

# The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Vol. 3. No. 48.

Lincoln, Nebraska, December 18, 1903.

Whole No. 152.

## Mr. Bryan's Thanksgiving Day Address

DELIVERED AT THE BANQUET GIVEN BY HON. JOSEPH CHOATE, AMBASSADOR TO THE COURT OF ST. JAMES, AT THE HOTEL CECIL, LONDON, NOV. 26, 1903.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency, Your Grace, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen: It is I who have reason to be grateful for the opportunity of meeting so many of my own countrymen and those who are so like my countrymen that I cannot, looking down the tables, tell which is which. I am not surprised to find that the ladies of England are so handsome as to be taken for Americans, for I have found the ladies everywhere handsome enough for the men, but I have been a little surprised to find that I could not tell an Englishman from an American on the street here. And as I have a high opinion of the American, I cannot have a low opinion of the Englishman. (Cheers.) It is proper that I should express my gratitude tonight for several things. I am grateful to our distinguished ambassador for the courtesies he has shown me, and I have the advantage of him in one respect, I had seen and heard him before. Once when I was in Washington, a young man then, I went into the supreme court of the United States, and heard a lawyer arguing a case. I was so impressed with the appearance of the man and with the manner of his speech that I inquired who this lawyer might be, and was told that it was Mr. Choate, of New York. From that time to this I have looked back to that occasion, and I have never found in my country a lawyer who measured higher than he did. (Cheers.) I am grateful to him for his kind words, although in doing me what he intended for a kindness he has somewhat embarrassed me, and if I were to give full credit to what he has said I am afraid I might soon be like the young lady whose sweetheart praised her until she became so vain that she would not speak to him. (Laughter.) This society, I am informed, celebrates two occasions, the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving Day. On the Fourth of July we celebrate our independence; on Thanksgiving Day we acknowledge our dependence. And it is proper that Mr. Choate should be a conspicuous figure on both occasions, because on the Fourth of July we boast of what we have, and on Thanksgiving Day we feel grateful for what we have received, and we are both proud and grateful for Ambassador Choate. (Laughter and cheers.) On the Fourth of July the eagle seems a little larger than it does on any other day, and its scream may grate more harshly on the foreign ear than it does at any other time. But on this day we cultivate reverence and express our appreciation of those blessings that have come to our country without the thought or aid of Americans. We have reason to look with some degree of pride upon the achievement of the United States; we contemplate the present with satisfaction, and look to the future with hope; and yet on this occasion we may well remember that we are but building upon the foundations that have been laid for us. We did not create the fertile soil that is the basis of our agricultural greatness; the streams that drain and feed our valleys were not channelled by human hands. We did not fashion the climate that gives us the white cotton belt of the south, the yellow wheat belt of the north, and the central corn belt that joins the two and overlaps them both. We do not gather up the moisture and fix the date of the early and later rains; we did not hide away in the mountains the gold and the silver; we did not store in the earth the deposits of copper and of zinc; we did not create the measures of coal and the beds of iron. All these natural resources, which we have but commenced to develop, are the gift of Him before Whom we bow in gratitude tonight. (Loud cheers.) Nor are we indebted to the Heavenly Father alone, for we have received much from those who are separated from us by the Atlantic. If we have great and flourishing industries we must not forget that every nation in Europe has sent us its trained and skilled artisans. If we have made intellectual progress, we must remember that those who crossed the ocean as pioneers brought with them their intelligence and their desire for learning. Even our religion is not of

American origin. Like you, we laid the foundations of our church in the Holy Land, and those who came in the Mayflower and in other ships brought a love of religious liberty. Free speech, which has been developed in our country, and which we prize so much, is not of American origin. Since I have been here I have been profoundly impressed with the part that Englishmen have taken in establishing the right of free speech. (Cheers.) And I may say that before I came to this country the thing that most challenged my admiration in the Englishman was his determination to make his opinion known when he had an opinion that he thought should be given to the world. (Cheers.) Passing through the Bank of England, to which my friend, the ambassador, has referred, my attention was called to a protest that Admiral Cochrane wrote upon the bank-note with which he paid the thousand pounds fine that had been assessed against him. I was interested in that protest because it showed a fearlessness that indicates the possibilities of the race. Let me read what he said: "My health having suffered by long and close confinement, and my oppressors having resolved to deprive me of property or life, I submit to robbery to protect myself from murder (laughter) in the hope that I shall live to bring the delinquents to justice." (Renewed laughter.) That is the spirit that moves the world! There was a man in prison. He must pay his fine in order to gain his liberty. He believed the action of the court unjust. He knew that if he stayed there he would lose his life and lose the chance for vindication, and yet, as he was going forth from the prison doors, he did not go with bowed head or cringing, but flung his protest in the face of his oppressors, and told them he submitted to robbery to protect his life in the hope that, having escaped from their hands, he might bring them to justice. I like that in the Englishman, and during my short knowledge of public affairs I have looked across the ocean and admired the moral courage and the manliness of those Englishmen who have dared to stand out against overwhelming odds and assert their opinions before the world. (Cheers.) We sometimes feel that we have a sort of proprietary interest in the principles of government set forth in the Declaration of Independence. That is a document which we have given to the world, and yet the principles set forth therein were not invented by an American. Thomas Jefferson expressed them in felicitous language and put them into permanent form, but the principles had been known before. The doctrine that all men are created equal, that they are endowed with inalienable rights, that governments were instituted amongst men to secure these rights, and that they derived their just power from the consent of the governed—this doctrine which stands four square with all the world was not conceived in the United States, it did not spring from the American mind—aye, it did not come so much from any mind as it was an emanation from the heart, and it had been in the hearts of men for ages. (Cheers.) Before Columbus turned the prow of his ship towards the west on that eventful voyage, before the Barons wrested Magna Charta from King John—yes, before the Roman legions landed on the shores of this island—aye, before Homer sang—that sentiment had nestled in the heart of man, and nerved him to resist the oppressor. That sentiment was not even of human origin. Our own great Lincoln declared that it was God himself who implanted in every human heart the love of liberty. Yes, when God created man He gave him life He linked to life the love of liberty, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. (Cheers.) We have received great blessings from God and from all the world, and what is our duty? We cannot make return to those from whom those gifts were received. It is not in our power to make return to the Father above. Nor can we make return to those who have sacrificed so much for our advancement. The child can

never make full return to the mother whose life trembled in the balance at its birth, and whose kindness and care guarded it in all the years of infancy. The student cannot make full return to the teacher who awakened the mind, and aroused an ambition for a broader intellectual life. The adult cannot make full return to the patriarch whose noble life gave inspiration and incentive. So a generation cannot make return to the generation gone; it must make its return to the generations to come. Our nation must discharge its debt not to the dead, but to the living. How can our country discharge this great debt? In but one way, and that is by giving to the world something equal in value to that which it has received from the world. And what is the greatest gift that man can bestow upon man? Feed a man and he will hunger again; give him clothing and his clothing will wear out; but give him a noble ideal, and that ideal will be with him through every waking hour, lifting him to a higher plane of life, and giving him a broader conception of his relations to his fellows. I know, therefore, of no greater service that my country can render to the world than to furnish to the world the highest ideal that the world has known. That ideal must be so far above us that it will keep us looking upward all our lives, and so far in advance of us that we shall never overtake it. I know of no better illustration, no better symbol, of an ideal life than the living spring, pouring forth constantly of that which refreshes and invigorates, not the stagnant pool which receives contribution from all the land around and around and gives forth nothing. (Cheers.) Our nation must make a large contribution to the welfare of the world, and it is no reflection upon those who have gone before to say that we ought to do better than they have done. We would not meet the responsibilities of today if we did not build still higher the social structure to which they devoted their lives. (Cheers.) I visited the Tower of London today and saw upon the wall a strange figure. It was made of swords, ramrods, and bayonets, and was fashioned into the form of a flower. Someone had put a card on it and aptly named it the passion flower—and it has been too often the international flower. But the world has made progress. No longer do ambition and avarice furnish a sufficient excuse for war. The world has made progress, and today you cannot justify bloodshed except in defense of a right already ascertained, and then only when all peaceable means have been exhausted. (Cheers.) The world has made progress. We have reached a point where we respect not the man who will die to secure some pecuniary advantage, but who will die in defense of his rights. We admire the moral courage of the man who is willing to die in defense of his rights, but there is yet before us a higher ground. Is he great who will die in defense of his rights? There is yet to come a greater man still—the man who will die rather than trespass upon the rights of another. (Cheers.) Hall to the nation whatever its name may be that leads the world towards the realization of this higher ideal. I am glad that we now recognize that there is something more powerful than physical force, and no one has stated it better than Carlyle. He said that thought was stronger than artillery parks, and at last moulded the world like soft clay; that behind thought was love, and that there never was a wise head that had not behind it a generous heart. The world was coming to understand that armies and navies, however numerous and strong, are impotent to stop thought. Thought inspired by love will yet rule the world. I am glad that there is a national product more valuable than gold or silver, more valuable than cotton or wheat or corn or iron, the ideal. That is a merchandise—if I may call it such—that moves freely from country to country. You cannot vex it with an export tax or hinder it with an import tariff. (Cheers.) It is greater than legislators, and rises triumphant over the machinery of gov-