

WHY GREAT BRITAIN IS NOW ENGAGED IN WAR

A DISCUSSION OF THE CAUSE AND ITS TREMENDOUS ISSUES

IT WAS a reflection of the first of political philosophers that disturbances in States, though they may arise on trifling occasions, do not involve trifling issues. The present world-wide war started from the case of Serbia, but involved, even from the start, much larger issues.

If only a dispute between Serbia and Austria-Hungary had been in question, Britain, as Sir Edward Grey repeatedly stated, would have no concern in the affair. But since as we shall see, this dispute was bound to have ulterior consequences, it is necessary to understand what this dispute was about.

The Case of Serbia.

Serbia is a small, but very ancient kingdom in the Balkan Peninsula. It obtained considerable accession of territory as the result of the recent wars in the Balkans, the war between the Balkan States and Turkey, and then the war among the Balkan States themselves.

The Serbian people are akin, in race and religion, to the Slavs, of which race Russia is the predominant Power and to which race also many of the subjects of Austria-Hungary belong.

On June 28, 1914, "the crime at Sarajevo" was committed, namely, the murder of the heir-apparent to the throne, of Austria-Hungary and his consort in the capital of Bosnia.

That province, once a part of the ancient Serbian kingdom, had fallen into the possession of the Turks; the administration of it had been given to Austria, by the Berlin Treaty after the Russo-Turkish war, in 1878; and in 1908 Austria annexed it.

Allocation—Not Proof

The Austrian Government alleged (but has not proved) that the crime of Sarajevo was a culminating point in a "subversive movement" organised

by the Serbian Government "with the object of detaching a part of the territories of Austria-Hungary from the Monarchy."

On July 23 the Austrian Government addressed an ultimatum to Serbia. Austria had been "left a perfectly free hand" by Germany.

It was admitted by Sir Edward Grey that "one naturally sympathised with many of the requirements of the ultimatum," and that "the murder of the Archduke and some of the circumstances respecting Serbia quoted in the (Austria) Note aroused sympathy with Austria."

Russia also admitted that "the demands were reasonable enough in some cases."

ULTIMATUM GAVE SERBIA LITTLE TIME

But there were two features in the Austrian ultimatum which caused alarm and regret to those who desired to see the peace of Europe maintained. The first was the inclusion of a time-limit, so short (48 hours) as to leave diplomacy little time to avert war. The second was that what Austria demanded within 48 hours was not a reply, but the reply dictated by Austria.

"I had never before seen," said Sir Edward Grey, "one State address to another independent State a document of so formidable a character."

The German foreign Secretary "admitted that the Serbian Government could not swallow certain of the Austro-Hungarian demands."

Sir Edward Grey advised Serbia to go to the furthest possible point in meeting those demands, and similar advice was given to her by France and Russia.

The Serbian Government replied, within the appointed time, conceding the greater part of the Austrian demands. The conceded demands were of a very stringent character.

The Serbian reply "involved," said Sir Edward Grey, "the greatest humiliation that he had ever seen a country undergo." Nevertheless Austria refused to accept the reply, and declared war against Serbia (July 28).

Touched Her Independence

The part of the Austrian demands which Serbia had felt unable to concede touched her very existence as an independent State, and with regard to these matters she offered to submit them to the Hague Tribunal.

The fact that Austria, while receiving satisfaction on the other points, had made the refusal of the latter points a *casus belli* raised suspicions of her ultimate intentions.

"The real question," said the Russian Foreign Minister, "was whether Austria was to crush Serbia and to reduce her to the status of a vassal, or whether she was to leave Serbia a free and independent State."

ISSUE SURE TO INVOLVE THE OTHERS

It had been recognised from the first that the case of Serbia could not be isolated. The aggression upon Serbia by Austria (with the previous

consent of Germany) was bound to involve the other Powers.

The German Government did indeed protest to Sir Edward Grey that "the question at issue was one for settlement between Serbia and Austria alone"; but everybody else knew that it could not be so, and the German Government, as we shall see presently, seem to have known this also.

The relations between Austria and Russia had already been strained by the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Aggression by Austria upon Serbia was certain to be regarded by Russia with the utmost alarm and indignation. During the Balkan crisis the Russian Foreign Minister "had made it clear to the Austrian Government that war with Russia must inevitably follow an Austrian attack on Serbia."

Intolerable to Russia

"It was clear that Austrian domination of Serbia was an intolerable to Russia as the independence of the Netherlands on Germany would be to Great Britain."

"It must be obvious," said Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons (July 27), "to any person who reflects upon the situation that the moment the dispute ceases to be one between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and becomes one in which another Great Power is involved, it can but end in the greatest catastrophe that has ever befallen the Continent of Europe at one blow; no one can say what would be the limit of the issues that might be raised by such a conflict."

Challenged a European War

War between Russia and Austria, in a case wherein Germany had supported the latter, must involve Germany as her ally, and France would be drawn in as the ally of Russia. The action of Austria and Germany

in the case of Serbia was thus likely to challenge a European War.

England and France and Russia saw this. Italy, the ally of Austria and Germany, saw it also. When the general war was breaking out, the Italian Government, being asked to state its intentions, replied: "The war undertaken by Austria, and the consequences which might result, had, in the words of the German Ambassador himself, an aggressive object. Both were therefore in conflict with the purely defensive character of the Triple Alliance, and in such circumstances Italy would remain neutral."

Saw the Consequences

"We were fully conscious," said the German Government itself, "that a possible warlike procedure by Austria Hungary against Serbia might bring Russia upon the scene and so involve us in war in accordance with our duties as Allies."

"As for Germany," said the German Ambassador at Vienna to the British, "she knew very well what she was about in backing up Austria-Hungary in this matter."

GREY MADE STRONG BID FOR PEACE

Foreseeing all this, Sir Edward Grey, whose efforts during the recent Balkan wars had won for him the title of the Peacemaker of Europe, was early in the field with proposals for averting war, and the British Government "persisted to the very last moment of the last hour in that

great and beneficent but unhappily frustrated purpose" (Mr. Asquith).

Already on July 20, having received an inkling of what was on foot, Sir Edward Grey spoke to the German Ambassador of the importance, if the peace of Europe was to be preserved, of Austria "keeping her demand within reasonable limits."

Not Adopted

The suggestion was not adopted. The German Foreign Secretary "considered it inadvisable that the Austro-Hungarian Government should be approached by the German Government on the matter" (July 22).

The Austria ultimatum, which the same Minister "admitted that the Serbian Government could not swallow," was despatched on the following day.

On July 23, having heard from the Austrian Ambassador an outline of what the Austrian note contained, Sir Edward Grey pressed upon him, as also upon the German Government, the desirability of persuading the Austrian Government to extend its time-limit.

The Russian Government took the same line.

Difficulty and Delay

The German Ambassador was instructed to "pass on" Sir Edward Grey's suggestion, but the German Foreign Secretary said that "there would be delay and difficulty in getting time-limit extended," adding, "quite freely, that the Austro-Hungarian Government wished to give the Serbians a lesson and meant to take military action."

On July 24, having received the text of the Austrian ultimatum, and foreseeing that if Austria attacked Serbia Russia would mobilise, Sir Edward Grey proposed that "Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain, who had not direct interests in Serbia, should act together for the sake of

peace, simultaneously in Vienna and St. Petersburg," "in the event of the relations between Austria and Russia becoming threatening."

"It would be very desirable," he said to the German Ambassador, "to get Austria not to precipitate military action and so gain more time. But none of us could influence Austria in this direction unless Germany would propose and participate in such action at Vienna."

GERMANY BLOCKED THE WAY

France was favorable to this plan. So was Italy. Russia was "quite ready to stand aside and leave the question in the hands of England, France, Germany and Italy."

Having thus received assurances that, if only Germany agreed, his plan might be efficacious, Sir Edward Grey on July 26 formally invited the Governments of France, Germany and Italy to instruct their several ambassadors to confer with him "for the purpose of discovering an issue which would prevent complications." The invitation was accepted by France and Italy.

Germany Stood Aloof

The German Foreign Secretary "could not fall in with the suggestion, desirous though he was to cooperate for the maintenance of peace" (July 27).

Sir Edward Grey thereupon saw the German Ambassador (July 27) and promised "as long as Germany (Continued on page 3)

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