

# 1. Portrait of a Man (1862-1934)

## His work for peace

### His contribution to Wilson's 14 points



The war he so dreaded broke out in early August 1914. Within a few days, the spark lit in Sarajevo had become a general conflagration. Henri Lambert constantly strove to hasten the end of this deadly madness. He multiplied his contacts, including within pacifist circles and among social democrats, and especially at the end of 1916, when the United States was still neutral, with Colonel House, President Wilson's right hand man. Despairing of Europe's leaders, he saw in Wilson the only hope. His position as a free agent, a person above the fray, had allowed him to address the belligerents on both sides. Everyone knows that in such circumstances the supporters of the parties involved each hold exclusive friendships and that therefore Henri Lambert's position, alone and apart, was not very easy to

maintain. He nevertheless defended his ideas and his analysis with tenacity, developing and constantly repeating them, sometimes writing articles in newspapers or magazines, sometimes more substantial studies, and all this in English and French as well as in German.

Meanwhile, from late 1916 to the end of 1918 he came into continuous personal contact with Colonel House. Through him, Henri Lambert exercised a discreet but strong influence through the introduction of the key provision of economic openness (Point 3) in the famous "Fourteen Points" of President Wilson, announced in his speech of January 1918. The "14 Points" was to be the basis of the armistice agreed on 11 November 1918. "Point 3" should have provided the essential basis of the "Peace Conference" of 1919 and of the Treaty of Versailles.

During this same year 1917, in the USA Henri Lambert published two editions of his *Pax Economica* under the title *Pax Economica: freedom of international exchange the sole method for the permanent and universal abolition of war, with a statement of the cause and the solution of the European crisis and a sketch of the only possible conclusive settlement of the problems confronting the world*. New York, 1917. During his stay in America that lasted until late December 1918, over almost two and a half years, he wrote about fifty letters to Colonel House, was received by him at the White House, and was honoured with a mention in House's memoirs. When one knows how very charged House's diary was and how many famous names filed into his office, as his memoirs attest, one can see that the relations between the two men had become more than cordial.

If the memory and role of President Wilson have remained in the public mind, those of Colonel House are now gone except among historians. Fortunately, therefore, the remarkable new book – very precise, detailed and balanced – by historian Godfrey Hodgson reminds us of House’s extremely important role from 1913 until 1918-19 vis-à-vis President Wilson. We can do no better than to quote the words of this eminent Oxford historian: *“The importance of Colonel Edward M. House in 20<sup>th</sup> century American foreign policy is enormous: from 1913 to 1919 he served not only as an intimate friend and chief political adviser to President Woodrow Wilson but also as national security adviser and senior diplomat. Yet the relationship between House and the president ended in a quarrel at the Paris peace conference of 1919 – largely because of Mrs. Wilson’s hostility to House – since when House has received little sympathetic historical attention.”*



To illustrate his influence, we reprise below an extract from a letter from Henri Lambert addressed to Colonel House dated March 12, 1917, and an excerpt of a reply from Colonel House to Henri Lambert a few months later, October 24, 1917.

**– From a letter of Henri Lambert to Colonel House – March 12, 1917:**

*“ ... I persist in my hopefulness. Of course, today’s international law of neutrality is not founded on true international ethics. Even so, the only thing to do is to apply it as it is, according to the letter of it. Surely also the whole international ‘law of war’ entirely lacks true fundamental principles. But the Germans have to abide by the law which they have made, or accepted, and the only reasonable thing they can do is to trust the President of the United States to take the right next step for peace. I am not without some confidence that V. Bernstorff will clarify the political atmosphere and the minds in Berlin in this respect. I would like to be allowed, dear Colonel House, to draw your special attention to what appears to me to be a very important aspect of the European problem – namely, that freedom of nationalities and freedom of the seas cannot serve as causes of peace, they can only be its consequences. When it comes to practical policy, various important considerations make it impossible, when dealing with the peace problem, to neglect or be silent on these two very important questions. Nevertheless, they are not fundamental questions, they will not serve as the ‘foundations’ of the edifice of a reconstructed peaceful civilisation. This edifice must, I think, be understood in this way.” Liberty (national and individual) can only be preserved if grounded on security. This is what Sir Edward Grey meant in 1915, when he said that Great Britain was ready to discuss the question of ‘freedom of the seas’ but that the condition making this freedom possible had first to be established. Fundamental security is economic security...”*

**– From a letter of Colonel House to Henri Lambert, October 24, 1917:**

*“The President and I had a long talk last night alone. We went over the situation carefully. He again expressed pleasure that I was to represent him, and declared once more that he would not be willing for anyone else to do so. In the course of the conversation, I expressed the opinion that if such a war as this could be justified at all, its justification would be largely because it had given him a commanding opportunity for unselfish service... Then he had laid down the principle that no nation should acquire territory without the consent of the*

*governed. Now he should lay down the doctrine that nations should be equally unselfish regarding commerce. There should be complete freedom of commerce upon the seas, no preferential tariffs or transportation rates upon land, making the staple products and raw materials of the world accessible to all. The President's eyes glistened and he rose to the argument sympathetically."*

In this surely, the ideas shared by Henri Lambert in his many letters and interviews with "dear Colonel House" had borne fruit.

On January 8, 1918, in a major speech to Congress President Woodrow Wilson proposed, his 14 Point Peace Plan, (the "Fourteen Points" largely developed by "The Inquiry" of Colonel House), the second of which concerned the freedom of navigation on the seas, and the third freedom of international trade (i.e. the removal of economic barriers and commercial equality for all nations) for the drafting of which Henri Lambert had worked tenaciously in the background, ever hopeful that the latter would be included as the first Point and the foundation of peace. He sent a telegram to the President which read as follows: ***"This day, Mr. President, will be recorded as that of the greatest, noblest and grandest utterance and act in the history of mankind. Respectfully, Henri Lambert, manufacturer in Charleroi, Belgium."***

In the words of his son, Valentin, there is no doubt that Henri Lambert had hoped and fought for this Point to be first of the fourteen. It only first appeared at eleventh place, finally arriving at third. But the outcome was not a foregone conclusion. Thus, as of January 9, 1918, the day after the declaration, House noted that: *"I then suggested the removal, as far as possible, of trade barriers. He [the President] argued that this would meet with opposition, particularly in the Senate."* The President expressed reservations, having in mind the fierce protectionism of the American Republicans, led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Wilson's political enemy, and the very pronounced strength of American protectionism, even among Democrats.



On November 11, 1918 the Armistice was signed, the Kaiser and the Reichstag having accepted the "14 Points", with England and France having no choice but to rally to it. The die was cast. On January 18, 1919 the Paris Conference began that was to lead to the disastrous Treaty of Versailles, signed on June 28, 1919. Henri Lambert returned to Charleroi to January 20, 1919. He resumed his industrial activities and attended to the repair and restarting of his plant, after his long period of absence. Meanwhile, House came to stay in Paris in late 1918 to organise the long and ultimately catastrophic negotiation of "the Peace".