

SHAKESPEARE AND WOODROW WILSON

by

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In his Julius Caesar Shakespeare has given us the tragedy of Brutus, the tragedy of the idealist in politics. We have just witnessed such a tragedy upon the stage of history with Woodrow Wilson for its protagonist. So striking are the resemblances between the characters, careers, and fates of these two great men that some future Plutarch, taking for his parallel lives heroes from the world of reality and from the realm of poetry, might well devote a chapter to a comparison of these two great figures.

Both men were devoted heart and soul to a high ideal; both enjoyed an hour of intoxicating triumph speedily followed by a violent reaction. Both were too far above the mass of men to understand that with the majority reason counts for nothing against passion. "The President," state The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, "thought that organization amounted to nothing and that the people determined such matters (Colonel House is referring to the Presidential election of 1916) themselves. To hear him talk you would think the man in the street understood the theory and philosophy of government as he did and was actuated by the same motives." After reading Brutus's address to the Roman people one could well imagine a similar observation on Brutus in The Intimate Papers of Caius Cassius.

Both men failed to realize that logic was no substitute for persuasiveness, that appeals to an abstract ideal, no matter how lofty, failed to sway the mob mind when countered by appeals to self-interest and to pseudo-patriotic sentimentality. The Republican leaders indeed showed more than a little of Antony's skill in playing upon the emotion of the herd, their patriotic fervor, their fears for their pockets, their suspicion of foreigners, their susceptibility to catch-cries such as the claptrap about entangling alliances.

By one of the strangest coincidences recorded in the pages of history Woodrow Wilson, like Brutus, received his first disillusionment from the Roman mob. Woodrow Wilson's journey through Italy was a triumphal procession. The crowd acclaimed him with frantic enthusiasm as he drove through the streets of Rome. It was such a triumph as Augustus might have enjoyed after Actium.

But when Woodrow Wilson set himself to thwart the selfish ambitions of the Italian government in the matter of Fiume, and confidently appealed to the Italian people to disavow the imperialism of their rulers, and to accept him as their guide along the path of international idealism, it was at once evident how completely he had failed to understand the people of Italy. Hotels and streets which had been named for him were hastily rechristened. The streets of Rome, which had resounded with vivas as he drove through them a few short months before, now echoed to the sound of execration of his name mingled with acclamations for Italy's Prime Minister. Orlando, who had returned to Rome to assure himself of the support of his fellow countrymen,

The mistakes that marred the careers of both were of a nature strikingly similar. As Brutus, through unconscious love of exclusive domination, refused to enlist in his cause the services of Cicero, the