

THE COMMON PEOPLE



Speech delivered by Louis F. Post
Fourth of July celebration at Fair-
view under the auspices of the Fair-
view Jefferson Club. ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Rev. Harry Huntington, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church at Normal, asked the divine blessing upon the assembly at the celebration of the Fourth of July at Fairview. The invocation follows:

"Let us bow our heads in prayer. Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. We thank Thee, our Father, that we are permitted to observe Independence Day. We thank Thee for all that day means to us. We thank Thee for our sturdy forefathers who assembled more than a century and a quarter ago today to declare in the name of God that we are, and of right ought to be, free and independent people. And we pray today, in the name of Christ, that we may continue to be a free and independent people. Our Father, we believe that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that sin is a reproach to any people, therefore we pray that as a people we may keep very close to God. We are proud of our nation, proud of our sturdy pioneers, proud of the men who sacrificed and died upon battle fields that we might have our country. We are proud of our American institutions. We are proud of our broad fields, and our hills and mountains. But, oh, Father, in our pride, will not Thou help us that we may be very humble, and may not forget that a nation cannot be maintained upon wealth and upon power alone, but that it must be established upon the hearts of the people. Our Father, we know that the lust of office some times kills, and that the spoils of office some times buys men. Oh, God, give us men! Our time demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands. Men whom the lust of office cannot kill. Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy. Men who possess opinions and a will. Men who have honor. Men who will not lie. Men who can stand before a demagogue and scorn his treacherous flatteries without winking. Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog in public duty and in private thinking. Our Father, we pray Thy blessing upon every American throughout the length and breadth of our land. Bless our people and let them truly be strong men and women, and may we keep very close to the teachings of the Man of Galilee. We ask Thy blessing upon the president of these United States and upon every official over our land, and as officers who have taken the oath to do their duty in the administration of their office, may all our officers seek to perform that duty rightly and honestly in the sight of God. May we come to the place where manhood is above office, where manhood is first, and where we all as an American people seek to know and do the whole of our duty. We pray, Heavenly Father, that this day may not be observed in a superficial celebration, and that people may meet together today to do honor to the flag and to the heroes of the past. That they may meet together to observe and consider the great questions that interest us as a people, that we may be sober, honest-minded people. That we may study the questions of our day in the sight of God as He would have us study it, and that we may truly be men and women.

"We ask Thy blessings upon us all, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Mr. Post was introduced by Mr. Bryan and spoke as follows:

Mr. Bryan, Ladies and Gentlemen: It is a great pleasure and a great honor to be allowed to participate in a Fourth of July celebration like this, in such a place as this, and in such company as I find myself today.

But everybody in the United States does not like the kind of celebration that Mr. Bryan is proposing as well as I do. Some days ago I asked a gentleman if he was going to attend the Fourth of July celebration at Mr. Bryan's place. "No," he answered, "I am tired of hearing Mr. Bryan talk about equal rights and things of that kind." (Laughter.) "But," I asked, "aren't you going to attend a Fourth of July celebration anywhere?" "Oh, yes, I suppose so," said he; "I shall go to some place around home." "Don't you expect to hear some speaker there?" "Of course I do." "And don't you expect that speaker to say something in favor of equal right?" "Oh, yes," he replied, "but I don't mind that; what makes me sore on Bryan is that he believes in it." (Laughter and applause.)

That suggests the real significance, ladies and

gentlemen, of this particular celebration at this particular place. The men who are met here do believe in the utterances that have been read from this book today. They do believe in the Declaration of Independence. They do believe, therefore, in the equal rights of all men before the law. That is the principle that we are proposing, if I understand it, to celebrate.

We are not celebrating merely the birth of a nation—the birth of even so great a republic as this. Why, it isn't worth while to celebrate the birth of the nation simply because it is a nation. Nations have been born and nations have died. This nation was born a little more than a century ago. We cannot tell how soon it may possibly die as the others have died. But the principles upon which this nation was founded, those principles of equality, those principles of justice, those principles of righteousness, they can never die! (Voice: Amen.—Applause.) And it is those principles that we are celebrating.

You have often heard men who claim to be patriotic say, "Our country, right or wrong." They think that is patriotism. But that is not patriotism. That is political idolatry, my friends. Think of it a moment. Analyze it. My country, right or wrong! My state, right or wrong! My party, right or wrong! My county, right or wrong! My township, right or wrong! My family, right or wrong! Myself, right or wrong! ME! (Laughter and applause.) That is what it all comes down to. (Applause.) It is nothing but magnified selfishness, magnified self-interest, magnified egotism—to stand for our country, right or wrong. Let us stand for our country right, always; but never for our country wrong. (Applause.)

Why, the men who gave currency to this idea of "Our country, right or wrong"—who was he? A naval officer. I have no doubt of his patriotism. What did he say? "I hope my country may always be right; but as a naval officer, right or wrong, my country!" Well, what has that to do with you as voters? Suppose a constable that you had elected to execute laws, not to make them, suppose he should say, "I hope the law may always be just, but just or not, I shall execute it." That is all that that naval officer said. He never meant to advise the American people, those who have votes, that they with their votes should stand for our country, wrong. For the constable, the naval officer, the army officer, the man whose business it is to execute the law—it is not for him in that capacity to say whether the law is right or not; but for you, and you, and you, every one of you, you who have votes, it is for you to see to it that you never call upon any of your officers, from constable to admiral, from admiral to president, ever to execute an unjust law. Our country, right! Not our country, right or wrong, but our country, right! That is the position for voters to take.

A similar principle applies to the flag. Now don't imagine that I am a traitor if I say an unusual word about the flag. We have two flags. There is that piece of bunting, a mere piece of cloth. You can buy it anywhere for a few cents or a few dollars; red stripes and white stripes, blue field and white stars—all of them. That is simply a symbol, and if you bow down to worship that piece of cloth you are a political idolator. Unless you can look beyond the cloth itself, unless when that cloth thrills you it thrills you with a thought of the great patriotic truth the cloth represents, you are no American patriot, you are nothing but a pagan worshipping an idol.

And how often are the people made to worship that symbol in order to hide from them some—well, just let me tell you a story: Once upon a time in an eastern town they got up a Washington birthday celebration of the ordinary kind for the school children, and they put a flag across the back wall of the school house, and they had other flag trimmings, and so forth, and they had an orator who spoke about the great and good Washington. He wanted to make a little dramatic effect in the course of his talk, so he suddenly stopped and said, "My little boys and girls, do you know why that flag is stretched across there?" There was no answer. "What!" he exclaimed, "don't you know why that flag is there today?" A little boy raised his hand and said, "I know." "That's it," said the orator; "that's it; and now, my little patriotic friend, why is that flag stretched across there today?" "If you please, sir," piped up the boy, "it's to hide the dirt on the wall!"

(Laughter.) The boy saw through it. Yet I know full-bearded men who don't see through it. You can hide dirt on the wall from them every time if you stretch the flag over it. (Applause.) They are worshipping a mere idol, a symbol. Let us honor the flag for what it stands for, and not merely because it is our bunting.

I was asked if I would say a word today about the common people. The common people! Do you know that that little story about the flag suggests a great truth that runs through the whole idea of the common people. It is the judgment of the child in regard to matters of simple right and wrong. The child of any intelligence at all will pierce through all your hypocrisy. And there seems to be something like the judgment of the child, like the spirit of the child, not in one particular child perhaps, but in children generally, and in the children of larger growth—a certain something which when it is expressed we call it public opinion. Now, public opinion is really the expression of the spirit of the common people. See how the sun comes through the meshes of this tent, with its heat and with its light. It lights up all in the tent, and it warms it—making it too warm, possibly, for the sun's heat is like the great love of God himself, we sometimes have to get in the shade or it will burn us up. Just as the sun's light and heat come down through the tent upon us, in a similar way do the very love and wisdom of God, infinite love and infinite wisdom, come pouring down upon mankind. He who will open up the windows of his mind and soul will receive that heat and that light, that love and that wisdom; and the great mass of the common people, the unprivileged people, do open up the doors of their hearts and minds, and take in this heat and this light, this love and this wisdom from the infinite, and so we get an effect that has been expressed in the terms, "The voice of the people is the voice of God."

You may think of that perhaps as a meaningless phrase. But it is not so. The voice of the people is the voice of God speaking out among men. The voice of the people is the voice of God! That is a true saying. You can always appeal—Abraham Lincoln knew it and none knew it better—you can always appeal to the common people on the basis of right. When you touch a man's sense of right, or if you touch the sense of right of the mass of the people, the common people, the unprivileged people, you strike a chord which never fails ultimately to respond. It is true that the common people sometimes do fail to respond. It is true that truth often loses battles. But truth never has and never will lose a war. When the common people understand, they always respond to appeals for the right. We have had this response—how often have we had it! Often enough, it should seem, to convince those who tell us that there is no such thing as right, that there must at any rate be some such thing as wrong—either in their own heads or in their own hearts.

There are men who call themselves scientists (God save the mark)—men who tell us that it is a scientific fact that there is no such thing as universal right, but that a thing that is right in one place and at one time may be wrong at another place and at another time; that liberty, for instance, may be right in Nebraska, but wrong in the Philippines. The idea of right they tell us is a myth. They call themselves scientists; they deal with facts alone. I should call them grasshopper scientists. There is a story about one of that class of scientists who had got it into his head that grasshoppers hear through their legs. He wouldn't take this on faith. He took nothing on faith. That would be superstitious. He was going to prove it. So he got a grasshopper. He put the grasshopper on the end of the table, and then he went to the other end and tapped on it—and the grasshopper jumped. "Ah," said he, "that indicates that my theory is true. The grasshopper's legs heard this sound and up jumped the grasshopper." But this was not conclusive. He had to prove a negative. He had to prove that there was no sense of hearing anywhere else in the grasshopper's anatomy. So he pulled off the legs of the grasshopper and put him back in the same place on the table, and then he tapped on the table, again, and behold the grasshopper didn't jump! (Laughter.) So he said, this scientist said, "Therefore,"—and he said it with as much logic as distinguished social scientists sometimes use—

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