

WOODROW WILSON AS SEEN BY AN INTIMATE FRIEND

The New York Times has secured the following intimate sketch of Woodrow Wilson, written by Professor Stockton Axson, whose sister, Ellen Louise Axson, was the President's first wife.

There are many who can analyze and describe Wilson, the statesman, known all the world, but the ranks are thinning among those who have known him intimately since his youth.

My wonder about what Mr. Wilson himself will say if he should ever read this article, for it has never seemed to me to have his personal affairs intimately talked about, and yet only reason why I should write at all is that I am in a position to talk to him personally and that the country has a right to know what man of man is President.

It was in 1883 that Woodrow Wilson and Ellen Axson became engaged. She was visiting friends in the North Carolina mountains when my father fell seriously ill.

Unforgettable for me is the conversation which my sister and I had on the night of her arrival home. In the earlier part of the evening she had been anxious about my father, but when he had at last been made comfortable and had fallen asleep, she joined me in the little sitting room.

Of the many mental pictures which I have of my sister, three at this mo-

ment stand out with peculiar vividness; the way she looked that night when she told me of her engagement; the way she looked when she held her first born in her arms, waiting for him to come from a distant place for the first sight of his child; and the way she looked in the little cottage in Princeton the night that he was elected President of the United States.

It was two years before they were married. He was studying at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, in the name of the Independent Presbyterian church in Savannah, Ga., his father and grandfather officiating. I remember how he and I shared about the books in my grandfather's bookcase while we waited for the train to come down stairs.

Their first home was at Bryn Mawr, Penn., where she was a member of the newly founded college for women, their second was in Middletown, Conn., where he was professor in Wesleyan University; their third home was in Princeton, N. J., where he was professor for twelve years and president for eight; then came the wider life as governor of New Jersey and President of the United States.

As soon as they had a home in Bryn Mawr they sent for our little orphan brother, Edward, and he was a member of their household until he married. Probably the sharpest blow my sister ever suffered was when Edward, his young wife, and their baby were all drowned together.

Her naturally strong constitution broke temporarily, for he was as her son rather than her brother. I myself became a member of their family for a year in Middletown, and ever since have been practically a member of it, for during the long years in Princeton, though I had my own apartments, I used their house as if it were my own home.

Margaret (now Mrs. Elliott) had the same privileges. All of which would indicate that when Woodrow Wilson married he married a family as well as a wife, and that is not very far from the truth. If he ever knew any difference between her, relatives and his own he never indicated it.

And his blood became as her blood. I have never known a case where each adopted the other's family so completely. He even used to refer to her dead father and mother by the childhood names by which she always called them.

I think he would probably say now that one of his favorite uncles was her Uncle Tom—Dr. Thomas Hoyt of Philadelphia. Once when Uncle Tom was visiting "us" in Middletown, Mr. Wilson broke into a soft chuckle while he and I were sitting alone.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked. He replied: "To think how I blacked Uncle Tom's boots this morning. Passing his bedroom door I saw that he had put his boots outside, naturally assuming that all self-respecting people keep a man. I knew Bridget wouldn't black them, and Annie couldn't so there was nothing to do but tackle the job myself."

It occurs to me, as I write down this true episode, that he might very well have sent me to do it, seems that I was only a college student while he was a professor, and besides, it was my Uncle Tom, any way. But Woodrow Wilson would not do that simply because he was too considerate—the most considerate man I ever knew—as well as the most generous and the tenderest.

So there is a Presidential picture to go along with Lincoln splitting rails, and Garfield on a

chased boat, and Grant driving a dray—Wilson blacking Uncle Tom's boots—Uncle Tom by marriage.

It is hard for me to speak in moderate terms of the beauty of the Wilson's married life—that married life which I saw so intimately for more than 25 years. They say "the bravest are the tenderest," and this strongest man in all the world today has always been so gentle in his home life that he has appealed to some too domestic. In the days of the unfortunate collegiate quarrels in Princeton, my charge that used to be made against him was that he was so shut out of his home life that he did not know men and the ways of men.

For years a man of Woodrow Wilson's genius for rapid perception knows more about men in the flash of an eye than slower men learn of each other in whole long afternoons of club life and gossip over their billiards. But in the charge there is this much truth: that Mr. Wilson's own fire-side has always been dearer to him than the thirteenth mans of casual contacts. If I were asked to name the leading and governing characteristic of this man, I should reply: "That is not easy, for he is a man of commanding genius, and genius is necessarily complex; but certainly one of his leading traits is deep affection. Sometimes in his public dealings, he is forced to harden his heart deliberately in order that he may do justice, but so soon as he can follow his own instinct there emerges, above all his intellectuality and all his iron firmness of will, his affection."

In the family circle he can give this affection free reign, and hence he probably never feels so completely himself as when he gathers with wife and daughters and a few chosen friends around the fireside and allows his spirit to move him whither it listeth. He simply cannot live without affection, for this, our American-great man, is no superman, but human to the core of him.

In the long years of his and my sister's life together, they were more completely one than any two people with whom I have been thrown into intimate contact. They took color from each other, as water and sky reflect each other's moods. Their tastes in books, pictures, statues, and architecture coalesced. He taught her to love his prose favorites, Burke and Bagehot and Bierrell. (The first Bierrell book I ever saw was an inscribed gift book from him to her;) she taught him to love her poetic favorites, especially Wordsworth and Browning; he had a deep and true instinct for architecture, which he imparted to her, and she in turn quickened his discrimination for color in landscape painting and in nature—for she had a skill in color that would have made her a distinguished artist had she not made her painting secondary to her greater career as wife and mother.

It interests me to observe how the three girls have shared their parents' tastes and talents; Margaret has her father's passion for music; Eleanor, Mrs. McAlister, her mother's gift for painting; in young childhood, Jessie, Mrs. Sayre, had something of her father's taste for literary expression and of her mother's taste for art; but as she developed these were overshadowed by that which both her parents had in common, a strong humanitarian instinct, which meant satisfaction in settlement work until she was married.

We often hear it said of a married pair—so often that it has become a sort of "brōmide"—"A good word never passed between that couple." I have been honestly trying to think if I ever heard anything approaching an altercation between Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, and I cannot recall even a shadow of such. And yet these were no weakling, but two spirited people, each with a power of conviction possible only to very strong characters. They would sometimes differ in their opinions, but their relationship was

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so rooted in mutual love and loyalty that their differences were casual and superficial, never fundamental. I have seen Mr. Wilson humorously assume the role of a browbeaten and hapless person, unallowed to hold an opinion, when his wife would say in her impetuous way, "Woodrow, you know you don't think that!" and he would smile and say, "Madam I was venturing to think that I thought that until I was corrected." At one time, when the girls were growing up, he used to laugh and quote Chief Justice Fuller, who remarked that his jurisdiction extended over all the United States except the Fuller family. (Continued on last page.)

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