

## MEMORIAL DAY—ANTIETAM BATTLEFIELD

May 30, 1940

Antietam

**M**EMORIAL Day, each passing year, comes to us with fresh significance. By this I mean that the background of our emotions is inevitably colored by the current events of our time. The emotions themselves do not change. We cannot come to the grave-side of patriots without a deep sense of reverence or without a devout feeling of gratitude. Yet it is equally true that there is a difference between experiencing these emotions in tranquility and experiencing them in the midst of tumult.

Twenty years ago—ten—five—even two years ago, it was possible to feel a profound conviction that the United States had seen its last World War—at least within our lifetimes. No longer, we believed, was it necessary to make much of an issue of peace. It was already with us, and was here to stay. Any public man who expressed doubts upon the subject was held to be a sensationalist. We were complacent in our own security. We were cynical of foreign governments—even friendly ones—which extolled the blessings of peace while vigorously preparing for war. We came to the cemeteries and to the monuments on Memorial Days of the none-too-distant past, and we laid down our wreaths and went away saying to ourselves: “Thank Heaven, it will never happen again.”

Yes, and we had good reason for that optimism. The men who lay in those graves had given us all that could ever be asked of them. Independence had been won for us—at Valley Forge, at Bunker Hill, at Yorktown. Unity was decided for us at Gettysburg, at Manassas. And finally, we had seen our belief in democracy upheld and re-affirmed on the Western Front of two decades ago. Our Country was, perhaps, disappointed in the results of the victory overseas, but at least the United States had fought on the victorious side—and fought well; and the disappointment in European events only confirmed the opinion that we had nothing else for which to fight. Therefore we came to these shrines and honored these departed heroes amid a tranquility which we fondly supposed would be everlasting.

How remote—how chimerical all of that seems on the Memorial Anniversary which we are observing today.

The tumult echoes about us:—The crash of cannon is also the crash of tumbling nations which cherished their own independence, their unity, their democratic ideals. We should be less than human and more than foolish if, on Memorial Day 1940, we attempted to deny our anxiety or to belittle our apprehensions. And we should be poor Americans if we did not enter into the spiritual presence of those who died to make America what it is, and not say to them: “Come what may out of this tumult, you shall not have died in vain.”

Because of this day, as on no other national occasion, it is fitting to remember that our blessings exist only because men have gone to war to procure and protect them for us. We would be neither independent, nor united, nor democratically governed unless there had been men who died in battles—and gold star mothers who raised them in the love of their Country.

These are unwelcome thoughts, no doubt; but they are inescapable. Merely to mention war is not to advocate it—which, Heaven forbid—or even to defend