THE AWAKENING MIDDLE CLASS
By THOMAS R. MARSHALL, Vice President of United States

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The ancient battle cry of the Templars was “God and my right.” If this could have come down through the ages as the battle cry of mankind, many evils might have been prevented, for he who contemplates God with His compromises and concessions between contending forces in nature would have been inevitably impressed with the great truth that “my right” is not a fixed, definite and unbending privilege to be, to think and to do what I please. “My right” is rather my duty to so adjust my aims and my efforts as to produce harmony in civil society.

Humanity, striving for higher and better things, particularly as exemplified among English-speaking peoples, soon clipped the Templars’ motto into just “my right.” The King who foolishly thought he ruled by right divine and that he could do no wrong interpreted “my right” to mean “my will” and regarded all other forces of life and society as subservient thereto.

Such a definition of “my right” inevitably produced friction, such friction that at Runnymede the barons wrested the great charter of English liberty from their overlord. And yet they learned but little. The battle cry was still “my right,” and they assumed that all the other wishes of mankind were held in bondage to their own, and thus the laws were largely made for themselves, incidentally for others.

With the printing press, knowledge came, and the so-called great middle class of the world, more especially the business man, took charge of the conduct of human affairs through legislative bodies. And still wisdom lingered and still the cry was “my right.”

Another, and the greatest of evils in all the history of human kind, has taken place: the man who thinks he works exclusively with his hands, but who, if he stopped to consider would realize that his hands are only doing what his brain lays out for him to do, has marched upon the scene of government.

Does wisdom still linger and is the old cry of “my right” again to be exemplified or attempted to be exemplified by these men taking into their hands the machinery of government and fixing by man-made laws the political, social and economic conditions of the world? Is it to be a repetition of the old experience of humankind—“my right,” regardless of the other fellow?

Here and there in the long process of the ages there has been a gleam of light from individuals and from groups of men, and in 1776 a theoretical sun arose, called the Declaration of Independence, to shed its light upon the world. Is it to prove to be a pale, anaemic sun, or is it to be a glowing, refugent, warming and earth-revivifying source of light and heat and power?

The long, long fight from John at Runnymede to Haig and Pershing in Flanders and in France seems to have been fought under the battle cry “my right,” and “my right” seems always to have been to seize the instruments of power and to wield them regardless of my duty and regardless of the rights of others.

If in my own little political or social life I had ever sought or defended legislative enactment for myself or for any particular group of my fellow-countrymen, then I ought to be estopped from making this inquiry: Has not the hour struck upon the dial of time when the great mission of English-speaking peoples and, more particularly, the great mission of the American, is to teach and to live upon the principle of the mutual duties of men toward each other and of organized society toward all its members?

No defense can be made of the past, seamed, scarred, mutilated and blackened by special legislation as it has been. What is to be said of the laws of government which, defining crime, declare that of two men committing crimes one shall by the law be deemed guilty and the other by the selfsame law be held innocent? What sort of a democratic brain is it that hunts a moonshiner to his lair, arrests, convicts and incarcerates him in a Federal prison, and elects to the United States Senate the man who buys his product?

Special legislation must necessarily come so long as the old cry of “my right” remains the battle cry of the Republic and so long as men are recognized as good citizens, at the same time separating themselves and their interests from the common weal.

I know what hot blood can do. I know how self-defense can rapidly degenerate into willful murder. I can thoroughly appreciate how the long, long years of injustice have warped their judgment and made vindictive many of our citizenry. I can even sympathize with those who, having been the victims of special legislation, declare that now is the time to pay back the grievances they have suffered in legislative coin of like mintage.

But there are many in this Republic—I think a majority—who have never voted for any special privilege to any man or set of men; who, from the first moment of their conscious political and social life, have been convinced that the never-ending contest of class against class, of prejudice against prejudice, of right against right is the most inanimating thing in the life of the State.

Have we learned anything out of the great war through which we have just passed? Have we only thrown off a military autocracy to take up and counter an autocracy of either wealth or poverty? Is there enough calm and deliberate judgment and courage in the Republic to take from Independence Hall the Declaration and write it upon the life and conduct of the Republic?

Have not twenty centuries of Christian civilization yet taught, not as a mere catchword but as the moving force of life, that no man has a right without having a duty superimposed upon that right?

Are we so blind, so childish, so impotent as to dream that, if either individually or by association we convince ourselves that we have certain rights and that governments are ordained among men, we can get hold of the government, to assure us of those rights, regardless of their effect upon our fellow-men? If so, instead of peace on earth to men of good-will, out of this war there will sim-
An Extraordinary Turn-Out of the "Middle Class"—Through Roundabout the Brooklyn Bridge Entrance Augmented by Baseball Bulletin Fans and Spectators at a Recent Function in City Hall Park in Honor of a Distinguished Visitor.

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