

November 10th 1920.

Hon. Warren G. Harding,  
Point Isabel, Texas.

Dear Harding:

I got back to my office a day or two ago. Your overwhelming victory is the most joyous thing that ever happened, and I repeat with all my heart the congratulation which I wired you on the 2nd inst. Your own part in the campaign was beyond all praise – always candid, straight spoken; never stooping to any form of littleness; always voicing a big thing; never, though sorely tried, turning aside for scolding or recrimination. All things considered, there never was in the history of politics a personal campaign conducted with so fine a spirit, or upon so high a plane of dignity, and it is for that, more than because you were successful that I give you the tribute of my admiration and respect.

The short statements you made immediately following the election was altogether admirable. I loved the modest but unafraid spirit which it manifested. You have before you a task of great difficulty – a man's size job – but you will not fail.

The vote you received was the most impressive ever registered by the American people not only from the standpoint of its size but from the standpoint of its meaning. It was due to the three causes which you so well interpreted and emphasized: democratic incompetency, executive autocracy and the attempt to compel us to participate in European affairs. I am glad you never permitted yourself to be swerved from your attitude of uncompromising opposition to the league,

in spite of the fears of some timid people by whom you were more or less besided. The overwhelming majority of our people are opposed to that league, and by far the greater number in my judgment are either opposed or utterly indifferent to any substitute. The talk about disaffected sentiment consequent upon the Des Moines speech was utter humbug – a reflex of fear rather than judgment. There was no disaffection on account of that speech except among a small group of professors and the like, and among the international traders and bankers. Among the rank and file the initial mis-construction of that utterance really made votes. That was especially marked in the large cities like New York and Chicago where the Hearst papers continually emphasized the destructive portion of your arguments and where – whether we like it or not – those papers were immensely powerful.

I may be wrong, but I think the sentiment of the people, as a whole, will grow more indifferent to the fate of the league as time passes. I am not boring you with this letter for the sake of saying this, but for the purpose of drawing the conclusion that we must proceed with the utmost caution in the work of instituting any new world relationship. We occupy a position of tremendous strategic value; we are the dominating power on this hemisphere; three thousand miles of water separate us from Europe and five thousand miles of water separate us from Asia; our leadership in all America is unchallenged; we haven't a military rival north or south, and we should never allow ourselves to be beguiled into any arrangement which will permit Europe to meddle in the affairs of this continent or compel us to meddle in the affairs of Europe. Moreover any association which we form will be one-sided in its benefits, for distracted Europe needs us, while we need Europe very little, or not at all; and whatever we do will be far more for the sake of the world outside than for our own sake. I should regard it as extremely unwise were to enter into any agreement without eliminating not only every element of moral or legal compulsion, but

every suggestion of military or economic force as the sanction behind its provisions. If the people of the civilized world cannot be depended upon to voluntarily use force whenever it becomes wise and righteous, they should never be bound to do so. Indeed, they cannot be bound, for peoples as distinguished from rulers, will not go to war and get themselves killed merely to fulfill a contract for the benefit of somebody else.

I think we ought to put our emphasis on the establishment of an international court of justice to try and determine international controversies of a justiciable nature; and we should not stand for any association whose functions will extend further than to investigate, report findings and recommend remedies (which might, in extreme cases, include the recommendation of military or economic force) but which each nation will be left free to follow or reject, as the conscience of its own people at the time may direct.

Next to the welfare of the country the success of your administration is the thing nearest my heart, and I strongly believe that an adjustment of the international problem along these general lines will contribute to both.

I had a talk the other day with Ralph Easley and John Hays Hammond. Both are closely connected with the Civic Federation. They are anxious to have a dinner where you will be the guest of honor, attended by leading representatives of capital and labor. I am inclined to think that it might be a good thing for you to accept. I imagine those labor leaders who opposed you have been somewhat startled and chastened by the great vote which you received, and they would probably welcome an opportunity of establishing themselves on a friendly footing.

There are some things I should like to talk with you about whenever there is an opportunity, but they are not pressing and can wait.

Please remember me to Mrs. Harding, who played her part in the contest with such fine taste and discriminating good sense.

Very sincerely,