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Mem. Visit to Woodrow Wilson - May 5, 1922

An invitation to "drink tea" with Mr. and Mrs. Wilson at half past five, May 5, 1922. My first visit to 2340 S Street. * 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 fatiguer in it which was heart-breaking. All the way through the conversation I noticed this fatigue of voice - a bad sign, in my judgment.

The weather was terrible, floods of rain, and I said, "I suppose you could not go out this afternoon." "On the contrary," they both exclaimed, "we always go." Mrs. Wilson added, "I never let him miss a day." He spoke of the pleasure he took in his drive. I found it difficult to make conversation. There was a restraint on his part, quite unlike his old self.

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We had already talked about the house. Mrs. Wilson had shown me her garden and commented on how lucky they were to step into so beautiful a place, and it is really a delightful place. The books at the further end of the room run up to the top, and he spoke of them as being marooned, and said he didn't like it. Mrs. Wilson said that she had been trying to find a ladder that was not ugly, and he said "There ain't no such animal." She told of a political admirer - a lady from Baltimore, who had visited her and who had told

her of a really beautiful ladder in a Baltimore house and promised to get the design for her, but she never heard from her.

2 We spoke of Sprunt, and MacRae, whom I had just seen in Wilmington. He warmly approved of MacRae's work of colonization. I spoke of how warm their loyalty to him was and of their interest in any of his expressions, making this an opening to the idea I had in mind. X 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, and did not know how to think. He said, "No, he has nothing to think with." But, I added, he is very likeable. 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. #

Wilson thinks little of the Four Power Pact, says that in entering such a pact as that, we have more need of the navy than ever, that it will be nothing but a navy that can enforce such a pact.

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I said that of course Harding never understood anything about the League of Nations, that in my judgment it was the bewilderment of the country and not any conscious rejection of the League that was the trouble in 1920 - spoke of my experience in the North-west. Mrs. Wilson said that Mrs. Barnes had recently been there and that she thought, from intelligently analyzing the causes that were behind the overwhelming defeat were: the German vote, the Irish vote, the Negro vote, etc. Mr. Wilson

says that he doesn't think it was a referendum in any sense - though he didn't use that word. I took this chance to get in my suggestion that he could call - particularly the women of the country back to basic ideals - perhaps write a primer of democracy. That is, that it looks to me that they don't quite know where they are going, and that they try to satisfy their ideals by fidelity to the political machine, that they will accept things that otherwise they would disdain to have anything to do with, out of loyalty - that loyalty to party is being put before principle - and this is seen in the Newberry case, which worries me greatly.

Wilson says that the Newberry case is the most dangerous thing of its kind that has 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, that now the party having used him, has to sustain him. I said that this had disturbed me more than anything that has happened for a long time in regard to women, that I have found that women who were entirely committed to the League of Nations were standing by their party in this, and that was one reason why I felt so strongly that we need this basic instruction in democratic idealism.

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Wilson says he sympathizes with party loyalty, that you cannot have democratic government unless leadership is accepted and followed. He says that certain Senators came to him recently and talked over a program for the party. He said that he would lay out the program if they would put it before the democratic caucus, and, having accepted it, would agree to follow it; that they would not do it. He said, "They have their petty, willful notions of independence, apart from party - will not follow a

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program."

I take it that here what he is talking about is a program quite apart from political immorality like the Newberry case. The Newberry case was introduced, as I remember now, by his taking up a copy of a little evening paper and saying to Mrs. Wilson, "My dear, here is a new mot - New - Bury - very good is it not?" Then we were off as above. This of course is accepting the explanation that the Newberry case buried New. I said, I am glad that he was defeated. He says, "Yes, there are worse men, in many respects, in the United States than Beveridge." Well, I say, he is better than New anyway. He says, "Yes."

One of his expressions in this discussion was, "We have made the world safe for democracy. The world would not permit today that any small nation should be seized, agree that it has the right to work out its destiny; but democracy is in danger from interior revolution, it must learn to preserve itself." He says that the danger to the League of Nations today is from the Supreme Council, that it is an unauthorized body, made up of the worst elements in Europe." (whether he refers to Lloyd George here or not I do not know.)

Am much interested in Mrs. Wilson's attitude - perfectly charming, kindly, literary, interested, watching him every moment - most delightful to look at.

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Wilson speaks of the fact that there are many common people, working men, who have written, expressing their loyalty to the League. She says that the mail is very interesting. For a time, in the illness of his secretary, Mr. Bolling, she read the mail to Mr. Wilson and became so interested in it that now she takes her knitting and goes in while the mail is being read to him. Evidently he follows it with keen interest, it is his communication with the country and a measure of the

country's interest in him.

At the end of half an hour I think and feeling that I had staid as long as I ought, that he was beginning to be tired, I rose to go. Mr. Wilson said, "You will come again. Let us know in advance." Mrs. Wilson said, "He is allowed to see only one person a day, so we have to arrange ahead."

When I go away I say to him, "Don't forget the primer of democracy, Mr. Wilson, we need it very much." He quite surprised me by a droop of his head and a very humble, "I don't know enough to do it."

My whole impression is of a broken man but of a spirit as unyielding, as capable of contempt for those he reagrd as contemptible, of outspoken repudiations of those he regards as "marplots" as he calls Reid, and others, as ever. His mind is clear and strong, but there is a bitterness of spirit which I fear will make it incapable of rendering the very great service that I believe he might do today; and that is, putting aside all contemporary questions and policies, to recall the country constantly to the big fundamental principles and ideals. To carry out J.S.P's idea I am going to try and get the suggestion in a letter. It should be a discussion in which one would ask, What is out situation today? What are its tendencies? its

in a letter. It should be a discussion in which one would ask, What is our situation today? What are its tendencies? its dangers? What is the citizen's attitude today? What are we working for anyway in a democracy? How can we realize it, etc.? It is not as a leader of the democratic party but as the leader of democracy that Mr. Wilson can render his great service today. But I don't know whether I dare put that to him. I think he still clings to party leadership, but I don't believe he will ever have the physical force to take it on.

WILSON

In speaking of Harding, Mr. Wilson said he was entirely right not to see the women and children who had presented themselves the day before to plead for the release of their fathers and husbands, the political prisoners.

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

When you run up against this side of Mr. Wilson's mind, you are touching one of the reasons why so many people who came in contact with him, hated him. He is inflexible in his judgments.