

The Shape of Things to Come¹

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TWENTY-FIVE years ago today, in that first June of American participation in the first World War, Woodrow Wilson spoke in Washington. He said: "This flag which we honor and under which we serve is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than that which we give it from generation to generation. The choices are ours. It floats in majestic silence above the hosts that execute those choices, whether in peace or in war. And yet, though silent, it speaks to us — speaks to us of the past, of the men and women who went before us and of the records they wrote upon it. We celebrate the day of its birth; and from its birth until now it has witnessed a great history, has floated on high the symbol of great events, of a great plan of life worked out by a great people. We are about to carry it into battle, to lift it where it will draw the fire of our enemies. We are about to bid thousands, hundreds of thousands, it may be millions, of our men, the young, the strong, the capable of the Nation, to go forth and die beneath it on fields of blood far away." To what purpose? For answer, in 1942 as in 1917, "We are accountable at the bar of history and must plead in utter frankness what purpose it is we seek to serve." And if our answer be right, as we are confident it is, "our flag shall wear a new luster . . . and a new glory shall shine in the face of our people."

Today, in the most literal sense, throughout the world — from Iceland and Greenland and Alaska down to Trinidad, from England and Ireland across the vast reaches of the Atlantic, the continental stretches of the United States, and the even greater distances of the Pacific, to Australia, and India, and the Near East — better than four million of our soldiers, sailors, and marines join a hundred and thirty million other Americans in celebration of this day. How fitting

¹ The principal address on a Flag Day program presented under the joint auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society and the commissioned and enlisted personnel of Fort Snelling on June 14, 1942, at Fort Snelling (see *post*, p. 267). *Ed.*

that we of the upper Mississippi Valley should meet on this historic ground! An hour since, crack units of a great citizen army passed in review. It was composed in part of the Third Infantry, the oldest regiment in the United States Army, which has a history dating back to 1784. For more than fifty years it has been identified with Minnesota and the Northwest. It boasts not only of service in Mexico, with the Army of the Potomac, in Cuba, in Alaska, in the Philippines, and in scores of skirmishes far afield, but of traditions of things endured and things accomplished, such as regiments hand down forever. As one watched, there came to mind the words of General Marshall at West Point the other day: "In physique, in natural ability, and in intelligence" our new army is the "finest in the world. In their eagerness to work, to endure and to carry through any mission, they are all that could be desired of soldiers."

Similar scenes were witnessed here at Fort Snelling in the first World War, when the men of the first and succeeding officers' training camps marched by; in 1898, when the Fifteenth Minnesota was quartered here; and in 1861, when the First Minnesota, later immortalized at Bull Run, and Antietam, and Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, heard on another June 14 that it had been ordered to the East. Then as Dr. Folwell relates, "pandemonium reigned in camp." Eight days later the men of the First Minnesota went on board two waiting transports here at the water's edge.

Thus four generations of fighting men have left Fort Snelling in the flower of their manhood to honor their obligations, and the obligations of their forebears, to a government which opened up this abundant world of prairies, rivers, and woods, that therein we might multiply, and prosper, and enjoy a democratic way of life.

Into the happy hunting grounds of the Sioux and the Chippewa, this nascent empire of the voyageur, the trapper, and the fur trader, came Captain Jonathan Carver on an autumn day in 1766, stood on the bluff which rises at the junction of the Mississippi and the Minnesota rivers, and viewed the wonderful landscape which lay before him. Prophetically he wrote: "To what power or authority this new world will become dependent, after it has arisen from its present un-

cultivated state, time alone can discover. . . . But the seat of Empire, from time immemorial, has been gradually progressive towards the West."

Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike, standing near the same confluence thirty-nine years later on September 23, 1805, saw the advantages "which would arise from a fort located at that point. From the high bluff . . . the course of both streams would be under the sweep of the guns. Sheer walls of stone rising from the Mississippi could prevent invasion; and the fur trading business could be regulated" from the Great Lakes to the plains of the Missouri, "as all boats entering or leaving the Indian country must use one or the other of the two rivers." Then and there he bought the site from the Sioux for presents valued at two hundred dollars, and sixty gallons of liquor.

Fourteen years passed. On August 24, 1819, about a hundred men of the Fifth United States Infantry disembarked, and log cabins and a stockade—"Cantonment New Hope"—were built opposite the towering height where a few years later rose the white stone walls of Fort Snelling, originally known as Fort St. Anthony. A year later Colonel Josiah Snelling took command. "As a soldier he was a true leader of men, loyal to his country and his superiors; as a pioneer he raised the flag of authority in a lawless wilderness, and as a builder he erected more than stone walls for he laid the foundations of civilization in the Northwest."

By 1823 Colonel Snelling had located and practically completed on the extreme point of land between the two rivers a new fort which for years was one of the strongest outposts on the western frontier. "Lying far from the seats of government, in a region of wandering traders and red men, the fort became the exponent of the government—the only symbol of governmental restriction in a region almost entirely without law." There it served to keep the "Indians friendly while the foundations of American life were being laid." The history of this fort, however, "was not made by the rifles and sabers of the soldiers." The Indian, the Indian agent, the trapper, and the trader are gone, but "the axe and the plow of the pioneer who worked in safety beneath its potential protection have left their his-

tory upon the landscape of the great Northwest." Like many other lonely posts, Fort Snelling fostered settlement and thus made a "permanent contribution . . . to the development of the surrounding region."

Here and at Mendota were the first American settlements in southern Minnesota. Here were women and children, with books, schooling, religious services, entertainment. Here the first cultural existence in the state began. Soldiers and civilians alike evinced "the self-confidence and the grim determination which are the products of frontier service."

The history of these people — their experience and that of all other Americans — has created for us the significance of our flag. When at Wake Island, on the beaches and in the jungles of Bataan, in the Coral Sea, and at Midway, we reaffirm our greatness, it is the tradition of the past — patriotism, and loyalty, and sacrifice, and high purpose for the future — which speaks. The builders of Fort Snelling were the pioneers on the frontiers of a new nation. We are the pioneers on the frontiers of a new world. All we seek is freedom, and a lasting peace. Our generation has trod this road before. Why did we fail to achieve our goal? We cannot fail again.

It avails nothing to say that we won the last war and lost the peace. In an immediate sense we did win. "What did we get out of it?" the skeptics ask our generation. We established for ourselves and for our children the right for twenty-five years to live as we chose to live. That is a great deal in itself. Had we lost, they would have known in the oppression of the conqueror what we had fought to avert. Victory assured for us the continuity of our democratic institutions, but continuity of rights and blessings seldom suggest the initial sacrifice. We made an investment in America. We do not regret it.

Yet, in a larger sense, we did fail. We preserved our way of life, but we are at war again. Our sons make their investment now. Out of our mistakes, out of their sacrifice, we must set up an international control which will make a third World War impossible.

We must accept our share of the responsibility for the tragic pay-off

of these twenty years. Germany dominated Europe before 1914. It was winning in the spring of 1917. We entered the struggle, swung the balance of power the other way, and, after victory, withdrew, permitting Germany, with its seventy million people and its industrial and military genius, again to threaten the Old World and the New. How can we justify our record? Where is the common sense of it? We fight to save a civilization we love, and then fail to support an international mechanism devised to protect that civilization by barring power politics from the world. More than that, we withdraw within the barriers of an economic nationalism and restricted immigration, particularly at a time when war-weary and sickly nations need a common blood bank to survive. Whether we like it or not, America is a world power, the greatest on the earth, and we cannot escape, even if we would, our political and economic and social involvement in and responsibility to the world. The boys who have died in the Pacific will have died in vain, if, when this war is over, we assume another "splendid isolation."

"No man is an Island, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee." Along the road of moral defeat of the past ten years — Manchukuo, Ethiopia, Austria, Munich, Prague — John Donne could have told us that each time the bell tolled, it tolled for you and for me.

Isolationism is the twin of pacificism. Too many thought until Pearl Harbor that we didn't have to fight. The Russians thought so, too, and the unwilling French. All accepted the dictum that a country worth dying for was worth living for. Too few accepted the reverse — a country worth living for is worth dying for. The flower of the youth of France — a million and a half of them — exist in Nazi prison camps. Would they embrace today — would Occupied France accept — a policy of appeasement, of peace at any price? The democ-

racies have learned since Munich that peace cannot be bought at any price, even that of slavery or death, when ruthless force wills to rule the earth. Force must be met with force.

Now to our most tragic and stupid error. Too many years we failed to recognize that Communism, and Fascism, and National Socialism were the facets of a rapidly developing world revolution which recognized no boundaries in its lust for territorial and ideological conquest. This rise to power of the dictators cannot be attributed entirely to the treaty of Versailles; that is an escapist rationalization. Exhausted and disillusioned peoples sought new leadership and new concepts and yearned again for the sense of self-respecting power. The world they had known before 1914 was gone beyond recall. A new world was struggling to be born. The sterile leadership of a Baldwin or a Daladier offered not bread, but a stone. We played the stock market behind our own high tariff wall. "We are not," we said, "interested in Europe's petty squabbles." To the hungry and receptive peoples of Europe, Democracy sounded smug, pacifistic, uncomprehending, hopelessly capitalistic. They misunderstood our overwhelming desire for peace, as we did theirs for change. In despair they turned to the self-appointed creators of a new order, which, through military effort if need be, would rule the world.

Still we were blind. We might have met successfully their dynamic philosophy with one not implemented by a gestapo or a concentration camp. For it is not merely with military weapons that the menace of totalitarianism is met, but with ideas which can arouse the enthusiasm of all peoples, irrespective of race or creed, and give them strength in days which are dark, and hope for an uncertain future. When war came it was too late. Now we must wait upon the peace — "a people's peace." "The century which will come of this war . . . must be the century of the common man," says Vice-president Henry A. Wallace, for the man who has been deluded by Hitler as well as by the Frenchman who saw no reason to fight because, he thought, there was little difference between his way of life and what the conqueror professed to offer.

Where the bricks are fallen
We will build with new stone
Where the beams are rotten
We will build with new timbers
Where the Word is unspoken
We will build with new speech.

President Roosevelt's four freedoms are the stones of a foundation reconstructed in this spirit. Two come out of our political past—freedom of speech and of expression and freedom of every person to worship God in his own way; two, out of our new social sense—freedom from want and freedom from fear. As war aims these freedoms are far more revolutionary than the general principles of that Atlantic Charter upon which Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill base their "hopes for a better future for the world": no aggrandizement or territorial changes not in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned; the right of all peoples to choose their form of government, with the restoration of those which have been torn down; equal access for all, victor and vanquished, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world; improved labor standards, economic adjustment, and social security; freedom of the seas; and disarmament. We must implement this peace with a world organization of which the United Nations are the nucleus.

Mr. Sumner Welles suggests, as a first step, a "long Armistice" during which we can disarm the aggressor, participate in an international police force to restore and maintain order until a permanent system can be set up, and work out a world organization which will determine the final terms of peace "after the period of social and economic chaos which will come inevitably upon the termination of the present war and after the completion of the gigantic task of relief, or reconstruction and rehabilitation which will confront the United Nations at the time of the Armistice." No attempt would be made to work out a permanent peace settlement for months or years—not until passions cooled and hatreds became tempered, immediate economic and social adjustments were made, and the peacemakers could take a clearer view "of the enormous problems in the fields of national

ambitions and economic pressures and over-all security before they attempted to draft a blueprint for a new post-war world."

It is too early to draft that blueprint. Many questions are being settled for us as the struggle proceeds. With our accelerating effort, our purposes are taking a more definite shape, and we insist that those purposes be permanently secured. The settlement lasts longer than the war. We are now prepared for any sacrifice. Are we prepared for the sacrifice of peace? Certainly the costs of a continuing world federation are less than those of this second World War, or a third World War to come. Under the shadow of a great threat, we are unified and unselfish. We must discipline ourselves to a continued and unstinted effort, to a continued co-operation when the war is ended. It guarantees a better world of freedom and of peace at a far lesser price.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian says to one who falters: "If you will go with me, you must go against wind and tide." In a similar spirit the pioneers carried the flag we honor, as do the boys at Midway and Dutch Harbor today. The flag speaks to us of the courageous past, and of this present, and of the future we must build. Let us go along the road of the future together, though it be against wind and tide. Then do we pass on the heritage, pioneers of a new world beneath the flag of freedom.



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