

Speech at the Gran restaurant “Miramar”

May 16th 1921

I am not going to make a speech. This intimate family lunch was a pause, a break between two ceremonies.

What do you want me to talk about?

(Many voices replied: “Whatever I want, whatever I want”).

During the meal,” he continued, “I was recalling memories of my travels, especially those of the United States, and as I spoke I noticed that many friends were listening to my words.

Well, I am going to be an enlightened Baedeker.

The United States is the first nation in the world, because it is the most agricultural and the most industrial country on earth.

In the history of peoples, there has never been a country known to occupy the position of the Federal Republic of the United States.

There have been peoples who have based their greatness, their power, on the rule of force, on their military might; others on their agriculture, none like the United States: it is the only case of the first power in the world in the industrial and agricultural order.

Let me explain; the small European countries and the so-called great powers of Europe all lack something to live on.

Let us imagine England. Being a first-rate industrial power, in the field of industry, if a storm prevents the arrival of ships in its port for eight days, its markets would suffer, its people would suffer, and it would starve if the isolation lasted a month.

The English, kings of industry, need other nations to supply them with everything they need to eat.

The United States owes its greatness, its power, to its industrial and agricultural potential and to its women.

It is a country that forms a world within a world.

If the United States were to turn its back on the rest of the peoples of the earth, they would starve and America would continue to live perfectly well on its own.

There, in that country, swords are not drawn, and no account is taken of the number of medals won. It is a great country because of these circumstances and because of the simplicity of its public customs.

In Washington, in the White House, a simple palace, like the simplest palaces of Versailles, resides the chief magistrate of the nation; from there it may well be said that for four years the world is governed.

When, in my travels, I used to walk in front of the White House, its presence evoked in me the memory of Napoleon.

If Napoleon were to raise his head and, surrounded by his marshals, walk in front of the simple presidential mansion, he would not believe that the world is ruled from there.

What a beautiful and great nation it is!

In reality, there is no such thing as a great nationality; there are many small nationalities, many small autonomous republics, each quite distinct from the others in terms of customs and legislation.

In the State of New York, for a divorce to be granted, one of the spouses must be caught in the act of adultery. On the other hand, in other states, it is sufficient for the spouses to express their intention to divorce for the divorce to be decreed.

There are States, such as Kansas, where not only the use of alcohol, but also of tobacco, is forbidden, and as soon as you enter the State, the guards get into the railway carriage in which you are travelling, and forbid you to smoke until you cross its frontiers again.

Those States form the Federal Republic of North America, a country so large that in travelling from New York to California, in the six days and nights of the journey, you have to turn your watch forward or backward six times, for you have travelled six meridians, a whole world.

Where the greatness of this people is most evident is in the matter of education.

In that country there is no Minister of Education. The first letters belong to the State, to the Universities, to private individuals, and the citizens of the United States would be offended if anyone believed that there could be a better Minister of Education than themselves.

There are more than 500 private Universities, and these, as well as the schools of first letters, I imagine them as great structures, many times greater in size and sumptuousness than ours.

Schools and universities are huge 40-hectare parks with their lakes, paths and promenades. So it is understandable that children want to go there and cry when they are not allowed to.

In the lakes of the parks of the Universities, the students paddle, as if on horseback, along their promenades.

These Universities owe their life to the magnificence of several citizens who in one of their features agreed to create and maintain them, for which they donate hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Thus, in these parks stand proudly several buildings: some for literature, others for natural sciences and so on for the various branches of knowledge.

The rich not only get together, build universities and pay for them, but when they die, they leave their fortunes to live on in these educational establishments.

The United States is the only country where the rich, where the great millionaires have their wealth forgiven. This is not to say that there are no class differences or questions of envy, which is a feeling ingrained in all men in all countries.

The French people and the English people are advanced, progressive peoples, but they do not have the strength of the United States. When I talk to the French, the English, the Spanish - and I am referring to the people of Europe - I ask: what millionaire has left his fortune to create libraries and to found and support universities?

In these countries, fortunes are wanted by the parents for their children, and the most that some rich people do is to bequeath property to found hospitals in which the names of the donor are proclaimed on marble and statues.

There, the opposite is true. On my recent trip I had the opportunity to meet a daughter of the billionaire Morgan, to whom her father had bequeathed only one million dollars, like her siblings, because the Yankee millionaire assumed that they could live on that million and the rest of his fortune, which exceeded one billion dollars, was earmarked for cultural institutions.

A millionaire lady, who had learned classical Greek, wanted to create a department for that language and when she founded it she erected a reproduction of the Greek temple in the park of one of those universities.

We also have in America a Spanish multimillionaire, Mr. Huntington, who has founded the Hispanic Museum, a palace where he gathers all the works that speak of Spain and in whose library anyone who wishes to study Spain will find all the necessary information.

This multimillionaire is the one who commissioned Sorolla's paintings of the Spanish regions.

Another Yankee millionaire, the king of steel, Carnegie, was told that Seville was the home of the Archive of the Indies and, thanks to its splendour, many Yankee professors study there everything related to the history of America.

The United States is a different country from ours and from all others in terms of its political and family organisation. It is constituted in a very different way. Man is the worker, the one who specialises, the one who is concerned only with his work, his business, his profession, which is always specialised.

The woman, on the other hand, is the one who stays at home, who reads, who attends lectures and who keeps abreast of the literary movement.

On these trips I invented a little story, the one about the Metropolitan, which I have repeated on different occasions, to paint the character of the American.

A great American gentleman comes out of the Metropolitan Theatre in New York after attending an opera performance.

He meets a friend, who asks him, “How was the opera?” and he replies, “I don’t know. Tomorrow my diary will tell me”.

This indicates the confidence that everyone has in his favourite press.

I have met some very educated women.

In Spain we abolished the Inquisition and replaced it with fear of ridicule.

Perhaps we come up with a great idea and abandon it, not putting it into practice for fear of ridicule.

I attended the American Convention where the question of women’s suffrage was to be settled, and women from all over the United States, who were demanding the right of suffrage, surrounded the building, and with banners with inscriptions on them, lined up so that the politicians, when they attended the sessions, had no choice but to read the contents.

These women, in order to distinguish themselves, wore uniforms of white suits with short skirts, and if there were some very beautiful women among them, there were also others who weighed more than 100 kilos, which, if at first made me smile, soon made me understand that these women were worthy of the great people. Shortly afterwards, these same women, understanding that they are not yet sufficiently prepared, have only taken two or three women deputies to Parliament.

Women lead, and it is to their leadership that the customs of that people are a model of morality.

It is a country of absolute religious freedom and tolerance.

There is no American who does not have a religion, and sects and new religions are constantly emerging, with no shortage of followers, but all of them live in complete solidarity.

I have spoken in the temples of many religions.

I remember one day in the morning I was to give a lecture in a place on the 27th floor of a skyscraper building. I arrived a quarter of an hour before the scheduled time and in the hall, my audience was waiting for the people gathered to leave to hear the propaganda of a new religion.

After my lecture, a Japanese poet was to give another. So in the course of two hours three very different lectures were given to three very different audiences.

We have made a lot of progress, in the world and especially in the United States.

Spain is the most fashionable people there, the one that inspires the most interest today.

The characteristic of the American is naivety. When the European war ended, speaking of Spain, they said: “They are a people of gentlemen, of men. With bad ships they left San-

tiago de Cuba and put up a fight against the great American squadron and fought; quite unlike Germany, whose first-power squadron did not leave the ports”.

I have had the honour of eating at the United States Military School, where Spanish is taught, where the professors gave me a banquet, and all through it they were tormented by one thought. We,” they said, “were wrong to go ahead and declare war on Spain over the Maine, because it has since been proved that the explosion that sank her was internal.

We have over other peoples an excess of intelligence, an excess of imagination that leads us to think of eighty solutions in a minute and end up adopting none. They, on the other hand, spend their lives with four or five ideas and carry them out; hence their greatness.

The peoples who win in armed struggles are the herd peoples. Today, armies are made up of millions of men, all led by a single head.

We Spaniards had difficulty in accepting this discipline. In my constant travelling, I came across many Spanish colonies; in all of them there were at least three groups; we sin in excess of individualism.

At heart we are all anarchists. This word means not to obey the law, to trample it underfoot, and we have such a character that if we are forced to obey it we say there is no freedom.

In the United States, before laws are passed, they are discussed, debated, fought over, but once they are passed, they are obeyed and complied with.

Discipline is imposed.

We have more freedom, if that is what you want to call it, but less money: it is up to you to decide what is best for Spain and for yourselves.