

PROHIBITION: STATE AND NATIONAL

Speech of William J. Bryan, Delivered at Auditorium, St. Joseph, Missouri, September 18, 1918

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It makes me feel as if I were somewhat aged when I remember that it is twenty-three years since I first spoke in your city, and was introduced to you by your very distinguished citizen, Hon. Calvin Burnes. I have returned many times since and never with more pleasure than I come to-night. My life has been spent for now more than a quarter of a century upon the political battlefield. Twenty-eight years,—for that is the length of time since my first Congressional nomination,—I have been laboring in behalf of reforms, and the latter years of my life have been made glad by the triumph of many reforms for which we began to fight more than two decades ago; but in all these years I have never taken part in any fight which was as great in its far reaching influence as the fight in which we are now engaged and my heart has never been so deeply in a cause as in the cause which now approaches its complete triumph. And this cause has grown more rapidly than any other cause with which I have been connected. We are traveling towards the dawn; the day grows brighter hour by hour, and I am glad tonight to find upon this platform men who dare oppose what has been in the past a majority sentiment in this city. It takes moral courage to face an adverse majority, and there is no majority that has been as tyrannical and as despotic as the majority which has stood guard over the saloon. I desire, therefore, to express my great delight at, and my appreciation of the fact that you have citizens here who are willing to take the risk of offending those interested in the liquor business and are making their fight open, direct and positive against the saloon.

Allow me to encourage them by telling them that if they will hold out for eighteen months longer there will not be a brewery, a distillery or a saloon in the City of St. Joseph to terrorize any one.

The institution is going. The question that you have to decide is whether you will help to drive it out or be its champions until it is driven out.

CAUSE UPPERMOST IN MINDS AND HEARTS OF PEOPLE

Before I take up the subject that brings us here I shall dwell for a little while upon a greater cause, for the cause uppermost in the minds and hearts of our people at this time is the cause in which millions of our men are now engaged; the cause to which we are pledging billions of our dollars. I want to speak for just a little while of the war, and shall draw some parallels between this cause at home and the cause that we are fighting for across the sea. Let me bring you a thought from the standpoint of my line of work. It has been my business to compare forms of government, to study methods of government, and to work for improvements in government, and I ask you to consider for a moment the effect that this war will have upon the world's thought on the subject of government. When our nation entered this war the character of the conflict as a combat between two forms of government was greatly emphasized, for now, standing face to face upon the battlefield, are the greatest republic in all history and that government which in modern times best represents all that is antagonistic to our ideas of government. Ours is a people's government. Here the people rule. Those who temporarily exercise authority are chosen by the people, and while they act for the people they act within the limits of a written constitution. Here the people are the masters, and the officials are but the public servants chosen to give expression to the people's will. Being a people's government it has safeguarded the rights of the people and its chief concern has been to secure equality of opportunity to the people. To show you how fully and completely it has accomplished its purpose let me present this illustration. If a boy is born in this land and his parents die before he is old enough to know them and he is reared in an orphan asylum, such are the opportunities that are attached to American citizenship that if that orphan boy will but improve those opportunities he has just as good a chance to become the

greatest business man of his generation as has the son of the greatest business man of the preceding generation. More than that, if that orphan boy will but improve his opportunities he has just as good a chance to become President of the United States in his day as has the son of any former President. That is our country, and this equality of opportunity is worth more to our children than any amount of money that a father can leave to a child. A large fortune in anticipation has ruined many young men, a large fortune in possession has ruined many more, and a fortune does not always remain in the hands of the one who inherits it, but equality of opportunity, such as attaches to citizenship in this country, meets the child on the threshold of his life and it is his to improve while his life lasts. That equality of opportunity is a thing so priceless that every man in this country and, if necessary, every woman also can afford to die to keep the path open between the child and the stars. That is our country.

WAR A CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

The German government is the very opposite of ours. At its head stands one who claims to rule by right divine, and he is supported in these absurd pretensions by military power. The German people are not their own masters; they enjoy such privileges as their sovereign condescends to grant to them.

Now, these two forms of government have met upon the battlefield and one of them will be victorious. Both have had their defenders in the past. The champions of autocracy have laid emphasis upon strength. They have insisted that under their form of government the ruler could more quickly and more surely concentrate his entire force against a given object. We have disputed the claim; we have contended that our form of government is not only the most wise but also the strongest, and no one has better expressed our views than the great historian Bancroft who, nearly one hundred years ago, said that "a republic is in truth the strongest of governments because, discarding the implements of terror, it dares to build its citadel in the hearts of men." And, now, the test is to be made and we are to find out which is the better foundation upon which to build a government, the love of the people or the fear that an autocrat can excite in the hearts of his subjects.

When I was a boy in the college I read a book entitled "Creasy's Fifteen Decisive Battles," and in that book the author says that a single battle in the past changed the course of civilization for hundreds of years. If a little battle in the past could thus affect the future who today is presumptuous enough to look ahead and attempt to guess for how many hundreds of years the stream of thought on the subject of government may be colored by this the bloodiest of all the battles of history, the one that is being fought today upon the western front. Therefore, in addition to all other reasons why we must win this war let me suggest this reason. We must not only win it for ourselves, and for our allies, and for the world of today, but, as believers in our form of government, as those who would commend this form of government to the confidence of those who live after us, we must win this war also for the world of tomorrow. We can not afford to have an historian write an hundred years from now that when these two forms of government met upon the battlefield an Emperor was better able to mobilize the resources of an Empire than a President and Congress were the resources of a Republic; and the students of history will never be permitted to read that the oppressed subjects of an ambitious Kaiser were more loyal to their government than were the free citizens of this great republic to those who they themselves had chosen and to a government that had given them more of blessings than any other people had ever enjoyed. We not only must win this war but we will win this war.

PEOPLE WILL MEASURE UP TO DEMANDS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I have no more doubt of the triumph of our arms than I have of the rising of tomorrow's sun, but my faith in victory rests upon the be-

lief that in the days to come as in the days thus far our people will measure up to every responsibility and meet every demand made upon their patriotism. For the purpose of what I have to say on that subject tonight let me divide our people into three classes. In the first class I put our soldiers and our sailors, those who in the army and navy offer their all and are ready to die if necessary in their nation's defense. No matter how willingly these men approach the battle front on them falls the heaviest burden of this war. I put no one else in the same class with our soldier boys.

In the second class I put those who occupy positions of great responsibility, chief among them our President, who carries such a load of responsibility and care as has never fallen on any other President. Near him are those who to a less degree share the burden that he bears. If you would know how heavy this burden is and what a false step would mean turn back in memory a few months to the time when a United States senator charged that the war department had broken down, and when in some quarters there was a demand that Secretary Baker should resign. Had the charge been made good he would have been compelled to withdraw from the cabinet and the remainder of his days would have been lived under the cloud that a forced retirement would have put upon him. But, fortunately, when he made his answer it was so complete that he not only silenced his critics but established himself more firmly than before in the nation's confidence, and now, a few months afterwards, a world is amazed that that same Secretary Baker should have been able, in so short a time, to have carried across an ocean three thousand miles wide one million, six hundred thousand American soldiers and put them on the battlefields of Europe.

For many months a coterie of newspapers in the northeast tried to drive Josephus Daniels out of the cabinet. They ridiculed him; they misrepresented him, and Daniels himself is not happier than I that he has overwhelmed his enemies; and here again the world is amazed that that same Secretary Daniels should have been able to so safeguard our troops in transit that less than three hundred have perished on the waters.

I mention these two because they were the ones singled out for attack, and now I want to tell you that the chief influence back of the attack on them was the liquor interests of this country.

They did not like the way Josephus had driven John Barleycorn from the ships of Uncle Sam, and they did not like the way Baker had made dry zones around the cantonments on land.

Had these two men been willing to get down on their knees and worship the Rum god there would have been no attempt to drive either one of them out of the cabinet. Outside of this inner circle there is a little larger circle made of some five hundred senators and members who deal daily with problems both difficult and delicate. The President and those associated with him in authority I put in the second class.

DUTY OF ALL TO STAND BACK OF PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS

In the third class are all the rest of the people. This is the big class, and we who are in the third class, while not required to make the sacrifices demanded of the soldier and not called upon to bear the burden of responsibility that rests upon the President and those near him, have our duties also, and our first duty, as I conceive it, is to stand as one man, without dissension, division or discord, back of our President and Congress and support our government in anything and everything that it sees fit to undertake while this war lasts. That is our first duty and it is a duty that cannot be discharged by words only. It requires deeds, and deeds along every one of the many lines of our nation's activities.

Let me call attention to three lines and that only briefly. In the first place our government is doing more than it ever did before and more than any other government ever tried to do to make the lot of the soldier as easy as possible when he is sick or wounded, and his moral welfare as safe as possible while he is in the army. A