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the end of the Cold War, such questions have become important again. We have also realized that sometimes it is necessary to understand the historical roots of the issues with which we are dealing. Countries and peoples, like individuals, have memories and they have experiences, which shape the ways they act towards each other, shape how they react to the present and approach the future. Of course we also need to understand economics, social structures, geography, or value systems. But if we ignore history, we deprive ourselves of a useful tool.

The Paris Peace Conference was an event the like of which we will never see again. It brought together some of the most powerful people in the world for six months. As they talked, debated, agreed and disagreed, they got to know each other in a way that few leaders have time for today. It is simply inconceivable today that the President of the United States or the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the Prime Ministers of Italy and France, Australia and Canada or the Queen of Romania, to mention only a few of those who were there, would spend so much time together talking over great and sometimes trivial issues.

The Peace Conference has usually been remembered as a failure and its participants as obstinately short-sighted and foolish. This is unfair. The peacemakers faced problems which often defied solution. It should always be remembered that the conference took place in the aftermath of the worst world war that had been seen in modern history. The signs of the war were visible everywhere in Paris. Half the women on the streets in 1919 were wearing black because they had lost someone in that war. There were gaps in the trees along the grand avenues because the trees had been cut down for firewood. Many of the delegates also made the short trip northwards to the battlefields of the Western Front.

The war—known as the Great War in those days—had devastated Europe. Twenty million men had died, twice as many again were wounded. Four years of fighting had churned up huge tracts, in the north of France and Belgium, along the frontiers between Germany and Austria-Hungary and Russia, and in the Balkans. European civilization and the confidence that Europeans had once had in themselves had been shaken to the core. The Europeans of 1919 had a very real feeling that they had destroyed not just physical parts of their