

# "America Faces Its Most Momentous Year"

## President of Princeton University Says Crisis of the Present Day Is Greater Than That of the Revolution or the Civil War

By George MacAdam.

**T**HAT there is reason for considering us a nation "spiritually bankrupt," that we are suffering from "an emasculated sentimentality," that we put "peace and prosperity" above righteous action—these are the grave charges made by John Grier Hibben, President of Princeton University.

"The American nation, I believe, is facing the most momentous year in its history," said President Hibben. "Not even the darkest days of the Revolution or of the civil war were so fraught with danger to our Republic as will be the year 1917.

"There are grave questions of foreign policy, and equally grave questions of domestic policy, that must be met and answered—questions growing out of the great conflict in Europe, and questions growing out of the acute industrial conflict in this country. And as we meet and answer those questions, so it will be determined whether or not we are a nation that is spiritually bankrupt.

"I believe that it behooves each of us at this beginning of the new year to take stock of himself, to make a strict appraisal of his motives, to scrutinize closely his opinions—in short, to make an impartial examination of what he is getting from the world, of what he demands from the world, and of what he is giving and is willing to give the world in return.

"There never was a time when our temptations were as subtle as they are now. They are the temptations that grow out of prosperity. I might say that our peril is the peril of prosperity. In our day and generation we have been 'dazzled by a too near view of material things.' The man without a country today is not the exile, the outcast, the traitor, but the one who lives in smug respectability and self-content, with no thought of his country's needs and no concern for the realization of her manifest obligations.

"It is not the foe without, but the enervating influences within that cause a nation to sicken and die. All history teaches that lesson.

"Too many of us have on all sides comforts and pleasures which make us consider ourselves alone. Too many of us are completely self-centred, thinking only of the things that will please and profit us as individuals.

"It is imperative that we should recognize our true relation as individuals to our country, and the true relation also of our country to the world. Each individual should contribute his gifts and powers to the nation that its life may be the more complete. We have but a brief time at best to play our part and do our share. But by what we do or by what we leave undone our country is richer or poorer, is impelled forward or held back, is ennobled or degraded.

"There has been too much talk in our country of the rights of man. The time has come to emphasize the common duties of man. If we are as ready to recognize our evident obligations as we are to fight for our inalienable rights, we are in the way of solving many of the most perplexing problems both of our national life and of our international relations.

"Our whole present idea of patriotism is wrong. We have come to regard our land as a place where certain privileges are assured to us by the Government. We are too apt to love our country merely because of the advantages that thus accrue. My idea of patriotism is one essentially of sacrifice: We should not regard the flag so much as the symbol of the protection, of the blessings that it affords us, as we should as the symbol of what we owe our country and what we are willing to sacrifice to its stability and well-being.

"Nowadays we put too much emphasis on a man's ability to make a great deal of money; we are too likely to set up the ideal of financial success as the only ideal. It is wise, necessary, for a man to work hard, to be diligent in his pro-

fession, business, or trade, to look out for his own interests. But this isn't his whole duty in life.

"In the days of the Revolution, of the civil war, Americans had not lost the willingness to sacrifice themselves for the good of the State. They were simpler, harder, closer to religious and moral law. We cannot go back to the material conditions of those more primitive times, but we must recapture something of their spirit.

"Unquestionably the greatest disaster that could come to this country, far

be looked upon with suspicion when it is closely associated with the cry for 'peace and prosperity.'

"One of the most sinister effects of this great war upon America is that it seems to have made us absolutely callous to outrages and barbarities perpetrated upon others, even if those others are our fellow-citizens. We seem to have lost the capacity for that righteous indignation which is the supreme test of the moral vigor, both of a nation and of an individual. We have in a most lamentable way allowed that long list of atrocities

only fighting for their national lives, without any desire for the acquisition of new territory or greater power, but that, above and beyond this, they are fighting for the fundamental principles of justice and the rights of smaller nations and the sanctity of international pledges and international law.

"A peace forced at this time in any way upon the Allies by the neutral nations would mean a surrender by the Allies of all the great and holy principles for which they have been giving up their very life-blood. A peace made at this time would be a peace made for expediency, a peace made out of deference to prosperity. It would strip this great world war of its moral significance. Instead of being a titanic struggle for right and justice, it would be a vast, meaningless slaughter.

"A peace now would mean that there will be no insurance to the nations of Europe, to the United States, to the world in general, of an enduring peace. Unless those great spiritual principles for which the Allies are battling are firmly established by victory, peace will only be a truce for the sake of expediency, of prosperity.

"In considering our attitude toward the war, we must remember that we are going to reap the fruits of the final victory. There is an unreflecting emotionalism that regards all war, regardless of the principles at stake, as the scourge of the earth. But while we may abhor the horror of war, it is the merest fatuity to attempt to lay down the general proposition that peace is always desirable.

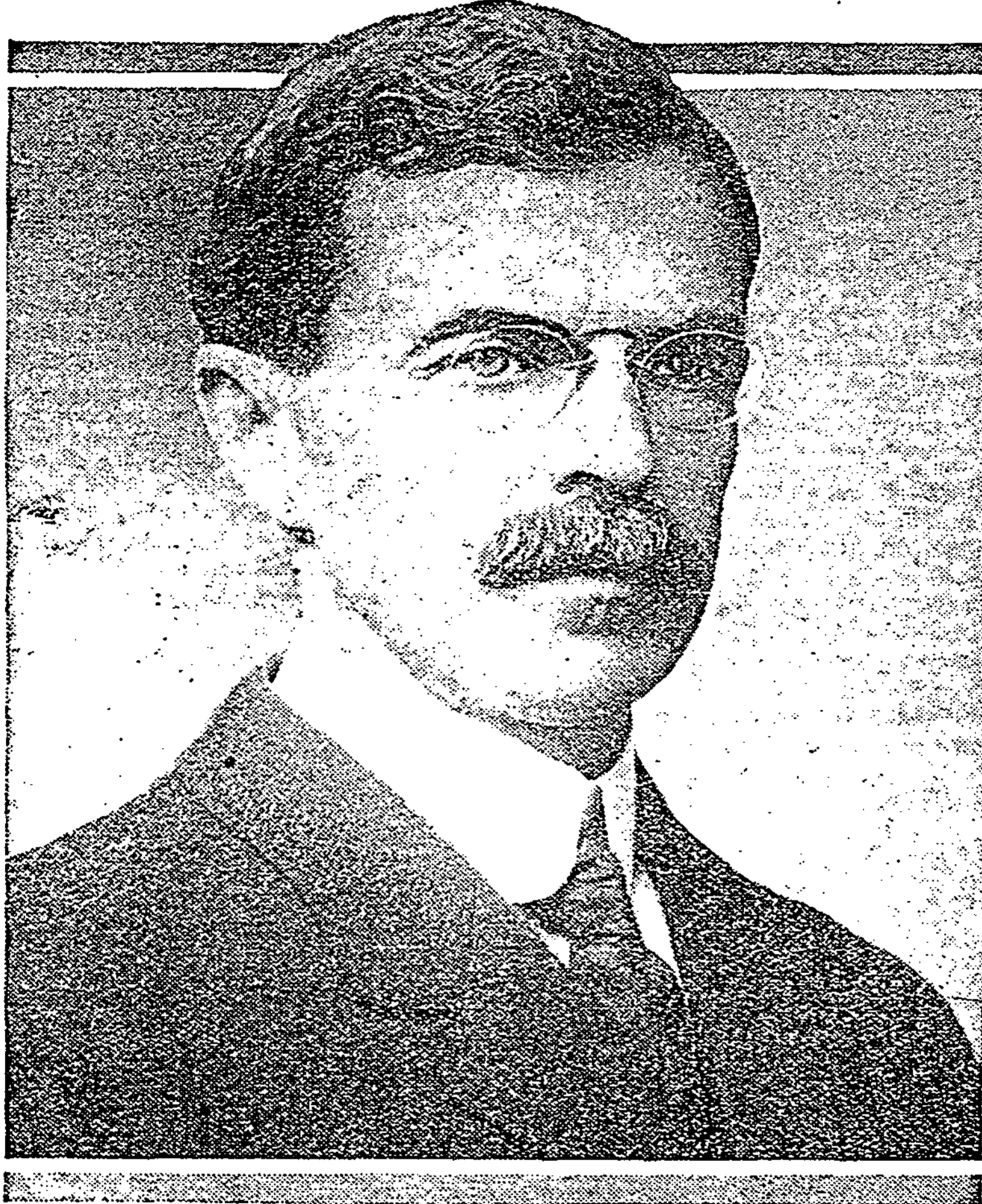
"I believe that every true American should echo the quotation from Abraham Lincoln that Lloyd George took as the keynote of his speech in answer to the German peace proposals—'We accepted the war for an object, a worthy object. The war will end when that object is attained. Under God I hope it will never end until that time.'

"Must it not seem incongruous to every right-thinking man that the Germans call for peace at a time when they are pursuing their inhuman policy of sending away into slavery thousands of their fellow human beings?

"For the last hundred years the greatest authority in Germany on right moral conduct is Immanuel Kant. His moral maxim, universally quoted in Germany in school books, from pulpits, and in the ordinary intercourse of life, was this: 'A man is always to be regarded as an end in himself and never as a means to an end.' In other words, we must respect his personality, just as we expect him to respect our personality. And when you take away from him his freedom you deny that personality—he is no longer a person, he is a thing, a chattel.

"We do not want to become involved in war; we do not want to fight. But we should have the spirit of being willing to fight rather than to sacrifice our national honor. Our fathers struggled heroically for the cause of liberty, not merely that America might be a land of liberty, but that the idea of liberty might be given to all the nations of the earth. That is the thought that is back of the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty enlightening the world. Therefore, in a great world contest where the liberty of a people like that of Serbia or Belgium has been destroyed with a systematic efficiency, it is not only the duty, but the privilege of American citizens as a nation to voice their strong feeling of protest, and to declare to the whole world that no peace without full restoration and reparation should even be considered. Nor should that declaration be merely vocal; the American nation should be in readiness to back up their voice of protest by deeds should events necessitate it.

"We must show by our deeds that we prize honor above comfort, and justice above gain, and mercy above justice, and that we would gladly lay down our lives rather than, by living to ourselves in peace and prosperity, prove false to God and man."



President John Grier Hibben of Princeton.

greater than any foreign war, would be the arraying of class against class in our industrial life. The serious differences between capital and labor are increasing in number and in bitterness. Only a few months ago we saw this nation threatened with what would have been equivalent to civil war because employers and employes could not be brought together. The danger of industrial strife hangs as an ominous cloud over the country. And it will remain, so long as there is dominant in these controversies that spirit of utter selfishness brazenly voiced by one of the prominent leaders in that crisis: 'I am simply the cave man fighting for what I can get.'

"America is being criticised abroad today with words not only of bitterness, but of scorn. It is alleged that we think only of our material comfort and convenience and that all our thoughts range on the level of things that can be weighed and measured and counted. We may resent this; but must we not confess, with humiliation, that there is a large measure of truth in the indictment?

"In all our discussions, both public and private, of our attitude toward the great war, the emphasis is always laid upon the preservation of our present condition of peace and prosperity. That seems to be regarded as the supreme end of all effort.

"In many quarters there is a disposition to glorify neutrality into the ultimate virtue in international relations. When neutrality represents an honest and courageous impartiality it is indeed an admirable thing. But neutrality is to

that began with the invasion of Belgium and apparently has not ended with the deportation of the remnants of the heroic people into slavery—we have allowed this long list of atrocities to slip out of our memories. It apparently has no influence upon the judgment that we render upon the warring nations. It positively has no influence upon our course of action. The Lusitania is forgotten; other U-boat horrors are forgotten.

"Now and then the effort is made to salve our conscience by the assertion that we have given liberally to Belgium and Serbia and Poland and the other desolated districts. But the cold fact is that our gifts have in no wise been commensurate with our wealth.

"We have given most liberally to Belgium; but even New Zealand and Canada, who are both giving generously of their blood and treasure to the war, have been far more openhanded with Belgium than have we. Our contributions to Belgium were greatest at the beginning of the war when the shock of her sufferings was fresh upon us. Since then our giving has steadily fallen off; we have grown callous to the crying needs of that stricken land. Our much-vaunted generosity was a mere emotional flash in the pan.

"We have come to a time in our own history, and in the history of the world, when an emasculated sentimentality would prove the greatest possible snare to us. I feel that any endeavor at the present time to bring about peace would be premature and wholly wrong. I feel very strongly that the Allies are not