

THE GENIUS OF AMERICA

THE members of this delegation, whom I have much pleasure in receiving, are all American citizens who chance to have been born in other countries than our own. You have called upon me to testify for yourselves and the millions of others who, though not natives to our soil, are in every other respect thorough-going, loyal and devoted Americans. I am glad to welcome you, not only to this place, but to the full privileges and opportunities, and especially to the full responsibilities and duties, of American citizens. It is not very long, as history views matters, since all of us were alien to this soil. I suppose that if Methuselah were at this time an American in his period of middle life, and should drop in on our little party, he would regard us all as upstarts. Fortunately, American ideas of hospitality have been greatly modified since the times when some of my early American forbears argued the matter with the Indian known as King Philip. He and his Indian supporters regarded themselves as the real Americans, and maintained their case all too effectively.

It is a truism, of course, but it is none the less a fact which we must never forget, that this continent and this American community have been blessed with an unparalleled capacity for assimilating peoples of varying races and nations. The continuing migration which in three centuries has established here this nation of more than a hundred million, has been the greatest that history records as taking place in any such brief period. Viewing it historically, we

To a delegation of foreign-born citizens at the White House, Thursday morning, October 16, 1924

find that the migration to America was little more than a westward projection of the series of great movements of peoples, by which Europe was given its present population. But there is a striking difference between the migrations into Europe, and the later movements of the same racial elements to the New World.

It was the fate of Europe to be always a battleground. Differences in race, in religion, in political genius and social ideals, seemed always, in the atmosphere of our mother continent, to be invitations to contest by battle. From the dawn of history, and we can only conjecture how much longer, the conflicts of races and civilizations, of traditions and usages, have gone on. It is one of the anomalies of the human story that these peoples, who could not be assimilated and unified under the skies of Europe, should on coming to America discover an amazing genius for coöperation, for fusion, and for harmonious effort. Yet they were the same people when they came here that they had been on the other side of the Atlantic. Quite apparently, they found something in our institutions, something in the American system of Government and society which they themselves helped to construct, that furnished to all of them a political and cultural common denominator.

Is it possible for us to make an analysis which will disclose this element that has wrought such a strangely different result here in our country? It must be an element that was present among the peoples of Europe while they were still in Europe. It could not have been brought here except by them. There has been nobody else to bring it. The original human materials were the same in both cases.

It has seemed to me that our search for this mysterious factor of difference must lead to the conclusion that it was not a single factor but the united workings of at least three forces, that brought about the wide difference. Among these I should place, first, the broadly tolerant atti-

tude that has been a characteristic of this country. I use the word in its most inclusive sense, to cover tolerance of religious opinion, tolerance in politics, tolerance in social relationships; in general, the liberal attitude of every citizen toward his fellows. It is this factor which has preserved to all of us that equality of opportunity which enables every American to become the architect of whatever fortune he deserves.

Along with this element of universal tolerance, I should couple our Republican system of Government, which gives to every man a share and a responsibility in the direction of public affairs. And third, I should place our system of universal free education.

I shall not quarrel with anybody who chooses to give these three factors a different order of importance. That is a matter for individual judgment. But I do believe that these three factors largely represent the advantages which our people have enjoyed, and which have made it possible for them to build here a great, harmonious, liberal, community of free people. Starting anew in a land of almost unlimited natural opportunity, the early settlers found that the success of their nation-building experiments must depend upon their working harmoniously together, sinking non-essential differences, coöperating frankly and sincerely in the general interest, and, above all else, forgetting the ancient antagonisms. It has been our good fortune that we have been able to shake off the old traditions, to strike hands with our neighbor in the common effort to preserve our new-found liberties. And along with this, through our system of universal education, we have been able to guard against the revival of old, or the creation of new regional or group hostilities.

You who represent the more recent accretions to our population, know how generously you have been received. You know how free and unquestioned has been your access

to the opportunities of this land. You have been expected to do your honest share of the day's work in a community which ranked productive toil as a distinction rather than a degradation. We have all taken our chance on that condition. Because we have been willing to do so, we have been prospered in material things and, what is ever more worth while, in the things of the spirit. Generation after generation, from the beginnings of permanent settlement here, the country has been able to receive and absorb a great number of newcomers from the older countries. That was possible so long as there was cheap land for settlement, and the assurance that industry could put value into it.

But with the passing of the day of lands so cheap as to be well-nigh free, we are coming to confront a new set of conditions. It has been found necessary to inquire whether under these new conditions we can be sure of finding employment for the diverse elements and enormous numbers of new immigrants that are offered to us. We are all agreed, whether we be Americans of the first or of the seventh generation on this soil, that it is not desirable to receive more immigrants than can reasonably be assured of bettering their condition by coming here. For the sake both of those who would come and more especially of those already here, it has been thought wise to avoid the danger of increasing our numbers too fast. It is not a reflection on any race or creed. We might not be able to support them if their numbers were too great. In such event, the first sufferers would be the most recent immigrants, unaccustomed to our life and language and industrial methods. We want to keep wages and living conditions good for everyone who is now here or who may come here.

As a Nation, our first duty must be to those who are already our inhabitants, whether native or immigrants. To them we owe an especial and a weighty obligation. They came to us with stout hearts and high hopes of bettering

their estate. They have contributed much to making our country what it is. They magnificently proved their loyalty by contributing their full part when the war made demand for sacrifices by all Americans.

It must be the hope of every American citizen to maintain here as a permanent establishment, and as a perpetual inheritance for Americans of the future, the full measure of benefits and advantages which our people have been privileged to enjoy. It is our earnest wish to coöperate and to help in every possible way in restoring the unfortunate countries of the Old World. We want to help them to rid themselves of the bad traditions, the ancient animosities, the long established hostilities. We want our America to continue an example and a demonstration that peace, harmony, coöperation and a truly national patriotic sentiment may be established and perpetuated on an American scale. We believe our first great service to the Old World will be in proving this. And in proving it, we shall be doing the things that will best equip us, spiritually and materially, to give the most effective help toward relieving the suffering nations of the Old World.

You have demonstrated again and again that it is useless to appeal to you on any thing but patriotic motives. You are for America, you are for our Constitution, you will not be tempted to take any action that will imperil our society or our Government.

It is the natural and correct attitude of mind for each of us to have regard for our own race and the place of our own origin. There is abundant room here for the preservation and development of the many divergent virtues that are characteristic of the different races which have made America their home. They ought to cling to all these virtues and cultivate them tenaciously. It is my own belief that in this land of freedom new arrivals should especially keep up their devotion to religion. Disregarding the need

of the individual for a religious life, I feel that there is a more urgent necessity, based on the requirements of good citizenship and the maintenance of our institutions, for devotion to religion in America than anywhere else in the world. One of the greatest dangers that beset those coming to this country, especially those of the younger generation, is that they will fall away from the religion of their fathers, and never become attached to any other faith.

But in cherishing all that is best in the land of your origin, and in desiring the highest welfare of the people of the old home, the question arises as to how that result can best be secured. I know that there is no better American spirit than that which is exhibited by many of those who have recently come to our shores. It is my belief that those who live here and really want to help some other country, can best accomplish that result by making themselves truly and wholly American. I mean by that, giving their first allegiance to this country and always directing their actions in a course which will be first of all for the best interests of this country. They cannot help other nations by bringing old world race prejudices and race hatreds into action here. In fact, they can best help other countries by scrupulously avoiding any such motives. It can be taken for granted that we all wish to help Europe. We cannot secure that result by proposing or taking any action that would injure America. Nor can we secure it by proposing or taking any action that would seriously injure some European country. The spirit of America is to help everybody and injure nobody. We can be in a position to help only by unifying the American nation, building it up, making it strong, keeping it independent, using its inclination to help and its disinclination to injure. Those who cast in their lot with this country can be true to the land of their origin only by first being true to America. When the public sees and realizes that racial groups here are first of all devoted to

the interests of this country, there will be little difficulty in securing here the present needed help and assistance for the countries of the old world.

This is the main thought which your presence here brings to my mind. Let us maintain all the high ideals which have been characteristic of our different races at home. Let us keep our desire to help other lands as a great and broad principle, not to help in one place and do harm in another, but to render assistance everywhere. Let us remember also that the best method of promoting this action is by giving undivided allegiance to America, maintaining its institutions, supporting its Government, and, by leaving it internally harmonious, making it eternally powerful in promoting a reign of justice and mercy throughout the earth.