The Madness at Versailles

IT was not to be hoped that there would be a generous peace. The wickednesses of the German armies were too obvious, the bad faith of the German Imperial Government had been too clearly demonstrated to admit of any settlement which did not impose heavy penalties and exact specific and ample guarantees. The temper of the victorious Allies as a whole was too harsh, and that of the French in particular too strained with nervous dread, to make possible a peace under which Germany would have much power to recuperate rapidly. Moreover, official reports and unofficial intimations from Paris, although dealing for the most part with scattered details rather than with larger or connected topics, have been sufficient to indicate that the Peace Conference was little disposed to make concessions, and increasingly inclined to be drastic. For a rigorous peace, in short, the world was already somewhat prepared. But it was not prepared for a peace of undisguised vengeance, for a peace which openly flouts some of the plainer dictates of reason and humanity, repudiates every generous word that Mr. Wilson has ever uttered regarding Germany, flies in the face of accepted principles of law and economics, and makes the very name of democracy a reproach. In the whole history of diplomacy there is no treaty more properly to be regarded as an international crime than the amazing document which the German representatives are now asked to sign.

Only as one keeps in mind the high professions with which the war was conducted—professions of which Mr. Wilson, more than any one else, was the polished and unctuous mouthpiece, and which the Allies by their applause impliedly accepted—is the enormity of what has happened to be fully comprehended. The world was to be made safe for democracy. German militarism was to be crushed, and the German Constitution itself was to be so changed as to emancipate the German people from autocratic rule and make impossible the repetition of such a war as this one had proved itself to be. The German people, who, it was repeatedly affirmed, had had no part in bringing on the war, and who at the worst were the helpless instruments of its prosecution, were to be freed from tyranny and given a chance to take their place among the peoples who love liberty and practice righteousness. Again and again, in the rhetorical documents in which Mr. Wilson expounded to a waiting world the divine order of human society, he declared that America, at least, had no quarrel with the German people, that it begrudged them no greatness which their industry and intelligence might attain, and that a victorious peace, if it meant punitive damages or harsh restraint, would be worse than useless as a world settlement. And for the attainment of these ends and their sanctification a League of Nations was to be set up, with Germany itself, if it would cease to do evil and learn to do well, as one of its members.

How have these generous professions, honorable alike to those who made them and to those who trusted them, been carried out? The treaty affords only one answer. Germany and the German people are virtually to be destroyed. The burdens which the treaty imposes are heavier than any people can bear and progress. To begin with, German territory is to be diminished. Including Alsace-Lorraine, Silesia, Posen, the Saar Basin, and other areas, Germany is to lose 38,175 square miles, in addition to 8,572 square miles in Schleswig and East Prussia which will presumably have to be parted with in consequence of referendum votes on the question of allegiance for which the treaty provides. Even conceding that the whole of Alsace-Lorraine ought to be restored to France, and that the inhabitants of the designated portions of Schleswig and East Prussia should be allowed to determine their allegiance, the loss of territory still aggregates 29,575 square miles. In addition to deprivation of territory in Europe, Germany is to renounce in favor of the Allies and the other so-called associated Powers all its overseas possessions, including not only its colonies but its rights and property in China, Siam, Liberia, Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, and Bulgaria. The destruction of Germany’s military and naval power is virtually complete; its army is reduced to 100,000 men, its navy is cut down to a handful of vessels, conscription is abolished, the further construction of wireless stations is forbidden, and most of its cables are appropriated by the victors. Within a zone of fifty kilometres east of the Rhine all fortifications are to be destroyed.

All this, drastic as it is, forms only the opening chapter. There are to be reparations, indemnities, and strangling economic punishments as well. What the aggregate amount of indemnities and reparations is to be has not, apparently, yet been determined, but, whatever it is, Germany is to go on paying it for thirty years, beginning with an initial payment within two years of a billion pounds sterling. At the same time it is required to devote its economic resources directly to the restoration of the invaded regions of Belgium and France; to deliver annually for ten years to those countries and to Italy great quantities of coal (one of its principal coal fields, the Saar Basin, having in the meantime been surrendered); and to grant to the Allied and associated Powers preferences and concessions in trade which will go far toward destroying German competition in any branch of industry. As if deliberately to add insult to penalty, the victors further propose to exact from Germany most-favored-nation treatment for their own vessels in the German fishing and coasting trade, and even in towsage; while as a guarantee that the requirements of the treaty will be met, German territory west of the Rhine, together with the bridgeheads on that river, is to be occupied by Allied and associated troops for fifteen years, unless in the meantime the requirements of the treaty are fully complied with.

Nor is this all. The provisions for the disarmament of Germany, which might easily, had the victorious Powers so chosen, have been made a beneficent illustration of how a great state might live in peace and happiness without an army or a navy greater than the needs for a police, are wholly negatived, so far as moral value is concerned, by the failure of the treaty to provide for any measure whatever of disarmament on the part of the Allies and their associates. As the treaty stands, Germany is to be stripped of its means of defence as well as of offence, while its conquerors hover about it fully armed. If there were still need of proof that the League of Nations, as a device for insuring world peace, is only an alliance of three great Powers to enforce their will upon all the others, the treatment accorded to Germany at this point should furnish the demonstration. Further, what is to be said for a treaty which requires Germany to “hand over to the associated Governments, either jointly or severally, all persons” accused of “having committed acts in violation of the laws
and customs of war," together with "all documents and information necessary to insure full knowledge of the in-

criminating acts, the discovery of the offenders, and the

just appreciation of the responsibility," one of the alleged offenders being the former Kaiser, now outside of German
territory; to concede in advance the validity of treaties
yet to be made with Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey,
including the decisions which may be made regarding
their territory; to recognize in advance any new states that
may be formed out of the territory of the three Powers men-
tioned, with such boundaries as may be agreed upon; to
accept in advance the decisions of prize courts of the Al-
lies regarding ships or goods; and to admit the jurisdiction
of a League of Nations of which it is not a member, and
which it cannot enter save with the unanimous consent of
the Powers which are seeking its destruction?

Such are the terms to which the representatives of Ger-
many are asked to set their hands without demur. Such
is the treaty which is to end a war fought to overthrow
autocracy and militarism and to enthrone democracy and peace.
Such is the settlement to which the President of the
United States has given his approval, and the Senate of the United States will be asked to ratify. The
heinousness of its offending, the calculating harshness of its demands and impositions, the gross repudiation of moral
obligations and good faith which it involves, its gross injustice to the Allied peoples themselves and to their moral
atoning, become only the more apparent as its terms are studied. It is a peace of vengeance, not of justice. It
will not restore Germany to the family of nations; it will destroy Germany as a Great Power. What will be the fate
of Germany if the treaty prevails is, however, quite the least important aspect of the matter; the great and start-
ing question now is what will be the fate of democracy, of political and economic liberty, of morals and ideals?
How stands it with the peoples at this grave moment in the world's career?

It would be idle now to mince words. The meaning of the treaty is obvious. After nearly five years of strenu-
ounous effort and high expectancy, the hopes of the peoples have been destroyed. The progress of democracy as either
a theory or a practice of social righteousness has been suddenly and forcibly checked. The great reforms which
were to substitute the rule of peoples for the rule of Gov-
ernments, abolish war as a means of aggression or of set-
tling international disputes, break down alliances and bal-
cances of power, put secret diplomacy under the ban, do away with discriminating tariffs, establish the right of
self-government for all peoples who desired it and were fit to exercise it, and bind the nations in a world league in
which all would enjoy equal rights and equal opportunity, have been checked in their progress. In place of these
helpful things of which patriots had dreamed, and which the peoples of the world for one brief moment imagined
they were about to grasp, there has been enthroned at
Versailles an arrogant and self-sufficient autocracy of five Great Powers, two of which are practically at the mercy of
the other three; an autocracy owning no authority save its
own will, deliberating in secret, parceling out privileges and
territory as best serves its own interests, turning a deaf ear to protests and closing its eyes to facts, observing
no sounder principles than those of political compromise,
and ordering all things by its own self-centred notions of
how the peoples may best be controlled. It is this Versailles
autocracy which, in crushing Germany as a world Power, has itself assumed the rôle of world dictator. That it is
vindictive as well as powerful, that its resources are im-
mense, and that it intends to have its way with the peoples
and their aspirations, no one now need cherish any doubt whatever. Progress henceforth is to go by favor, and the
favor will be that of the Big Three.

History, perhaps, will some time tell us how, among the
men who have dominated the proceedings at Versailles, the
responsibility for this state of things should be apportioned.
None, surely, who have had a hand in the determinations
of the Peace Conference can go unblamed, save as they
may have been overborne by the weight of authority. Yet
the verdict of history will not, we think, be incorrectly fore-
cast if the larger blame for the check which liberty and democracy have received is laid to the charge of Woodrow
Wilson. To Mr. Wilson, more than to any other man who
has ever lived, it fell to voice the aspirations of the world's peoples and to receive their homage. The times and the
opportunity were alike supremely great. The stream of
revolt against privilege and privilege-begotten wealth, the
demand for the abolition of autocracy and the substitution
of a political and economic régime in which the people
should rule in fact as well as in name, had risen to the
point where all that was needed, apparently, was wise and
inspiring direction to make it an instrument of the greatest
gains for human welfare that the race had ever known.
It was Mr. Wilson's achievement to give to this great yearn-
ing of the world's masses, not indeed constructive leader-
ship, for he has built nothing that will endure, but a
wining exposition and a moral appeal which caught the
imagination of peoples everywhere, riveted their attention
upon him as the one man living who sounded their motives
and voiced their aspirations, and made him their idol as
well as their guide and friend. The trust which the peoples
gave him, the appeals which they fondly directed to him,
and the high expectations with which they hung upon his
words, were as pathetic in simplicity as they were imposing
in weight and mass. He was the hope of democracy, and the
fear of his enemies was the confidence of his friends.

How Mr. Wilson has repaid the confidence which the
peoples gave him, all the world now knows. The one-time
idol of democracy stands today discredited and condemned.
His rhetorical phrases, torn and faded tinsel of a thought
which men now doubt if he himself ever really believed,
will never again fall with hypnotic charm upon the ears of
eager multitudes. The camouflage of ethical precept and
political philosophizing which for long blinded the eyes
of all but the most observing has been stripped away, and
the peoples of the world see revealed, not a friend faithful
to the last, but an arrogant autocrat and a compromising
politician. And with the loss of the robes which gave him
sanctity goes also the loss of all liberal and ennobling sup-
port. There will still be many to applaud the treaty, and
to join hands with Mr. Wilson in remorseless effort to push
vengeance to completion, but they will not be the liberals
who long acclaimed him as their leader nor the masses who
once saw in him a second Providence. Those who stand
with him now—strange transformation when one recalls
the years of his ascendancy—are the staunch supporters
of power and privilege, the controllers of great wealth and
dictators of social favor, the volatile champions of the es-
established order against every form of revolution, the
prophets of hate and prejudice, and the timid and depend-
ent whose souls are not their own. These are the ones who now do Mr. Wilson honor.

It is well that the line should at last be clearly drawn, for with the publication of the German treaty the real battle for liberty begins. All that has gone before—the overthrow of Czarism in Russia, the constitutional struggle in Germany, the establishment of a Soviet Government in Hungary, the revolt against tyranny or constraint in all quarters of the globe—are only the preliminaries of the great revolution to whose support the friends of freedom must now rally everywhere. Less and less, as that struggle widens, will the world have place for either liberals or conservatives: Versailles has forced men into two main camps, the radicals and the reactionaries. Heaven grant that the revolution may be peaceful, and that it may destroy only to rebuild! Whatever its course, it is the peoples who have been deluded and ignored who will play the leading part, for with the appalling example of Mr. Wilson and the Peace Conference before their eyes, the peoples will have small use for any leadership save their own. This is the scene which the moral collapse at Versailles opens to the world, this the promised land toward which the peoples of the world will now press with all their strength. With Germany crushed and autocracy enthroned, with the strong hand of power at the throat of liberty, the battle opens which is to make men free.

A Secretary of Education

The reconstruction programme of the Republicans in the next Congress will include a plan for a Department of Education under a Secretary who will be a member of the Cabinet. A bill approved by the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Federation of Labor, is to be introduced by Representative Towner of Iowa, who is slated to be chairman of the House Committee on Education. This measure, substantially the same as the one urged during the last Congress, aims to coordinate the work of the eighty-odd Federal bureaus and boards among which educational administration is now scattered, and to meet some of the needs called to popular attention during the war, though known to educational students long before its outbreak. The proposed bill authorizes an annual appropriation of $100,000,000, to be distributed as follows: removal of illiteracy, $7,500,000; Americanization, $7,500,000; equalization of educational opportunities, including partial payment of teachers' salaries and extension of school terms, $50,000,000; physical education, including health and sanitation, $20,000,000; and preparation of teachers, $15,000,000. The fund is to be shared with the States under plans similar to those employed in road-building and farm-extension work in the Department of Agriculture—that is to say, Federal appropriations will be contingent on corresponding State grants, and the administration and control of education will remain in the hands of State and local authorities.

The improvement of our national education is a purpose which will of course command the instant assent of all intelligent persons, and there is no doubt of the need. The disclosure by the Draft Act of the presence in the United States of 700,000 illiterate men between twenty-one and thirty-one years of age came as a shock to most persons who had not studied the situation. Americanization of course has become, during the past five years, a word to conjure with. The wretched physical equipment of schools, especially in isolated rural districts, and the inadequate pay of teachers, have long been matters of common knowledge. In physical education, as is well known, we have done next to nothing, while Sweden, for example, has for a century enjoyed the benefits of a system that has made the Swedes probably the best developed people physically in the world. As for the training of teachers, there are tens of thousands of them today who could not pass examinations for entrance to a respectable high school. Nothing is better calculated to dispel the characteristic American complaisance regarding "our great system of free public education" than an honest examination of its actual details and results.

To state the need, however, is by no means to approve every suggested means of meeting it. We do indeed favor the use of the Federal taxing power for the purpose of improving educational facilities in backward communities throughout the country; but we realize that something more than the increase of per capita appropriations is needed for such improvement, as our experience shows. We have multiplied schools, but have not yet educated ourselves. We have learned how to make a living, but have not yet learned how to live. The war has shown us how many among us do not know how to read; but, what is much more serious, it has also shown us how many do not know how to think. It has set us to demanding literacy and "Americanization"; unfortunately it has not set us to demanding power of reflection, independent judgment, and moral self-discipline—the qualities that mean life, as opposed to mere living. It is these qualities at which education must aim, and they are not to be developed simply by machinery and administration.

If the proposed plan is to serve genuine educational ends, therefore, we must have clear answers to certain questions. Is it designed to increase or diminish the power of the "administrators" who already overload our schools, from kindergarten to university, by comparison with the power of the teachers who teach? Four-fifths of the so-called "Americanization" work now carried on is an ignorant and narrow attempt to force our immigrants into the straitjacket of a provincial, materialistic, and inurbane "American" life. Is it for such work that we are to spend seven and a half millions, or is it for the mutual enrichment of their life and ours, and for the sturdy maintenance of the older American ideals that many have been so ready to forget during the war? Is physical education intended to make of the people good working cattie, or is it designed to develop the sound body that shall be the instrument of the sane, keen mind, serving the serene and honest spirit? In "equalizing opportunities," is it planned simply to have better buildings and to "raise the standard" of teachers by requiring a longer period of preparation? In a word, is the proposed Department of Education to be machinery, or is it to be embodied spirit? Is it planned to make our children think more or less alike? Is it intended to produce standardized citizens, guaranteed to think right when Washington pushes the button, or is it designed to train thoughtful, independent, kindly men and women, richly endowed in mind and spirit? That is the central question; it cannot be too carefully pondered, and the probable working of the proposed plan cannot be too narrowly examined with reference to its effect in this direction. For man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.