

An Unforgettable Figure

WOODROW WILSON, by Gerald W. Johnson. Harper. 293 pages. \$2.00

THIS latest book on Woodrow Wilson with the appropriate sub-title of "the unforgettable figure who has returned to haunt us"—with pictures and cartoons assembled by LOOK magazine, and text and captions by Gerald W. Johnson, a careful student of our political history, could not be more timely. The volume furnishes convincing evidence that high sounding agreements for world security that remain unimplemented are nothing but more of the scraps of paper that in the past led us into World War I and World War II, and may land us in anarchic conditions from which our civilization would never revive.

As the hour draws near for the most fateful decision the people of America have ever been called upon to make it is an unpleasant but inescapable duty to review the circumstances in which the last war was won and the peace lost. As our far-flung battle lines are pushed forward and the cracks in the enemy bastions become more apparent it is wise to recall the words of the great Mazzini, who told those who would listen that: "The morrow of the Victory has more perils than its eve."

These words were little heeded in 1919 but tomorrow, after a tremendous series of disasters, we are to be vouchsafed another chance to save civilization. It is more helpful I think to prepare for this decision than to join with those who debate whether it was Wilson or humanity who lost the peace in Paris or whether it was Lodge in Washington.

Whether he was right or wrong in his uncompromising attitude during the Senate battles over the ratification of the Covenant of the League, it is certain that President Wilson, later, did not take a narrow or personal view of the battles that were to come, that he knew would come. To me and to many others in practically identical language, in December 1921, he said, looking back on the struggle at home and abroad which had relegated him to an invalid's chair:

"We at least have nothing to conceal. I glory in the ideas that we defended in France and they will triumph. Perhaps the world charter which we fashioned in Paris will be redrawn in a happier form, but as to its ultimate acceptance I have not a shadow of a doubt. The world will not commit suicide."

It is devoutly to be hoped, when the day of Unconditional Surrender of the war criminals arrives, we will not be taken by surprise.

While, as becomes our democracy, opposing and even clashing views may be expressed, we shall not fall into partisan groups. Certainly to bulwark our shaky civilization all parties can and should combine and certainly the party of Wilson has not an exclusive copyright on all peace plans. Many good Americans who lived and died before Woodrow Wilson was born planned universal peace which passed the understanding of the men of their generation. As the record shows William Penn was the first to bring the dream to America. Quaker though he was he made it quite clear that in his judgment his peace plan, if it were to survive, should have force behind it.

As a matter of fact both Congress and the Republican Party have an excellent record on the vital problem which is now presented to them again, if you but blot out the war-shocked years of 1919 and 1920. Indeed the record shows that in 1910 Congress passed unanimously a Joint Resolution authorizing President William Howard Taft to invite all nations to unite with us in forming a league to lessen the probability of war and suggesting for this purpose an international police force to be composed of the combined navies of the world. Even Theodore Roosevelt who later was to become an outspoken opponent of all the Wilsonian plans for world peace, while still in the White House and with the weight of responsibility upon his shoulders, said and wrote repeatedly: "It would be a master stroke if those great powers honestly bent on peace would form a league, not only to keep the peace among themselves but to prevent by force if necessary its being broken by others." Later, on several occasions, President Theodore Roosevelt pointed out with insistence and with emphasis that the failure of the plans agreed to at the Hague was "due to the lack of any Police to enforce the decrees of the Court."

Of one thing we can be assured, that unless the United Nations stand together on the day of settlement there will be no peace. It has been argued that even had we entered the League, World War II would have come all the same. And that may be true, but what cannot be denied is that a very few hours after the Versailles Treaty was defeated in the U. S. Senate (November 19, 1919) all but the shallowest of pretenses to carry out the obligations entered upon at the Armistice and in the Treaty were abandoned by the Germans.

I only have space to mention one of these innumerable derelictions but it is an important one and tragically topical today. The Weimar Government in the treaty pledged itself to turn

over to us five thousand or more war criminals to be tried in our courts and according to their deserts. Four days after the defeat of the Treaty, as the record shows, the Germans, quite openly launched their policy of non-fulfillment. How natural that was for a people who are accustomed to yield—and to cringe only before force! The great associated power which had contributed so powerfully to winning the war refused to assist in maintaining peace and security! Of the long list of war criminals only four were now brought before the improvised German court in Leipzig. Two were found innocent and two were given light sentences which they never served out! Five thousand war criminals were returned to their homes in the guise

of heroes and the green light for World War II was flashed before the astonished eyes of a people who for all their boasting knew that they had been defeated in battle and expected to have their opportunities for booty and Kriegspiel curtailed for many years to come.

Those who read this tragic story of the lights that failed and who view the pictures of a new world that danced across the screen in 1918 but soon vanished, cannot fail to realize that only in unity is the strength that is required to cope with the situation which is now creeping up on us. Unless we meet a shifty and crafty foe with a united front we may have won many battles but we shall have lost the war.

STEPHEN BONSAI

Lanny Budd's Adventures

PRESIDENTIAL AGENT, by Upton Sinclair.
Viking. 655 pages. \$3.00

THIS novel is first of all the personal story of Lanny Budd, art expert on easy terms with the super-privileged of two continents but in active sympathy with the underdogs; of the fantastic, desperate expedients by which he sought vainly to rescue his wife, a German Socialist, from Gestapo torture-chambers where eventually she died; of what he saw on his travels in France, England, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the United States, and reported secretly to President Roosevelt; and of the assorted lovely ladies (including Frau Goering) whom he tactfully excluded from his bed.

Presidential Agent—fifth volume of the Lanny Budd cycle that began with *World's End* and the Treaty of Versailles—is primarily, however, an objective history of the year of atrocities from the summer of 1937 to the Pact of Munich, that fateful year when the financial and political powers of England, France and the United States purchased World War II by selling to Hitler's torturers the people of Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia—in the fond delusion that through this shameful commerce they were buying "peace in our time" for themselves.

Finally, this book presents a sympathetic interpretation of President Roosevelt's struggles to attain his purposes despite pressure groups, special interests, and lagging public opinion. In the first pages appears an imagined conversation wherein F. D. R. tells his confidential agent that, just as Leon Blum under pressure from reactionary elements in France had sought

to save the social reforms of the *Front Populaire* by withholding arms from the Loyalists in Spain, so Roosevelt, aiming to save the New Deal, had felt himself obliged to yield to the insistence of the Catholic hierarchy that he abandon the people of Spain to the tender mercies of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco.

The book ends with a scene wherein the President explains himself:

"I am under orders, as much so as any private in the army. The American people are my boss, and I have the job of finding out what they want, and doing it. I might bull something through, but what good would it do if the people repudiated it at the next election? . . . I can only lead them as fast as they will follow. . . . If I go faster, I lose contact; and somebody else becomes the leader.

"Never forget that it takes time to change the thinking of a hundred million people, or even of the educated part of them. You go to Europe and see the events with your own eyes; but the people do not go, and the tragedy seems far off and unreal to them. . . . I have to await events. . . . Facts are the only teachers who will be heeded.

"There are some words—I think St. Paul's: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' I think that applies to nations as to individuals. I refuse to believe that men can commit such crimes as the Nazis have committed, and not raise up some agency of justice against them. . . .

"If ever you are tempted to wonder about what I am doing in a crisis, you can guide yourself by the certainty that I am asking what Lincoln would have done.