

A Speech before the Canadian Club at Montreal December 7, 1914

I speak of that which is uppermost in the thoughts of all men, the pending struggle which touches the destiny of more than half the world. Much has been said and written as to the direct causes which involved our Empire in this conflict. The utmost devotion and earnestness characterized the efforts of Mr. Asquith and Sir Edward Grey, first to prevent war and next to narrow the conflict. The view has been expressed that an earlier declaration of Great Britain's determination would possibly have saved the situation. Those who are familiar with the later phases of constitutional government in Great Britain understand thoroughly that the British Government could have taken no other course than that which they did adopt. There was a day when the Crown of Great Britain made war without consulting Parliament or the people. A later day came when the King made war only upon the advice and with the consent of his ministers responsible to the people for the advice which they gave. But there came, I think, a still later day when neither the Crown nor Ministers could make war without knowing that the cause was just and that public opinion supported them. It is not necessary to discuss the understanding with France. The tremendous growth of navies throughout the world, and especially of the German Navy, apparently made it essential in these later years that an *entente* or understanding with other powers should be established to the end that the safety of our ocean pathways might not be imperilled. It would appear that Great Britain was to safeguard the interests of France upon the ocean at certain vital points, as our interests were safeguarded by the French Navy in the Mediterranean. Public opinion in Great Britain halted and was indeed divided as to the just measure of our responsibilities; but the great voice of the nation certainly desired and intended that they should be honourably and effectively discharged, not only in the letter, but in the spirit. Every consideration was, however, swept aside, all doubt was dissipated, and public opinion throughout the Empire was rendered practically unanimous by the action of Germany herself. All the great powers of Europe had guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium by solemn treaty, first in 1832 and afterwards in 1839. In 1870 Great Britain had insisted that such neutrality should be respected by Germany