

WELCOMING THE COUNCIL OF LITHUANIAN SOCIETIES ON OCCASION OF PLANTING COMMEMORATIVE OAK TREE

State House Lawn, May 18, 1941

Annapolis

IT seems peculiarly fitting that the ceremonies commemorating and renewing the close ties established by the State of Maryland and the Republic of Lithuania six years ago, with the planting of the Oak Tree on our State House lawn, should coincide with the celebration throughout the Nation today of "I Am An American Day."

Since that Sunday in May, 1935, when representatives of the Council of Lithuanian Societies assembled on our State House grounds to plant the Oak Tree which the government of their homeland had sent to our State, many things have happened to solidify the close bond thus established.

At that time, the tree-planting ceremony was an expression of grateful appreciation from the Government of Lithuania for the passage by the Maryland Legislature of the joint resolution establishing Republic of Lithuania Day annually in Maryland. Today, however, your pilgrimage to this Maryland shrine brings to mind similar pilgrimages from Europe to Maryland three hundred years ago, when the newly established Colony of Maryland offered for the first time a refuge for the oppressed of all lands.

The happy coincidence that your visitation comes on a day set aside to mark in a special way the advantages of American citizenship, will appeal with particular significance to a group like yours, a group whose fatherland, after having enjoyed the privileges of freedom such as we know it here in America, now finds these priceless liberties denied them.

Constituted as we human beings are, it often happens that we never really appreciate the good things we have until we've either lost them, or face a serious threat in that direction. Here in America our free way of life has been so bound up with our very existence that it seems inconceivable that we should ever be without those privileges. Individual liberty; the right of free speech, of free press, of free assembly; the right to worship God according to the individual conscience, all of these have become so much a part of our every-day life that possibly some of us haven't realized how blest we are.

I have no doubt that many of those who came to us from other lands and have become American citizens, having known what life is under oppression, sometimes value more sincerely the things that America has to offer than do we who have been born and raised under that priceless heritage.

With the world in turmoil today, however; with practically all of continental Europe under the control of governments who deny every right to the peoples of these lands; with Democracy threatened throughout the world as it never has been threatened before, it is timely that *all of us* set aside this