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## AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT WILSON

By Frank Harris

**M**R. PRESIDENT: I know how dangerous it is to speak to the man at the wheel; in a great storm a thing almost inexcusable. The intrusion is usually due to overweening conceit; the self-chosen adviser imagines he is better informed or wiser than the helmsman. That is not my case. I am honestly convinced that you, Sir, know more about the present situation than any other man in these United States; you have far better sources of knowledge at your command and you are, to boot, one of the best heads in the country. Any little fragment of extraordinary information that I have managed to get has shown me that you have in all probability known it also and weighed it. I have more than ordinary confidence in your knowledge, your wisdom and your integrity.

I have read carefully a good deal of what you have written and I feel certain that you would make almost any sacrifice to stand in the future with Lincoln rather than with—President Tyler, let me say, or Andy Johnson. You are accessible to the highest of human motives, and it is because of my belief in you and my esteem for you that I venture even at this crisis to address you.

I have not the honor of knowing you personally. The only time I have ever seen you near at hand was at Hot Sulphur Springs shortly after your marriage. You will remember the evening of the first of January, 1916, when the

colored servants in the hotel gave an entertainment which you and Mrs. Wilson honored with your presence. Lord and Lady Aberdeen sat opposite you on the other side of the hall. You appeared to take a good deal of interest in the excellent singing and laughed unaffectedly at the astonishing artistry of the comedian who pretended to shave a customer while playing "bones" about his face instead of plying a razor. At the close, after thanking the manager, you bowed to the guests and left the hall. The guests responded as you passed them like men minded to show deference to the Head of the State while preserving their own self-possession and self-respect.

There was one exception, but as he was a foreign nobleman I will not mention him. The whole scene made me proud of American self-restraint and good manners. And you, Sir, if you will allow me to say so, added credit even to your great position, not only by the unfeigned interest you took in the little entertainment, but by your cordial simplicity of bearing. At any rate you made me inclined from that day on to study your sayings and doings not only with interest but with sympathy.

Once in a thousand years it is given to a man to exercise a great choice, a world-shaking decision: Caesar at the Rubicon; Napoleon when offered command by Barras while the drums of the Sections were beating in the Paris streets; you, Sir, when you declared war on Germany.

You had provocation enough. Goodness knows: I am not even questioning the rightness of your decision. But when you handed Ambassador Bernstorff his papers, you did not declare war immediately, as is customary. You acceded to his request to take no irrevocable step till he had had time to see the Kaiser: five weeks you waited before telling Congress that a state of war existed between this country and Germany; three weeks more you waited before declaring war.

You hoped against hope for peace; you prayed that Germany might back down before the power of the United States was thrown into the balance against her. I think the more of you for waiting; it is only a strong man who can so postpone decision, when all forces, all advisers, all interests are pressing to action. To be such a floodgate requires rare moral courage, singular self-confidence, unique strength.

Did it ever strike you, Sir, that the great decisions I have instanced in the past were not momentary; but repeated? Caesar could have explained the crossing of the Rubicon to the satisfaction of the Roman Senate; his really decisive step as dictator was taken when months later he entered Rome and drove Metellus from the Treasury. Caesar could have democratized the man state had he so wished; he had ferred to play autocrat and they Brutus' dagger.

Similarly when Napoleon ventures the retail