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ARMISTICE DAY ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE
ARMISTICE DAY CONVOCATION

OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

NOVEMBER 11, 1921

BY
MAJOR GENERAL MILTON J. FOREMAN
PAST GRAND COMMANDER
OF THE
AMERICAN LEGION

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Convocation Program

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESIDING

Prelude

DIRECTOR FREDERIC B. STIVEN

Religious Exercises

THE REVEREND EDWARD S. BOYER
Chaplain of the American Legion

"America"

SUNG BY THE AUDIENCE

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Past Grand Commander of the American Legion

"The Star Spangled Banner"

SUNG BY THE AUDIENCE

The Benediction

THE REVEREND EDWARD S. BOYER

ARMISTICE DAY ADDRESS

MAJOR GENERAL MILTON J. FOREMAN

It is impossible to address an audience composed so largely of young men and women on the anniversary of Armistice Day without reflecting on the meaning of that day to the young men and women of America. When silence fell at eleven o'clock on November 11, 1918, after more than four interminable years of the unbelievable noise of war, those of us elders who listened in that instant of healing peace, thought first of all: "This saves our young men."

We had lived through many years. We had had our opportunities and to such extent as we could, had taken advantage of them. Nothing had interfered with the progress of our development except our own mistakes and incapacities. Such rights as life offers had been ours—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in our own way. But before millions of our American young men the war had stepped with a forbidding gesture. To millions of our young men war had denied those rights. It had said:

"For you there remains only one motto—duty. You may not go your own ways. You may not choose your own lives. For you there can be, for a time, no liberty. For liberty you must substitute discipline. For the pursuit of happiness you must substitute discipline. And as for life, you must disregard it. Your lives are no longer yours; they belong to your country. Not on yourselves as individuals depends your progress, but on the mighty fortunes of war."

For, as you all know, this war like most wars was fought by the young men. At thirty a man is usually still at the beginning of his career. His formal education is complete, of course, but his experience of life has hardly begun. In the next thirty years he expects really to do his work in the world. But in war, for every man of thirty there are thousands under that age. Indeed, for every man of thirty there are hundreds who have not yet reached twenty. Boys are the raw material ground up in that deadly mill.

And so when war ceased, when the forbidding gesture was withdrawn, when Armistice Day proclaimed the end of fighting and the success of our great cause, we older men, as I said, saw in it, first of all, the salvation of our young men. Now again they might do as we had been privileged to do—live their own lives, reflect upon their own problems, envisage their own opportunities, assume responsibility for their own problems. That was the first thought that came to me, as I stood on the banks of the Meuse on that long expected day: "Thank God, our young men are saved for us."

Perhaps not at once, but very soon, the belief sprang up in our hearts that the armistice represented not so much the triumph of the Allied Armies over the Germans as the wider triumph of good

things in general over evil things in general. We believed that it had brought, not for the moment only but for the long future, good tidings of great joy to all the world. We knew that it announced the end of the most murderous struggle the world has ever seen but we expected more. We expected it to be the beginning of a day of new hope for every country. From the war which it closed we expected to learn certain lessons of high value. You all remember how innumera- bly that phrase was repeated—"the lessons of the war." What were they?

In the first place, there must be no more wars. This was to have been "the war to end war."

In the second place, we were taught the possibilities of international cooperation. As the Allies had united in the conflict, so they would unite after it. Contest would be succeeded by covenants and peace on earth accompanied by good will among all men.

In the third place, we were shown the folly of kings and the strength of organized democracies. It was the Emperor of Germany and the coterie about him, stupid, pigheaded, callous, and greedy, who had plunged the world into the whirlpool; it was the nations essentially democratic in government—France, England, and the United States—that had finally extricated it from destruction. By the armistice, tyranny was doomed forever and democracy forever saved. So we believed and so we preached.

Well, in three years how far have we learned those lessons? What, compared with our hopes, have been the actual developments since November 11, 1918?

There has not been in Europe since that time one single day when armed forces have not been either in conflict or preparing for conflict. Russia, Poland, Greece, Turkey, and Spain have been almost steadily engaged. Many more lives have been lost on the battlefields of Europe since November, 1918, than the United States lost in the world war conflict during the nineteen months of our participation. Only on the seas has peace continued. But we know that Japan's navy is increasing steadily and it is not unnatural, considering her inaccessibility and the certainty that no nation will attack her, to wonder why, unless she intends some day to make herself the aggressor in a war.

Reading history now, we can see what we did not see clearly before the smoke had fairly cleared away in 1918—that war has been the normal, peace the abnormal state of the world. I take no stock in the doctrine sometimes advanced that war is a desirable thing because it develops the virtues of courage and decision and hardens the fibre of a nation that tends to grow soft in time of peace. Our individual lives call on us so constantly for courage and decision, whether our country happens to be at war or not, that our good

fibres never soften. A man who makes a success of farming or engineering or medicine or teaching or the law or banking or manufacturing is constantly called on for courage and decision; and though we had been for years at peace when we entered the great war in April, 1917, no one who witnessed a single engagement, a single skirmish in which our young men engaged in 1917 or 1918 could doubt for a moment the quality of their courage or the vigor of their decision. If anything, they were too courageous—they bordered on the reckless; too decisive—they verged wholly on the impulsive. Yet these qualities had resulted wholly from the experience of peace.

No, peace is wholly desirable; war is wholly undesirable from every point of view. But desirable or undesirable, how are we going to keep out of it? By a blind belief that if we do not approve of it we may avoid it? By a trust that the horrors of the last great conflict were so apparent that no nation is ever going to risk them another time?

We stand today, economically speaking, the strongest nation in the world. We are so outstandingly the creditor nation that the world's business can hardly adjust itself to the situation. What does it mean that the pound sterling, the franc, the lira, the crown, the Japanese yen, the German mark, all are below par value? Simply that everybody except ourselves owes more than he can pay. Moreover, in resources we excite world envy. Iron, coal, oil, wheat, cotton,—every staple, every basic raw material, we possess and can produce in quantities that no other single nation can hope to rival.

Do the other nations love us for this reason? About as much as the average mine worker loves the mine owner; about as much as the average farmer loves the man who holds a chattel mortgage on his cattle and his machinery. Do they believe in our idealism? About as much as they did before the war; about as much as we believe in theirs; about as much as England does in Ireland's, or as the Irish believe in the idealism of England.

They know that we are not a militaristic nation. They know that we are not aggressive, that we have never yet struck unless we have been struck first; therefore they are confident they need not be fearful of our arms. But of our trade, of our resources, of the possibilities of our development, they are fearful. In that respect, we are rapidly finding ourselves forced into the position, in their regard, which was formerly held by Germany.

We say with perfect honesty that all we desire is liberty to develop as we choose. But in the assertion of that liberty it is certain we do annoy. In protecting the development of our agriculture in California, we annoy Japan. In asserting our rights over the Panama Canal, we annoy England. In refusing to entangle ourselves in the confusion of Central Europe, we annoy France and Italy.

In insisting upon the payment of debts due us, we annoy Europe from end to end. And if they do not love us, and do not fear us, and we continue to irritate their pride, is our position wholly safe? As a producing and trading nation, it is unassailable; as a nation open to military or naval attack, is it obviously so?

I repeat that the great war emphatically did not end war; that our outstanding eminence as a business nation does not shield us from war, but rather invites it; that our consciousness that we shall never indulge in military or naval aggression is no protection at all but, if anything, the reverse. We require a protective force in reserve as surely as a rich house requires watchmen, or a great treasure requires bolts and bars.

A convention of great nations assembles in Washington today to discuss the possibilities of the limitation of armaments. No man can hate war more than I do, or be more in sympathy with the ideals and hopes of the President of the United States when he called that assemblage together, but let us be sure when we discuss armament that we know what we mean; that if we should agree on limitation, we know what we are agreeing on and what we expect the limitation to do for us.

France at this moment has a standing army of 800,000 men and a system of conscription which includes practically every able-bodied young man in the mother country itself, and in all its colonies. Even Madagascar, for instance, is strictly conscripted, although the inhabitants of that island have no representation of any kind in the French Parliament.

The United States, on the other hand, has a standing army of only 158,000, although our population is three times that of France. Our National Guard though authorized up to 216,000 men has only 121,000 actually enrolled; and the moment the war was over we dismissed conscription as, apparently, a total impossibility.

On the other hand, the naval fighting tonnage of France is scarcely a fifth of our own. Should, therefore, our navy be cut down by four-fifths to equalize that of France or should the army of France be cut down to some fifty thousand to equalize our own? If neither of these highly unlikely events takes place, may we expect to find some standard adopted which will establish a mathematical ratio between land forces and sea forces, in accordance with which both France and the United States can proceed to limit their armaments?

These suggestions have only to be put forth to show the absurdity of endeavoring to limit armaments on any calculated ratio. The absurdity becomes all the more striking when we reflect, moreover, that no nation stands in relation to only one of the others. It is concerned with all. The Japanese navy is some five-twelfths the

size of our own. The Japanese army, including all men trained and immediately available for modern warfare, is some five or six times as large as our own army. The English army is conducted on the same principles as our own and is of approximately the same size. The English navy is about one-third larger than our navy. Therefore, any "limitation" which related to France and ourselves would not fit England and ourselves, and any which fitted England would not fit ourselves and Japan.

Why have we a large navy? For two reasons. We have a long coastline to protect, and we have, much against our will but inevitably, become entangled in foreign affairs. We protest, for example, against Japan's policy in China. We insist on the necessity of having some control over such distant centers of communication as the island of Yap. We demand, or at any rate we refuse to forgive, the payment of some eleven billion dollars owed to our government by foreign governments. As long as we are no longer merely the sponsors of the Monroe Doctrine but are concerned with affairs everywhere, we must either content ourselves with the futility of gesticulation or we must be prepared to make our protests—if we would protect and insist on our claims—mean something.

Why does France have a large army? Because she has found it necessary in the past. But for her army, there would have been no Armistice Day to celebrate. But for her standing army, France would now be the vassal of Germany, and on terms which would make the reparations exacted from Germany seem like kisses exchanged among children. Germany is, for the present, impotent but France cannot forget that the population of Germany is still much larger than her own, that the physical resources of Germany are still much more varied than her own, and that, within the memory of many of her citizens, Germany has twice invaded her borders at a moment's warning. It is true that her own army is eating France up. It is true that bankruptcy stares her in the face if Germany does not pay the bills which France has drawn on her—and there seems at present no way, in either money or goods, by which these bills can be paid. But the fear of what has happened is too vivid to forget, the bitterness of suffering too sharp to permit forgiveness. Any French government which would markedly cut down the French army would not last till the sunrise of the next day.

In other words, each nation has its own special and different interests to protect. Each nation is affected not by any special psychology but by special circumstances. England without uninterrupted imports could not sustain the life of her people for a year; therefore England feels she must be able to keep control of the seas. Japan has seen unprotected India and unprotected China pass into

the hands of exploiters from abroad, including herself. She alone has armed; she alone has maintained her national integrity in the far East; therefore her people reason she must remain armed by land and sea. It is as plain as the nose on a man's face that no ratio of limitation of armament can be adopted which suits, or seems to suit, these widely varying special circumstances that concern each nation individually; and it is equally plain that by no form of mathematical calculation can that ratio be found. If it exists, it is a psychological thing only—the conviction that not only greed and injustice, but the necessity for economic competition have for some reason ceased, or are ceasing to exist.

This leads us to the second hope which sprung up in so many hearts on Armistice Day three years ago—the possibility of enduring international cooperation, not only between this nation and that nation, or between England and America, or France and America, or Japan and America, but among all nations. There was the talk of a League of Nations which should not only prevent war in the future, but should advance world interests in time of peace.

That League of Nations was never formed. *A* League came into existence and is in existence now; but not only have its achievements been limited to matters of wholly secondary interests, not only has there been more war in Europe subsequent to its formation than at any time for many years preceding 1914, not only has its effect been apparently to make all Central Europe into a hotbed such as the Balkans alone used to be, but the United States is not even a party to its councils. By the largest majority ever registered, the people voted in 1920, two years after the war ended, not to affiliate with that League. Whether the vote meant that we did not wish affiliation with *any* league, no one can say. It certainly stated most ringingly: "No affiliation with the League as now formed."

What has been our course so far as international cooperation in general is concerned? In 1918, when the war ended, we were on warmer terms with the three now greatest nations in Europe, England, France, and Italy, than ever before. Have we been able to maintain that warmth? The only legislation we have undertaken since then that is not wholly domestic in its intention is what? We have adopted new laws regarding immigration; we have changed our tariff; and we have concluded a peace with Germany. The new immigration laws are the strictest we have ever had, saying to Europe, in effect: "You must keep more of your people at home; we will not have them here." The new tariff is higher than it has been for many years. It says to Europe, in effect: "You must send more of your goods elsewhere; we cannot afford to admit them here." And the peace with Germany is a *separate* peace. It does not unite with our allies on terms. It says: "We prefer to make our own terms; those you make do not suit us."

This is, *all* of our international legislation since the war has been, not toward greater cooperation, but toward greater self assertion. It has emphasized, not our connection with other nations, but our isolation from them. It has been, not international idealism, but national economic individualism.

Have we been wrong in this? Possibly. I am not at the moment discussing ethics, but facts. I am pointing out the difference between the dream and the event. We—that is to say England, France, Italy, and the United States—seemed like a single force on that November day three years ago because the dominating desire of each of us was identical. If any dominating desire could have remained identical, we should seem like a single force today. But none could so remain. In that statement lies the difficulty of internationalism.

We did not quarrel stupidly over any “division of spoils.” There were no spoils to divide. The war left us badly off. Its enormous destruction had engulfed Germany, almost engulfed France and Italy, left England and the United States on a far less sound economic footing than before. Each nation’s eagerness was for rehabilitation. But the rehabilitation of each had to be, to some extent, at the expense of every other. And particularly, the rehabilitation of the European countries had to be at the expense of the United States.

We united in the war because we all wanted the same thing—the defeat of Germany who threatened the world. We parted after the war because we found ourselves on different economic levels and no nation which was higher wished to sink. Germany owed France, and France owed England, and England and France and Italy all owed us. If France had forgiven the debt of Germany, and England in time had forgiven the debt of France and we had forgiven the debts of all the European nations, an equalization might have been effected, we are told. But in that case Germany would have been placed on the economic level of France and France would not endure that for a moment. When economic theories come into conflict with a passion that is born of fear and suffering, economic theories do not stand a chance. France wanted her rights, and insisted on them; every other nation promptly wanted its and insisted on them except Germany and Austria who had neither rights nor the power to insist. It was a grand scramble. Our representatives were present at that part of it which was called the Conference of Versailles but we as a nation took no part in it; we merely reserved *our* rights, and have been reserving them ever since.

But as for international cooperation, that ceased, as I have said, the instant the united victory prevailed, and the divided hope of continued economic existence took its place. Internationalism, it

became clear, was the insubstantial fabric of a dream. Indeed, it is almost amusing to reflect that the same people who advocate it believe firmly in anti-trust legislation and often denounce "big business" merely because it is big, thereby affirming in one breath that among individuals competition is life and among nations it is the contrary.

But if internationalism—in the sense that Mr. H. G. Wells, for instance, understands the word—seems much further off now than it did in 1918, is the idea underlying our democracies any stronger? And this is the third and last point to which I referred a while ago as one of the lessons of the war. Even in this case, at first, it seems as if we are on doubtful ground.

Kings, it is true, have become largely a dead issue. William Hohenzollern, a broken half-imbecile old man, is puttering about the grounds of a Dutch country house; the former Emperor of Austria is on his way to unknown exile; he who was a Czar of all the Russians lies somewhere in an unmarked, hasty, and bloody grave. There is hardly a sovereign by blood of any real political importance in the world any more, and the "divine right" is as impossible to bring again into existence as the mastodon. But are democracies any *safer* for the world than they were before the war?

Russia has gone farther along the line of democratic theory than in any other country. The rights of man as man are more emphasized in the plan of the Soviet government than in any other. Believe that Lenin, Trotzky, and the rest are mere human devils greedy for power or believe them to be sincere intelligent lovers of humanity, it is all one. Their system of democracy without training has made Russia a ghastly caricature of a nation, in which millions starve on grass and roots, and the bodies of little children are carried daily in wagons like garbage and dumped by hundreds into great pits. Russia is the *reductio ad absurdum* of democratic theory, the unspeakably horrible example of a country which has escaped from tyranny before it was ready for freedom. And what of the western democracies of Europe—England (monarchial in name only), France, and the new Germany? France and Germany are both near financial ruin; Germany is bankrupt and France is nearly so. It can be a matter of only a few months now when Germany will announce her complete inability to pay even the interest on her debt of reparations. France, which has been clinging to the slender hope of these payments to reduce the fearful burden of her national debts, will then demand the Ruhr Valley. If she takes it, she will be financially no better off; to hold it and develop it will cost her all she could get from it in taxes and trade-profits. And what will follow on her discovery that she is no better off, no man can prophesy, except that it will be perilous to her national existence.

Even England, next after ourselves the strongest nation in the world, sees herself in a position which terrifies her statecraft. Read H. G. Wells, the most influential Englishman out of office, if you would be made gloomy about England's future. Her debts are increasing instead of lessening; her trade is growing less instead of greater; the unrest of her workers is more obvious every year and the belief that a class government in the place of a general government can be set up is steadily growing.

It is plain that in spite of the armistice and its military triumph, democracies are by no means entirely safe. There seems nowhere in Europe any confidence in any political leaders, or any agreement on a political plan of salvation. The countries are split up into almost innumerable parties, which shift and recombine like the bits of broken glass in a kaleidoscope.

And yet, except by confidence in a great leader and by unified and disciplined determination to carry out his plans, it is impossible for us to progress. In war every man comes very soon to realize the truth of this fact. In our own Civil War the South was for a long time successful in spite of the most tremendous handicaps because it early perceived and permitted its armies to be controlled by the great genius of Robert E. Lee; and it was not until the North finally also perceived and established a similar confidence in the genius of General Grant that the war could be concluded.

In the great conflict which ended three years ago, the same truth was manifested. It was won only by unified effort under a great leader. He was among us only a few days ago—seventy years old now, small, gray, looking like an elder in a country church in New England. But he had a genius for military strategy, a genius for directing men in huge masses, a genius for waiting without fear until the moment arrived when he could strike with the greatest possible force. And because he not only possessed this genius, but was trusted by the trained and skillful leaders under him, he was able to conclude that long agony and establish himself forever in the hearts and memories of all of us—Ferdinand Foch, Marshal of France.

Yes, military men recognize in war the necessity for leaders and for intelligent men who can follow, and as surely as there is a sun in heaven, the same thing is true in time of peace. By getting rid of kings we have not gotten rid of the necessity of leaders; just the reverse. Unless our democracy can develop great leaders it is certain to go down. In a kingdom, in an empire, there is a tradition of reverence and confidence in the head of the country which tends to keep men in line. In a democracy, this tradition being set aside, only the absolute reality of leadership will suffice.

And what will bring us, here in America, this leadership, changing but enduring from generation to generation? Education, train-

ing, discipline. These only. Some of us may have thought that the victory proclaimed by the armistice was a short cut to the safety of the world. I have been trying to point out that it was not. There is no short cut. Political evolution and development do not come about with the awe-inspiring slowness of physical evolution. If it is true that a real primitive man, distinguishable from the ape-form, existed a million and a half years ago and that actually recorded history extends over no longer a period than four or five thousand, the physical and mental development of man must have gone on with an imperfectibility that baffles the imagination. Our political evolution, we may be thankful, is not so halting as that. But it is slow and there are no short cuts to it; and the only way we can progress toward it at all is, as I have said, by education.

I do not think this education is necessarily formal. Even in the shadow of your buildings and with the honor of speaking here filling my whole heart, I cannot bring myself to say that I think only among young men and young women with college educations may we expect to find the great leaders and the trained and disciplined followers on whom this country must depend. But I think most of them, if they come at all, will come from such training as you have here. And if you do not recognize your responsibilities and face facts and seek year after year to understand and interpret facts, and do not accept humbly the duty of leading if you have the qualities of a leader, and of backing up your chosen leader with every ounce of power and loyalty you have, if that is to be your lot in life—I think if you do not do these things, you students of the University of Illinois, the guns will have roared and the blood of your brothers will have been spilled in France in vain and the moment of triumph that we felt there, three years ago, will prove transitory indeed.

For what was the armistice? Only the physical end of a great conflict. He was a dreamer indeed who could have expected that the mere cessation of fighting would settle the problems of the future. The very fighting itself had set up new problems of enormous complexity that in their importance overshadow the old. Between good and bad no armistice is possible; the fight goes on and on; the sound of its cannon can never cease, as it ceased three years ago in France. We must develop our national feeling. We must get rid of "blocs"—agricultural blocs, labor blocs, capitalistic blocs,—and think of our country as a unit and ourselves as much a part of that unit as if we were the officers and the privates in an army. We must train ourselves in this *national* service, fight in it, die in it if necessary; quit ourselves in it like men, as your brothers, and many of you, too, did in the actual armies of those desperate months in 1918. They had the courage for that service. You must have the courage and endurance for this.