

AMERICA'S NEW PLACE IN THE WORLD

BY PHILIP GIBBS

THE United States of America has a new meaning in the world, and has entered, by no desire of its own, into the great family of nations, as a rich uncle whose authority and temper must be respected by those who desire his influence in their family quarrels, difficulties, and conditions of life. Before the war the United States was wonderfully aloof from the peoples of Europe. The three thousand miles of Atlantic Ocean made it seem enormously far away, and quite beyond the orbit of those passionate politics which stirred European communities with Old World hatred and modern rivalries. It was free from the fear which was at the back of all European diplomacy and international intrigue—the fear of great standing armies across artificial frontiers, the fear of invasion, the fear of a modern European war in which nation against nation would be at one another's throats, in a wild struggle for self-preservation. America was still the New World, far away, to which people went in a spirit of adventure, in search of fortune and liberty. There was a chance of one, a certainty of the other, and it was this certain gift which called to multitudes of men and women—Russians and Russian Jews, Poles and Polish Jews, Czechs, and Bohemians, and Germans of all kinds—to escape from the bondage which cramped their souls under the oppression of their own governments, and to gain the freedom of the Stars and Stripes. To the popular imagination of Europe, America was the world's democratic paradise, where every man had equal opportunity and rights, a living wage with a fair margin, and the possibility of enormous luck.

VOL. CXL.—No. 835.—12

A steady stream of youth flowed out from Ireland to New York, year after year, and Irish peasants left behind in their hovels heard of great doings by Pat and Mick, who had become the gentleman entirely out there in the States, and of Kathleen and Biddy, who were piling up the dollars so fast that they could send some back to the old people and not feel the loss of them at all, at all.

The internal resources of America were so vast and the development of their own states so absorbed the energies of the people that there was no need of international diplomacy and intrigue to capture new markets of the world or to gain new territory for the possession of raw material. The United States was self-centered and self-sufficient, and the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine prohibiting foreign powers from any colonizing within the boundaries of the Republic was developed in popular imagination and tradition to a firm policy of self-isolation and of non-interference by others. The American people had no interest, politically, in the government or affairs of other nations, and they desired to be left alone, with a "Hands off!" their own sovereign power. It was this reality of isolation which gave America immense advantages as a republic and had a profound influence upon the psychology of her citizens.

Being aloof from the traditions of European peoples and from their political entanglements and interdependence, the United States could adopt a clear and straightforward policy of self-development on industrial lines. Her diplomacy was as simple as a child's copy-

book maxim. Her ambassadors and ministers at European courts had no need of casuistry or Machiavellian subtlety. They had an exceedingly interesting and pleasant time reporting back the absurdities of European embassies, the melodrama of European rivalries, the back-stairs influence at work in secret treaties, the assassinations, riots, revolutions, and political crises which from time to time convulsed various countries—and the corrupt bargainings and jugglings between small powers and great powers. The American representatives in Europe watched all this as the greatest game on earth, but far away from the United States, and without the slightest effect upon the destiny of their own country, except when it excited Wall Street gamblers. American diplomats were not weighed down by the fear of offending the susceptibilities of Germany or France or Italy or Russia, nor were they asked to play off one country against another, in order to maintain that delicate and evil mechanism known as “the balance of power”—the uniting of armed bands for self-defense or the means of aggression. The frontiers of America were inviolate and the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard were not open to sudden attack like the boundaries between Germany and France, Turkey and Bulgaria, Italy and Austria, where fear of invasion was the undercurrent of all political and popular thought, and the motive power of all national energy, to the detriment of social progress, because of the crippling cost of standing armies and unproductive labor for the material of war. Nationally, therefore, the United States of America was in supreme luck because she could use her youth and resources with full advantage, free from menace and beyond all rivalry.

The character of the people responded to this independence of the Republic. The average American citizen, as far as I knew him, in Europe before the war, had an amused contempt for many

institutions and social ideas which he observed in a continental tour. He was able to regard the hotchpotch of European nationalities and traditions from an aloof and judicial viewpoint. They seemed to him on the whole very silly. He could not understand why an invisible line on a road should make people on each side of the line hate one another desperately. He watched the march past of troops in France or Germany, the saluting of generals, the clicking of heels, the brilliant uniforms of officers, as a pageant which was utterly out of date in its application to life, and as a degradation of individual dignity. He did not link up the thriftiness of the French peasant—the desperate hoarding of his *petit sou*—with the old fear of invasion by German legions across the frontier, when the peasant might see his little farm in flames and his harvest trampled down by soldiers' boots. The American visitor observed the fuss made when one king visited another, and read the false adulation of the royal visitor, the insincere speeches at royal banquets, the list of decorations conferred upon court flunkies, and laughed at the whole absurdity, not seeing that it was all part of a bid for a new alliance or a bribe for peace, or a mask of fear, until the time came when all bids and bribes should be of no more avail, and the only masks worn were to be gas-masks, when the rival nations should hack at one another in a frenzy of slaughter.

The American in Europe who came to have a look round was astonished at the old-fashioned ways of people—their subservience to “caste” ideas, their allegiance to the divine right of kings as to the “Little Father” of the Russian people, and the “shining armor” of the German Kaiser, and their apparent contentment with the wide gulf between underpaid labor and privileged capital. He did not realize that his own liberty of ideas and high rate of wage-earning were due to citizenship in a country free from militarism and

its crushing taxation, and free also from hereditary customs upheld by the power of the sword used in civil strife as well as in international conflict, by the imperial governments of Russia, Germany, and other powers whose social philosophy was no different, though less tyrannical in expression. The American said, "I like Europe as a peep-show, and it's a good place to spend money in; but we can teach you a few things in the United States; one of them is equality, and another is opportunity."

He was right, and it was his luck. Because of those privileges many pilgrims of fortune went to America from all the countries of Europe, in a great tide of emigration, adopting American citizenship in most cases soon after sighting the Statue of Liberty—"old Lib," as I heard her called. The United States received these foreigners in hundreds of thousands and became "the melting-pot" of races. The melting process, however, was not so rapid as some people imagined, and it was something of a shock to the States to discover a few years before the war, and with a deeper realization at the outbreak of war, that they had within their boundaries enormous populations of foreign-born citizens, Germans, Poles, Slavs of all kinds, Italians, and Austrians, who had not assimilated American ideas, but kept their speech, customs, and national sentiment. It was the vast foreign element which had to be converted to the American outlook upon the world tragedy which opened in August, 1914. This mass of hostile or unwilling people had to be dragged into action when America found that her isolation was broken, that she could no longer stand aloof from the rest of mankind, or be indifferent to the fate of friendly nations menaced with destruction, or endure a series of outrages which clouded her own power, or risk the world supremacy of a military autocracy which, if triumphant in Europe, would very soon dictate to the United States. It is the miracle of the Stars and Stripes

that when the American government conscripted all able-bodied youth and raised a vast and well-trained army, and sent it into the battle-fields of France and Flanders, there was no civil outbreak among those foreign-born citizens, and with absolute obedience they took their places in the ranks, Germans to fight against their own flesh and blood, because of allegiance to a state which had given them liberty, provided they defended the ideals which belonged to the state—in this case the hardest test of loyalty, not without tragedy and agony and fear.

For the first time there was no liberty in the United States—no liberty of private judgment, no liberty of action, no liberty of speech. The state ruled with complete despotism over the lives of its citizens, not tolerating any infringements of its orders, because the safety of the state would be endangered unless victory were assured. That was an enormous shock, I am sure, to the psychology of all Americans, even to those most loyal to the state authority, and it has caused an entire change in the mental attitude of all American citizens toward the conditions and relationships of life, because that sense of utter liberty they had before the war is limited now by the knowledge that at any time the Republic of which they are citizens may call upon them for life itself and for all service up to that of death, and that, whatever their ideals should be, they may not refuse. In that way they have no longer an advantage over Frenchmen, or Germans, or Russians, or Italians, whom they pitied as men without liberty of souls or bodies. That is to say, they have to make surrender to the state of all things in the last resort, which is war—a law which many European peoples learned to their cost, many times before, and which America learned once in her own Civil War, but thought she could forget with other painful old things in the lumber-room of history.

The people of the United States have learned many other things during the last few years, when all the world has changed, and they stand now at the parting of the ways, looking back on the things they knew which they will never see again, and looking forward to the future, which is still doubtful to them in its destiny. I went to them on a visit during the period between armistice and peace, when mentally, I think, they were in a transition stage, very conscious of this place at the crossroads, and filled with grave anxiety, in spite of exultation at the power of their armies and the valor of their men who had helped to gain stupendous victory.

The things that had happened within the United States before and after its declaration of war had stirred them with passionate and complicated emotions. From the very outset of the Great War, long before the United States was directly involved, large numbers of Americans of the old stock, born of English, Irish, Scottish, or Dutch ancestry, were neutral only by order and not at all in spirit. Their sentiment toward France, based on the Lafayette tradition and their love of Paris and of French literature and wit, made them hate the invasion of northern France and eager to act as champions of the French people. Their old ties with England, the bond of speech and of blood, made them put aside any minor antagonisms which they had felt on account of old prejudice, and they followed with deep sympathy and anxiety the progress of the heroic struggle of British armies in the slaughter-fields. They were impatient for America to get into the conflict against German aggression. As the Germans became more ruthless of humane laws, more desperate in their attacks upon non-combatant as well as military populations by sea and air and land, these Americans became sick and fevered at the thought of their own neutrality, and supported Colonel Roosevelt in his driving influence to get the United

States into the war. They became more and more embittered with President Wilson, who adopted an academic view of the jungle scenes in Europe, dissociated the German people from the crimes of their war lords, and expounded a Christian philosophy of world politics which seemed like cowardice and humiliation of American pride to people stung to fury by German insults and outrages. These thoughts were beginning to seethe like yeast throughout masses of American people, especially in the East, but took a long time to reach and stir the great West and were resisted by the mentality of foreign-born populations, including the Jewish communities and the Irish. They were adverse to war, and took a detached view of the struggle in Europe, which seemed to them too far away to matter to America. The German populations had a natural sympathy for their own race, much as some of them detested its militaristic ideals. There were, I imagine, also many intellectual men, not dragged down by the apathy of the masses, to whom "the war" seemed of less importance to the United States than the condition of the crops or the local baseball match. They felt that President Wilson's extreme caution and exalted pacifism were on nobler lines of thought than the loud-mouthed jingoism and bloodthirsty howlings of low-class newspapers and speakers.

The *Lusitania* was sunk, and the cry of agony and wrath went up from many hearts in the world at this new phase of war; but still the United States stayed out; and many Americans had a fire of indignation in their hearts because their President still held back. They believed that the American people would have rallied to him as one man had he made that outrage the signal of war. They seemed to have no patience with his anxiety to act as a moral mentor instead of as a leader of great armies in a fight against world criminals. At last the President's caution was overmastered by the urgent

necessity of intervention on behalf of Great Britain and France and Belgium, panting and bleeding from every pore after three years of struggle; even his philosophy of aloofness was borne down by acts of war which wounded American interests and threatened American security. So the United States declared war, gathered her youth into great training-camps, and launched into the world struggle with slow but ever-increasing energy which swept the people with a mighty whirlwind of emotion.

The American people as a whole did truly enter into war in the spirit of crusaders. They sent out their sons as rescuers of stricken peoples fighting desperately against criminal powers. They had no selfish interests behind their sacrifice, and they did not understand that defeat of the nations allied against Germany would inevitably menace them with dire perils to their sovereign power, to their commercial prosperity, and to their ideals of civilization. Those things were true, but it was not because of them that the people of the United States were uplifted by a wonderful exaltation and that they put their full strength into preparing themselves for a long and bloody war. Every little home was turned into a Red Cross factory. Every young man of pluck and pride was eager to get the first call for active service in the field. Girls took on men's jobs, old ladies knitted until their eyes were dim. Hard business men gave away their dollars in bundles, denied themselves at meal-times so that Europe should be fed, tried by some little sacrifice to share the spirit of those who made offer of their lives. The materialism of which America had been accused, not unjustly, was broken through by a spiritual idealism which touched every class, and Americans did not shrink from sacrifice, but asked for it as a privilege, and were regretful that as a people they suffered so little in comparison with those who had fought and agonized so long. . . .

All this I heard when I went to America in the spring, between armistice and peace, and with my own eyes and ears I saw and heard the proof of it. Up Fifth Avenue I saw the march past of troops whom I had seen before marching along the roads of war to Ypres and Amiens, when the British army was hard pressed and glad to see these new-comers. In New York clubs I met young American officers who had been training with British staffs and battalions before they fought alongside British troops. And in American homes I met women who were still waiting for their men whom they had sent away with brave faces, hiding the fear in their hearts, and now knew, with thankfulness, that they were safe. Victory had come quickly after the entry of the American troops, but it was only the low braggart who said, "We won the war—and taught the English how to fight." The main body of educated people whom I met in many American cities said, rather: "We were the last straw that broke the camel's back. We were glad to share the victory, but we did not suffer enough. We came in too late to take our full share of sacrifice."

At that time, after the armistice and when Mr. Wilson was in Europe at the Peace Conference, the people I met were not so much buoyed up with the sense of victory as perplexed and anxious about the new responsibilities which they would be asked to fulfil. A tremendous controversy raged round the President, who baffled them by his acts and speeches and silences. When in an article which I wrote soon after my landing I said I was "all for Wilson" I received an immense number of letters "putting me wise" as to the failure of the President to gain the confidence of the American people and their grievous apprehensions that he was, out of personal vanity and with a stubborn, autocratic spirit, bartering away the rights and liberties of the United States, without the knowledge or support of

the people, and involving them in European entanglements which they were not prepared to accept. This antagonism to the President was summed up clearly enough in some such words as those that follow:

Taft and Roosevelt quarreled; Wilson was born of it. Wilson is all there is to the Democratic party. He has had to dominate it; the brain of America is in the Republican camp. He refused to use this material when offered for the war. He would not allow Roosevelt to go to France and fight; he would not use General Wood, who was the "Lord Bobs" of this country in regard to preparedness. For the winning of the war we put party aside and the Congress gave Wilson unlimited power. (Lincoln put party aside and used the best he could get.) Now Mr. Wilson asks and gets very little advice. When he has a difficult question he secludes himself, except for Colonel House—and we know nothing about Colonel House. Mr. Wilson dominated America and no one objected; the war was being won. In the fall he saw, of course, victory, and was planning his trip abroad. He boldly asked for a Democratic Senate, which would give him control of the treaty-making power. He said, practically: "Everybody shows himself bigger than party. I will, too. All together now! But you prove it and give me a party Senate, not a Senate picked from the best brains of this America, but a Democratic Senate, so that I can have full power in the Peace Conference." The laugh that went up must have hit the stars, and we almost forgot the war to watch the election. Can you imagine Roosevelt in New York in this crisis? He held a monster meeting and said what he thought, through his teeth. "Unconditional surrender for Germany, no matter what it costs" (not idle words—Quentin's death in France had cost Roosevelt his famous boyishness of spirit), "and a Senate that will curb autocratic power in America." Then he told his hearers that they would not need a key to understand his speech. Now power goes to people's heads. Mr. Wilson had changed. Time and again opposition in Congress failed. You would hear, "Wilson always wins." Always a dominating figure, he grew defiant, a trifle ruthless, heady. The American answer to Wilson was a Republi-

can Senate, and the Senators were put there to balance him. When he decided to go to Europe he simply said he was going. He did not ask our approval, nor find out our wishes, nor even tell us what he was going to say, but did take over the cables and put them under government control. He made himself so inaccessible at that time that no one could get his ear. On his flying visit to New York he said that he returned to France to tell them that we backed him. Is that true? We don't know what we think yet. We haven't made up our minds. We will back him when he is frank and when we are convinced. We can't sign our souls away, all our wonderful heritages, without knowing all about it. . . . If we join a League of Nations, shall we prevent war? Or, if we join, shall we be absorbed and make the fight a bigger one?

This, I believe, is a fair statement of the views held by many educated people in the United States at the time between armistice and peace. I heard just such words in the City Club of New York, in the Union League Club, from people in Boston and Philadelphia and Washington, and at many dinner-tables where, after the preliminary courtesies of conversation, there was a quick clash of opinion among the guests, husbands differing from wives, brothers from sisters, and friends from friends, over the personality and purpose of the President, and the practical possibilities of a League of Nations. The defenders of the President waived aside all personal issues and supported him ardently because they believed that it was only by the application of his ideals, modified, no doubt, by contact with the actual problems of European states, that a new war more devastating to the world than the one just past could be prevented, and that his obstinacy and singleness of purpose on behalf of a League of Nations pointed him out as the Man of Destiny who would lead humanity out of the jungle to a higher plane of civilized philosophy.

That was my own view of his mission and character, though now I think he

perhaps failed at the Peace Conference in carrying out the principles of his own Fourteen Points, and weakened under the pressure of the governing powers of France, Belgium, and England, who desired revenge as well as reparation, and the death of German militarism under the heel of an Allied militarism based on the old German philosophy of might. If the President failed it was largely because he insisted upon playing "a lone hand," and did not have the confidence of his country behind him, nor its understanding of his purpose.

America, during the time of my visit, was afraid of taking too strong a lead in the resettlement of Europe. So far from wishing to "boss the show," as some people suspected, most Americans had an unnatural timidity, and one count of their charge against Wilson was his obstinacy in his dealings with Lloyd George and Clemenceau. It was a consciousness of ignorance about European problems which made the Americans draw back from strong decisions, and above all it was the fear of being "dragged in" to new wars, not of their concern, which made them deeply suspicious of the League of Nations. In many conversations I found this fear the dominant thought. "If you people want to fight one another again, you will have to do without us," said American soldiers just back from the front. "No more crusades for us!" said others. "American isolation—and a plague on all your little nations!" said civilians as well as soldiers. Bitter memories of French "economy" spoiled for American soldiers the romance of the Lafayette tradition. "I lost my leg," said one man, "for a country which charged for the trenches where we fought, and for people who put up their prices three hundred per cent. when the American armies came to rescue them. France can go to hell as far as I'm concerned." . . . Nevertheless, it became more clear to thinking minds in America that the

days of "isolation" were gone, and that for good or evil the United States is linked up by unbreakable bonds of interest and responsibility with other great powers of the world. Never again can she be indifferent to their fate. If another great convulsion happens in Europe, American troops will again be there, quicker than before, because her action in the last war and her share of the terms of peace have made her responsible in honor for the safety of certain peoples and the upholding of certain agreements. The Atlantic has shrunk in size to a narrow strip of water and the sky is a corridor which will be quickly traversed by aircraft before the next great war. But these physical conditions which are changing by mechanical development, altering the timetables of traffic, are of no account compared with the vast change that happened in the world when the Stars and Stripes fluttered in the fields of France and Flanders, when the bodies of America's heroic youth were laid to rest there under little white crosses, and when the United States of America entered into an intimate and enduring relationship with Great Britain and France.

The effect of this change is not yet apparent in its fullness. America is still in a state of transition, watching, studying, thinking, feeling, and talking herself into convictions which will alter the fate of the world. I believe with all my heart and soul that America's relationship with Europe will be all the better for Europe. I believe that the spirit of the American people is essentially and unalterably democratic, and that as far as their power goes it will be used against the tyranny of military castes and attempted oppression of peoples. I believe that the influence of this spirit, visible to me in many people I met, will be of enormous benefit to England and France, because it will be used as an arbitrating factor in the conflict which is bound to come in both those countries between the old régime and the new. The in-

fluence of America will be the determining power in the settlement of Ireland on a basis of common sense free from the silly old fetishes of historical enmities on both sides. It will intervene to give a chance of life to the German race after they have paid the forfeit for their guilt in the last war, and will, I am certain, react against the stupid philosophy of enduring vengeance with its desire to make a slave-state in Central Europe, which still animates bloody-minded men and women so passionate of revenge that that are kindling the fires of another terrible and devastating war.

The United States of America is bound up with the fate of Europe, but its people will still remain rather aloof in mentality from the passions of European nations, and will be more judicial in their judgment because of that. Instinctively, rather than intellectually, Americans will act in behalf of democratic rights against autocratic plots. They will not allow the Russian people to be hounded back under the heels of grand-dukes and under the lash of the knout. They will be inclined to support a League of Nations not as a machinery to stifle popular progress by a combination of governments, but as a court for the reform of international laws and the safeguarding of liberty. Europe will not be able to ignore the judgment of America. That country is, as I said, the rich uncle whose temper they must consult because of gratitude for favors to come—and because of wealth and power in the world's markets.

America is at the threshold of her supreme destiny in the world. By her action in the war, when for the first time her strength was revealed as a mighty nation, full grown and conscious of power, she has attained the highest place among the peoples, and her will shall prevail if it is based upon justice and liberty. I believe that America's destiny will be glorious for mankind, not because I think that the individual

American is a better, nobler, more spiritual being than the individual Englishman, Frenchman, or Russian, but because I see, or think I see, that this great country is inspired more than any other nation among the big powers by the united organized qualities of simple, commonplace people, with kindness of heart, independence of spirit, and sincerity of ideas, free from the old heritage of caste, snobbishness, militarism, and fetish-worship which still lingers among the Junkers of Europe. They are a middle-class empire, untainted by imperial ambition or ancient traditions of overlordship. They are governed by middle-class sentiment. They put all problems of life to the test of that simplicity which is found in middle-class homes, where neither anarchy is welcome nor aristocratic privilege. America is the empire of the wage-earner, where even her plutocrats have but little power over the independence of the people. It is a nation of nobodies great with the power of the common man and the plain sense that governs his way of life. Other nations are still ruled by their "somebodies"—by their pomposities and high panjandrams. But it is the nobodies whose turn is coming in history, and America is on their side.

In that great federation of United States I saw, even in a brief visit, possible dangers that may spoil America's chance. I saw a luxury of wealth in New York and other cities which may be a vicious canker in the soul of the people. I saw a sullen discontent among wage-earners and home-coming soldiers because too many people had an unfair share of wealth. I met American Junkers who would use the military possibilities of the greatest army in the world for imperialistic adventures and world dominance. I heard of anarchy being whispered among foreign-born masses in American cities and passed over to other laborers not of foreign origin. In the censorship of news I saw the first and most ominous

sign of government autocracy desiring to work its will upon the people by keeping them in ignorance and warping their opinions; and now and then I was conscious of an intolerance of free thought which happened to conflict with popular sentiment, as ruthless as in Russia during Czardom. I saw hatred based on ignorance and the brute spirit of men inflamed by war. But these were only accidental things, to be found wherever humanity is crowded, and after my visit to America

I came away with memories, which are still strong in my heart, of a people filled with vital energy, kind in heart, sincere and simple in their ways of thought and speech, idealistic in emotion, practical in conduct, and democratic by faith and upbringing. The soul of America is clean and strong and free; and the power that comes out of it will, I think and hope and pray, be used to gain the liberties of other nations, and to help forward the welfare of the human family.

AN HOUR ON A HILL

BY GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

IN Greece the shadows slept as still,
In Rome the hills were arched as high,
Their wind now blows my hair, and will
Stir other maidens' when I die.

And leaves that print the dust with lines,
And pebbles rubbed and rounded blue,
And baby burrs, like porcupines,
Looked this way when the Nile was new.

And dust, to Babylonian feet
Was pollen soft, and good to tread.
The bees that mumble in this heat
Made the same honey for their bread.

And early with the sun, and late
Crept the same shades, and flew the same
White flags of clouds across the straight
Horizon of another name.

Men chipped us messages in stone,
The careful stories of their kings—
But they were dumb about their own
Small pleasant things.