

# WOODROW WILSON MAN OF THE HOUR

Intimate View of New Jersey's Scholarly Governor and the Progressive Principles of Representative Government for Which He Stands.

By C. E. S. Wood.

Woodrow Wilson is clean shaven mentally as well as factually. He is a pleasure to hear him talk, because of his clear language. He uses words as the skilled mechanic uses his tools and illustrates the very opposite of Tully's cynical witticism that language was given to conceal thought. There is no excuse for either the illiterate man or the scholar not knowing precisely what Governor Wilson's thoughts are after he has listened to the words which, sentence by sentence, drop out of the simplest style, so simple as to be classical.

He was a refreshing contrast to the usual political orator. Instead of glittering generalities there were specific concrete statements. Instead of a cloud of fine sounding phrases, appealing to patriotism, loyalty, and the emotions there was close, logical reasoning upon the actual facts as we all know them actually to exist. He said and did no use for these, but only for facts, and that he never attempted to be logical. His manner is quiet, but impressive, with absolute sincerity. You feel his earnestness in five minutes after he has begun speaking. He is neither cold nor magnetic, but he has the charm of a distinct personality, of perpetual humor and of an inborn love for and belief in the common man. He recognizes "The Brotherhood of Man," as it is so often phrased, an instinct which is inborn and which can never be acquired. Governor Wilson claims it does exist to some degree in everyone, that it is part of the germ of life and the condition of living and that there is no one so apparently cold, selfish and heartless but that somewhere in his makeup exists this love of humanity, gleaming like a spring in a dark grove.

Woodrow Wilson's belief is that these selfish men, grasping and apparently cruel men, only need to have their point of view corrected, and under different conditions they too will give thirsty humanity drink from this hidden spring.

**A Veritable "Highbrow."**  
Governor Wilson is of medium height, spare rather than stout, has the long face of the sensitive nature and intellectual man, to which length of face a slight brow and a high forehead are added. He is one of our veritable "highbrows." He has been a member of the faculties of four different universities, president of Princeton, professor of political science and government; has written a political history of the United States, and in the history and theory of government is certainly the best equipped man in public life in the United States today.

The question was: "Being a statesman in theory could he be a practical politician?" New Jersey has furnished a complete answer. He has been politician enough to pick the professional politicians up in his hand with such degrees of gentleness or severity as suited the occasion. It is quite thoroughly understood that the governor of New Jersey wears Woodrow Wilson's hat. His own view of it is that it is a simple matter, public opinion, after all, governs if it can only be brought to bear. The great masses of the common people will have their own way if you only show them how; and, as he says, all that he did was to find out all he could find out of the secret workings of the machine and then tell the people all that he knew. He had no secrets from them, but took them fully into his confidence, and public opinion did the rest. He added that the praise bestowed on him for being simply an honest man who for his word, was almost pathetic, for it showed how often and how much the people have been betrayed and how little they expect from men they have elected to office as their trustees and servants.

**A Stone Wall for the Right.**  
He determined hawklike nose and firm and slightly protruding bulldog lower jaw were not shared by his Scotch-Irish ancestry for nothing. We can well imagine that his New Jersey adversaries found him, and that his future antagonists will find him, a stone wall for the right; and fortunately his conception of the right is the simple conception that the blessings of the land, the blessings of liberty and the privileges of government, are for all the people and not for any select or privileged class who constitute themselves the governors of the people. Yet Governor Wilson quite correctly gives these governing bosses credit as a body for an entire sincerity of belief that they are the proper ones to govern the people and that they can govern the people better than the people can govern themselves. As he has expressed it, the Hamiltonian theory of government has expanded far beyond the ideas of Hamilton, and the conception today is that those having the largest property interests have the most at stake; they come nearest to being the owners of the corporation, and therefore they have the right to govern, forgetful of the fact that human life, human happiness and human liberty and the rights of the common man are infinitely more important than property, and that the masses of men constitute the majority stockholders in the corporation and the great property holders only the minority.

Though Governor Wilson takes what may be called, in a general way and not referring to the Socialist party, the socialistic view that equality exists for the good of all, for equal opportunity to all and laws which protect the people that all could not take part in government; that there must be some delegation, that it was desirable to have leadership, that the essential thing was to prepare the machinery so that men of great ability would be that life held no greater opportunity and offered no greater reward than public service, for the public welfare. In this connection, his approval of the initiative and referendum, the direct primary, and what is known as the Oregon system, was unreserved and without equivocation. But he pointed out that these were only corrective steps, breaking down the barrier between the people and the law making power vested in legislatures, of our incomplete system of government.

The initiative and referendum give the people the power to the referendum, if necessary, their legislatures enact their own laws for themselves. So with the direct primary, it is a lash held upon the back of the old-time convention, which met merely to ratify a slate prepared in secret. But he assumed (and speaking for myself and those who have been somewhat instrumental in bringing about the Oregon system, he rightly assumes) that these measures were only the means to an end, intermediate steps, and that it could not be contemplated and is not contemplated that the initiative and referendum shall take the place of a truly representative legislative body and that the whole people of Oregon shall become the lawmakers in detail for all of the laws of Oregon.

**A Constitutional Iconoclast.**  
Governor Wilson arrived in Portland Thursday morning and left Friday night. Thursday evening he spoke at a banquet given him by the Commercial club, and after that he spent the night at the address of the newspaper men at the Press club. The next day he spoke at a luncheon at the Y. M. C. A. to what



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may be called an assembly of the old guard of insurgents in Oregon, a body in which all classes, all professions and all parties were represented. That evening he spoke at the University club at a dinner given in his honor, and at 8 o'clock he addressed the people at the armory, which was packed to the doors with one of the largest audiences ever gathered in Portland. Governor Wilson remarked himself that he was speaking oftener than he was constitutionally for a governor to do. He evidently has, as all thoughtful men have, a good natured contempt for this idolatry of paper constitutions, those shackles put upon the living by the dead, and made difficult to alter, as if the wisdom of government would die with the makers and the living generations would not be competent to judge for themselves.

Though he did not say so and I have no right to say so for him, I guess that like all thoughtful men he believes written constitutions are unnecessary to a people whose machinery of government is truly sufficient and properly adapted, which ours as yet is not. The fundamentals of constitutional rights and liberty are not written on parchments, but, by blood and turmoil and rebellion, in the history of the people and in the traditions carried in their hearts, and most of all in the instincts for self-preservation. If a government be truly representative of all the people there is no need for written constitutions. The people will take care of themselves. Every syllable of any real value in the United States constitution is drawn from the unwritten constitution of England, achieved in the struggle of her people for liberty.

**England's Constitution Unwritten.**  
England never had a written constitution. It is true she has certain historic acts on parchment—the magna charta, habeas corpus, the bill of rights—but these are not a straw which can be interposed between an act of parliament and its perfect execution. No court in England can set aside an act of parliament upon the claim that the constitution of England is higher than parliament. The fact is, nothing is higher than parliament. Parliament is higher than the constitution. Parliament makes the constitution, because parliament is truly representative of the people, to a degree at least, and the constitution, therefore, slowly follows and is moulded to fit the changing thought and changing life of the English people. No secret legislation is possible, and upon all questions of moment a direct referendum to the people is forced in the shape of a new parliament. In Canada, as in England, there is no written constitution. No court can set aside a law of the colonial parliament. Secret legislation is impossible, and the majority in parliament keeps its eye on the way the popular wind is blowing, for their continuance in charge of the government depends upon the popular wind, and if ever any important measure proposed by the government is voted down in parliament, a direct referendum to the people has to be taken.

I suspect that Governor Wilson has the flexibility and the historic sufficiency of the British form of government somewhat in mind in his criticism of our state government. New Jersey, as well as Oregon, and Oregon as well as others. For example, one thought which in some form or another appeared in each of his addresses relating to government, was that the leader selected by the people for instance, the governor of a state, ought to have the power to originate laws on behalf of the people, present these laws before the legislature and elaborate arguments in their favor. He claimed that under the constitution of New Jersey he had a right to present these bills, and was doing it; and that he would not hesitate to suggest a law in general terms, and actually to prepare the law and submit it to the legislature; but at this point, under the present constitution his power would end. The measure would be buried in a committee and he could not help himself, except by some indirect political expedient.

**Wilson's Theory of Leadership.**  
His opponent in the New Jersey campaign, as I understand the matter, claimed that this was unconstitutional, and that if he were elected he would

be a good law abiding figurehead of a government; whereas Governor Wilson said: "I have personal knowledge that many of the most important laws presented to the New Jersey legislature originated in the offices of corporation lawyers. They are then presented to favorable committees and the psychological moment is watched to put them through with the greatest secrecy and the least publicity." "Now," said he, "if a corporation lawyer can prepare a law of course a governor can prepare one as an individual, but I claim that he should be empowered to prepare the law as governor of the people, representing the people, and should have power to present his reasons for the law, to watch it in its passage, to drag it out from committees if it is buried. I can do this now after a fashion," continued he, "by preparing a law, giving my reasons to the public; and if it is buried in committee, set the constituents of the chairman of that committee on his trail and make it uncomfortable for him if he leaves the law embalmed in his committee. But this is not an orderly and regular way to proceed. This is not a part of the organic machinery of government as it is used to the legislature because the legislature has no opportunity of answering the governor back, and the governor may be wrong and the legislature right. The only way to ascertain any wrong place any right is by debate, by looking at the question from all sides, and this debate, to be of value to the people, must be public, and the debate, to be of value to the lawmakers themselves, and a restraint and a correction upon improper conduct, must be public. The great tonic to the great corrector for corruption and betrayal and selfishness, is publicity."

I am of course not giving Governor Wilson's express words, which were chosen with perfect fitness for his meaning, but the above is the sense of a thought which, as I say, evidently seemed to him so important that it is the one thought he brought forth again and again. Now how can the governor, or the people's executive, have a chance to originate bills and present them to the legislature, and present his side in debate, and drag them from their burial place in a committee unless the governor, ex-officio, has the right to go to the floor of the legislative halls to present the bill, make the argument for it, and to keep it alive and bring it to a decision? On the other hand, how can the legislature be assured of fair play unless this debate takes place in its own halls, where each and every member of the legislature as a representative of the people has the right to present his views? And how can all this thrashing over of the matter in debate be made wholly public for the interest and instruction of the people, except by public debate in the legislative chambers.

Therefore I infer that Governor Wilson believes, as all thoughtful men do, that the rigid denial to the executive, in our federal constitution and in the state constitutions imitated from it, of any part in originating legislation, watching over its passage and taking part in the debates upon it, is a great mistake. It came about through the excessive hatred of monarchy at the time of the revolution when our president or executive was likened to the kind, and it was feared the presidency might even become a kingship in the hands of some ambitious tyrant. The framers of the constitution were forgetful of the fact that even the king of England, by his cabinet or ministry, has access to the halls of law making. I wish to take this occasion once more to publicly announce my hearty agreement with what I assume to be Governor Wilson's meaning, that we will never get the true corrective for exploiting laws and selfish interest laws—we will never get the true education of the people in government as a vital concern in which they are partners—and we will never get that constant interest and attention of the people which means evolution and progress, until we get these two things: First, a short ballot, in which the people select only the very fewest and most important of their executive agents, leaving to these administrators the duty and the responsibility of selecting all others, the

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duty and responsibility being undivided and plain, and the responsibility for failure clear and distinct; and, second, that the chief executive, at least, shall have the right to originate laws in the full blaze of the public forum, through the matter out with the people's other representatives in legislative assemblies. In the many speeches made by Governor Wilson while with us, it was delightful to note that, with a certain spontaneity, he found from each gathering occasion to present some new thought pertinent to the time. Of course, what he said were old thoughts to him, and had been polished and repolished by years of friction in his trained mind; but I mean he did not repeat himself so far as his audiences were concerned, but threw out to each an appropriate thought, well worthy of their digestion. His own recurrent thought might be condensed into this statement: "I thoroughly approve of your Oregon system, but if you think you have come to the end, you are mistaken. Man never stands still, either individually or as a nation. You have only got into a preliminary position, and your next step, which I will not attempt to dictate or suggest, must be to devise some organic institution or institutions which more or less automatically will produce purity of administration and legislation, and this can only be done by making it automatically inevitable that the people's executive shall not be a figurehead in the matter of proposing and watching over the people's legislation, and that proposed legislation shall be assured of the fullest publicity by debate and discussion and that it cannot be buried in a committee. Your initiative and referendum must be a means to this end, for it cannot be supposed that you intend to make of the entire state a legislative assembly, of throwing the legislative power open to every person who, for means best known to himself, can procure the necessary petition. You will always keep the power of the initiative and referendum in your hands, now that you have got it, is a matter of course; but you will keep it as a

protection and last resort, and will not so often use it after you have once constructed a machine which will do your bidding efficiently."

I would say in conclusion that Governor Wilson has three characteristics which mark him as the man of the hour, to use an entirely original phrase. He is a man of great original brain power, which is more important than all his learning, of innate sympathy for the common man and the great mass of the people, and with a sense of humor which bubbles like a perennial spring and makes green grass and refreshing herbage grow along its course. His brain power gives him a grasp of the political situation and economic conditions such as, in my opinion, few men have, and enables him to perceive where lies the justice of each conflict. His human sympathy and knowledge of economics give him a thorough understanding of the injustice of modern conditions and a bravery to battle for the rights of the common man, such as I am convinced would be, to say the least, the equal of Colonel Bryan's or Colonel Roosevelt's, and which is calmer than either's—more like a nature force; and his sense of humor, with his human sympathy, makes him likable and attracts people to him; and the whole combination secures their confidence.

In my opinion, it has been a positive education to have had this visit from Governor Wilson. He said he had received much benefit and instruction from us. It is my hope and belief that the people of Oregon have received much aid and instruction from him in the problems with which we are now wrestling in state and municipal government, and in my opinion, it makes very little difference to Governor Wilson whether he becomes president of the United States or not. He treats that subject in a dignified way, saying that the office is too exalted for high a trust for any man to refuse, but whether he ever be president of the United States or not, we may be thankful he has stepped out of the cloister of the university and has taken for his larger class the people of the

United States, who, he himself says, follow honest leadership toward better conditions.

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