



## VI. GERMANY'S FIRST PEACE DRIVES

The Attempts of the German Government After the First Battle of the Marne to Obtain Advantageous Peace Terms That Would Leave Them in the Position of Practical Victors

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*More hitherto unwritten history of the war is contained in the present instalment of the Page letters. It sheds light not only on Germany's desire to obtain a Prussian peace after the Battle of the Marne, but upon Germany's diplomatic methods. The Straus and Speyer incident, as here related, discloses Germany deliberately starting afoot peace proposals, and then, when the situation did not develop in her interests, calmly repudiating the whole proceeding.*

*This instalment contains several letters which disclose the purposes of Colonel House's visit to Europe in the winter of 1915 and the reasons why that visit inevitably resulted in failure. It reveals the fact that the most important details of the League of Nations had taken shape in President Wilson's mind as early as October, 1914. It contains also the first record of the "Freedom of the Seas."—THE EDITORS.*

**T**HE Declaration of London was not the only problem that distracted Page in these early months of the war. Washington's apparent determination to make peace also added to his daily anxieties. That any attempt to end hostilities should have distressed so peace-loving and humanitarian a statesman as Page may seem surprising; it was, however, for the very reason that he was a man of peace that these Washington endeavors caused him endless worry. In Page's opinion they indicated that President Wilson did not have an accurate understanding of the war. The inspiring force back of them, as the Ambassador well understood, was a panic-stricken Germany. The real purpose was not a peace, but a truce;

and the cause which was to be advanced was not democracy but Prussian absolutism. Between the Battle of the Marne and the sinking of the *Lusitania* four attempts were made to end the war; all four were set afoot by Germany. President Wilson was the man to whom the Germans appealed to rescue them from their dilemma. It is no longer a secret that the Germans at this time regarded their situation as a tragic one; the success which they had anticipated for forty years had proved to be a disaster. The attempt to repeat the great episodes of 1864, 1866, and 1870, when Prussia had overwhelmed Denmark, Austria, and France in three brief campaigns, had ignominiously failed. Instead of beholding a conquered Europe at her feet, Germany

awoke from her illusion to find herself encompassed by a ring of resolute and powerful foes. The fact that the British Empire, with its immense resources, naval, military, and economic, was now leading the alliance against them, convinced the most intelligent Germans that the Fatherland was face to face with the greatest crisis in its history.

Peace now became the underground Germanic programme. Yet the Germans did not have that inexorable respect for facts which would have persuaded them to accept terms to which the Allies could consent. The military oligarchy were thinking not so much of saving the Fatherland as of saving themselves; a settlement which would have been satisfactory to their enemies would have demanded concessions which the German people, trained for forty years to expect an unparalleled victory, would have regarded as a defeat. The collapse of the militarists and of Hohenzollernism would have ensued. What they desired was a peace which they could picture to their deluded people as a triumph, one which would enable them to extricate themselves at the smallest possible cost from what seemed a desperate position, which would enable them to escape the penalties of their crimes, to emerge from their failure with a Germany still powerful, both in economic resources and in arms, and to set to work again industriously preparing to renew the struggle at a more favorable time. If negotiations resulted in such a truce, the German purpose would be splendidly served; even if they failed, however, the gain for Germany would still be great. Germany could appear as the belligerent which desired peace and the Entente could perhaps be manoeuvred into the position of the side responsible for continuing the war. The consideration which was chiefly at stake in these tortuous proceedings was public opinion in the United States. Americans do not yet understand the extent to which their country was regarded as the determining power. Both the German and the British Foreign Offices clearly understood, in August, 1914, that the United States, by throwing its support, especially its economic support, to one side or the other, could settle the result. Probably Germany grasped this point even more clearly than did Great Britain, for, from the beginning, she constantly nourished the hope that she could embroil the United States and Great Britain—a calamity which would

have given victory to the German arms. In every German move there were thus several motives, and one of the chief purposes of the subterranean campaigns which she now started for peace, was the desire of putting Britain in the false light of prolonging the war for aggressive purposes, and thus turning to herself that public opinion in this country which was so outspoken on the side of the Allies. Such public opinion, if it could be brought to regard Germany in a tolerant spirit, could easily be fanned into a flame by the disputes over blockades and shipping, and the power of the United States might thus be used for the advancement of the Fatherland. On the other hand, if Germany could obtain a peace which would show a profit for her tremendous effort, then the negotiations could have accomplished their purpose.

Conditions at Washington favored operations of this kind. Secretary Bryan was an ultra-pacifist; like men of one idea, he saw only the fact of a hideous war, and he would have welcomed anything that would end hostilities. The cessation of bloodshed was to him the great end to be attained: in the mind of Secretary Bryan it was more important that the war should be stopped than that the Allies should win. To President Wilson the European disaster appeared to be merely a selfish struggle for power, in which both sides were almost equally to blame. He never accepted Page's obvious interpretation that the single cause was Germany's determination to embark upon a war of world conquest. From the beginning, therefore, Page saw that he would have great difficulty in preventing intervention from Washington in the interest of Germany, yet this was another great service to which he now unhesitatingly directed his efforts.

The Ambassador was especially apprehensive of these peace moves in the early days of September, when the victorious German armies were marching on Paris. In London, as in most parts of the world, the capture of the French capital was then regarded as inevitable. September 3, 1914, was one of the darkest days in modern times. The population of Paris was fleeing southward; the Government had moved its headquarters to Bordeaux; and the moment seemed to be at hand when the German Emperor would make his long anticipated entry into the capital of France. It was under these circumstances that the American Ambassador to Great Britain sent

the following message directly to the President:

*Mr. Page to The President*

American Embassy, London,  
Sep. 3, 4 A. M.

Everybody in this city confidently believes that the Germans, if they capture Paris, will make a proposal for peace, and that the German Emperor will send you a message declaring that he is unwilling to shed another drop of blood. Any proposal that the Kaiser makes will be simply the proposal of a conqueror. His real purpose will be to preserve the Hohenzollern dynasty and the imperial bureaucracy. The prevailing English judgment is that, if Germany be permitted to stop hostilities, the war will have accomplished nothing. There is a determination here to destroy utterly the German bureaucracy and Englishmen are prepared to sacrifice themselves to any extent in men and money. The preparations that are being made here are for a long war; as I read the disposition and the character of Englishmen they will not stop until they have accomplished their purpose. There is a general expression of hope in this country that neither the American Government nor the public opinion of our country will look upon any suggestion for peace as a serious one which does not aim, first of all, at the absolute destruction of the German bureaucracy.

From such facts as I can obtain, it seems clear to me that the opinion of Europe—excluding of course, Germany—is rapidly solidifying into a severe condemnation of the German Empire. The profoundest moral judgment of the world is taking the strongest stand against Germany and German methods. Such incidents as the burning of Louvain and other places, the slaughter of civilian populations, the outrages against women and children—outrages of such a nature that they cannot be printed, but which form a matter of common conversation everywhere—have had the result of arousing Great Britain to a mood of the grimmest determination.

PAGE.

This message had hardly reached Washington when the peace effort of which it warned the President began to take practical form. In properly estimating these manœuvres it must be borne in mind that German diplomacy

always worked underground and that it approached its negotiations in a way that would make the other side appear as taking the initiative. This was a phase of German diplomatic technique with which every European Foreign Office had long been familiar. Count Bernstorff arrived in the United States from Germany in the latter part of August, evidently with instructions from his government to secure the intercession of the United States. There were two unofficial men in New York who were ideally qualified to serve the part of intermediaries. Mr. James Speyer had been born and had spent his early life at Frankfort-on-the-Main, Germany. As the head of the American branch of a great German banking house, his interests and sympathies were strong on the side of the Fatherland; indeed, he made no attempt to conceal his strong pro-German enthusiasm. Mr. Oscar S. Straus, like Mr. Speyer, had been born in Germany, but his antecedents were quite different. Mr. Straus's father had been a German revolutionist of '48; like Carl Schurz, Abraham Jacobi, and Franz Sigel, he had come to America to escape Prussian militarism and the Prussian autocracy, and his children had been educated in a detestation of the things for which the German Empire stood. Mr. Oscar Straus was only two years old when he was brought to this country; he had given the best evidences of his Americanism in a distinguished public career. Three times he had served the United States as Ambassador to Turkey; he had filled the post of Secretary of Commerce and Labor in President Roosevelt's cabinet, and had held other important public commissions. Among his other activities, Mr. Straus had played an important part in the peace movement of the preceding quarter of a century and he had been a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague. Mr. Straus was on excellent terms with the German, the British, and the French ambassadors at Washington. As far back as 1888, when he was American Minister at Constantinople, Bernstorff, then a youth, was an attaché at the German Embassy; the young German was frequently at the American Legation and used to remind Mr. Straus, whenever he met him in later years, how pleasantly he remembered his hospitality. With Sir Cecil Spring Rice, the British Ambassador, and M. Jules Jusserand, the French Ambassador, Mr. Straus had also become

principle it is the same fight that we have made, in our domestic field, during recent decades. Now the same fight has come on a far larger scale than men ever dreamed of before.

It isn't, therefore, for merely doctrinal reasons that we are concerned for the spread of democracy nor merely because a democracy is the only scheme of organization yet wrought out that keeps the door of opportunity open and invites all men to their fullest development. But we are interested in it because under no other system can the world be made an even reasonably safe place to live in. For autocracies only wage aggressive wars. Aggressive autocracies, especially military autocracies, must be softened down by peace (and they have never been so softened) or destroyed by war. The All-Highest doctrine of Germany today is the same as the Taxation without Representation of George III — only more virulent, stronger, and further-reaching. Only by its end can the German people recover and build up their character and take the permanent place in the world that they — thus changed — will be entitled to. They will either reduce Europe to the vassalage of a military autocracy, which may then overrun the whole world or drench it in blood, or they must through stages of liberalism work their way towards some approach to a democracy, and there is no doubt which event is impending. The liberal idea will win this struggle, and Europe will be out of danger of a

A FACSIMILE OF ONE OF MR. PAGE'S LETTERS

Mr. Page's letters lose some of their charm by being transferred to print, for they are as beautiful in their handwriting as in their English. This is a page from a letter written to President Wilson in November, 1916, giving the Ambassador's reasons why the United States should sever diplomatic relations with Germany. The reasons given in this communication were identically those which President Wilson incorporated in his famous speech of April 2, 1917, asking Congress to declare war on Germany

friendly in Constantinople and in Washington. This background, and Mr. Straus's well-known pro-British sentiments, would have made him an ideal man to act as a liaison agent between the Germans and the Allies, but there were other reasons why this ex-Ambassador would be useful at this time. Mr. Straus had been in Europe at the outbreak of the war; he had come into contact with the British statesman in those exciting early August days; in particular he had discussed all phases of the conflict with Sir Edward Grey, and before leaving England, he had given certain interviews which the British statesmen declared had greatly helped their cause in the United States. Of course, the German Government knew all about these activities.

On September 4, Mr. Straus arrived at New York from the *Mauretania*. He had hardly reached this country when he was called upon the telephone by Mr. Speyer, a friend of many years' standing. Count Bernstorff, the German Ambassador, Mr. Speyer said, was a guest at his country home, Waldheim, at Scarborough-on-the-Hudson; Mr. Speyer was giving a small, informal dinner on the next evening, Saturday, September 5, and he asked Mr. and Mrs. Straus to come. The other important guests were Mr. Frank A. Vanderlip, President of The National City Bank, and Mrs. Vanderlip. Mr. Straus accepted the invitation, mentally resolving that he would not discuss the war himself, but merely listen. It would certainly have been a difficult task for any man to avoid this subject on this particular evening; the date was September 5, the day on which the German army suddenly stopped in its progress toward Paris, and turned eastward, the French and the British forces in pursuit. A few minutes before Count Bernstorff sat down at Mr. Speyer's table, with Mr. Straus opposite, he had learned that the magnificent enterprise which Germany had planned for forty years had failed and that his country was facing a monstrous disaster. The Battle of the Marne was raging in all its fury while this pacific conversation at Mr. Speyer's house was taking place.

Of course, the war became the immediate topic of discussion. Count Bernstorff at once plunged into the usual German viewpoint, —that Germany did not want war in the first place, that the Entente had forced the issue, and the like.

"The Emperor and the German Government stood for peace," he said.

Naturally a man who had spent a considerable part of his life promoting the peace cause pricked up his ears at this statement.

"Does that sentiment still prevail in Germany?" asked Mr. Straus.

"Yes," replied the German Ambassador.

"Would your Government entertain a proposal for mediation now?" asked Mr. Straus.

"Certainly," Bernstorff promptly replied. He hastened to add, however, that he was speaking unofficially. He had had no telegraphic communication from Berlin for five days, and therefore could not definitely give the attitude of his Government. But he was quite sure that the Kaiser would be glad to have President Wilson take steps to end the war.

The possibility that he might play a part in bringing hostilities to a close now occurred to Mr. Straus. He had come to the dinner determined to avoid the subject altogether, but Count Bernstorff had precipitated the issue in a way that left the American no option. Certainly Mr. Straus would have been derelict if he had not reported this conversation to the high quarters for which Count Bernstorff had evidently intended it.

"That is a very important statement you have made, Mr. Ambassador," said Mr. Straus, measuring every word. "May I make use of it?"

"Yes."

"May I use it in any way I choose?"

"You may," replied Bernstorff.

Mr. Straus saw in this acquiescent mood a chance to appeal directly to President Wilson.

"Do you object to my laying this matter before our Government?"

"No, I do not."

Mr. Straus glanced at his watch; it was 10:15 o'clock.

"I think I shall go to Washington at once—this very night. I can get the midnight train."

Count Bernstorff seemed to think that that would be a good idea. In a few moments Mr. Straus was speeding in his automobile through Westchester County in the direction of the Pennsylvania Station. He caught the express, and, the next morning, which was Sunday the sixth, he was laying the whole matter before Secretary Bryan at the latter's house. Naturally Mr. Bryan was

overjoyed at the news; he at once summoned Bernstorff from New York to Washington, and went over the suggestion personally. The German Ambassador repeated the statements which he had made to Mr. Straus—always guardedly qualifying his remarks by saying that the proposal had not come originally from him but from his American friend. Meanwhile Mr. Bryan asked Mr. Straus to discuss the matter with the British and French ambassadors.

The meeting took place at the British Embassy. The two representatives of the Entente, though only too glad to talk the matter over, were more skeptical about the attitude of Bernstorff than Mr. Bryan had been.

"Of course, Mr. Straus," said Sir Cecil Spring Rice, "you know that this dinner was arranged purposely so that the German Ambassador could meet you?"

Mr. Straus demurred at this statement, but the Englishman smiled.

"Do you suppose," Sir Cecil asked, "that any ambassador would make such a statement as Bernstorff made to you without instructions from his government?"

"You and Monsieur Jusserand," replied the American, "have devoted your whole lives to diplomacy with distinguished ability and you can therefore answer that question better than I."

"I can assure you," replied M. Jusserand, "that no ambassador under the German system would dare for a moment to make such a statement without being authorized to do so."

"The Germans," added Sir Cecil, "have a way of making such statements unofficially and then denying that they have ever made them."

Both the British and French ambassadors, however, thought that the proposal should be seriously considered.

"If it holds out one chance in a hundred of lessening the length of the war, we should entertain it," said Ambassador Jusserand.

"I certainly hope that you will entertain it cordially," said Mr. Straus.

"Not cordially—that is a little too strong."

"Well, sympathetically?"

"Yes, sympathetically," said M. Jusserand, with a smile.

These facts were at once cabled to Page, who took the matter up with Sir Edward Grey. A despatch from the latter to the

British Ambassador in Washington gives a splendid summary of the British attitude on such approaches at this time.

*Sir Edward Grey to Sir C. Spring Rice.*

Foreign Office,  
September 9, 1914.

SIR:

The American Ambassador showed me to-day a communication that he had had from Mr. Bryan. It was to the effect that Mr. Straus and Mr. Speyer had been talking with the German Ambassador, who had said that, though he was without instructions, he thought that Germany might be disposed to end the war by mediation. This had been repeated to Mr. Bryan, who had spoken to the German Ambassador, and had heard the same from him. Mr. Bryan had taken the matter up, and was asking direct whether the German Emperor would accept mediation if the other parties who were at war would do the same.

The American Ambassador said to me that this information gave him a little concern. He feared that, coming after the declaration that we had signed last week with France and Russia about carrying on the war in common,<sup>1</sup> the peace parties in the United States might be given the impression that Germany was in favor of peace, and that the responsibility for continuing the war was on others.

I said that the agreement that we had made with France and Russia was an obvious one; when three countries were at war on the same side, one of them could not honorably make special terms for itself and leave the others in the lurch. As to mediation, I was favorable to it in principle, but the real question was: On what terms could the war be ended? If the United States could devise anything that would bring this war to an end and prevent another such war being forced on Europe I should welcome the proposal.

The Ambassador said that before the war began I had made suggestions for avoiding it, and that these suggestions had been refused.

I said that this was so, but since the war

<sup>1</sup>On September 5, 1914, Great Britain, France, and Russia signed the Pact of London, an agreement which bound the three powers of the Entente to make war and peace as a unit. Each power specifically pledged itself not to make a separate peace.

began there were two further considerations to be borne in mind: We were fighting to save the west of Europe from being dominated by Prussian militarism; Germany had prepared to the day for this war, and we could not again have a great military power in the middle of Europe preparing war in this way and forcing it upon us; and the second thing was that cruel wrong had been done to Belgium, for which there should be some compensation. I had no indication whatever that Germany was prepared to make any reparation to Belgium, and, while repeating that in principle I was favorable to mediation, I could see nothing to do but to wait for the reply of the German Emperor to the question that Mr. Bryan had put to him, and for the United States to ascertain on what terms Germany would make peace if the Emperor's reply was favorable to mediation.

The Ambassador made it quite clear that he regarded what the German Ambassador had said as a move in the game. He agreed with what I had said respecting terms of peace, and that there seemed no prospect at present of Germany being prepared to accept them.

I am, &c.,  
E. GREY

A letter from Page to Colonel House depicts the insincerity of this German manœuvre:

*Mr. Page to Col. Edward M. House*

London, September 10, 1914.

MY DEAR HOUSE:

A rather serious situation has arisen: The Germans of course thought that they would take Paris. They were then going to propose a conqueror's terms of peace, which they knew would not be accepted. But they would use their so-called offer of peace purely for publicity purposes. They would say, "See, men of the world, we want peace; we offer peace; the continuance of this awful war is not our doing." They are using Hearst for this purpose. I fear they are trying to use so good a man as Oscar Straus. They are fooling the Secretary.

Every nation was willing to accept Sir Edward Grey's proposals but Germany. She was bent on a war of conquest. Now she's likely to get licked—lock, stock, and barrel. She is carrying on a propaganda and a publicity campaign all over the world. The Allies can't and won't accept any peace except

on the condition that German militarism be uprooted. They are not going to live again under that awful shadow and fear. They say truly that life on such terms is not worth living. Moreover, if Germany should win the military control of Europe, she would soon—that same war-party—attack the United States. The war will not end until this condition can be imposed—that there shall be no more militarism.

But in the meantime, such men as Straus (a good fellow) may be able to let (by helping) the Germans appear to the Peace people as really desiring peace. Of course, what they want is to save their mutton.

And if we begin mediation talk now on that basis, we shall not be wanted when a real chance for mediation comes. If we are so silly as to play into the hands of the German-Hearst publicity bureau, our chance for real usefulness will be thrown away.

Put the President on his guard.

Heartily,  
W. H. P.

In the latter part of the month came Germany's reply. One would never suspect, on reading it, that Germany had herself instigated the negotiation. The Kaiser repeated the old charges that the Entente had forced the war on the Fatherland, that it was now determined to annihilate the Central Powers and that consequently there was no hope that the warring countries could agree upon acceptable terms for ending the struggle.

So ended Germany's first peace drive, and in the only possible way that it could end. But the Washington administration continued to be most friendly to mediation. A letter of Colonel House's, dated October 4, 1914, possesses great historical importance. It was written after a detailed discussion with President Wilson, and it indicates not only the President's desire to bring the struggle to a close, but it describes in some detail the principles which the President then regarded as essential to a permanent peace. It furnishes the central idea of the presidential policy for the next four years; indeed it contains the first statement of that famous "Article X" of the covenant of the League of Nations which was Mr. Wilson's most important contribution to that contentious document. This was the article which pledges the League "to respect and preserve as against external

aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence" of all its members; it was the article, which, more than any other, made the League obnoxious to Americans, who interpreted it as an attempt to involve them perpetually in the quarrels of Europe; and it was the one section of the Treaty of Versailles which was most responsible for the rejection of that document by the United States Senate. There are other suggestions in Colonel House's letter which apparently bore fruit in the League Covenant. It is somewhat astonishing that a letter of Colonel House's, written as far back as October 3, 1914, two months after the outbreak of the war, should contain "Article X" as one of the essential terms of peace, as well as other ideas afterward incorporated in that document, accompanied by an injunction that Page should present the suggestion to Sir Edward Grey:

*Col. Edward M. House to Mr. Page*

115 East 53rd Street,  
New York City.

DEAR PAGE:

Frank [the Ambassador's son] has just come in and has given me your letter of September 22nd<sup>1</sup> which is of absorbing interest. You have never done anything better than this letter, and some day, when you give the word, it must be published. But in the meantime, it will repose in the safe deposit box along with your others and with those of our great President.

I have just returned from Washington where I was with the President for nearly four days. He is looking well and is well. Sometimes his spirits droop, but then again, he is his normal self.

Before I came from Prides<sup>2</sup> I was fearful lest Straus, Bernstorff, and others would drive the President into doing something unwise. I have always counseled him to remain quiet for the moment and let matters unfold themselves further. In the meantime, I have been conferring with Bernstorff, with Dumba<sup>3</sup> and, of course, Spring Rice. The President now wants me to keep in touch with the situation and I do not think there is any danger of any one on the outside injecting

<sup>1</sup>Published in the December, 1921, issue of the *WORLD'S WORK*.

<sup>2</sup>Colonel House's summer home in Massachusetts.

<sup>3</sup>Ambassador from Austria-Hungary to the United States.

themselves into it unless Mr. Bryan does something on his own initiative.

Both Bernstorff and Dumba say that their countries are ready for peace talks, but the difficulty is with England. Sir Cecil says their statements are made merely to place England in a false position.

The attitude, I think, for England to maintain is the one which she so ably put forth to the world. That is, peace must come only upon condition of disarmament and must be permanent. I have a feeling that Germany will soon be willing to discuss terms. I do not agree that Germany has to be completely crushed and that terms must be made either in Berlin or London. It is manifestly against England's interest and the interest of Europe generally for Russia to become the dominating military force in Europe, just as Germany was. The dislike which England has for Germany should not blind her to actual conditions. If Germany is crushed, England cannot solely write the terms of peace, but Russia's wishes must also largely prevail.

With Russia strong in militarism, there is no way by which she could be reached. Her Government is so constituted that friendly conversations could not be had with her as they might be had even with such a power as Germany, and the world would look forward to another cataclysm and in the not too distant future.

When peace conversations begin, at best, they will probably continue many months before anything tangible comes from them. England and the Allies could readily stand on the general proposition that only enduring peace will satisfy them and I can see no insuperable obstacle in the way.

The Kaiser did not want war and was not responsible for it further than his lack of foresight which led him to build up a formidable engine of war which later dominated him. Peace cannot be made until the war party in Germany find that their ambitions cannot be realized, and this, I think, they are beginning to know.

When the war is ended and the necessary territorial alignments made, it seems to me, the best guaranty of peace could be brought by every nation in Europe guaranteeing the territorial integrity of every other nation.<sup>1</sup> By confining the manufacture of arms to the

<sup>1</sup>This is essentially Article X of the Covenant of the League of Nations.



governments themselves and by permitting representatives of all nations to inspect, at any time, the works.<sup>1</sup>

Then, too, all sources of national irritation should be removed so what at first may be a sore spot cannot grow into a malignant disease.<sup>2</sup> It will not be too difficult, I think, to bring about an agreement that will insure permanent peace, provided all the nations of Europe are honest in their desire for it.

I am writing this to you with the President's knowledge and consent and with the thought that it will be conveyed to Sir Edward. There is a growing impatience in this country because of this war and there is constant pressure upon the President to use his influence to bring about normal conditions. He does not wish to do anything to irritate or offend any one of the belligerent nations, but he has an abiding faith in the efficacy of open and frank discussion between those that are now at war.

As far as I can see, no harm can be done by a dispassionate discussion at this stage, even though nothing comes of it. In a way, it is perhaps better that informal and unofficial conversations are begun and later the principals can take it up themselves.

I am sure that Sir Edward is too great a man to let any prejudices deter him from ending, as soon as possible, the infinite suffering that each day of war entails.

Faithfully yours,  
E. M. HOUSE.

October 3rd, 1914.

It is apparent that the failure of this first attempt at mediation discouraged neither Bernstorff nor the Washington administration. Colonel House was constantly meeting the German and the British Ambassadors; he was also, as his correspondence shows, in touch with Zimmermann, the German Under Foreign Secretary. The German desire for peace grew stronger in the autumn and winter of 1914-15, as the fact became more and more clear that Great Britain was summoning all her resources for the greatest effort in her history, as the stalemate on the Aisne more and more impressed upon the German chieftains the impossibility of obtaining any decision against the French army, and as the Russians showed signs of great recuperation

<sup>1</sup>There is a suggestion of these provisions in Article VIII of the League Covenant.

<sup>2</sup>Article XI of the League Covenant reflects the influence of this idea.

after the disaster of Tannenberg. By December 4, Washington had evidently made up its mind to move again.

*Col. Edward M. House to Mr. Page*

115 East 53rd Street,  
New York City.

DEAR PAGE:

The President desires to start peace parleys at the very earliest moment, but he does not wish to offend the sensibilities of either side by making a proposal before the time is opportune. He is counting upon being given a hint, possibly through me, in an unofficial way, as to when a proffer from him will be acceptable.

Pressure is being brought upon him to offer his services again, for this country is suffering, like the rest of the neutral world, from the effects of the war, and our people are becoming restless.

Would you mind conveying this thought delicately to Sir Edward Grey and letting me know what he thinks?

Would the Allies consider parleys upon a basis of indemnity for Belgium and a cessation of militarism? If so, then something may be begun with the Dual Alliance.

I have been told that negotiations between Russia and Japan were carried on several months before they agreed to meet at Portsmouth. The havoc that is being wrought in human lives and treasure is too great to permit racial feeling or revenge to enter into the thoughts of those who govern the nations at war.

I stand ready to go to Germany at any moment in order to sound the temper of that government, and I would then go to England as I did last June.

This nation would not look with favor upon a policy that held nothing but the complete annihilation of the enemy:

Something must be done sometime, by somebody, to initiate a peace movement, and I can think of no way, at the moment, than the one suggested.

I will greatly appreciate your writing me fully and freely in regard to this phase of the situation.

Faithfully yours,  
E. M. HOUSE.

December 4th, 1914.

To this Page immediately replied:

Mr. Page to Col. Edward M. House

December 12th, 1914.

MY DEAR HOUSE:

The English rulers have no feeling of vengeance. I have never seen the slightest traces of that. But they are determined to secure future safety. They will not have this experience repeated if they can help it. They realize now that they have been living under a sort of fear—or dread—for ten years: they sometimes felt that it was bound to come some time and then at other times they could hardly believe it. And they will spend all the men and all the money they have rather than suffer that fear again or have that danger. Now, if anybody could fix a basis for the complete restoration of Belgium, and for the elimination of militarism, I am sure the *English* would talk on that basis. But there are two difficulties—Russia wouldn't talk till she has Constantinople, and I haven't found anybody who can say exactly what you mean by the "elimination of militarism." Disarmament? England *will* have her navy to protect her incoming bread and meat. How, then, can she say to Germany, "You can't have an army."

You say the Americans are becoming "restless." The plain fact is that the English people, and especially the English military and naval people, don't care a fig what the Americans think and feel. They say, "We're fighting *their* battle, too—the battle of Democracy and freedom from bureaucracy—why don't they come and help us in our life-and-death struggle?" I have a drawer full of letters saying this, not one of which I have ever answered. The official people never say that of course—nor the really responsible people, but a vast multitude of the public do. This feeling comes out even in the present military and naval rulers of this Kingdom—comes indirectly to me. A part of the public, then, and the military part of the Cabinet, don't longer care for American opinion and they resent even such a reference to peace as the President made in his Message to Congress.<sup>1</sup> But the civil part of the Cabinet and the

<sup>1</sup>From the President's second message to Congress, December 8, 1914: "It is our dearest present hope that this character and reputation may presently, in God's providence, bring us an opportunity, such as has seldom been vouchsafed any nation, to counsel and obtain peace in the world and reconciliation and a healing settlement of many a matter that has cooled and interrupted the friendship of nations."

responsible and better part of the public do care very much. The President's intimation about peace, however, got no real response here. They think he doesn't understand the meaning of the war. They don't want war; they are not a warlike people. They don't hate the Germans. There is no feeling of vengeance. They constantly say: "Why do the Germans hate us? We don't hate them." But, since Germany set out to rule the world and to conquer Great Britain, they say, "We'll all die first." That's "all there is to it." And they will all die unless they can so fix things that this war cannot be repeated. Lady K., as kindly an old lady as ever lived, said to me the other day, "A great honor has come to us. Our son has been killed in battle, fighting for the safety of England."

Now, the question which nobody seems to be able to answer is this: How can the military party and the military spirit of Germany be prevented from continuing to prepare for the conquest of Great Britain and from going to work to try it again? That implies a change in the form, spirit, and control of the German Empire. If they keep up a great army, they will keep it up with that end more or less in view. If the military party keeps in power, they will try it again in twenty-five or forty years. This is all that the English care about or think about.

They don't see how it is to be done themselves. All they see yet is that they must show the Germans that they can't whip Great Britain. If England wins decisively the English hope that somehow the military party will be overthrown in Germany and that the Germans, under peaceful leadership, will go about their business—industrial, political, educational, etc.—and quit dreaming of and planning for universal empire and quit maintaining a great war-machine, which at some time, for some reason, must attack somebody to justify its existence. This makes it difficult for the English to make overtures to or to receive overtures from this military war-party which now *is* Germany. But, if it be possible so completely to whip the war party that it will somehow be thrown out of power at home—that's the only way they now see out of it. To patch up a peace leaving the German war party in power, they think, would be only to invite another war.

If you can get over this point, you can bring the English around in ten minutes. But they are not going to take any chances on it. Read English history and English literature about the Spanish Armada or about Napoleon. They are acting those same scenes over again, having the same emotions, the same purpose: nobody must invade or threaten England. "If they do, we'll spend the last man and the last shilling. We value," they say truly, "the good will and the friendship of the United States more than we value anything except our own freedom, but we'll risk even that rather than admit copper to Germany, because every pound of copper prolongs the war."

There you are. I've blinked myself blind and talked myself hoarse to men in authority—from Grey down—to see a way out—without keeping this intolerable slaughter up to the end. But they stand just where I tell you.

And the horror of it no man knows. The news is suppressed. Even those who see it and know it do not realize it. Four of the crack regiments of this Kingdom—regiments that contained the flower of the land and to which it was a distinction to belong—have been practically annihilated twice. Yet their ranks are filled up and you never hear a murmur. Presently it'll be true that hardly a title or an estate in England will go to its natural heir—the heir has been killed. Yet, not a murmur; for England is threatened with invasion. They'll all die first. It will presently be true that more men will have been killed in this war than were killed before in all the organized wars since the Christian era began. The English are willing and eager to stop it if things can be so fixed that there will be no military power in Europe that wishes or prepares to attack and invade England.

I've had many one-hour, two-hour, three-hour talks with Sir Edward Grey. He sees nothing further than I have written. He says to me often that if the United States could see its way to cease to protest against stopping war materials from getting into Germany, they could end the war more quickly—all this, of course, informally; and I say to him that the United States will consider any proposal you will make that does not infringe on a strict neutrality. Violate a rigid neutrality we will not do. And, of course, he does not ask that. I give him more trouble than all the

other neutral Powers combined; they all say this. And, on the other side, his war-lord associates in the Cabinet make his way hard.

So it goes—God bless us, it's awful. I never get away from it—war, war, war every waking minute, and the worry of it; and I see no near end of it. I've had only one thoroughly satisfactory experience in a coon's age, and that was this: Two American ships were stopped the other day at Falmouth. I telegraphed the captains to come here to see me. I got the facts from them—all the facts. I telephoned Sir Edward that I wished to see him at once. I had him call in one of his ship-detaining committee. I put the facts on the table. I said, "By what right, or theory of right, or on what excuse, are those ships stopped? They are engaged in neutral commerce. They fly the American flag." One of them was released that night—no more questions asked. The other was allowed to go after giving bond to return a lot of kerosene which was loaded at the bottom of the ship.

If I could get facts, I could do many things. The State Department telegraphs me merely what the shipper says—a partial statement. The British Government tells me (after infinite delay) another set of facts. The British Government says, "We're sorry, but the Prize Court must decide." Our Government wires a dissertation on International Law—Protest, protest: (I've done nothing else since the world began!) One hour with a sensible ship captain does more than a month of cross-wrangling with Government Departments.

I am trying my best, God knows, to keep the way as smooth as possible; but neither government helps me. Our Government merely sends the shipper's ex-parte statement. This Government uses the Navy's excuse. . . .

At present, I can't for the life of me see a way to peace, for the one reason I have told you. The Germans wish to whip England, to invade England. They started with their army toward England. Till that happened England didn't have an army. But I see no human power that can give the English now what they are determined to have—safety for the future—till some radical change is made in the German system so that they will no longer have a war-party any more than England has a war-party. England surely has no wish to make conquest of Ger-

many. If Germany will show that she has no wish to make conquest of England, the war would end to-morrow.

What impresses me through it all is the backwardness of all the Old World in realizing the true aims of government and the true methods. I can't see why any man who has hope for the progress of mankind should care to live anywhere in Europe. To me it is all infinitely sad. This dreadful war is a logical outcome of their condition, their thought, their backwardness. I think I shall never care to see the continent again, which of course is committing suicide and bankruptcy. When my natural term of service is done here, I shall go home with more joy than you can imagine. That's the only home for a man who wishes his horizon to continue to grow wider.

All this for you and me only—nobody else.

Heartily yours,  
WALTER H. PAGE.

Probably Page thought that this statement of the case—and it was certainly a masterly statement—would end any attempt to get what he regarded as an unsatisfactory and dangerous peace. But President Wilson could not be deterred from pressing the issue. His conviction was firm that this winter of 1914-15 represented the most opportune time to bring the warring nations to terms, and it was a conviction from which he never departed. After the sinking of the *Lusitania* the administration gazed back regretfully at its frustrated attempts of the preceding winter, and it was inclined to place the responsibility for this failure upon Great Britain and France. "The President's judgment," wrote Colonel House on August 4, 1915, three months after the *Lusitania* went down, "was that last autumn was the time to discuss peace parleys, and we both saw present possibilities. War is a great gamble at best, and there was too much at stake in this one to take chances. I believe if one could have started peace parleys in November, we could have forced the evacuation of both France and Belgium, and finally forced a peace which would have eliminated militarism on land and sea. The wishes of the Allies were heeded with the result that the war has now fastened itself upon the vitals of Europe and what the end may be is beyond the knowledge of man."

This shows that the efforts which the administration was making were not casual or faint-hearted, but that they represented a most serious determination to bring hostilities to an end. This letter and the correspondence which now took place with Page also indicate the general terms upon which the Wilson administration believed that the mighty differences could be composed. The ideas which Colonel House now set forth were probably more the President's than his own; he was merely the intermediary in their transmission. They emphasized Mr. Wilson's conviction that a decisive victory on either side would be a misfortune for mankind. As early as January, 1914, this was clearly the conviction that underlay all others in the President's interpretation of events. His other basic idea was that militarism should come to an end "on land and sea"; this could mean nothing except that Germany was expected to abandon its army and that Great Britain was to abandon its navy.

*Col. Edward M. House to Mr. Page*

115 East 53rd Street,  
New York City.

DEAR PAGE:

I believe the Dual Alliance is thoroughly ready for peace and I believe they would be willing to agree upon terms England would accept, provided Russia and France could be satisfied.

They would, in my opinion, evacuate both Belgium and France and indemnify the former, and they would, I think, be willing to begin negotiations upon a basis looking to permanent peace.

It would surprise me if the Germans did not come out in the open soon and declare that they have always been for peace, that they are for peace now, and that they are willing to enter into a compact which would insure peace for all time; that they have been misrepresented and maligned and that they leave the entire responsibility for the continuation of the war with the Allies.

If they should do this, it would create a profound impression, and if it was not met with sympathy by the Allies, the neutral sentiment, which is now almost wholly against the Germans, would veer toward them.

Will you not convey this thought to Sir Edward and let me know what he says?

The President is willing and anxious for me to go to England and Germany as soon as there is anything tangible to go on, and whenever my presence will be welcome. The Germans have already indicated this feeling, but I have not been able to get from Spring Rice any expression from his Government.

As I told you before, the President does not wish to offend the sensibilities of any one by premature action, but he is, of course, enormously interested in initiating at least tentative conversations.

Will you not advise me in regard to this?

Faithfully yours,

E. M. HOUSE.

January 4th, 1915.

*Col. Edward M. House to Mr. Page*

115 East 53rd Street,  
New York City.

DEAR PAGE:

The President has sent me a copy of your confidential dispatch No. 1474, January 15th.

The reason you had no information in regard to what General French mentioned was because no one knew of it outside of the President and myself and there was no safe way to inform you.

As a matter of fact, there has been no direct proposal made by anybody. I have had repeated informal talks with the different ambassadors and I have had direct communication with Zimmermann, which has led the President and me to believe that peace conversations may be now initiated in an unofficial way.

This is the purpose of my going over on the *Lusitania*, January 30th. When I reach London I will be guided by circumstances as to whether I shall go next to France or Germany.

The President and I find that we are going around in a circle in dealing with the representatives in Washington and he thinks it advisable and necessary to reach the principals direct. When I explain just what is in the President's mind, I believe they will all feel that it was wise for me to come at this time.

I shall not write more fully for the reason I am to see you so soon.

I am sending this through the kindness of Sir Horace Plunkett.

Faithfully yours,

E. M. HOUSE.

January 18, 1915.

P. S. We shall probably say, for public consumption, that I am coming to look into relief measures, and see what further can be done. Of course, no one but you and Sir Edward must know the real purpose of my visit.

Why was Colonel House so confident that the Dual Alliance was prepared at this time to discuss terms of peace? Colonel House, as his letter shows, was in communication with Zimmermann, the German Under Foreign Secretary. But a more important approach had just been made, though information bearing on this had not been sent to Page. The Kaiser had asked President Wilson to transmit to Great Britain a suggestion of making peace on the basis of surrendering Belgium and of paying for its restoration. It seems incredible that the Ambassador should not have been told of this, but Page learned of the proposal from Field Marshal French, then commanding the British armies in the field, and this accounts for Colonel House's explanation that, "the reason you had no information in regard to what General French mentioned was because no one knew of it outside of the President and myself and there was no safe way to inform you." Page has left a memorandum which explains the whole strange proceeding—a paper which is interesting not only for its contents, but as an illustration of the unofficial way in which diplomacy was conducted in Washington at this time:

Field Marshal Sir John French, secretly at home from his command of the English forces in France, invited me to luncheon. There were his especially confidential friend, Moore, the American who lives with him, and Sir John's private secretary. The military situation is this: a trench stalemate in France. Neither army has made appreciable progress in three months. Neither can advance without a great loss of men. Neither is whipped. Neither can conquer. It would require a million more men than the Allies can command and a very long time to drive the Germans back across Belgium. Presently, if the Russians succeed in driving the Germans back to German soil, there will be another trench stalemate there. Thus the war wears a practically endless outlook so far as military operations are concerned. Germany has plenty of men and plenty of food for a long struggle yet; and, if she use all the copper now in domestic use in the Empire, she will probably have also plenty

of ammunition for a long struggle. She is not nearly at the end of her rope either in a military or an economic sense.

What then? The Allies are still stronger—so long as they hold together as one man. But is it reasonable to assume that they can? And, even if they can, is it worth while to win a complete victory at such a cost as the lives of practically all the able-bodied men in Europe? But can the Allies hold together as one man for two or three or four years? Well, what are we going to do? And here came the news of the lunch. General French informed me that the President had sent to England, at the request of the Kaiser, a proposal looking toward peace, Germany offering to give up Belgium and to pay for its restoration.

"This," said Sir John, "is their fourth proposal."

"And," he went on, "if they will restore Belgium and give Alsace-Lorraine to France and Constantinople will go to Russia, I can't see how we can refuse it."

He scouted the popular idea of "crushing out militarism" once for all. It would be desirable, even if it were not necessary, to leave Germany as a first-class Power. We couldn't disarm her people for ever. We've got to leave her and the rest to do what they think they must do; and we must arm ourselves the best we can against them.

Now—did General French send for me and tell me this just for fun and just because he likes me? He was very eager to know my opinion whether this peace offer were genuine or whether it was a trick of the Germans to—publish it later and thereby to throw the blame for continuing the war on England?

It occurs to me as possible that he was directed to tell me what he told, trusting to me, in spite of his protestations of personal confidence, etc., to get it to the President. Assuming that the President sent the Kaiser's message to the King, this may be a suggested informal answer—that if the offer be extended to give France and Russia what they want, it will be considered, etc. This may or may not be true. Alas! the fact that I know nothing about the offer has no meaning; for the State Department never informs me of anything it takes up with the British Ambassador in Washington. Well, I'll see.

These were therefore the reasons why Colonel House had decided to come to Europe and enter

into peace negotiations with the warring Powers. Colonel House was wise in taking all possible precautions to conceal the purpose of this visit. His letter intimates that the German Government was eager to have him cross the ocean on this particular mission; it discloses, on the other hand, that the British Government regarded the proposed negotiations with no enthusiasm. Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith would have been glad to end hostilities on terms that permanently established peace and abolished the vices which were responsible for the war, and they were ready to welcome courteously the President's representative and discuss the situation with him in a fair-minded spirit. But they did not believe that such an enterprise could serve a useful purpose. Possibly the military authorities, as General French's remarks to Page may indicate, did not believe that either side could win a decisive victory, but this was not the belief of the British public itself. The atmosphere in England at that time was one of confidence in the success of British arms and of suspicion and distrust of the British Government. A strong expectation prevailed in the popular mind, that the three great powers of the Entente would at an early date destroy the menace which had enshrouded Europe for forty years, and there was no intention of giving Germany a breathing spell during which she could regenerate her forces to resume the onslaught. In the winter of 1915 Great Britain was preparing for the naval attack on the Dardanelles, and its success was regarded as inevitable. Page had an opportunity to observe the state of optimism which prevailed in high British circles. In March of 1915 he was visiting the Prime Minister at Deal Castle; one afternoon Mr. Asquith took him aside, informed him of the Dardanelles preparations and declared that the Allies would have possession of Constantinople in two weeks. The Prime Minister's attitude was not one of hope; it was one of confidence. The capture of Constantinople, of course, would have brought an early success to the Allied army on all fronts.<sup>1</sup> This was the mood that was spurring on the British public to its utmost exertions, and, with such

<sup>1</sup>The opening of the Dardanelles would have given Russian agricultural products access to the markets of the world and thus preserved the Russian economic structure. It would also have enabled the Entente to munition the Russian army. With a completely equipped Russian army in the East and the Entente army in the West, Germany could not have long survived the pressure.

a determination prevailing everywhere, a step in the direction of peace was the last thing that the British desired; such a step could have been interpreted only as an attempt to deprive the Allies of their victory and as an effort to assist Germany in escaping the consequences of her crimes. Combined with this stout popular resolve, however, there was a lack of confidence in the Asquith ministry. An impression was broadcast that it was pacifist, even "defeatist," in its thinking, and that it harbored a weak humanitarianism which was disposed to look gently even upon the behavior of the Prussians. The masses suspected that the ministry would welcome a peace with Germany which would mean little more than a cessation of hostilities and which would leave the great problems of the war unsolved. That this opinion was unjust, that, on the contrary, the British Foreign Office was steadily resisting all attempts to end the war on an unsatisfactory basis, Page's correspondence, already quoted, abundantly proves, but this unreasoning belief did prevail and it was an important factor in the situation. This is the reason why the British Cabinet regarded Colonel House's visit at that time with positive alarm. It feared that, should the purpose become known, the British public and press would conclude that the Government had invited a peace discussion. Had any such idea seized the popular mind in February and March, 1915, a scandal would have developed which would probably have caused the downfall of the Asquith Ministry. "Don't fool yourself about peace," Page writes to his son Arthur, about this time. "If any one should talk about peace, or doves, or ploughshares here, they'd shoot him."

Colonel House reached London early in February and was soon in close consultation with the Prime Minister and Sir Edward Grey. He made a great personal success; the British statesmen gained a high regard for his disinterestedness and his general desire to serve the cause of decency among nations; but he made little progress in his peace plans simply because the facts were so discouraging and so impregnable. Sir Edward repeated to him what he had already said to Page many times; that Great Britain was prepared to discuss a peace that would really safeguard the future of Europe, but was not prepared to discuss one that would merely reinstate the régime that had existed before 1914. The

fact that the Germans were not ready to accept such a peace made discussion useless. Disappointed at this failure, Colonel House left for Berlin. His letters to Page shows that the British judgment of Germany was not unjust and that the warnings which Page had sent to Washington were based on facts:

*Colonel Edward M. House to Mr. Page*

DEAR PAGE:

I arrived yesterday morning and I saw Zimmermann<sup>1</sup> almost immediately. He was very cordial and talked to me frankly and sensibly.

I tried to bring about a better feeling toward England, and told him how closely their interests touched at certain points. I also told him of the broad way in which Sir Edward was looking at the difficult problems that confronted Europe, and I expressed the hope that this view would be reciprocated elsewhere, so that, when the final settlement came, it could be made in a way that would be to the advantage of mankind.

The Chancellor is out of town for a few days and I shall see him when he returns. I shall also see Ballin, von Gwynner and many others. I had lunch yesterday with Baron von Wimpsch who is a very close friend of the Emperor.

Zimmermann said that it was impossible for them to make any peace overtures, and he gave me to understand, that for the moment, even what England would perhaps consent to now, could not be accepted by Germany, to say nothing of what France had in mind.

I shall hope to establish good relations here and then go somewhere and await further developments. I doubt whether more can be done until some decisive military result is obtained by one or other of the belligerents.

I will write further if there is any change in the situation. I shall probably be here until at least the 27th.

Faithfully yours,  
E. M. HOUSE.

March 20, 1915.

*Col. Edward M. House to Mr. Page*

DEAR PAGE:

While I have accomplished here much that is of value yet I leave sadly disappointed that

<sup>1</sup>German Under Foreign Secretary.



AMBASSADOR PAGE AND THE EMBASSY STAFF

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HERBERT HENRY ASQUITH

© Keystone

Prime Minister of Great Britain in February, 1915, at the time of Colonel House's peace mission. The cabinet was confident of military success within a brief period and not disposed to finish the war without destroying Prussian militarism



COUNT JOHANN VON BERNSTORFF

German Ambassador to the United States during the World War. On September 5, 1914, the day the Germans were beaten back at the Marne, he instigated a movement for peace, the details of which are given in the text



FIELD MARSHAL LORD JOHN FRENCH

Who, in the spring of 1915, did not entertain as optimistic a view on an Allied military triumph as did the British Cabinet and the British public



© Pirie MacDonald

OSCAR S. STRAUS

A German-American of strong pro-British feeling, who in September, 1914, was the bearer of a peace message from Ambassador Bernstorff to Mr. Bryan, then American Secretary of State



JAMES SPEYER

The head of a German-American banking firm, at whose country house on the Hudson the German peace "drive" of September, 1914, was set in motion

no direct move can be made toward peace.

The Civil Government are ready, and upon terms that would at least make an opening. There is also a large number in military and naval circles that I believe would be glad to begin parleys, but the trouble is mainly with the people. It is a very dangerous thing to permit a people to be misled and their minds inflamed either by the press, by speeches, or otherwise.

In my opinion, no government could live

here at this time if peace was proposed upon terms that would have any chance of acceptance. Those in civil authority that I have met are as reasonable and fairminded as their counterparts in England or America, but, for the moment, they are impotent.

I hear on every side the old story that all Germany wants is a permanent guaranty of peace, so that she may proceed upon her industrial career undisturbed.

I have talked of the second convention,<sup>1</sup> and it has been cordially received and there is a sentiment here, as well as elsewhere, to make settlement upon lines broad enough to prevent a recurrence of present conditions.

There is much to tell you verbally, which I prefer not to write.

Faithfully yours,

E. M. HOUSE.

March 26, 1915.

Colonel House's next letter is most important, for it records the birth of that new idea which afterward became a ruling thought with President Wilson and the cause of almost endless difficulties in his dealings with Great Britain. The "new phase of the situation"

to which he refers is "the Freedom of the Seas" and this brief note to Page, dated March 27, 1915, contains the first reference to this idea on record. Indeed, it is evident from the letter itself that Colonel House made this notation the very day the idea occurred to him.

<sup>1</sup>It was the Wilson Administration's plan that there should be two peace gatherings, one of the belligerents to settle the war, and the other of belligerents and neutrals, to settle questions of general importance growing out of the war. This latter is what Col. House means by "the second convention."

*Col. Edward M. House to Mr. Page.*

Dear Page:

I have had a most satisfactory talk with the Chancellor. After conferring with Stovall,<sup>1</sup> Page,<sup>2</sup> and Willard<sup>3</sup>, I shall return to Paris and then to London to discuss with Sir Edward a phase of the situation which promises results.

I did not think of it until to-day and have mentioned it to both the Chancellor and Zimmermann, who have received it cordially, and who join me in the belief that it may be the first thread to bridge the chasm.

I am writing hastily, for the pouch is waiting to be closed.

Faithfully yours,

E. M. HOUSE.

March 27, 1915.

The "freedom of the seas" was merely a proposal to make all merchant shipping, enemy and neutral, free from attack in time of war. It would have automatically ended all blockades and all interference with commerce. Germany would have been at liberty to send all her merchant ships to sea for undisturbed trade with all parts of the world in war time as in peace, and, in future, navies would be used simply for fighting. Offensively, their purpose would be to bombard enemy fortifications, to meet enemy ships in battle, and to convoy ships which were

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Pleasant A. Stovall, American Minister in Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Thomas Nelson Page, American Ambassador to Italy.

<sup>3</sup>Mr. Joseph E. Willard, American Ambassador to Spain.

#### HERR VON BALLIN

The great German ship owner, who was one of the men with whom Colonel House discussed peace in the spring of 1915. The Wilson Administration believed that Germany would have ended the war on satisfactory terms at that time. It afterward blamed Great Britain for not meeting the situation in a conciliatory spirit

transporting troops for the invasion of enemy soil; defensively, their usefulness would consist in protecting the homeland from such attacks and such invasions. Perhaps an argument can be made for this new rule of warfare, but it is at once apparent that it is the most startling proposal made in modern times in the direction of disarmament. It meant that Great Britain should abandon that agency of warfare with which she had destroyed Napoleon, and with which she expected to destroy Germany in the prevailing struggle—the blockade. From a defensive standpoint, Colonel House's proposed reform would have been a great advantage to Britain, for an honorable observance of the rule would have insured the British people its food supply in wartime. With Great Britain, however, the blockade has been historically an offensive measure: it is the way in which England



has always made war. Just what reception this idea would have had with official London, in April, 1915, had Colonel House been able to present it as his own proposal, is not clear, but the Germans, with characteristic stupidity, prevented the American from having a fair chance. The Berlin Foreign Office at once cabled to Count Bernstorff and Bernhard Dernburg—the latter a bovine publicity agent who was then promoting the German cause in the American press—with instructions to start a “propaganda” in behalf of the “freedom of the seas.” By the time Colonel House reached London, therefore, these four words had been adorned with the Germanic label. British statesmen regarded the suggestion as coming from Germany and not from America: and the reception was worse than cold.

And another tragedy now roughly interrupted President Wilson’s attempts at mediation. Page’s letters have disclosed that he possessed almost a clairvoyant faculty of foreseeing approaching events. The letters of the latter part of April and of early May contain many forebodings of tragedy. “Peace? Lord knows when!” he writes to his son Arthur on May 2nd. “The blowing up of a liner with American passengers may be the prelude. I almost expect such a thing.” And again on the same date: “If a British liner full of American passengers be blown up, what will Uncle Sam do? That’s what’s going to happen.”

“We all have the feeling here,” the Ambassador writes on May 6th, “that more and



ALFRED ZIMMERMANN

German Foreign-Secretary in 1915. Colonel House’s letters, published herewith, show that he was in constant touch with Zimmermann in the autumn and winter of 1914-15. It was to him that Colonel House, as one of his letters shows, first proposed the “freedom of the seas” as furnishing one basis for ending the war. The Chancellor and Zimmermann, Colonel House wrote Page, on March 27, 1915, “join me in the belief that it may be the first thread to bridge the chasm”

more frightful things are about to happen.”

The ink on those words was scarcely dry when a message from Queenstown was handed to the American Ambassador. A German submarine had torpedoed and sunk the *Lusitania* off the Old Head of Kinsale, and one hundred and twenty-four American men, women, and children had been drowned.

*The March instalment will describe the sensation produced in England by the sinking of the Lusitania, and will contain the letters written to President Wilson and Colonel House, giving Ambassador Page’s opinions on the President’s Lusitania notes*