are saying that if we should go to war upon either side there would be a divided America—an abominable libel of ignorance! America is not all of it, vocal just now. It is vocal in spots.

"But I, for one, have a complete and abiding faith in that great silent body of Americans who are not standing up and shouting and expressing their opinions just now, but are waiting to find out and support the duty of America. I am just as sure of their solidity and of their loyalty and of their unanimity, if we act justly, as I am that the history of this country has at every crisis and turning point illustrated this great lesson."

Second: The importance of confirming "rumors"

on international matters before they are given to the public:

"I wanted to point out to you gentlemen simply this: There is news and news. There is what is called news from Turtle Bay that turns out to be falsehood, at any rate in what it is said to signify, but which, if you could get the nation to believe it true, might disturb our equilibrium and our self-possession. We ought not to deal in stuff of that kind. We ought not to permit that sort of thing to use up the electrical energy of the wires, because its energy is malign, its energy is not of the truth, its energy is of mischief. It is possible to sift truth.

"I have known some things to go out on the wires as true when there was only one man or one group of men who could have told the originators of that report whether it was true or not, and they were not asked whether it was true or not for fear it might not be true. That sort of report ought not to go out over the wires.

"There is generally, if not always, somebody who knows whether that thing is so or not, and in these days, above all other days, we ought to take particular pains to resort to the one small group of men or to the one man if there be but one, who knows whether those things are true or not. The world ought to know the truth; the world ought not at this period of unstable equilibrium to be disturbed by rumor, ought not to be disturbed by imaginative combinations of circumstances, or, rather, by circumstances stated in combination which do not belong in combination."

Third: America first:

"So that I am not speaking in a selfish spirit when I say that our whole duty, for the present at any rate, is summed up in this motto: 'America first.' Let us think of America before we think of Europe, in order that America may be fit to be Europe's friend when the day of tested friendship comes. The test of friendship is not now sympathy with the one side or the other, but getting ready to help both sides when the struggle is over. * * *

"What I try to remind myself of every day when I am almost overcome by perplexities, what I try to remember, is what the people at home are thinking about. I try to put myself in the place of the man who does not know all the things that I know and ask myself what he would like the policy of this country to be. Not the talkative man, not the partisan man, not the man who remembers first that he is a republican or a democrat, or that his parents were German or English, but the man who remembers first that the whole destiny of modern affairs centers largely upon his being an American first of all.

"If I permitted myself to be a partisan in this present struggle, I would be unworthy to represent you. If I permitted myself to forget the people who are not partisans, I would be unworthy to be your spokesman. I am not sure that I am worthy to represent you, but I do claim this degree of worthiness—that before everything else I love America."

Here are three pertinent thoughts—real neutrality; news that is news; and America first—and the greatest of these is the last mentioned because it embraces the other two. If an American citizen has a proper conception of his obli-

gation to his country he will be neutral in EX-PRESSION—that is entirely possible—and neutral in thought, as far as possible. The president's duties have been made more delicate and difficult than they would otherwise have been, by the partisan action of those Americans who have engaged in the discussion of the merits of the European controversy and, by denunciation of one side, called forth denunciation of the other.

The American citizen who properly regards his obligations to his country will neither originate nor put into circulation false rumors affecting international relations, and to circulate rumors not known to be true is almost as reprehensible as the circulation of news known to be untrue. The newspaper that finds profit in stirring up unfriendliness between nations puts love of money above patriotism.

The president has rendered a valuable service to his country in using so pertinent an occasion for the delivery of an announcement so pregnant with thought and so representative of the high ideals for which he stands. Our nation occupies a position of rare responsibility and it is the imperative duty of its citizenship to consider that responsibility and to assist the president to so completely retain the confidence of all the belligerent nations as to give to our nation's counsel the maximum of weight and influence. By thinking of America first and by considering the highest interests of this country we can most help those who are unhappily engaged in the terrible struggle that rages across the waters.

W. J. BRYAN.

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A CALL TO THE COLORS

The world is aroused to the menace of alcohol — war has been declared against it in every civilized land and there is no neutral ground. I call you to the colors—to the standard raised by the National Abstainers Union for "Health and Home and Humanity." Rise! Let us pledge our support to the cause in water—in water, the daily need of every living thing. It ascends from the seas, obedient to the summons of the sun, and, descending, showers blessings upon the earth; it gives of its sparkling beauty to the fragrant flower; its alchemy transmutes base clay into golden grain; it is the canvas upon which the finger of the Infinite traces the radiant bow of promise. It is the drink that refreshes and adds no sorrow with it—Jehovah looked upon it at Creation's dawn and said—"It is good."—From Mr. Bryan's address at Carnegie hall, New York, April 30, 1915.