

# The Aspirin Age

1919  
1941

# THE ASPIRIN AGE

1919 \* 1941

EDITED BY  
ISABEL LEIGHTON



A TOUCHSTONE BOOK

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## ✧ Editor's Preface

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THIS IS a story of America between two wars, told in terms of the most significant, or typical, or utterly fantastic news events of the gaudy and chaotic years that separated Versailles and Pearl Harbor. From the troubled vantage point of 1949, the United States of the twenties and thirties appears, in retrospect, as a strange, uncharted, and enchanted land; so many of the personalities and events that challenged our imaginations during that time now seem almost to have been part of a spell . . . hectic, frenzied, not always beneficent . . . cast over the entire country. We seem to have fluctuated between headaches: sometimes induced by prohibition, more frequently by the fevered pace of the times. During these throbbing years we searched in vain for a cure-all, coming no closer to it than the aspirin bottle. Hence: The Aspirin Age.

Twenty-two prominent authors, all closely connected with the period, have written expressly for this book the chapters that follow. Some of the events are described by active participants; others are retold by reporters who were on the scene or by specially qualified observers. Who was more integral a part of the struggle against the Kingfish, Huey Long, than Hodding Carter? Who could have been closer to the Dempsey-Tunney fight than Gene Tunney himself?

This is, I hope, no mere chronicling of arresting events, but rather a re-creation of a strange and almost somnambulistic time when America was much younger in spirit than it ever can be again. A time too close, still, for historical appraisal, yet too distant to be accurately assessed by most of us. They were years of high tragedy and low comedy, of truth and delusion, of complacency and hysteria. Sacco and Vanzetti died in this period, and so did prohibition. Much else came to life. Some of it, I hope, is here.

ISABEL LEIGHTON

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# The Forgotten Men of Versailles

BY HARRY HANSEN

When Harry Hansen attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 he was a seasoned, but not too hard-boiled, war correspondent. He began his newspaper career carrying papers in Davenport, Iowa, and held all the editorial positions on his home-town newspaper before he entered college. He edited the university graduates' magazine, promoted books for the University of Chicago Press, and did his first war reporting for the Chicago *Daily News* from the German front lines in Belgium in 1914. His Peace Conference reports were syndicated throughout the country by the North American Newspaper Alliance and appeared in the New York *Globe*. Mr. Hansen has written *The Adventures of the Fourteen Points* (1919), about the making of the Treaty of Versailles; *Midwest Portraits* (1923), the first book to contain studies of Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg; several other books of nonfiction and a novel. He became literary editor of the New York *World* and later of the New York *World-Telegram*, and is now editor of the *World Almanac*.

## ✧ 1

EXACTLY THIRTY years have passed since that gray day in Paris when President Poincaré of France formally opened the Peace Conference that was to result in the Treaty of Versailles. Gray skies above; a gray stone building on the Quai d'Orsay; black motorcars, flying little flags, carrying men in top hats and military coats to the doors; and fewer than five hundred spectators idling around the wrought-iron gates—this is my memory of January 18, 1919.

Few of us who presented press cards at the entrance and stretched our necks to get a glimpse of the formalities in the Salle d'Horloge could have forecast the far-flung consequences of this meeting. No doubt there



were statesmen, especially such veterans as Georges Clemenceau, who looked on this as one of the periodic adjustments of power and a division of spoils and advantages. We Americans, on the other hand, spoke of it as the final act in crushing military aggression, in outlawing war and guaranteeing the protection of minorities by international agreement. Had we not forced on the European Allies a set of principles that contradicted some of their established practices, threatened agreements to divide the spoils made between them in secret treaties, and gained their assent to a world union to keep the peace? Had we not, by incorporating these conditions in the terms of the armistice, practically guaranteed the rehabilitation of Germany and its future co-operation?

The limousine flying a white eagle on a blue ground and carrying the President of the United States to the opening session had implications of latent power, but already Woodrow Wilson was being measured by his equals as a man with human limitations. "We are going to have difficulties with this Presbyterian," Clemenceau had said, as he read Wilson's speech at Manchester declaring that the balance of power was responsible for Europe's woes and must go. Retorting before the Chamber of Deputies, Clemenceau had declared that he remained faithful to the balance of power; "this system of alliances, which I do not renounce, shall be my guiding thought at the Conference . . . so that there can be no separation in peace of the four powers that have fought side by side."

Now they sat near each other at the big U-shaped table in the Salle, an overdressed hall dating from the boastful era of the Second Empire. At their backs rose a white marble mantelpiece, surmounted by a gold clock and a marble statue of Liberty holding aloft a torch. The French, who did not believe that "open covenants, openly arrived at" applied to the press, had barred the way of correspondents by placing tables as barriers under the three arches that led to a gallery overlooking the grounds of the building, which was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Through these openings we were permitted to gaze at the men who had seats at the green table. They were not men of equal status, despite the professed democratic procedure. Top place belonged to representatives of the principal belligerents, with full powers; then came subordinate delegations from the British Dominions and India, whose

exact position was still to be determined; also men from states with special or limited interests, and finally those from states that had broken off relations with the Germans, without fighting in the field.

It was not easy to see or hear in this comparatively small chamber, but we could observe Woodrow Wilson, serious, lantern-jawed, listening gravely as the President of France declared that "America, the daughter of Europe, crossed the ocean to wrest her mother from the humiliation of thralldom and to save civilization." Such phrases were familiar to American ears; they were the common coin of our idealistic appraisal of a tough job, and the President who sat there had electrified American public opinion with similar, though better expressed, sentiments. Beside him sat the plenipotentiaries he had named and whose choice had been ridiculed by the opposition in the United States as a multiplication of mouthpieces. While General Tasker H. Bliss, military representative on the Supreme War Council, was not included in this criticism, Robert Lansing, Secretary of State, Henry White, one-time Ambassador in Paris, and Colonel E. M. House were specifically indicated, and the reservation that Mr. White was a Republican did not mollify Republicans in the Senate, who felt that the President's disregard of the Senate, though legal, was arbitrary and partisan.

It was Woodrow Wilson who proposed that Clemenceau, "the grand young man of France," be made permanent chairman of the conference, and that spirited leader, wearing gray silk gloves, a black tie, and round white cuffs, and looking more like a bulldog than a tiger, took charge. Beside him sat Stephen Pichon, Louis-Lucien Klotz, André Tardieu, and Jules Cambon; on the other side of Woodrow Wilson sat David Lloyd George, animated and eager, Andrew Bonar Law, Lord Milner, Arthur J. Balfour, still without a title, and George N. Barnes. Marshal Foch, dignified and handsome in his powder-blue uniform, sat near the French delegation, as a privileged guest; then, as our eyes roved over the assembly, we identified Vittorio Orlando, firmly determined to realize the aspirations of Italy as a great power; the Marquis Saionzi, Baron Makino, and Viscount Chinda of Japan; Paul Hymans of Belgium, Sir Robert Borden of Canada, W. M. Hughes of Australia, Eleftherios Veniselos of Greece, Lou Tseng-Tsiang and Chengting Wang of China, the Maharaja Ganga Singh Bahadur, the

turbaned representatives of the Arab kingdom of Hedjaz, and many others whose names were associated with causes and demands.

This was the first formal session in public and as much of an open meeting as the Peace Conference ever achieved. There were to be others like it—the reading of the *Covenant of the League of Nations*, for instance, in this same room, and the flamboyant signing of the treaty of peace by two insignificant Germans in the Hall of Mirrors of the Bourbon kings at Versailles. But open negotiations proved impractical from the first; decisions had to be reached by the five great powers, which organized the Supreme Council, or Council of Ten; this shrank to the Council of Four, in which Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Vittorio Orlando tackled major issues, occasionally expanding to the Council of Five when Japan's interests were involved.

Thus, at the very outset, President Wilson's principle of "open covenants, openly arrived at" was set aside. Ray Stannard Baker was named by the President to head a bureau through which news of American activities was to be filtered to the American press. This was no surprise to such seasoned men as Frank Simonds, Mark Sullivan, Richard V. Oulahan, Laurence Hills, Clinton Gilbert, and David Lawrence, who had found their way through the Wilsonian labyrinth in Washington, but it startled some of the rest of us, and led to formal protests by Herbert Bayard Swope, Arthur D. Krock, Paul Scott Mowrer, and other energetic men. Indeed, at the first session, David Lawrence showed his disregard of official barriers by vaulting over the tables and buttonholing Lloyd George, an incident that sticks in my memory because the next day the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, made a point of reproving Lawrence for what he termed a breach of good conduct.

There were other men in the American delegation who had no illusions about the hard, preparatory work necessary to negotiations. Several years before Colonel E. M. House, at the President's request, had begun a systematic effort to compile political, economic, and geographic information on all subjects likely to come up at the final settlement. The work of Walter Lippmann and David Hunter Miller had clarified principles for Woodrow Wilson and shaped some of his most

important declarations. James T. Shotwell, Charles Seymour, James Brown Scott, George Louis Beer, Archibald Coolidge, Isaiah Bowman, Charles H. Haskins, and others of like stature had worked without stint to provide essential data; a whole library had been accumulated and moved to Paris aboard the *George Washington*, the ship that carried the President and the American delegation to Europe.

Through these agencies, which occupied offices in the Hôtel Crillon and adjoining buildings, President Wilson was furnished not only with information but with summaries of interviews with representatives of many nations who wanted help from the Peace Conference. Thus Colonel E. M. House became an important source of information; his rooms adjoined those in which Robert Lansing, Henry White, and General Bliss daily exchanged views on the weather with the press, and I have a vivid memory of Herbert Bayard Swope striding firmly toward Colonel House's apartment, with Arthur D. Krock always two steps behind him, ignoring the blandishments of the Secretary of State.

For although Woodrow Wilson had instituted a "censorship" of conference news, it was quite impossible to keep matters secret; other nations had too much at stake not to invite the co-operation of world opinion. We did not have to ferret out information in odd corners of Paris; we were overwhelmed by requests for interviews, invitations to social affairs where politics would be served with tea and cakes, and tons of printed propaganda. But communication with the United States was still chiefly by cable, and there were no radio commentators to give a blow-by-blow version of the conference.

The conflicting issues were apparent long before the conference met, and every day were debated in the newspapers. Political leaders especially were eager to influence public opinion, because this was the principal support of Woodrow Wilson. His prestige with the people of Europe was enormous, because of his stand for democratic principles and the rights of minorities. His formal entry into Paris resembled that of a conquering hero; it was estimated that one hundred thousand Frenchmen were packed into the Place de la Concorde to cheer his arrival at the Crillon. This popularity the French leaders tried to counteract.

Before the conference met Europeans had suggested to Colonel

House that the President, as head of a state, could not confer with men who did not possess equal authority. The President replied that prime ministers and premiers were executives of their own countries, holding powers similar to his own. Opposition also arose in the United States, where it was felt that his position as arbitrator would be compromised if he went to Europe; this was brought to his attention by Herbert Hoover, American member of the Supreme Economic Council, battle-scarred by his altercations with Europeans. But the President gave no heed to these well-meant warnings; his subsequent experiences proved them right.

It was not yet customary to take a poll of the opinions of the man on the street in 1919; had he been consulted he would have insisted, with a prideful swagger, that the President go to Europe and give orders right and left. For the war had been a great American enterprise; the public had believed the President when he said, "The world must be made safe for democracy," and was convinced that American troops had won the war for the Allies. Yet there was a strong counterpoint in the demand that the boys be brought back from Europe, now that the job was done. The Army, too, clamored for leave in Paris and a quick trip home. Moreover, its letters were filled with gripes about prohibition, which, the men declared, "was put over on us when we couldn't object." Their attitude was expressed by the cartoonist Wallgren in the *Stars and Stripes*, when he portrayed the lady of the Statue of Liberty welcoming the veterans back by holding aloft a beer mug, upside down.

When the conference was organized the five big powers took over all the important work, giving such meager representation on committees to the nineteen junior nations, or "powers with special interests," that one after another of their delegates protested. Many of these men were important in their own countries—Paul Hymans was Minister of Foreign Affairs for Belgium, Joao Calogeras had been Minister of Finance for Brazil, Eleftherios Veniselos was Prime Minister of Greece, Lou Tseng-Tsiang was Minister of Foreign Affairs for China, and young Eduard Beneš was Minister of Foreign Affairs of the newly constituted Czechoslovak republic.

These and others were put in their place by Clemenceau. He said flatly that the five great powers had twelve million men under arms

at the time of the armistice, and their dead could be counted by millions. If they had not intended to create a society of nations, the five great powers need have consulted only themselves in the settlement. The smaller nations might state their case, at any time. But the great questions should come before the five. "And to give you my reason frankly," he said, "it is because I could not, we would not, agree that any committee should have the right to dictate to the five great powers."

So actually Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Orlando made the peace amid bitter arguments and recriminations. Once the debate became so personal that Clemenceau threatened to assault Lloyd George. Threats to leave the conference were made by several delegations; the Japanese were prepared to withdraw over Shantung; President Wilson once ordered the *George Washington* to be ready to take him home; and the Italian delegation actually withdrew when all its claims were not granted.

It was easy to subscribe to the principle that only a just peace would restore Europe to political and economic health, but every nation interpreted this to mean the rectification of its own grievances. France was determined to get guarantees against further aggression by the Germans; it asked the return of Alsace-Lorraine; the cession of the Saar, in which the population was more German than French; the permanent occupation of the Rhineland; full payment for all damages inflicted by the Germans and, to supplement the League of Nations, a defensive alliance with Great Britain and the United States. Japan was so determined to succeed the Germans in Shantung that the President opposed this as a violation of the territory of China.

Italy asked fulfillment of the Treaty of London, whereby Britain and France had agreed to vast concessions to draw Italy into the war. Italy had been promised the Trentino to the Brenner, Trieste, a large slice of the Dalmatian coast with strategic islands, and spheres of influence in Asia Minor. The Italian demands conflicted with several of the Fourteen Points; moreover, the needs of the new states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia had to be satisfied. Italy now also demanded the port of Fiume, which had an Italian majority, but had been specifically reserved for the Croats in the Treaty of London.

## 2.

MANY EVENTS of the Peace Conference were dramatic and spectacular, and some gave evidence of emotional tension behind calm fronts, but none exceeded in general interest the appearance of a delegation of royal Arabs from the hot sands of the desert, escorted by a man who was to become a strange, unsettling figure in Near East diplomacy—Lawrence of Arabia. Their arrival brought before the unsuspecting members of the Council of Four the conflicting problems of Asia Minor, which bedevil the nations to this day.

Here two British factions confronted each other, one supporting the Balfour effort to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the other backing the claims of the Sherif of Mecca, Hussein, to all the lands of Asia Minor liberated from the Turks. A complicating factor was the insistence of the French that the council honor the letter of the Sykes-Picot secret agreement, which divided Asia Minor into French and British zones and left the Arabs in a subordinate position. The British who opposed this argued that the greatest contribution to victory had been made by General Edmund Allenby's expedition, which, with the help of the Arabs, threw the Turks out of the country.

In this connection the British and French had a job for the United States: keeping order in Armenia. This was the toughest spot in the Near East at the time. They thought the plight of the Armenians, who had been cut down by both Turks and Greeks, would appeal to the humanitarian instincts of the Americans. However, our representatives considered the idea too dangerous for consideration.

The struggle of the Arabs was dramatized for me the day the Emir Feisal pitched his tent amid the red velvet carpets, the damask hangings, and the white and gold walls of the Hôtel Continental in the Rue de Rivoli. That house held memories of the Second Empire, and for a short time during this conference an aged woman in black, once known as the Empress Eugénie, received diplomats here and warned them never again to permit Germany to have an armed force.

The Emir Feisal was a tall Arab with sensitive features, a fringe of beard, long well-groomed fingers, and the refined bearing of the educated man who listens attentively to the trite mumblings of others. He

had come as the representative of his father, Hussein, who had proclaimed himself King of the Hedjaz with British support. His apartments were guarded by turbaned Negroes, and inside were other Negroes who spoke in deep voices as they performed the offices of hospitality.

The men of the prince's entourage favored European dress, but over it they wore long robes of black wool, while picturesque turbans were held fast by a number of gold cords across the forehead. On the day I first saw him, the Emir was also wearing a black robe with a gold cloth turban. In his belt stuck a pistol with a jeweled handle. Before the Council of Four, I have been told, he also wore a scimitar. His manner was free of all formality. He was there to get recognition for the King of the Hedjaz as head of the new Arabian federation, and he spoke politely but firmly in French of the vital help the Arabs had given the Allies and the recognition by Britain of their independent sovereignty.

But the Emir Feisal was not to be the sole spokesman for Hedjaz. He had hardly completed his remarks when an English officer in uniform, wearing a turban like the others, came unobtrusively into the room. He was a man of medium height, with strong features, of which his firm chin was most prominent. Without any explanation he introduced himself as Colonel Lawrence. The prince at once yielded the floor to him. The story of his dashing campaigns as officer of liaison between General Allenby and the Arabs was just becoming current.

Colonel Lawrence talked freely and with the evident determination to impress the company with the validity of the Arabian claims. He described their war exploits, but omitted his part in the fighting, calling himself an archaeologist who had been pressed into service in an emergency. He said there was no possible doubt about the rightness of the Arab position. He was so completely at ease and so persuasive that soon he had most of the company sitting on the carpet with him, as in an Arab tent. After he had described the holy city of Mecca, which was closed to unbelievers, someone asked him: "Were you ever in Mecca?"

"If anyone said I was, I should deny it," replied Colonel Lawrence.

From Colonel Lawrence I received a circumstantial statement of the Arab attitude toward the Zionist movement for a Jewish homeland in



Palestine. The Arabs were willing to make concessions to the Jews without, however, yielding sovereignty to any of the territory. "We have a kinship with the Jews," the Emir Feisal had said. "Both Jews and Arabs are Semitic. We are cousins." But Colonel Lawrence made specific the proposed political relationship. "The King of the Hedjaz has no objection to giving autonomy to the Zionists in the land they ask, from Dan to Beersheba," he said. But sovereignty would have to rest with the Arabs.

And here the abiding hope for a homeland where harassed Jews could flourish, where Hebrew would be the official tongue, was confronted by the Arab determination to rule what had been Turkey in Asia, both having British political groups behind them. While the delegation from Hedjaz pressed this point of view on the Council of Four, the spokesmen for the Zionists, Chaim Weizmann, Nahum Sokolow, M. Ussischkin, and several other leaders, asked the conference to guarantee Palestine as an autonomous state under British protection, as foreshadowed in the Balfour Declaration.

Zionism gained many adherents in Britain just before the first World War, when Dr. Weizmann urged the formation of a haven in Palestine for Jews persecuted in Czarist Russia, Poland, Rumania, and other lands of Eastern Europe. The proposal was supported in the United States by many influential Jews, including Dr. Stephen S. Wise, Louis Marshall, Louis D. Brandeis, and Felix Frankfurter. Not all were agreed on the form of government, but they recognized the need.

Strange to record, the Germans were the first to make amelioration of restrictions on Jews an issue in the first World War, because it served their purpose to get help from them in Poland and Russia. In the same year the British recognized the Jewish interest in Palestine briefly in the Sykes-Picot agreement with France, but David Lloyd George later called the plan for French and British zones "a crude hacking of the Holy Land." The German General Staff made the gesture of asking Turkey, its ally, to remove some of the Jewish burdens, and the British prevailed on the Russians to grant some concessions. The Russian Revolution gave the Jews freedom of worship and full citizenship, but when the Bolshevists came into power the confiscation of private business and the suppression of religious organizations hurt the Jews.