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WHAT THE WORLD
OWES TO
PRESIDENT WILSON

BY

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YOU will not expect me, I know, this afternoon to give you an appreciation of the personality of Woodrow Wilson. It would indeed be impertinent for me to attempt to do so before an audience such as this, which contains many who knew him intimately. I shall try to speak as a student of history and politics; but I shall not try to conceal the fact—I could not if I would—that the personality of Woodrow Wilson has been one of the main intellectual and moral influences of my life. It is perhaps true to say that Woodrow Wilson exercised a greater influence on the youth of Britain than upon that of any other country in the world, especially on those of us who were taking part in the European war. When we began to perceive, as we thought we did, that the ideals for which most of us had entered the war were disappearing as the struggle went on, so that it seemed almost as if it made no difference which side had the victory, it was Woodrow Wilson who recreated the ideals which meant so much to us. At the very crisis of the struggle a voice came over the Atlantic, seeming then, indeed, very far off, yet clear and resonant, which awoke to new life all those liberal elements in Europe which wanted a particular kind of world peace, gave a new morale, a new idealism to the allied forces, and, indeed, exercised as great an influence on the issue of the struggle as the 2,000,000 American soldiers who eventually came to take part in it.

There is now a vast mass of material available about Woodrow Wilson—the records of fervent disciples, the accounts of colleagues great and small, some of them more anxious to reveal their own part in events than to appreciate his, the bitter railings of

his enemies, and the sorrowful criticisms of those who did not obtain from him all that they had hoped and expected. But there is little evidence that Woodrow Wilson himself cared very much about what our generation thought about him. He was an historian, and he was prepared to leave to history the justification of his life and ideas. We cannot conceive him publishing any apologia of his life, such as Bismarck did in his old age. If he had lived and written, as he meant to do, it would have been rather with his ideas than his own actions that he was concerned. But as the years go by and we are further removed from the great struggle in which he took part, he stands out more and more above the other statesmen as the greatest figure of all those men who were subjected to the greatest test of modern history.

Lord Acton has said, 'Great men are always bad men,' and by great men he meant great men of action. Yet there is now in all countries a recognition of the fact that Woodrow Wilson was not only a great man but a good man. The reason why his policy has prevailed is because it was founded upon principle. It was another great American statesman, perhaps the greatest American diplomatist who ever lived, John Quincy Adams, who said, 'The more of pure moral principle is carried into the policy of a government, the wiser and more profound will that policy be.' It is because Woodrow Wilson founded his work upon moral principle that it has continued to live.

Before I go on to the main subject of our meeting—the League of Nations—I want to say a word or two about Woodrow Wilson and the peace treaties, because there is often much misunderstanding about the part he played in connection with them. Even his friends have suggested that he made a bargain over the treaties so that he might obtain the League of Nations from European statesmen. That is an entire misconception. Woodrow Wilson made no

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bargain for the League. He had secured the League of Nations as an integral part of the peace settlement before the rest of the treaties were written. When the statesmen first met at Paris to consider their programme, the French produced a list of subjects in which the League of Nations was one of half a hundred others, and a long way down the list. Neither Lloyd George nor President Wilson would accept such a programme, and they were asked what they wanted to put first. Lloyd George said that he put first reparations and the punishment of the guilty; Woodrow Wilson put the League of Nations first, with the result that by February 14 he was able to present the first draft of the covenant and get it accepted by a plenary conference of all the nations assembled in Paris. The later alterations were largely directed to secure the acceptance of his own countrymen rather than the acceptance of the nations of Europe.

But once the League was accepted, on the rest of the peace Woodrow Wilson had, of course, to accept compromises, and it is true that the result has been deplored by people in all countries. But what Woodrow Wilson tried to do was to secure that the permanent things should be as good as possible and that the worst things should be as temporary as possible. How far has the last ten years justified him?

Well, in the first place, the economic provisions of the treaties against which the most crushing criticism was levelled ten years ago have now almost completely disappeared. The settlement which is now being reached is more or less along the lines which most independent thinkers thought just ten years ago.

And though, of course, the territorial decisions have been more permanent, yet Wilson managed to secure, in conjunction with Britain, that the most important of them all was settled in the right way. There was an enormous danger that a new Alsace-

Lorraine would be erected between France and Germany. Wilson prevented that; and no one would have rejoiced more than he to know that Germany, as well as France, has now accepted the frontier between the two countries, and that it has been secured and negotiated by a treaty, the efficacy of which depends upon the League of Nations itself. 'The towers of Strasbourg,' once said Lord Acton, 'dominate the landscape of Europe.' They now no longer dominate the landscape of Europe.

In other parts of Europe, of course, the frontiers were not so successfully drawn. Blots still remain. But it is difficult to see how any better frontiers could have been made at that time. As it was, 100,000,000 minorities were reduced to thirty, most of which were inevitable minorities, and for most of them the League of Nations is gradually building up a system of protection through the agency of the minority treaties.

Nor is it true, as has often been said in this country, that Wilson sacrificed American interests in order to obtain the League of Nations. What were the American interests in 1919? In the first place, there was the financial interest. I do not know how far Woodrow Wilson himself would have insisted as much as has been done upon those rights, but at any rate at Paris, in spite of every blandishment and every form of pressure, he retained them intact, and no one can deny but that he represented in doing that the vast majority of his countrymen.

Secondly, America desired to have parity in naval armament with the greatest naval power. That parity had practically already been secured by the measures which Woodrow Wilson had taken before the war came to an end.

Thirdly, above all, Woodrow Wilson believed that world peace was the greatest of America's interests. It was for that reason that he laid the foundations of the League of Nations.

The idea of a League of Nations was not, of course, invented by Woodrow Wilson. It had arisen in many countries; it was accepted by men of many different politics. For example, let me quote to you one of the most notable utterances made in this country before America came into the war: 'I know how quickly we shall be met with the statement that this is a dangerous question—that no nation can submit to the judgment of other nations—and we must be careful at the beginning not to attempt too much. I know the difficulties which arise when we speak of anything which seems to involve an alliance. But I do not believe that when Washington warned us against entangling alliances he meant for one moment that we should not join with other civilised nations of the world if a method could be found to diminish war and encourage peace.'

That sentiment was not spoken by Woodrow Wilson. It was spoken by Senator Lodge, in this city of Washington, on Saturday, May 27, 1916, at the first annual meeting of the League to enforce peace. But, though other men in other countries had the idea, it was Woodrow Wilson's passionate advocacy that made the idea possible. No one else with the same conviction had the power; no one else with the power had the same conviction.

In 1919 the destinies of the world were in the hands of three men—Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson (it is interesting to note that not one of them was an Englishman)—all men of rare gifts and great moral courage, to whom the democracies of three countries had entrusted extraordinary powers in the course of the great struggle. How different was their attitude toward the great problems that confronted them! Clemenceau lived in the past. For him, history had ended in 1871. Lloyd George has always lived in the present. He had to think of the last election and the next. Wilson lived in the future.

Thus, while neither Lloyd George nor Clemenceau opposed the League of Nations, it was not for them the supreme necessity of mankind. It was left to Woodrow Wilson to gather around himself the liberal forces of France and Britain, the aspirations of the small powers and the neutrals, the immense longings of the peoples in all countries, and to bring out of the chaotic world, which had almost disintegrated before their eyes, a new order which will mark an epoch in the history of mankind. That is the reason why the name of Woodrow Wilson will always be associated with the League of Nations in a way the name of no other man is associated with any of the great charters of the liberties of mankind.

How far has the last ten years justified him?

In the first place, the League of Nations has lived. Woodrow Wilson said, on February 14, 1919, when he brought the covenant of the League before the statesmen at Paris, 'A living thing is born.' It was a bold challenge. Not many there believed him. It came, indeed, into a world in which it seemed almost impossible that it should live. America not only withdrew from the League, but for some short time was actively hostile to it. Lloyd George never attended a meeting of the Council or Assembly of the League of Nations, and put far more trust in a body that was then called the 'Supreme Council.' France relied far more upon her armies in the Rhineland than upon the League of Nations. Germany, rebuffed, turned away from the League which it found powerless to protect it, and when I visited the Ruhr in 1923 I found that German working men almost spat when the League of Nations was mentioned, in order to take the taste of it out of their mouths. Nevertheless, the League lived, and it might say, like Sieyès, who, when asked what he did during the period of the Terror, answered 'j'ai vécu'—'I succeeded in living.' Indeed, the infant Hercules even strangled some of the serpents that surrounded its cradle, and

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gained strength in the process, and it has grown from year to year, creating new things and attempting new tasks, so that men have gradually learned to do things that they never did before, and found out new things to do that they never dreamed of doing.

This is the great justification of Woodrow Wilson. If he had not lived, we should still be arguing whether a form of world organisation was possible; professors would have been writing articles about it, and parliaments would have been debating it. As it is, we have had a great laboratory where plans could be made by the men who alone could insure their trial. We have learned more about international co-operation in the last ten years than all the prophets, professors, and publicists had told us in the 400 years of modern history that preceded it.

Secondly, the League of Nations has made possible a new kind of friendship and understanding among the statesmen of a large portion of the world. Woodrow Wilson told us at Manchester, on December 30, 1918, 'Friendship must have machinery... that makes it necessary to make some great effort to have with one another an easy and constant method of conference, so that troubles may be taken when they are little and not allowed to grow until they are big.' How far has the League of Nations succeeded in carrying out that idea? Well, I hardly need to tell you. It has become a commonplace that a new era has arisen in the relations between statesmen. Since 1919 the Council has held fifty-seven sessions and the Assembly of the League has met eleven times.

The foreign ministers of Britain, France, and Germany are constantly meeting one another around the Council table, and there come together with them the foreign ministers of almost every European State and many from other quarters of the globe. It is impossible to over-estimate the effect of this constant intercourse on the minds of the statesmen. It enables them to understand their common

problems in a way no other device could make possible. In 1914 Sir Edward Grey had been only once on the Continent of Europe. When he exchanged those fateful telegrams with the foreign ministers of the other great European States he hardly knew anything of the men who would receive them and how their minds would act. The new device has transformed the relations of the European powers and made possible things that would not have been dreamt of in 1919.

Let us admit, however, that it has not yet been possible to apply this mechanism fully to the whole world. In 1928, when the surface relations between Britain and the United States were not quite so good as they are to-day, Mr. Baldwin spoke to the House of Commons as follows:—

‘In Europe all her statesmen have got into the habit of meeting at Geneva and talking together, by which they learn not only each others’ point of view but, what is very important, each others’ idiosyncrasies as individuals, and I think there is rapidly coming into European statesmanship . . . a desire in negotiations to see the other point of view and to compromise if something can be effected by that compromise, far more than existed before the war. American statesmen do not know European statesmen; European statesmen do not know American statesmen. There is no personal intercourse, and the only intercourse that takes place is the written dispatch that goes across 3,000 miles of ocean. It is a far more difficult thing to get a mutual understanding in these circumstances.’

May we not rejoice that since those words were spoken measures have been taken to close the gap between Europe and America, and is it too much to hope that it will soon become a normal part of international relations that the most responsible American statesmen will constantly meet their colleagues in other parts of the world?

Thirdly, the League has inaugurated a new

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system of public diplomacy. This was, of course, a point on which Woodrow Wilson often insisted. It is an entirely new thing. In the nineteenth century it was a commonplace that diplomacy was founded on secret treaties and secret discussions. The peoples were bound by conventions of whose terms they were almost entirely unaware, and it was considered impossible that the most intimate problems which affected the pride and prestige of nations should be openly discussed in a public forum.

Now, as regards secret treaties, the provisions in the covenant have so completely destroyed them that the journalists have been driven in despair to fabricate them. It has become simply impossible for statesmen to rely on them. The old era of Bismarckian diplomacy has in that sense passed away forever. As regards the public discussion of vital international relations, this was, of course, more difficult to establish. It was done first in the assembly of the League of Nations, and it is one of the reasons why the assembly of the League has established its tremendously important position in the whole fabric of international relations. That victory was largely won by the persistent advocacy and example of Lord Cecil. It was gradually applied by the Council, which, though of course it also meets in secret, yet constantly meets in public for the discussion of vital international questions. The scene at Geneva has now become one which the world regards as normal, with the foreign ministers of the great European powers, with representatives of Europe, Asia and America beside them, discussing openly the most difficult of international problems in which the vital interests and prestige of their nations are involved, often without knowing what the results of their conversations will be. Before them are the representatives of the Press of the world, and as they talk messenger boys run out of the room carrying their words to the wires by which

they are flashed to all countries in the world. By this means you have got the beginnings of a new technique among the statesmen of the world, and above all you have got a means not only for the education of the statesmen but, what is just as necessary, for the education of the peoples upon whose will, ultimately, the actions of the statesmen depend. This is an invention just as marvellous and as little expected as the invention of the airplane and the radio.

Fourthly, nothing was more persistent in Wilson's advocacy of the League than the rights of the small nations. In the nineteenth century the small powers had no influence upon international affairs. They were never consulted unless indeed occasionally, when they were the victims of some great power. In one sense the Great War was fought for their rights. It saw the end of four empires, while the greatest of them all was so transformed as to be an entirely new political conception at the end of it. Yet at the end of the World War the world lay in the grasp of the great powers. Not a ship could sail the sea, hardly a ton of food be moved without their consent. Their armies and financial and economic resources made them masters of the world as never before. How were the small states to find their place in the new order? Woodrow Wilson's first plan put the states of the world upon an equality.

It was from General Smuts that the idea came of a council of great powers, but when the small powers insisted on representation upon it, Wilson gladly accepted their conditions, and on the Council of the League nine places are now reserved for the representatives of the smaller powers. They have played an important part in the work of that body, and had a far greater influence upon international affairs than they ever possessed in the nineteenth century. You will recall that in 1926 Professor Uden, the representative of Sweden, was able to

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obtain his own way against the united pressure of the three great powers of Europe. Moreover, in the assembly the small powers are able to criticise as they like the actions of the great.

Some of the small nations also were in a grievous state as a result of the Great War. They needed assistance badly, and yet they wished to preserve their independence. Through the action of the League, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece have been able to receive financial and economic help, and yet not surrender one jot or tittle of their independence.

Some small nations have received recognition which they could never have obtained unless the League of Nations had been in existence. At the crisis of affairs in Paris, Woodrow Wilson received from Washington the message: 'A word for Ireland would help.' He must have been extraordinarily tempted to say that word, to make some gesture which could be used for political ends, but he did not do so. He did not do so, because he was convinced that any action at that time would do the cause of Ireland more harm than good. Yet in four years the Irish Free State was in existence and its independence was guaranteed by its participation in the structure of the League of Nations itself. Woodrow Wilson was right when he trusted to the action of the League to prepare the way for the freedom of Ireland. Though England had then unexampled resources—the soldiers that broke the Hindenburg line, vast masses of airplanes, tanks, and armoured cars—she could not crush Ireland, because her will was paralysed by the new principles which Woodrow Wilson had made effective. Moreover, the strategic difficulties which had complicated the Irish question were much lessened by the mere existence of the League of Nations. Thus the Irish Free State has been able to take its place among the other nations of the world. She has played a most interesting and very intelligent part at Geneva. Naturally she has

quite often been on a different side from Britain, but she has learned there to co-operate not only with the other nations of the British Commonwealth, but with all the other nations members of the League, and has played an important part in the keeping of world peace, so that we may say in one sense that Woodrow Wilson was one of the founders of Ireland's freedom.

And the League has brought freedom to oppressed peoples of every kind, even those who could never speak for themselves. I need hardly remind you of the great work which is being done for native races through the agency of the League of Nations. We often forget that there are still millions of slaves in the world, but, at any rate, hundreds of thousands have been freed through the agency of the slavery convention drawn up at Geneva two years ago, to which the United States has, as you know, gladly subscribed.

To tell you of the many other activities of the League for the welfare of mankind would take far more time than I have at my disposal, but let me turn now in these last few minutes to consideration of the question as to how far the League of Nations is suitably designed as an instrument for the prevention of war. Let us begin by asking ourselves what exactly we mean by the prevention of war.

The idea of preventing war is not a new one. In Europe, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there were no wars, except in the Balkans, and on the whole the statesmen were anxious for peace and desirous of avoiding war. They had their instruments. They believed in alliances and big armaments as preventives of war, strange as it may seem to us now; while others, outside the ring of statesmen, used to preach that brotherhood was the sole means to prevent war; while others, again, said that the economic connections between the nations, the connections of capital and the connections of labour, were now so strong that they would prevent war.

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Well, we know now that all those instruments were futile. So far from alliances and big armaments preventing war, we know that they are instruments for and bound to produce war. Alliances produce counter-alliances, and big armaments produce fear, both of which produce war. Nor is brotherhood by itself likely to stop war unless the world changes much more quickly than it has done in the last 2,000 years; while the crisis of 1914 showed that ties between international capital and international labour, which were thought so strong, were just about as powerful as cobwebs across the mouth of a cannon.

Surely the reason for the failure of all these things was that they did not go to the root of the question. If we want to prevent war, we must set up something to do in the future what war has done in the past. And war in the past has been the great decider between the nations, deciding brutally, badly, often creating as many problems as it solved, but still for the moment making the great decision and enforcing it. It was war, for example, that decided that the British flag should fly over Canada and India and that the American flag should fly over Texas and California, and if we are to abolish war we must have somewhere an agency that can make decisions as big as those. I don't pretend to say that the League of Nations has yet successfully solved that great problem. But at least in the last ten years we have learned more about the method of solution than at any other period of the world's history.

In the first place, the covenant itself, by the obligations it imposes upon the states who signed it, has put tremendous barriers in the way of war, barriers of publicity, and delay, and it has created new means for the settlement of the great decisions. It has, for example, brought into existence the Permanent Court of International Justice, which is now recognised by the peoples of the whole world, with the

exception of a small minority, as a body in which they can place full trust and confidence for the settlement of legal disputes between the nations. At the last assembly the Prime Minister of Britain announced that Britain and all the Dominions were prepared to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the court for all legal disputes. Their example was followed by many other states, so that now all the great powers of Europe and more than half the membership of the League of Nations have agreed to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the court for all legal disputes between them.

The covenant does not pretend to make the final settlements. It is, however, always concerned with the peace of the world. By Article 11, Wilson's favourite article, every state which has signed the covenant has the friendly right of interfering between any other two members that are disputants, a right which does not exist by international law apart from the covenant of the League of Nations, so that the Council has the supreme duty of continually watching over the peace of the world. It has not, however, tried to arrogate to itself the right to decide unless the disputants wish it to, and in the last ten years more and more the tendency has been for the Council to watch over the peace of the world, while the decisions are made by other bodies. There are, for example, large numbers of treaties that have been signed between nations which provide for the settlement of disputes of all kinds, and the League of Nations has itself drawn up a general act for the settlement of such disputes, which is now under the consideration of the great powers of Europe. There have been other treaties on this side of the world for the American powers.

We may say, therefore, that on the question of decisions tremendous progress has been made, but how about enforcing these decisions? Here I touch upon the most controversial question of international politics. There are some people who

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say that the idea of force must be entirely removed from any plan for international peace. There are others who think that any such plan is useless unless there are great armies and navies to enforce the peace of the world.

Woodrow Wilson agreed with those who placed moral force first. It is the foundation upon which human society must rest. He said, on December 4, 1918, at the Sorbonne, 'My conception of the League of Nations is just this, that it shall operate as the organised moral force of men throughout the world.' We have all rejoiced in the Kellogg Pact. It has shown how great that moral force is, and no one would have rejoiced in it more than Woodrow Wilson. He would have rejoiced also in the manner in which it was made, at the care which was taken that it should conflict in no way with the promises which states have taken under the covenant of the League of Nations itself. But is it enough? The armies and navies and the air fleets which exist give the answer. If the moral force of the world is to prevail, it must have a means by which it can be organised, as Woodrow Wilson said. Once it is organised, then the amount of armed force which it will be necessary to place at its disposal will be such that no armed force can challenge the moral force. It is surely in some such way that the great problem of organised world peace will be solved, and the way to it was clearly pointed by Woodrow Wilson, although it was impossible for him to work out all the machinery necessary in the short time in which the covenant of the League of Nations was made.

Ultimately, of course, the success of any such plan depends on the fact that the organisation should be a world one. Woodrow Wilson could never think except in terms of a world organisation. It was difficult for him to think of the continents as separated when 2,000,000 American soldiers stood on European soil together with hundreds of thousands

of others from Asia, Africa, and Australasia. America,' he said, 'is not interested in the peace of Europe but in the peace of the world.' How far has the League of Nations carried out that idea?

It is sometimes talked about as though it was purely a European agency. Well, you have only to look on the map on the wall (pointing to a map of the world on which all the states, members of the League of Nations, were represented) to see how world-wide it is—every state of Europe up to the Russian frontier, four-fifths of Asia, most of South and Central America, and all Australasia, and one state of the North American Continent! Yet it must be admitted that the League has not functioned in other parts of the world so easily as it has functioned in Europe.

The absence of Russia and the United States has made it less world-wide than Woodrow Wilson meant it to be, and has therefore complicated many of its problems. Yet we may rejoice that more and more the United States has found it possible to co-operate with the League in some of the greatest problems that affect humanity, and at Geneva itself, as Europe grows more and more pacified, attention is now being directed out in the world. At the last assembly, for example, a great portion of the speech of the British Prime Minister was devoted to extra-European problems; and no speech aroused greater attention than that of the Chinese representative, who brought before the assembly the question of Article 19 in connection with China's 'unequal treaties.'

Are not those of us right who assure the world that in her own time and in her own way the United States will find a solution for all the problems that now divide us? Woodrow Wilson himself was at any rate confident in his dying days that America would do so. We may believe it, because the principles which he gave to the world were above all American. One of Woodrow Wilson's greatest

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speeches was made before the World War took place, in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on July 4, 1914, when he analysed the Declaration of Independence and showed that it was above all a practical document for putting into force by human bodies great principles; and then, perhaps with that intuitive foreboding that great men sometimes have, he went on to speak as follows: 'My dream is that, as the years go on and the world knows more and more about America, it will also drink at those fountains of youth and renewal; that it also will turn to America for those moral inspirations which lie at the basis of all freedom . . . I do not know that there will ever be a declaration of independence and of grievances for mankind, but I believe that if any such document is ever drawn it will be drawn in the spirit of the American Declaration of Independence, and that America has lifted high the light which will shine unto all generations and guide the feet of mankind to the goal of justice and liberty and peace.'

Woodrow Wilson was able to found the League of Nations not only because he was a great man and a good man, but because he was a great American.