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The Peace That Passeth Understanding

A FANTASY BY JOHN REED

Scene: The Salon de l'Horloge in the Palais d'Orsay, Paris—meeting-place of the Peace Conference. At back a heavily-ornate mantel of white marble, surmounted by a Clock, above which rises the marble statue of a woman holding a torch; by some called "Victory," by others "Liberty," "Enlightenment," "Prohibition," etc. The Clock is fifty years slow.

The dialogue is carried on by each Delegate in his native tongue—but this presents no difficulties, as all understand one another perfectly.

During the action of the play incidental music may be provided, consisting of patriotic airs played softly.

Discovered: Seated at the Peace Table, President Wilson, Premiers Clemenceau, Lloyd-George and Orlando, and Baron Makino, the Japanese Delegate. As the curtain rises there is general laughter, in which Orlando does not join.

WILSON.—I had no idea the lower classes were so extensive.

That explains my speech at Turin. I said, "The industrial workers will dictate the peace terms. . . ." (Renewed mirth. Orlando looks sour).

ORLANDO (gloomily). Corpi di Bacco! Yes. You put me in a hell of a fix* I was forced to suppress that speech. We almost had a revolution! You must remember that the Italian workingmen are not educated—we have no Samuel Gompers.

LLOYD-GEORGE—(to Orlando). Oh I say, old cock! Don't take yourself so seriously. They're always talking Revolution—in England, too—but so long as we can keep them voting . . .

CLEMENCEAU (to Wilson, with Gallie charm.) Saperlotte! What a man! And that League of Nations—quelle idee! At first I thought you some sort of Henry Ford. . . . Who but you could have explained that Balance of Power and the League of Nations are identical!

WILSON. Yes, yes . . . May I not insist that ^{to say} the phrase we must strive to attain? The advertising business is very highly developed at home . . .

MAKINO (with Oriental suavity). All the same Open Door in China.

WILSON (modestly). A trifling achievement. Why in America, my second campaign was won by the phrase, "He kept us out of war." (General hilarity).

ORLANDO (pounding the table). Per dio! That's what we need in Italy! Couldn't you make another trip explaining that Italian treaty the Bolsheviki published?

LLOYD-GEORGE (briskly). Well, gentlemen, I am reluctant to interrupt this pleasant diversion, but I suggest that we get to work on what our American colleague calls "the solemn and responsible task of establishing the peace of Europe and the world." (Laughter). I don't want to be late for the Folies Bergeres; going to the theater is another method of government which we have learned from Mr. Wilson. (He bows to the President).

CLEMENCEAU (taking his place at the head of the table). The Peace Conference will now come to order. Let the room be searched.

(The Delegates look under the table, behind curtains, tapestries, pictures, and the statue above the Clock. Orlando emerges first from beneath the table, holding the Serbian Delegate by the ear)

ORLANDO (severely). What are you doing here? Don't you realize that this is the Peace Conference?

SERBIAN DELEGATE—But we fought in the war.

ORLANDO—That was war! This is peace! (The Serbian Delegate is ejected).

(Clemenceau drags from behind the Clock the Belgian Delegate).

CLEMENCEAU (shaking him). Eavesdropping again, eh? How many times must you be told that this is a private affair!

BELGIAN DELEGATE—But the War was about us, wasn't it?

CLEMENCEAU—War? War? Don't you know that the war is over? (The Belgian Delegate is ejected.)

(Concealed in the folds of tapestry Makino discovers the

Teheko-Slovak Delegate.)

MAKINO (indignantly). Once more and you'll be de-recognized!

TCHEKO-SLOVAK DELEGATE—But the Fourteen Points—MAKINO—They have not yet been interpreted. Run along now back to Siberia and shoot Bolsheviki until you're sent for! (The Teheko-Slovak Delegate is ejected.)

(Lloyd-George appears, grasping the Rumanian Delegate by the collar).

RUMANIAN DELEGATE—But you promised us Transylvania! LLOYD-GEORGE (testily). In the Wilsonian sense! In the Wilsonian sense! (The Rumanian Delegate is ejected.)

(During this time Wilson is in the fire-place, thrusting up the chimney with a poker. Three persons come rattling down, covered with soot. As they are seized by the Delegates and brought forward, they can be identified as the Armenian Delegate, the Yugo-Slav delegate, and the Polish Delegate.)

ARMENIAN DELEGATE—We thought the independence of Armenia—

WILSON (firmly). May I suggest that the Conference take note of the ingratitude of this person? At this very moment we are raising a Relief Fund in the United States!

ORLANDO (to the Yugo-Slav). What do you mean, butting in here?

YUGO-SLAV DELEGATE—But thousands of our people fought in the Italian army.

ORLANDO—Well, what more do you want?

CLEMENCEAU (to the Pole). You be careful, young man, or we'll take away your pianist and give you a flute-player!

(The Armenian, Yugo-Slav and Polish Delegates are ejected.)

MAKINO (to Wilson). I think somebody's calling you. (Wilson crosses over and opens the window. A shrill clamor of Spanish voices from the Delegates of the Central American Republic can be heard.)

WILSON (loftily). We are here to see, in short, that the very foundations of the war are swept away. . . . Those foundations were the aggression of great powers upon the small.

DELEGATES OF COLOMBIA, PANAMA, SAN SALVADOR, NICARAGUA, GUATEMALA, SANTO DOMINGO, etc.—How about the taking of the Panama Canal? Why do the United States Marines control elections in Nicaragua? Why does the American Government disregard the decisions of the High Court which the American government set up? Why did the United States abolish the Santo Domingan Republic and set up an American military dictatorship? Nicaraguan canal-route—Brown Brothers—United Fruit Company—etc., etc.

WILSON—Nothing less than the emancipation of the world will accomplish peace. (With a noble gesture he sweeps the Latin-American Delegates off the sill and closes the window).

CLEMENCEAU (wiping the perspiration from his brow).—The Peace Conference is now safe for Democracy!

WILSON—Select classes of men no longer direct the affairs of the world, but the fortunes of the world are now in the hands of the plain people! (Laughter).

MAKINO—It is worth coming all the way from Japan just to hear him!

CLEMENCEAU—Now, gentlemen, before we get down to dismembering Germany, fixing the amount of the indemnity and stamping out Bolshevism, I should like to ask Mr. Wilson to interpret some of his Fourteen Points. . . . Of course we know it's all right, but there is anxiety in certain quarters. . . . Rothchild telephoned me this morning.

For instance, will our distinguished colleague explain how in hell* he proposes to get around Point One—Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view?

WILSON—Well, gentlemen, are we not "openly arriving"? Everybody knows that we're holding a Peace Conference. And then the word "understanding"; that means something people

*Inferno di uno fixo—Trans.

*Comment diable—Trans.