

The one thing which we could not have done, in my opinion, was to repudiate our responsibility. We are a very strong Power, one of the strongest in the world, and here, under our eyes and within range of our guns, a thing was being done which menaced every living creature in Europe. The one thing that no statesman could possibly do was to say : ' This is no concern of ours. We will go our ways as usual.' It was perfectly possible to stand aside and proclaim our neutrality. But—apart from questions of honour—to proclaim neutrality was quite as grave a step as to proclaim war. Let no man imagine that he can escape blood-guiltiness by standing still while murder is committed before his eyes.

I will not argue here what the right decision would have been. It depends, unlike the point of honour, on a careful balancing of evidence and consequences, and scarcely any one in the country except the Government has sufficient knowledge to make the balance. For my own part, I should have started with a strong predilection for peace, even a fragmentary peace, but should ultimately have been guided chiefly by the public men whom I most trust. But, as things fell out, our Government was not forced to make a decision on this difficult ground at all, because Germany took a further step which made the whole situation clear. Her treatment of Belgium not only roused our passionate indignation, but compelled us either to declare war or to break our pledged word. I incline, however, to think that our whole welfare is so vitally dependent on the observance of public law and the rights of nations, and would have been so terribly endangered by the presence of Germany in a conqueror's mood at Ostend and Zeebrugge, not to speak of Dunkirk and Calais, that in this case mere self-