

Better Homes (1922)

By CALVIN COOLIDGE

We spend too much time in longing for the things that are far off and too little in the enjoyment of the things that are near at hand. We live too much in dreams and too little in realities. We cherish too many impossible projects of setting worlds in order, which are bound to fail. We consider too little plans for putting our own households in order, which might easily be made to succeed. A large part of our seeming ills would be dispelled if we could but turn from the visionary to the practical. We need the influence of vision, we need the inspiring power of ideals, but all these are worthless unless they can be translated into positive actions.

The world has been through a great spiritual and moral awakening in these last few years. There are those who fear that this may all be dissipated. It will be unless it can be turned into something actual. In our own country conditions have developed which make this more than ever easy of accomplishment. It ought to be expressed not merely in official and public deeds, but in personal and private actions. It must come through a realization that the great things of life are not reserved for the enjoyment of a few, but are within the reach of all.

There are two shrines at which mankind has always worshipped, must always worship: the altar which represents religion, and the hearthstone which represents the home.

These are the product of fixed beliefs and fixed modes of living. They have not grown up by accident; they are the means, deliberate, mature, sanctified, by which the human race, in harmony with its own great nature, is developed and perfected. They are at once the source and the result of the inborn longing for what is completed, for what has that finality and security required to give to society the necessary element of stability.

The genius of America has long been directed to the construction of great highways and railroads, the erection of massive buildings for the promotion of trade and the transaction of public business. It has supplied hospitals, institutions of learning and places of religious worship. All of these are worthy of the great effort and the sustained purpose which alone has made them possible. They contribute to the general welfare of all the people, but they are all too detached, too remote; they

do not make the necessary contribution of a feeling of proprietorship and ownership. They do not complete the circuit. They are for the people, but not of the people. They do not satisfy that longing which exists in every human breast to be able to say: "This is mine."

We believe in American institutions. We believe that they are justified by the light of reason, and by the result of experience. We believe in the right of self-government. We believe in the protection of the personal rights of life and liberty and the enjoyment of the rewards of industry. We believe in the right to acquire, to hold, and transmit property. We believe in all that which is represented under the general designation of a republic.

But while we hold that these principles are sound we do not claim that they have yet become fully established. We do not claim that our institutions are yet perfected.

It is of little avail to assert that there is an inherent right to own property unless there is an open opportunity that this right may be enjoyed in a fair degree by all. That which is referred to in such critical terms as capitalism cannot prevail unless it is adapted to the general requirements. Unless it be of the people it will cease to have a place under our institutions, even as slavery ceased.

It is time to demonstrate more effectively that property is of the people. It is time to transfer some of the approbation and effort that has gone into the building of public works to the building, ornamenting, and owning of private homes by the people at large—attractive, worthy, permanent homes.

Society rests on the home. It is the foundation of our institutions. Around it are gathered all the cherished memories of childhood, the accomplishments of maturity, and the consolations of age. So long as a people hold the home sacred they will be in the possession of a strength of character which it will be impossible to destroy.

Apparently the world at large, certainly our own country, is turning more and more for guidance to that wisdom born of affection which we call the intuition of woman. Her first thought is always of the home. Her first care is for its provision. As our laws and customs are improved by her influence, it is likely to be first in the direction of greater facility for acquiring, and greater security in holding a home.

Some of the fine enthusiasm which was developed by the required sacrifices of war may well find a new expression in turning towards the making of the home. It

is the final answer to every challenge of the soundness of the fundamental principles of our institutions. It holds the assurance and prospect of contentment and of satisfaction.

Under present conditions any ambition of America to become a nation of home owners would be by no means impossible of fulfillment. The land is available, the materials are at hand, the necessary accumulation of credit exists, the courage, the endurance and the sacrifice of the people are not wanting. Let them begin, however slender their means, the building and perfecting of the national character by the building and adorning of a home which shall be worthy of the habitation of an American family, calm in the assurance that "the gods send thread for a web begun."

Here will be found that satisfaction which comes from possession and achievement. Here is the opportunity to express the soul in art. Here is the Sacred influence, here in the earth at our feet, around the hearthstone, which raises man to his true estate.

(Signed) Calvin Coolidge

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