

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S RESIGNATION
FROM THE WILSON CABINET.

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S RESIGNATION
FROM THE WILSON CABINET

By

WESLEY A. PATZKOWSKY

Bachelor of Arts
Phillips University
Enid, Oklahoma

1932

Submitted to the Department of History
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

1940

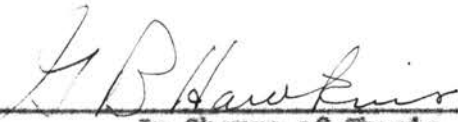
LIBRARY
PHILLIPS UNIVERSITY
ENID, OKLAHOMA


OKLAHOMA
AGRICULTURAL & MECHANICAL COLLEGE
LIBRARY


111

AUG 5 1940

APPROVED:


In Charge of Thesis


Head of Department of History


Dean of Graduate School

126871

Dedicated

to

MY WIFE

PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to present in some detail the events that led to the appointment of William Jennings Bryan as President Wilson's Secretary of State; his policies while in that position; circumstances leading to his resignation; and a treatment of the outstanding events that followed his resignation. An attempt is also made to show how two eminent American statesmen, espousing almost opposite policies and yet having similar motives and objectives, tried to steer the "ship of state" along a course of peace in a warring world.

Whatever may be the verdict of future generations upon Mr. Bryan's pre-war policy and his ultimate resignation, it is quite apparent that a study of his activities as Secretary of State, and the expert opinion of those who have studied the problem of neutrality since the World War, place him in a prophetic role. He foresaw many of the pitfalls upon which our "ship of state" was embarking and he had at least a semblance of a policy whereby the entry of America into the World War might have been averted.

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Professor Glenn B. Hawkins for his guidance and helpful suggestions in connection with this work and to Professors Edward F. Willis, O. A. Hilton, and T. H. Reynolds for their constructive criticism. The courteous treatment and tireless services of Miss Harrison, librarian, and her staff have been greatly appreciated by the writer.

All the sources and material used in the preparation of this thesis have been found in the libraries of the University of Texas, Austin, Texas; the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; and the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Oklahoma A. and M. College

Stillwater, Oklahoma

September 5, 1939.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I. Bryan, the Man.

1. Early life.
2. Bryan as a lawyer, chautauqua speaker, soldier, and politician.

Chapter II. Bryan as Secretary of State.

1. His domestic policy.
2. His foreign policy.
 - a. Ideas on peace and neutrality.
 - b. Resentment of Allied interference.

Chapter III. The "Great Commoner" Heeds the Call of Conscience.

1. German depredations.
2. Bryan vs. President and Colleagues.
3. Why Bryan resigned.
4. Reactions to Bryan's resignation.

Chapter IV. Vindication of Bryan's Gallant Fight.

1. Wilson loses his struggle for neutrality.
2. Was our position on neutrality tenable?
3. The neutrality issue re-appears after the War.
4. America accepts Bryan's principles of neutrality with belated enthusiasm.
5. Conclusions.

CHAPTER I

BRYAN; THE MAN

William Jennings Bryan, the fourth of a family of nine children was born on the nineteenth day of March, 1860, at Salem, Illinois, of Scotch-Irish parentage.¹ Bryan, a sturdy youngster, sat on the floor of the tiny Salem house and widened his mouth by sucking his fist while his father, Silas, made speeches for Honorable Stephen A. Douglas in 1860.² This physical experience just described probably accounts for the extent of William Jennings Bryan's smile. A man, speaking of Bryan's generous smile, once said, "That man can whisper in his own ear."³

His father, born 1822, was of Irish extraction and lived near Sperryville, Virginia, until he had passed his majority. He was a devout Christian and a member of the Baptist Church. Family prayers thrice a day and a reading of the Bible in the evening, instead of punch and whist and the conscious interplay of sex in the highly romantic trappings of the South, characterized the family life of Silas Bryan.⁴

Silas moved to Salem, Illinois, at the age of twenty-seven. Two years later he was admitted to the bar. Mr. Bryan began his practice in 1851 and in 1852 was elected to the State Senate where he served eight years. He was elected circuit judge of six adjoining counties

¹William Jennings Bryan, Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan, p. 15.
²Paxton Hibben, The Peerless Leader, William Jennings Bryan, p. 23.
³Ibid., pp. 75-76.
⁴Ibid., p. 15.

in 1860 and was reelected in 1866, serving until 1872. Bryan was elected a member of the Constitutional Convention of Illinois in 1869 and assisted in the drafting of that Constitution.⁵

His wife, Elizabeth Jennings, was twelve years younger. She had been his pupil, when, as a college student, Silas had taught in the Walnut Hill District, Walnut Hill, Illinois. Mrs. Bryan was a Methodist and for the first twenty years of her married life she retained her membership there in spite of her husband's membership elsewhere. In 1872, she transferred her membership to the Baptist Church. Mrs. Bryan died ten days before her son's nomination for the presidency at the Chicago convention in 1896.⁶

William Jennings Bryan had three ambitions before he was six years old. The first was to be a Baptist preacher. His father took him to an immersion one night during a protracted meeting held in a Christian church. The disappearance under the water of the candidate for celestial honors and the highly emotional singing and groans and cries of Glory!-- from the onlookers frightened him.⁷ On his return home, Bryan inquired of his father whether it would be necessary for him to go down into the pool of water to be a Baptist preacher. The answer being in the affirmative, Bryan's enthusiasm failed him because of his dreadful fear of water.⁸

His second ambition was to be a farmer and raise pumpkins. His neighbor's middle aged daughter was the source of this inspiration. She promised to marry him if he would become a farmer and raise

⁵Bryan, op. cit., p. 15.

⁶Ibid., p. 25.

⁷Hibben, op. cit., p. 47.

⁸Bryan, op. cit., p. 17.

pumpkins. A short time later she married Bryan's cousin justifying her action by saying that Bryan had changed his ambition from farming to law.⁹

Bryan's third ambition was a more permanent one, that of becoming a lawyer. The last of these ambitions no doubt was stimulated by his father's career as a circuit judge at this time.¹⁰ Bryan's religious training was not neglected at any period of his life.¹¹ Family prayer and Sunday School attendance were among the sweetest recollections of his boyhood days. It is of interest to note that, at the age of fourteen, he became affiliated with the Presbyterian church to which neither of his parents belonged. This inclination to join was based upon two facts: first, his conversion held in that church; and second, the fact that some seventy of his schoolmates were members of a Presbyterian Sunday School class.¹²

Bryan's parents were enthusiastic in their appreciation of education. They hoped that their children should have the best schooling that their generation offered. William Jennings Bryan entered Whipple Academy and later he attended Illinois College.¹³ His interests while in school were mathematics and political economy. Here he also established a reputation as a public speaker, debater, and orator.

In the autumn of 1879 in Jacksonville, Illinois, Bryan made the acquaintance of Mary Elizabeth Baird who became his companion for

⁹Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹J. C. Long, *Bryan, The Great Commoner*, p. 24.

¹²Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹³Hibben, *op. cit.*, p. 56. (Before the Civil War the latter institution was the "foundation and hotbed of ultra abolitionism," but with the termination of the war it became a stronghold of free trade.)

life in 1884. The Bryans had three children, Ruth Baird, William Jennings, Jr., and Grace Dexter, the first of whom has gained considerable prestige.

Bryan became affiliated with the Brown, Kirby, and Russell law firm in July, 1883, at Jacksonville, Illinois. He used law as a stepping stone to political preferment rather than as a profession.¹⁴ His net income for the remainder of the year, 1883, was sixty-seven dollars. In the following year, however, his income increased to seven hundred dollars with even greater returns in subsequent years.

Bryan had a desire to go West. He was of the opinion that Illinois did not hold a great future for him. The young state of Nebraska, with its growing population and industries, lured him. Bryan moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, on October 1, 1887. His wife stayed in Illinois until he became definitely located. Here again circumstances were in his favor. A former schoolmate, by the name of Talbot, was practicing law in Lincoln. Upon his suggestion, Bryan became associated with him in what was called the Talbot-Bryan law firm. It was this city that became the home of one of the greatest political leaders in American history. Nebraska is sometimes referred to as the home of "Bryanism."¹⁵

Bryan's experience as a soldier was a very limited one. When the McKinley administration became involved in a war with Spain in 1898, Bryan offer his services in any capacity to the president. The Third Nebraska Volunteer Regiment, under Colonel William Jennings

¹⁴Hibben, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁵Bryan, op. cit., pp. 61-84.

Bryan, was organized on July 13, 1898, at Omaha, Nebraska. This regiment was later sent to Jacksonville, Florida, where it underwent many hardships due to the unfavorable climate. Colonel Bryan was loved and respected by his soldiers because of his generous and affectionate nature. As soon as the war ended Colonel Bryan resigned his commission.¹⁶

In 1900, Bryan commenced the publication of his weekly periodical The Commoner. It is of interest to note that the advance subscription to The Commoner entirely defrayed the cost of its initial publication. This periodical afforded Bryan an opportunity to reflect his views on public questions. The hostile press pursued his writings and utterances with merciless criticism. Bryan was ably assisted in editing the paper by his brother, Charles W. Bryan. When the former became Secretary of State in the Wilson cabinet, the periodical became a monthly publication. Some years later Bryan changed his residence to Florida. There he became engrossed with other matters whereupon The Commoner suspended publication in April, 1923.¹⁷

Besides being a lawyer, politician, and editor, Bryan spent many years in Chatauqua work. This afforded him an opportunity to make an honorable living as well as a chance to listen and speak to the mind of the American people. Although his themes were usually non-partisan, he devoted considerable time to aiding the various causes which he advocated. Bryan's messages were simple, passionate, and so keyed to lofty issues that they never failed to find an eager response. He was

¹⁶Bryan, op. cit., pp. 119-128.

¹⁷Ibid.

criticized for lecturing while Secretary of State. Bryan considered this criticism as just another attempt of the unfriendly newspapers to misrepresent him. His reply was that the president approved of the Chatauqua work which occupied fifteen days in two years; this gave him less time off than any of Bryan's secretaries. It was a well known fact that President Taft lectured at Chatauquas after he was elected, also that Vice-President Marshall and Speaker Clark lectured while they were in office without being criticized.¹⁸

No doubt Mr. Bryan's happiest, as well as his saddest, moments in life were in the political arena. With the exceptions of 1880, and the occasions when he, himself, was presidential candidate, Bryan never missed a Democratic National Convention after 1876. It is also significant to note that he was never defeated in his attempt to get the nomination, which happened to be on three different occasions. His political career began in Nebraska when he was elected to Congress in 1890 from a Republican district and reelected two years later. These successes encouraged him to seek election to the United States Senate in 1894, in spite of the fact that Nebraska was a Republican state. In this attempt he was defeated as the Congressional elections resulted in a Republican landslide. Bryan became the Democratic leader of the progressive wing at the Chicago convention in 1896. The bi-metallism group gained control of the convention, and Bryan, as its leader, won the nomination after having delivered the famous "Cross of Gold" speech.¹⁹ In spite of his eloquence and almost magical

¹⁸Bryan, op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁹Long, op. cit., p. 4.

oratorical power, the silver tongued orator was defeated by the Republican nominee, Mr. McKinley. The struggle was again taken up in 1900. This time the main issue was imperialism. It was a spectacular campaign with two of America's most brilliant political gladiators in action, namely Bryan and Roosevelt. Victory went to the Republicans. Immediately after the election of 1900, Bryan announced that he would not be a candidate in 1904. He was a delegate to the convention to St. Louis, however, where he busied himself with the party platform. The defeat of Mr. Parker, the Democratic nominee of the conservative wing, was more decisive than any of Bryan's. Four years later Mr. Bryan again took up the fight where he had left off in 1900, only to be defeated a third time (1908).²⁰

Three times nominated, three times defeated, and still Bryan was a potent force in Democratic politics. In one respect he never experienced defeat, for he was the leader and symbol of "progressivism" which transcended all political party lines. According to many authorities, no shrewder, no more experienced political manager ever lived in the United States.²¹ To appreciate this evaluation of Bryan, we shall follow some of his maneuvers in the Baltimore convention of 1912.

Bryan had announced that he was not to be a candidate in 1912. In spite of this announcement, some Democratic leaders still believed that he was a potential candidate in case of a dead-locked convention.²² All aspiring candidates fully realized that their nomination depended on

²⁰ Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

²¹ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters*, III, p. 334.

²² *Ibid.*, footnote p. 359.

Bryan's support. The two leading Democrats were Clark and Wilson. Colonel House early exhibited an interest in Wilson's candidacy. Shrewd politician as House was, he began to enlist Bryan's goodwill for the Wilson cause by a very clever maneuver. On December 6, 1911, House conveyed the following facts to Bryan, stating that: "Hearst, unfriendly to Bryan, was against Woodrow Wilson; Harvey aligned with the eastern financial centers, said that everybody on Wall Street was in a frenzy against Wilson; Morgan was virulent in his opposition to Wilson."²³ Nothing could have been more pleasing to Bryan than to know that the financial centers were opposing Wilson.

At the opening of the convention, Clark had 436 pledged delegates and Wilson 248.²⁴ It might be of interest to point out that state delegations voted as a unit until the progressives obtained a repeal of this rule in 1912.²⁵ The convention was a battle between progressives and conservatives. The latter succeeded in electing Mr. Parker temporary chairman. Having nullified the unit rule, the progressives electrified the convention when Bryan introduced a resolution as follows:

We hereby declare ourselves opposed to the nomination of any candidate for President who is a representative of, or under obligation to, J. Pierpont Morgan, Thomas F. Ryan, August Belmont, or any other member of the privilege hunting and favor seeking class.²⁶

The resolution carried by a vote of 383 to 201. How did the Wilson and Clark leaders vote? Many of the latter voted no, thus lessening the chances of their candidate. When the New York delegation voted

²³ Charles Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, I, pp. 50-51.

²⁴ Baker, op. cit., III, p. 323.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 342.

²⁶ Bryan, op. cit., p. 174.

for Clark on the fifth ballot, Bryan became convinced that Morgan, Ryan, and Belmont forces were at work. Nebraska's delegation was pledged to Clark. As the balloting continued, some of them began to vote for Wilson. Senator Hitchcock demanded a poll of the Nebraska delegation whereupon Bryan likewise announced his change in these words:

I shall with-hold my vote from Mr. Clark as long as the New York vote is recorded for him....I shall not be a party to the nomination of any man...who will not, when elected, be absolutely free to carry out the anti-Morgan, Ryan, Belmont resolution....I cast my vote for Nebraska's second choice, Woodrow Wilson.²⁷

Cheering and applause were profuse; Clark's strength began to wane. Wilson's supporters took courage. The fight became dogged and unremitting. Wilson's votes continued to creep up, slowly, irresistibly.²⁸ State after state climbed on the Wilson bandwagon and on the forty-sixth ballot he polled 990 votes which assured his nomination.²⁹ Another victory was won by the progressive Democrats with the guidance of their gallant leader, Mr. Bryan.

²⁷Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 523-524.

²⁸Baker, *op. cit.*, III, p. 362.

²⁹*Ibid.*

CHAPTER II

BRYAN AS SECRETARY OF STATE

No Secretary of State ever entered into his position with a more colorful background of political life, and few with less experience in public life, than William Jennings Bryan who was commissioned on March 5, 1913.¹

The events leading to his appointment are of more than usual interest. The President, Woodrow Wilson, approached the task of choosing his cabinet with anxiety if not with dread. He eagerly turned for assistance to Colonel House whose reputation for political sagacity was well established. The President's confidence in the Colonel was further stimulated by the latter's obviously disinterested attitude.

Wilson was definitely obligated to Bryan. The latter had made Wilson's nomination possible; he had stumped the country for seven weeks. As the untiring leader of the party for sixteen lean years, Bryan was entitled to recognition.² In many ways his services would prove invaluable. He would help establish party harmony both outside of Congress and in it, thereby assisting in securing the reforms in which Wilson was deeply interested. And as Mr. Dooley sapiently remarked, "Wilson might find Bryan more manageable in his bosom than on his back."³ The President did not want Bryan in the Cabinet for he

¹Samuel Flagg Bemis, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, X, p. 3.

²Baker, op. cit., III, p. 440.

³Ibid., p. 441.

distrusted his political views and doubted his wisdom.⁴ Colonel House advised Wilson to offer Bryan the position of Secretary of State or Ambassador to England. On three or four different occasions the President asked House if Bryan was still his choice to which he replied in the affirmative.⁵ Bryan had no intention of being sent away into foreign service. He once remarked that he didn't intend to get that far away from Washington and that he was intent upon seeing what was going on there.

Domestic affairs of the State Department were soon overshadowed by the more pressing foreign problems ushered in by the World War. The Federal Reserve Act was, in Colonel House's opinion, the most important single legislative act of the entire Wilson administration.⁶ Although primarily a monetary problem, Bryan's support and advice was to be reckoned with. The bill creating the Federal Reserve system, in its original form, was opposed by Bryan in the belief that the bank notes should be issued by the Federal Reserve treasury and the appointment of the entire board should be controlled by the President. When these changes were made, he heartily endorsed the bill.⁷ Carter Glass, an authority on money and banking, as well as co-author of the Federal Reserve Act, wrote to Bryan September 25, 1913, saying:

We are immensely indebted to you for effective aid in critical periods of the contest....I desire to thank you for your great assistance to me and to the cause, and also to express my personal gratification at the manner in which you have disappointed your enemies and pleased your friends by standing firmly with the President for sound legislation in behalf of the American people....⁸

⁴Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, I, pp. 88-99.

⁵Baker, op. cit., III, p. 441.

⁶Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, I, p. 166.

⁷Bryan, op. cit., pp. 370-371.

⁸Ibid., pp. 373-374.

It gave the Secretary a great deal of pleasure when in April, 1913, he signed the document which provided for the direct election of United States senators. It seemed particularly fitting that his hand should sign the document after some twenty years of work for this measure.⁹

The Administration became involved in a controversy with the California legislature over restrictive alien land legislation. In April, 1913, Secretary Bryan was sent to California to present the Administration's point of view. He labored earnestly to secure moderation of the anti-Japanese legislation, but without any tangible results.¹⁰

The "New Democracy" of the Wilson Administration was worthily represented in the field of foreign relations by Bryan as Secretary of State. He had a definite philosophy, as well as a concrete plan whereby America should assume a supreme moral leadership in world progress and become the accepted arbiter of world disputes.¹¹ His plan provided for, first, the submission of all international disputes to a permanent international commission of five members for investigation;¹² second, a year's time for such an investigation and a report, during which period there should be no hostilities; third, the reservation to each party of the right of independent action at the conclusion of the investigation.¹³ Our arbitration treaties,

⁹Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 374-465.

¹⁰Bemis, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, X, p. 11.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹²The tribunal was to be chosen as follows; one by each country from among its citizens, one chosen by each country from the other country, and the fifth member chosen by the other four. Allen Johnson, Dictionary of American Biography, III, p. 196.

¹³Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

heretofore, had excluded questions of honor, independence, vital interests, and interests of third parties -- the very questions that cause wars. This plan was submitted to the President who gave his hearty approval. A short time later the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations approved the same. Thirty nations signed such conciliation treaties with the United States, but the Senate refused to sign with Panama and the Dominican Republic.¹⁴ In the crisis of 1914 the Bryan treaties proved ineffective in spite of his earnest efforts to invoke them. Germany had not accepted an arbitration treaty with us when the war began but she did so immediately afterward.¹⁵

With the coming of the Great War in the summer of 1914, the President issued the famous "strict and impartial" neutrality proclamation on August 4, 1914.¹⁶ To be neutral in "thought" and "feeling" proved eventually impossible even for the President himself, to say nothing of his ambassadors abroad.¹⁷ Undoubtedly it was Wilson's object, at the outbreak of the war, to avoid being drawn into the struggle; however, he made no attempt to conceal his pro-Allies bias. In fact it appears that as early as September, 1915, he began to doubt if America could or should remain aloof much longer. Despite the irritations caused by allied control of neutral trade, he looked upon the Allies as the defenders of civilization.¹⁸ In 1915, when the question of an embargo was brought up in a cabinet discussion, the

¹⁴Johnson, Dictionary of American Biography, III, p. 196.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement, p. 550.

¹⁷Bemis, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, X, p. 584.

¹⁸Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 49.

President replied:

Gentlemen, the Allies are standing with their backs to the wall, fighting wild beasts. I will permit nothing to be done by our country to hinder or embarrass them in the prosecution of the war unless admitted rights are grossly violated.¹⁹

He confided to his private secretary, Mr. Joseph P. Tumulty, that "England was fighting for civilization," and that he didn't intend to press her "too hard on the question of blockade."²⁰ In September, 1915, Wilson told House he "had never been sure that we ought not to take a part in the conflict, and if it seemed evident that Germany with her militaristic ideas were to win, the obligation on us was greater than war."²¹

American public opinion likewise was predisposed to the Allied cause. The predisposition, nurtured during years of cultural and political affinity and now strengthened by an economic tie-up and propaganda, was indeed strong but not strong enough to bring the United States into the European holocaust.²² The pro-Ally bias was more discernible in the East than elsewhere. The further from the eastern seaboard the less the pro-Ally feeling. Americans in general were sympathetic to the democracies of England and France. Economic forces played no small part in off-setting the ill effects of an illegal blockade system by the Entente. This economic factor will be developed further in connection with our belligerent trade. Banking interests and "big business" never attempted to conceal their biased positions. The following lines indicate their attitude: the editor of

¹⁹ Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 50.

²⁰ Joseph P. Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson as I Knew Him, pp. 230-231.

²¹ Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 84.

²² Bemis, The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, X, pp. 584-585.

Commerce and Finance stated that no theoretical neutrality could stifle admiration for English courage and English success; the Wall Street Journal called attention to the fact that by January 15, 1915, some \$500,000,000 of munitions and war supplies had been sent to the Allied Governments; "big business" circles definitely favored long term financing for exports of munitions of war to the Allied cause.²³ The overwhelming effectiveness of the Allied propaganda in the United States is to be found in the predisposition of the American public to receive propaganda in a nearly absolute Allied command over all channels of communication and opinion, and in the passionate and sincere conviction of the Allied propagandists.

Our position as a neutral in the war was an extremely delicate and complicated one. We were the largest and most resourceful of the neutral countries. The Allies looked with eager eyes to our almost unlimited resources in both raw materials, commodities, and money. The Central Powers were less fortunate in that they were victims of an effective blockade system. At the beginning of the conflict, Secretary Bryan issued a proclamation stating our position as regards the manufacturing and sale of war materials saying: "All persons may lawfully and without restriction...manufacture and sell within the United States arms and munitions of war."²⁵ This proclamation was the object of considerable criticism in the United States Senate, which varied somewhat in opinion as to what should be the proportion of interference with our neutral trade. The critics of this proposal were

²³Charles Callan Tansill, America Goes to War, pp. 83-111.

²⁴Walter Millis, Road To War, p. 64.

²⁵Foreign Relations, loc. cit.

in favor of an arms embargo. The reply of the State Department was that the Administration's plan was in keeping with past practices.

An extremely vexatious problem soon developed in the form of credits and loans. In August, 1914, J. P. Morgan, as purchasing agent for the English and French Governments, inquired of the State Department if America's bankers would be allowed to extend temporary credit to belligerent powers for the purpose of facilitating purchases in this country. With the approval of the President, Secretary Bryan, on August 15, 1914, communicated to J. P. Morgan that, "Loans by American bankers to any foreign belligerent are inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality."²⁶ The immense purchases of the Allies could not be financed without the extension of large credits, consequently our trade would have withered away if this attitude had been maintained. While never officially reversed, it was gradually sapped by interpretations. This process we shall now examine.

In mid-October a representative of the National City Bank went to Washington to discuss the financial situation with Secretary Bryan. Bryan was soon confused by a barrage of technical terms and consented to a compromise which, in essence, was a strategic retreat from the position he took on August 15; the Department of State issued a press release on October 15, saying in effect that the President possessed no legal authority to interfere in any way with the trade between the people of the United States and the nationals of belligerent countries.²⁷ Along with this press release, there were numerous "inspired" articles in the press attempting to explain the new attitude taken by the

²⁶Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement, p. 530.

²⁷Senate Report, No. 944, 74 Cong., 2nd sess., Pt. 6, pp. 7-16.

Department of State which beclouded the issue more than ever. No definite action was desirable until the Administration would clarify its position on credits and loans. On October 23, 1914, the Counselor of the Department of State, Mr. Lansing, prepared a memorandum on "Credits of Foreign Governments in This Country and Their Relation to Trade," presenting the case for credits, as well as for the traffic in war supplies.²⁸ Having carefully read the memorandum, the President had this to say to his Counselor:

...Treasury notes or other evidence of debt in payment for articles purchased in this country is merely a means of facilitating trade by a system of credits....The question of an arrangement of this sort ought not to be submitted to this government for its opinion, since it has given its view on loans in general, although an arrangement of credits has to do with a commercial debt rather than a money loan.²⁹

This conference took place when Bryan was out of the city.

From the above statements it is apparent that the Administration was making a distinction between "general loans" and credit loans. Bryan seemed unaware of the fact that there was little difference between credits and loans. J. P. Morgan later frankly admitted that credits and loans belong in the same category.³⁰ Still more encouragement was available for the banking interests when on March 31, 1915, the Secretary of State issued the following press release:

This Government has not felt that it was justified in interposing objections to the credit arrangements which have been brought to its attention. It has neither approved these nor disapproved...it has merely taken no action in the premises and expressed no opinion.³¹

²⁸ Baker, *op. cit.*, V, p. 186.

²⁹ "Memorandum of a Conversation with the President at 8:30 this evening relative to Loans and Bank Credits to Belligerent Governments," cited by Tansill, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁰ Senate Report, No. 944, 74 Cong., 2nd sess., Pt. 6, p. 25.

³¹ Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, p. 820.

Demands for credits and loans were increasing, but the possibility of a German victory seemed to bother the financial centers in the summer of 1915. By this time, the Allied trade with the United States was extremely favorable with more trade certain if sufficient credit could be made available. In order to facilitate trade, it was proposed that the Federal Reserve Board adopt a more favorable attitude toward rediscounting operations. Several members were favorable to the plan, whereby the Federal Reserve Banks would accept drafts drawn by London bankers on their New York correspondents. Mr. Warburn and Mr. Miller were strongly opposed to such operations.³² This was interpreted as acquiescing to further credit expansion. Nothing was left undone in encouraging our trade with the Allies with the aid of Federal Reserve credit. On November 28, 1916, the Federal Reserve Board caused great excitement in the Allied capitals when, by a temporary reversal of policy, it suggested that the investors in unsecured foreign loans should receive full and authoritative data in order that they might judge the future intelligently in the light of past and present conditions.³³ Two incidents followed this ruling that are of interest. England announced a black list that applied to about thirty American firms and the President issued a note to the belligerent countries asking them to state their conditions for making peace calling attention to the fact that, "the objects of the belligerents of both sides are virtually the same in the war as stated in general terms to their own people and to the world."³⁴ This statement made England indignant.

³²Tansill, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-106.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

³⁴Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement, p. 98.

These events were soon permanently smoothed over by the ever-blundering German diplomacy when, on January 31, 1917, Ambassador Bernstorff handed to Secretary Lansing the note announcing the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.³⁵ Few people failed to realize the significance of this announcement. Knowing that war with Germany was highly probable, the Federal Reserve Board wished to reverse its former attitude of November 28. On March 8, 1917, it issued a press statement designed to assist in floating loans for the Allied Governments by saying that the Board had never intended to create the impression that American investments in foreign loans should be restricted. It merely wanted to indicate the dangers of "undue" employment by American bankers of their funds in the purchase of foreign loans.³⁶ March 5, 1917, Page, our Ambassador to London, sent a cablegram to the Secretary of State urging the American Government to declare war on Germany immediately in order to bolster Allied credit and save American export trade.³⁷ According to Seymour the cablegram had very little influence in shaping the decisions of the President, for it contained nothing which was not familiar to the Administration.³⁸ From the evidence presented, it is obvious that America was not drawn into the World War solely by any single set of circumstances such as the devious manipulations of the financial centers. It is, however, difficult to quarrel seriously with nations that had literally dragged America from the deep slough of economic despondency.

³⁵ Robert Lansing, War Memoirs of Robert Lansing, p. 210.

³⁶ Tansill, op. cit., p. 152.

³⁷ Foreign Relations, 1917, Supplement, p. 516.

³⁸ Charles Seymour, American Neutrality, 1914-1917, pp. 82-83.

This far our attention has been directed to our position toward the belligerents in matters regarding the manufacture and sale of war materials, commodities, and the extension of credit to facilitate trade. American commercial interests encountered new difficulties in their relation with the belligerent countries when they evolved a system of blockades peculiar to their own strength and weakness. Interference by the Entente powers with American neutral rights will be discussed presently and German depredations will be taken up in the following chapter.

The Administration was forced to deal with the problems imposed by the country's neutral position. For the citizens' rights of trade a ready made solution was at hand in the Declaration of London, signed in 1909 by the delegates of ten states, but remaining inoperative due to the British Government's failure to ratify it.³⁹ Secretary Bryan inquired of the belligerent powers August 6, 1914, if they would adhere to the Declaration of London.⁴⁰ This inquiry caused Ambassador Page much resentment for he regarded it "the first great mistake the American Government made in its relations with Great Britain."⁴¹ England's reply of August 22, carried modifications that amounted to a rejection by overthrowing the whole balance in favor of the drastic employment of sea power.⁴²

³⁹The Declaration of London, among other things, provided for three categories of contraband: absolute, conditional, and non-contraband. Article 28 classified metallic ore, cotton, wood, silk, jute, rubber and hides as non-contraband, which was not subject to capture, when bound for a neutral port. Article 65 provided for acceptance of all or none of the Declaration. Tansill, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-151.

⁴⁰*Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement*, pp. 216-220.

⁴¹Burton J. Hendrick, *Walter H. Page, Life and Letters*, I, pp. 373-375.

⁴²*Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement*, pp. 218-219.

In the legal controversies that followed over the rights of neutral trade, we find that the British system of blockade was developed by the tactful and cunning Viscount Grey, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and very ably assisted by America's No. 1 Anglophile, our Ambassador, Mr. Page. Grey says, "the comfort, support, and encouragement that his [Page's] presence was to me in London may be imagined but not overestimated."⁴³ The Secretary of Foreign Affairs was fully aware of the vital importance of British and American relations, and that the surest way to lose the war was to antagonize the United States. Furthermore, Lord Kitchener was dependent on munitions from America for his new army.⁴⁴ The object of diplomacy was to secure the maximum of blockade that could be enforced without a rupture with the United States.

Page, upon calling at the Foreign Office one day, produced a long dispatch from Washington protesting the stopping of contraband going to neutral ports. "I am instructed," he said, "to read this dispatch to you." He read and I listened. He then said, "I have now read the dispatch but I do not agree with it; let us consider how it should be answered."⁴⁵

England began to develop her blockade system by issuing a series of decrees, Orders in Council, as the need for them arose. The first of these came on August 20, 1914, applying the doctrine of continuous

⁴³Viscount Grey, Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916, II, p. 102.

⁴⁴George Macaulay Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon: Life and Letters, p. 347.

⁴⁵Grey, op. cit., p. 110.

voyage to conditional contraband ultimately destined to reach enemy territory;⁴⁶ followed by an order, October 29, 1914, making all conditional contraband liable to capture;⁴⁷ March 11, 1915, another order was issued extending the doctrine of continuous voyage to non-contraband goods en route to a neutral port if ultimately destined for the enemy; on March 30, 1916, a new Order in Council stated that "ultimate" destination to enemy territory existed "if goods were consigned to or for a person who, during the present hostilities, has forwarded imported contraband goods belonging to or occupied by the enemy."⁴⁸

President Wilson was extremely irritated by the action of the British Government in issuing the Order of August, 1914. He asked the Department of State to prepare a vigorous protest, one with "teeth in it."⁴⁹ The result was a long instruction to Ambassador Page which was signed by Lansing. Two days after the completion of the document Wilson showed House a copy of it which the latter considered much too critical. Instead a much "softened" cablegram was sent to London, a joint production of the President, House, and the British Ambassador, saying in effect "that the American Government was 'greatly disturbed' by the Order in Council of August 20, and feared that any strict application of its provisions would arouse a spirit of resentment among the American people against Great Britain."⁵⁰ Upon receiving the new instructions, Page went to the Foreign Office

⁴⁶ Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement, pp. 219-220.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 262-263.

⁴⁸ Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement, p. 361.

⁴⁹ Baker, op. cit., p. 205.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

for a friendly session with Sir Edward Grey, only to further dilute the cablegram by putting his own interpretation on it. Grey pointed out that not a single cargo had been confiscated, whereupon Mr. Page informed Sir Edward that: "there was no desire to press the case of people who traded deliberately and directly with Germany, but there was great feeling against stopping legitimate American trade with Holland."⁵¹ Mr. Lansing as Counselor for the Department of State, formulated most of the protests sent to England. In his Memoirs, he has written an indictment of the British practice regarding the visiting and searching of American vessels bound for neutral ports. The American Government did at times strongly object to the treatment accorded American shipping, but the British authorities "proceeded with their policy regardless of protests and complaints."⁵² Concerning other protests he speaks of them as being "half-hearted," and says "there was in my mind the conviction that we would ultimately become an ally of Great Britain and that it would not do, therefore, to let our controversies reach a point where diplomatic correspondence gave place to action."⁵³ The many protests, vigorous or otherwise, sent by Bryan or Lansing seemingly did not materially alter the British practice of interference with American shipping.

Irritation aroused by the British blockade practices was elevated to higher degree by the announcement in London of a British "black-list" July 18, 1916, which affected about thirty American firms. Wilson was considering asking Congress to authorize him to prohibit

⁵¹Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement, p. 237.

⁵²Lansing, op. cit., p. 123.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 127-128.

loans and restrict exportations to the Allies.⁵⁴ Congress passed two measures on September 7 and 8, 1916, empowering the President to deny clearance papers to any ship unfairly discriminating against the commerce of the United States and to refuse facilities in American ports to the merchant marine of any nation that discriminated against American commerce. After the usual exchange of notes the British Government responded favorably by removing the names of five firms from the list. Retaliatory measures were never taken as the President feared they would inevitably lead to new and harsher British measures. In 1916, with the British Government on the brink of financial collapse, and with America as the sole means of British salvation, it seems as though the President overlooked an opportunity to gain far-reaching concessions with reference to the blockade and the black list.⁵⁵

A new difficulty arose between the United States and the Allied Powers with reference to the interference with and censorship of American mails in August, 1915. The British maintained that neutral countries were using the mails to conceal illegal shipments to the Central Powers.⁵⁶ Many inconveniences were experienced due to the Allied practices. American indignation rose to new heights in the summer of 1916. Instead of any thought of compromise on this issue the British Government suggested that the United States recognize the validity of censorship at the ports of Ramsgate, Falmouth and Kirkwell; furthermore, as a friendly gesture the American Government should see to it that "the mails between America and the neutral countries of northern Europe

⁵⁴Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 313.

⁵⁵Tansill, op. cit., p. 547.

⁵⁶Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, p. 735.

were dispatched through England."⁵⁷ American protests to this illegal practice of interception and censorship were given scant attention and we were informed that England intended to continue her policy.

An annoying practice, though not an infraction of international law, was the hovering of British warships outside the territorial waters three mile limit of the United States. No amount of coaxing, on our part, could induce England to withdraw its warships. England maintained that a close watch on the commerce that passed in and out of large American ports was necessary; furthermore, Great Britain could not abandon "any of its rights" under international law which would be of assistance in defeating Germany.⁵⁸

Although Bryan sent a number of protests in regard to the illegal practices of England's blockade system, most of the notes were formulated by Lansing, who was the Counselor of the State Department. Mr. Bryan was away from Washington on numerous occasions, consequently his services were not always available. A most regrettable fact is that his services and counsel were often not wanted, especially when relations of the United States with Great Britain and Germany became tense. Wilson depended more and more upon his Anglophile advisers, particularly Colonel House.

⁵⁷Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, p. 733.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 759-761.

CHAPTER III

THE "GREAT COMMONER" HEEDS THE CALL OF CONSCIENCE

Besides protesting against the British Orders in Council, and other illegal British practices previously discussed, the Department of State shifted its attention to other problems that were pressing for solution. On November 3, 1914, the British Admiralty announced that the North Sea was thereafter to be considered as a "military area" or war zone.¹ Previous to this announcement England and Germany had been laying mines in the same area.

The Governments of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway protested against this action of the British Admiralty, and the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the hope that their protests would have the support of the United States.² Our government chose not to challenge the position taken by the British Admiralty.

As a result of this supine policy of acquiescence, the American shipping bound to neutral ports in the North Sea was compelled to put in at British ports to secure pilots or instructions as to the best routes to take to avoid the mine fields. This arrangement made it convenient for the British to carry out their policy of visiting and searching American vessels for contraband.

This British attempt to cut off all neutral trade with Germany caused deep concern to the officials in the German Foreign Office. Knowing that neutral pressure would not be strong enough to compel

¹Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement, p. 464.

²Ibid., p. 465.

Great Britain to abandon her policy of "starvation" the German Government's only recourse was to devise counter measures which would speedily relieve a situation that threatened ultimate military defeat through the collapse of the economic structure of Germany.

The German Naval Staff decided that submarine warfare would serve as an effective retaliatory measure. Considerable discussion was provoked as to the exact measures necessary to carry out their policy so as to arouse the least criticism from the neutral countries. Vice-Admiral Von Pohl, the Chief of the German Naval Staff, suggested that the waters surrounding Great Britain and Ireland be declared a war zone. Admiral von Tirpitz was in favor of a "blockade" of England. The several proposals were discussed by the Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg; Zimmerman, the Under Secretary of State; General von Falkenhayn, Chief of the General Staff of the Army; Mr. Clements Delbruck, Secretary of State for the Interior; and Vice-Admiral Von Pohl. On February 2, consent was given to use the submarine war zone policy if the Kaiser would give his consent.³

On February 4, 1915, the war zone proclamation was issued. According to the proclamation the waters

...surrounding Great Britain and Ireland, including the whole English Channel are hereby declared to be comprised within the seat of war and that all enemy merchant vessels found in these waters after the eighteenth instantly will be destroyed... it cannot always be avoided that neutral vessels suffer from attacks intended to strike enemy ships.⁴

Count Bernstorff, German Ambassador to the United States, forwarded a memorandum of the Imperial Chancellor to Secretary Bryan on February 7,

³Tansill, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-229.

⁴Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, p. 94.

justifying the establishment of a war zone by citing British proclamation of November 3 designating the whole North Sea as a "military area."⁵

The German Federal Council issued a decree, on January 25, 1915, placing certain cereals and flour under government control. Three days later Count Bernstorff informed the American Government that the German decree did not refer to "foodstuffs that would reach Germany from neutral countries, but referred solely to the supply of food then in Germany, the object was to prevent a possible accumulation and cornering of foodstuffs."⁶

As soon as the British Government learned of the German decree of January 25, Mr. Grey sent a short note to Ambassador Page announcing that the German Government had "officially taken over the use and distribution of all food in the Empire." This meant that "all food in effect belongs to the army," and therefore cargoes of foodstuffs from America to Germany had lost their non-contraband character and were liable to seizure.⁷

The German Government wishing to clarify their decree of January 25, formally assured the State Department that:

...all goods imported to Germany from the United States directly or indirectly, and which belong to the class of relative contraband, as foodstuffs, will not be used by the German Army or Navy nor by Government authorities, but will be left to the free consumption of the German civilian population.⁸

Such assurance had little weight with Sir Edward Grey.

⁵Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 95-97.

⁶Ibid., pp. 317-318.

⁷Ibid., p. 317.

⁸Ibid., p. 95.

Our government was forced to make a very important decision in regard to the British blockade of all foodstuffs to Germany and the German submarine war policy. When the German war zone proclamation was received by the Department of State on February 5, Secretary Bryan was out West on a speaking trip. Mr. Lansing at once advised the President of the latest German move which presented a "delicate situation." On the following day Mr. Lansing and President Wilson held a conference. The Counselor drafted a preliminary note of a highly menacing nature. The destruction of merchant vessels without "visit and search" was a "wanton act unparalleled in naval warfare," and the German Government should be held to strict accountability for any loss of American property.⁹ Mr. Lansing wavered from the position taken in his note after reading the explanatory memorandum of the German Government, on February 7, concerning the submarine war zone announcement. He informed the President that the advisability of "any protest at all" was "open to question."¹⁰

It was finally decided that notes would be sent to both Great Britain and Germany. Secretary Bryan sent a note to the British Government, February 10, protesting against any "general use" of the American flag by British merchant ships to escape capture.¹¹ The phraseology of the note was vigorous. President Wilson frankly admitted to Colonel House that he regretted the necessity of sending the note of February 10.¹²

Sir Edward defended as an established principle of international law, the right of a belligerent ship to use a neutral flag to escape

⁹Baker, *op. cit.*, V, pp. 246-247.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹¹*Foreign Relations*, 1915, *Supplement*, pp. 100-101.

¹²Tansill, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

capture. Such a practice had long been recognized by all nations.

The note to Germany contained most of the sharp phrases suggested in Lansing's note of February 6. Before answering the note, the German Government through their Ambassador, Count Bernstorff, defended the establishment of the war zone as a reprisal against the "murderous character" of the English method of naval warfare which sought to condemn "the German people to death by starvation."¹³ This plea impressed Secretary Bryan. After a conversation with the Austrian and German ambassadors, he was inclined to believe that there was a possibility of getting the German war zone proclamation withdrawn if the British Government would permit foodstuffs to be imported to Germany. Secretary von Jagow's reply to the American note of February 10, was addressed to Gerard, our ambassador to Germany, February 16. He stated that it was very far indeed from the intention of the German Government to destroy neutral lives and property. The Commander of German submarines had been instructed to "abstain from violence to American merchant vessels when they were recognizable."¹⁴

On February 20, 1915, Secretary Bryan addressed identical notes to Germany and Great Britain suggesting that neither nation use submarines to attack merchant ships of any nationality except to enforce the right of "visit and search." If Germany would agree to this restriction, then England should consent to the shipment of foodstuffs to Germany to be distributed to the civilian population through American agencies.¹⁵ Before these notes were sent to the respective

¹³Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, p. 105.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 114-115.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 119-120.

countries, Ambassador Page informed the State Department that there was not a "ray of hope for such an agreement."¹⁶ Upon being informed by Colonel House of the President's desire that this proposal be presented to the British Foreign Secretary with all "emphasis," Lansing replied that he did not consider the arrangement a wise one. He consented to make an appointment, but frankly admitted that he had no "stomach for it."¹⁷

The German reply on March 1, promised adherence to Secretary Bryan's note providing the right to import certain raw materials was included.¹⁸

March 15, Sir Edward Grey presented Page a note containing a long list of German misdeeds thereby justifying England's policy. Among the list of misdeeds was the use of poisonous gas. Consequently Bryan's efforts came to naught.¹⁹

According to the German war zone proclamation of February 4, submarine warfare was to become effective on the eighteenth. The final order was delayed until February 22. There was considerable speculation in German naval and diplomatic quarters as to whether the American merchant vessels would avoid the war zone.

Changing methods in naval operations against the merchant shipping of a belligerent country became a complicated problem to the warring powers, and created an embarrassing condition for the neutral powers. Was it possible to differentiate between merchant vessels

¹⁶Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 118-119.

¹⁷Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, I, pp. 444-445.

¹⁸Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 129-130.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 140-143.

armed for offensive and defensive purposes? Was it reasonable to expect a submarine to abide by the usual formula of "visit and search?"

It became apparent to the Department of State that the American Government would have to assume a definite attitude toward armed merchant vessels, so on September 19, 1914, an official circular was sent to the diplomatic representatives of the belligerent states. The American Government admitted that a merchant vessel of a belligerent state might carry armaments for the sole purpose of defense without becoming a ship of war. It also stated that armaments on a vessel created a presumption that they were to be used for offensive purposes yet this presumption could be overcome by reliable evidence to the contrary. The circular then laid down ten criteria that could be used to test the validity of such evidence.²⁰ This circular accepted the musty canons of international law as adequate to cover the new developments of modern naval warfare.

The failure of Mr. Lansing to look to the future rather than to the past boded ill for any continuance of American neutrality. Circumstances later forced Lansing to reverse himself completely on the definition of armed merchant vessels only to slip into "strategic retreat" later in order to placate Colonel House.

The supreme crisis in the story of American neutrality came on March 28, 1915, when the German submarine U-28, cruising in the Irish Sea, saw a large vessel approaching without a flag or any sign of identity. The U-28 signalled for it to stop immediately, but instead the ship attempted to escape. This flight proved fruitless and when

²⁰Foreign Relations, 1914, Supplement, pp. 611-612.

AUG 5 1940

the steamer stopped, the commander of the U-28 discovered it was the British steamer Falaba with passengers. Twenty-three minutes were allowed for evacuation. Then the commander of the U-28 fired a torpedo causing the Falaba to sink within ten minutes. One hundred four passengers and members of the crew perished.

In his logbook, the commander of the U-28 reported that there was a trawler close to the Falaba, and other small boats were near. One of the trawlers had been following the movements of the U-28 for an hour awaiting an opportunity to attack it. The Falaba's cargo of ammunition may have exploded thereby hastening its sinking.²¹

American public opinion became indignant upon learning that an American citizen, Mr. Leon C. Thrasher, had been drowned as a result of the attack. Mr. Lansing prepared a memorandum on the legal points involved. An American citizen taking passage upon a belligerent merchant vessel was entitled to rely upon an enemy's war vessel conforming to the established rules of "visit and search." It was apparent that the American Government would file a complaint and a demand for damages.

The real fight for American neutrality was waged in April, 1915. Lansing believed that American citizens had an unquestionable right to travel on British ships sailing through the war zone, and their lives should not be imperiled by submarine warfare. The American Government should uphold the "right" of uncontrolled travel on the high seas. He contended the Falaba incident was a "flagrant violation of international law and international morality." To the

²¹Lansill, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

President he suggested that we send a vigorous note of protest.

Secretary Bryan fought strenuously to counteract these militant suggestions of Lansing to the President. To Bryan it appeared that Wilson could not think outside the categories presented by the prevailing international laws that were so outmoded by the changing conditions of modern warfare. As a last effort to modify the President's viewpoint on the Thrasher case, Secretary Bryan prepared a note to the Chief Executive as follows:

...You do not make allowance for the fact that we were notified of the intended use of the submarine or for the fact that the deceased knowingly took the risk of traveling on an enemy ship. I cannot see that he is differently situated from those who, by remaining in a belligerent country assume risk of injury. Our people will, I believe, be slow to admit the right of a citizen to involve his country in war when by exercising ordinary care he could have avoided danger.

The fact that we have not contested Great Britain's assertion of the right to use our flag has still further aggravated Germany....I venture to suggest an appeal to the nations of war to consider the terms of peace....As a neutral we cannot have in mind the wishes of one side more than the wishes of the other side.²²

In reply to Secretary Bryan's note, the President frankly admitted that he wasn't confident that a note too strongly worded would be desirable. Perhaps it wouldn't even be necessary to make a formal representation at all. With reference to an appeal for peace, he concluded that the present moment was not only inopportune but that the attempt would be futile if not "offensive" to the belligerent powers.²³

Before the President had decided on the phraseology he should use in a note to Germany, news came to the Department of State to the effect that the American Steamer Cushing had been attacked by a German seaplane

²²Bryan, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

²³Tansill, *op. cit.*, p. 261-262.

on April 28, and that the American tanker Gulflight had been torpedoed on May 1. No lives were lost on the Cushing, but two of the crew of the Gulflight had been drowned and the captain died of shock.²⁴ Our Ambassador, Gerard, was informed by the German Government that the Cushing attack had been an "unfortunate, unintentional accident," which was "very much regretted." In the case of the Gulflight, it was an "unintentional mistake," that was "unavoidable" due to extenuating circumstances. We were assured that full "recompense would be made for the damage."²⁵

These incidents aroused the ire of Mr. Lansing and again he advocated immediate and vigorous action. The pro-Ally newspapers of the East were filled with cries of outrage against the barbaric practices of the German submarine warfare. Were these attacks made on an innocent and uninformed people? On May 1 an advertisement appeared in some fifty American newspapers warning American citizens against taking passage on British vessels traversing the war zone.

From Washington, President Wilson telegraphed Colonel House to get his advice concerning the Gulflight. On May 5, the Colonel replied, "I believe a sharp note indicating your determination for full reparation will be sufficient. I fear a more serious breach may follow..."²⁶ Before the President had acted, reports were received telling about the sinking of the Lusitania on May 7.

Of all the British merchant ships the Lusitania was the undisputable queen; she was the pride of the British nation.²⁷ The great

²⁴ Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 378-384, 419-440, 526.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 440.

²⁶ Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, p. 432.

²⁷ Anon., "Judge Mayer Court Decision," Literary Digest, LVIII, September, 1918, pp. 64-65.

Cunarder sailed on May 1 with a considerable quantity of ammunition and less than two thousand individuals aboard. Unknown to them was the departure the day before of the U-20 from the German submarine base, Wilhelmshaven. The U-20 under the direction of Commander Schwieger, was to enforce the blockade off the southwest coast of Ireland. There was no concern felt by the passengers on the Lusitania since they were in the safe keeping of the British navy. Under the command of Captain Turner, the Lusitania was held on the usual route. Her voyage was comparatively uneventful. During the early part of the night of May 6, the Lusitania received two wireless messages from the naval station at Queenstown, Ireland. The first at 7:30 read, "Submarine active off the south coast of Ireland." One hour later a general warning was received "Avoid headlands. Pass harbors at full speed. Steer mid-channel course. Submarines off Fastnet."²⁸

The morning of May 7 was exceedingly foggy which made it difficult for the Lusitania to determine her location. Thus Captain Turner reduced speed to fifteen knots.²⁹ As the morning passed, the fog rose and disappeared. The Lusitania increased her speed to eighteen knots. At 12:40 the Lusitania got its last warning, "Submarines five miles south of Cape Clear, proceeding west when last sighted at 10:00 A. M."³⁰

On the morning of that fateful day, May 7, Colonel House was being shown through the Kew Gardens by Sir Edward Grey. All the beauty and loveliness of the famous gardens did not dispel the horrors

²⁸Anon., "Judge Mayer Court Decision," op. cit., p. 66.

²⁹Millis, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

³⁰Anon., "Judge Mayer Court Decision," loc. cit.

of the war from their minds. They spoke of the probability of an ocean liner being sunk. Colonel House remarked that if this were done an indignant American public would probably lead us into war.³¹ An hour later the Colonel and the King were engaged in conversation. Strange as it may seem, the probability of Germany sinking a transatlantic liner again became the topic for discussion. King George said "Suppose they should sink the Lusitania with American passengers on board?"³²

At 2:10 P. M., the U-20 torpedoed the Lusitania causing her to sink in about eighteen minutes. As a result of the destruction of the vessel, 1, 198 persons perished. There were 197 Americans on board and 128 of them lost their lives.³³ The rapid sinking of the Lusitania and the lack of preparation for such an emergency accounts for the appalling loss of life.³⁴

The first real crisis in German American relations had arisen. Newspapers caustically criticized the German Government as having committed "deliberate murder," "mass murder," and an "outrage." However, the desire to go to war with Germany received very little support.³⁵ Upon a close examination of the outraged press comment, less than one percent actually demanded war. Editorial comment, as to the necessary steps to be taken against Germany, was unfortunately vague. Their demands generally called for Germany to disavow, to make reparation, and to abandon her submarine warfare without involving the

³¹ Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, p. 432.

³² Ibid.

³³ Senate Documents, 67 Cong., 2nd sess., No. 176.

³⁴ Millis, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

³⁵ David Houston, Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet, I, p. 132.

United States in any serious trouble.³⁶

There was considerable feeling in America, as well as in England, that the British authorities were guilty of criminal negligence for allowing the tragedy to happen. The public of both countries generally felt that convoys should have been available for passenger liners through the danger zones. Winston Churchill, head of the British Admiralty during the World War, admitted (under heavy questioning before the House of Commons) that the Admiralty had sent convoys on two different occasions to protect British freighters loaded with American horses.³⁷

Professor Bemis remarked:

One might well wonder whether the British Government purposely exposed to attack the Lusitania and other British passenger vessels carrying American citizens in order to lead the Germans on to a rash act which might bring the United States into the war.... The truth probably will never be known whether the British and French Governments deliberately exposed these ships for high diplomatic stakes.³⁸

What position would the American Government take in regard to the Lusitania episode? In a note to the President, Secretary Bryan expressed the opinion that "Germany had a right to prevent contraband going to the Allies, and that ships carrying contraband should not rely upon passengers to protect her from attack."³⁹ Mr. Lansing thought very differently. The acceptance of Bryan's views would be equivalent to American admission of the validity of submarine warfare. Both the President and Mr. Lansing worked on a note to Germany.

³⁶ Millis, op. cit., p. 175.

³⁷ Thomas Bailey, "The Sinking of the Lusitania," American Historical Review, XLI, October, 1935, pp. 54-72.

³⁸ Samuel Flagg Bemis, Diplomatic History of the United States, p. 610.

³⁹ Bryan, op. cit., pp. 398-399.

On May 11 the cabinet discussed the relative merits of the two notes. After considerable discussion the President's draft was accepted, differing only slightly from Lansing's. The note reiterated the American declaration of February 10, regarding attacks on vessels without "visit and search" and again using the term "strict accountability." It asserted the practical impossibility of submarines observing international law. The American Government expected reparations for injuries and that measures should be taken to prevent recurrence of these injuries.⁴⁰

Bryan assented to the dispatch of the first note, May 13, with the understanding that its effect on Germany should be counterbalanced by one or more of the accompanying actions: (1) settlement of disputed issues to be deferred in accordance with the principle of the conciliation treaties; (2) a prohibition of warning against travel on belligerent ships carrying contraband; (3) an immediate note to Great Britain asking satisfaction in the matter of interference with American trade.⁴¹ On one point after another he was disappointed. The President who, before the note was sent had agreed to issue a statement concerning the reckoning, withdrew his approval when the time for issuing it arrived.⁴² On May 14, he decided against any form of notice to American passengers.⁴³

On May 22, the German Foreign Office sent the long awaited reply. The most important points raised in the note were: (1) that the

⁴⁰Baker, *op. cit.*, V., p. 537.

⁴¹Bemis, *Diplomatic History of the United States*, p. 39.

⁴²Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 399-402.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 403.

Lusitania was an auxiliary cruiser of the British navy; (2) that it was armed; (3) that the British Government had authorized the use of the American flag; (4) that British merchant vessels were instructed to ram or otherwise destroy German submarines; (5) that the Lusitania carried munitions of war.⁴⁴ Germany further hoped that the United States would order a careful examination into the facts surrounding the sinking of the Lusitania. The note asserted that German submarine attacks upon neutral vessels were attributable to the misuse of neutral flags by British vessels.⁴⁵

The German reply was considered entirely unsatisfactory. It neither accepted or refused to acknowledge the principles slid down in our note of May 13. Its final statement was reserved pending the receipt of further information from the United States government.

No time was lost by the Chief Executive in preparing a reply to the German note. Cabinet meetings were held every day, beginning June 1 and extending to June 8, until the final draft was completed. Discussions at these meetings often reflected a deep "feeling." Secretary Garrison contended that Germany should be made to accept or reject the principles as stated in our note of May 13.⁴⁶ When the Cabinet disapproved of sending a note of protest along with the German note, to Great Britain concerning violations of neutral shipping, Bryan asserted they were pro-Ally. The President sharply rebuked him, saying that his remarks were unfair.⁴⁷

Bryan wished to avoid haste in answering the German note. He

⁴⁴ Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, p. 419.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Houston, op. cit., p. 136.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

suggested investigating all the facts before taking a position. On nearly every occasion Secretary Bryan was opposed by the militant Counselor, Mr. Lansing, who was distinctly displeased with the German note. It revealed, he thought, a desire to continue their policy which our government declared was illegal and inhuman. Accordingly, our reply should be firm and without the usual expressions of friendship.⁴⁸ The President was sympathetic with the Counselor's viewpoint. The Secretary of State endeavored to convince the President that a second note to Germany would have serious repercussions. In his final plea to Wilson, Bryan suggested that our dispute with Germany be settled by arbitration; that our Government prevent passenger ships from carrying munitions of war; and that a note of protest to England be sent before reply to the German note of May 28 was dispatched.⁴⁹

In the face of defeat, the Secretary of State was convinced that his services were no longer useful. On Saturday June 5, Secretary McAdoo tried in vain to dissuade Bryan from his contemplated resignation. In a final attempt to alter the President's course, Bryan visited the Chief Executive on June 7. He pled passionately for a delay in dispatching the note as well as a change in Wilson's attitude toward Germany but without success. Thoroughly discouraged and broken with emotion, Secretary Bryan returned to the Department of State to prepare his letter of resignation.⁵⁰ The next day, June 8, the President accepted the resignation with a "feeling of personal sorrow."⁵¹

⁴⁸Tansill, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-333.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁵⁰Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 423-424.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 407.

The second note to Germany differed little from the first. It merely reaffirmed our Government's position as to "strict accountability" for all acts committed in violation of international law. It further refuted the German contentions of May 28, but with a modifying clause, namely: "Should the Imperial German Government be in possession of convincing evidence concerning the Lusitania heretofore unknown to the American Government, the United States sincerely hopes that it will submit that evidence for consideration."⁵² This materially softened the tone of the note. Bryan had no knowledge of this change at the time of his resignation.⁵³

Mr. Bryan gave a very explicit statement to the press, concerning his resignation. "The 'real issue,' he explained, was 'not between persons,' but 'between systems,' the system of 'force' and 'persuasion.' Force represents the 'old system' and persuasion represents the 'new system.' The note to Germany conforms to the standards of the 'old system.'"⁵⁴

They differed on the suggestion of investigating our dispute with Germany by an international commission and as to warning Americans against traveling on belligerent vessels or with cargoes of ammunition. Concerning the second point of difference he continues:

The question of traveling on a belligerent ship passing through a war zone is not a question of right under international law; the question is whether he ought not, out of consideration for his country and personal safety, avoid danger when avoidance is possible.

It is a very one-sided citizenship that compels a Government

⁵²Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 408-409.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 408.

⁵⁴Anon., "Mr. Bryan's Split With the President," Literary Digest, L, June 19, 1915, pp. 1449-1452.

to go to war over a citizen's rights and yet relieves the citizen of all obligations to consider the nation's welfare.

President Wilson advised Americans to leave Mexico when insurrection broke out there. This advice was eminently wise, and I think the same course should be followed in regard to warning Americans to keep off vessels subject to attack.

American passenger ships should be prohibited from carrying ammunition. Passengers and ammunition should not travel together.⁵⁵

Newspaper editorials were bitter in their attack regarding Bryan's resignation as Secretary of State. Concerning their bitterness, Mr. McAdoo once said, "I had no idea of the hurricane of abuse that was to howl around him."⁵⁶ The New York World declared his resignation was unspeakable "treachery;" Louisville Courier-Journal commented that, "men have been shot and beheaded, even hanged, drawn and quartered for treason less heinous;" the Syracuse Post-Standard remarked, "Billy Sunday in the wrong niche;" and the Pittsburg Chronical Telegram calls him "the peace piffle and grape juice statesman."⁵⁷ All the newspaper comments were not as severe as those that have been quoted. Eastern editorials, as a rule, were extremely bitter. Many commentators never doubted Bryan's honesty and integrity but they questioned his judgment. Mrs. Edith Bolling-Wilson's reply to the question concerning Bryan's resignation was, "Good; for I hope the President can replace him with someone who is able and one who can command respect for the office both at home and abroad."⁵⁸

Although Bryan was much abused, ridiculed, scorned, and vilified, he was not without admirers and sympathizers. McAdoo regarded Bryan as one of the "shrewdest" men he had ever known.⁵⁹ Ray Stannard Baker

⁵⁵ New York Times, Current History Magazine, 1915, IV, pp. 645-647.

⁵⁶ Millis, op. cit., p. 190.

⁵⁷ New York Times, op. cit., IV, pp. 640-645.

⁵⁸ Edith Bolling Wilson, My Memoirs, p. 63.

⁵⁹ William G. McAdoo, Crowded Years, p. 337.

inclined to the view that Bryan was the "statesman of largest calibre among Wilson's advisers."⁶⁰ Dr. Joseph Fuller frankly stated that Bryan was the "only member of the Administration who possessed and consistently urged a constructive policy for avoiding the dangers that beset its course."⁶¹ Professor William E. Dodd has this to say about the former Secretary. If Bryan had been elected President in 1896, America might have been saved

...from the clutches of power interests which seek to destroy all that is worthy in our national life....I was doubly distressed when you found it necessary to leave Mr. Wilson's cabinet, both for your sake and for that of the Administration.... Wilson's mistake consists in yielding to the militaristic forces of our time.⁶²

Bryan was mistaken in his contention that the note of June 9 would result in an immediate severance of diplomatic relations with Germany. However, much to our chagrin, Wilson's foreign policy, slowly but surely, involved us in a European struggle which might have been averted had Wilson heeded the "Commoner's" counsel rather than that of Lansing and House.

⁶⁰Baker, op. cit., V, p. 337.

⁶¹Bemis, American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, X, p. 31.

⁶²Tansill, op. cit., p. 337.

CHAPTER IV

VINDICATION OF BRYAN'S GALLANT FIGHT

During the entire summer of 1915, until the end of the year, there was no shattering crisis comparable with the sinking of the Lusitania. There were steadily gathering clouds, black with the portents of the rising storm. Several lesser events, the sinking of the American, the Arabic, the Hesperian, and the Ancona; the cotton controversy with Great Britain during the late summer; all added to the difficulties which the President had to meet. It was a period of interminable note writing, protests, secret negotiations, with gradually increasing asperity on all sides.¹

The intense feeling over the Lusitania affair gradually subsided when Germany made several concessions in regard to her submarine campaign. On July 8, 1915, the German Government promised free safe passage to large passenger steamers if properly marked.² Our reply of July 21, as usual, reiterated the right of Americans to travel the high seas without danger of injury and stated that repetition of the Lusitania affair would be interpreted as a "deliberately unfriendly" act. To offset this terse statement, we then extended an invitation to the German Government to cooperate with us in the struggle for the "freedom of the seas."³ The British were plainly disappointed that the German crisis was passing without American involvement thereby causing American influence to become ineffective.⁴

¹Baker, op. cit., V, p. 362.

²Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 463-466.

³Ibid., pp. 480-482.

⁴Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 54.

During all this time, from June until December 1915, the controversies with Great Britain grew more irritating, causing the President more anxiety than the issues with Germany.⁵ The exactions of the British blockade disrupted American business. Trade with Central Europe was destroyed. In July Ambassador Page sent a dispatch to the President warning him that the British Government was considering putting cotton on the contraband list.⁶ This thoroughly aroused Wilson's ire.

Mr. Page was so little in sympathy with the Chief Executive that he was almost hoping for another Lusitania outrage in order to force America into the war. He wrote to House on July 21: "It is a curious thing to say but the only solution that I can see is another Lusitania outrage which would force war."⁷

On August 24, 1915, the Department of State was informed of the British proclamation placing cotton and cotton goods on the absolute contraband list.⁸ Sharp protests were raised by many Americans at this abject surrender to England of numerous rights for which a war had once been fought. The announced cotton contraband list met with acquiescence in the State Department.

The most pressing problem that faced the Administration in the field of foreign relations in 1915 and 1916 was the one dealing with the right of merchant ships to carry defensive armament. As previously discussed,⁹ the State Department had issued a circular differentiating

⁵Baker, *op. cit.*, V, p. 363.

⁶*Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement*, p. 193.

⁷Hendrick, *op. cit.*, II, p. 26.

⁸*Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement*, p. 174.

⁹See p. 32.

between offensive and defensive armament. This circular of September 19, 1914, was issued before the appearance of the submarine as an important factor in naval operations. It soon became apparent that the submarine was extremely vulnerable to attack by merchant ships carrying defensive armament as defined by the circular of September 19. The German Government made numerous complaints of attacks upon submarines by British passenger steamers.¹⁰

Lansing clearly recognized the need of amending the September circular to meet the new developments. On January 18, 1916, Lansing announced "that merchant vessels of belligerent nationality should be prohibited and prevented from carrying any armament whatsoever."¹¹ Apparently the Secretary of State and the President were beginning to see the light only to be overcome by two unfortunate incidents.

The German Government issued a decree on the 11th of the following month, declaring "all armed merchant ships were subject to destruction after February 29. The rights of neutral ships were to be respected."¹² This was an unfortunate announcement even though it merely conformed to Lansing's contentions. Wilson's reply to the German declaration was that Germany would be held "strictly accountable" for attacks upon armed merchantmen in accordance with former agreements.¹³

A more weighty reason for a forced retreat on the part of Lansing was Colonel House's influence in molding the mind of Wilson. When informed of the Administration's new order of January 18, House cabled to Lansing requesting that the order be held in abeyance until his return.¹⁴

¹⁰ Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 104-105; 1916, pp. 92, 163-167, 173.

¹¹ Ibid., 1916, pp. 146-148.

¹² Ibid., pp. 163-165.

¹³ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁴ Senate Report, No. 944, 74 Cong., 2nd sess., Pt. 5, p. 126.

The Colonel experienced no difficulty in convincing his Chief that Germany was seeking an excuse to throw off all restraints in under sea warfare. The President and his intimate adviser being in perfect agreement, Lansing was forced to devise a "strategic retreat" on February 16. In this he admitted the present rules for arming belligerent merchant vessels were inadequate to meet the existing circumstances and ought to be changed, but that the American Government did not feel justified in making such a change without the consent of the contending belligerents. Furthermore, he stated that if the Entente Powers rejected the proposal of January 18, the United States would be forced to rely upon the established rules of international law. Under these rules if American lives were lost through submarine attacks upon armed merchantmen, the offense would be considered as a breach of international law.¹⁵

President Wilson missed an opportunity to remove the only serious cause of friction in German American relations, which he could have done by upholding the declaration made by Lansing on January 18, 1916. American entry into the World War was due in part to the failures of the President to follow a course dictated by American rather than Allied interests. Most of the credit for this tragic and fateful decision goes to Colonel House. Thus, the losing struggle for neutrality continued unabated.

Two extremely important events occurred in February and March, 1916, that clearly indicate the unneutral policy of the Administration. It is of no little importance that these incidents happened almost simultaneously. The first was the so-called House-Grey peace proposal; the

¹⁵Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement, p. 170.

other was the bitter struggle in Congress over the question of warning Americans not to sail on armed Belligerent ships.

Ten months before the election which returned Wilson to the White House in 1916, "because he kept us out of War," Colonel House negotiated a secret agreement with England and France in behalf of Wilson which pledged the United States to enter the war on the side of the Allies.¹⁶ By a series of conversations and conferences with Sir Edward Grey, House concluded a "Gentlemen's Agreement," thereby chaining the United States to the chariot of the Entente.¹⁷ On February 23, the House-Grey agreement was completed stating that:

President Wilson was ready, upon hearing from England and France that the moment was opportune, to call a conference to put an end to the war. If the Allies accepted the proposal and should Germany refuse it, the United States would probably enter the war against Germany.

If such a conference met, the peace terms should not be unfavorable to the Allies; if the conference failed to secure peace, the United States would leave the conference as a belligerent on the side of the Allies, if Germany was unreasonable. If the Allies delayed in accepting Wilson's offer, and if later on the course of the war was unfavorable to them and the intervention of the United States seemed ineffective, the United States would probably disinterest themselves in Europe and look to their own protection.¹⁸

Early on the morning of March 6, the Colonel arrived in Washington. The President accepted the House-Grey agreement with but one amendment. Wilson inserted the word "probably" so as to read that the United States would probably leave the conference as a belligerent on the side of the Allies.¹⁹ In a most emphatic way Wilson sanctioned, on March 7, House's promise to the Allies by drafting a cablegram to Mr. Grey announcing

¹⁶George Sylvester Viereck, The Strangest Friendship in History, Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House, p. 106.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁹Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 201.

the formal acceptance of the agreement. For obvious reasons the cablegram was signed by House.²⁰

Colonel House was bitterly disappointed when the Allies rejected our overtures. He thought the Allies had become "cock-sure" since Verdun, and that they might change their views on militarism and navalism.²¹ It is also true that the terms of peace agreed to by Wilson and House were milder than the terms proposed in the secret treaties among the Allies themselves.²²

With the House-Grey Agreement in the process of completion, a bitter struggle was being waged in Congress in February over the question of the right of American citizens to sail on merchant ships carrying armaments. Congress was deeply concerned due to the fact that the German declaration of February 8 declared all armed enemy merchant ships would be sunk at sight. Congressional leaders were demanding that our government make a definite move to warn American citizens of the impending dangers involved in traveling on armed belligerent ships.

In order to prevent embarrassment to the Administration, the Chief Executive held a conference at the White House on February 21, with Senator Stone, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Kern, Majority leader in the Senate and Representative Flood, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.²³ The conferees learned from the President that war with Germany would result from any loss of American lives through the sinking of armed merchant ships by submarines.²⁴ These Democratic leaders left the conference feeling

²⁰ Seymour, American Diplomacy During the World War, p. 154.

²¹ Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, pp. 282-283.

²² Viereck, op. cit., p. 116.

²³ Tansill, op. cit., p. 465.

²⁴ Congressional Record, LIII, Appendix, p. 833.

that the Chief Executive was headed directly for a war with Germany over a very questionable proposition.²⁵

The conference created a very tense situation in Congress. Members of the President's party were determined to check him in his attempt to force, even to the point of war, German adherence to our questionable position. Meanwhile the Gore-McLemore resolutions were introduced in Congress providing for warning American citizens of the dangers of traveling on armed merchant vessels. The resolutions were crudely drawn thereby inviting much criticism.²⁶ Claude Kitchin, the Floor Leader, was actively supporting the warning resolution. He feared that the Chief Executive's political power and skill would cause the members of his party to "fling away their convictions and vote to please the President."²⁷ Although the Gore resolution was defeated on March 3, and the McLemore resolution on March 7, after a bitter controversy, Congress had clearly voiced its desire for continued peace.²⁸

The Administration's inclination toward the side of the Allies made war a definite possibility when on March 23 the *Sussex*, a French steamer, was torpedoed without warning in the English Channel, with several American casualties. Ambassador Page sent a telegram counseling immediate war.²⁹ Colonel House, leaving his sick bed to go to Washington to resume his role as Presidential mentor, urged drastic action against Germany.³⁰ Secretary Lansing was bellicose and believed that the

²⁵Congressional Record, LIII, Appendix, p. 832.

²⁶Arnet, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁷Ibid., p. 164.

²⁸Congressional Record, LIII, pp. 3465, 3720.

²⁹Tansill, op. cit., p. 493.

³⁰Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, pp. 228-229.

United States had no recourse but an immediate rupture with Germany.³¹ Colonel House and the President, having agreed that a break was inevitable, drafted a cablegram to Sir Edward Grey, April 6, informing him of the situation and requesting him to consult with France and Russia "with a view to immediate action."³² Thanks to British obtuseness and not to the pacific desire of President Wilson, the entry of America into the war was postponed another year.³³ The Allies were not interested in our offer at that particular time.

After an exchange of notes, the German Government made concessions that allayed, at least temporarily, the fears of our Government. We were informed, on May 4, that submarine warfare would be carried out according to the general principles of visit and search and the destruction of merchant vessels as recognized by international law. This course was to be followed only on the condition that the neutral government's would compel the Allies to respect neutral rights.³⁴ The note was not entirely satisfactory but sufficiently so to cause the Colonel to advise Wilson to accept it.³⁵ Our reply to Germany, May 8, stated that we assumed her Government would continue the policy as outlined in the note of May 4, regardless of contingent action between the American Government and any belligerent Government.³⁶ The only answer given by the German Government to this communication was an intimation from Count Bernstorff that his Government had advised him

³¹Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, pp. 228-229.

³²Ibid., p. 231.

³³Seymour, American Diplomacy During the World War., pp. 161-172.

³⁴Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement, pp. 257-260.

³⁵Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 242.

³⁶Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement, p. 263.

that their "change of policy" was to be perpetual.³⁹ Thus the Sussex crisis was brought to an abrupt and peaceful conclusion.

In the late summer and early fall of 1916, the German Government exhibited a friendly attitude toward American mediation whereas the British Government was openly disinclined to accept American good offices. The Allied capitals indicated that peace proposals by the neutral powers would, in all probability, cause irritation.³⁸

This situation created a state of affairs in Germany where the naval leaders were demanding a renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare. The President decided to postpone any peace negotiations until after the election.³⁹ Thus, we find world peace in the balance between military pressure in Germany and presidential hesitation in the United States.

Ambassador Page, who was recalled in the summer of 1916 to get a bath in "Americanism," bluntly pointed out to the President that the Allies had never invited a neutral to take part in peace negotiations. He continued saying that the Allies resented Wilson's "meddling in their affairs."⁴⁰ The President refused to accept Page's counsel. With the British engaged in their great Somme offensive in the summer of 1916, they failed to be interested in peace negotiations.

On December 18, 1916, President Wilson sent his peace note to the belligerents requesting that they state the terms on which they would conclude peace.⁴¹ Mr. McAdoo and Mr. Houston, pro-Ally cabinet members, were opposed to sending the peace note. It might be regarded as a

³⁷Tansill, *op. cit.*, p. 515.

³⁸*Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement*, pp. 46-47.

³⁹Seymour, *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, II, p. 333.

⁴⁰Lansing, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁴¹*Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement*, pp. 97-99.

gesture of friendship to Germany.⁴²

The German Government replied on December 26, that she could not state her peace terms, but instead suggested that the belligerent powers have a "direct exchange of views."⁴³ The German Government desired a neutral spot in Europe free from American "indiscreetness" and "intermeddling."⁴⁴ The Germans feared that Wilson was predisposed to the Allied cause and that destroyed any possibility of a peace conference.

Likewise the joint reply of the Allies on January 10, 1917, dashed all hopes of peace. Their terms, based on "secret agreement" among themselves, were certain to be rejected by the Central Powers. They were based on Lloyd George's "knock-out" policy -- a peace dictated by the victors.⁴⁵

President Wilson continued to exert all his influence for the cause of peace. For the first time since the outbreak of the war, he was really neutral toward both belligerent groups.⁴⁶ This fact caused Secretary Lansing and the State Department officials considerable uneasiness. It appeared to them that Wilson was for peace at almost any price.⁴⁷

New obstacles to peace continually confronted the President. On January 10, Germany announced that all armed merchant vessels of its

⁴²Houston, op. cit., I, pp. 212-222.

⁴³Foreign Relations, 1916, Supplement, pp. 117-118.

⁴⁴German Documents, II, p. 1005. Cited, Tansill, op. cit., p. 627.

⁴⁵Foreign Relations, 1917, pp. 6-9.

⁴⁶Tansill, op. cit., p. 631.

⁴⁷Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 413.

adversaries would be treated as belligerents.⁴⁸ This warning caused The Department of State grave concern for there was a factual basis to the German memorandum. Had not Lansing contended, January 18, 1916, that no belligerent merchant ships should be allowed to carry armament, only to slip into strategic retreat? On January 26, 1917, the Neutrality Board, held that the merchant ships had the right to carry minimum and maximum armaments. Guns should not exceed six inches in caliber.⁴⁹

The President's message before the Senate on January 22, 1917, marks his last public attempt to bring peace to a warring world. It appears that Mr. Lansing was very much out of sympathy with his Chief's plans.⁵⁰ In his message the President pleaded for a peace "without victory;" a scrapping of the ancient system of balance of powers; that nations of the world should adopt the Monroe Doctrine as the "doctrine of the world."⁵¹

In all its splendor the speech fell on deaf ears in the Allied camp, at least until German militarism should be destroyed.⁵² On January 31, 1917, Ambassador Bernstorff presented a note to Secretary Lansing announcing an unrestricted submarine campaign after February 1.⁵³ A new problem presented itself.

What would Wilson say? Was the struggle for neutrality lost? After a series of discussions with Lansing, House, and his Cabinet, Wilson decided to break off diplomatic relations with Germany. On

⁴⁸ Foreign Relations, 1917, pp. 82-87.

⁴⁹ Tansill, op. cit., p. 635.

⁵⁰ Lansing, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

⁵¹ Foreign Relations, 1917, pp. 24-29.

⁵² Seymour, Intimate papers of Colonel House, II, p. 419.

⁵³ Lansing, op. cit., pp. 209-210.

February 3, Count Bernstorff was given his passports.⁵⁴ Pressure was being exerted on the President to declare war on Germany. McAdoo pressed for immediate action; Secretary Houston suggested that Wilson ask Congress for permission to arm American merchantmen.⁵⁵ The contents of the Zimmermann note to the German Minister in Mexico City was sent to Lansing, February 24. It provided that in case of war between Germany and the United States, Mexico should join in alliance with Germany. Mexico would receive generous financial support, and the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona would be restored.⁵⁶ Although absurd in itself, the Zimmermann "plot" received a good airing by the American press. The Department of State received news on March 14, that the American steamer Algonquin had been destroyed by a submarine.⁵⁷ Four days later three more American vessels had been sunk by submarines.⁵⁸ Events were moving fast.

The President called a cabinet meeting march 20. The question of war with Germany immediately came up. Secretary Houston expressed the view that the quickest way to "hit Germany was to keep the Allies." Other members of the cabinet were equally belligerent.⁵⁹ Lansing sent word to House to come to Washington to urge Wilson to adopt a more active policy.⁶⁰ The Chief Executive decided to convene Congress on April 3, to communicate to them "the grave matters of national policy."⁶¹

⁵⁴Lansing, op. cit., p. 217.

⁵⁵Houston, op. cit., I, pp. 233-238.

⁵⁶Foreign Relations, 1917, pp. 147-148.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 174.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 180-184.

⁵⁹Houston, op. cit., I, pp. 241-244.

⁶⁰Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 460.

⁶¹Lansing, op. cit., p. 237.

On March 27, the Colonel visited the President at the White House. Here the omniscient House lectured to his Chief concerning the inevitability of war with Germany.⁶² With the Colonel at his elbow the President began the preparation of his war message to Congress. The message with its graceful variations was pleasing to the master as well as to his pupil.⁶³

Under the impact of his fervid oratory a resolution was introduced in Congress which declared that a state of war had been "thrust upon the United States" by the German Government. The resolution was adopted by Congress. On April 6, 1917, it received the approval of the President.⁶⁴ The long drama of American "neutrality" was concluded. Submarine warfare was the positive cause of American intervention.⁶⁵

The old adage "hindsight is better than foresight" is quite applicable to our problems as a neutral power during the World War. If America, in the twenty years previous to the shot at Sarajevo, had devoted half the intelligence and a small fraction of the treasure spent by the militarists to forging the implements of peace and training the people to use them, we could in all probability have prevented the war.⁶⁶

Let us indulge in a bit of reflective thinking concerning the problem of neutrality as it affected us during the World War. In so doing, let us in our own thinking appraise the policies pursued by the various governments. Do we still react in the same way to problems of the World War period?

⁶²Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, pp. 464-465.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 464-468.

⁶⁴Congressional Record, LV, 65 Congress, Special session, pp. 200-261, 305-413.

⁶⁵Seymour, op. cit., p. 171.

⁶⁶Baker, op. cit., V, p. 153.

We acquiesced in British violation of international law including the establishing of a "war zone." How could we justify our position in ignoring or trying to force our way through a German "war zone," meanwhile holding Germany to "strict accountability" for all unfortunate incidents? We warned citizens to leave Mexico during periods of civil strife, why didn't we warn American citizens to avoid the dangers of the German war zone? We acquiesced in the English practice of economic "strangulation" and "starvation" of a whole nation, but protested vehemently when American lives were lost in the war zone announced by Germany. Germany's acts, like the British were not aimed against us but against a declared enemy. The English Admiralty ordered merchant ships to ram submarines.⁶⁷ She offered a huge sum of money for the destruction of a submarine by a merchant vessel.⁶⁸ Knowing these things, were we justified in insisting upon the right of "visit and search?" What would our answer be if in case of war with a foreign power whose fleet was superior, if our fleet was bottled up, our ports closed by the enemy fleet, our very economic life hanging in the balance? Would we not in the struggle for existence strike our enemy with the only effective weapon of the sea remaining, though in violation of international law?⁶⁹ Would we contend that, under the circumstances our submarine commanders should permit the landing at the ports of the enemy ammunition and arms to kill our soldiers?⁷⁰

⁶⁷Foreign Relations, 1915, Supplement, pp. 653-654.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 656.

⁶⁹Arnet, op. cit., p. 232.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 233.

Since the termination of the World War American public opinion has demanded that we adopt a relatively definite neutrality policy that would attempt to safeguard our neutral rights as well as keep us from becoming involved in another world conflagration. In April, 1934, Mr. Charles Warren, who had served as United States Assistant Attorney-General from August, 1914, to April, 1917, brought out an important study of the whole neutrality problem.⁷¹ In 1935-36 the Congress of the United States passed a neutrality law embodying the very principles of Mr. Warren's report. As our neutrality law stands

1. It prohibits, in time of war between foreign states, with the exception of American states, exports from the United States of arms, ammunition, or implements of war, as defined by the Presidential proclamation, to any port of such belligerent state, or to any neutral port for trans-shipment to, or for the use of, a belligerent country.
2. It prohibits loans or credits, or dealing in such to a belligerent.
3. The President determines when a state of war exists.
4. It requires the licensing of all manufactures, exporters or importers, of munitions and implements of war, during the times of peace.
5. It forbids American ships in time of war to carry munitions or implements of war to a belligerent port, or to a neutral port for trans-shipment to, or for the use of, a belligerent country.
6. It forbids any vessel, domestic or foreign, in time of war, to take out from American ports "men, or fuel, arms, ammunitions, implements of war, or other supplies" to belligerent warships or tenders.
7. It empowers the President to forbid to belligerent "submarines" the use of American neutral ports whenever that may help protect the citizens of the United States or its commercial interests.
8. The President has the power to refuse passports or protection to American citizens traveling as passengers on belligerent ships.⁷²

Now that the American people have spoken, what shall be said of Mr. Bryan? In the fight for American neutrality during the momentous years from 1914-1917, did he not reveal an understanding of American habitudes

⁷¹Charles Warren, "Troubles of a Neutral," Foreign Affairs, April, 1934.

⁷²Bemis, Diplomatic History of the United States, pp. 661-662.

of thought that was far deeper and infinitely more comprehensive than that of President Wilson and his coterie of astute advisers? How could he detect, above the loud clamor of vibrant voices, the voice of the future calling for those who had the courage to forsake familiar patterns of political thought in favor of new modes that would fit into new situations? His greatest defeat was his failure to keep America out of war in 1917. He fought the battle of American neutrality, which was riven by forces which he could not gauge, with amazing vitality until he went down, as many thought, to inglorious defeat.

Today the "Great Commoner" stands vindicated before the eyes of the American people. America has accepted his principles of neutrality though with belated enthusiasm. Bryan's attitude toward American neutrality during those critical years of 1914-1917 proves that he was a political prophet whose principles are being adopted today. This gallant struggle was not in vain even though it caused him to resign his commission with his Chief. In spite of the fact that his policy of: no large loans to belligerent countries; warning American citizens not to travel on belligerent ships; protesting against the use of the American flag by belligerents; and prohibiting passenger ships from carrying ammunition was thought unreasonable and impractical by his associates, they have since been incorporated in our neutrality laws of today. Although Bryan's mind did not foresee all the pitfalls of a neutral in a world at war, his policy was conceived on the basis of a "true spirit of neutrality" rather than that of "strict legal neutrality."

In conclusion, it may be said that when Europe was at war our "ship of state" was guided by a peace-loving President whose sympathies

were with the Allied cause. His Secretary of State, Mr. Bryan, too, was an avowed pacifist counseling his Chief to steer a course of impartial neutrality. President Wilson was unfortunate in that his intimate adviser, Colonel House, and his legal adviser, Mr. Lansing, to say nothing of his ambassadors to England and France, were avowed Anglophiles or active interventionists. If the President had followed Mr. Bryan's counsel, rather than that of Lansing, in all probability there would have been no Lusitania for America. Had Wilson stood firm in the enforcement of Mr. Lansing's order of January 18, 1916, prohibiting armaments on merchant vessels, it would have removed the only serious cause of friction in German-American relations. This failure was largely due to Colonel House's counsel. America's entry into the World War might have been prevented had Wilson followed Bryan's advice. Today we are again faced with the question of neutrality. America! what will be your answer?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Documents:

Congressional Record.

64 Congress, XXXIX, LIII, 1916.

65 Congress, LV, 1917.

Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917.

Supplements. 9 vols. Washington, 1928.

Report of Federal Reserve.

Bulletin, December, 1916.

Bulletin, April, 1917.

Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Senate Documents.

63 Congress, 3 sessions, No. 716.

67 Congress, 2 sessions, No. 176.

Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Senate Report.

74 Congress, 2 sessions, No. 944.

Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Diaries and Correspondence:

Baker, Ray Stannard. Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters. 8 vols.

Doubleday, Page, and Company, New York, 1927-1939.

Bryan, William J. The Memoirs of W. J. Bryan.

John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, Pa., 1925.

Grey, Viscount. Twenty-Five Years; 1892-1916. 2 vols.

Fredrick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1925.

Hendricks, Burton J. The Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page.

3 vols. Doubleday, Page, and Company, Garden City, 1925.

Houston, David F. Eight Years With Wilson's Cabinet. 2 vols.

Doubleday, Page, and Company, Garden City, 1926.

Lansing, Robert. War Memoirs of Robert Lansing.

Boobs-Merrill Company, New York, 1935.

- Savage, Carlton. Policies of the United States Toward Commerce in War. 2 vols. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.
- Seymour, Charles. Intimate Papers of Colonel House. 4 vols. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1926.
- Trevelyan, George Macaulay. Gray of Fallodon; Life and Letters. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1937.
- Wilson, Edith Bolling. My Memoirs. Bobbs-Merrill Company, New York, 1939.

Books:

- McAdoo, William G. Crowded Years. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1931.
- Tumulty, Joseph P. Woodrow Wilson as I Knew Him. Doubleday, Page, and Company, Garden City, 1921.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Books:

- Arnet, Alex Mathews. Claude Kitchen and the Wilson War Policies. Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1937.
- Beard, Charles A. and Mary. The Rise of American Civilization. 2 vols. Harcourt, New York, 1935.
- Bemis, Samuel Flagg. The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy. 10 vols. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1929.
- Bemis, Samuel Flagg. Diplomatic History of the United States. Henry Holt & Company, New York, 1936.
- Hibben, Paxton. The Fearless Leader, William Jennings Bryan. Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1928.
- Long, J. C. Bryan, The Great Commoner. D. Appleton & Company, New York, 1928.
- Millis, Walter. Road to War. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1935.
- Johnson, Allen. Dictionary of American Biography. 20 vols. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1929.
- Seymour, Charles. American Diplomacy during the World War. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1934.

Seymour, Charles. American Neutrality, 1914-1917. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1935.

Tansill, Charles Callan. America Goes to War. Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1938.

Viereck, George Sylvester. The Strangest Friendship in History, Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House. Liveright Inc., New York, 1932.

Werner, M. R. Bryan. Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, 1929.

Newspapers:

Austin American (Austin, Texas), June 9, 1915.

Austin Daily Statesman (Austin, Texas), June 9, 1915.

Christian Science Monitor (Boston), June 9; June 10, 1915.

London Evening Star (England), June 10, 1915.

New York Times, June 9; June 10, 1915.

New York Times, Current History Magazine, IV, 1915.

Periodicals:

Anon. "Judge Mayer Court Decision," Literary Digest, LVIII, September, 1918.

Anon. "Mr. Bryan's Split with the President," Literary Digest, L, June 19, 1915.

Bailey, Thomas. "The Sinking of the Lusitania," American Historical Review, XLI, October, 1935.

Warren, Charles. "Troubles of a Neutral," Foreign Affairs, XXI, April, 1934.

Typist:

Iris Koch,

Stillwater, Oklahoma.