



"Watchman, What of the Night?"

An Address by A. F. Thomas
Before the Sphex Club, November 22nd, 1940
at Lynchburg, Virginia



Gift. Noell

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MR. PRESIDENT:

Isaiah, the prophet, records a time when world conditions were strikingly similar to those existing today. It was a time of great misadventure and misfortune. The word of the Lord came in this terrible time saying, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

It was under these circumstances that the watchman was called upon to make his report. It does not appear that the Lord's invitation to reason together was accepted. This invitation is still open, but there seems little prospect that men, blinded by selfishness and greed for power, will submit their claims in the forum of reason. The employment of force to the limit, force to destruction, seems more probable. The world seems to have gone mad and is busily engaged in destroying itself. The war of twenty-six years ago was begun with the purpose of acquiring more territory, more wealth and more power on the one side and opposed by others with the purpose of holding what they had. The United States with no territorial designs, no

aspirations for more power nor designs to acquire wealth possessed by others was forced into that war by fear of consequences to itself should Germany win. Its declared purpose was to make the world safe for Democracy. Germany met the defeat she richly deserved but strange to say, instead of democracy becoming better established, it has steadily declined in power and influence every day since the Versailles treaty was signed. The allies at Versailles, instead of seeking to make a settlement that would re-establish the world upon a just and equitable basis, engaged in an unseemly effort to appropriate whatever of the spoils they could get. To its credit be it said that the United States did not participate in this discreditable division of spoils. Its part had been creditably done and it retired holding a huge debt which the allies have not paid and it is hardly probable that they ever will pay. Instead of an increase of friendliness following the war the reaction was entirely to the contrary. Selfish isolation and more intense nationalism instead of democratic coöperation followed, even among the allies. Instead of increased confidence in and affection for the United States, Europe developed an intense jealousy on account of the supposed wealth and power that this country possessed.

The world has attempted to repeal the moral law so that it may unrestrictedly engage in the effort to get material wealth and power. Under this condition, Germany, not as a defender of moral principles, but as a contestant in the game of grab, prepared to gather and use force to accomplish her purpose. England and France claiming to be the European representatives of democracy sold Czecho-Slovakia down the river to Germany without so much as giving her and her friend Russia a chance to be heard. This was not done to preserve justice or democratic right, but for the ignoble purpose of preserving the *status quo* and have "peace in our time." That the miserable attempt failed should be a source of satisfaction to everyone who believes in moral law. It may have been that England and France were not prepared to fight Germany at that time, but they at least could have preserved their self-

respect by protesting against this act of highway robbery by Germany. Unfortunately, Germany is not alone in the desire to commit such acts. The economic world, both as nations, associations and individuals, is functioning under the selfish law of the jungle, "The good old rule, the simple plan, let him get who hath the power and let him keep who can." So long as this plan prevails, under which the world functions, nations as well as individuals must act in accordance with it or perish of inanition. Individuals, associations and nations may deplore evil effects, war being one of them, but so long as this system lasts these unfortunate results are inevitable. Force is the fundamental basis of the system and war is its highest form. The world engages in very earnest prayer that it may be spared the horrors of war, but it moves irresolutely and slowly toward substituting a system of mutual service for that which the jungleman with his club inaugurated. The exchange of the club for the bomb and the torpedo represents the adoption of new methods with no change whatever in the principle. Two of the most important factors in the situation are the moral law and the proper adjustment of political and economic forces under it. Moral law is an absolute sovereign. None has a right to violate it, none has a right to do wrong. All other sovereignties are relative and their power accompanies the spread of the general interest, that is to say, in local affairs the local government should be supreme. In state affairs the state should be sovereign, in matters of general interest, the general government should be supreme. In matters of international concern a government having sovereign power over these matters should be instituted. In kingships and oligarchies the sovereign power is vested in the king or the oligarchs. In representative democracy, the power is vested in the people.

All of these different forms of limited sovereignty are subject to the absolute authority of the moral law which automatically enforces its decrees because a beneficent Providence has provided that these visitations, which are evils, carry within themselves the elements of their own destruction. Starting with the lowest and crudest forms of

social organization, society has developed higher forms as more complex relations have arisen. Local, state and general governments have come into existence. So far there has not been instituted any government to take over the control and management of international affairs. These relations have now become so numerous and complex that there exists a state of anarchy and chaos in this field, therefore necessity will force the world to undertake to make provision to bring the world as a whole under law and order.

Up to this time each nation, however small and insignificant has been mistakenly assumed to be an independent sovereign, therefore having the right to manage its foreign affairs as it chose without relation to the effects that its action might have on the foreign affairs of other nations. This supposed sovereign power could be exercised even to the extent of making war upon its neighbor nations. This arose out of a misconception of the nature of sovereignty and the failure to recognize that sovereignty is limited and not absolute. It is true that sovereignty resides in the international field, but it does not belong exclusively to any nation or association of nations. It belongs to all of the nations, to be exercised to promote the general welfare of the world whenever a representative international government shall have been organized to assume responsible direction of the international affairs of the world.

The need for the organization of international government is becoming increasingly apparent. Science and technology have made the world a neighborhood. The rapid transportation of products and the practically instantaneous transmission of ideas have annihilated distance and time. Thus have neighborly relations between all the peoples of the earth been made possible. This change in fundamental relationship necessarily compels readjustment and change of the pre-existing order. It produces a centralization of political and economic power never before approached at any time in the past. This power should and must be used for the promotion of the welfare of mankind. Where shall this power be vested if not in an international government



controlled by representatives of all peoples? It is not a question of centralization because that is already in process of accomplishment, but it is the vital question of control of this power so that the benefits which it makes possible may be realized by all the world, or to leave it to destroy the hope of democratic world civilization. The automobile, the fast ship, the æroplane, the telegraph, telephone and wireless have already established centralization of power and it is being exercised by selfish interests to rob and oppress others. Can this be allowed to continue if civilization itself is to live?

Science and technology promote coöperation and as this is the basis of civilization man must of necessity make such changes in his social institutions as may be most promotive of the general welfare. Failure to do this causes arrested social development which will lead to a chain of evils and finally result in social revolution or that which is worse, social devolution.

The government of the United States furnishes the best example of what the form of an international government should be. The Constitution of the United States after an existence of one hundred and fifty-three years is still not thoroughly understood or appreciated by many. Analysis of this remarkable instrument shows that its framers were very able men or that they built more wisely than they knew—perhaps both. The Constitution established the principle of divided sovereignty, that is to say, that in matters of interstate concern, the sovereignty was vested in the general government while in those of intrastate relation it was vested in the separate states. This method leaves open the way to constant, peaceful readjustment so that things local may be changed from local to national status as the common interest becomes general or vice versa. This form also recognizes that there is no such thing as absolute sovereignty, but that all have an indefeasible right to participate in matters that relate to their interest and welfare. The development of this principle of divided sovereignty leads at once to the conclusion that an international government should be formed with a Congress to make international

laws, a judicial system to interpret them and an executive to administer them. The Congress should be composed of representatives from each nation. The armies and navies of all nations should be turned over to this international government and no nation should have more armed forces than what might be necessary to preserve law and order in the nation itself. Dependent territories should become the wards of the international government pending their development into States.

Under such an arrangement war by any nation would no longer be a sovereign act, but a revolution, to be suppressed by the forces of the international government. So organized, the world would be brought under law and order and war, as we know it, between nations would cease. Such an organization contemplates a perpetual union of the states of the world from which no nation would have the right to secede. Utopian, one may say, but not as much so as any other remedy for war without the existence of such an organization. This international organization would itself be subject to moral law. So organized, the whole world would be brought under the control of civil government and the necessity for the employment of force by nations would disappear. The Constitution of the United States as a political instrument, deserves all the commendation that has been bestowed upon it by the world, but it only dealt with the political side of the nation's life. Owing, no doubt, to the low state of economic development at that time, its framers did not realize the importance, yea the necessity, of providing a democratic plan for the development of the social economy. The framers of the Constitution had the correct conception that government was the servant and not the master of the people, but they applied the principle only to the political side. Science and technology then were themselves in an undeveloped state, but today it is all different. A broader conception of the principle of public service is now a necessity, not only for the promotion of the general welfare, but for the preservation of the life of democracy itself. The government must now enter the economic field to preserve the liberty and freedom

of the masses just as it did at the time of its organization to vouchsafe and safeguard the political liberty and freedom of individuals. It must own and operate the social machinery of the country, thus becoming a public servant to all. Its sphere of action should be broadened to include anything which it can do better than other agencies to promote the general welfare. This doctrine applies with equal force to municipal, state and federal governments. In other words, a system of service whenever possible, should displace the profit system. It is only in this way that democracy can use the coöperative principle to develop itself fully, serve the public to its full capacity and insure its own existence.

The rule should be to introduce government ownership and operation whenever the service, under private initiative approaches private monopoly. This transition is already in process and has made more progress than is generally appreciated. Transportation, power, light, water, in fact all public utilities, offer inviting fields for the substitution of public for private initiative. Banking, insurance and monopolistic enterprises in manufacture and distribution may also be included in the category. In fact, the principle has already been introduced in postal service, parcel post, water, banking, power and insurance. Tobacco offers a very inviting prospect, since government monopoly of it has been in operation for a long time in many foreign countries with highly satisfactory results.

The American people in the formation of its political government planted a seed that contains within it the true remedy for all the political and economic ills of the world. Under these principles the partial application of coöperation for selfish purpose cannot become a proper political or economic policy because it lacks moral foundation. To the failure of the framers of the American constitution to recognize that a plan for the orderly development of economic power was as important to the maintenance of democratic liberty for the masses as was the provision of a plan for development of political power to insure individual liberty and freedom, may be attributed the most of

the present day economic problems. The life of democracy depends upon the free development of both political and economic power. The cry of "Business" for "liberty" and "freedom" is in essence the demand of those having special privileges that they be not interfered with in the exercise of them. They want license not liberty.

The American and French revolutions marked the destruction of the feudal system. It was the end of an era. The horrors occurring during these revolutions were forgotten and all look back to the bloody events as blessings which brought into existence a higher and nobler era in which all might enjoy a liberty and freedom never known before. Is it not possible, even probable, that out of the worldwide war of today will come a still better era based upon the eternal principles of justice and fraternity?

The totalitarian nations have learned that highest efficiency is reached by the centralization and combination of political and economic power. Actual experience has demonstrated that nations which do not adopt this method cannot stand up before those which do adopt it. The easy going democratic nations are being rudely awakened from their lethargic state and compelled in self-defense to adopt the same method. The question is at once raised, does not this method with its concentration of power and centralization of control destroy democracy? By no means. Totalitarianism is an arbitrary method of making public policies under which the few impose their views upon the many, whereas democracy is the making of these public policies in accord with the wishes of the many. The policies once adopted, the method of concentration of control is a way of administration which both democracy and totalitarianism will eventually adopt. The objection that concentration of power and centralization of control incur the risk of abuse is not valid. If all things subject to abuse were eliminated there would be no civilization left. The rule should be to employ the best instruments available for right purposes and to maintain a close watch to prevent their misuse for bad purposes.

The organizers of the United States government failed to provide a plan for an orderly development of its social economy and left it to be done under private initiative or *laissez faire*. The public policy followed was to assist the economic evolution under a system of special privilege by land grants, protective tariffs, etc., thus introducing a practice that was directly opposed to the democratic axiom of equal rights to all and special privileges to none. In accordance with this undemocratic policy, private interests, spurred by the hope of profit forced the economic evolution forward with the logical result of a rapid approach to a state of private monopoly that concentrated social economic power in the hands of a constantly diminishing number of possessors of special privilege. In no other country has such rapid progress been made in the development of its economic system as in the United States. It has brought with it many advantages and benefits—concentration of economic resources, improved methods of manufacture and distribution, mass production and a standard of living that has not been equalled in any other country. These benefits have resulted from a broader but still a partial application of the coöperative principle. Along with the above benefits evils have come, business cycles with their booms and panics, feasts and famines, inconstancy of employment, which creates bread lines and necessitates the feeding of millions of hungry people out of the public treasury.

The country has learned to produce abundantly but spasmodically. What it has yet to learn is that production must be uniform and constant in order that labor may be constantly employed. Such a condition must exist if proper distribution is to be had. The beneficiaries of special privilege have done more to advance the cause of general coöperation than any other class. They have shown the world how to do it. In doing this they have unwittingly been industriously sawing off the limb they were sitting on. The all important thing to be done is to make the necessary readjustments to bring the economic and political forces into proper collaboration to the end that the broadest possible application of the coöperative principle may be made. To

accomplish this the old conception that state sovereignty is absolute must be discarded.

Along with this change must come the idea that international sovereignty belongs to the people of the world as a whole and must be exercised for worldwide benefit. Governments, too, should no longer be considered as political instruments only, but they should exercise economic as well as political power. In other words, governments should be public servants to do for their owners—the people—whatever they can do better than other agencies. The people of this country are practically unanimous in the opinion that everything possible should be done to make the western hemisphere, from Greenland to Cape Horn, safe from attack by any European or Asiatic power or combination of them and further that the success of Great Britain is necessary to our own safety. This nation has resolved to assist her to the extent of its ability.

While on the defense question the American people are as one, the same cannot be said of economic opinion. Party names are steadily becoming less definitive. A realignment of party voters has already begun and there are many indications that a parting of the ways will soon come when those who wish to preserve the *status quo ante* will form a party to oppose those who believe in increasing the functions of government to serve the people. These two schools of thought are in principle directly opposed and there appears to be little prospect of compromise. A new era is being born. Whether it is to be by normal processes or by Caesarian operation depends upon the intelligence of mankind, but born it must and will be.

When the world conflagration has burned out, when the destructive storms have passed, win whoever may, a lame and halt world will gather itself together to begin the task of reconstruction. The general result will ultimately be a better understanding of political and social fundamentals and a broader application of coöperative principles. This task will fall to a few large nations, the smaller ones having been wiped out or reduced to dependencies.

The old world is passing and the new world comes apace. Tremendous fundamental changes in all countries are indicated. Great Britain's muddle will give it a momentous task to bring into order its hereditary monarchy, its aristocratic control modified by a democratic element that is ever growing stronger and its overlordship over the larger part of its population, residing in Africa and Asia, which is now in different stages of development ranging from savagery up through barbarism and feudalism. Its problem is to arrange a coördination that will promote the general welfare, not of Great Britain alone, but will permit access upon equal terms to all other nations since imperialistic exploitation must be abolished.

Germany, Russia, Italy and Japan must rid themselves of the arbitrary powers which their leaders have assumed and adopt more democratic methods for the use of the consolidated political and economic powers they have gotten and employ them for the constructive purpose of promoting the general welfare of their people. The United States, in order to protect the public and to preserve its democracy must take up vigorously the readjustment of its economic life and bring it into accord with democratic principles. Its trend toward private monopoly with its plutocratic results must be changed by extension of government functions in the economic field introducing the service system to displace the capitalistic profit system. This change can be most effectively made by its local, state and federal governments. Mexico and Central America should form a central government as the states of the United States have done and South America should do the same. There are already signs of trouble in South America and should actual war extend to the western hemisphere further difficulties will likely arise. The war, if it continues as long as now seems probable, will do much to bring about many necessary changes in all countries, but the period of reconstruction will nevertheless present many serious and difficult problems. It can safely be assumed that the world after the war will never be what it was before the war.

Japan, with the worst of motives, is conferring a great favor upon China in rudely awakening her from her sleep of several thousand years. When once her four hundred millions have been aroused and made cognizant of world conditions and scientific accomplishment, she will become a great nation. It has been said that God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. This may become an example of bringing good out of evil. Sordid selfishness, individual and collective, approaches its end. No effort has been made to place the blame for present conditions upon any class or nation. They have all been guilty of sins of omission and commission for which they must atone. The day of judgment has arrived. The battle of Armageddon is on. The great problem before the world is the coördination of its economic and political forces to bring them into accord with moral law and democratic methods. Democracy must be understood to be more than a form of government. It is a philosophy of life.

A first duty is the relegation of powers and duties to their proper spheres of interest whether local, general or international. The law of being is incessant change and constant readjustment. The world stands at the parting of the ways. It cannot remain static. It must go forward to greater attainment or backward to the jungle of despair. Above all the clouds which now shut off the vision, God's sun is still shining. Firm, unfaltering faith in God, the all powerful universal spirit and an earnest, honest effort by man to establish proper relations with Him by humble obedience to His moral law are the only certain remedies for the world's ills.

After all has been said, it comes back to the Gospel of Jesus which teaches that God is the loving Father of all His children and that love must be the motivation of all human right conduct. Thus the kingdom of God will come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In the struggle onward and upward it will be well to remember:

“We reach not heaven at a single bound
But build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies
And mount to the summit round by round.”

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