

Mem. on Woodrow Wilson

for Mrs. Allan Mills

My first sight of Woodrow Wilson was at a political meeting at Newark, N.J. It was a rather boistrous meeting. I cannot remember the date but I think it was while he was Governor and at the time that "Martine" was up for Senator. I remember the contrast between the two: Wilson slender, alert, elegant - Martine fat, flabby, common place.

Wilson spoke, and I never before realized what the scholar in politics might be. *(I) should have known* *nothing of ledge at all, not a trace of intellectual superciliousness.* He seemed altogether at home, he was humorous and good natured. *if cruelly honest* The way he handled his English - so flexible, so effective, captivated me. I went away *for him whatever else you - See me* altogether sold to him. *Cabriel dinner 2/5/16.*

I think the next that I saw of him was at Shadow Lawn before the election of 1916. I went down at the request of Woolley, and with the consent of Wilson, to get an interview. I think I give my impression of him at that time rather frankly in my article. I remember now how simple and friendly every one was about the place, without any letting up of dignity. It was my first im-^{NO}pression, of dignity. *second* Mrs. Wilson, I remember, was particularly nice. He was thoughtful about my comfort. It was hot and we went to a shady porch. He himself suggested that I take notes, which I did very rapidly and freely - he stopping me now and then to say, 'Now, how have you got that?' It was evident that he wanted the interview to be representative if it was to be anything. I felt very much at home with him, I remember, though I had rather dreaded the interview.

These two contacts with him gave me the impression of a friendly, natural person, quite different from the impression that

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so many people have, but which probably they have reason for if they found themselves in opposition to him.

I am sure that of this Shadow Lawn episode you will find all you want in the Collier article. He took great pains, I remember, to read the proofs for me as I had asked him to do, and he made some corrections, very courteously and gently. I am sorry that I cannot put my hand on those proofs which I kept, with the correspondence.

Now as to that dinner. It was the Daniels Cabinet dinner in the February after his marriage. We of course were all ahead of him and standing waiting for his arrival. I was talking interestedly with somebody and had forgotten what it was all about, when I was conscious of a distinguished pair which made you stop to look at them in the doorway. It took me an instant to remember what we were there for, and that this was the President's Lady.

My first thought, I recall, was, How he looks the part! And he did. Of course we were curious about Mrs. Wilson. You know all the tattle that had been going around. Well, she was a handsome figure, much more the "First Lady" in appearance than a lot of them have been. Elegantly dressed, but she didn't reach him in distinction. He looked a good deal more like a president than most of them have. I was particularly struck in Paris at the plenary conferences at the way he bore himself. At that high table, you will remember, I am sure, that he looked something more than any individual there. He seems to have felt that he owed dignity to the public.

While we were at the dinner table I noticed that he was gay. I learned later that he told stories and quoted limericks all through the dinner. It was later when I had my turn of talking

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to him & I told him I was ^{good} ~~chance~~ ^{friend} ~~only~~ ^{friend}
the nurse's animation and ~~gotten~~ ^{only} ~~well~~ - he talks
eagerly full to talk of her and to try and do
right of the difference of courtship as a lady when
each time he calls the house is surrounded
by ~~civil service~~ Secret service men!
In spite of this gayly one

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with him that I knew he was anxious. I suppose I must have said something about its being an anxious time. ~~I remember he said,~~ ^{but} "No one can tell how anxious it is." "I never go to bed without realizing that I may be called up by news that will mean that we are at war. Before tomorrow morning we may be at war. It is harder because the reports that come to us must be kept secret. Hasty action, indiscretion might plunge us into a dangerous situation when a little care would entirely change the face of things." *My great duty is not to see red?*

I remember he said, "You cannot always know that the reports of the morning are true reports."

He repeated something that I think was in that interview, that he felt his great duty was not to see red, as he expressed it. I knew I carried away from that dinner a feeling of the tremendous difficulty, of the tremendous threat under which ^{we} he constantly lived, and of a man that had steeled himself to see ^{it} through. It strengthened my confidence in him. [#] *A see it*

Throughout the war I had some correspondence with him. I wrote him every now and then, at his request. Not very often of course, but when I thought that there was something that possibly would not come to his attention; and I always received cordial answers and cordial requests to not fail to write him if I thought there was something that he should know. I remember his saying, "What you tell me is something that I could get in no other way."

Far from feeling that he was shutting himself off from sources of information, I am confident that he was doing his utmost to inform himself, that his refusals to see or listen to people came obviously from the fact that they brought him what he already knew. I remember of hearing people who had gone to him saying that he told them impatiently "I know that," and not being allowed to go on. He was not willing to take time going over things that he

already knew.

One thing that came up at the dinner was his satisfaction in the warm reception he received on the trip that he and Mrs. Wilson made, I think, in January after their marriage. That you can verify. I do not remember where they went - you will know - but he spoke very heartily of his feeling that the people were with him in his attitude towards the war so far. He said he had gotten an impression much stronger by that trip than he had ever had before of public opinion and how it works, that it was a good thing for a president to go among the people at times, he had learned much by it, he wished he could do it oftener.

I did not see him in Paris - didn't try to. It seemed to me too cruel unless there was something that was of first importance, but I got an impression of how the glint of steel in the man made sometimes for cruelty in personal relations. But how could he be otherwise in that mess?

I did not see him after his illness until early in May of 1922. He wrote me in regard to a little piece that *Colliers' Weekly* had used as an editorial under the title of "The Man They Cannot Forget." In this letter he said, "I wish to express to you my pride and deep pleasure that you should entertain such thoughts of me. It is the favorable verdict of minds like your own which every one dealing with high and difficult affairs should desire and strive for. Hoping that I shall many times more have the pleasure that I had at Shadow Lawn of exchanging thoughts with you personally, etc."

That gave me an opening which I should not have sought, and the Tea Party was the result. I jotted down some rough notes at the time. Here are a few paragraphs:

Mrs. Wilson came to the drawing room for me. Fine

impression of sweetness, self-control and elegance - never was more taken with her. Very cordial. Took me into the library where, at the right of the fireplace, Mr. Wilson was sitting. Startled by a sense that he was a very sick man. My first conscious thought was that this was no time to push the idea that I had in mind of persuading him about a series of conversations; the impropriety, if not cruelty of it, came on me at the first glimpse of him. His hand clasp was strong and warm, but there was an almost pathetic look in his face when he said, "You will forgive my not getting up, I cannot rise." And his voice had a fatigue in it which was heartbreaking. All the way through the conversation I noticed this fatigue of voice - a bad sign.

Mrs. Wilson spoke of my having been in Washington through the Conference and asked me if I found the foreigners interesting. I said, I did, that the whole thing had interested me very much - Mr. Harding especially. She spoke of feeling sorry for him, but it is obvious that W.W. is not sorry, rather contemptuous. I said, 'Of course he doesn't know anything, doesn't know how to think.' He said, "No, he has nothing to think with." 'But,' I added, 'he is very likable.' He went on to say that when he (W.W.) went before the Senate Committee in regard to the League of Nations, Harding was one of the Committee and that nobody asked such unintelligent questions - which I can quite believe.

He referred to the Newberry case as the most dangerous thing of its kind that had ever happened in the Republic, that Newberry was used to pack the Senate against the League of Nations, that if it had not been for him it would not have been rejected.

The Newberry case was introduced, as I remember, by his taking up a copy of a little evening paper and saying to Mrs.

Wilson, "Here is a new mot - New - bury - very good is it not?"

They tell me a good deal about the mail, the answering of which seems to have been their chief occupation. For a time Mrs. Wilson read the letters to Mr. Wilson, and she said she became so interested in them that now she takes her knitting and goes in while the secretary is reading them to him. Evidently he followed everything with keen interest.

One thing which we had talked about was an idea that J.S.P. expanded for a primer of Democracy. When I went away, I said, "Don't forget the primer of Democracy, Mr. Wilson. We need it very much." His head dropped, and he said very simply, "I don't know enough to do it."

My whole impression was of a man broken physically but of a spirit as unyielding, as capable of contempt for those he regarded as contemptible, of outspoken repudiation of those he called marplots, Reed, Lodge and others, as ever. His mind was clear and strong, but his spirit was harsh and unbending.

I remember that in speaking of Harding he said that he was entirely right not to see the women and children who had presented themselves the day before my visit to plead for the release of their fathers and husbands who were political prisoners.

"They do not deserve release," he said severely. "Debs never should have been released. He is one of the worst men in the country. He should be in the penitentiary."

One of the pleasant things about this visit was his talk about his library. The books ran to the ceiling where he said they were marooned. Evidently he and Mrs. Wilson had studied a good deal about some kind of a contrivance by which he could

get to them - a ladder which would not be unsightly, and I remember he said, 'There ain't no such animal.'

They had a lovely garden behind the house, and he evidently took great interest in that, and indeed in the whole house, which was really charming.

The day was atrocious - torrents of rain, and I remarked that it was too bad he could not have his ride. He replied, "But we have had it. We never miss it."

Mrs. Wilson told me, in asking me to come again, that he saw but one person a day and generally for not more than 15 minutes so that they had to arrange several days in advance for visitors. She also said, "Mr. Wilson would like to have spoken to you about 'The Man They Cannot Forget' which touched him deeply, but he cannot talk of anything that moves him without tears, and you can understand how much he dislikes to break down before his friends."