

"What the American Legion means to the United States" is the topic that has been suggested to me for discussion tonight. It is a timely one, in truth, one that, I have no doubt, has been in the minds of many thousands of our countrymen at some time or another during these past six months as they read what was happening in Europe, saw weaker nations crushed beneath the might of ruthless neighbors, and possibly wondered when something like that might threaten even our own Land of the Free. There is much that should be dwelt upon by anyone who seeks to do justice to the American Legion's worth to America, and in the few moments allotted me I shall attempt to review briefly some of the outstanding contributions that have been made, and are being made, by the Legion to America's security and national well-being.

I believe, however, I can come close to summing up the Legion's meaning to America when I tell you of the new member of the Legion who confessed recently that he had never given much thought to the organization. He never had any idea of joining it and aiding in its work, until the day several years ago when he stood for hours on the sidewalk in New York City, and was thrilled to the very depths of his being by the thousands upon thousands of Legionnaires who, hour after hour, marched proudly by under the combined banners of the Legion and of the United States, as the climax to the greatest national convention the Legion ever held.

"It was a sight I'll never forget," this man said. "There I stood, hour upon hour, unable to tear myself away, even though I was supposed to be in New York upon business, and had plenty to keep me going every minute. 'Good Heavens! Will they never stop coming?' he said to himself after the first few hours. 'Good Heavens! Don't let them stop coming!' was the way he put it, hours later, when the sun began to fade behind the skyscrapers, and the first shadows of evening descended, while still the marching ranks came on and on.

"As first one State and then another sent its representation down the avenue, the thought came to him, he said, that here, before his very eyes was all the answer anyone would ever need to any threats that could be made against America—that here was ample warning to all the world that America never again would be caught unprepared.

"What more salutary punishment could be conceived," he said to himself, as he watched the countless marchers, "for the Communist or any member of a disloyal breed, than to be compelled to stand on the sidelines for an American Legion Parade, and see for themselves what an insurmountable obstacle there is to any subversive doctrine or activity that might dare to raise its head among us." The first thing he did on his return from New York was to apply for membership in the Legion. He wanted to be a part of that bulwark of American manhood, even though it took him nearly twenty years to make up his mind. And it took the realization of what the American Legion has come to mean to America, to persuade him finally to pitch in and assume his share of the burden that, as he put it, "every real American must be prepared to carry if he has sense enough to value properly his free American citizenship, and if he has love enough for his children to wish to turn his citizenship over to them in at least as good shape as it was when he received it."

In seeking to arrive at any valuation of the American Legion to the United States, we need but to refer to the Preamble of the Legion's Constitution to