

CHAPTER IV

PRESIDENT WILSON AND COLONEL HOUSE

BEFORE proceeding to narrate the discussions and the business transacted at this historical conference, it might be well to give some idea of the personages who took a leading part in these transactions. In my War Memoirs I have already given my impressions of the veteran statesman who was President of the Conference, and also of Lord Balfour and Mr. Bonar Law.

All the European delegates were especially concerned to discover what President Wilson was like, what he was after and what he meant to insist upon. As to the rest of us, we had often met before and worked together harmoniously during the trials of the War.

President Wilson the unknown quantity We could not always agree, but the disagreements were national rather than personal. We could only act within the limits permitted by the opinions of the people we respectively represented. Their exigencies, their difficulties, their aims, traditions and prejudices had to be taken into account. We all understood that perfectly well and allowed for it in our judgment of the stand taken by others. Clemenceau, Orlando, Sonnino, Balfour and I had conferred, conversed and consulted times without number on all the most important issues with which we would be confronted at this Congress. Clemenceau and I had gone together through the dark and depressing events of the 1918 spring-time. Orlando, Sonnino and I had spent anxious days together restoring the

Italian front after the catastrophe of Caporetto, and we had all discussed round the same table unity of command during the winter and spring of 1918. We had also had many conversations on some of the main outlines of a peace settlement. But President Wilson none of us knew. He was the product, not, it is true, of a different world, but of another hemisphere. Whilst we were dealing every day with ghastly realities on land and sea, some of them visible to our own eyes and audible to our ears, he was soaring in clouds of serene rhetoric. When the Allied Armies were hard pressed and our troops were falling by the hundred thousand in vain endeavours to drive back our redoubtable foe, we could with difficulty even approach him to persuade him to view the grim struggle below, and to come down to earth to deal with its urgent demands before the accumulating slaughter should bury our cause in irreparable disaster. When he came to France, the French Government and people were anxious that he should visit the devastated areas so as to acquaint him with the demoniac actualities of war. He managed to elude their request and to ignore their hints right to the end. Once, under great pressure, he visited Rheims and, viewing the ruins that a few years ago were a glorious cathedral, congratulated the prelate on the edifice not being nearly as much defaced as he had expected to see it. He shunned the sight or study of unpleasant truths that diverted him from his foregone conclusions.

That is how Wilson appeared to those who met him for the first time, and they eyed him with a measure of suspicion not unmixed with apprehension. Clemenceau followed his movements like an old watchdog keeping an eye on a strange and unwelcome dog

*Wilson and
Clemenceau*



Hon. D. Lloyd George
With the best wishes
of his friend, Woodrow Wilson

who has visited the farmyard and of whose intentions he is more than doubtful. There never was a greater contrast, mental or spiritual, than that which existed between these two notable men. Wilson with his high but narrow brow, his fine head with its elevated crown and his dreamy but untrustful eye—the make-up of the idealist who is also something of an egoist; Clemenceau, with a powerful head and the square brow of the logician—the head conspicuously flat topped, with no upper storey in which to lodge the humanities, the ever vigilant and fierce eye of the animal who has hunted and been hunted all his life. The idealist amused him so long as he did not insist on incorporating his dreams in a Treaty which Clemenceau had to sign. It was part of the real joy of these Conferences to observe Clemenceau's attitude towards Wilson during the first five weeks of the Conference. He listened with eyes and ears lest Wilson should by a phrase commit the Conference to some proposition which weakened the settlement from the French standpoint. If Wilson ended his allocution without doing any perceptible harm, Clemenceau's stern face temporarily relaxed, and he expressed his relief with a deep sigh. But if the President took a flight beyond the azure main, as he was occasionally inclined to do without regard to relevance, Clemenceau would open his great eyes in twinkling wonder, and turn them on me as much as to say: "Here he is off again!"

I really think that at first the idealistic President regarded himself as a missionary whose
The President's sermon function it was to rescue the poor European heathen from their age-long worship of false and fiery gods. He was apt to address us in that vein, beginning with a few simple

and elementary truths about right being more important than might, and justice being more eternal than force. No doubt Europe needed the lesson, but the President forgot that the Allies had fought for nearly five years for international right and fairplay, and were then exhausted and sore from the terrible wounds they had sustained in the struggle. They were therefore impatient at having little sermonettes delivered to them, full of rudimentary sentences about things which they had fought for years to vindicate when the President was proclaiming that he was too proud to fight for them. Those who suggest that anyone sitting at that table resented President Wilson's exalted principles are calumniating the myriads who died for those ideals. We were just as truly there to frame a treaty that would not dishonour their memory as was the President of the United States.

There was a memorable meeting where President Wilson's homiletic style provoked from Clemenceau one of his most brilliant replies. It arose over the question of the restoration to France of the 1814 frontier of the Saar Valley. The Allied Powers, including Britain, Prussia, Russia and Austria, had after Napoleon's overthrow in 1814 determined the North-Eastern frontiers of France in such a way as to give to the French a part of the Saar Valley. Clemenceau pleaded for the restoration of a frontier thus accorded to France in the hour of complete defeat. President Wilson retorted "that was a hundred years ago—a hundred years is a very long time." "Yes," said Clemenceau, "a very long time in the history of the États-Unis." Wilson then diverged into his usual rhapsody about the superiority of right to might: he referred to those great French idealists—Lafayette

*Clemenceau's
retorts*

and Rochambeau—whose names were held in immortal honour in the United States; and he ended an eloquent appeal to Clemenceau by quoting Napoleon's saying on his deathbed that "in the end right always triumphed over might." Clemenceau did not reply in English, of which he had a considerable mastery, but as was his invariable practice when he had something to say to which he attached importance, sent for an interpreter and then replied in French. He said: "President Wilson has quoted Napoleon as having said that in the end might was beaten by right. He says that he uttered this sentiment on his deathbed. Had it been true it was rather late for him to have discovered it. But it was not true. President Wilson alluded in glowing language to those idealistic young Frenchmen who helped to liberate America. However exalted the ideals of Lafayette and Rochambeau, they would never have achieved them without force. Force brought the United States into being and force again prevented it from falling to pieces." The President acknowledged the cogency of the reply.

But his most extraordinary outburst was when he was developing some theme—I rather think it was connected with the League of Nations—which led him to explain the failure of Christianity to achieve its highest ideals. "Why," he said, "has Jesus Christ so far not succeeded in inducing the world to follow His teachings in these matters? It is because He taught the ideal without devising any practical means of attaining it. That is the reason why I am proposing a practical scheme to carry out His aims." Clemenceau slowly opened his dark eyes to their widest dimensions and swept them round the assembly to see how the Christians gathered around the table enjoyed this exposure of the futility of their Master.

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Gradually we rubbed along to a better understanding of each other; we learned to make allowance for difference of tradition, antecedents, temperament and environment. This was *Accommodation reached by degrees* President Wilson's first contact with Europe and its tangled and thorny jungle, for ages the favourite hunting ground of beasts of prey and poisonous reptiles springing and creeping on their victims. He discovered that he could not judge this old Continent, with its feuds dating from a time when the historical memory of man fades into utter darkness, as he would the relations of America with Mexico. Ancient races have been exterminated in America and their quarrels and wrongs have been buried with them. Emigration has settled the disputes about the righteousness of the conquests of Texas and California. The Rio Grande has not the tragic memories of the Rhine. There are no chronicles which record the savageries perpetrated on the banks of the Rio Grande. The annals of the sanguinary feuds provoked by centuries of watch on the Rhine by Teuton, Gaul and Roman are still preserved. On the other hand, we accepted the fact that the remoteness of America from the scene of our endless conflicts enabled her to take a more detached and therefore a calmer view of the problems upon the solution of which we were engaged.

When a man provokes angry controversy about himself, his theories and his actions, and when it continues years after his death, then it is safe to assume that he was an arresting personality. I visited the States some years ago and came across many men and women in many States who accorded to Wilson a reverence which is reserved only for the most venerated amongst the saints of the calendar. On the other hand, I met

Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt compared

a great number to whom I dared not mention his name because of the fury it engendered. It was as great a breach of good manners to mention him in certain circles as it would be to introduce the name of the Devil in refined society. A man who excited such a clash of passion in his day and after his day was done must have been a man of striking and powerful individuality.

What kind of man was he? With friends and foes alike his personality unbalanced judgment. How did he impress those who for the first time came into close personal contact with him without possessing any definite preconceived ideas, whether prejudices or predilections, about him? To that class I belonged. His stern and dauntless Radicalism always appealed to me. He was disliked by Wall Street and feared by millionaires. I had not myself been a particular pet of financiers or of the ultra-rich, except perhaps when they were in dire distress at the beginning of the War and they needed my help to extricate them from their troubles. I admired his oratory—his phrases which were like diamonds, clear cut, brilliant, if hard. On the other hand, I am not enamoured of doctrinaires who shrink from the audacious action which alone can make effective the far-reaching doctrines which they preach. Here I did not think him comparable to his great rival Theodore Roosevelt, who curbed the oppression of concentrated wealth by measures which made him hated by the rich right up to and beyond the tomb. "How is it," said the great progressive, "that whenever I mention the Eighth Commandment, there is a panic in Wall Street?" The answer was: because he applied that Mosaic precept to some of the most profitable transactions of the more rapacious in that potent fraternity. The Wilson action was more

hesitant and timorous. He did not hit as hard or as direct as the famous Bull Moose at the weak spots of the beasts of prey who infested the American financial jungle. That defect characterised Wilson's conduct before and after the War. He had an implicit faith in the efficacy of phrases. Diamond does not break glass; its impress has to be followed by adequate pressure.

When I first encountered Wilson it was with mixed feelings. I certainly felt no hostility towards him but

*My liking
for Wilson* I was very curious to know what he was like. At our first meeting at Charing Cross Station, the frankness of his countenance and the affability and almost warmth of his greeting won my goodwill and, as far as I was concerned, he never lost it. I sat opposite to him for months in the same small Parisian room. I conversed with him repeatedly in private, and I broke bread with him on a few occasions. I therefore had all the opportunity that anyone could desire for forming an estimate of this notable and towering figure in his day. The favourable personal impression made on my mind by our first handshake was deepened by my subsequent meetings. He was even-tempered and agreeable. He had the charm which emanates from a fine intelligence, integrity of purpose and a complete absence of querulousness or cantankerousness. He was stiff, unbending, uncommunicative, but he was pleasant almost to the confines of geniality.

When the Congress was drawing to a close, Clemenceau asked me in his abrupt manner: "How do you like Wilson?" I replied: "I like him, and I like him very much better now than I did at the beginning." "So do I," said the Tiger. No three men, cooped together for so many months discussing momentous issues bristling with controversial

points, ever got on better or more agreeably together than did Clemenceau, Wilson and I. To quote M. Tardieu in his book, "The Truth about the Treaty": "despite divergencies of opinion, the personal relations between the three men during those forty days have never ceased to be sincere, calm and affectionate. May their fellow countrymen never forget it!" I gladly endorse this testimony to the good feeling, goodwill and—towards the end—the really affectionate relations that existed between the three men who took the leading part in deciding the lines upon which the Versailles Treaty should be framed. When I criticise Wilson it will be with genuine personal regret. It will be attributable to my resolve to write a truthful narrative as to events and persons without reference to my own personal inclinations.

He was a most interesting but not a very difficult study. There were no obscurities or subtleties in his character—at least none that an average student of human nature could not decipher without much difficulty.

All men and women have dual natures. But Wilson was the most clear-cut specimen of duality that I have ever met. The two human beings of which he was constituted never merged or mixed. They were separate and distinct contrasts but nevertheless on quite good terms with each other. It is not that he had feet of clay. He stood quite firmly on his feet unless he was pushed over entirely. But there were lumps of pure unmixed clay here and there amidst the gold in every part of his character. And both were genuine. There was nothing false or sham about him. The gold was sterling and the clay was honest marl, and they were both visible to the naked eye. He was the most extraordinary

Pleasant relations of the "Big Three"

Wilson's dual character

compound I have ever encountered of the noble visionary, the implacable and unscrupulous partisan, the exalted idealist and the man of rather petty personal rancours.

Most men—perhaps all men in a greater or less degree—are an inextricable mixture of good and evil motives and impulses, some noble, some base. Wilson was no exception. He was not only a mixture, but he was badly mixed. There must be sand in all concrete: character depends on the proportions of the sand to the cement and on the way they are mixed together. On the one hand there was his idealism and his undoubted integrity. On the other there were his personal hatreds, his suspiciousness, his intolerance of criticism and his complete lack of generosity towards men who dared to differ from him. The result was that at one moment you seemed to come up against a fine strong character which was a solid pillar upon which you could rest the weight of any cause, however momentous; the next moment you found patches of rather poor stuff in his attitude and actions which destroyed your confidence and your respect. This was the President Wilson we were expecting in London, and with whom we had to discuss the terms of peace on the official assumption that he was speaking the mind of America and that what he said would receive the full endorsement of the great country of which he was the Chief Magistrate.

But Wilson's duality obtruded itself more and more as the Congress proceeded. It was registered in his face, and any practised physiognomist could readily detect the imprint. There was the lofty brow of the idealist, there was the fine eye now shining with righteous passion, now remote and distrustful and hard

with suspicion; one moment faith kindling into a prophetic glow, the next moment flaming from personal dislike into hatred.

There never were greater contrasts so conspicuously displayed in the same person without any effort at concealment. He rose naturally and without effort to great heights. He descended just as easily to the depths. Spiritually he dwelt above the snow line high

above his fellows in an atmosphere pure, glistening and bracing, but cold. Suddenly he was precipitated like an avalanche into the swamps of petty personal or party malignity down below. His was rather an ecclesiastical than a political type of mind. He had high ideals and honestly held them as a faith with a religious fervour. He believed all he preached about human brotherhood and charity towards all men. Nevertheless he was a bigoted sectarian who placed in the category of the damned all those who belonged to a different political creed and excluded them for ever from charitable thought or destiny. His radiant charitableness towards mankind turned to flame when it came into contact with heretics.

He was also vigilantly jealous of all who seemed to dispute or even impinge upon his authority. He would not share or delegate the minutest particle of power.

His face was contorted with an unsightly hatred if you mentioned the names of two or three eminent

Republicans who had criticised him or his policies. I shall always remember with a horrified pang the interview I had with him on the day when the news came

of Theodore Roosevelt's sudden death. The late Mr. Wickersham had forwarded to me in Paris a letter of introduction written by Mr. Roosevelt from his sick

*Hatred of
Theodore
Roosevelt*

bed. It was placed in my hand just after I had received the tragic news of his sudden death. I was naturally shocked, for I had a great admiration and liking for this great dynamic personality. I had been about to leave for a meeting at the President's house, and as soon as I entered Mr. Wilson's room I expressed my sorrow. I was aghast at the outburst of acrid detestation which flowed from Wilson's lips. He was a man of burning animosities—against persons as well as principles—and he took no trouble to conceal either. There was nothing of the hypocrite in his composition. I would not like to suggest that there is less reticence observed in the States on these occasions than in the Old World. There is the story of a famous American politician who, on being asked whether he proposed to attend the funeral of a rival whom he cordially detested, replied: "No, but I thoroughly approve of it!"

Unconsciously Wilson copied Lincoln—his stories, his vivid phrases, his human appeal. In spite of this unconscious imitation there never were

Contrast with Lincoln two men who offered so complete a contrast in intellect and character. Lincoln's wit and humour were the natural flow of a gay and genial temperament and of a keen sense of the merry as well as the ridiculous. Wilson had no humour and his wit was synthetic. Wilson was a man of outstanding ability, highly cultivated and polished; Lincoln was a man of genius. Lincoln had the practical common sense of a son of the soil. He was intensely human and therefore hated war with its abominable cruelty. Above all his heart was tortured with the thought that he had to kill and maim and starve and deny medicaments to tens of thousands of his own fellow-countrymen, and he did his best to avert it. I once read a biography of Lincoln which gave photo-

graphs of this resolute but warm-hearted humanitarian at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the Civil War. By the last act of the tragedy anguish had chiselled deep furrows in his brow and countenance. Gaiety had been chased from the humorous eyes, and deep sadness and grief reigned in their depths. But once war was declared he went all legitimate lengths to achieve victory for what he conceived to be the cause of right. He did not haver and hesitate. He concentrated all his powerful mind on the most effective means and instruments for winning through. Wilson also abhorred the carnage and savagery of war: he also did his utmost to keep out of it: he also was driven by an irresistible current which he could not control to resort to it against his will, and after prolonged efforts to keep out of it. There the comparison ends and the contrast appears. When he finally committed himself to the struggle he did not, like Lincoln, put all his energies and abilities into preparing for battle. He continued to display his aversion to the war he had himself declared by failing to throw his strength of mind and will into its energetic prosecution.

He was genuinely humane, but he completely lacked the human touch of Lincoln. The hand was too frigid. It gave you the impression that Wilson's philanthropy was purely intellectual, whereas Lincoln's came straight from the heart.

There has been a vast amount of discussion as to whether Wilson ought ever to have crossed the Atlantic and to have taken personal part in the deliberations of the Peace Conference. *His attendance at the Peace Conference* Opinion has now definitely settled down on the side of declaring that it was a grave error of judgment. That opinion is by no means confined to Wilson's detractors. I cannot say that I took

that view at the time. I was delighted to have an opportunity of meeting him and of entering into a heart-to-heart discussion with this remarkable man on problems affecting the settlement of the world. I am now convinced that his personal attendance at the Conference was a mistake. It would undoubtedly have been better if he had chosen a mixed team of Democrats and Republicans to represent his views. He would have wielded much greater authority and achieved his own purpose more surely. A cable from the President of the United States intimating that he disapproved of some particular proposition and that, if it were inserted in the Treaty, he could not sign it, would have made it much easier for the French and British representatives to persuade their respective publics to accept modifications. But it was essential that the delegation appointed should not merely be men of capacity and influence, but also persons in whom the President trusted, and unfortunately he was not of a trustful disposition. His pervasive suspiciousness was his most disabling weakness. He believed in mankind but he distrusted all men. Trustful natures encounter many hurtful disappointments in life, but they get more out of it than do the suspicious. Co-operation with their fellow men is to the former a constant joy; to the latter it is a perpetual worry. With ordinary prudence, vigilance and insight the former get the best help from the best helpers; the latter only get an uneasy and grudging service from the second best. The higher types respond to confidence and are chilled by distrust. For that reason Wilson never rallied first-rate minds around him and he did not always succeed in retaining the second-rate. That is why he decided that his personal presence in Europe and at the table of the Congress was inevitable.

But the moment he appeared at our Councils, he was there on equal terms with the rest of us. His training had never qualified him for such a position. Whether as Principal of a College, as Governor of New Jersey, or President of the United States, he was always *primus*, not *inter pares* but amongst subordinates. He was not accustomed to confer with equals. He found it exceedingly difficult to adapt himself to that position. In the capacities he had filled he might have debated but he also decided. But when he came to the Peace Congress his decisions counted no more than those of the Prime Ministers with whom he conferred.

I had also an impression that this was the first occasion upon which he had entered into the rough and tumble of political life. He entered into politics late in life. Before he threw himself into the tumult and savageries of the political arena he had led a secluded and sheltered life as the Head of a College. As such he dwelt in a tranquil environment of implicit obedience from all who surrounded him and all who were subject to his rule. Outspoken criticism of the Principal was a breach of discipline. He was like an autocrat with a censored Press and a platform monopolised by himself and his subordinates. If you lead that kind of life well into middle-age, sensitive nerves are not hardened for the stinging and scorching arrows that burn and fester in the ruthless conflicts of a political career. Despite Wilson's apparent calm and his impassivity of countenance, almost Indian in its rigidity, he was an extremely sensitive man. The pride that prevented him from showing it made it all the more hurtful. There is no knowing what pain he suffered from the rancorous criticisms of his own opponents in America whilst he was engaged on his

*Unused to
political
rough and
tumble*

great task in Europe, or from the spiteful paragraphs and caricatures of the Parisian Press. Clemenceau and I had endured this kind of malignity all our days, so when the French Press attacked Clemenceau as a traitor for surrendering the rights of his own country, and both the French and English Press reviled me, neither of us lost a minute's sleep. There was nothing new in this experience for either of us. I once visited the snake farm at São Paulo, Brazil, where they have a shuddering collection of the most poisonous serpents in the Brazilian jungles. The head of the establishment explained to me how a few years ago these vipers destroyed thousands of horses and cattle every year, and something had to be done to protect the rancheros from their ravages. That was the origin of the snake farm. They were now able to inoculate the stock with a virus prepared out of the poisons extracted from snakes. A few injections in the horses or cattle when they were young made them immune. With the older animals it was rather late in life to begin the process. Old politicians like Clemenceau, and I claim the same for myself, had been from our early youth upwards working and hunting in the most snake-infested jungles that politics can provide. We had been bitten and stung many a time by every kind of poisonous reptile, and having survived so long we were now immune. But Wilson had led a protected life amongst well ordered and academic cloisters. There he had no stings to fear except from the insects which you cannot keep from buzzing in the best garnished edifice. Even against those he was carefully netted around, and therefore he had not been thoroughly inoculated by the experiences which had made the old horses of the political jungle indifferent to attack.

This accounts for his nervous and spiritual break-

down in the middle of the Conference. He was received in Paris on his first appearance with an organised adulation of applause in the streets and approbation in the Press which was intoxicating, and intended to inebriate. Streets were named after him, Senate and Chamber of Deputies gave him an official welcome, a palace was placed at his disposal, the picked regiments of France provided his escort and their best bands played him through the most impressive avenues of the city. Then came a blighting, withering blizzard of criticism and calumny. Wilson's self-confidence wilted and shrivelled under the ceaseless blast.

Many angry controversies have raged around his name in his own country, and they have not yet died down, so that it will be difficult there to secure a fair verdict on either side as to his rank amongst the rulers of America. But no one can doubt that he was a supremely able man. As to his character, outside the partisans who still hold him in detestation, those who met him in Europe, and had every opportunity of weighing and measuring his character, pay him the tribute of unreserved recognition of his sincerity as an idealist.

His last spurt of will-power and energy at the Congress he spent on a futile endeavour first to cajole and then to bully a gifted but hysterical Italian poet out of Fiume. The more clumsily he cooed or the more loftily he preached, the more vehemently did D'Annunzio gesticulate and orate defiance inside Fiume. After his pact with Clemenceau which protected Woodrow Wilson from the calumnious scribblings of the Parisian pen dipped in gall,¹ his interventions on the German Treaty were languid and his protests tepid. Things were not

¹See chapter VIII.

*Criticism
broke him
down*

*A disillusioned
evangelist*

shaping themselves on the lines of his dream. When he sailed for Europe he had a vision of arriving in the Old World as a New Messiah to save it from its predatory transgressions, and directing its feet along the paths of peace, righteousness and fraternity. The diverse races and traditions of America had been hammered partly in the fires of war into one people with one common national patriotism. Wilson thought he might persuade the warring tribes of Europe—no more numerous than those of the States—to weld into one fraternity whilst they were still soft and malleable after issuing from the glowing furnace of the Great War. He had a habit of beginning his admonitions to the statesmen of an old hemisphere whom he believed were steeped in the spirit of rapine: “Friends—for we are all friends here.”

His experiences at the Peace Congress disclosed to him two disconcerting truths. One is a truth which has so often baffled all of us in life: that our greatest difficulties come not so much from deciding whether we should follow the dictates of a clear principle or not, but in choosing the particular principle which is most applicable to the facts, or in ascertaining accurately the particular facts upon which the principle is to be shaped. Thus President Wilson discovered that the chronic troubles of Europe could not be settled by hanging round its neck the phylacteries of abstract justice. He found that abstract principles did not settle frontiers so tangled historically and traditionally that no one could with certainty unravel the title to lands on either side. He found that strict justice required that compensation should be paid for all torts, but that strict insistence on a right which every civilised country recognised caused complications he was not prepared to face. Everywhere he found that decisions based on his conceptions of right

and wrong carried him away from a real settlement, and that practical expediency demanded compromise on every side and on every question. From his desk at the White House it all looked so simple and easy, provided he could persuade the sophisticated diplomats of the Old World to stick to his revised Decalogue. But he found that he could not measure accurately with his rigid yard-stick timber gnarled and twisted by the storms of centuries.

Another truth which came to him as a slap in the face was the discovery that War-ridden Europe was readier than were his own countrymen to enter into an Association of Nations to preserve peace. His bitterest disappointment came not from the greed and obduracy of the sinful Old World, but from the narrow selfishness of his own people bred on a soil not yet soured by ancient memories of wrong and strife. There was one part of the Treaty he claimed—not justly—as the work of his own hands—the Covenant of Peace. He had anticipated opposition and chicanery in Europe to defeat his cherished aim. When he met the men whose evil disposition he had crossed the seas to overcome, he found they were entirely of his mind on the subject of the League. He was almost abashed to discover that they had worked out careful plans to give practical effect to ideas which he had been satisfied to leave in the realm of undefined aspiration. His sycophants flattered him that when he presided over a Committee which adopted those schemes, and when the full assembly endorsed them, it was his art and courage which had triumphed. He knew better. The bloodstained hands of European statesmanship had actually prepared the plan and had helped him to mould and to fashion the idea until it

*Opposed not
by Europe
but by
America*

was perfected, as he thought, according to his own image. And then his own fellow countrymen flung it into the gutter to rot. They would have none of it. That blow from his own kith and kin in whom he believed stunned and paralysed him. A disillusioned prophet is an abject spectacle. All Wilson's appeals had been in vain: the Heavens remained as brass and the false prophets were permitted to strike him down. He never recovered, but his fame will endure. He sacrificed his life for the attainment of a noble purpose. The immolation was none the less genuine that it was unnecessary, and that his aim could have been better achieved had he not taken steps which entailed a fatal breakdown in his powers. More tact and less pride would have enabled him to attain his end. A gentle bow on entering the portals of the Senate would have enabled him to get through. But he remained stiff and erect, and hit his head on the lintel and was for ever stunned and silenced by the blow. It was a double tragedy. The first was his ignominious failure to register a success which was already in his hands. The second was that, in taking the longest and most craggy road to reach a goal which was easily attainable by a shorter and equally honourable avenue, he fretted away the remnant of a strength which was already almost worn out by unnecessary toil. Had he conquered his stubborn pride, had he subordinated his personal antipathies for the sake of a great cause of which he was an outstanding champion, America would have been in the League of Nations and the whole history of the world would have been changed. Has there ever been a greater tragedy in human history?

*Killed by
failure*

The last time I saw him was when I visited America

in 1923. It was shortly before his death. His health was then so precarious that his doctor warned me that the interview must be a short one. Physically he was a wreck. One side was paralysed, but the impairment to his powers of speech was not apparent. He was pleased to see me and his reception was cordial. He alluded with pleasure to his experiences at the Conference. Of Clemenceau he spoke in kindly terms. But when the name of Poincaré was mentioned, all the bitterness of his nature burst into a sentence of concentrated hatred. "He is a cheat and a liar," he exclaimed. He repeated the phrase with fierce emphasis. Poincaré disliked and distrusted him and the detestation was mutual. The name of Coolidge provoked another outburst. When I informed him that I had just left his successor at the White House, he asked me what I thought of him. I replied that I was not quite sure. He replied: "I will tell you what he is like. Oscar Wilde once saw a man who was giving himself great airs at a social function. He went up to him and putting on his eyeglass"—here Wilson took his glasses in his right hand and fixed them at his eye—"he said to him: 'Are you supposed to be anyone in particular?' Coolidge is no one in particular." Here was the old Wilson with his personal hatreds unquenched right to the end of his journey.

We shunned all reference to the League of Nations. The doctor signalled to me that the interview should be terminated. That is the last I saw of this extraordinary mixture of real greatness thwarted by much littleness.

Was he hero, saint or martyr? There was something of each in the struggles of the last years of his life and in the circumstances of his death, though not enough to warrant the claim made on his behalf to

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any of these noble appellations. But that he honestly consecrated an upright character and a fine intellect to the service of mankind, no one will deny who is not afflicted with a party spirit so charged with rancour as to have become an insanity of the soul.

There was no man who played as active, continuous and useful a part in President Wilson's dealings with Europe as Colonel House. He was the *An implacable Democrat* Claudius of this pacific American Caesar. He was one of the most subtle and successful political managers of his day. His manœuvres were largely responsible for Wilson's ascent to the Presidential throne. A Democrat from the southernmost of the Southern States, he was drenched with all the Party fanaticism of that fierce breed. His natural suavity of demeanour and softness of speech concealed his real antipathy towards Republicans of all sorts and kinds. It was uncompromising and inexorable. I attributed Wilson's greatest blunder—the failure to take one or two of the more moderate and sympathetic Republican leaders with him to Paris—partly to House's encouragement of Wilson's instinctive dislike of all Republicans, if not to the actual counsel which he gave him to have nothing to do with any of them. But he was not only an intense Democrat; he was above all a devoted and devout Wilson democrat. Wilson was his idol, but his in the sense that it was House who had picked him out, shaped him as a politician, built the altar for him and placed him there above it to be worshipped. As a party leader Wilson was not the creator of House, but his creation. All the same there could be no doubt of House's genuine admiration and worship for what was the work of his own hands. He recognised that he had

chosen first-class timber. Judging from his Memoirs, he was under the impression that he not only chiselled and shaped the idol but also pulled the hidden strings that moved it. And he was ecstatically proud of it.

House was about the only man that Wilson really trusted amongst his associates and counsellors. He gave him that abnormal measure of confidence because House very adroitly gave Wilson the impression that the advice he gave was not his own but Wilson's idea.

His tact in handling President Wilson

The President was exceptionally distrustful and full of lurking misgivings about men in general. He demanded the most exacting proofs of faith and attachment from all his subordinates. He was not satisfied with mere party loyalty. The incense offered must have a distinct aroma of personal adoration. House accorded it in full—not to say, fulsome—measure. Page, the well-beloved American Ambassador in London, was not a true worshipper; he was just a good Democrat at home and a faithful servant of his country in a foreign court—and no more. Hence his despatches on the course of events in England during the War were suspect and carried no weight in the White House. Secretary Lansing was a mere cypher—an amiable lawyer of good standing and of respectable abilities but of no particular distinction or definite personality. He just did what he was told, and was never told to do very much. He was not of the true faith; his "Memoirs" show that he had not assimilated into his system the Decree of Infallibility. But House had. So in foreign policy he became the trusted—and the only trusted—instrument and exponent of the President's ideas across the Atlantic. He visited Berlin, Paris and London during the War, saw every statesman who counted on either side and reported every

interview that he had to the great chief. When the Supreme Council met in Paris to discuss the terms of the Armistice and afterwards the arrangements for the Peace Conference, House, with no official status, was the acknowledged spokesman of the American Republic. I think there were other Americans present, but I have forgotten their names, for they did not matter and took no part in the discussions. The voice of House was the voice of Wilson. He cabled to the White House every day messages setting forth how he had stood up to the unregenerate Europeans for Wilson's high ideals. He told the President how all the Allied statesmen dreaded his appearance in person at the table of the Peace Congress, and were pleading that he should not come.

When the President arrived in Paris, I saw less and gradually less of House. I thought it better to deal with Wilson direct. In spite of all that has been disseminated and believed to the contrary, I was more in sympathy with the President's ideas as to the main objectives

Clemenceau's use of House we ought to strive for in the peace settlement, and particularly as to the things we ought to avoid, than I was with Clemenceau's one aim of keeping Germany down feeble and fettered. Wilson soon came to understand my attitude and therefore he realised that no intermediary was required between him and me. On the other hand, the astute French Premier saw the value of getting at House and using his influence over Wilson to mollify and mould the too idealistic President into the right frame of mind on the French policy. House and Clemenceau saw a great deal of each other behind the scenes. Whenever there were difficulties Clemenceau got at House. It was House who negotiated the nefarious arrangement by which the French Press were to be induced to withdraw their disreput-

able campaign of slander and spite against the President in return for an assurance that Wilson would modify his objections to the French demands on their eastern frontiers. It was a fateful and in some respects a fatal pact which did no credit to either party. Wilson crossed the watershed and henceforth the stream of American influence flowed downwards on the wrong side of the Mount of Beatitudes.

There is no man whose real character has always eluded one more than that of Colonel House. This genial, kindly, unpretentious, insignificant looking little man baffled analysis. That he was intelligent, tactful, understanding and sympathetic, all who knew him will recognise and gladly recognise. But how deep did his intelligence, comprehension, and sympathies go? He saw more clearly than most men—or even women—to the bottom of the shallow waters which are to be found here and there in the greatest of oceans and of men. But could he penetrate the depths of human nature or of human events? I have come to the conclusion that he emphatically could not. Intellectually he was nowhere near the same plane as Wilson. But he was sane, even-tempered, adroit and wise in all things appertaining to the management of men and affairs. He had a well-balanced, but not a powerful mind. He got his ideas from his chief and he accepted them loyally and manipulated them skilfully. But he gave one the impression that had he served a different type of leader with a completely different set of ideas he would have adopted his theories with the same zeal and put them across with the same deftness. He was essentially a salesman and not a producer. He would have been an excellent Ambassador but a poor Foreign Minister. In the sphere of law with which I am

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limitations
of his
character*

acquainted he would have been an accomplished family lawyer—prudent, courteous, courtly and thoroughly loyal to his client. In every transaction I had with him he was frank and straightforward. His methods were not without guile but there was no deception. When I recognise that he was honourable in all his dealings, it is not inconsistent with this characteristic to say that he possessed craft. It is perhaps to his credit that he was not nearly as cunning as he thought he was.

House was generally liked by all those who transacted any business with him and it is a testimony to his sterling quality that those who took to him at the beginning continued to like him. It is a tragedy that the only exception to that experience was President Wilson himself, whom House had helped to high office and who

*His quarrel
with
Wilson*

incidentally gave to House his one avenue to celebrity. They quarrelled at the end of Wilson's day when the shadows were falling on his brilliant career. A long and continuous friendship is a great strain, and with men and women of strong personality it hardly ever survives the wear and tear of incessant contact over a prolonged period in trying times. My impression of the break between these two men, each remarkable in his way, is that Wilson was primarily at fault. I was present on the occasion which caused the coolness. Wilson was at the time involved in a bitter dispute with the Italians over Fiume. He threw himself into the contention between Italy and Jugoslavia with an intensity which I had never seen him display over any other difference of opinion in the framing of the Treaty. It was distracting his thoughts from infinitely more important issues and it was fretting his own nerve. House realised this with the eye of a devoted and tender friend and was anxious to find

some solution that would get the troublesome little matter out of the way. He talked to Clemenceau and to me on the subject and we found ourselves in complete sympathy with his desires. One day an informal meeting was summoned at the American headquarters at the Hotel Crillon to talk over one or two questions which needed straightening out. House invited M. Clemenceau and myself to come to his room half an hour before the Conference to talk over the Fiume imbroglio, in order to see whether we could find some way out that would on the whole satisfy all the contending parties. We had not been in the room very long before the door opened and Wilson appeared with a rigid and displeased countenance and an unfriendly eye. I have always thought someone must have communicated to him the fact that House had the two Premiers closeted with him in secret conference at his room in the Crillon. House had his rivals in the American camp who were not too pleased with the position accorded to him. As soon as Wilson entered the room, he said in a quiet but somewhat stern voice: "Hello, what is this about?" He was clearly upset, and as we discovered afterwards irreconcilably angry—not with the two foreign Premiers but with House for not informing him. He felt he ought to have been present when a question was being discussed in which he had so supreme an interest. It was undoubtedly an indiscretion on House's part but it was done entirely in order to save Wilson from an annoying problem which was undermining his strength.

House was never forgiven. I saw little of him after this unpleasant interview. He was not charged with any more errands from Wilson. The President was intensely jealous of his personal authority. He had at least one divine attribute: he was a jealous god; and in disregarding what was due to him House forgot that aspect of his

idol and thus committed the unforgivable sin. The snapping of the golden thread of a tried and affectionate friendship over a trivial misunderstanding easily explained was one of the premonitory symptoms of the fatal disease which soon after laid the President low.

When Wilson was stricken down and became a helpless paralytic, he refused to see Colonel House—once his most intimate friend—at his bedside. Although he lingered on for years and saw many of his old friends, Clemenceau and myself amongst them, House he would not receive. It would have been better for House's reputation had he left matters there, when sympathy would have been entirely with him. Instead of doing so he dealt a foul blow at a stricken man by publishing without Wilson's consent confidential letters which had passed between them. There was an obvious intent to "show Wilson up." It was always a suggestion of the feline about Colonel House's movements. But he was always such a friendly cat. He relates with a reminiscent purr how delighted he was when Clemenceau stroked him on the back and muttered pleasant things to him. That old savage could occasionally cajole and caress when he was bent on persuasion. And to win over House was one way of taming Wilson. House became as much Clemenceau's man as he had been and was still Wilson's. But the friendliest of cats have their claws. Even Wilson's enemies—and he had a multitude—were shocked at the treachery of the scratch and the moment chosen for the deed. Whilst they did not hesitate to make political capital out of the revelations they felt that this betrayal of intimate communications shook the temple of friendship to its foundations. House's chagrin had overcome his sense of honour.

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