

Woodrow Wilson

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IT is difficult to appreciate or to evaluate the character and career of a great historical figure like Woodrow Wilson in the very moment of his passing, while a great wave of emotional sympathy with his tragic suffering is possessing all the people, but I cannot put aside your request that I pay some tribute to this great American figure who was my friend and for whom I have deep admiration. I was brought up in the same little Southern city with Woodrow Wilson. His father, Joseph R. Wilson, was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Wilmington, North Carolina. My father was deacon in that church. My first memory of Wilson was of a tall, slender youth at home from Princeton University for the holidays, and I who sat in the pew next behind him, a youngster in the home schools, was deeply impressed with the fact that he was a Princeton student. The last time I saw him in health, on the night of April 2, 1917, he was speaking from the clerk's desk in the House of Representatives, to a mighty hushed audience, the words that led this great industrial democracy into war. I recall my pride in him that night, the dignity of his presence, the culture and solidity and substance of his great speech. He was indeed a gallant figure, possessing all the arts and graces of the greatest platform speaker of his generation. I recall how sure I felt that he would never strike a false note and the delight I had and we all had in the cadences of his voice and the quiet, profound intensity of his manner revealing how deeply impressed on his own soul were the issues of the hour. The last time I saw Woodrow Wilson in life was a year ago, on Armistice Day, when he stood for five minutes on the portico of his S Street home and, with a voice still beautiful and unravaged by disease, spoke with a ringing belligerency suggestive of his habit in former days. Woodrow Wilson played many important rôles on the great stage as an educator, a historian, a student of political institutions, politician, statesman, President, international leader. His activities were of the widest range. I believe it will be the verdict of history that his place is among the select group of very great Americans. I am sure that it is enrolled among the great Presidents of the Republic—men of the type of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln, Roosevelt. He was a leader, of course, in the most romantic and unselfish enterprise ever undertaken by this or any other people. No such

administrative burden ever before befell any other President. During the period between November, 1918, and March, 1919, he wielded a power greater perhaps than was ever before wielded by any ruler in the political history of mankind. As one recalls what the task of settling the World War really meant, it is very clear that the power of Cæsar and Napoleon and Alexander was parochial compared to the power wielded by Wilson at that time. To all of his tasks he brought a strong will and uncompromising steadfastness and amazing faith in himself and his cause and a depth of conviction that disregarded opposition.

If I were asked to put down the most outstanding and distinctive attribute of the character of Woodrow Wilson, I should say courage—physical courage, mental courage, moral courage. Personally he was a man of charming manners, of alluring social qualities, and possessed all of the qualities of the highly cultivated citizen of the world; but what he really loved was a fight in a good cause that he believed to be right. He regarded compromise as a form of treason, and it is to be feared that his intensity of conviction led him astray in judgment in the last phases of the battle for the entrance of the United States into the League of Nations.

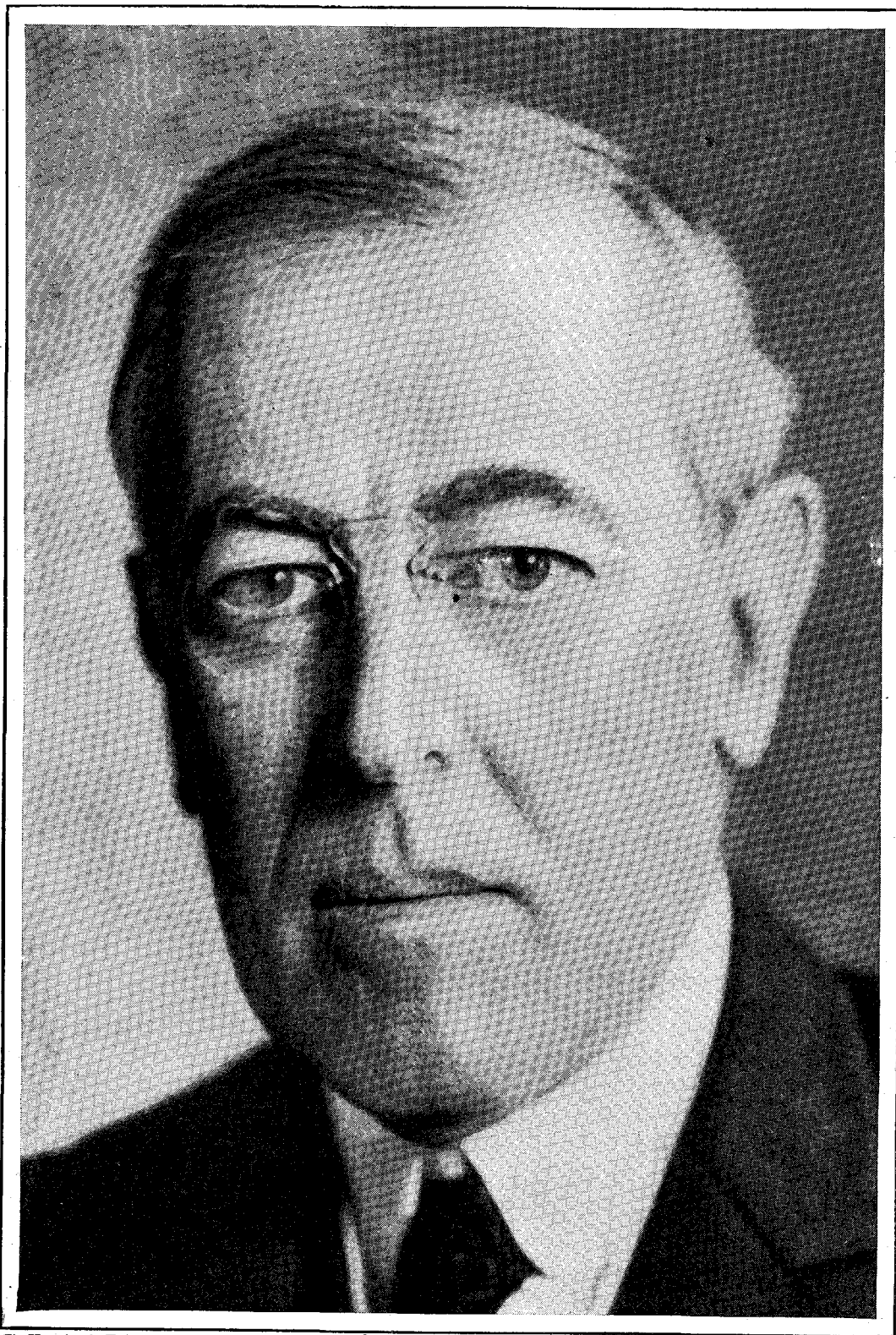
Woodrow Wilson will as the years go by more and more appeal to men as a twentieth-century type of a great liberal, more spiritually akin to Thomas Jefferson than any other man in American history. His shortcomings were Jeffersonian, and his virtues were Jeffersonian. He went forward to meet a battle more eagerly than Jefferson, but did not hang on to a fight with any greater intensity. The root of liberalism lies in the dignity and worth of the individual. Its pursuit is the pursuit of the social good rather than of class benefits. It submits all the assertions of authority to the judgment of the individual, whether they issue out of scriptures or creeds or constitutions.

Like Jefferson, I do not think Wilson took a tremendous interest in individual men. Unlike John Marshall, if he saw on the roadside Tom Jones he was not keenly interested to fall into conversation with Tom Jones, but he had faith in the ultimate integrity and common sense of all the Tom Joneses if democracy gave them sufficient training for their task, and, like Jefferson, he would have gone to the stake to guarantee them freedom from tyranny and oppression and the right to make the most of themselves. I,

therefore, predict that Woodrow Wilson will be joined unto the great liberals of the world, chosen to that group by the voice of mankind, men who have suffered and fought and died to promote the slow but majestic movement of men in all lands—men like John Milton and John Hampden, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, Martin Luther and Ulrich von Hutten, Mazzini and Cavour, Gladstone and John Morley and Abraham Lincoln.

The world will never forget and Americans will forever be proud of the part played by Woodrow Wilson in the World War. It was a task of incredible difficulty. It was impossible to perform the task without error, but, as Americans shall forever take pride in the fact that George Washington stood in the forefront of the Nation's life when independence was at stake, so they will have pride that Woodrow Wilson incarnated the American spirit when world freedom was at stake. His great state papers, even his much-derided notes, his Fourteen Points, his memorable addresses, will define for all time the purposes of the war and the ideals and aims of American democracy. In the last three or four years, while Woodrow Wilson has fought his fight with disease and suffering, all men have noted how the heart of the Republic has been turning to him in tenderness, appreciation, and good will. The supreme achievement of his life and the main reason why the heart of the Republic is turning to him is that he brought to this Republic the League of Nations, the most rational scheme of international co-operation ever devised by man. Such a League had been for centuries the dream of great spirits—Plato, Henry of Navarre, William Penn, Kant—but he brought a practical covenant itself for the practical consideration of a practical people. He failed in this partly through temperamental inhibitions of his own, but infinitely more through the savage and cruel dislike of him and of his aims by opposing political forces. But the League lives. It has set a standard around which men of generous impulses and clear thinking will rally for all time. I think there was something of the poet in the soul of Wilson. He knew the spiritual value of the ideal of the League of Nations. He tied his policies and his name for all time to those ideals, and thus has achieved a solid and substantial immortality, greater perhaps than that of any of the great figures of the mighty epoch through which he passed.

By telegraph from Charlottesville, Virginia.



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Woodrow Wilson
President of the United States
1913—1921