

DEMOCRACY NO LONGER AN EXPERIMENT

ADDRESS TO THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC, WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 28, 1915. FROM OFFICIAL PUBLICATION IN MR. WILSON'S FILES.

IT is a singular thing that men of a single generation should have witnessed what you have witnessed in the crowded fifty years which you celebrate tonight. You took part when you were young men in a struggle the meaning of which, I dare say, you thought would not be revealed during your lifetime, and yet more has happened in the making of this Nation in your lifetime than has ever happened in the making of any other nation in the lifetime of a dozen generations.

The Nation in which you now live is not the Nation for whose union you fought. You have seen many things come about which have made this Nation one of the representative nations of the world with regard to the modern spirit of that world, and you have the satisfaction, which, I dare say few soldiers have ever had, of looking back upon a war absolutely unique in this, that, instead of destroying, it healed; that, instead of making a permanent division, it made a permanent union. * * * *

This Nation was from the beginning a spiritual enterprise, and you have seen the spirits of the two once-divided sections of this country absolutely

united. A war which seemed as if it had the seed of every kind of bitterness in it has seen a single generation put bitterness absolutely out of its heart and you feel, as I am sure the men who fought against you feel, that you were comrades even then, though you did not know it, and that now you know that you are comrades in a common love for a country which you are equally eager to serve.

This is a miracle of the spirit, so far as national history is concerned. This is one of the very few wars in which in one sense everybody engaged may take pride. Some wars are to be regretted, some wars mar the annals of history, but some wars, contrasted with those, make those annals distinguished, show that the spirit of man sometimes springs to great enterprises that are even greater than his own mind had conceived. * * * *

You set the Nation free for that greater career of development, of unhampered development, which the world has witnessed since the Civil War; but, for my part, I would not be proud of the extraordinary physical development of this country, of its extraordinary development in material wealth and financial power, did I not believe that the people of the United States wished all of this power devoted to ideal ends.

There have been other nations as rich as we, there have been other nations as powerful, there have been other nations as spirited; but I hope we shall never forget that we created this Nation, not to serve ourselves, but to serve mankind. * * * *

I hope I may say without even an implication of

criticism upon any other great people in the world that it has always seemed to me that the people of the United States wished to be regarded as devoted to the promotion of particular principles of human right. The United States were founded, not to provide free homes, but to assert human rights. This flag meant a great enterprise of the human spirit.

Nobody, no large bodies of men, in the time that flag was first set up believed with a very firm belief in the efficacy of democracy. Do you realize that only so long ago as the time of the American Revolution democracy was regarded as an experiment in the world and we were regarded as rash experimenters? But we not only believed in it, we showed that our belief was well founded, and that a nation as powerful as any in the world could be erected upon the will of the people; that, indeed, there was a power in such a nation that dwelt in no other nation, unless also in that other nation the spirit of the people prevailed.

Democracy is the most difficult form of government, because it is the form under which you have to persuade the largest number of persons to do anything in particular. But I think we were the more pleased to undertake it because it is difficult. Anybody can do what is easy. We have shown that we could do what was hard, and the pride that ought to dwell in your hearts tonight is that you saw to it that that experiment was brought to the day of its triumphant demonstration. We now know and the world knows that the thing that we then undertook, rash as it seemed, has been practicable, and that we

have set up in the world a government maintained and promoted by the general conscience and the general conviction. So I stand here not to welcome you to the Nation's Capital as if I were your host, but merely to welcome you to your own Capital, because I am, and am proud to be, your servant. I hope I shall catch, as I hope we shall all catch, from the spirit of this occasion a new consecration to the high duties of American citizenship.
