

## *philip dru*, the blueprint of a presidential adviser

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Some fascinating events have taken place at the intersection of fiction and history. In such a place one may find *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Looking Backward*—both novels which are not only interesting examples of the thinking of their time, but also movers of events. Another such novel, which reflects the intellectual atmosphere of the progressive era, was *Philip Dru, Administrator*. While this novel is far less well-known than either of those previously mentioned, its author was nearer the seat of political power than either Harriett Stowe or Edward Bellamy ever had been.

*Philip Dru* was the creation of Colonel Edward Mandell House, a dabbler in Texas politics who moved into national political prominence in the era of Woodrow Wilson. Having gained the confidence of Wilson during the 1912 presidential campaign, House was offered a seat in the cabinet but he refused, perhaps realizing that the role of unofficial adviser better fitted his talents and his purposes. Free of the responsibilities and detailed duties of public office, House functioned behind the scenes from the time of Wilson's election until the end of the first world war, when he accepted public appointment for the first time by becoming a member of the peace commission.

Although observers were not then aware of it, they could have had a blueprint of House's political ideas throughout the period of his influence on the President, for these ideas were neatly packaged into the novel, *Philip Dru*, which was written during the year of Wilson's first presidential campaign. The book was published anonymously and it was only a minor project in the Colonel's crowded schedule. House conceived the idea of writing the novel in the autumn of 1911. In the ensuing winter he was ill in Austin, Texas, and during his convalescence he wrote *Philip Dru* as a sort of pastime while he was barred from active participation in politics. He completed the book with some dispatch.

He later said, "I was surprised at the rapidity with which I wrote, for I was not certain when I began that I could do it at all. . . ." <sup>1</sup> He spent no more than thirty days on the manuscript before sending it to Sidney Mezes, his brother-in-law, who was a member of the faculty of the University of Texas and later President of the College of the City of New York.

House soon became involved in the political affairs of 1912 and the spring found him furthering the candidacy of Wilson. By the time of the convention in June, House was ready to begin his yearly summer pilgrimage to Europe. House devoted some time to *Philip Dru* on his overseas voyage in June and on the return trip in August, but once back in the United States he completely immersed himself in the political campaign and so could spare no more time for the book. Consequently he sent it to the publisher without further revision. <sup>2</sup> The book appeared in the autumn, just after the election, and since it was published anonymously, it was advertised in the following way: "The author of this book, a man prominent in political councils, must necessarily remain anonymous. His pages are full of the facts known only to the inner circle in statecraft and finance." <sup>3</sup>

The book itself was by no means unique. It was similar in plot to two novels that had been published around the turn of the century, *President John Smith* by Frederick U. Adams and *The Legal Revolution of 1902* by Bert Wellman. <sup>4</sup> Like these earlier utopian novels, *Philip Dru* depicted a centralized, ruthless, corrupt government. The United States of *Philip Dru* was controlled by two men who operated behind the scenes. One of these was Selwyn, the political boss, who most observers believed was a composite portrait of Nelson Aldrich and Mark Hanna. <sup>5</sup> The second was Thor, the financier, who was probably modeled after J. Pierpoint Morgan. <sup>6</sup>

In the novel, these men set up a puppet as President of the United States and were well on their way to controlling the entire nation when their secret plans were made public by a clerk who accidentally acquired a recording of one of their secret sessions. The country was thrown into a panic, and the man who stepped forward to lead the national uprising in the time of crisis was Philip Dru, a brilliant military strategist, who had been forced to leave the army because of an injury. Since he had lived among the poor and had been engaged in social work, Dru realized that the nation's political and economic system had to be changed and, as a consequence, he consented to lead the revolution. By Dru's superior military strategy, he defeated the government forces in a bloody battle <sup>7</sup> and assumed complete control of the United States for a period of time during which he set up a new constitution and system of laws for the country, providing the needed reforms. With the new government in operation and with enemies abroad stilled, Dru left the country so that none would think he intended to become a permanent dictator. House's

book thus follows the traditional form of the utopian novel by giving an analysis of society's evils in the first section and proposals for change in the second.

The appearance of *Philip Dru* coincided with the beginning of the Wilson administration with its progressive reforms, and it has thus sometimes been considered as a sort of text book for the administration. However, it is difficult to ascertain how much Wilson was influenced by the book, or, indeed to be quite certain that he read it.<sup>8</sup> George Sylvester Viereck, after talking with House wrote: "The book itself, Colonel House assures me, was never discussed between him and Wilson."<sup>9</sup> However, many of the ideas it proposes were discussed by the two men, as were most of the progressive theories of the time. Many of the reforms House advocated in the book were to become law.

In the novel, Dru decided that the country's judicial system should be simplified, and the power of the courts was to be limited so that they would no longer rule on the constitutionality of laws. He carried the work of simplification further by having the nation's legal code reformed. "He [Dru] pointed out that heretofore the laws had been made for the judges, for the lawyers and for those whose financial or political influence enabled them to obtain special privileges, but that hereafter the whole legal machinery was to be run absolutely in the interest of the people." In addition to these legal changes, the political aspect of the nation was to be changed somewhat by granting suffrage to women. The new federal and state constitutions provided in the book are simple skeletons, but they do not differ greatly from the similar provisions of the Constitution of the United States.

As for the financial affairs of the nation, the primary basis of taxation was to be land and the improvements thereon were to be taxed at a very low rate, thus providing a modified form of Henry George's tax scheme. In addition, a graduated income tax would be levied on all and would run up to a high of 70% on extremely large incomes. The protective nature of the tariff was to be eliminated, and that which remained was to be for revenue purposes only. Private corporations were to be made to pay taxes on their net earnings and to allow representatives of government and labor to sit on their boards.<sup>10</sup>

Many of these changes were soon before the Congress and the President in forms similar to the proposals in the novel. The close connection between the appearance of the book and the various progressive measures in Congress has led several observers to emphasize the importance of House's creation. One critical commentator wrote: "Seldom in history has an apparently fantastic piece of soothsaying been followed so swiftly by its total fulfillment."<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the domestic reforms in the novel, House advanced ideas on foreign policy. For example, in the book, after Dru gained control of the government and began the domestic reforms that were to

transform the country, he found that a powerful coalition of foreign nations was forming against him. To destroy its foundation, which was a British-German-Japanese alliance, he arranged to have the British ministry overthrown. When a new ministry came to power in England, Dru negotiated an Anglo-American concert for a "world wide policy of peace and commercial freedom."<sup>12</sup> Under this plan, there was to be some degree of disarmament and a lowering of customs barriers; and zones of friendly commercial rivalry were to be established.

The comment of House in *Philip Dru* on Russia is interesting in the light of the impending Russian revolution and the United States policy toward that catastrophic upheaval: "That great land had not yet discarded the ways and habits of mediaevalism. Her people were not being educated, and she indicated no intention of preparing them for the responsibilities of self government, to which they were entitled." House then went on to consider possible change: "Sometimes in his day dreams, Dru thought of Russia in its vastness, of the ignorance and hopeless outlook of the people, and wondered when her deliverance would come. There was, he knew, great work for someone in that despotic land."<sup>13</sup>

In House's final analysis in *Philip Dru*, the form of international understanding, devised by the establishment of spheres of influence for each of four great powers—the United States, Great Britain, Japan and Germany—would bring about a "lasting and beneficent peace."<sup>14</sup> The extent of the greater United States under House's scheme would stretch throughout the northern half of the Western Hemisphere, and her sphere of influence would include the entire hemisphere.

House's ideas on foreign policy, as stated in *Philip Dru*, included a large extension of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary, a world wide system of spheres of influence to maintain a balance of power among the larger nations, the lowering of trade barriers and an antipathy toward Russia.

In comparing these aspects of House's fantasy with Wilsonian reality, a most obvious parallel may be found in Wilson's Mexican policy. Wilson sounded very like Dru, and he acted as Dru might in his intervention in Mexico. There are also parallels between Wilsonian ideals of world government and those expounded in *Philip Dru*; however, Dru's ideas of a world order were based on more pragmatic principles than those of Wilson. Dru's idea was to recognize the strong nations of the world and provide them with a sphere of influence to exploit. Wilson, on the other hand, had a more idealistic vision in which the nations of the world were to be governed by great moral principles, and he stressed democratic forms of government, self-determination of peoples and freedom of the seas. Wilson and Dru agreed on the importance of disarmament and the removal of trade barriers, but House's fictional character was more successful than Wilson would be in reality. The distaste for Czarist Russia obvious in the novel was similar to the later attitude of the Wilson

administration toward Soviet Russia. In summary, then, while the view of foreign affairs in *Philip Dru* bears some resemblance to Wilsonian foreign policy, the latter attempted, at least, a more idealistic approach to world affairs.

*Philip Dru*, generally speaking, was not well received when it first appeared. Some reviewers simply regarded it as a bad novel. Walter Lippman reviewed the book for the *New York Times*. He noted that the author was "quite incapable of producing a character or sustaining a plot."<sup>15</sup> Arthur D. Howden Smith, an otherwise sympathetic biographer of House, admits that the novel was "probably one of the worst ever published."<sup>16</sup> A later critic stated that "any high school freshman could have improved" on the "fatuous love story" in *Philip Dru*.<sup>17</sup>

Although the book received no critical praise for its literary qualities, several observers noted that it might be important for its political ideas. Since the publisher, in advertising the book, preserved the anonymity of the author, the novel piqued the imagination of the reviewers and perhaps caused the book to have a wider notice than it otherwise might have received. Several reviewers, indeed, expressed the hope that the author was prominent in the new administration, thus indicating approval of the theories advanced in the book.<sup>18</sup> There were guesses that the author was Theodore Roosevelt or, astonishingly, William Jennings Bryan.<sup>19</sup> George Middleton, in *LaFollette's Weekly*, said that the book's appeal to the "personnel of our progressive administration will be readily understood."<sup>20</sup> The Lippman review in the *Times* did not agree with these sentiments. Rather, Lippman expressed concern over the possibility that the author might be an influential man: "Now, if the author is really a man of affairs, this is an extraordinary book. It shows how utterly juvenile a great man can be. If he is really an 'insider,' then we who are on the outside have very little to learn. If he is really an example of the far-seeing public man, then in all sincerity, I say, God help this sunny land."<sup>21</sup>

There were people, of course, who knew the secret of the authorship of the novel since they were in House's confidence. House noted that he sent the first draft of the book to Sidney Mezes, and he also submitted it to David Houston, who was to be Secretary of Agriculture in Wilson's administration. House wished to have Houston's criticisms of the economic parts of the book. "He kept the manuscript until I passed through St. Louis on my way East. He declared the belief that it was economically sound, but held that the fiction in it was so thin that he advised rewriting it as a serious work, as he had suggested originally."<sup>22</sup> Edward S. Martin of *Life Magazine* agreed with Houston that before the book was published it should be rewritten as a nonfiction work. In his view, "some of it was so good that it was a pity that parts of it were so bad."<sup>23</sup> The book's publisher, B. W. Huebsch, also agreed that the work should take the form of an economics book.<sup>24</sup>

Although House did not want it generally known that he was the author of the book, he did want it to reach important people, so he made arrangements to have copies of the work sent to several influential people. He also sent copies of it to people as though it were the work of someone else.<sup>25</sup> Within a few months of the book's appearance, there were several people who had been taken into the Colonel's confidence, but the general public was not yet aware of the fact of his authorship. In 1917 an enterprising book seller noted the growing influence of House in the administration and wrote: "As time goes on the interest in it [*Philip Dru*] becomes more intense, due to the fact that so many of the ideas expressed in 'Philip Dru: Administrator' have been discussed as becoming laws." The statement ends with this question, "Is Colonel E. M. House of Texas the author?"<sup>26</sup> Another clue to the author's identity was revealed when Arthur D. Howden Smith published *The Real Colonel House* in 1918. Chandler P. Anderson, a prominent Republican and Washington lawyer, was discussing the Smith biography with an observant friend and then noted in his diary that there was a striking similarity between "the parts of the biography which were quoted as coming from Colonel House" and *Philip Dru*.<sup>27</sup> For anyone who had not yet guessed that House was responsible for *Philip Dru*, Senator Lawrence Y. Sherman of Illinois proclaimed that fact on the floor of the Senate on September 3, 1918, in the midst of a long harangue against House. In the words of Senator Sherman: "Be it ever remembered the simon pure texture of the colonel's thoughts can be had only by digesting a novel written by him. I know that heretofore it has ordinarily been mere gossip around the cloakrooms that he was the author; but I state, subject to any proof that may be offered that he is not, that I have satisfactory evidence as leads me to say that he is the author of the novel."<sup>28</sup> Sherman noted that "Philip Dru is an autobiography of the Colonel himself and solves the conundrum how to get rid of the Constitution." House's forebears had failed to accomplish this end in the Civil War, Sherman said, so the second generation succeeded in fiction.<sup>29</sup>

In 1920, even after the Colonel's authorship of the book was exposed in the Senate, *Philip Dru* was reprinted anonymously. Despite its modest success and notoriety, though, the book has been almost universally ignored by text books and monographs in the field. One survey of one hundred and fifty books "in which some mention, not to say discussion, of *Philip Dru* would have been relevant," showed that only two "gave any inkling of the novel's existence."<sup>30</sup> J. B. Matthews, writing in *American Mercury* in 1954, considered this omission as a plot by "the so-called liberal historians" who did not wish it to be known that "the Wilson and Roosevelt revolutions, by which they swear, were contaminated at their source by a reformer—Colonel House—who blandly declared that he had anticipated Mussolini in his depiction of Philip Dru."<sup>31</sup> According to Matthews, House's novel "glorifies treason,"<sup>32</sup> and

in this vein, Senator Sherman had earlier charged before the United States Senate that “it is a fair question whether this whole allegory of alleged inefficiency and oppression does not violate the espionage act every time a copy of the book is sold. I believe it does.”<sup>33</sup>

*Philip Dru* has undergone something of a revival of interest since the 1950's. Matthew's article, previously cited, was one of the ways in which it was brought to the attention of the American right wing, and for a time copies of the two original printings of the book were very much sought after. In 1961, Dan Smoot, a spokesman for right wing causes, noted that the reforms of *Philip Dru*, since adopted, were ones that were written into the *Communist Manifesto* as weapons necessary in the destruction of capitalism.<sup>34</sup>

The book has been used to attack two Presidents. As previously noted, *Philip Dru* and its author were used in the Senate to attack Woodrow Wilson for his “unofficial and personal government.”<sup>35</sup> More recently, Franklin Roosevelt was criticised for including elements of *Philip Dru* in his policies.<sup>36</sup> The fact that House himself compared Dru with Mussolini tended to discredit the Presidents who seemed to have accepted the same ideas. House threw himself into the arms of his critics when he gave his analysis of the efficacy of a dictatorship in the United States: “There is to be found considerable sentiment favorable to a Mussolini sort of dictatorship in the conservative circles in America. . . . This is well enough, provided the man in control is a beneficent dictator—but how few such are to be found! Italy has such a government now functioning under the able and courageous Mussolini. . . .”<sup>37</sup>

In 1965, *Philip Dru* was reissued by the John Birch Society. An anonymous preface is included in this edition, “The Master Plan for Conquering America.” In this preface, the problems which beset the American republic are traced back to Adam Weishaupt, the Illuminati, the Jacobins, Marx, Engels and Colonel E. Mandell House. According to this account, House attended a conference in Brussels in the “early 1900's” with Mussolini and Lenin, among others. “The conference decided that the world should be plunged into a war which should break the backbone of Capitalistic economy and bring into being a world government under the direction of Socialistic and Communistic leaders.” After attending the conference, House returned to the United States, “to draw up the blueprint for the coming American Red Revolution.”<sup>38</sup> That blueprint, to the American right wing, is *Philip Dru*. To the author of the preface, “the majority of Wilson's leftist actions can be laid at Col. House's door.”

While it is impossible to determine whether *Philip Dru*, as distinguished from House himself, had any tangible effect on the policies of the Wilson period, there were several observers at the time who believed that the work had a significant influence on the administration. Senator Sherman, for example, believed that the Smith biography of House and

House's novel "throw a flood of light upon the intentions of the administration."<sup>39</sup> George Middleton reported that "according to reliable authority" the book was read by the President and at least three members of the cabinet—Secretary of State Bryan, Secretary of Agriculture Houston and Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo.<sup>40</sup> Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane's letters reveal that he had read *Philip Dru*, and felt that "all that book has said should be comes about slowly. . . . The President comes to Philip Dru in the end."<sup>41</sup>

Colonel House revealed the extent to which he identified himself with Philip Dru in a letter he wrote in 1915. He was trying to conceal his authorship of the novel from a friend to whom he was sending a copy, and he wrote: "I am sending you the book of which I spoke. . . . It was written by a man I know. . . . My friend—whose name is not to be mentioned—told me . . . that Philip was all that he himself would like to be but was not."<sup>42</sup> House also stated in his diary that *Philip Dru* was a true expression of his thoughts. He wrote in 1916: "In regard to 'Philip Dru,' I want to say that there are some things in it I wrote hastily and in which I do not concur, but most of it I stand upon as being both my ethical and political faith."<sup>43</sup> In a similar passage, a year later, he wrote: "Philip Dru expresses my thought and aspirations and, at every opportunity, I have tried to press rulers, public men and those influencing public opinion, in that direction. Perhaps the most valuable work I have done in that direction has been in influencing the President. I began with him before he became President and I have never relaxed my efforts. At every turn I have stirred his ambition to become the great liberal leader of the world."<sup>44</sup>

One important point must be made with regard to this book. It was published as House stood on the threshold of his career as the President's adviser and it did contain a key to his political ideas and attitudes. However, to construe these ideas as contributing to a communistic revolution in this country is to misinterpret both the book and the man. One can consult in *Philip Dru* the blueprint House provided for his political performance between 1912 and 1919; one may not find there the seeds of any conspiracy. The methods by which House depicted Dru's obtaining power in the novel may be rather shocking, but the manner in which House's dictator used that power is strictly in the progressive tradition of the first two decades of this century.

*Philip Dru* was obviously an expression both of House's ambition and his political dreams, and it was an expression of the ideas of the man who had an impressive amount of influence on Woodrow Wilson. Seldom have the elements of a utopia been implemented so soon as the reforms of *Philip Dru* were; seldom has a utopian reformer been as influential as House was. For these reasons, *Philip Dru* is a significant political document.

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## footnotes

1. Quoted in Edward M. House, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, ed. by Charles Seymour (Boston, 1926), I, 154.
2. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has quoted the book's publisher, B. W. Huebsch, as saying that Harry E. Maule had to rewrite *Philip Dru* "in order to bring it up to minimum standards of readability." This was revision in style, not content. See *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Boston, 1957), 493.
3. Quoted in the *Congressional Record* (Senate), 65 Congress, 2 Session, September 3, 1918, 9875.
4. Vernon L. Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams; a Study of American Utopias* (Providence, 1947), 188.
5. One author says that in Selwyn House saw himself. Louis W. Koenig, *The Invisible Presidency* (New York, 1960), 191. However, it is difficult to imagine House identifying himself with a character who is stripped of his power.
6. Parrington, *American Dreams*, 188.
7. House has been criticised for the violence of this bloody battle scene. See, for example, J. B. Matthews, "Philip Dru: Fascist Prototype," *American Mercury*, LXXIX (November, 1954), 136.
8. For those asserting that he had, see George Middleton, "Literary Notes," *LaFollette's Weekly*, V (March 29, 1913), 7. Also, Robert S. Rifkind, "The Colonel's Dream of Power," *American Heritage*, X (February, 1959), 64.
9. G. S. Viereck, *The Strangest Friendship in History* (New York, 1932), 28.
10. [Edward M. House,] *Philip Dru, Administrator* (New York, 1920), Chapters 29-42. The quotation is from p. 200.
11. Matthews, "Philip Dru," 131-32.
12. [House,] *Philip Dru*, 273.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Walter Lippman, "America's Future Pictured in a Decidedly Quaint Novel," *New York Times Book Review*, December 8, 1912, 754.
16. Arthur D. H. Smith, *Mr. House of Texas* (New York, 1940), 23.
17. Matthews, "Philip Dru," 134.
18. House, *The Intimate Papers*, I, 153.
19. Matthews, "Philip Dru," 132, and Middleton, "Literary Notes," 7.
20. Middleton, "Literary Notes," 7.
21. "When Walter Lippman penned these unkind lines about the author of *Philip Dru*, he could hardly have foreseen that he, Lippman, would in less than five years become the right-hand assistant of Colonel House in preparing the essential data for the anticipated peace conference at the end of World War I." Matthews, "Philip Dru," 134.
22. Quoted in House, *The Intimate Papers*, I, 154.
23. *Ibid.*, I, 155.
24. Entries of January 23, 1913, and March 17, 1916, House Diary, Papers of Edward M. House, Yale University Library.
25. Entries of November 20, 1912, and July 8, 1914, House Diary.
26. Quoted in House, *The Intimate Papers*, I, 154.
27. Chandler P. Anderson Diary, June 25, 1918, Chandler P. Anderson Papers, Library of Congress. Anderson, although a Republican, served in the State Department during part of the Wilson administration and was often critical of Wilsonian policies.
28. *Congressional Record* (Senate), 65 Congress, 2 session, September 3, 1918, 9875.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Matthews, "Philip Dru," 135.
31. *Ibid.*, 136.
32. *Ibid.*, 131.
33. *Congressional Record* (Senate), 65 Congress, 2 session, September 3, 1918, 9875.
34. *Dan Smoot Report*, VIII (July 3, 1961).
35. *New York Times*, September 4, 1918, 10.
36. Matthews, "Philip Dru," 136. Similarities between Dru and the New Deal are noted in V. L. Parrington's *American Dreams*, 190-91. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has pointed out that Roosevelt was familiar with the book and that his secretary had requested a copy for him. Noted in *The Crisis of the Old Order*, 493-94.
37. Edward M. House, "Does America Need a Dictator?" *Liberty*, X (January 7, 1933), 6.
38. The edition here discussed contains no publication information in it, and the information in the preface is not documented.
39. *Congressional Record* (Senate), 65 Congress, 2 session, September 3, 1918, 9879.
40. Middleton, "Literary Notes," 7.

41. Franklin K. Lane, *The Letters of Franklin K. Lane*, ed. by A. W. Lane and L. H. Wall (Boston, 1922), 197.
42. Quoted in Alexander and Juliette George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House* (New York, 1956), 131.
43. House, *The Intimate Papers*, I, 158.
44. Entry of March 17, 1917, House Diary.