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ADDRESS

OF

WOODROW WILSON

Governor of New Jersey

BEFORE THE

IROQUOIS CLUB

CHICAGO, ILL.

LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY, 12, 1912

AT THE HOTEL LA SALLE



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*Mr. President, Mr. Toastmaster, and Fellow Citizens:*

I feel it a great honor to stand here in the presence of this distinguished body of men in order to speak once more the faith that is in me. I have many times spoken in the City of Chicago and I want to say with commiseration for them, that many gentlemen here present have often heard me, and yet it is always delightful to be able to speak again to those with whom I have been brought in close association, on those principles which I know to be sound and patriotic, upon a theme which invites any man to speak the truth. For the thought that is uppermost in the minds of all of us is, of course, that this is Lincoln's birthday, and I know of no example which more provokes than his, simplicity, sincerity and truth.

I sometimes think it is a singular circumstance that the present Republican Party should have sprung from Lincoln, but that is one of the mysteries of Providence, and for my part I feel the closest kinship in principle and in political lineament to that great mind. I wonder if we appreciate, gentlemen, just how apposite his example is to the present moment. Here was a case where the nation had come to a critical turning point in its history, where it had to make a choice whether it would divide or remain united upon a fundamental question of social structure—a question which was all the more difficult to approach and more difficult to solve, because it involved so much passion, because it involved some of the deepest feelings that men can acquire. There is nothing so solid in our present social structure as was exhibited in the old social structure of the United States for at that time there were roots that had run back generation after generation, and to disturb them seemed almost to disturb the foundation of the life of the people. At that critical juncture what happened? Was a man picked out who had become experienced and sophisticated among the ruling class of the community? Is it not an interesting circumstance that a man should have come almost untutored from the mass of the people, who had the wisdom, who had the vision as well as the courage and sagacity to handle a great crisis with a steadiness which made it possible to save the nation? I do not know any life which more illustrates the fundamental faith of democracy. The fundamental faith of democracy is that out of a mass of uncatalogued men you can always count upon genius asserting itself, genius suited to mankind, genius suited to the task. The richness of a democracy is in this—that it never has to predict who is going to save it. It never relies upon those of established influence. The gates of opportunity are wide open and he may enter who is fit. And when you look back to that rugged, almost ungainly figure, like the gnarled oak of the forest that suddenly arose and showed itself to be head and shoulders not only in physical but moral stature above its fellows, and then see the sad and wistful eyes with which he moved among his fellowmen, not as a man who works revolution, but as a man who interprets the thought of his own and insists also upon all classes listening to this fundamental voice of the people themselves. Is not that a vindication

of democracy? We don't have to train men to interpret the United States. They are born with the largesse of Providence, a Providence that has always tried to teach mankind that only God can classify man and that men cannot.

What produced the birth of Freedom in the modern world? It was the conception that every man stood naked and individual in his responsibility before his God and Maker and that the only test was the test of native worth and native principle. That's what has been the foundation of liberty, and so far as we have forgotten and obscured it, so far as we have impaired its operation, we have gone astray and found ourselves in a jungle from which we do not see any way of extrication. Therefore, I do not know of any better day upon which to explain what seems to me to be the duty of the Democracy than the Birthday of Lincoln.

I heard a story about Lincoln the other day—a new one—which had such a distinctive flavor of authenticity that I am sure it was true. I believe it was told by Mr. Horace White, who was a young reporter at the time of the debates between Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. As I was told the story, at one of the very best of those debates he was sitting on the platform in an open space near Lincoln. Lincoln was seated, as usual, in his long linen duster and alongside of him was a lady whom Mr. White did not know. Mr. Douglas spoke first and when he had sat down Mr. Lincoln leisurely got up, slowly removed the linen duster, carefully folded it up, placed it in the lap of the lady who was sitting by and said, "Won't you be kind enough to hold this garment until I go stone Stephen?" Now, Stephen Douglas, as the men of Illinois need not be told, was a very astute and very admirable figure in our politics, but just at that moment Douglas stood for an order of things, a process of reasoning in politics, about to be rejected and this man of the people used as the missiles with which to stone Stephen not any words of personal bitterness, nothing but the words of common, homely reason and a fearless analysis of the existing situation of affairs in the United States. He uttered, you will remember, that immortal sentence, "I do not say that the Union will be destroyed, but I do say that it cannot continue to exist half free and half slave." He predicted a peaceful outcome, he predicted an outcome that would save the unity and integrity of the Nation, but he also fearlessly stated the fact that as it stood it could not go on. And, gentlemen, that statement ought to be made now—that *as our economic affairs are now organized they cannot go on*. There is no such deep division as existed in Lincoln's day: it is more intricate, it is more difficult to-day than the division which existed in Lincoln's day, but it is not of the sort that invites the passions of whole populations, thank God. It is something that can, by clear thinking, be dealt with and successfully dealt with, and no man who is a friend of this country predicts any of the deeper sorts of trouble, any of the revolutionary processes which destroy and do not restore. Our task is one of restoration, of refreshment, of rejuvenation, of the recovery of things which we all revere but which are overcast and overweighted with all sorts of things which we wish, by slow and prudent stages, to rid ourselves of. But, notwithstanding that we wish this, that we have the time and we have the temper in which to solve these things, we ought to be perfectly radical in our statement of the fact that as at present organized the thing cannot go on. That is really not debatable. What is debatable is the wise thing to do.

As I have looked about me and as I have traveled from one part of this country to the other I have been struck by nothing so much as this—the unity in the thinking and in the temper of the people of all parts of the United States. Not long ago I had the pleasure of visiting the city of Madison, Wisconsin, and then proceeding directly from there, without interruption of journey, to Dallas, Texas, and if I had not known that I had not been transported in my dreams, had not known the space I had traversed between Wisconsin and Texas, I should have thought I was in the same state, for there was the same point of view, the same purpose in politics, the same desire for emancipation from the old connections; that will allow men to argue and also to act the way they feel instead of acting the way they are labeled; the same determination to pick out men and measures as they please, and not to be satisfied until they had picked out the right men and measures according to the purposes they had framed in their hearts; the determination to see to it that they did not get fooled by anybody any more. And there are various ways of getting fooled. You can get fooled by people who think they mean what they say and don't; you can get fooled by people who know they don't mean what they say and yet say it. You can even get fooled by people who earnestly mean what they say and don't know what they are talking about. And the people are out to catch all kinds of fraud in respect of the man who is a fraud upon himself as well as the man who is a fraud upon them, and in the circumstances it is a most interesting and exhilarating field in which to play ball, because you feel that the combination of politics that is about to take place is going to take place with an impulse gained from a new generation. It is a very interesting fact that the harness of modern politics sits most lightly upon the youngest men. The young men of this country are now about to take a serious part in the plot and they are determined that they are going to make the plot, not such as it was theoretically represented to them to be when they were in school and college, but such as they have found it is. I myself contributed to deceive them at one time in some respects, but I know more than I did then; I have found some gentlemen out. Distance and perspective make a great deal of difference. When you get on the inside things look somewhat different from the way they looked on the outside, and you can always test a man by the very simple rule, put in very plain language, which we generally express when we say "put up or shut up." *Do* the thing you profess to believe or else get out of the game. I used to take a somewhat active part in advising men younger than myself about the game of football, and we always knew when we were picking out promising material for behind the line that it did not prove a man was a good halfback because he would take the ball and start with it instantly. You had to wait until he approached an opening and see how he struck the line, and if he hesitated to go through there was no more time wasted on him. The way you tell a man is whether he still has his head down and steam on when he strikes the line, because most of them will go down very finely and then check and stop and wonder what is going to happen when that mass of men come in his way. There is the same thing in politics. We need a great many men to forge through the line.

I am going to speak very frankly to you to-day about what I conceive to be the opportunity of the Democratic Party. That's the opportunity I am interested in. I am not responsible for the Republican Party. I would wish to mention men in my prayers to a higher authority who are,

because the Republican field is singularly broken and what really needs to be expounded in order to explain the Democratic opportunity, is why the Republican Party is so broken. Why is it that you cannot for the life of you calculate which are in the numerical ascendency, the Standpatters or the Insurgents? Of course the Insurgents make more noise than the Standpatters. Most of the Standpatters wear gum shoes and it is impossible by the assistance of your ear to count the number of men with gum shoes on, whereas it is quite possible to reckon the host of their opponents, for they all shout and there is a great deal of noise among the allies of war on the Insurgent side of the Republican camp, but nobody quite knows who is in command of the camp. All of that is due to the fact that the so-called Insurgent Republicans know something has happened to the Republican Party; that it has lost its way. But whether it has lost its way or not every man with a weather eye must perceive that it is not bound for any accommodating haven, that the country is out of humor with those who recently administered its affairs; that it does not believe they are bound for a definite enough goal and does not believe they know how to get there even if they believe they know they do. I am not saying this by way of harsh criticism but by way of analysis. I am not arguing with you; I am telling you. Now, on the other hand, you have an extraordinarily stubborn tradition and that tradition is that every man of business standing and of business foresight will naturally ally himself with the Republican Party, because that's the businessman's party. That is the proposition that has been established in this country by those elections which have time out of mind been personally conducted. These people have had expounded to them so long and forcibly the idea that nobody understands the prosperity of America except Republicans that a good many intelligent people have actually come to believe it and it is expected of young men, if they are going to get into the ranks of solid persons, that they will ally themselves with the Republican Party.

Now, the business of America must be taken care of. Nobody denies that. America is a business country and the particular thing of which business is intolerant is ill-considered and rapid change. It is profoundly distrustful of everything that it regards as experimental. It believes that sure perdition lies in the direction of a theoretical program and therefore it shrugs its shoulders with regard to any such out and out doctrine as free trade, and to say a man is a free trader is almost as much as to say that his credit is not good at the bank, that he does not understand business, that he does not understand all those interests which have been built together and become vested by reason of the advantages which have been founded upon a protective tariff. When I talk with Insurgent Republicans and we lay our views frankly before one another, the only difference I can find between myself and them is this: they have a profound reverence for the theory of protection. They are willing to let down the bars of the tariff a good deal, willing to reduce it if it don't go down very far, but even to take down a single bar seems a concession. They say, "The fence was higher when the old man was living and I don't know what the old man would say if his son should take down a bar. The cattle might get out. I recognize the spirit—the cows are free agents, but I am not going to take the fence down. I would do it with a bad conscience and if I took it down I wouldn't dare join the old man in the next world."

Now, I have not the least feeling of piety on the question of protection. The whole question is one of expediency pure and simple. Either it is or it is not good for the country. If it is good for the country we ought to have it. If it is not, we ought not to have it and if it is good in some degree for the country we ought to have it in that degree and no more. Everything you say about it must be proved by data and facts and not by any theory. I have no feeling of piety with regard to the doctrine of free trade or any political doctrine except the political doctrine of the equal rights of men. The standard is the actual good of the country, not any theoretical measure of that good nor anything taken out of theoretical books.

Now, we are in the presence, therefore, of a state of mind and a state of mind is a very serious thing, I can tell you. A panic is a state of mind. When a panic comes on there is just as much money in the country as when it started and there is just as much credit; that is to say, men are just as much deserving of credit as they were before it started, but it is a state of mind where nobody any longer knows it is safe to trust, where everybody is looked upon with distrust and every enterprise is supposed to be overworked. There is therefore universal timidity, and inasmuch as states of mind in a crisis can ruin men's fortunes, a state of mind is a very serious thing. And this present state of mind of the country at large is a very serious thing, which the successful party must understand and arrest. The fortunate circumstance is that business is finding out for itself that something is the matter. It does not have to be told by politicians; it knows something is the matter, for business is aware that privilege has lifted its ugly head in the organization of business and that in order that the average businessman should have the free opportunities of his own occupation something has got to be done to stop the domination and tyranny of privilege. In other words, business itself is aware that it is in bondage and it is determined to break out of bondage.

The pathetic thing to my mind, gentlemen, is this: I make it my business to talk to as many men engaged in large affairs as I can get access to, to lay my mind frankly before them and induce them to lay theirs frankly before me, and what strikes me is the extraordinary number of men who absolutely agree with me as to what ought to be done but beseech me not to use their names or to quote them. In other words, something exists in this country of which businessmen are afraid, and if there is something to make the businessmen of this country afraid it ought to be removed at any cost. And so business is getting a little more tolerant before the proposals of change. Business is saying, "After all there is something the matter. We are perfectly willing to sit down and work out an analysis of what it is that is the matter and we will assist in correcting it if you will only deal temperately with it and in the terms which we can understand." And business is beginning to realize, also, that the combinations—and I am not now speaking of individual trusts, for the problem is much bigger than that, but with the combinations of personnel, the understandings, private tips; of those things which I need not describe to this body of men, that hold you together or else make it dangerous for you to break out; that the very privilege that is dominating business is seeing to it that politics is dominated by its purposes and that most of those processes of politics of which we have grown suspicious are allied with processes of business of which we also have grown suspicious. When I hear

you say to me let business alone, I say I will do it upon one condition; that you will let politics alone. Politics did not enter business. Let me tell you that business entered politics. Now if you want this thing remedied take business out of politics. Take your own condition—and I am now talking on the chance that I am addressing some people who hold the opinion I have just quoted—if you want the politician to give business a chance, then all I have to say to you is, give politics a chance to act independently of the influence of money and of privilege. These are some of the things, gentlemen, to which my eyes have been opened since I got on the inside. I have seen men with my own eyes, in at least one state legislature, who did not dare to vote the way they thought and who clearly disclosed to me in private that they wouldn't dare say it in public, and for their sakes I wouldn't dare use their names for they would be ruined—who disclosed to me in private those business connections which had them in their grip. They told me if they voted the way they thought they could not renew their notes at certain banks. This is terrible. It is disgraceful. It is the grip of business on politics, and I say, let the throat of politics go, withdraw this iron hand and let the wholesome blood get into the brain again. Mark you, gentlemen, I know just as well as you do that this is not what most businessmen do. I am honored by the friendship and confidence of scores of businessmen who study and understand the interests of this country just as well as any man of my acquaintance; but what sometimes makes the heat come into my blood is to realize how a small number of men have put their comrades in business in a false attitude toward public affairs by the things they ventured privately to do. No man of conscience or who knew anything would enter a protest against the businessmen of this honest nation, but it is because we are fighting the old thing that I am so much interested in the cause we are fighting—the old thing of privilege, of little groups of men, the thing we have been fighting time out of mind ever since the conception of liberty was born.

Such is the state of mind of the country, and now the question is, will the country trust the Democratic Party to undertake the solution of these difficulties? I say that it is not a question of individual leaders—it is a question of the disposition and methods of the Democratic Party. Upon what terms will they trust the Democratic Party? Why, in the first place, they will trust it just so soon as they make sure that the Democratic Party knows what's the matter, that it does not see phantasms, that it does not see unreal things, that it has gone to the bottom of the items which constitute the process that we should correct; that it has the intimate knowledge of the actual things to be done which will make the touch of its hand definite when it comes to the cure. I am fond of using a figure of speech in this connection which I think is a very useful figure. If a man is ill, the whole of whose system is sound except that in some one place there is a malignant growth, what does the surgeon do if he wants to save his patient's life? He cuts out the malignant growth, but he cannot do so until he knows just where the growth is, and it is not safe for him to approach it unless he can tenderly and delicately separate the intervening muscles and nerves and vital fibres and touching nothing else, finds the exact spot, and with a skill, bred of knowledge, extricates the one thing that interferes with the wholesome course of the blood. And the country is going to judge the Democratic Party by its prognosis and diagnosis. It has got to show that it knows just where and what the



malignant growth is and then it has got to show that it can produce surgeons who can cut that thing out without hurting anything else.

Now, the diagnosis is going on. It is somewhat unpleasant. It is very embarrassing to have your interior structure inquired into. There is an intimacy about the inquiries of the surgeon which is in one sense highly unconstitutional. It invades the very intimacies of the individual structure, but there is this inquiry going on. The Stanley Committee has been conducting a part of the prognosis. There are inquiries going on which are inquiring into the particulars item by item of the processes by which prices are determined irrespective of the demand in the market; the processes by which the product is controlled and competition excluded, the processes by which the output is limited and thereby the income determined; the processes by which free competitors are thrown out of competition or pushed to the wall. These things are being, item by item, disclosed.

Now, when we get these items—we don't have to wait for all of them, we can go after them one at a time—having discovered your item then get your cure. You know if you want to make a rabbit pie, first get your rabbit—and so with these; having discovered them, then see that the Democratic Party is wise enough to suggest a way in which the remedies can be matched with the details. We have got the principles. We did not have to have statutes to forbid monopoly in the United States. The immemorial principles of the common law forbid monopoly. It needed only the genius of those who could blaze a way into new territory, to make statutes unnecessary in stopping the processes and methods of monopoly. We are not debating monopoly. We are debating the very much more difficult problem of how to stop monopoly; and whenever we see monopoly showing its head there is the place for your shillalah. I withdraw the analogy because I don't look upon politics as a Donnybrook Fair, but with that apology I would not further amend the indictment.

We know the items. Now it is perfectly possible to direct the processes of your law against the items without disturbing anything that is honest and natural and inevitable in the development of modern business. The enemy of business is a man with a program which goes further than he can see, or with a program the items of which are not based upon the indisputable evidence produced in the examination. Just so long as you feel your way in politics you are unreasonably disturbing business, but so soon as you know your way, go the whole length without stopping to ask anybody's leave. Correct the mistakes, correct the errors, check the things that are wrong, and you cannot make a mistake in checking anything that is wrong. Now I, for my part, feel that the Democratic Party is better qualified to do these things I will say than any other party, because the Democratic Party keeps its connections and has kept its connections time out of mind with those things fundamental in our political conceptions. I always remember, gentlemen, that America was established not to create wealth—though any nation must create wealth which is going to make an economic foundation for its life—but to realize a vision, to realize an ideal. America has put itself under bonds to the earth to discover and maintain liberty among men, and if she cannot see liberty now with the clear, unerring vision she had at the outset, she has lost her title, she has lost every claim to the leadership and respect of the nations

of the world. If she is going to put her material processes before her spiritual processes, then all I have to say is she has ceased to be America and should withdraw the name in order to withdraw the promise, because that name has always shone here in the West like a beacon of hope and confidence for all the nations of the world. Men have turned their eyes towards America in order that they might release themselves from the very kind of privilege which we have permitted in some places to grow; and if we discover that we ourselves have fallen into the slough, that we ourselves have not taken the ways that lie upon firm ground, the ways that lift themselves up the long slopes that are the slopes of ultimate emancipation, then how will the hope of the world subside, how will men cry out in despair that the great light in the West has gone out. Unless, gentlemen, we once more get in our hearts the passion for what America stands for we shall accomplish nothing. And in this age of difficulty and perplexity, how does any man relieve himself from perplexity? If he goes to bed at night arguing upon the grounds of solvency and expediency he will toss all night long on his bed, but if it is proof he desires, there is only one rule, and that is the rule of right and justice, and if he says, "I am going to stand by that, cost what it may," then sleep will come to him as it came to him when a little child and he imagined that angels were about his couch. That is the temper that makes America and I, for my part, am confident with the confidence of youth that this spirit has come back to America. I don't profess its coming. The great hurricane with which comment moves from one part of this country to another is to realize that it has come, that men are ready to make sacrifices in order that the public weal may be served and that there is henceforth to be a common council into which men will enter, not only that they and their individual fortunes may be served but that the great fortunes of America may also be served; I am not speaking in my interest. No, gentlemen you knew when you came here that you were not going to listen to a man who was going to commend himself to you. You knew you were going to listen to a man who whether he was right or wrong was going to tell you what he thought and leave it to the jury and not the private councils held with men of understandings. In this country I am aware of the coming on of a new spirit—that old subtle cunning and sagacity that used to be the rule in America. The old idea of lie low and let the thing work itself out is disappearing. You can't lie low any more, because there is a searchlight moving everywhere. You know the old quotation, Heaven lies about us in our infancy, and the cynical modification of it is that in old age we lie about ourselves; but we have not reached the stage of senility as yet in which we do lie about ourselves. Frankness has come to be the law of life amongst us—amongst those of us who respect ourselves and respect our communities and hope for the best things in politics, and that's the reason the lines of party are being obscured; that's the reason men are about to treat them according to their right temperaments and purposes; that's the reason the standpat dam that has been built so high but of such stolid, stupid masonry, is going to give way. Nothing is more solid than the solidity of the willingness of men to think. After twenty years of teaching I was greatly comforted by a professor at Yale who told me that after an equal length of time he had come to the conclusion that the human mind had infinite measures of resources; and these resources are not going to give way, but what is going to happen is this: Engineers are coming to the front. They say you don't have to break

that dam down; it would flood the country. You have to penetrate it, and let this great body of water piled up behind run through those great courses, alongside of which we can build mills and happy homes and see that the future generations of America know what the power is amongst them and can guide it and trust it. That's what is going to happen and then we will be thankful; and I am thankful the standpat dam was so long unpenetrated. It gave us time to think. That's the only thing I have to say in favor of chewing tobacco; it gives you time to think between sentences. We have had time to think and examine and we have concluded we cannot break the "dam" thing down, but we can penetrate it and take control of these great forces which have been built up behind it; and so far as I am concerned the future is a future of hope for the Democratic Party, because it has a prospect of vision, of ideals applied, of knowledge soberly acted upon, of purposes indomitably applied, until nothing can resist the steady impact of its force. And so in the Twentieth Century we shall renew the distinction which came upon America at the end of the Seventeenth Century, where, looking upon our own affairs without excitement, without revolutionary impulse, we altered the processes of our life to suit the sober processes of our law and America has come again upon a constructive age of politics where her statesmen shall talk business and her business consent to the processes of liberty and achievement.

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