

# Independence for Armenia

[Abstract of an address by William Jennings Bryan at the Armenian Independence Banquet, New York, February 8, 1919.]

I am honored to be officially connected with an organization which has for its object the encouraging of Armenian independence and am pleased to participate in this dinner given to advance the purpose of the organization.

If any people have earned the right to be free and independent, masters of their own destiny and sovereigns in control of their own government, it is the Armenians. For more than two thousand years they have maintained their existence amidst difficulties and under hardships that would have crushed a weaker people into the dust. They have not only preserved their race integrity and ideals but they have been the heralds of the democracy founded by the Nazarene. There have been "a voice crying in the wilderness" — but their day is here, even though the dawn of that day has been reddened by the blood which they have so freely shed. The high character of the Armenians in the United States compels us to respect the country from which they came.

Of all the nations of the earth none should be so ready as the United States to extend recognition and speak the word of welcome because ours is the greatest and most successful of republics. Its national existence extends over 142 years and its population has grown from three to more than one hundred millions, while its wealth has expanded until it is, today, the richest nation in the world, with a future as boundless as its present is bright and its past glorious.

## STEADY MARCH TOWARD MORE AND MORE POPULAR GOVERNMENT

For 130 years it has administered its government in accordance with a written constitution and the adoption, during that time, of 18 amendments show its ability to mould its organic law to suit its advancing needs. These amendments also prove the steady march of its people toward more and more popular government and that approximation toward justice which is the object of popular government. Our nation has taught the world how to secure progress without bloodshed — it has made revolution unnecessary by making evolution easy. We have, through agitation and constitutional revisions, secured reforms which were formerly obtainable only at the cost of blood and treasure. When the supreme court annulled a statutory income tax the people undertook to change their constitution so as to specifically authorize an income tax and they succeeded, though it required 18 years of patient effort.

When they became convinced that alcohol was a habit forming drug and injurious to those who use it, as well as to those dependent upon the users, they arose in their might and, by constitutional amendment, proceeded to banish this arch-enemy from the land. When, after 103 years of experience, they became convinced that the election of United States senators was a limitation upon the people's power to choose their representatives and the cause of increasing corruption they amended their constitution so as to make the election of United States senators as democratic as the election of the members of the house of representatives. They are about to adopt another amendment extending the franchise to women in the belief that the joining of woman's conscience with man's judgment will hasten the triumph of every righteous cause, and they will, before many years, I am convinced, add a twentieth amendment reserving to the people the power to vote, through a referendum, the acts of their legislatures and, through the initiative, secure such desirable legislation as they are not able to secure through their representatives.

Our nation has proved that the setting of a good example is the best service that one individual or nation can render another. The German philosopher, Nietzsche, preached the gospel of force and set up the superman as an object of worship. "The will to power" he placed above all other attributes. He died in an insane asylum and the monarch who sought to put Nietzsche's philosophy into practice became an exile from his own land, seeking refuge under an alien flag. Our nation, relying on example rather than on force, is giving the world ideals — vindicating the wisdom of Carlyle, who in the closing chapters of his French Revolution, declared that "thought is stronger than artillery parks and at

last moulds the world like soft clay," wisely adding, and "back of thoughts is love."

Our theory of government — "an indissoluble union of indestructible states" — is the greatest invention in government that the world has known in the thousand years. It is a theory under which a republic can expand definitely in area and population without loss of efficiency. Under our theory of government the nation, confining itself to national and international affairs, is able to deal with all problems that concern it while the local communities, attending to their immediate affairs, not only govern themselves more wisely than they could be governed from the national capital, but, governing themselves, relieve the national government of a burden which would ere this have become insupportable. We long ago established the fact that a republic could mobilize its resources in time of peace and, by placing before its citizens more of hope, of opportunity and of aspirations than have ever been placed before any other citizens, could stimulate them to the largest endeavor. Within the last two years we have shown that a republic can also mobilize its resources in time of war — it would have been a disgrace to us and a blow to our form of government if, when our republic was brought face to face with an autocratic government, the result had been such as to justify any historian in saying that the oppressed subjects of an ambitious Kaiser were more loyal to their government than were the free citizens of this republic to officials whom they themselves had chosen and to a government which had given them more blessings than any other citizens have ever enjoyed.

Our nation is in a position to be the world's teacher in democracy because it has, itself, lived up to its teachings. It does not ask whether people are capable of self-government; it declares that they are. Nearly 100 years ago Henry Clay gave voice to this nation's conception when he said: (I quote from memory without attempting to be literal) "It would be a reflection upon the goodness of the Almighty to say that he made any people incapable of self-government and left them to be the victims of kings and emperors." The believer in popular government cannot take any other position. People differ in wisdom, as they differ in self-restraint, but no line can be drawn between peoples separating those capable of self-government from those incapable. Whenever that line is attempted it finds its inspiration in the fact that the so-called superior nations find it profitable to exploit the so-called inferior nations on the theory that the government, forcibly thrown over the inferior one — as a net is thrown over a bird — is administered for the benefit of those held in subjection. This nation does not stand for that idea and has already proven its sincerity by the promise of independence to the Filipinos who, as a result of the Spanish war, came temporarily under our control.

## OUR NATION HAS BECOME THE MOTHER-REPUBLIC

Our example has inspired hope throughout the world — because our people fought for liberty others have fought for it; because our people adopted a constitution others have adopted constitutions and the influence spreads. Our nation has become the mother-republic. I might compare its influence in the western hemisphere to the banyan tree — our influence has reached out until it has touched nation after nation and these nations, rooted in the soil, have become supports of the mother-tree. Our influence has extended across the Pacific and China has adopted a constitution like ours. Our example has called republics into existence throughout Europe, why not a republic in the land where the ark rested, — the land that gave us the olive branch as the symbol of peace.

It is appropriate that the Armenians, some 100,000 in numbers, who have come to this country should be our ambassadors to carry not only our greetings but our ideals to their brethren in Armenia. Let them relate to the martyrs of Armenia the thrilling story of our nation's life and progress; let them tell how we build securely upon the solid foundation of a people's consent; how completely we trust the intelligence, the integrity and the patriotism of our citizens; how every step has been a step forward toward more popular methods of government. Let them proclaim the value of free speech and of a free press, built upon the theory of Jefferson that "error is harm-

less when reason is left free to combat it." Tell them that freedom of speech is as necessary to those in authority as to the citizens because, without it, the people's servants cannot know the people's will. And do not forget to proclaim the value of religious tolerance. The right of each individual to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, without let or hindrance from his government, is one of the basic principles of our republic. The blood of millions of Armenian martyrs cries out against the imposition of religious tests in the government to be organized in Armenia, and this sentimental protest finds support in actual experience in all the lands where religious freedom is enjoyed. Let those among us of Armenian blood impart to their kindred in Asia the lessons that they have learned here, transplanting there the flower and fruit of our political system — while they warn against the noxious weeds and the tares that the enemy would sow in the wheat.

## PLAN FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

AND MAY I ENTRUST TO THE FRIENDS OF ARMENIA AN IDEA THAT HAS BEEN GROWING IN MY MIND FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND WHICH SEEMS TO ME TO BE ESPECIALLY APPLICABLE TO THE PRESENT SITUATION. THE DOCTRINE OF SELF-DETERMINATION IS FOUNDED IN THE HIGHEST CONCEPTION OF JUSTICE BUT ITS APPLICATION IS OFTEN RENDERED DIFFICULT BY A MIXTURE OF POPULATIONS. THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT BY THE DOMINANT ELEMENT OVER LARGE MINORITIES OF DIFFERENT RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS IS ALMOST AS DIFFICULT AS IT IS FOR ONE NATION TO DEAL JUSTLY WITH ANOTHER SUBJECT NATION. NO MATTER WHAT BOUNDARIES ARE FIXED TO THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA THE TERRITORY SET APART FOR THE NEW NATION WILL, NECESSARILY, BE OCCUPIED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY RACES. AND AS THE ARMENIANS ARE SCATTERED OVER A VERY WIDE AREA IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR ALL OF THEM TO BE INCLUDED IN ANY GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISION. IT IS TO REMEDY THIS DIFFICULTY THAT I VENTURE TO MAKE A SUGGESTION. IT IS THIS: THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ARMENIAN REPUBLIC AGREE TO PURCHASE, AT ITS PRESENT VALUE, ALL THE PROPERTY, REAL AND PERSONAL, BELONGING TO ANYONE OR ANOTHER RACE WHO DOES NOT DESIRE TO LIVE UNDER THE NEW GOVERNMENT. IN THE CASE OF ARMENIA, THIS WILL HAVE SEVERAL ADVANTAGES. IN THE FIRST PLACE, IT WILL PERMIT THOSE TO LEAVE, WITHOUT FINANCIAL SACRIFICE, WHO, BEING UNFRIENDLY TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT, WOULD BE DISCORDANT ELEMENTS IF THEY REMAINED, AND THE PROPERTY THUS PURCHASED COULD BE SOLD TO ARMENIANS IN OTHER PARTS OF EUROPE WHO WOULD BE DRAWN BACK TO THEIR HOME LAND BY THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM AND PROGRESS. SUCH A PLAN WOULD NOT INVOLVE ANY NET LOSS TO THE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT PROPERTY WOULD FALL IN PRICE UNDER THE NEW CONDITIONS, AND ANY ADVANCE IN PRICE WOULD MAKE THE TRANSACTION PROFITABLE TO THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS ENTIRELY PROBABLE THAT MOST OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER RACES WOULD PREFER TO REMAIN, PARTLY BECAUSE OF BUSINESS ADVANTAGES, PARTLY BECAUSE OF INTER-MARRIAGE, BUT LARGELY BECAUSE THEY COULD FIND NOWHERE ELSE SO BRIGHT AN OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE. IF THEY REMAINED CRITICISM WOULD BE SILENCED; HAVING THE PRIVILEGE OF LEAVING WITHOUT LOSS TO THEMSELVES THEY COULD NOT COMPLAIN THAT THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT DID THEM ANY INJUSTICE. I BELIEVE THAT ADOPTION OF SUCH A POLICY BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ARMENIAN REPUBLIC WOULD NOT ONLY BE OF VERY GREAT VALUE TO IT AND TO ITS PEOPLE BUT THAT IT WOULD GIVE TO THE WORLD A JUST PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSAL APPLICATION AND MAKE EASIER THE ADJUSTMENT OF TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN EVERY PART OF THE WORLD.

PERMIT ME, IN CONCLUSION, TO JOIN WITH THE FRIENDS ASSEMBLED HERE IN WISHING LONG LIFE AND GREAT PROSPERITY TO THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA.