Review: Some Geographers at the Conference of Paris: Review

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SOME GEOGRAPHERS AT THE CONFERENCE OF PARIS

What really happened at Paris : The Story of the Peace Conference, 1919, by the American Delegates.— Edited by Edward Mandell House and Charles Seymour, Litt.D. Charles Scribner & Sons ; London : Hodder & Stoughton. 1921. Pp. xv. + 528. *With Five Sketch-maps.* 25s. net.

THIS book was not sent us for review ; but it requires notice. In his "Foreword" Colonel House claims that the final decisions of the Conference were largely based upon facts and opinions furnished by those who tell the story : seventeen members of the American Delegation, most of whom had been engaged on "The Inquiry" set up by President Wilson in the house of the American Geographical Society of New York to study the conditions of peace, as a preliminary to the Conference.

A great deal of the work was necessarily geographical, and to this side of it we will confine our attention. The members of "The Inquiry"—as happens in Intelligence Divisions—ranged far afield ; they studied South American boundary disputes, because "if they should be included in the settlement the United States would be expected to take a leading part in their consideration" ; the "political habits and customs of Russia," though the time did not prove ripe for settlement ; the "tribal organizations of the backward peoples" of Africa and the islands of the Pacific, though these regions were in the result considered by the Conference on much broader lines. Finally, "Base maps were constructed for the whole of Europe and the Near East. . . . In volume this was one of the largest undertakings of the Inquiry. . . . But at the Conference these maps were hardly used at all. Some of the cases containing them were not opened. The world series of millionth maps proved to be sufficient for all needs. They constituted a sort of international currency, readily accessible, familiar to all participants, and inexpensive." Those who worked at another Geographical Society all through the war will appreciate this unintended compliment to the hundred or so sheets they compiled ; but whether "inexpensive" is just must be left to the Geographical Section, General Staff, who paid for their fair drawing and reproduction.

The Inquiry, therefore, had the usual experience that much of its earlier work was beside the mark. But "by the middle of October tentative boundaries for the whole of Mittel Europa had been worked out. . . . In January 1919 a 'Black Book,' illustrated by maps, was prepared, laying down and discussing revised boundaries ; and in February, after conferences with our colleagues of other delegations, a 'Red Book,' with further revision, was made ready."

A reader might easily make the mistake of supposing that the bulk of all boundary-making was done by the American Delegation : "college professors and the like, who, as members of The Inquiry, had been studying the special questions with a view to the eventual discussion of terms of peace." What really happened was more complicated and more widely distributed. The Territorial Commissions of delegates named by the five principal powers made reports to the Supreme Council in general terms. If a report was approved it went back to a technical sub-commission for precise definition of the boundary. This definition was then referred by the Supreme Council to a standing Geographical Committee sitting at the *Service Géographique* under the Presidency of General Bourgeois, which criticized it, referred it back on occasion to the Supreme Council, and prepared the instructions to Boundary

Commissions. Of this process, after the first step, there is scarcely a hint in the volume under review, which confines the story to the preliminary work of the Territorial Commissions, and leaves out all the skilled technique, in which the Service Géographique and the Geographical Section of the British General Staff had at least a large share.

Some chapters of the story are very well told: notably those on Poland, and on Fiume and the Asiatic Problem, by Professors R. H. Lord and D. W. Johnson, who write impartially and judiciously. We regret that it is impossible to say the same of the chapter by Dr. Isaiah Bowman, on Constantinople and the Balkans. "Most of the political settlements of the time, though apparently based upon principles of justice, are very strongly contributory toward British material advantage." "British shipping has made the most conspicuous gains as a result of the division of the German fleet. Of ships, Great Britain has taken, roughly, 70 per cent. In the reconstruction of commerce in the Constantinople region, and in the revival of shipping facilities, Great Britain stands ready to play not merely the principal, but a wholly dominating part." So much for the spirit in which the Chief Territorial Adviser to the American Commission writes of the Straits. But why does he drag Danzig into the Balkans? "Would Lloyd George continue in the rôle of irresponsible and playful plenipotentiary, or would he recognize the stake at Danzig—Danzig, behind which were the textile mills, coal, and the petroleum of the Carpathian forelands? Suddenly Lloyd George changed from a state of bored indifference to one of aggressive participation." And so, for a couple of pages. "Six months thereafter, and against the protest of the American representative on the supreme council, Sir Reginald Tower was appointed high commissioner at Danzig. His stormy course there could have been predicted with mathematical accuracy by any one interested enough to see why Lloyd George labored for a free city on the shores of the Baltic, where British shipping and capital were to be rapidly increased, and why Sir Reginald was chosen on the basis of a record in South America quite unfavourably known to many American merchants"! And this last outrage on a distinguished public servant and honoured Fellow of our Society is committed by one of our Honorary Corresponding Members.

The level of the book is thus singularly unequal, and in the mean much below that of 'The Truth about the Treaty,' by M. André Tardieu, or 'The History of the Peace Conference,' edited by Mr. Temperley. It contains, however, much that is interesting to political geographers, and furnishes many useful clues. But its bias is in places so obvious that it can have no claim to authority. The insulting reference to the Japanese delegates on p. 24; the burlesque of the Teschen settlement on p. 82; the double-pointed sneer at the Albanian delegation on p. 19; the childish self-advertisement at the bottom of p. 96—show that some of the authors are not writing serious history, but are playing down to a public. And a note "In Explanation," by Mr. Edward W. Bok, tells why. "When the Academy of Music in Philadelphia was taken under lease, in the autumn of 1920, for a term of years by a group of public-spirited citizens, it was for the purpose of acquiring the building so as to dedicate it to the public good. . . . It was determined to recreate the Foyer in the building into a beautiful auditorium of intimate size, which would serve as a Public Forum. In discussing this project with Colonel Edward M. House, he explained his conviction that the time had come to tell the American public, for the first time, the inside story of the Peace Conference at Paris. . . . And when the first talk was delivered every seat in the auditorium was sold to the most intellectually distinguished audience ever brought together in Philadelphia."