

## LEAGUE VANQUISHED BY IDEA OF TRIPLE ALLIANCE, SAYS SIMONDS

By FRANK H. SIMONDS  
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The proverbial visitor from Mars would not find himself more perplexed or confused than the American returning home to his own country after six months spent in the atmosphere of Europe and in immediate contact with the facts of the peace conference. At home a mighty controversy is plainly raging over the provisional settlements and permanent unsettlements of the Paris conference. So far the situation is identical with that in the French capital, but while in France the argument centers about one set of circumstances, in America the things debated are totally different. In a word, the peace discussion in the two hemispheres is about wholly dissimilar questions carried on in an utterly dissimilar fashion.

And at the outset of any examination of this difference it is essential to note the primary fact. In the United States debate still centers about the League of Nations; in Europe—outside the circle of Americans closely associated with the president—the league of nations has ceased to occupy attention, provoke discussion—to put it quite bluntly, it has ceased to exist. Instead, the thing considered is the future association of France, Great Britain and the United States, in an alliance which will perpetuate the present association in Paris and preserve world order and peace.

There is another fact that is equally necessary to emphasize and that is that there never was save for one brief emotional moment coinciding with the president's arrival in Europe on his first trip, any real belief in the League of Nations in Europe. During that moment masses of people suddenly relieved from the immediate agonies of the conflict, still broken with their suffering, looked to the president as a man from another world come to perform miracles, transform empires, abolish age-long rivalries. In the reaction from the horror of the war men and women turned with a strange moving of utterly transitory faith to the president of the United States.

But this moment passed almost instantly. If the British, French and Italian people were for a moment transported out of themselves, they quite as suddenly returned to their normal condition. If the British people desired permanent peace they did not in the least subscribe to the idea that they themselves and not the Germans should pay for the war, for the wanton destruction on land and sea. The English people were not willing that the Germans should re-establish themselves in their old colonies along the British waterways—that German ships should replace British ships sunk by submarines.

As for the French people, they knew that the sole hope of French solvency lay in compelling the Germans to repay for devastation and they first demanded that military protection should be gained with victory. Italy, in the same fashion, resolved to build her future along the Adriatic. Europe was from the outset resolved upon an European settlement. Only America, with small losses set off by enormous economic gains, would ever think of a peace of conciliation.

And so from the very outset an American and an European idea were in conflict. President Wilson came to Europe to promote a peace of conciliation, based upon his Fourteen Points, and to be perpetuated by his League of Nations, which was to make war impossible in the future. Europe—the Allies—were equally resolved upon a peace which should so far as it was humanly possible repair their losses and heal their gaping wounds. If America's idealistic experiment was possible, alike in view of our history and our contemporary condition, for Europe it was impossible alike because of traditions and immediate circumstances.

But given the essential facts, the diplomacy of the great powers, Britain, France and Italy, dealt with the American proposal in totally different fashions, particularly at the outset. The British on their part, with supreme good sense, elected not to oppose Mr. Wilson, but to associate themselves with a proposal recognized by most of them to be decidedly impractical, and gain thereby the incalculable advantage of new and closer friendship with the United States. The French, honestly but moderately, proclaimed their lack of faith in the Wilsonian Doctrine, while the Italians stood coolly aside, insisting at all times upon such national benefits as they had material claims upon.

Harmony With British. The result was inevitable. In the briefest time the British and American representatives in Paris were working in closest harmony. Cecil, Smuts and half a dozen other British and Colonial representatives were framing the covenant of the League of Nations, while between the French and American representatives there was in existence and between the Italian and American representatives there was growing up an estrangement, which shortly endangered the peace of the world.

Now in all this situation which resulted in the greatest diplomatic triumph in all British history, it is very hard to separate accident from design. I do not believe it is true as is frequently urged that the British undertook to receive or manipulate the President and the American representatives. They did not believe in the league of nations any more than the French, but they saw, what the French failed to see, that friendly and sympathetic association with the President promised to pave the way to something eminently desirable, namely, a permanent Anglo-American alliance, in fact if not on paper.

They saw with equal clarity two other things; they saw that there was very real likelihood that championship of the President's ideas would remove the possibility of a clash over such issues as the freedom of the seas and the possession of the German colonies. Henry IV once said of his change of religion that "France was worth a mass," and British statesmanship with equal vision recognized that American friendship, accepting the President as representative of America, was worth any amount of sympathy and aid to the President in furthering a plan, which, whether practical or not, was without peril to British interests and had an appeal to

certain elements in the British population.

The other thing the British saw with the greatest clearness, was that the war had changed the position of America. Britain, victorious though she was, had been crippled financially and economically; recovery if certain would be slow; America was a potential rival certain to occupy something of Britain's position in the world for some time to come, certain to be the strongest single power on earth for many decades. Therefore, to quarrel with America would be fatal and to quarrel over the league of nations mere fatuity.

Desire U. S. Friendship.

At this point it is necessary to add one more thing. If British policy clearly pointed in one direction, there is no less unmistakable evidence that the desire of many Englishmen without regard to national questions was for a new basis of Anglo-American relations. If there was calculation in British policy, there was not less certainly, spontaneous and widespread anxiety to establish newer and firmer friendship between the two English-speaking peoples. In sum, I am anxious to make clear that the British statesmen did not merely conspire to use Mr. Wilson's idealism; they and their fellow countrymen came to Paris or stayed at home equally resolved to promote the cause of Anglo-American friendship.

British statesmen, however, saw clearly that the league of nations idea could not succeed. They recognized that no peace of conciliation was possible, because they knew their Europe—they knew their own people, the French people, and the Italian people would never consent to permit Germany to escape from the war unscathed, to resume the old attacks while the nations attacked by Germany were left ruined and bankrupt. What they expected was that as the league of nations project became more and more potentially illusive, Anglo-American association extended to include France, would become more and more powerful, until the three nations, acting together, dominated, first the peace conference, and later the world, through the medium of a real interest if not of solved covenants. The league of nations thus from the very outset meant for the British an Anglo-French American alliance.

The French on their part began very boldly. Like George Washington, M. Clemenceau was incapable of telling a lie, and unlike a wise diplomat he had to blurt out the truth—the result was, as I have said, instant estrangement between France and the United States, as represented by Mr. Wilson, and a very unfortunate period of disappointment. Frenchmen would not and could not believe in the league of nations, with the memory of old and recent German invasions and devastations in their minds. Moreover they knew—and it gave them furious rage—that their allies across the channel did not believe in the League

of Nations, and they felt they were being abandoned by their British friends, whereas in the main they were the victims of their own logic. French Antagonistic.

At a certain moment, this situation was acute for the French saw the British with Mr. Wilson's consent acquiring all the German colonies, the German fleets, Turkish provinces, while their far more modest demands such as the claim upon the Saar coal basin were denied by Mr. Wilson, and their Syrian aspirations, at least as legitimate as British pretensions in Mesopotamia, violently opposed by American and British statesmen. This was the situation in the first stage of the peace conference. In this period Mr. Wilson, with British help, framed the covenant of the League of Nations, with British aid excluded French amendments designed to give France security, and Japanese changes drafted to remove the stigma of race inferiority. Then Mr. Wilson returned to the United States. So far the League of Nations had been the center of European as well as American discussion, but at this precise moment the whole situation changed.

With the President's departure, the peace conference turned from the League of Nations to the material problems, territorial and economic. And at this point British policy necessarily changed. For Britain, like France and Italy, had material interests involved. Like France and Italy she had economic and financial claims. Moreover, she had secret treaties alike with France, Japan and Italy which bound her to support her allies' claims and even when these claims conflicted with the Fourteen Points and insured the impossibility of making a peace of conciliation.

As a consequence, when Mr. Wilson returned he found himself in the presence of Europe. Europe had given on him his League of Nations; it was prepared to give him such amendments as the political situation in America demanded; but in return it now asked of him his assent to the material and practical conditions which had taken shape in his absence. Above all, they demanded that he should subscribe to the European idea of German responsibility on the financial side and to the provisions made in the secret treaties.

Wilson Faces Crisis. But these European demands, legitimate, justified approval, since if they were not satisfied France was ruined, Britain gravely wounded, Italy left with her own nationalities unsatisfied and abolished, all hope of peace of conciliation. Germany, after these terms had been imposed, was bound to be crippled, sullen, resentful. She was bound to plan new wars and harbor all old resentments. While the Jugo Slavs, the Greeks and the Chinese were equally certain to resist the decisions of the peace conference.

In this situation, Mr. Wilson had to choose; he might retire from the peace conference, he might retire from the peace conference, he might remain rigidly faithful to his Fourteen Points and his dream of a peace of conciliation. But retirement meant in addition political difficulties at home which require no emphasis. That he debated doing this—his sudden call for the George Washington clearly indicates. That he found the threat of going was alone unavailable,

the sequence of events clearly demonstrated.

Mr. Wilson then faced the great crisis. To go meant the ruin of the League of Nations, the success at home of his political enemies, the confusion of the Allied cause. But to stay meant to consent to an European peace, to accept terms of accord with his program, of a peace of conciliation—it meant to lose the commanding role in the peace conference.

Fight is Continued.

The President's decision was to stay. He believed, he was convinced, that if a League of Nations were once established, set in motion, all else would in the end resolve itself. Meantime, he would try, and he did try, to obtain such modifications of Allied claims as were possible. He continued to fight, notably in the case of Fiume, for at least a semblance of his program, of his Fourteen Points.

Nevertheless in the very nature of things the league of nations idea disappeared. The settlement with Germany, territorially as well as politically, based on justice in the main, insured permanent German utility, and France demanded and obtained the president's endorsement of a guarantee against Germany, which amounted in fact to a new Anglo-French American alliance.

After this, there was no more European concern for the league of nations. What the British has always seen as the big possibility of the league of nations in fact, what the French had tardily recognized as the maximum of possibility, was now arrived—namely an alliance with the United States. Moreover, this alliance was a fact in Paris and dominated the peace conference.

Small Powers Struggle

Exactly in the same way the smaller powers recognized the fact; they too with their claims laid aside all hope or expectation of a league of nations and began to struggle for the material facts openly. Poland and Czechoslovakia, Serbia and Rumania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Serbia and Italy, Poland and Ukraine, Rumania and Bulgaria, Bulgaria and Serbia, turned from the thought of peaceful settlement to the preparation for conflict. When I left Paris on May 31, not less than eighteen wars were in progress in Europe alone.

In a word, in the presence of national aspirations and dreams in eastern and in southern Europe, in the face of imperious material necessities in western Europe, the whole conception of a peace of conciliation, of a league of nations to perpetuate an amicable solution, Mr. Wilson's conception broke down and disappeared. There was left only one thing—the Anglo-French-American association. It would not insure peace in Russia or in central and southern Europe, since it was unwilling to send troops; it could not prevent conflicts between rival races; it could not, because of the material facts concerning Britain, France, Italy and Japan, make any but a victor's peace with Germany, and once it had agreed upon its terms and served them upon Germany, it was plain that most of the dreams expressed in the league of nations were incapable of realization.

Solution Breaks Down

To sum up: Mr. Wilson came to Europe with an American plan for solving European problems. But once the solution was applied to the facts

it broke down. Mr. Wilson's principles for which he fought earnestly, were put into the league of nations covenant and the European nations solemnly accepted the covenant, but having done this they proceeded to frame their peace on the basis of facts, financial, economical and territorial.

They could not do otherwise, for any other course meant ruin for their countries and victory for Germany. But once this was done there emerged not a peace of conciliation, but a treaty which put Germany for fifteen years literally in the hands of her conquerors, and compelled her to work under their direction to repay the sums she had cost them through her attacks. But to do this meant to transform the League of Nations into an alliance whose main business was to keep Germany in hand until the account was settled, after an indefinite number of years.

This briefly is the story of the collapse in Europe of the League of Nations, as a fact, Europe having endorsed Mr. Wilson's ideals, applied its own principles, it made a European peace, the best and most just European peace in history, I believe, but something utterly removed from Mr. Wilson's idea of a peace of conciliation and literally a peace only to be enforced by the continued application of actual force.

Disbelief in League.

Moreover, the nations, large and small, whose aspirations, frequently legitimate, were not realized, declined to accept the decisions of the peace conference, and either resorted to arms or bided their time with the intention of ultimately appealing to arms. And in this situation the League of Nations disappeared from calculations. From the serious discussions of Paris, save in American circles; where, as to the returning American it seems to have continued to occupy American attention almost to the exclusion of all else. In Paris I talked with scores and scores of representatives of big and little nations, but never one did I meet who actually believed in the League of Nations as the fact or the possibility it still seems to many Americans. What they all talked about was the Anglo-French-American alliance, which as I said at the beginning was the reality. British statesmen from the beginning saw behind the League of Nations idea and the French statesmen presently perceived.

Europe does not believe in the League of Nations. It has accepted the covenant because America, through Mr. Wilson, asked for it. To Europe it is America's share in the spoils of victory, just as the German colonies fall to Britain and Alsace-Lorraine to France. We might have had territory and money if we had asked for them; our right to claim both was never challenged. Indeed, Europe is anxious to have us take certain territories in Asia Minor. But the thing I am trying to say is that Europe adopted the covenant of the League of Nations not because it believed in the idea, but because it recognized that America, who had associated with the allies in the victory, asked for such a covenant. It proved its lack of faith in the idea by proceeding thereafter to make peace on a European basis without regard to the ideas of the League of Nations and thus completely eliminated the League of Nations as an actual living fact.

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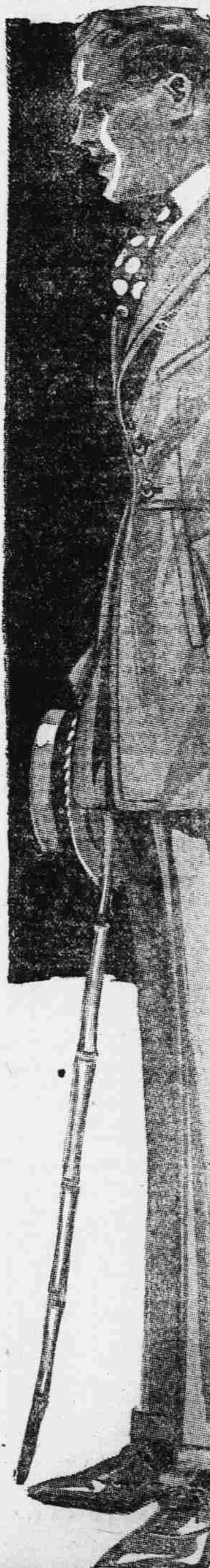
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