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Address by

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Attorney General of the United States

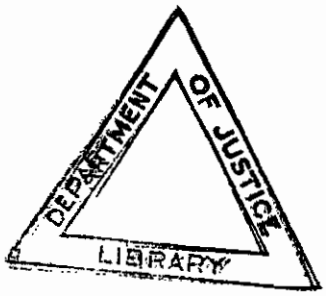
Before the Bi-Annual Dinner of the

Order of Ahepa

at the

Mayflower Hotel

Washington, D. C.



Monday, March 23, 1942

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It would be hard to convey to you the satisfaction with which I address you. We meet here as fellow Americans, as citizens of an American Republic almost twenty five hundred years younger than the Greek Commonwealth from which it is descended. If other Americans are with us tonight of French, Italian, Polish, English, Scandinavian, Dutch, Spanish or Russian descent, he would share equally with us the heritage of liberty and self-government which came to us from Greece. Whatever other contribution each race and country has made to this free congregation of people, they have brought that common gift to these shores. We are all proud of it.

Once I might have said that this was school-boy emotion. But now in the greater clarity which is given to all of us in days of extreme national danger, when our way of life becomes inexpressibly dear to us, and its whole history passes quickly before our internal vision, I can accept this emotion of pride in your company as being wholly adult and simple. And I can say admiringly, with, I think, full awareness of the compliment involved, that you Ahepans, and your fellow Americans of Greek ancestry, already, in the way you have put the love of country above self-interest, and in your sense of political responsibility, have demonstrated your line of descent.

It was your efforts largely that made clear to us the injustice of the plight of those persons of Greek extraction who emigrated here from the Dodocanese Islands and the islands of the Aegean Sea. We announced, on February 23, their removal from the category of alien enemy. This ruling is applicable only to subjects of Italy who were, prior to August 6, 1924, either Turkish subjects or persons of Greek extraction, and habitual residents of these islands. It goes without saying that it does not apply to aliens who have at any time voluntarily become German, Italian or Japanese subjects. As you undoubtedly know, by the Treaty of Lausanne, in 1923, Turkey handed over these islands to Italy, who, in 1924, blanketed their inhabitants under Italian citizenship.

I say you are largely responsible for drawing our attention to their plight. Not wholly. All Americans have been conscious of the quality of the modern Greek spirit for several years; first in its repudiation of domestic tyranny, but more lately in the magnificent fury with which it hurled itself against the invading hordes of the totalitarian countries. No blanket of Italian citizenship or of German bombs could ever be devised that would dampen its ardour or could put out its flame. The future which Mussolini had in store for them was unknown. In casting in their future with us, they at least knew it would be in keeping with their past. They knew themselves to be descended of the Greeks with whom Byron fought in 1821 and of whom he wrote

"The mountains look on Marathon
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone
I dreamed that Greece might still be free.
For standing on the Persian's grave
I could not deem myself a slave."

Last summer the Greeks thrilled the world with exploits which matched those of Thermopalae and Marathon of old. But it was before that, again back in 1923, that they showed another trait which proved them to be our brothers in a modern democracy. That was when they gave us an example of hospitality which we can well ponder.

Mr. Henry Morgenthau, Senior, who had been our Minister to Turkey, said of them:

> "My first intimate knowledge of the Greeks and their wonderful character was derived from my close contact with them in 1923 when I went there to help re-settle the Greek refugees from Turkey. Then, in their adversity, they displayed a most admirable spirit. They received a horde of impoverished refugees who came in a most dilapidated condition for a haven in old Greece. The five million population of Greeks received the million or more of refugees with open arms as their long lost brothers, and granted them not alone refuge, but immediate citizenship in their country, and sixty-five of the refugees were elected as members of Parliament that very year. I was thrilled and amazed at their wonderful action."

Our Republic is in many ways different from the republic of Pericles. The modern commonwealth has gone a long, exciting, arduous journey from the city states, the commonwealths of the fifth century before Christ. The modern democracies differ not alone by the two and a half thousand years of time which separates them. They differ because, unlike the commonwealth of ancient Greece, they hold conglomerate people in many climates.

In ancient Greece it was not hard to make a living. Their word for unemployment was the same word as for leisure, and their word for work the same as for lack of leisure. They enjoyed the freedom of religion, of assembly, of speech and speculation; but our Greek ancestors did not need to worry overmuch for that modern imperious freedom, the freedom from want. The goat, the olive, the corn, wheat, and the grape; these gave a man time to develop his reason and his political activities, and to embellish them with unparalleled art. What wonder that freedom could exist within city walls where wants were few, simply and easily met, and where, furthermore, there was the unquestioned but forced aid of the woman and the slave.

That was no place for freedom as we know it now. Freedom belongs to every man, in every climate. The idea spreads because it is native to man. He has to conceive it in different terms for different physical circumstances. It is modified by the fact that he no longer believes that it is right to have slaves or to withhold from women their equal place in the family and in society. It is modified by the demands of physical want. Thus pushed out from the city wall, freedom became a demanding thing. It forced men to develop their inventive faculties, so that they could wrest security and warmth from the ground. The love of liberty and of security which must go along with it forced countries fast becoming too populous to triumph over distance; to invent all manner of means of transportation. As they moved far from each other, men had to invent ways of keeping in touch with each other, and of communicating the formulae of making land and ocean work for them. As the days grew too short to take care of their multiplying needs, they had to conquer the night.

It is through this constantly complicating process that we have almost lost sight at times of the simple and beloved object that always beckons us onward. We have spent so much of our energy taking care of the physical wants of life that we do not put that freedom in its proper place beside the others. We have exaggerated our physical needs. We will soon know how much of that deified comfort we have sought is muffling and useless in our search for freedom, now that it is so soon to be stripped in sacrifice for victory.

After the industrial revolution, I think it is safe to say that Pericles would not have known what we mean, that is, the all of us over the world, by freedom or by liberty. Neitsche, whom our enemy is so fond of quoting, says the Greeks are, like genius, simple. That is why they are the immortal teachers. For the enemy ever to say this, is for them to admit the truth of the saying that there are no great teachers, only great pupils.

We are past the stage of technological revolution. From here out, new inventions will not much change our problems. We have already learned how to lighten the burden of man to give him leisure. Further to lighten it for some will not be helpful. Many have long since passed maximum comfort. Our problem is one of distribution, to give everyone enough. Then we will see the relationship of intellectual, religious or racial tolerance to wages, or to freedom from want; which is to say, the relationship of all the other freedoms of the mind to the freedom of the body.

The scientific momentum did not take account of this spiritual search for the simple life. We must stay with the effort, probably, until it has worn itself out. It is in a sense almost automatic. What must be more voluntary, the thing for which we must discipline ourselves, is the distribution of the goods and services which are tossed off as the by-products of this momentum.

The Greek view of life expressed its virtue by seeking balance between the various goods that it sought to achieve. In the great days of Athens this balance found its flower in the relation of the citizen to the state. The Greek city became a living organism merging the lives of her free citizens into a unity from which their culture grew. The Greeks loved their State. They thought of her not as tyrant or policeman, but as an extension of their own lives, calling for discipline and sacrifice. In time of war particularly their sacrifices grew, and all individual conflict was gladly merged in the life of the State.

Today again Greece has come alive. The influence of Greek civilization is rooted in our own; and now again her courage shines across the world. Her experience of freedom is at the beginning of the long history of all men in achieving freedom.

Our war today is a war of peoples, allied throughout the world to reconquer or to defend their status as free men. Today the peoples see and understand that their very right to live as human beings and not as beasts is at stake. Their greatest source of hope and strength lies in this sense that this war affects their lives. Nothing must threaten that unity. No group should attempt to advance its interest at the expense of any other. All interests must be subservient to the national good. Any attempt to

take advantage of the war to push an ambition that is not for the good of the nation as a whole should not be tolerated by the weight of public opinion. The broad public interest must always come first. For if the excuse of war is unnecessarily used to break down the standards of living of the people, the will of the people to victory cannot be sustained. They will no longer believe that it is their war. And this is, in the ultimate analysis, a civilian war. If the minds of the workers are left without affirmative enthusiasm, without the convinced belief that it <u>is</u> their war, they will not carry it through to the triumphant conclusion.

Most of the people of the world want the same thing. It is to be free and happy and at peace with each other. Certainly we shall never be at peace until we are all free. If all of us in this room should die in this war, and our sons and our grandsons, the war will go on until free men win out. As one might say of the men of Thermopolae, to die for it, if not to conquer then, is finally to conquer. That is why, since freedom is both our cause and our assurance, we must preserve and extend it while we are fighting.

The conquered will understand this as well as the armies who unwillingly take the command of the dictators. Can you believe that any of the invading Germans other than their masters can enjoy the spectacle of life to which they have reduced the noble Greeks? A few days ago Greek officials said that between 150,000 and 200,000 Greeks had perished as a result of German and Italian occupation by execution, massacre, starvation or malnutrition. Furthermore they expressed a fear that half the population may be dead before the war ends, if a way is not found to feed them. People collapse, so it is said, as they stand in line to get their day's ration of four ounces of black bread. In one orphanage, 300 out of 317 children are said to have died for

want of food. A park in Athens Constitution Square has been converted into a cemetery, because so many people died in the center of the city and no transportation was available to move the bodies to the cemeteries on the outskirts. German officers come to the houses and requisition blankets, rugs, and anything they can find. They pay in money which will buy nothing. In the villages, they inspect tax records, and then order the mayor to produce so many cattle and sheep, holding the village priest, the school teacher and a few others as hostages until the goods are delivered.

When I hear these stories, I wonder what Pericles would have said about the dead in Hitler's Constitution Square of Athens and about the Greeks who died while defending their land against the invader. Perhaps he would have used the same words he used in his own day:

> "We survivors may pray to be spared their bitter hour, but must disdain to meet the foe with a spirit less triumphant. Let us draw strength, not merely from twice-told arguments--how fair and noble a thing it is to show courage in battle--but from the busy spectacle of our great city's life as we have it before us day by day, falling in love with her as we see her, and remembering that all this greatness she owes to men with the fighter's daring, the wise man's understanding of his duty, and the good man's self-discipline in its performance--to men who, if they failed in any ordeal, disdained to deprive the city of their services, but sacrificed their lives as the best offerings on her behalf. So they gave their bodies to the commonwealth and received, each for his own memory, praise

that will never die, and with it the grandest of all sepulchres, not that in which their mortal bones are laid, but a home in the minds of men, where their glory remains fresh to stir to speech or action as the occasion comes by. For the whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men; and their story is not graven only on stone over their native earth, but lives on far away, without visible symbol, woven into the stuff of other men's lives. For you now it remains to rival what they have done and, knowing the secret of happiness to be freedom and the secret of freedom a brave heart, not idly to stand aside from the enemy's onset."