

The Officer's Responsibility

[Speech of William Jennings Bryan at Fort Benj. Harrison, Indiana, August 3rd, 1917.]

General Glenn, Gentlemen:

This is, in some respects, the most remarkable audience that it has ever been my pleasure to address in the course of a life, thirty-seven years of which have been largely devoted to public speaking.

In the first place, this assemblage carried me back nineteen years, to the time when I was, for a little while, a soldier. I do not mention my service to make a comparison between that war and this. We had few called to the colors compared with the number that have already been summoned for service in this war. We entered the war against Spain in order that a little republic on a little island might be made secure. You entered this larger war that democracy may be made safe on this big, round world of ours. Your work, therefore, is a very different and a much larger work.

But coming into your presence, I am reminded of my experience when I first thought of becoming a soldier. I broke the news to my wife one evening; I told her that I had reached the conclusion that war was imminent and, if we entered the war, I thought it my duty to offer my services. To relieve her anxiety, I told her that I would have the safest place in the army, that of a colonel. She said there was no safe place in the army. I replied that, from the number of colonels I had met, I was satisfied that few had ever been killed. She said: "You can not fight." I said: "You never saw me mad." She said: "They do not get mad, they get scared." I said: "You never saw me scared."

My experience in the army covered about five months. My offer of service was sent on the day war was declared; my resignation as colonel was accepted the day the treaty was signed, so that my constructive service covered the entire period of the war. I was in the army long enough to learn something more of men than I had ever learned before. I became better acquainted with men in the army than I had outside, and I reached the conclusion that army life brings out the best and the worst in man. I have cherished among the inner circle of my friends some men whom I learned to know in the army.

I am glad to come and speak tonight to this remarkable collection of men. I have been speaking to men all over the world and to crowds varying largely in size. My first political speech was prepared thirty-seven years ago, but it was never delivered. There were three speakers and no audience. I look back to that first occasion with gratitude because it relieves me of any fear of falling below my bett'ring.

This audience differs from any other audience I have ever addressed, in several respects. A few years ago I had an occasion to deliver an address when it was not proper for me to make a political speech. It is quite a hardship for one of my experience to avoid politics. I have tried to make speeches that were entirely free from any political suggestions, but one who enters into politics, actively, is sure to encounter prejudice—sometimes so deep that his words are misconstrued.

I remember that in 1908 I had occasion to make a speech in New York; it was in February, near enough to the campaign of 1908 for me to know that that was one of the years that I would be a candidate. Knowing that I would be closely watched, I made up my mind that I would disappoint them by saying nothing that they could criticize. I went to the Bible for my text and took as my subject: "Thou Shalt Not Steal." And, do you know, I hurt the feelings of more people that night than ever before. They seemed to think I was making a personal attack upon them. Even in the west one can not always escape manifestations of this prejudice. Some time after I went to Nebraska and before there was any particular reason for republicans to dislike me, we had a Civic Federation in our city, and it asked the churches to hold meetings the night before election, suggesting for discussion, "Purity in Politics." A republican spoke for his party; I spoke for mine. The audience made no hostile demonstrations and I thought we had had a good meeting. But the next day a prominent republican was denouncing me on the streets and charging that I had desecrated the Presby-

terian church with a political speech. It happened that a friend of mine who heard the speech overheard this gentleman's accusation and assured the republican that I did not make a political speech. "Well, he told them to vote for Judge Broady, the democratic nominee," said the republican. "No," responded my friend, "He never mentioned Judge Broady's name." "But," said the republican, "He told them to vote for the best man, and everybody knew he meant Judge Broady."

I make many religious speeches but republicans sometimes say I talk politics, and whenever I make a democratic speech they say I am preaching a sermon. The only explanation I can give is that there is so little difference between a good democratic speech and a good sermon people get them confused.

On the occasion to which I have referred, I had to avoid politics and in looking for a subject I happened to run upon the word: Civilization. I thought that might be a subject upon which to make a speech general enough not to be regarded as political. So I began to look up the word to see what had been said on the subject; if you have never made the investigation you will be surprised to find how little can be found that has been said on this subject. What surprised me more was that I could find no definition that seemed to be adequate. I found several things spoken of as entering into civilization, but a definition, in order to be a real definition, should include every essential element of the thing defined and exclude everything else. Finding no such definition I ventured to make one. I am not sure it is a perfect one. If you think it is not, make a better one and see how difficult the subject is to handle.

This is my definition of civilization: Civilization is the harmonious development of the human race, physically, mentally, and morally. I would count that civilization the highest in which there was among the people the highest development of the three-fold man. Now, if that is a fair definition of civilization then every citizen has his part in establishing the standard of his nation's civilization: for just in proportion as the citizen can present as his contribution the highest development of body, of mind and of heart, he makes the largest possible contribution to the civilization of his nation and his age.

Now, my friends, if that is correct, then I ask you, where, among all the audiences that I have addressed, have I stood face to face with a larger number of men who represent a higher average development than the men whom I have the honor to address tonight? I am not flattering you. (Applause.) I do not ask YOU to applaud: I will let your instructors applaud the statement.

Now let me tell you the foundations upon which I make the statement. You have passed a physical examination. I know of nowhere else in this country or, for that matter, in the world, where I could find higher perfection of physical development than I find in this select audience tonight. So, the first part of your contribution to civilization is a large and sufficient part, for, were you not examples of health and types of physical development you would not be among the chosen few who are assembled here.

What about your mental development? They tell me that 85 per cent of you are college men. Do you know what that means? Have you ever examined the statistics of this country? We claim, and I think we are entitled to the claim, that we have in this country the highest standard of education—the highest average education to be found in all the world. But in spite of all we do to educate our people, do you know how many take advantage of our colleges? Less than two per cent of the boys and girls who enter the graded schools ever enter a college or university—LESS THAN ONE IN FIFTY.

Now, when you know that 85 per cent of your membership are men who have been in college, you can see that you represent a very small percentage of the nation. You represent the less-than-two-per-cent who carry education as far as the university or college. Where then, could I find, in this country or in the world, a higher average, measured by intellectual standards? Where could I find so many men who have contributed so largely to the lifting of the level of

our nation's intelligence, and thus contributed to the standard of civilization?

But that is not the thing that interests me most. I find another thing that is even more gratifying, namely, that about 85 per cent of the men who are registered here give their connection with some church organization. Now, I believe that, of the three, the heart is the most important. The head is more important than the body, and the heart is more important than the head. If man is developed in body only, he may be a perfect brute and nothing more. If a man is developed only physically and mentally he may be simply an influential scoundrel. If I had to choose between development of the head and development of the heart, I would much prefer the development of the heart. A good heart can take a dull brain and make it useful for society, but a bad heart can not make a good use of any brain, no matter how trained or brilliant.

Young men, I speak for your fathers and your mothers, and I can speak as a parent, for I have passed through the period a parent passes through while his children are being reared, and I have reached the age when a parent becomes a grandparent, and thus interested in two generations. I can speak as parent and grandparent and tell you that the burden of your mother's prayer and of your father's wish is that you shall be GOOD rather than that you shall be smart.

"Out of the heart are the issues of life." "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." I am more gratified to find that you measure high by religious standards than I am gratified by your intellectual measurement. You never know what a man is until you measure him in units of spiritual power. Measure him in units of horsepower and he is not as strong as some beasts. Measure him in units of intellectual power and you soon reach his limitations, but measure him in units of spiritual power and there is no ratio that can describe the difference between man at his best and man at his worst.

Men, I do not flatter you, therefore, when I tell you that, in the last four decades I do not know when I have stood in the presence of so many men who average so high in their contribution to what I describe as civilization. I appreciate the privilege. I thank your commanding officer for the honor extended me in inviting me here. I am glad to use the time given me to say a word to you.

I shall not exhort you to be brave—it is not necessary. In all this audience there is not a man who will ever turn his back to the foe, not one who will fail to measure up to the requirements of a soldier or lack courage in time of danger. Nor will I spend any time encouraging you to believe that your country will stand behind you. It would be a reflection on my country to occupy one minute of your time in assuring you that you will not be deserted by the American people. We live in the best country on earth, under the best form of government that man's mind ever conceived—a government which rests upon great fundamental principles, principles which are essential to a government like ours. One of these principles is freedom of speech, but, my friends, every man should know that discussion ends when the country renders its decision and the people announce their will. "Acquiescence in the will of the people," as Jefferson declared, "is the vital principle of a republic, from which there is no appeal except to force."

So, today, our nation is one. If there is a discordant voice in this nation today it must come from one who either does not understand the genius of our institutions or whose heart is not with his country. I think I know the American people; I believe I am as well acquainted with them as any other citizen. I have been among them now for a generation and I know that the American people will stand back of the President and congress and furnish the government whatever it needs, in men and money, to win this war.

People ask me every day how long this war will last. My answer is that I do not know; and I do not know any body who does know. When anybody tells me he thinks he knows I lose confidence in his judgment. I know of nothing upon which any human being is able to predicate a guess that is of any value as to the length of this war. But, my friends, I can state a fact that is worth more than any guess, prediction or prophecy, and that is that no matter whether the war be long or short, the shortest road to peace