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Henceforth*



*Owen
Wister*

BY OWEN WISTER

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NEIGHBOURS HENCEFORTH

BY

OWEN WISTER

OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS
MEMBRE CORRESPONDANT DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DE GENS DE LETTRES
HONORARY FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE

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APPENDIX B

FOCH SPEAKS HIS MIND

ON November 7th, 1920, eighteen months to a day after the Treaty of Versailles was delivered to the Germans, Marshal Foch was on his way to Amiens to decorate the graves of the Australians who had defended the city for three years, and saved it in 1918, and had left fifty thousand dead on French soil.

Perhaps it was because he was in the same private car in which the Germans had signed the Armistice almost exactly two years before, that his companion, M. Jules Sauerwein, a writer for *Le Matin*, found him in a mood, at first slightly reluctant but finally almost without reserve, to talk about the Armistice. He broke his silence about this and also about two other matters of historic interest, namely, the circumstances in which he was made commander-in-chief of the allied armies after the disaster to the 5th British army in the great spring drive of 1918, and the tardiness as well as the character of the peace treaty.

No observer can look at the face of Foch, especially at his eyes, without perceiving that his is a nature of perfect loyalty and also that whatever animation may pass over the surface, he is deeply and finally sad. This comes not alone from the personal bereavement that he suffered in the war; it is due also, and possibly even more, to the undoing of his work by the politicians, which he foresaw but which he was powerless to prevent.

When the world read his reasons for granting an armistice at the time they were published—the sparing of human life, since all was gained without further bloodshed—they seemed adequate. Very few could have known then that the Armistice was forced upon him against his conviction, and that loyalty alone prompted him not only to assent openly but also openly to support the step taken. What he would have done had he known that no peace would be signed until the following June, no one can be sure, probably not even he.

To lay the calamity of the Armistice wholly at Mr. Wilson's door is probably not any more correct than to leave out his influence altogether. Several causes would seem to have combined, and were alleged then, and later. It was said that the British Army, after its tremendous and exhausting pursuit, could have gone no further then; that all the armies had marched so far in advance of their

bases of supply as to make further progress at that time, or until the spring, impossible; that every bridge and other link of communication had been destroyed by the retreating Germans, so that necessary repairs both in front and in the rear would have delayed an invasion of Germany until spring, giving Germany time to entrench herself formidably; and, finally, that Mr. Wilson, whose fourteen points had helped to allay in January a growing socialistic opposition to carrying on the war in 1918, had by his notes to Max of Baden in October again revived this opposition to an extent so widespread that it had to be reckoned with. These reasons, if true, must have seemed strong in November 1918. A complete answer to them, however, is to be found in the plan for the Lorraine offensive to have been launched on November 14th. In the light of that, any threat to withdraw the American troops would have been by itself enough to have forced the Armistice; and if such a threat was in fact made, Mr. Wilson's figure will stand almost as prominent in history as that of the Kaiser.

Much controversy surrounds the delay in uniting all the armies under the command of Foch after this had been urged in high quarters. The conversation between him and Sauerwein throws some light upon this, but not enough. Foch begins by expressing weariness of repeating the story of the Armistice, but as he warms to it, occasionally dropping into colloquialisms for which it is not easy to find English equivalents, his opinion of the slump from victory to failure is revealed, as well as his unhappiness.

"What is an armistice? It is a suspension of arms, a cessation of hostilities, which has for its object the discussion of peace by putting the governments which have consented to it in a situation such that they can impose the peace on which they have decided.

"Has the Armistice which I signed on the 11th of November, 1918, fulfilled its object?

"Yes, since on the 28th of June, after seven months of negotiations, Germany accepted all the conditions of the Allies. I had said to M. Clemenceau, the President of the Council, 'Here is my Armistice; you can make any peace you please, I am in a position to enforce it.' If the peace has not been good, is it my fault? I did my work; it was for the politicians to do theirs.

"I had been thinking the peace over for a long while. By September 1918 I was writing to M. Clemenceau. I said to him: 'The end of the war approaches. Send me a member of our foreign ministry to inform me of the conditions of peace which you are preparing in order that our armies may occupy all the regions which should serve as a guaranty for the execution of the treaty which you will make.'

"Mr. Clemenceau replied: 'That is no business of yours.'

"Do you wish me to tell you about the Armistice? It has been told so often! Very well; I'll tell you that when I saw them entering this car, Erzberger and the two others, accompanied by a naval officer whose name I have completely forgotten, I had a moment of emotion. I said to myself, 'Here is Germany. Very

well, since it is coming to me, I will treat it as it deserves. It is beaten. I will be stiff, cold, but without rancour or rudeness.'

"I had reached Rethonde at six in the evening, where my train was put on a siding. Next morning a train arrived very slowly, pushed from behind. It was the German train. They laid a foot-bridge between the two trains because it was very muddy. An instant later Weygand entered and told me that the German plenipotentiaries were at hand. Erzberger comes first, and presents the others in a fairly indistinct voice. It's translated. I say: 'Gentlemen, have you your credentials? We'll examine their validity.' They show me papers signed by Max of Baden. We consider them satisfactory. I turn to Erzberger and say to him: 'What do you desire of me?' 'We have come,' he answers, 'to receive communications of the conditions on which you wish to make the Armistice.'

"I answer: 'I have no communication to make to you. If you have any request to present to me, make it.' And he gives some more explanations. I say to him: 'Do you ask for an armistice?' He answers me: 'We ask it.' I reply: 'Then I will inform you through my intermediary upon what conditions the allied governments consent to grant the Armistice.'

'We sit down in the next car where my officers were. Admiral Wemyss at my right, Weygand at my left, and opposite me Erzberger, between Oberdorf and Winterfeldt. Weygand read them the conditions, which were translated piece by piece.

"I saw them collapse. Winterfeldt was very pale. I even think he was crying. After the reading, I add at once: 'Gentlemen, I leave this text with you; you have 72 hours to answer in. During that time you can present me comments of detail.'

"Then Erzberger became piteous. 'Monsieur le maréchal, I pray you will not wait for 72 hours. Stop the hostilities to-day. Our armies are the prey of anarchy; bolshevism threatens them; this bolshevism may spread over Germany, over all central Europe, and threaten even France herself.'

"I don't budge. I reply: 'I don't know what condition your armies are in; I only know the state of my own. Not only can I not stop the offensive, but I will give the order to push it with redoubled energy.'

"Then Winterfeldt takes it up. He had notes in front of him and he had carefully got up his case.

"'It is necessary,' said he to me, 'that our chiefs-of-staff should confer and talk over together all the details of execution. How can they? How can they communicate if the hostilities continue? I request you to stop the hostilities.'

"I answered him: 'These technical discussions will be entirely in order in 72 hours. From now until then hostilities will continue.'

"They withdrew. As for me, I send an order to all the allied armies, a last call to the courage and energy of all. All the commanders-in-chief returned me an enthusiastic answer: 'Count on us, we shall not stop.'

"I skip the three following days. The Germans attempted submersion, submersion by means of notes. Weygand received them and transmitted them to me."

Here the marshal with a smile of kindness and recognition interrupted himself to speak of his colleagues.

"They are," he said to me, 'crack-a-jacks. Ah, how well they know their business! And when there was talk of sending Weygand to Poland, and somebody said that he had never been in command, I said: 'Don't worry, he'll know what to do.'

"On the evening of the 10th I remind the Germans that they must sign the next day. They receive a long message from Hindenburg telling them to sign; but the revolution breaks out in Berlin, and I tell them: 'Who do you represent now?' They show me a telegram from President Ebert, a cipher telegram which was signed '606.' I don't know why. This telegram satisfied their authority.

"During the night of the 10th I didn't sleep much.

"I was resting between midnight and one o'clock, and then the Germans arrived. I allowed them 5000 mitrailleuses, and some camions. That was all. At 5.15 they signed in heavy, furious handwriting. At seven o'clock I left for Paris.

"At nine I was with M. Clemenceau. He was not particularly amiable. He was growling. He asked me if I had yielded to the Germans . . . but no matter about that . . . I told him that at eleven o'clock the cannon must be fired to announce the end of hostilities. He wanted it to be at four in the afternoon at the moment he should mount the tribune in the Chamber of Deputies. I told him that the allied armies had been advised since the night by my order; that at eleven o'clock the last shot would be fired, and the whole world would know it.

"On this M. Barthou, M. Neil, and others entered his study and backed me up. He consented to have the cannon fired at eleven o'clock.

"I said to him: 'My work is done. Yours begins.'"

SAUERWEIN: "But was it really over, your work? After beating Germany wasn't it your duty to give advice as to the peace?"

FOCH: "I don't know if it was my duty, or rather I believe it was, and that's what I understood; but I never was given the right.

"I often saw M. Clemenceau and I sent him three written notes. But let me tell you the end which will explain the beginning to you. The peace which they proposed to sign—I spoke to you about it at the time—seemed bad to me. I summed it up thus: neither frontiers nor pledges.

"For the security of France the frontier of the Rhine was needed, a military frontier, you understand, not a political one. For the reparations due France I demanded the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine until the full compliance with the treaty was consummated, because in my opinion that was the only way to secure those reparations.

"In the month of April, the 7th, I think, I was allowed to be heard at the council of ministers. I had vainly asked to be heard by the French delegation. They refused me. I recall that council of ministers. I came there with M. Jules Cambon and Tardieu. I asked at first if they kept no minutes. It appears that this was not the custom. Then, as I had committed my remarks to paper, I gave a copy to each minister and then began to speak and develop my theme : no guaranties, no security.

"M. Poincaré supported me, he alone, I must acknowledge it. After that they begged me to retire. Going out, I said to M. Tardieu before M. Cambon :

" 'Some day there will be a High Court to judge us, because France will never understand how we came to make a failure out of victory. On that day I want to present myself with a tranquil conscience and my papers in order.'

"I made one more attempt. It was at the full session of the 6th of May, when they gave to the allied powers the treaty which had been finished during the night. The Portuguese, and others whom I don't recall, protested. Then I got up and developed my theme once more. They listened, nobody said a word, and the session rose.

"While they were taking tea in the adjoining room I found M. Clemenceau and said :

" 'I had the honour to ask a question, and I should be glad of an answer.'

"Then I saw him talk animatedly a moment with M. Wilson and M. Lloyd George. Then he came back to me and declared :

" 'Our answer is, that there is no answer.'

"I replied :

" 'Monsieur the President, I am asking myself if I will accompany you to-morrow to Versailles. I find myself facing a case of conscience, the gravest that I have ever known in my existence. I repudiate that treaty, and I do not wish to participate in the responsibility by sitting beside you.'

"He was not pleased, and urged me to come. In the evening he sent M. John Dupuy to me, who held a long discourse with real emotion. Then I said to myself : 'The Allied governments are going to present themselves before Germany to impose a treaty upon her. Is it possible for them to present themselves without their armies, without the chief of their armies ? I haven't the right. It would be to weaken them in the presence of the enemy.'

"At Versailles I found myself by M. Klotz. When the ceremony of delivery was over, I said : 'Monsieur Minister of the Finances of the French Republic, with such a treaty you can present yourself at the bank of the German Empire and you will be paid in fake money.' M. Klotz replied acrimoniously, 'That is not my custom.'

" 'It will be your custom,' I retorted.

"And those are the people," concluded Marshal Foch, looking sadly at his pipe, "those are the people to whom I said :

" 'Make what peace you wish, I'll take care that it's performed.' "

APPENDIX B

SAUERWEIN : " It looks as if the head of our government did not love you to excess."

FOCH : " What can you do ? I don't know if he liked me, but he did not show it. I recall a council of war in London, the 14th of March, 1918. I had been nominated commander-in-chief of the reserve army, which didn't exist much. At that meeting I asked the English to contribute effectives to this army.

" Marshal Haig declared to me, in the name of the English Government, which was principally represented by Mr. Lloyd George, that it was impossible. I was going to answer sharply when—

" ' Be quiet,' said M. Clemenceau vigorously to me, ' I'm speaking in the name of the French Government, and I declare that I accept Marshal Haig's answer.' "

Here, writes M. Sauerwein, Foch smiled, and that violent incident seems to have left not the slightest bitterness.

" I said to myself," continued Foch, " wait. To-morrow I'll say something. And next day when the council was on the point of separating, I spoke, and I was not cut short this time. I declared that a formidable offensive was preparing, and I added that I knew what allied battles were. I've taken part at the Marne and in Italy. Here is what the liaisons ought to be (I said) and here is the way to play team-work, those are the precautions to be taken, etc., etc. I assure you (I said to them) that nothing is ready to resist the offensive and that it may be a disaster.

" They were impressed all the same. And a few days afterwards at Compiègne and Doullens they remembered me. [This was when Gough's army had been defeated.]

" At Doullens there were Lord Milner, Marshal Haig, M. Poincaré, M. Clemenceau, M. Loucheur, and General Pétain. I was not satisfied. From what I could learn, General Pétain was getting ready to retire on Paris, General Haig to the west. It was the open door for Germany—it was defeat.

" Marshal Haig, supported by Lord Milner, said there must be a responsible head and unity of command. I was proposed.

" ' We can,' said Clemenceau, ' give to Marshal Foch the command of the armies operating round Amiens.'

" Marshal Haig was the one who opposed this and declared that there was only one sensible solution, which was to give me the command of the armies on the west front. M. Clemenceau bowed, and it was decided.

" At lunch, which followed, M. Clemenceau said to me :

" ' Well, you have it, the place you wanted !'

" I lost patience a little ; I answered :

" ' What, Mr. President ! You give me a lost battle and you ask me to retrieve it. I accept, and you've the idea that you've made me a present ? It requires my entire self-effacement to accept in such circumstances.' "

