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REMARKS

OF THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

at a Luncheon

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
OCTOBER 26, 1921

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AT LUNCHEON, BIRMINGHAM, OCTOBER 26, 1921.

SENATOR UNDERWOOD, AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It is very pleasing indeed to be presented to a company in Alabama by Senator Underwood. There is a personal side to public life which is its chief compensation other than that which comes of the consciousness of service.

Viewing government from afar, the average American citizen little realizes how simple it is. He little stops to consider that the men and women who are making public history are very much like those who look on from the hearthstones of the Republic, except they are clothed with authority by the people for whom they act. And he little realizes how little of narrow partisanship is displayed when a problem which is vital to American security is in process of solution. Men who are really worth while are simpler than they are appraised, and vastly greater than many partisans have measured them.

It was my good fortune to establish two pleasing and helpful friendships with stalwart statesmen from Alabama. I entered the Senate when you commissioned Senator Underwood to that body, and somehow, I never knew just why, we began with a "paired" agreement to protect each other's votes. That arrangement held until I retired from the Senate, and we rarely, if ever, had to ask each other for instruction. There was a confident, respectful, and cordial friendship from the beginning, and it was never embarrassed. Perhaps I need not tell you that my high opinion and affectionate regard still abide. Not so very long ago it became my duty to choose four outstanding Americans to represent our Republic in a conference with the statesmen of the leading nations of the world. It was not a personal regard alone, but that feeling combined with a high estimate of his statesmanship and his lofty devotion to country, impelled me to name him as one of four to speak for America in a conference pregnant with incalculable possibilities. I know, as you know, he will serve us well, honoring himself, his friends and neighbors, and the land for which he speaks.

But I must speak of another Alabama friend, with a genuine sorrow that he is no longer here to join with you in your cordiality of welcome. I had a deep respect for dear, old Senator Bankhead, and I know we shared affectionate personal regards. In him you had and the Nation had a stalwart statesman and a fearless defender.

I hope it is not unseemly to relate a personal incident which strangely touched me. Amid the early preconvention speculation my name was mentioned as a possible condidate for the Presidency. One day Senator Bankhead beckoned me to his committee room, and in the fellowship of man to man, he said: "Harding, I am a Southern Democrat. I do not know how the 1920 election is going to result, but if we are to have a Republican President, I want you to know some of us Alabama Democrats would rather see you in the executive office than any Republican we know. If I can give you any pointers, or any personal influence in Alabama to help nominate, do not hesitate to call upon me."

Naturally, I treasure that expression of friendship, but I revere his memory because of his wisdom, his unfailing courage, and his inspiring Americanism, his reverence for our inherited institutions, the preservation of which is the security of our Republic.

Capt. Bankhead made every sacrifice in his devotion to the Confederate cause, which was happily lost. I saw him one day, in line with the Confederate veterans in reunion, wearing the uniform in which he fought. He wore it proudly, too, and I saluted him with affectionate regard, because I knew that in a proud Confederate's heart there throbbed a passionate love for our reunited country.

Somehow I wished for him only a few days ago. It was my fortune to visit the marines in camp on the battleground of The Wilderness. As guests of the marines, informally and without premeditation, was a group of Civil War veterans, half of them in blue and half in gray. When I greeted them a picture was suggested, and suddenly we found ourselves posed, the Yanks in blue flanking my right, the Confederates in gray flanking my left. Just as the cameras were about to click, some one proposed that we alter the pose and instead of having the blue on the right and the gray on the left, we blend the blue and the gray. No flank movement was ever so quickly executed, and the President was flanked by blue and gray on both sides.

That was a symbol of the rededication, out of the old order which settled indissoluble union and triumphant nationality for all succeeding time, and every heart was in unison, rejoicing in our common country. A more costly and more sanguinary rededication was made when the sons of the South and sons of the North touched elbows in defending the flag in war for Cuban liberation, and again a still more costly sacrificial offering was made in 1917, when America entered the World War.

I recall that the first Ohio boys to bear the flag of New World liberty to aid threatened freedom in Europe came to Alabama for their training, and they caught the spirit of your devotion, just as they

impressed you with their determination, and your sons and our sons braved the seas together, and gave new courage to our allies in Europe, and won new glories and a new consciousness for the American people.

United consecration for war shall never be challenged again. Our tasks now lie in applied concord and no less patriotic devotion in solving the problems of peace. These are not easy tasks. A world disordered amid the upheavals of war is not readily put in order again, and nations torn by the fever of conflict are not readily restored to normal ways.

But we shall succeed. Unshaken by the world cataclysm, we hold our foundations to be eternally right. The Nation which withstood internecine conflict, so heroically fought as the Civil War, will tolerate the threat of no minority which challenges the supremacy of law or endangers our common welfare.

There will never come the day when the rights of any minority are denied, however formidable or weak it may be, but no minority shall ever challenge the supremacy of the rule of law.

The readjustments and the restorations of peace are not easy. War invariably leaves its impress on the industrial and financial life of every participating people. With all my heart I crave a better and higher industrial state, as a compensation for the sacrifices made. But we can no more maintain the abnormal heights than we can favor the return to the old-time levels. There must be—there is—a righteous mean between these two extremes, and we mean to find it. It will be a lawful pursuit, orderly in our practices, and reverent for the Government, where justice is supreme and the law is our security.

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