Why President Wilson Failed

By AUSTIN HARRISON

Could President Wilson have secured a better Peace Treaty and a better Covenant for the League of Nations than he did? Mr. Austin Harrison, the distinguished Editor of the English Review, thinks that he could and in this article he tells how.

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WHEN the American President arrived in Paris, the extremists of Europe were in grievous plight. This stern, indefatigable man of letters—what would he do? Was it to be a Wilson peace? How to circumvent him? Who had the key to the Wilson mystery?

And when the President had been photographed with one trouser rolled up and the other down, and at the first sitting had laid no papers on the table, had said nothing, the excitement rose to fever pitch, for this man, it was said, not only knew how to be silent but could silence others; thus the days wore on.

Then the incredible happened. The President had no papers. He had come without a plan. The terrible scroll which, it was expected, would lay down the foundations of the League of Nations, was found to be non-existent. Almost a yell of delight went forth in Paris at the discovery that the President’s armory was auto-suggestion, that
and nothing more. The British looked at the French, the French smiled appreciatingly. General Smuts was at once hauled in to frame the design of the Covenant. And the moment that the French grasped the President’s weakness, they set to work to underpin him.

Talk did the trick, endless harangues, ceaseless argumentation; gesture, posture, gesticulation. The President had no plan to lean upon. After a few weeks his cardinal principle—open covenants openly arrived at—was lost, and the next step was to establish the old secret diplomacy, after which all was plain sailing.

The President, having been persuaded to change his policy towards Austria-Hungary after March, 1918, left America with some of his points not quite intact, he lost the “freedom of the seas” on the boat; he lost the “open covenants” in the first week at Paris. The rest was merely a matter of pressure. One by one the Points evaporated until nothing remained but the Covenant, in itself self-contradictory and elliptical, and entirely neutralized by the Treaty, every clause of which emanated a spirit antagonistic to the Covenant, every idea of which invalidates the utility of the League as a constructive mechanism. So after six months of chatter the thing is produced, and a more tenuous document was never penned. Either the Treaty means nothing or the Covenant means nothing—in Paris they
think the Covenant means nothing. The two together are utterly irreconcilable. In a word, President Wilson has failed.

Why?

Simply because he did not go to Paris on principle. Could he have succeeded? The answer is, he could not have failed had he stuck to principle and refused to be talked into nothingness.

No man ever possessed such power as President Wilson had on his arrival at Paris. All he had to do was to put on paper his Points of principle and refuse to be side-tracked. Had he done this, he would have won through easily, and the world might have witnessed a great Peace instead of the most reactionary and arbitrary peace in history.

Let us reconstruct the last five months, and picture the President arrived with a piece of paper, suave and inflexible. To begin at the first meeting.

"Gentlemen, I can see no point authorizing annexations. Kindly come to the point." The President looks from left to right expectantly.

"We must have the coal of the Saar Valley," scream the French. The President frowns: "I am going for a drive in the Elysees now; perhaps tomorrow the point will be clearer."

As he quits the hot room the delegates sit aghast; then the storm breaks. They determine upon private calls, but the President is out; when M. Clemenceau goes round at 8 p. m.
the President is at the Opera. On his return Mr. Lloyd George is waiting. "The French," he begins—— The President smiles: "I have sent you a copy of the Fourteen Points, dear Mr. George," he responds, "but now I must go to bed——à demain."

On the morrow, M. Clemenceau is tempestuous. "Lafayette"—— But again the President interrupts. The French insist, President Wilson once more strides out, and on the third day it is the same. On the fourth day, Mr. George calls with Mr. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil.

"We must save our political faces at home," they explain. "The elections were fought on indemnities; we must tie the Germans down for good, so that they cannot compete with us." The President pulls out his Fourteen Points—and his watch.

"You agreed to make peace on these principles. I have nothing more to say. If you have changed your minds, I have not. I will go to the play today if you do not wish to talk on the Points. Now what shall I do?"

Mr. George mutters something in Welsh, and then in strides M. Clemenceau followed by General Foch.

M. Clemenceau is witty, eloquent, fiery, indignant. He shoots off La Fayette. He stalks about the room. The Boche must be annihilated for good. Then Foch takes up the argument.
Nothing short of the left bank of the Rhine. And in the East we must have a buffer State running from the Baltic to the Adriatic, like Napoleon's Confederation of the Rhine.

The President rings a bell.

"Tell Colonel House to come in," he says to the equerry, and in five minutes the Colonel appears.

"There seems," observes the President, "to be a mistake. These gentlemen want to entangle us in European tribal affairs. Will you please wire for the George Washington and tell Pershing to get ready to withdraw all troops within a month. I am going home."

"You cannot do that," M. Clemenceau throws in heatedly.

"I beg pardon," observes the President dryly.

"But, Sir, you cannot leave us. La Fayette—"

"That is for you to decide. America entered the War to try to make a just and constructive peace. Now, as you clearly want the old kind of peace of hate and annexations, I cannot pledge America to support you. I had better leave you to fix it up yourselves. You see, I can do no good. I dare not go back with a Napoleonic peace in my pocket, that is all."

"Then you are a pro-German!" interjects a French minister, pale with emotion.

The President leans across to Colonel House. "Is Brandeis there?"
In a moment Brandeis appears. "There will be no further financial considerations until this order is rescinded," observes the President slowly. "But please make arrangements to feed Russia."

The President rises. "Gentlemen, I shall today send envoys to make a separate peace with our enemies, since we do not seem able to agree. I cannot spend the whole summer here, talking. At the sitting this afternoon, please arrange to give me a definite answer; whether we make peace on the agreed Fourteen Points or whether we don't. My daughter is waiting to take me out. Good morning!"

But the sitting that day is postponed. Instead the "Big Two" sit in secret from 3 to 7 p.m., and from 8 to midnight. A line of compromise is discussed. The Fourteen Points are read out aloud, Foch quitting the room. Finally Mr. George undertakes to act as mediator. He finds the President in bed, reading the "New Republic."

"We cannot agree," he says; "I can't induce the French to give way. They insist on their pound of flesh. They think you had better visit the devastated regions to get a truer orientation. I cannot desert them. I am pledged by the Elections. I got my Government on the cry of an eye for an eye. What am I to do?"

The President winks, smiles and positively winks again.
"In July, Mr. George, you made a speech and you said the Germans could have peace any day on my points. Am I to understand that was bluff, or do you insinuate that I was playing the joker?"

Mr. George starts. "But we are politicians. You don't mean to say you hold me to my public speeches. Why——"

"I make no criticism, my dear George. I merely ask you whether you suggest that I too don't mean what I say. I have the right to know that."

Mr. George here becomes painfully serious.

"Look here, let us chuck this and see what is to be done. If you refuse to make the sort of peace we want——"

"I shall go home," the President replies quietly. 
"Withdraw your troops?"
"Certainly."
"And your financial aid—food, etc.?"
"Unquestionably."
"Leave us in the lurch?"

"No. Leave you to fix up what you can. I shall always be ready to discuss an arrangement on principle, you know. Ambassador Reading knows that."

"But you don't really mean this?"
"I do. I swear it on the truth of Lincoln."
"Good God! Who is that?"
"The man who said, 'You cannot fool all the people all the time.' Now, good-night!"

On the sixth day another sitting takes place. President Wilson makes a speech.

"We made war on a vicious system, not on a people. Peace must give the new German democracy opportunity. There must be no annexations. We do not think a capitalist peace right. Nor can we be bound to any map-drawing on the lines of Tilsit. Open Covenants are essential. A Magna Charta of Rights must be laid down. All must come into the League or there can be no League, but only a grouping of powers. The Blockade must be removed—it is not gentlemanly. Have I the right to proceed?"

Uproar. No one can be heard. Forty different languages clash in epithets. An Italian sits on a Czecho-Slovak top-hat. M. Clemenceau breaks the bell. Finally the sitting is declared at an end. As they file out, all the people are buying newspapers. In great headlines they read: "The American troops left the zone of occupation early this morning."

The next day a still greater sensation is recorded. The papers announce the "retirement of the 'Tiger.' Cabinet crisis."

At 9 a. m., Mr. George is awaiting the President at breakfast.

"Well!"

"Well?"
“Do you play golf, George?”

“Heavens, man, don’t fool! Old ‘Clem’ has quit. What shall we do?”

“Wait for the next Government. Meanwhile, I’ll take you on at golf for a fiver.”

“But the ‘Tiger,’ he——”

“You cannot make a peace of principle with a ‘Tiger,’ you know.”

“Great Scot!”

“Yes. I see you’ve knighted Harry Lauder.”

Mr. George breaks down and sobs.

“We never thought you meant what you said,” he blurts out. “We never imagined you were serious.”

“You thought I played poker, eh?”

“That’s it.”

“Well, I do, but not when I deal on behalf of America with tens of millions of human lives, see!”

“Yes, yes. But what now?”

“Try this grape fruit. It is excellent.”

And Mr. George does try it, and afterwards he feels better.

Four days later a new French Government is formed. M. Anatole France is in it. Professor Aulard is a member of the Peace Conference. At last they meet in plenary council.

M. Anatole France delivers an impassioned address in the name of co-fraternity and cooperation. Then President Wilson rises. He un-
folds his scroll with the Fourteen Points, and reads them aloud.

"Gentlemen, are we agreed on the principles? We are. I am glad. Now, I have to make an announcement. It is to ask for sacrifice. Now, we begin. We have to find an adjustment for the Japanese difficulty. I propose, therefore, that Japan's troubles be submitted to the League when constituted, and Britain has agreed to refer Ireland to the same Court. That is our evidence of sincerity. The League, therefore, is our first concern. But there is Russia. Gentlemen, I propose to send an international commission to Russia in order that we may understand the Russian problem. In the meanwhile I move that the Blockade be removed and that the military terms of Peace be settled this week, all territorial adjustments to be settled by the League on the principles accepted already by the Powers. Are there any questions of detail?"

Signor Orlando rises. "According to the Pact of London——"

"Secret Treaties ipso facto fall in abeyance. We cannot go back to the old diplomacy. Any other objections?"

The Poles, Czechs, Jugo-Slavs, Rumanians cry in chorus: "We want the buffer State."

"Napoleon is dead," replies the President. "All these matters will be settled by the League."

The Italians become insistent; once more there
is an uproar. Colonel House and the President leave the Hall. The next morning in all the papers it is announced that the President is no longer in Paris.

The evening editions contain a short announcement to the effect that President Wilson, not being able to obtain "Open Covenants," left last evening for the boat, but proposes to call upon the Democracies of Europe to elect their own representatives and meet in a neutral country six months later for the purpose of establishing the League.

But on board he is stopped by Mr. George who has flown to the boat.

"Do anything you like, only don't leave us," and so the President returns.

He again opens the Assembly. He again reads out the Fourteen Points. Again he asks if there are objections!

But there are none; only murmurs are heard.

That afternoon peace was made, and at once it was published in the world's press.

Within a week, the League was formed, and held its first sitting exactly six weeks after the President's arrival in France. A month later the President sailed for America. It was a peace of conciliation and construction. The Germans undertook to pay a £5,000,000,000 indemnity. Alsace-Lorraine went to France, but there were no annexations. Only Posen was to be incorpo-
rated in a new Poland. By general assent, President Wilson had achieved the greatest victory known in history. De Valera called for three cheers for Lloyd George in Dublin and—got them. The world’s Peace celebrations lasted a whole week.

Questioned on his return, how he did it, the President replied:

“I showed them the principles and refused to talk off the Points.”

When asked what would have happened had he not stuck to his Points, he retorted grimly: “I should have been given the lemon, and I should have left Europe in chaos and turmoil, and instead of a League of Nations, why, Europe would have had another peace of Tilsit and the War would have been in vain. But thank God, the George Washington is a trusty ship.”

As the Tribune wrote: “The President has returned covered with honor. He won because, standing firm upon principle, he could not have failed.”
President Tyler at the Bar of History

In April, 1844, Mr. Tyler sent to the Senate a treaty of annexations which he had negotiated with Texas. Secret negotiations, a piece of business privately carried to completion and made public only when finished, suited well with the President's temper and way of action. A man naturally secretive; naturally fond, not of concealments, but of quiet and subtle management; not insincere, but indirect in his ways of approach, he relished statecraft of this sort and no doubt liked the Texan business all the better because it seemed to demand, in its very nature, a delicate and private handling. The Senate rejected the treaty by the very decisive vote of 16 to 35, men of both parties alike, deeply irritated that the President should spring this weighty matter upon the country in such a fashion, taking no counsel beforehand save such as he chose to take.

WILSON’S FOURTEEN POINTS OF PEACE

On January 8, 1918, President Wilson, in an address to a joint session of Congress, named fourteen points as essential in a consideration of peace. The fourteen points he stated as follows:

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at; after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the Government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory, and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy, and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a mere establishment of fact, a positive guarantee that she shall be dealt with as a free and equal nation, which is essential to the establishment of the lasting peace.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored; and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interests of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see secured and safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

XI. Roumania, Serbia and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea, and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely un molested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed, under specific covenants, for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independent and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.