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X

AMERICA AND ENGLAND [1]

(November, 1916)

YOUR EXCELLENCY, LORD BRYCE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

I confess that from my boyhood up, long before I had any knowledge to support the instinctive feeling, I have felt an ardent and even romantic interest in America. After all, America is the great representative of democracy, and the man who has no faith in democracy really confesses that he has no faith in the human race. And still more America in a peculiar way represents the hopes of the future. She embodies the greatest experiment known to history at escaping from the trammels of the past, while using the experience of the past, and starting humanity afresh with a clean slate. Such an experiment could not, of course, be confined to the members of a single nation. It must throw open its arms to a large part of the world. And we in Great Britain may well be satisfied with the share that we have taken and still possess in this building-up of the nation of the clean slate.

You will hardly expect me to speak about the Presidential election. We all think about it; but it is ground on which Mr. Roosevelt himself would recognize that an Englishman, if he walks at all, must walk "pussy-footedly." The one fact that stands out most prominently to an observer at a distance is the high personal quality of both the candidates. The record of American Presidents as a whole is a great testimonial to democracy; and it is certainly true in the present instance that, in force of character, in integrity, and in intellectual power, both candidates are men of the highest rank, who would do honour to any Cabinet in the world. On the matter with which in England we are most concerned,—the war in Europe,—we may also claim that both candidates have—what shall I say? I will not say any predilection in favour of the Allies, for I believe them to be just and impartial; but they both have the thing which to us matters most, some real understanding of the aims and causes, the nature and origin, of the conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you take a long view of history I think you will find that we stand now at a dramatic and momentous point. You in America are to history a nation of refugees, a nation built up by men and women who fled over a thousand leagues of inhospitable sea to escape from the oppressions and entanglements of Europe, and especially, in your early days, from those of Great Britain. English Cavaliers, Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Scotch Presbyterians, have all helped to build you up. In later generations, when there was no more need for people to fly for refuge from Great Britain, came the refugees of central and eastern Europe, and fragments of all the peoples that are still ground down by domestic poverty or the misgovernment of the Turk. It is, perhaps, a paradox to speak of your great and powerful continent at the present time as a nation of refugees. But I think the memory of your origin still affects your policy and certainly still haunts your imagination. Most nations have some sort of legendary conception of themselves, some *fable convenue* in which they instinctively believe, even when it has ceased to correspond with the facts. I believe great masses of people in America unconsciously think of themselves as refugees like their ancestors, and of Great Britain as a country of lords and flunkeys, pickpockets and John-Bull-like farmers in swallowtail coats, still governed by George III and Lord North or the "Sea Tyrants of 1813." When we wish to speak to you as brothers, you remember that we are the elder brothers who cast you out.

And now a cause has arisen, a need, a momentous issue, in which we as a nation, both those who cast your fathers out and those who comforted your fathers and remained in England fighting for the same causes as they, are constrained to appeal to you as brothers. Not necessarily for military help! Do not imagine that. So far as we can see, we have full confidence in ourselves and our allies. But we appeal to you, first of all, to understand us. It is intolerable to us, intolerable for all the future hope of humanity, that this our testimony of blood, this our martyrdom for a cause which we hold sacred, should be regarded by you, our friends and brothers across the Atlantic, as a mere quarrel of angry dogs over a bone. We have made our appeal and a large part of America has responded magnificently, with that swiftness of brain, that ready sympathy and generosity, which are so characteristically American. I know no better statements on the diplomatic causes of the war, at any rate among neutral nations, than some of those that were published quite early in the Eastern States. But other parts of your nation had gone too far off to hear us. They had built up their own life too

independently to care about our troubles. I believe also that the very magnitude of the cause at issue makes it difficult for us to explain and for them to understand. How shall we try to state that cause, to put into words, however imperfect, the centre of our profound feeling? It is a difficult task.

"Government of the people, by the people, for the people"? That is a principle which Americans have paid for with their blood and which they understand with every fibre of their being. But is it exactly democracy for which we are fighting? The Republic of France, the limited monarchy of England, and the autocracy of Russia? We sometimes say, and feel, that we are fighting for democracy, and in a sense it is true; but democracy alone cannot be the exact definition of our cause.

Is it, then, a fight for civilization against barbarism? The thesis is difficult to maintain. In material civilization, at least, Germany is actually our superior. The organization of German trade, of railways, of schools, even of things intellectual, seems, at least to a superficial glance, to be the acme of civilization. To speak of the Germans as barbarians may in some profounder sense have truth in it, but in the ordinary meaning of the words it is a paradox.

Some people again have tried to tell the Americans that we were fighting for Christianity against Godlessness, but that is not, as it stands, a very persuasive statement. They can point to many saintly lives in Germany; the bookshelves of their professors of divinity are loaded with German books of devotion and theology; and I hardly imagine that we and our French allies make quite the impression of a nation of early Christians.

None of these statements seems exactly adequate, yet there is some profound truth underlying all of them. I do not suppose that my own definition will stand criticism much better than these I have mentioned, but I will venture to put to you the way in which the issue strikes me. You remember the old philosophical doctrine of the "Social Contract" as the origin of ordered society; that men lived in a "state of nature," with no laws, no duties to one another, no relationships—*homo homini lupus*, "every man a wolf to every other man"; and then, finding that condition intolerable, they met together and made a "contract," and hence arose civilized society. And you will remember the criticism passed on the doctrine by such philosophers as T. H. Green: the criticism that beings in that supposed condition could not even begin to make a contract; that before any contract can be made, there must be some elementary sense of relationship, of mutual duty, some elementary instinct of public right. Before any contract is possible, there must be at least the elementary understanding that if a man pledges his word, he should keep it. It is that primary understanding, that elementary sense of brotherhood or of public right, which it seems to us the present Government of Germany in its dealing with foreign nations has sought to stamp out of existence. It has rejected, in the words of the King's Speech, "the old ordinance which has held civilized Europe together." It has acted on a new ordinance that every nation shall be a wolf to its neighbour.

Do you find that indictment hard to believe of such a nation as Germany? I think we can see how it came about. Germany is the great country of specialization. Above all she has produced the specialized soldier; not the human soldier, the Christian soldier, the chivalrous soldier, or the soldier with the sense of civic duties; but the soldier who is trained to be a soldier and nothing else, to disregard all the rest of human relations, to see all his country's neighbours merely as enemies to be duped and conquered, to treat all life according to some system of perverted biology as a mere struggle of force and fraud. They have created this type of soldier, able, concentrated, conscienceless, and remorseless, and then—what no other people in the world has done—they have given the nation over to his guidance. Of course we all have armies. We all have experts and strategists. But with the rest of us the soldier is the last resort, like the executioner. We call him up only when all other means have failed. But in Germany the soldier is always present. He is behind the diplomatist, behind the educator, behind the preacher; he is behind the philosopher in his study and the man of science in his laboratory; always present and always in authority. In other nations the sword is the servant of the public welfare, a savage servant never used but in the last necessity; in Germany all the resources of the nation are the servants of the sword.

How far can America be brought to see this or in general to understand our cause? Roughly speaking, I think it would be true to say that the most instructed part of America—New York, Boston, and the Eastern States—understood early. They understood rapidly and acutely and they responded generously. The rest of America is gradually learning to understand. I met, in my recent visit to the United States, two men, both exceptionally good witnesses and of different sides in home politics, who had journeyed right across the continent about a year ago and again recently; and they both made the same report: that the knowledge and the feeling of the comparatively small part of America which understands and studies European affairs were spreading steadily from East to West. They had reached much farther this year than a

year ago.

The position of our cause in America is not unsatisfactory. Both the Presidential candidates, as I have said, understand it. In speaking of them, whether they differ from us or not, no one would have to explain things from the beginning. Again, in the recent election, though naturally neither party actually turned away votes that offered themselves, there was no party which would dare openly to admit that it was pro-German, only a small, disorganized faction on both sides. I think we may also say that such points of difference as we have had with the United States during the war—and such points of difference are absolutely bound to arise—have been treated by the Government and the majority of the people of the United States, I will not say with any special indulgence towards us, but at least in a spirit of great fairness and neighbourly good-will. Of course America will not fight. What nation in history ever did fight from motives of pure philanthropy and sympathy in a war four thousand miles away? Of course America will not fight—unless, that is, the war should take some new and unexpected turn directly menacing her interests. But in many ways America can help or hinder us in the war; and especially it is America more than any other nation which will register the opinion of the neutral world. We believe that we and our allies can show that militarism is a failure: we want America to pronounce judgement that it is wicked.

Instructed America is already overwhelmingly with us. The great interest of the present situation is that by the issue of the Presidential election it is uninstructed America that is now largely in power. (When I say "instructed" and "uninstructed," I mean, of course, "instructed" and "uninstructed" as regards European affairs.) President Wilson has, of course, abundant knowledge and imagination; it is easy enough to state our case to him. But the great masses behind him, the masses of the South and West, are drawn precisely from the most non-European part of America, the part that neither knows about us nor wishes to know. It is to those great masses of the South and West that we have somehow to make ourselves understood. Many of you now present know them better than I do, but even I have known a good many. They will honestly try, I believe, to understand us. They will bring to the task, perhaps, some anti-British prejudices; certainly abundant ignorance—as abundant and profound as our own ignorance of the affairs of Minnesota and Wyoming. They will bring some lack of experience, some lack of tradition in that delicate tact combined with firmness, that self-restraint, that respect for foreign nations, that power of seeing another's point of view, which is essential to a sound foreign policy. But they will bring also quickness of mind, indomitable vigour, real American generosity, and a most abundant store of good-will. I do not think there is any nation on the earth which contains so large a proportion as America of people who really and actively wish to do right—and to feel good afterwards. It is to these people that we must appeal, not for help in war, nor for any immediate alliance, but for two purposes. We must appeal to them, first, merely to listen and think and understand; and secondly, when they have realized what we are fighting for during the war, to work for common ends with us after the peace. I will not wait now to define these ends; they have been stated by Mr. Asquith and Lord Grey. I do not know exactly what form it may prove best for America's co-operation to take. For my own part, I follow Lord Bryce and Lord Grey, Mr. Taft, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Hughes, as a devout believer in a league to enforce peace. America has made that proposal, and Lord Grey speaking for the Allies has announced that we are in favour of it. The exact form and machinery of the league must, of course, remain to be settled hereafter. But I do not think it will be exactly that league spoken of by Dr. Bethmann-Hollweg, of which Germany "is quite willing to put herself at the head"; nor do I imagine that its first object will be "to guarantee Germany from another invasion by Belgium."

The truth is—and this will be one of our difficulties—that between us and America, as between every belligerent and every neutral, there is one great gulf to bridge. Most neutrals—and especially these Westerners of whom I spoke—move inside a certain normal range of ideas. They understand the goodness of being sober, honest, thrifty, kind,—extraordinarily kind,—and even religious. They praise and admire—and even practise—the virtues which lie within the normal range of experience, that range within which to lose one's life is the greatest of misfortunes and to take another's life the greatest of crimes. But we in Great Britain have got beyond those barriers. We have become familiar with the knowledge that there are things in life which are greater than life. We have learnt, more than we ever learnt before, that the true work of mankind upon earth is to live for these greater things. I am not exaggerating or using high-falutin language. Go out into the street and talk with the first bus-driver or cabman who has lost his son in the war; he may be inarticulate, but if once he begins to speak freely, you will find him telling you that he does not grudge his son's life.

We stand outside the barriers that I have spoken of, and our words and gestures must seem strange to those within, but it is to them that we must explain ourselves. A picture rises to my mind as I am now speaking to you, a picture of New England as I motored through it a few months ago: the pretty, prosperous country towns; the workmen's settlements, especially in the evening when the men come back from work and the children from school; the refreshment rooms at the

big railway stations, full of fruit and coolness, with no smell of alcohol in the air and no tang of alcohol in the conversation between the customers and the waitresses; the whole atmosphere clean, healthy, and lighthearted, an atmosphere of fairly hard work and abundant prosperity. How can any foreigner—how dare any foreigner—ask that they should change that for the life which we are now leading?

I remember just before starting on that drive hearing by telegram that two of my intimate friends were killed, and on the ship I heard of two more. At Liverpool I remember the curious shabbiness of the streets and houses, as if all repainting and decorating were being put off until after the war. At Carlisle the mass of tense, overworked munition workers; the papers full, as they are now, of some two-thousand-odd daily casualties. I remember the impression then made upon me by the slow steps and somewhat haggard faces of ordinary men and women in the British streets. No; we cannot ask the Americans to stand in our shoes; but I would like them to know, and fully realize, that, by Heaven, we would not stand in theirs, nor in any others than our own! When I realize most fully the burden we are bearing, the ordeal of fire through which we are resolved to pass, I am not only proud of my country, I thank God that, if this awful evil was to fall upon humanity,—this awful evil to avert another yet more awful,—that our country was called upon to stand in the very van of battle and of suffering, and that we have not flinched from our task. We are the sailors in the ship of humanity, the sailors and the engineers. We may yet be swept off the deck; we may be crushed or stifled in the engine-room; but at least we are not mere passengers and we are not spectators.

To Western Americans, perhaps to all neutrals, the horrors of war so utterly outweigh all the other elements that it seems to be nothing but horror. That is, perhaps, the sane view, and our own feeling may have a touch of the insane about it, but I am sure that it has also a touch of the profounder truth. A friend and pupil of mine wrote to me the other day about the Somme battles, and how they had made him feel the difference between soul and body; how the body of man seemed a weak and poor thing, which he had seen torn to rags all about him and trodden into mud, and the soul of man something magnificent and indomitable, greater than he had ever conceived. When we talk like that, you neutrals sometimes shudder at us and feel as if we were possessed by an evil spirit. No. The spirit may be dangerous, but it is not evil. Go about England to-day and you will find in every town men and women whose hearts are broken, but who are uplifted by a new spiritual strength. They know that there are issues greater than life, and that for these issues, if it is well to die, it is also well to suffer. And there is one mistake, a mere mistake in psychology, which I would urge you not to commit. Do not confuse war with hatred. The people who feel this spiritual exaltation are exactly those whose hearts have not room for hatred. The soldiers fighting do not hate as a rule; and the people who feel greatly do not hate. It is mostly those who are somehow baffled and unable to help, or are brooding over personal wrongs, that give way to hatred. I remember reading in a New England farmhouse a curious document, the will of an old Southerner made in 1866, in which, since he had lost everything in the Civil War, he bequeathed to his children and grandchildren: "The bitter hatred and everlasting malignity of my heart against all Yankees, meaning by that term all who live north of Mason and Dixon's line." What a strange ghost of the past that now seems! How the moss has grown over those old stones that once were burning lava! And even he was not a soldier of the war, but an old man and a non-combatant; otherwise he would not have been so bitter. I would like our neutral and pacific friends to realize, first, that, as Lord Bryce has said, in our normal days we are as peaceful a nation as themselves; and secondly, that now, when war has become our duty, the more we feel the cause for which we are fighting and are uplifted in spirit by the need of determination and of sacrifice, the less room there is in our minds for the mean feelings of spite or hate or revenge. It rests with men themselves to turn this appalling experience into spiritual good or evil. There are influences enough, God knows, pulling in the evil direction; they are published every morning and evening. But the Government, the more thoughtful men and the central mind of the nation, are, I believe, keeping tenaciously to the higher and more permanent ideals. If that is done, we may win from this war, as from some great Aristotelian tragedy, a "purification wrought by pity and by fear."

Address to the Mayflower Club, November 14, 1916.

[The end of *Faith, War and Policy: X. America and England* by Gilbert Murray]