

## And The Fair Land (Abridged)

Anyone whose labors take him into the far reaches of this country is bound to mark how the years have made the land grow fruitful. This is indeed a big country, a rich country, in a way no array of figures can measure and so in a way past belief of those who have not seen it. Through the Northeastern complex, into the Southern lands, across the central plains and to its Western slopes we can only glimpse a measure of the bounty of America. We cannot help but be struck by the thought that this country, one day, can be even greater. America, though many know it not, is one of the great underdeveloped countries of the world; what it reaches for exceeds by far what it has grasped.

Too often we have been asked to fight in strange and distant places, for no clear purpose they could see and for no accomplishment they can measure. Our spirits are not quieted by the thought that the good and pleasant bounty that surrounds them can be destroyed in an instant by a single bomb. At home we see young arrayed against old, black against white, neighbor against neighbor, so that we stand in peril of social discord. Or how can we not despair when we see that the cities and countryside are in need of repair. Or when, in the face of these challenges, we turn for leadership to men in high places—only to find these men as frail as any others.

So sometimes we ask whence will come succor. What is to preserve our abundance, or even our civility? How can we pass on to our children a nation as strong and free as the one we inherited from our forefathers? How is our country to endure these cruel storms that beset it from without and from within? Of course we cannot quiet our spirits. For it is true that everywhere men turn their eyes today much of the world has a wild and savage hue. No one can say that the specter of war is banished. Nor can he say that when men or communities are put upon their own resources they are sure of solace; nor be sure that men of diverse kinds and diverse views can live peaceably together in a time of troubles.

But we can all remind ourselves that the richness of this country was not born in the resources of the earth, though they be plentiful, but in the people that took its measure. For that reminder is everywhere—in the cities, towns, farms, roads, factories, homes, hospitals, schools that spread everywhere over that wilderness.

We can remind ourselves that for all our social discord we remain the longest enduring society of self-governing free people in the world. As Archibald MacLeish once put it, we Americans are “the first self-constituted, self-declared, self-created people in the history of the world.” Being so, we are the marvel and the mystery of the world, for that enduring liberty is no less a blessing than the abundance of the earth. We are the people of a fabulous country, as Thomas Wolfe wrote, “the only fabulous country; it is the only place where miracles not only happen, but where they happen all the time.”

Those at this table who are 70 have lived nearly 1/5 of the time since the Pilgrims landed on the shores of this continent. This is almost enough time to begin to fully appreciate the inestimable privilege of being a legatee of those who first implanted our civilization in this Promised Land. It is impossible for the young to fully know, but never too late for the old to learn, that America truly is something worthy of our capacity for wonder.

This is an exceptional day for an exceptional people. And we might remind ourselves also, that if those men and women setting out from Delftshaven had been too daunted by the troubles they saw around them, then we might not this day be thankful for a blessed land.