

## Protect the Cotton Producers

The allies have announced their intention to declare cotton contraband. We shall, of course, protest, but protest may prove unavailing so long as the war lasts. The belligerent nations are too busy trying to destroy each other to pay much attention to the rights of neutrals. It is interesting, however, to notice how ready the pro-ally portion of the American press is to explain the urgent necessity which compels the allies to thus interfere with our tradewith neutrals. They can not see how Germany can feel under any compulsion to prevent ammunition, ready for use, from reaching the allies, but they have no difficulty in seeing a reason for intercepting all cotton because a small fraction of it may be used in the manufacture of ammunition. The pro-ally press is just as anxious to prevent war with the allies as it is to provoke war with Germany and Austria. THE NEUTRAL PRESS SHOULD OPPOSE WAR WITH ANY OF THE BELLIGERENTS.

The government should carry its protest as far as necessary to state its position clearly and emphatically, as it has with Germany, and it should use all possible diplomatic pressure to secure respect for our rights, but it should not carry the protest to the point of war or even to the point of suspending diplomatic relations. In the meantime the government should proceed to protect those American producers upon whom the burdens of the war fall most heavily. It is not the fault of our cotton farmers that this blow is struck at their industry—they suffer without blame. But to go to war to relieve them would simply increase the sacrifice called for. There is an easier way: extraordinary conditions require extraordinary remedies. Let the government fix a price based upon normal prices and either purchase and hold the cotton, or issue loans upon it so that the farmer will not be compelled to sacrifice it. When the war is over we can present a claim for damages if we are able to maintain our contention against the right of belligerent nations to declare cotton contraband. The same plan can be applied to any other non-perishable crop that is threatened with special injury. international law, as now interpreted and applied, seems to have been written for the benefit of nations at war rather than for the benefit of nations at peace; when peace is restored, the neutral nations will doubtless endeavor to secure such changes as may be necessary to protect the rights and interests of the nations that prefer to settle their disputes by reason rather than by force.

W. J. BRYAN.

### MR. BRYAN IS RIGHT

[From the Washington Post, August 25, 1915.]

Calm and dispassionate study of the situation has convinced a large proportion of the American people that citizens of this country ought to save their government embarrassment by refraining from traveling on British vessels.

Neutrals have a right to travel on merchant vessels of a belligerent and the United States government has very properly refused to waive this right in behalf of its citizens.

This does not prevent an American traveler, however, from using common sense while in the war zone. If any American wishes to waive his right and save his life by sticking to ships carrying the American flag, the United States government has no objection.

Mr. Bryan is right in suggesting that American travelers should do their share to avoid a quarrel with Germany by keeping off British ships. It is good, sensible advice. Most of the Americans who go through the war zone are already following it.

The situation might be compared to a disturbance in a street. Passersby have a right to use the sidewalk, and rioters have no right to shoot them while they are on their peaceful errands. But any man of sense, seeing a riot and hearing bullets whizzing, will keep off the street temporarily. He chooses to waive his right rather than risk losing his life. At the same time the authorities have no right to waive this right for him and to admit that peaceful citizens have no rights which the rioters are bound to respect. The analogy is not strict, but it is close enough

to explain the difference between the citizen's privilege and the state's duty.

In its note to the United States dated July 8, the German government said:

"The imperial government will always be ready to do all it can during the present war to prevent the jeopardizing of lives of American citizens. The imperial government therefore repeats the assurances that American ships will not be hindered in the prosecution of legitimate shipping, and the lives of American citizens in neutral vessels shall not be placed in jeopardy."

This does not concede that American citizens have a right to travel in British vessels, but it certainly does point out to individual Americans how they may travel safely through the war zone. Why should they not take advantage of this immunity? Why is not the American flag good enough for them?

It is suggested that in some cases Americans have urgent business and can not wait to get passage on an American vessel, but must travel on British vessels or be subjected to great inconvenience. Is their private business so important that they must make it paramount to their duty to the country? Are they willing that the United States and Germany should go to war on the point? Knowing that their government will not waive their rights, will they place it in the position of being forced to uphold these rights, even at the cost of tens of thousands of American lives?

The government has done its duty by standing up for the rights of its people and making it plain that it will fight rather than abandon these rights. Now, how about the citizen? Has he no duty in the premises? Is he as regardful of his government as his government is of him? Is the exercise of his individual right so necessary, so vital, that he can not waive it, even to avoid war?

The practical sense of Americans tells them that the right to travel on a belligerent ship is a minor and unessential right, which they can afford to waive in individual cases, so long as they are able to travel with perfect safety under their own flag.

### THE HOOSIER POET

Before another issue of The Commoner appears Indiana will honor "her most beloved son." October seventh—the 66th anniversary of the birth of James Whitcomb Riley, has been set apart by Governor Ralston's decree as Riley Day. The citizens of the Hoosier state will not begrudge the outside world the privilege of joining with them in doing honor to the poet whose fame, like his sympathies, long since extended beyond the borders of his nation. The Commoner tenders its tribute of respect, and shares in the universal wish that the distinguished author may enjoy many returns of the day—each happier than the one before.

Correspondents of New York newspapers are suggesting, in view of the utterances of Colonel Roosevelt, that his name be barred from the newspaper columns just as it was announced some weeks ago that Mr. Bryan's name would be eliminated. Editors now and then get the idea that they edit their own newspapers, but a little reflection shows them that the reader is the final arbiter. If they want to know what a public man is saying the newspapers must print his utterances; if one doesn't the others will, because the newspaper is a commercial enterprise first.

The Welsh miners who refused to continue work unless they received an advance in wages are being excoriated by the organs of wealth for being unpatriotic and as deserving of punishment as traitors because the navy needed coal. The offense, however, loses much of its viciousness when it is learned that all they were asking for was a 10 per cent increase in wages to meet a corresponding increase in living expenses and that the men who owned the coal were getting from 50 to 100 per cent more for it than they did under the old wage schedule.

### THE DOWN HILL ROAD

By substituting the word "war" for the word "Hell"—and Gen. Sherman saw no difference between the two—a classical quotation may be used to describe the well-worn highway that leads to trouble, and the difficult way out: "The gates of Hell (war) are open night and day. Smooth the descent and easy is the way. But to return and view the cheerful skies—In this the task and mighty labor lies."

## The Altgeld Statue

A striking bronze statue of John Peter Altgeld was unveiled at Chicago on Labor Day. It occupies a commanding position at the north end of Lincoln park, and represents the great humanitarian in the attitude of appeal for the family—the unit of society. The statue was designed by the eminent sculptor, Borglum, and was paid for by an appropriation (\$25,000) made by the Illinois legislature.

Altgeld was a great orator—he had a message; he was a friend of labor just as he was the friend of every other element, because all are parts of the human race. He was a philosopher—he took hold of fundamental principles. Here is one bit of his philosophy which warring nations should heed:

"The doctrine that 'might makes right' has covered the earth with misery. While it crushes the weak, it also destroys the strong. Every deception, every cruelty, every wrong, reaches back sooner or later and crushes its author. Justice is moral health, bringing happiness; wrong is moral disease, bringing moral death."

He was a man of faith—here is a sample of his utterances on this subject:

"I am not discouraged. Things will right themselves. The pendulum swings one way, and then another, but the steady pull of gravitation is toward the center of the earth. Any structure must be plumb if it is to endure. So it is with nations: Wrong may seem to triumph, right may seem to be defeated, but the gravitation of Eternal justice is toward the throne of God. Any political institution which is to endure must be plumb with that line of justice."

Believing that truth would triumph, and having confidence that he was right, he could wait. Thirteen years after his death the people of Illinois honor his memory. His career will be an inspiration not only to those who, like himself, are foreign born, but to native born as well. He has shown how, rising from obscurity, one may make himself a power in the world by attaching himself to great ideas.

W. J. BRYAN.

Greed knows no law and respects no conventions. The interests that have been attempting for years to secure a subsidized merchant marine owned by private parties are now utilizing the uneasiness caused by the war talk to push forward their old scheme. They are urging its necessity because the nation might, should it become embroiled in war, need these merchant vessels for transports, but it is to be recalled that when the president was championing a merchant marine owned by the government, they were able to restrain their patriotic impulses sufficient to oppose that solution of a big problem.

It must have been a decided shock to these gentlemen who are so very sure what the president should do with respect to Germany that they had declared that the time for further parley had passed and the time for blows had come, to read the very next day that the Berlin government stood ready to disavow the acts of the commander who torpedoed the Arabic and to make whatever reparation the government of the United States thought proper under the circumstances.

Elihu Root has finally discovered the existence of the invisible government, and is of the opinion that it has occasioned a great deal of sullen resentment on the part of the people. Mr. Root is a little bit late in making his discovery, but then he never seriously ran for president before.

### THE ELECTION OF POSTMASTERS

After a two years and a half struggle with the postoffices, with their disappointments and complaints, wonder if congress would not be inclined toward the selection of postmasters by popular vote? No office comes nearer to the people. Why not give them a chance to decide the question? Whether the selection is left to the party primary of the dominant party or to a general primary, it would be a satisfaction to the public and a relief to congressmen to put the responsibility upon the patrons—the post-office department reserving, of course, the right to prescribe qualifications and to remove for cause. This reform will come ultimately—why not now?

W. J. BRYAN.