

# NINE-TENTHS OF WISDOM IS BEING WISE IN TIME

A SPEECH DELIVERED AT LINCOLN, NEBRASKA,  
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IN the past there have been two great crises in our national life: that in which the infant nation was saved by the soldierly valor and single-minded statesmanship of Washington, and that in which, in its raw maturity, the nation was again saved by the men who followed Lincoln and Grant. In each case the victory was followed by over half a century of national unity, secured by the peace of victory; and during this peace, brought by the victory of righteousness, men forgot that all its benefits would be lost if it were turned into the peace of cowardice and slackness. The Revolution was a war for liberty; and that liberty became of permanent value only when, again under Washington's lead, it was made secure by the orderly strength of the Union. The liberty secured in the Civil War to the black man was thus secured only because the white man was willing to fight to the death for the Union, and for the flag to which we owe undivided allegiance.

The old thirteen States were born of the Revolution. Nebraska, like Kansas, was born of the Civil War. It was the struggle over the admission to statehood of Kansas and Nebraska which marked the real opening of the contest that culminated at Appomattox.

The contest settled three great principles:

1. That we were no longer to make words substitutes for facts, or accept fine phrases in lieu

of great deeds; and that therefore we were to make our devotion to liberty a fact instead of a phrase by abolishing slavery.

2. That we were all hereafter to be Americans with an undivided allegiance to the flag of the Union; an allegiance even more incompatible with a loyalty divided between our flag and some foreign flag than with a loyalty divided between the whole country and some section of the country.

3. That we were definitely to realize that while peace was normally a good thing, yet that righteousness stood above peace, and that the only good citizens were those who were sternly ready to face war rather than submit to an unrighteous or cowardly peace.

All these principles are at stake at the present moment. All three have been threatened, and therefore the honor and the welfare and the usefulness and, indeed, the very life of the Republic have been threatened by the pacifist and pro-German agitation of the last three years.

Our national record during these three years is not one to which we can look back with pride; for during these three years we violated the three principles established by the Civil War.

1. For two years and a half we used fine phrases to cover ugly facts, when we unctuously protested our devotion to the liberties of small, well-behaved nations in the abstract, and yet, in the concrete did not say one word of indignant protest when with ruthless brutality, and without one shadow of moral justification, Germany conquered and enslaved Belgium. We did not even dare to act when our own innocent women and children and unarmed men lost their lives on the high seas, and when their murder was insolently

justified by the tyrannous Prussianized autocracy which now menaces the entire peace-loving and liberty-loving world.

2. We permitted our national policy to be swayed by the national devotions and national antipathies of men who exercised the rights of American citizens but who showed themselves traitors to America by the way in which they prostituted our citizenship to the interests of Germany, or to their hatred of England; men whose allegiance to this country was merely one of the lips, while in their hearts their loyalty was wholly given to Germany, or else to any and every enemy of England, even although that enemy was also an enemy of the United States and of mankind. Such disloyalty was quite as mischievous as, and far less excusable than, sectional disloyalty.

3. It would be impossible to overstate the damage done to the moral fiber of our country by the professional pacifist propaganda, the peace-at-any-price propaganda, which had been growing in strength for the previous decade and which for the first two and a half years of the war was potent in influencing us as a people to play a part which was wholly unworthy of the teachings of the great men of our past. The professional pacifist movement was heavily financed by certain big capitalists. This was not merely admitted but blazoned abroad by some among them; whereas the accusations that the munition makers or any other interested persons, played any important part in the movement for preparedness were malicious falsehoods, well known to be such by those who uttered them. The professional pacifists during these two and a half years have occupied

precisely the position of the copperheads during the time of Abraham Lincoln.

We now pay the same tribute of respect to the men who fought for their convictions in the Civil War, whether they wore the blue or the gray — kinsmen of mine were in the Union army, and other kinsmen of mine in the Confederate army, and I am equally proud of both. But nobody is proud of the copperheads, who exalted peace above righteousness; and the professional pacifists of to-day are their spiritual heirs.

At last, thank Heaven, we came to our senses, realized our shortcomings, and tardily did our duty. At last we spurned the mean counsels of timidity and folly. At last we showed that we were not too proud to fight; and we have reversed and repudiated the mean and base proposal to secure peace without victory. At last we took up the challenge which Germany had, with equal brutality and contempt, so often hurled in our faces. At last we determined to make our loyalty to this nation's past and to the welfare of humanity, a matter of deeds and not merely of empty words. We have entered the great war for the future of civilization; and now that we are at war it behooves us to bear ourselves like men.

We are utterly unprepared. The things we are now doing, even when well done, are things which we ought to have begun doing three years ago. We can now only partially offset our folly in failing to prepare doing these last three years, in failing to heed the lesson writ large across the skies in letters of flame and blood. Nine-tenths of wisdom consists in being wise in time! Now we must fight without proper preparation. But we must prepare as well as we can at this late

date ; and the most important of all forms of preparedness is spiritual preparedness.

First of all we must sternly insist that all our people practice the patriotism of service, and that we all give a fervid and undivided loyalty to our common country. Patriotism is an affair of deeds, and patriotic words are good only in so far as they result in deeds. If phrase-making and oratory, whether by public servants or by outsiders, are treated as substitutes for deeds, the result is unmixed mischief. We read Lincoln's Gettysburg speech and Second Inaugural, only because his words were made good by his deeds, only because he threw aside all considerations other than the welfare of the nation, and with steadfast efficiency fought to the end for freedom and for the preservation of the Union.

As it was with that very great man in the past, so it must be with us lesser men in the present. Unless we now, at this moment, in this war, strive each of us to serve the country according to our several abilities, we are false to the memories of the nation-builders to whose sagacity and prowess we owe the creation of this state fifty years ago. Nebraska was founded as a State of the Union only because there were in the nation at that time enough men who were willing to do and dare and die at need for the Union. To-day, likewise, the instant and overwhelming need of the nation is for men who will serve in arms, and if necessary die, for the nation ; and next to this is the need for the men and women who will put our entire industrial and agricultural strength back of the fighting men in the field. Only the men and women who do this are true patriots ; for patriotism means service to the nation ; and

only those who render such service are fit to enjoy the privilege of citizenship.

We cannot render such service if our loyalty is in even the smallest degree divided between this and any other nation. There must be no division within our own ranks along the lines of creed or national origin; and any citizen of this country who uses his citizenship in the interest of some other country is a traitor to the United States. It is not merely our right, but our high duty, to insist on this fact. Twice over a century ago we fought Great Britain. In each contest the great majority of the citizens of British descent took the lead and proved that they were Americans and nothing else. Those who did not so act were traitors. Now we are at war with Germany; and every citizen of German blood is bound in this contest to show the same whole-hearted Americanism in support of the United States against Germany that was shown in 1776 and 1812 by the Americans of British descent in the contests with Great Britain. To act otherwise is to be guilty of treason.

In the Revolutionary War the British armies who strove against our liberties were aided by powerful bodies of German auxiliaries. One of Washington's most famous victories, that at Trenton, was gained purely over Germans; and his first military experience was against the French. But it would be unworthy folly now to inveigh against Germany because a hundred and forty years ago she furnished mercenary troops for our subjugation; or to inveigh against the French because they were the bitter foes of our people in colonial days. It was precisely as unworthy, precisely as silly and wicked, now to nourish hatred

against England. Washington's troops included men of English and Irish, of German and French, blood. But they were Americans and nothing else! They did not ask whether they were to fight English, French, or Germans. They fought the foes of the American flag, whoever these foes might be.

This must be our spirit to-day. We are a different people from any people of Europe. It is our boast that we admit the immigrant to full fellowship and equality with the native born. In return we demand that he shall share our undivided allegiance to the one flag which floats over all of us. The events of the last few years have conclusively shown that the man, whether of German, or of any other origin, who attempts to combine allegiance to this country with allegiance to another, is necessarily false to this country.

In this country we must have but one flag, the American flag; but one language, the English language; and above all, but one loyalty, an exclusive and undivided loyalty to the United States, with no Lot's wife attitude, no looking back to the various Old World countries from which our ancestors have severally come.

Now for the lesson of preparedness — military and economic, spiritual and material. As yet, nearly five months after Germany declared war on us, we have not so much as a division of troops ready for action. As yet we are utterly helpless to act in our own defense. The fault lies primarily in our complete failure to prepare during the last three years since the great war opened. Nine-tenths of wisdom is being wise in time! We have not been wise in time; and now we rely on our allies to protect us from the effect of our

folly. Just think of what Germany would have done to us within the first month — not to speak of the first four months — after we broke off diplomatic relations with her if we had not been able to shield our feeble and short-sighted unreadiness behind the navy of Great Britain and the armies of the allies. We owe our ignoble safety to the British fleet, and the French and English armies. We escape paying an utterly ruinous payment for our folly only because the soldiers and sailors of our allies pay for it with their lives. Uncle Sam is in the undignified position of the man who gets on a street car and then fumbles in his pocket while somebody else pays his fare.

If we had been willing to prepare, and if we had showed that we meant what we said, we would probably have prevented the war, and would certainly have brought it to a close as soon as we entered it. Now, friends, there is no use crying over spilt milk. But it is even worse to make believe that the milk was not spilt. The important thing is to face the fact of the spilling and resolve that it shall not be spilt again. Let us act in the spirit of the words of Abraham Lincoln at the close of the Civil War: "Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak and as strong, as silly and as wise, as bad and as good. Let us therefore study the incidents of this as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged." Let us manfully acknowledge how great have been our shortcomings for the last few years, and then let us, without a particle of revengeful or recriminatory or uncharitable feel-



ing, learn from them wisdom to be applied in our future conduct. From this time on let us insist on an absolute and undivided Americanism in this land, untempered by any half allegiance to the countries from which our ancestors may severally have sprung, and untainted by any unworthy national animosity towards any other country. Let us prepare ourselves spiritually, economically, and in all military and naval matters — including as a permanent policy the policy of universal military training and service — so that never again shall we be utterly unready, as we now are, to meet a great crisis. Finally, in the present war, a war for liberty and democracy against the ruthless militaristic tyranny of the Prussianized Germany of the Hohenzollerns, let us as speedily as possible train our giant, but our soft and unready, strength, so that we may use our hardened might to bring the slaughter to an end in the only way honorably possible, by securing for ourselves and our allies the peace of justice based on overwhelming victory.