

# *An English View of the President*

PRESIDENT WILSON FROM AN ENGLISH POINT OF VIEW. By H. Wilson Harris. (Frederick A. Stokes Co.; \$1.75.)

In presenting an English view of President Wilson, Mr. Harris has performed a service as valuable for American as for English readers. We of the United States, observing the inevitable inaccuracies and deficiencies in the consideration of our politics by a careful British student, may have a renewed comprehension of the greater depths of our ignorance of English politics.

Mr. Harris attempts an unadorned biography of Woodrow Wilson and a simple exposition of his presidential policies. What may appeal to most Americans as a fundamental error is his assumption that Mr. Wilson is primarily an initiating leader. A leader of exceptional power he undoubtedly is, but one who customarily takes the lead after a project has been formulated and organized and advanced to the dignity of either majority or strong minority support. This appears to be his self-chosen rôle. He does not waste his energy or influence in seeking out new roads and persuading the doubting hosts to follow. He watches mass opinion closely, and with the certainty of genius waits for and recognizes the gradual emergence of mature convictions and issues from the confused discussion of unhealthy or undeveloped policies wherein democracy thinks out loud.

Mr. Harris observes, for example, that the President changed his deprecation of preparedness in 1914 to a fervent advocacy before 1916, but lays the change largely to the education of Mr. Wilson by the events of 1915, giving the impression that the President then transmitted his enlightenment to the people. More accurately he might have written that the events of 1915, interpreted by the propagandists of preparedness, had enlightened the American people. A mass opinion demanding increased armament was formed, not with Mr. Wilson's aid, but considerably despite his very powerful resistance. The President, a high type of pacifist, reluctantly accepted the changed public opinion as his mentor. He took the lead with obvious hesitation, exhibited notably in his controversy with Secretary of War Garrison, but public opinion massed itself in increasing strength behind even this doubtful leadership and when the break with Germany came the President was able to swing it against

a stumbling, irresolute Congress, driving through his vast programme with enheartening ease.

Mexico furnishes perhaps a more vivid example of Mr. Wilson's quality on the negative side. The American people formulated no policy with regard to Mexico and the President in consequence, like the people, adopted "watchful waiting." The President had splendid ideals of Pan-Americanism, but ideals are not policies and it is a certain touchstone for Mr. Wilson's administration to note that his ideals are translated into policies only after the democracy, whose great servant he aspires to be and is, has formulated an opinion which can be relied upon to support an executive programme.

Woodrow Wilson the statesman combines a patient firmness in action, and an intellectual self-sufficiency in counsel, with an amazing and seemingly inconsistent responsiveness to public opinion. To interpret the public will seems to be his chosen ideal for a leader of democracy. To write successfully the life of such a man requires an intimate knowledge of the politics and politicians of his time. This knowledge Mr. Harris admittedly lacks. His minimizing of the profound influence of Progressivism, and the Progressive Party upon the President is peculiarly irritating to anyone well acquainted with the last decade of American politics. Mr. Harris refers to Senator La Follette, who bitterly opposed the Progressive Party and supported Wilson, as "one of the founders of the Progressive Party." He describes the Progressive platform, which sounded an absolutely new note in American politics and attacked vigorously both the old parties, as "a curious amalgam of the Republican and Democratic."

An inclination to be harsh with Mr. Harris should be restrained because of the clear sincerity and good intention of his work. He writes of recent American politics without a comprehension of the powerful influence of Colonel Roosevelt, and of the magnitude and depth of the struggle between him and Mr. Wilson. The two men are utterly different in character and method, and the conflict between them is inevitable and elemental. The life of neither can be written without a fair knowledge of the other. Mr. Harris labors under the handicap of having only superficial information concerning both.

His book will have the largest value for Americans in his interpretation of Mr. Wilson's international policy. Here, with a better com-

prehension of the issues and factors involved, he interprets more skilfully. Here, also, he is delineating a Wilson who is less the speaker of, and more the speaker for, democracy. The American people comprehend so little of international relations that they are accustomed to accept without controversy the presidential determinations of their will toward other peoples. The abrupt reversal of a policy of national isolation aroused little opposition, because to the masses "isolation," "Monroe Doctrine," "imperialism," and such terms had no poignant significance. The Balkan question will mean nothing to us as a people until it begins to cost us blood and money. Upon international questions Mr. Wilson spoke for the people, and his purposes rather than those of our people may be read in those utterances. Mr. Harris's exposition of Wilson as President of Humanity—to use the phrase of a hostile critic—is therefore more accurate and illuminating than his well-intentioned but inadequate presentation of Wilson as President of the United States.

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