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OUR UNITED STATES IN A  
BACKWARD-MOVING WORLD

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The human race is witnessing the greatest and most far-reaching revolution which history records and is in large part under its control. This revolution, which is primarily the outgrowth of economic problems and economic ambitions, has for more than a quarter-century involved the whole world. It took on violent military form with the declaration of war on August 1, 1914. It is that war, checked for a time by an armistice and by a treaty of peace that looked backward instead of forward,<sup>1</sup> which is again raging, and in far more cruel, inhuman and destructive form. It is in every sense of the word a war of real revolution.

Whether it be generally recognized or not, what we call the civilized world, which for seven hundred years has been moving steadily forward in the spirit of liberalism and toward liberalism's high ideals, has now turned suddenly and violently backward. The guidance of reason and of understanding, of moral principle and of religious faith, has been shockingly and cruelly displaced by the rule of brute force. Our literally stupendous achievements in literature, in philosophy, in the arts, in the sciences and in the comforts and conveniences of life count for nothing in the control of

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Bryant, Arthur, *Unfinished Victory* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1940).

national policy and of national conduct, and by far the major portion of the world is now under the rule of brutal compulsion. Such portion of the world as is not in that condition may soon be struggling for its life.

Had any one ventured a generation ago to predict that a great and highly civilized people like the Germans, with their magnificent record of accomplishment and influence in every aspect of the intellectual life, could have been reduced to mere blind and unreasoning instruments of torture and of brute force, he would have been thought quite mad. Nevertheless, just that has happened. So appalling a set of conditions and circumstances must be examined with dispassionate care in order that we may have something to guide us in judging what may be the meaning of it all and what will be its possible effect upon that which we Americans hold most dear.

One of the most influential happenings with which we have to deal and which is but little recognized is the effect on public opinion of the outstanding excellence of contemporary journalism, particularly in these United States, and of the world-wide news spread hour by hour through the radio. These powerful agencies, the press and the radio, have substituted information for knowledge. The steady flow of that information which they give so absorbs the attention of tens of millions of human beings that they have no opportunity and little temptation to give to this mass of information that critical interpretation and reflective understanding which might transform it into knowledge. We are therefore, in very large measure, living on the surface of the world's happenings. Few indeed are those who have

the capacity and the ability to go beneath that surface and to grasp the real significance of the knowledge which information might, but often does not, involve and convey. It is of vital importance that we learn to look beneath the surface of things.

As a matter of fact, the path which the constructive thought of the world was treading from the beginning of the twentieth century down almost to the outbreak of the World War of 1914-18 was the most hopeful and progressive in all modern history. Signs multiplied that statesmen and the people for whom they spoke had gained the vision of a prosperous, a contented and a peaceful world, organized for the preservation and protection of law and order in a way that would promote all those inspiring ideals which we recognize as the spirit and guide of liberalism.

What happened? Why was this progress, so full of promise and satisfaction, brought suddenly to an end, and why were reactionary and abhorrent forces set loose, to meet with so little effective opposition that they bid fair to control the world for generations and to put it back, as no one of us had ever believed possible, to a condition which is essentially one of barbaric rule by sheer force?

Bluntly, the answer must be that the democracies, foremost among which were France, Great Britain and the United States, showed themselves incompetent and unable to understand the new economic and political forces at work in the world and to co-operate for their control and direction in a manner which would preserve and protect the democratic system of economic, social and political order, as well as those free institutions

which had, we thought, been safely and permanently built upon that order. During these critical years the democracies have conspicuously lacked the able, constructive and courageous leadership which was so sorely needed. They were allowed to drift on the shoals of disaster.

Consider for a moment the progress which was making from 1898 to 1920 in the building of a system of world organization and international co-operation that should control and guide the new economic forces which the Industrial Revolution had set at work. The purpose, of course, was to increase prosperity for all peoples, great and small, and to protect the foundations of international peace through international co-operation. The first note of progress in this movement was struck by the noteworthy rescript appealing for international co-operation to promote peace, issued by the Czar of All the Russias in 1898. Immediately, the progressive and liberal forces of the world rallied to respond to that appeal. It will always be a matter of pride to many of us that the government of the United States took the lead in that great movement for world organization. It was the influence of the American delegation which gave to the first Hague Conference of 1899 the measure of success which it attained. From the speech of President McKinley made at Buffalo on September 5, 1901, containing the striking sentence, so often quoted, "The period of exclusiveness is past," down to the formal declarations by the two great political parties in the presidential campaign of 1920, American opinion showed itself ready to take responsible leadership in guiding the world toward a peaceful

solution of all international differences and difficulties. It had grasped the fact that the only possible way to avoid war and to keep out of war was to unite to remove the causes of war. The policies of Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Taft, of Secretaries of State John Hay and Elihu Root, all reflected and expressed this spirit of world leadership. Then came—as I have often pointed out—the epoch-marking Joint Resolution passed in June, 1910 by both Houses of the American Congress without a single dissenting vote, authorizing the President to begin negotiations with other governments in order to bring about a world organization which would establish and protect peace through the aid of an international police force composed of the combined navies of the world. How many of those who profess to represent public opinion in the United States today have ever heard of that Joint Resolution or know that it was passed without a dissenting vote?

The persistent assertion that the traditional policy of the United States is one of national and international isolation is contrary to every fact in our history. No people in the world has had more intimate, more constant and more influential relationships with other peoples than ourselves. Outstanding and distinguished examples of this international relationship and international influence are Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay, John Marshall, John Quincy Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell. The steady flow of immigration from one European country after another gave to our population long ago the many-sided character and intellectual interest which will always mark the American people.

We required the military co-operation of the people and the army of France in order to win the War of Independence. We found a way to take part in the war between Napoleon and Great Britain in what is called the War of 1812, against the protest of so outstanding a statesman and leader as Daniel Webster. Our country was invaded and public buildings at Washington were burned. When that war came to an end and the Treaty of Ghent was signed, not the slightest reference was made to those matters which had been alleged to have caused America's participation in the war. The War with Mexico was undertaken against the protest of Abraham Lincoln, who as Representative in Congress from the State of Illinois voted against it. The Spanish-American War in 1898 was absolutely unnecessary, and if it had not been insisted upon by the belligerent press, aided by numerous influential leaders of opinion, including Theodore Roosevelt, Cuba would have become free through diplomatic arrangement with Spain and without any armed hostilities whatsoever. The cost to the people of the United States of that unnecessary war is quite appalling, since highly organized and efficient lobbies have provided for a system of pensions to persons whose relation to the war was only nominal, which have already amounted to tens of millions of dollars and will continue yet for a long generation.

Isolation is the last thing of which the American government and the American people can be accused. Millions of American people are day by day and almost hour by hour informed and deeply interested in news from other peoples in every part of the world. No



other people manifests a like international interest. American agriculture, American industry, American commerce and American finance have penetrated and influenced the life of every nation on the globe. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that it was an American, Commodore Perry, who in 1852, under the express instructions of President Fillmore, to all intents and purposes discovered Japan and introduced its people to world trade and world relationship.

Unfortunately, the World War of 1914-18 broke before the European nations had been persuaded to accept the proposals of the American government made by President Taft pursuant to the Joint Resolution of 1910. But President Wilson had a great vision, and he offered a system of world organization similar to that proposed by the American Congress, to be effective when the Great War should come to its end. Unhappily, his temperament was such that he permitted personal frictions and dislikes to guide his public statements and his policies in a way which greatly weakened his influence and his leadership. Nevertheless, when the American people chose their President in 1920, they did so having before them the definite pledges of both great political parties to support an agreement among the nations to preserve the peace of the world. The statement contained in the Republican national platform was particularly clear and definite.

It is therefore obvious and of record that the American people were betrayed by the failure of those who were chosen to public office in 1920 to carry out the pledges so definitely made to them. Indeed, it is just at this point that a beginning is to be found for the

causes of those appalling happenings which have in twenty years succeeded in revolutionizing so large a portion of the world. It needed the votes of but a very small group of members of the United States Senate to deprive the American people of the safety, the benefit and the world leadership which they had then been pledged. The construction of a world of co-operating nations should then have gone forward under American inspiration and American leadership. Had this been done, we might well be living today in a far different world from that which confronts us.

With this record of promise and with these explicit pledges before us, it may again be pointed out what nonsense it is to speak of our having had a traditional policy of isolation, and of our having no interest in what happens to our fellow men in other lands! The truth is the precise opposite. We had offered leadership to the world, and both political parties had pledged it to the American people. It was the petty politicians at Washington and their shocking disregard of moral and political obligation which threw away the great opportunity which our government had envisaged and of which both political parties had pledged themselves to take advantage. If there be one definite cause, more explicit and more obvious than any other, of the weakness, and it may even be the downfall, of the democracies, it certainly finds expression in this disastrous record of the faithlessness of the small-minded American politician and office-holder, who had in his power for the time being the control of great public policies.

But even so, since a plan of world organization was accepted and entered upon through the establishment

of the League of Nations at Geneva, there still seemed opportunity for readjustment of a constructive and progressive character in the field of international relations. But neither the government of France nor the government of Great Britain stood firm on the new platform which had been erected. Both consistently backed and filled and compromised and hesitated, lest some gain-seeking undertaking might be interfered with if the high ends for which the League of Nations had been organized were vigorously and courageously pursued. Nevertheless, under the inspiring leadership of M. Briand, fifteen governments ratified in 1928 the famous Pact of Paris for the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy, and no fewer than sixty-three governments had signed and ratified this Pact by 1934. Many of us then thought that the end of war was in sight. We little realized the faithlessness of the signatory governments and that they would at once begin to prepare for war on an unprecedented scale of expenditure. Those who, in every land, had been at work for a generation upon these plans to end war by removing the causes of war, were profoundly grieved and shocked as they saw one happening after another which meant the weakening and the eventual tearing down of the structure which was then building.

Even as late as 1931, had there been better understanding and closer co-operation between the governments of some of the democracies, much of the worst which has taken place during the past ten years might never have happened at all. When there was no effective opposition to Japan's invasion of China, then the leaders of Nazi Germany saw no reason why they should not

violate their pledges and take possession of the east bank of the Rhine, and the Fascist government of Italy saw no reason why it should not violate its pledges and proceed to the conquest of Ethiopia. Then all barriers were down and the way was opened to the spread of the rule of brute force without the slightest regard for international law, for formal treaties and pledges or for human feeling. What has happened since is so clear and so obvious that it need not be dwelt upon.

The question which presses for an answer is why were these great democracies so incompetent. Why were they so lacking in vision, in courage and in spirit of co-operation? Why was it practicable for a small group of members of the United States Senate to make it impossible for the government of the United States to carry out the pledges which had been made to the American people? What was it which to all intents and purposes paralyzed the governments of France and of Great Britain in their support of the organized society of nations and prevented them from going forward with eagerness and vision on the constructive path of progress which had been pointed out?

The answer in the case of Great Britain may be found succinctly stated in two extraordinary volumes, one of which is a collection of speeches made during the years 1932 to 1938 by Winston Churchill, the present Prime Minister in the government of Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> In the

<sup>2</sup>Churchill, Rt. Hon. Winston S., *While England Slept: A Survey of World Affairs, 1932-1938* (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1938).

Kennedy, John F., *Why England Slept* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1940).

case of France, political and economic disintegration had been proceeding at a rapid pace after the death of Briand, apparently without any effective and constructive leadership to prevent it or to save the great people of France from the literally appalling fate which has now overtaken them. Plainly, what France has lacked in recent years is constructive and courageous moral and political leadership. The French people have unfortunately been divided into economic and social groups or classes which contested with each other for the control of the government and which apparently were unable or unwilling to work together for the good of the French people as a whole and for the glory and honor of France. The result has astounded the whole world. Nothing has been more staggering to us than to watch the forty-two million French people sitting silently and in coma while a small group of their fellow Frenchmen signed away not only the government of the Third Republic, but that great declaration for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity which sounded the note of the French Revolution a century and a half ago. In each and all of the democracies there have been and are forces at work which have gravely interfered with the effectiveness of these democracies. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to look upon democracy in France as dead. It is certainly in prison at the moment; but some of us, at least, will not give up the hope and the faith that it will find a way to reassert itself in the spirit of the truly great France of bygone days.

So outstanding a scholar and statesman as the Marquess of Crewe feels that liberalism is everywhere under an eclipse, and his discussion of the subject is highly

illuminating.<sup>3</sup> He points out that it was in England that the plant of liberalism first took root and that its growth there was slow and intermittent. Party politics played their part sometimes in encouraging liberalism and sometimes in hampering it, but all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it never died down. Then came the day when the French Revolution brought a new atmosphere to Europe and gave to liberalism the new impulse and effectiveness which lasted for a full century. Lord Crewe suggests, however, that liberalism by its very nature lacks cohesion. It promotes and invites differences of opinion and frequently calls upon public opinion to wait and see, rather than to reach a definite conclusion as to action to be immediately taken. The economic influences which began to play so large a part in national and international policy a hundred years ago gave liberalism in England its new opportunity to build itself upon a wider and more effective democratic basis in the shaping of public policy and upon freedom of international trade for the quick promotion of industry and of commerce. Toward the close of the nineteenth century, the weakening of liberalism in England began, and as Lord Crewe points out, its eclipse has continued until this day.

Liberalism in England has certainly been able to stir the mind of the people to influence and to shape legislation in many most important ways, yet there have been forces at work, partly national and partly international, the effect of which has been to limit liberalism's power to guide and to express British public opinion. As Lord

<sup>3</sup>Crewe, Marquess of, "The Eclipse of Liberty," in *The Fortnightly* of London, May, 1940, pp. 474-484.

Crewe states, the present is a most harassing period for liberals, especially for those of the younger generation, who find themselves forced into the political background during their best years and to whom the prospect of political influence and political leadership seems dark indeed. Nevertheless, the closing words of his analysis are these: "But let us conclude with a confident *Sursum corda!*"

It is in this spirit of *Sursum corda* that we Americans must approach the grave problems which stare us in the face. We dare not be discouraged or lacking in faith, for should we be, there would be little left to hope for in the world of today.

It is perfectly evident that all those important problems and policies which we have looked upon as national or domestic are now absorbed into and made part of the world revolution. The ordinary processes of trade and commerce no longer exist, and huge expenditures are making for purposes which we had thought belonged to the past and would never again be necessary. Armament and preparation for military war have become the dominant note in our public life. This means, of course, the diversion of labor and savings from those purposes for which we would wish to use them, to ends which are of necessity wasteful and destructive. Moreover, military war on the stupendous scale on which it is now being waged destroys in a few days the earnings and the savings of men for generations. The disastrous effect of this upon the accumulated wealth of our people will one of these days be quite obvious to every one; but there is no alternative.

Indeed, so absolute and so complete is this revolution

that we are yet unable fully to visualize or understand it. What are we Americans to do in order to protect and to save our own beloved institutions and the historic foundations upon which they rest? We have had ample warning of these problems and dangers, but we have paid little attention to them. It is two generations since Herbert Spencer wrote a famous essay entitled "The Coming Slavery," in which he predicted that tyranny would succeed liberty in England and probably elsewhere. He certainly did not have in mind the totalitarian state in the form in which it is now presented to us by Russia, by Germany and by Italy, but he did have in mind a state of affairs in which the government would control the life and occupations of the people, instead of the people controlling the policies of the government.

If we look frankly and fairly at the facts of our country's history, we cannot fail to see that there have been many signs during the past generation that all was not well with our political thinking and our political policies. So long as we had the leadership of our first six Presidents, each one of whom was an outstanding statesman of competence and of independence, the foundations of our government and political life were unshaken. After their time, however, we entered upon a period of political and partisan struggle the effects of which, while sometimes relatively harmless, were often definitely harmful. Finally, there came the climax of our great Civil War, which apparently was unavoidable. When that was over and the country's unity permanently established, then our problems became primarily economic and social. Whenever we were given opportunity to



approach these problems in a spirit of understanding and detachment from group or sectional interest, our public opinion responded to the demands made upon it with reasonably good results. But increasingly, our public opinion and our elected political representatives came under the pressure of closely organized and most persistent minority groups. These minority groups were not concerned with principles nor with the public welfare. They were concerned simply with that particular end upon which they had set their hearts and which appealed either to their imagination or to their personal or group interest. Unfortunately, the activity and influence of these minority groups have become stronger year by year at Washington and at several of our state capitals and today they are a genuine danger to our public welfare. Minority groups are able to exist and to succeed only because the majority group is indifferent and inattentive to them. Every once in a while we have evidence that American public opinion is sound and healthy and can be reached by the highest type of appeal. We have had several instances of this during the past two generations, but in every case grave damage had been done by the minority groups before public opinion effectively asserted itself.

Public opinion is the unseen product of education and practical experience. Education, in turn, is the function, in co-operation, of the family, the church and the school. If the family fails in its guiding influence and discipline and if the church fails in its religious instruction, then everything is left to the school, which is given an impossible burden to bear. It is just this situation which has arisen in the United States during the generation

through which we are still passing. In overwhelming proportion, the family has become almost unconscious of its chief educational responsibility. In like manner, the church, fortunately with some noteworthy exceptions, has done the same. The heavy burden put upon the school has resulted in confused thinking, unwise plans of instruction and a loss of opportunity to lay the foundations of true education, the effects of which are becoming obvious to every one. Fundamental discipline, both personal and social, has pretty well disappeared, and, without that discipline which develops into self-discipline, education is impossible.

What are the American people going to do about it? If they do not correct these conditions, they are simply playing into the hands of the advocates of a totalitarian state, for that type of state is at least efficient, and it is astonishing to how many persons efficiency makes stronger appeal than liberty.

Then, too, we have many signs of an incapacity to understand and to interpret liberty, or to distinguish it from license. There is a limit to liberty, and liberty ends where license begins. It is very difficult for many persons to understand this fact or to grasp its implications. If we are to have freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of the press, why should we not be free to say and think and print whatever we like? The answer is that the limit between liberty and license must be observed if liberty itself is to last. To suppose, as many individuals and groups seem to do, that liberty of thought and liberty of speech include liberty to agitate for the destruction of liberty itself, indicates on the part of such persons not only lack of common sense but

lack of any sense of humor. If liberty is to remain, the barrier between liberty and license must be recognized and observed.

In this backward-moving world, it may well be that leadership toward return to a new and forward-moving world is to rest with the United States. Despite our shortcomings and failures, we have written a record on the history of the last one hundred and fifty years which is not only of outstanding importance, but full of promise for the future.

We have established the oldest form of government now existing in the world and we have shown its capacity to continue to exist, unaltered in principle, through all the stupendous changes of a century and a half.

We have established in permanent form the federal principle, and it is that principle which must be applied if a new, a forward-facing, a prosperous and a peaceful world is to be built upon the wreck and the ruin of that backward-moving world at which we now look.

We have established freedom of trade among these federal units and have given to each unit fullest opportunity to develop its resources and the capacity of its population. This, again, is a principle which must be recognized and accepted in a contented and a peaceful world composed of nations, some great and some small, but all proud of their independence and of their capacity for human service.

We have established the authority of an independent judicial system, which means that not force nor the gain-seeking impulse, but right and justice, shall be accepted and enforced as ruling principles of human intercourse, whether personal, group or national. This, too,

is a principle which must dominate a newly organized and a forward-moving world.

The great progress which had been made in applying these fundamental principles to world organization and world life has been, for the time being, completely stopped, but there are those of us who have faith that it will not be long before those principles will again be turned to as fundamental and controlling.

It must be remembered that the peoples held for the moment under brutal dictatorship are each and all highly civilized. They have, each and all, made literally great contributions to literature and to science, to art and to industry. Who can possibly believe that when the emotional spasm is over—and that may be earlier than we now think—they will fail to assert themselves in terms of their old ambitions and their old principles? When that time comes—and may it come soon—where can these peoples turn save to the United States, to see at work, and on the whole successfully at work, those underlying principles of government, of life and of conduct which are the outgrowth of liberty and which alone make the continuance of liberty possible? All that we need to do is to make sure, always and everywhere, that gain-seeking, whether for individuals or for groups, is subordinated to public service. Would not Washington and Hamilton, Jefferson and Madison, Webster and Lincoln and our other great national leaders of the past, looking down from their home in high heaven, let their faces shine with contentment as they saw those principles and habits of life which they did so much to establish gaining control over what has become a wrecked and a backward-moving world, in order to turn it into a new,

a contented, a prosperous and a peaceful organized family of nations, worldwide in scope and safe beyond peradventure from the despot of tomorrow?

We may take encouragement from the little-remembered happenings of nearly a century and a half ago. For some twenty years Napoleon Bonaparte dominated by force the greater part of Europe and part of Africa and set his heart on the subjugation of liberty-loving Great Britain. To the statesmen of that day, the world upon which they looked seemed very much like the world by which we ourselves are confronted. It was liberalism which was struggling for its life and which was so gravely threatened that there was general despair concerning it. Hear these words spoken in the House of Commons by the younger Pitt on April 25, 1804, when Great Britain was arming itself to resist the invasion which Napoleon had planned, and see how absolutely they apply to what is now happening in the world:

I need not remind the house that we are come to a new æra in the history of nations; that we are called to struggle for the destiny, not of this country alone, but of the civilized world. We must remember that it is not for ourselves alone that we submit to unexampled privations. We have for ourselves the great duty of self-preservation to perform; but the duty of the people of England now is of a nobler and higher order. We are in the first place to provide for our security against an enemy whose malignity to this country knows no bounds: but this is not to close the views or the efforts of our exertion in so sacred a cause. Amid the wreck and the misery of nations, it is our just exultation, that we have continued superior to all that ambition or that despotism could effect, and our still higher exultation ought to be, that we provide not only for our own safety, but hold out a prospect to nations now bending under the

iron yoke of tyranny, what the exertions of a free people can effect; and that at least in this corner of the world, the name of liberty is still revered, cherished, and sanctified.<sup>4</sup>

It was eleven years later that Waterloo brought Napoleon's despotic career to an end and paved the way for the progress which European nations have since made.

May we not hope and pray that a twentieth-century Waterloo is not far distant?

<sup>4</sup>Pitt, William, *Speeches . . . in the House of Commons*, second edition. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808. Vol. III, pp. 362-363.