SECOND MAIN NEWS SECTION TWO

Oregon Sunday Journal

SIX PAGES EDITORIAL, SPORTS

PORTLAND, OREGON, SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 1, 1922.

The PEACE ¶ Written from the Personal & Unpublished Papers of Woodrow Wilson

By RAY STANNARD BAKER

The Sunday Journal herewith presents the introductory chapter of Ray Stannard Baker's story "The Peace," which is an authoritative narrative of how the peace of Paris was concluded. Woodrow Wilson gave Mr. Baker access to all of his personal and unpublished papers, which are the only reliable and incontrovertible records of the facts which heretofore have never been made public. This special feature will be published in The Journal serially throughout the year.

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PRESIDENT WILSON kept on his desk at Paris, during the peace conference, a large steel document box with a spring lock. I have seen him at the close of the day, after the session of the Council of Four, methodically put into this box all the papers and memoranda which had come to him in the course of the day's proceedings. From time to time, as the box filled up and the documents were no longer required, they were removed to larger boxes and trunks, one of them beautifully made by the ship's carpenter of the George Washington. All of these were brought home with him to the White House.

Ray Stannard Baker.

In the winter of 1920-1921 great pressure was brought to bear upon the president to give his own account of what happened at Paris. He had been under long and bitter attack, and his friends, confident that the best response to these criticisms was a true and complete account of the conference, urged him both by letter and by word of mouth to present the history of the events, using actual records and documents.

A MAN OF SILENCE

But the president, who had been desperately ill, was weighed down with the burdens of his closing administration. Moreover, no man who ever sat in the White House was so little self-explanatory as Mr. Wilson. He rarely defended himself when attacked, nor gave his friends the ammunition for such a defense. His end of a personal controversy was silence—to some of his enemies, an infuriating silence. He seemed incapable of presenting or dramatizing his own actions. A student of his voluminous speeches and writings will find few pages devoted to telling what he did, how he did it, or why. He has been a great actor upon the world's stage, the chief figure in supreme events; but he does not readily visualize either events or personalities; his characteristic and instinctive interest is in ideas. He can tell what he thinks and hopes and believes—no living man can do it better—but he has no genius for telling what he did.

In December, 1920, he wrote to me as follows:

"It is clear to me that it will not be possible for me to write anything such as you suggest, but I believe that you could do it admirably. * * * I have a trunk full of papers, and the next time you are down here I would like to have you go through them and see what they are and what the best use is that can be made of them. I plunked them into the trunk in Paris and have not had the time or physical energy even to sort or arrange them. I am looking forward with great satisfaction to the work you are proposing to do."

In January, 1921, I began working upon these documents at the White House. They were in two trunks and three steel boxes and for the most part had not been touched since the president put them aside in Paris. They can be grouped in three categories:

First: The complete minutes from April 19 to June 24, 1919, of the Council of Four (which consisted of the president of the United States, Mr. Lloyd George, the prime minister of Great Britain; M. Clemenceau, president of the Council of France, and Signor Orlando, premier of Italy.)

VOLUMINOUS RECORDS

A widespread belief has existed that no records were kept of the crucially important meetings of the Four. It is true that the first two or three weeks of these conferences, from about March 24 to April 19, were entirely informal; and, while no official minutes were made of the actual conversations, this period is excellently documented with memoranda, letters, reports and copies of resolutions; and there exist informal records, such as my own, of daily conversations with the president, which fill the gap. After April 19, however, and until the close of the conference, a remarkably complete and methodical record of the entire proceedings was kept. In one or two instances exact stenographic reports of the conversations are in existence; but for the most part the record was made in English by Sir Maurice Hankey of the British foreign office, who was the secretary of the Four. He was sometimes the only man present with the Four or the Three; but usually Mantoux, the French interpreter, was there and when Orlando attended he also had his secretary, Count Aldrovandi, with him, for Orlando was the only one of the Four who spoke no English. While Hankey's minutes are not verbatim, but are written in the English style of indirect narrative, reporting speeches and discussions in the third person, they reach, with the appendices, the rather tremendous bulk of some 1800 typewritten pages, legal size, probably not far short of three-quarters of a million words, and give a remarkably faithful, and often vivid, account of the discussions from day to day. Hankey was one of those incredibly able and efficient men of the super-secretarial type, who came into prominence at the peace conference. Mantaux was another, of whom I hope to speak again.

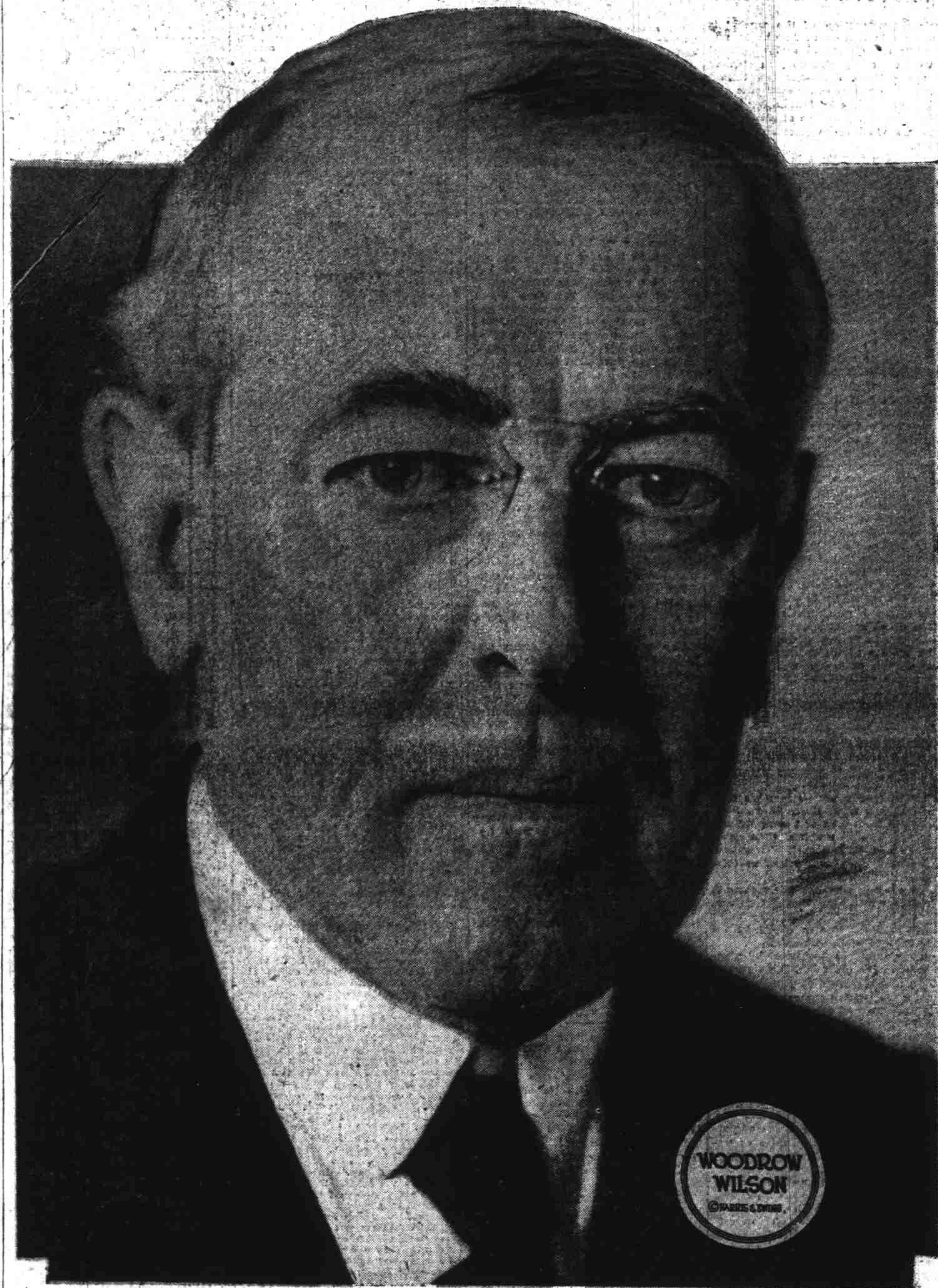
This record of the Council of Four, together with the minutes of the Council of Ten (consisting of the five chief representatives of the great powers—America, France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan—each accompanied by his foreign minister) from January 12, 1919, to June 17 (although the Ten, after March 15, met infrequently), and the so-called Council of Foreign Ministers, the "Little Five" (Secretary Lansing for America, Mr. Balfour for Great Britain, M. Pichon for France, Baron Sonnino for Italy and Baron Makino, though he was not a foreign minister, for Japan), from March 27 to June 12, to which I have also had access—these latter records also comprising, with their appendices, over 1200 typewritten pages, some half-million words—make up the complete and only official record of the peace conference, none of which has yet been published.

Second: The second category includes a large number of reports and memoranda made by the members of the American delegation for the president, also British and French reports that came into his hands in the course of the discussions, together with many of the records and minutes of the subsidiary commissions, such as the supreme economic council, and the various expert and investigatory committees. These documents contain much valuable historical material, revealing the attitude of the various nations represented at Paris at each point in the discussions, and the exact opinions of the delegates and experts.

MARGINAL MEMORANDA

In this category, also, I should place the president's own invaluable memoranda, often on the margins of documents, sometimes upon separate sheets written upon his typewriter or in his own stenographic hieroglyphics—which he has, in some cases, interpreted for the writer. Especially valuable and interesting are the notations in the president's hand showing the development of the League of Nations covenant and the extraordinary number of changes made in certain of the articles. Here also are the original drafts of the covenants made by the president, Colonel House, Lord Robert Cecil, Baron Phillimore, General Smuts, M. Bourgeois, the Italian and Swiss schemes, and others. All this material came naturally into the hands of Mr. Wilson. There is nowhere probably a more complete or explanatory record of every step in the development of the league covenant than this.

Third: The third category, in many ways the most interesting of any, contains the varied correspondence, petitions, resolutions, letters, which came personally to the president for help in a hundred causes—how the stricked people of the nations turned with hope and faith to America, how bitter the suffering was, and how vital the need. I found the examination of this material a breathless and exciting experience, like going through a treasure chest not filled with gold, but with the very souls of mankind. Here, for example, is a bulky petition from 17,000 Jugo-Slavs in the Fiume district beautifully bound in embroidered silk with an eloquent statement of how the names had been collected, partly by girls and women, sometimes with great risk to themselves. Here are pathetic appeals from starving Armenians, discontented Persians, suffering Albanians, ambitious Ukranians, all eager to get the ear and the friendly help of America; here are communications in the strangest variety and from every sort of people; autograph letters from most of the heads of European nations—for example, one from the king of



Spain written in English and enclosing a letter in German from "my cousin Charles, the late emperor of Austria," here letters from Lloyd George, memoranda from Clemenceau and Orlando, appeals from leaders and publicists of America, Great Britain, France and other countries, suggestions from experts not connected with the conference, warnings from radical leaders; an extraordinary exhibit of the thought of the world.

NO CLOISTERED SECLUSION

Those who have a picture of the president immured in a kind of cloister at Paris and cut off from knowledge of what the world was thinking about, have, of course, no knowledge of these sources of information and advice. It was the commonest experience at Paris to find eager delegations who had come hundreds of miles, often with difficulty and danger, trying to get to the president to give him information he already possessed. It would have been better, upon the human side, if the president could have seen face to face all these people—he did see an extraordinary variety of them—for they would have gone away feeling that they had had a real part in shaping the fate of the world; but this was not only physically impossible, but it was not the way the president worked. His training in all his previous life, it should not be forgotten, had been that of the scholar, the student, not the politician, accustomed to getting his information not from people but out of books, documents, letters—the written word. Having thus the essence of the matter, he probably underestimated the value of these human contacts. And too often it was not real information these delegations had to offer, but arguments, propaganda, irrelevant appeals for sympathy.

EVERYONE A DIARIST

In the preparation of this history the writer has also had the great advantage of many conversations, both at Paris and since, with various members of the commissions, both American and foreign, and has been able thus to supplement his own knowledge of specific events. He has also had the good fortune to see the personal records made by some of the men who were there. I suppose there never was a conference in which every human being present was so struck with a kind of historic awe. Almost everyone, except the president, kept a diary, of which the president was undoubtedly the central object, the chief interest. Some of them wrote surreptitiously, some boldly and without shame. Secretary Lansing was an indefatigable diarist. I remember seeing him many times sitting alone in his big empty office, writing in a small, neat book, in a small, neat, formal hand. When one came in to talk with him he would lay down his pen, reach for a pad of paper and during the conversation draw ope after another pencil sketches of strange, grotesque and sinister faces. He worked equally well with his right or left hand. In the course of the months at Paris, for he occupied his time in the conferences in the same way, he must have drawn thousands of such pictures.

Colonel House dictated his record to his secretary, sitting on a long couch with a gay-colored blanket thrown over his legs. He spoke in a smooth, even voice, bringing his hands together softly from time to time, sometimes just touching the finger tips, sometimes the whole palms. General Bliss wrote regularly and voluminously in longhand and like the outright and truthful old soldier he is, made no bones about it. It was with him a method of clarifying his own thoughts rather than of setting down an account of events. I shall like his memoirs best of all, I think, when he comes to publish them. As for the others who kept records in that vast Crillion establishment they were as the sands of the sea, and the sounds of their pens (one fancied he could identify it finally in the watches of the night) was like the washing of waves on the beach.

So much for the documentary and other material. The importance of the subject to be treated must excuse reference also to the writer's own sources of knowledge at Paris.

I spent nearly all of the year 1918 as a special commissioner of the state department, visiting England, France and Italy, and making a series of reports upon certain economic and political conditions in the allied countries.

These reports went primarily to the state department and also to Colonel House, who was at the head of the president's commission of inquiry, and some were transmitted direct to the president himself. In the course of this year of tremendous events I met many of the important leaders in the allied countries and endeavored especially to see and understand the powerful undercurrents; the labor and liberal movements, at work in all these countries. I had also a close view of the war itself on the French and Belgian fronts, and in Italy. I saw the stupendous efforts of our own army, and, at first hand, the devastation wrought by the Germans. This experience I found invaluable in giving me a clear understanding of the backgrounds of the peace conference; the real foundations of military force and economic need upon which it rested, and the atmosphere of suffering, dread, hatred, newly aroused ambitions, in which at Paris the discussions took place. Too many of the critics in America of the conference have been without an understanding of these underlying and precedent conditions.

BAKER APPOINTED

In December, 1918, several weeks before the peace conference opened, President Wilson appointed the writer to direct the press arrangements of the American commission — in the following letter to Colonel House, wherein he also outlined the general method of publicity to be employed.

> My dear House:
>
> I have been thinking a great deal lately about the contact of the commission with the public through the press and particularly about the way in which the commission should deal with the newspaper men who have come over from the United States. I have come to the conclusion that much the best way to handle the matter is for you and the other commissioners to hold a brief meeting each day and invite the representatives of the press to come in at each meeting for such interchange of information or suggestion as may be thought necessary. This I am sure is preferable to any formal plan or to any less definite arrangement.
>
> I am convinced also that the preparation of all the press matter that is to be issued from the commission is a task calling for a particular sort of experienced ability. I beg, therefore, that you and your fellow commissioners will agree to the appointment of Mr. Ray Stannard Baker as your representative in the performance of this duty. Mr. Baker enjoys my confidence in a very high degree and I have no hesitation in commending him to you as a man of ability, vision and ideals. He has been over here for the better part of a year, has established relationships which will be of the highest value, and is particularly esteemed by the very class of persons to whom it will be most advantageous to us to be properly interpreted in the news that we have to issue. If you see no conclusive objection to this, I would suggest that you request Mr. Baker to do us the very great service of acting in this capacity.
>
> I am writing in the same terms to the other members of the commission.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> WOODROW WILSON.

PRESS BUREAU ORGANIZED

So it became my task to organize the press bureau of the American commission and offices were opened at No. 4 Place de la Concorde, near the Hotel Crillon. Through this office passed all the official news of the conference, and it became, moreover, a center at which gathered the representatives of all the delegations and commissions from all countries that came to Paris; everyone who was seeking the support of American influence and American opinion, and who was not? We also saw all the various delegations from America; the Irish, the Jews, the labor leaders, the women's organizations, the negroes. It was one of the busiest offices of the commission.

The writer's duties brought him into contact with the American commissioners every morning before the daily session with the correspondents, and during all the later months of the conference he saw the president each afternoon following the close of the session of the council of four (sometimes oftener), went over fully the happenings of the day, determined upon exactly what should be made public, and afterward met the American correspondents. He crossed the ocean three times on the George Washington with the president and was able to serve him, in several instances, in important matters not connected with publicity. The supreme economic council also appointed him as a member of the board of four men, one from each nation, to direct its publicity, and the records of this important commission thus came into his hands.

The press bureau, under his direction, had charge of making and transmitting the American summary of the treaty.

The writer offers no excuse for the personal note he employs in various parts of this narrative; for only thus can he convey what he himself saw and knew. He is doing it also with the intent of making it clear that the judgments of men and events are his own and not those of the president. The president's own views are expressed with great completeness in the documents, memoranda and letters which are here reproduced or quoted from.

DISAGREES WITH WILSON

It is only honest to say that the writer did not agree with the president in some of his conclusions at Paris, and argued, before the decision was made, a different course of action from the one taken, as in the Shantung matter. He finds in his journal of April 29:

> "I went up to the president's house at 9 o'clock this morning where I laid before him the notes I had made together with various memoranda furto me by Williams and Hornbeck (the Far Eastern experts) and by Wellington Koo and others of the Chinese delegation. There is no possible doubt where the president's own sympathies lie. He is for the full rights of the Chinese. I told him that the sympathy of the world was undoubtedly with the Chinese.
>
> " 'I know that,' he said.
>
> "I made as strong a case as I could for the Chinese position, urging some postponement at least. The president pointed out how inextricably the whole matter was tied up with the old secret treaties, how Britain felt herself bound to Japan, and how, with Italy already out of the conference and Belgium bitterly discontented, the defection of Japan, not an unreasonable possibility, might not only break up the peace conference, but destroy the League of Nations."

It was also my belief that a much broader publicity, a constructive publicity, could have been had at the conference, and this view was frequently urged upon the president and upon the commissioners. I still believe that one of the greatest mistakes made at the conference, particularly for America, was a want of better understanding of what happened there, and the exact reasons why, in each particular case, the president decided as he did, for I am confident that if the American people could know what the problems were in shell-shocked Europe in 1919, the problems those desperately harassed leaders at Paris had to meet, there would today be a better and more sympathetic understanding of our newly developing international relationships. This whole problem of publicity and secrecy at Paris will be considered in a later chapter.

But it must be clearly said that I believed then in the essential truth of the great principles the president laid down at Paris, and do so still; that I had then, and have still, complete faith in the absolute sincerity of the president's purpose, and the conviction that, whatever may have been his mistakes, he fought for his principles under such difficulties and in such an atmosphere as the American people do not yet understand.

WILSON POINTS WAY

The president did not in those brief months achieve the "new world," the "new order," he so nobly phrased, so ardently desired, and so continuously fought for, but he chose the battle ground and set forth the issues which will engage the throught of the world for many years to come. And there is no more instructive failure—if it was failure—than the president's at Paris, for when we approach it with a desire not to condemn or defend, but to understand, it reveals, as nothing else could, the real elements of the struggle which the liberal of the world have yet before them. We see as in a spotlight the defects of our own governmental machinery as it concerns foreign affairs. We are able to judge more clearly the state of our own public opinion, and above all to get a truer sense of our relationships with the other great nations of the world.

Finally, we see in high relief the figure of an extraordinary human being, with supreme qualities of many kinds, with temperamental and physical limitation, who will never cease to fascinate the historian and biographer of representative and decisive characters.

Unless Americans can apprehend what really happened at Paris, what forces we had to meet there, how we were led, and what we did, we can scarcely go ahead with firm ground under our feet, to discuss what to do next. Paris must assuredly be the springboard for any future plunge into foreign affairs. Consequently this is an American narrative, from an American point of view. It is the account of what happened by one who was there, who knew the men engaged, and who had then and has had since, in even larger measure, a full access to the documents—not merely the formal records, but those tentative proposals, memoranda and correspondence, which often reveal, in their impulsive sincerity, later smoothed into conventional complaisances, the true purposes, the real desires of the actors upon that great stage.

(To Be Continued Next Sunday)