

## WOODROW WILSON, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEADER

### I

**D**ELIGHTFUL as it is to be here today to assist in dedicating a great building to the name and services of one of the great men of all time, it is with deep personal sorrow that I must endeavor to take the place on your program of another great Southerner so recently and suddenly taken from us. President Edwin A. Alderman was the teacher and master of so many of the present generation in the South that we find it very difficult to reconcile ourselves to the loss we have sustained.

But we have met here to consider for a day the meaning and significance of a close and valued friend of President Alderman, that great figure which passed from the mortal to the immortal scene eight years ago: Woodrow Wilson. There have been powerful men, and even great groups of men, who have tried these last years to forget, and cause others to forget, the leader of the United States who devoted his influence and the influence of his country to the idea of abolishing war and the introduction of a more just international system than that which now weighs so heavily upon the shoulders of all who labor and suffer in the humbler walks of life everywhere. There have been short-sighted men in all ages; and for a time such men have influenced the judgments of history. It was so with Jefferson who pointed resolutely all his life to the safe way for the South; it was not different with Stephen A. Douglas who alone of the great men of 1860 earnestly warned his fellows the way to escape the evils which lay ahead.

### II

In the year 1890 there appeared a lean, eager, ambitious young scholar on the campus of Princeton University. His in-

fluence was at once felt. He endeavored to show men how to become masters in the problems of government. For thirteen years he was the most influential member of that faculty. Then he became president of the University and sought to deepen the spirit of learning and public service in all the faculties and among the increasing number of students. For two decades at Princeton and other leading universities of the country there had been an increasing disposition to regard college life as a joyous vacation. Wilson was a living protest against this view.

It was but a little while before his attitude toward university life became a subject of discussion all over the country; he appeared at meetings of alumni, bar associations, teachers' organizations and bankers' conferences to persuade and to argue. It was the day of unprecedented corruption in public and business life: one thinks of the Croker régime in New York, the Sullivan machine in Chicago, the scandals of the insurance companies of the East, and the shame of Cincinnati, Saint Louis, and San Francisco. When one reviews the ugly history of that epoch there is no escape from the feeling that not only the colleges needed a new morale; the country stood in greater need of a thorough house cleaning. The transition from a teacher's desk at Princeton to the greatest of all pulpits in Washington was strangely made in 1913. More than any other leader in American history, Woodrow Wilson stood as a prophet before the people, a teacher who foresaw dangers and who urged men to prepare for the future. There has hardly been a reform in college education since his time which he did not foresee; and there has not been a great national issue on which his teachings do not today have an important bearing.

### III

In 1913 Woodrow Wilson pointed out

that the industrialist development in this country had reached a stage where foreign markets, not fear of competition, was the great objective. The United States Steel companies were then selling their output all over the world in successful rivalry with German and English manufactures; the makers of typewriters and sewing machines found hindrance only in trade barriers set up against them; Henry Ford was just showing all the world that his market was not limited by national boundaries; and the farmers, then as ever before, were compelled to sell their surplus in Europe. To any and all who had the wit to see beyond their noses, it was plain that the time had come to equalize and spread the profits of industry and agriculture over the country, and not longer by governmental intervention concentrate the benefits of the economic system in a few great cities and along the lines of a few great railways. The tariff policy of Henry Clay was out of date, as all things go out of date in time.

The President with the assistance of able co-workers elaborated a customs scheme which was neither a sudden nor a drastic change. It was directed toward three great objectives: a moderate and permanent increase in Federal income; the beginning of a readjustment of the tariff barriers of other countries, made high as retorts to American extreme measures; and a lowering of prices for the goods bought by the mass of the people, urban and rural. There has never been a better tariff. It was in accord with the lessons of English history; it revealed the fact that its authors knew something of the history of tariffs in France and Germany; and it certainly showed a more intimate knowledge of the needs of all groups in the United States than the authors of any other customs system ever offered in Washington. The time had come when the needs of the country, not those of a minority, must prevail.

But men are ever men. The beneficiaries of an old system were blinded to their true interest. Many of the great beneficiaries were able to understand; but the men-on-the-make could not see, and there was a large and dominant element of organized workingmen who could not understand a long-range scheme for the benefit of all. We had the unique spectacle of labor leaders fighting the battles of the most exploitive industrialists as against their unorganized farmer cousins. There was a large element all over the North who behaved exactly as the lesser slave holders of the South behaved when they crowded Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee into a secession movement which neither of them approved. The disaster which came upon the South has not yet been visited upon the industrial North; but there is imminent peril of it now.

This readjusted industrial reform was the first of the great Wilson changes of national policy. When the great war was over, the country threw aside with contempt the wisdom involved in the scheme already working well, in order to set up trade barriers which should keep out nearly all European goods; in 1929 when all but the blind saw the danger, another and a more archaic tariff was enacted; and the industrialists themselves were the first victims. Every other country immediately raised its walls; and the billions of American exports began to decline; since the domestic market was utterly unequal to absorb the surplus, the proudest industries closed doors or went on half time and became beggars at the doors of the great banks. Rarely has an educated people pressed more urgently upon a more foolish course. Not only the farmers of the country, for whom few cared even a little, but millions of workingmen who had voted for the foolish policy were set adrift; and today all classes feel the peril.

## IV

Another and an equally important problem was attacked by the Princeton schoolmaster. The world had gone for a hundred years upon the false Latin dictum: in time of peace prepare for war. The result of general action upon that assumption was the existence in 1914 of vast armies trained to fight at the drop of the hat, officers of high rank in all countries who constantly mapped the courses of military campaigns in other countries, and stood ready and itching for the outbreak. Five great navies stood guard over the seas, ready to take affront at the slightest pretext and begin blowing one another out of the water. In time of peace prepare for war simply meant that in Washington the President talked constantly of his "big stick"; in Berlin the Kaiser shouted even a little louder; and on the high seas the British admirals gave solemn decrees. It meant that billions of wealth were fast fixed in guns and ships; that everybody was belligerent; and that any day a new invention, like the flying machine or poison gas, might scrap it all. Yet because the Romans said a false thing two thousand years before, every statesman but Wilson repeated it as a solemn ritual in 1914.

Wilson, at first an abettor of this atavistic policy, made close study; and being a man of independent mind, he reversed himself and joined that German minority whose leaders astonished the Hohenzollern régime in 1911 by declaring: "Die Waffen Nieder: Lay down your arms." The failure to heed the warning of the simple German peasant led to the death of twenty million people, to debts under which all nations groan today and to economic disruption that staggers the wisest men.

The President of the United States, hounded from day to day by every kind of opponent, honest and dishonest, worked out his remedy. It turned out to be much like a remedy already worked out by leaders of the Republican party: let there be no

more wars; set up a police navy for the seas and a police army for the mainlands; and organize an international council which should sit from year to year and work out peacefully the issues involved in tariffs, race rivalries, and religious hatreds. The idea was as simple as that of the Federal constitution in 1787; it was endorsed by Messrs. Roosevelt and Taft and Bryan, leaders of the greatest elements of the national life, not already in the Wilson following. All the reasons of history urged its acceptance.

But here as in the effort to abolish a burdensome and antiquated tariff system, business-men-on-the-make were either blind from birth or they blinded themselves lest they see. Men quoted Washington, always bound by entangling alliances, as warning against entangling relations with Europe; they quoted Jefferson, who urged an entangling alliance with England in 1816; they talked of wicked pacifists, as if anybody could be more wicked or foolish than the militarists of 1914. Mr. Roosevelt doubted in 1918 what he had shouted for in 1908; Mr. Taft would attach an amendment about a Monroe doctrine which Monroe had never imagined; even Mr. Bryan was skeptical lest the wicked Europeans outwit the simple Americans. And the plan for world peace and friendly co-operation was defeated by the very men who had urged every item of its policy when there was no chance of its adoption. It was as human as the failure of the wise tariff measures in 1922. The greatest teacher of our age, like the great Virginian who died a little over a hundred years ago, was to fail; fail not because he was foolish, but because men preferred to risk the terrors of war to getting out of an old path.

Thus in the larger economic life, the schoolmaster of 1913 made his contribution to all history; in the greater matter of world peace, he offered an even greater and more promising scheme for "laying down

arms about to be antiquated"; but there was yet another item on which the second of Virginia statesmen begged men's attention.

## V

Through the nineteenth century the United States, Germany, and Italy waged terrible wars on behalf of the concept of a completer nationality. Cavour won in Italy an immortality which guarantees him the attention of the historians of all ages because he worked out the Union of Italy against the silent opposition of other countries and the open hostility of the Roman church; Abraham Lincoln earned a monument among the great of England on Trafalgar square because he welded thirty-five independent American states into the great Union which saved Europe from imperial Germany in 1918; and Bismarck is worshipped in Germany and honored all over the world as a reward for the unity of the German people which he accomplished in 1870. Unity and nationalism were the slogans of the nineteenth century. But in the twentieth century those ideas were steadily discredited by the Italian demand for the subjugation of peoples across the Adriatic, as much entitled to unity and nationalism as themselves; by great German leaders who talked of the sacredness of German freedom and unity, but denied both freedom and unity to Poland; and finally and sadly by the masters of the United States which held millions of Filipinos in unwilling subjection and steadily undermined both the economic and the political independence of Cuba.

You cannot have your cake and eat it too. Everyone of the great nations which had won their freedom and unity in the nineteenth century only after years of turmoil and bloodshed, in the twentieth century violated the faiths of their builders and turned to subjecting other peoples. An overweening nationalism, aggressive private and privileged groups, and an unimaginative statesmanship permitted this betrayal

of great causes. The greatest war of history was fought because of this betrayal; it was fought, as we know, and lost by all who engaged in it. Woodrow Wilson was not at first a prophet here, as he was not in the disarmament movement; but being a man of independence and open mind, he quickly came to see that nationalisms were merging into exploitive imperialisms. Seeing the danger ahead and himself in responsible position, he preached again a modified nationalism as important as ever was the unionism of Lincoln or Bismarck: Let all peoples submit their needs and their grievances to a council of nations; and there the best leaders of all countries would decide who was right, who was wrong. Separate, independent national action in trade barriers, in armaments and purely national, race, and religious behavior was like tariffs and armaments already out of date. The time had come when England must adjust her policy in India to fit her own professions of national freedom and unity; the United States could not longer quote Thomas Jefferson and suppress the aspirations of Filipinos and Cubans; and Germany might no longer deny Poland what she asked for herself. That was all; it was enough.

A new age had arrived in 1913; it was perfectly plain in 1918. There was one eminent man in Washington, millions of men over the United States and many, many millions of men all over Europe and Asia who saw that neither economic exploitations of majorities in individual countries (tariff extremes), nor great military equipments such as the nineteenth century had developed, nor finally overweening national egotisms might be allowed in the twentieth century. The man whom we honor today was wise enough to see a little ahead; he had the courage to urge his thought upon all men everywhere; and he persisted in the rightness and the humanity of his program till life itself vanished.

WILLIAM E. DODD