

Some Phases of the War Situation

[The address which is here printed was delivered by Sir George Foster, Minister of Trade and Commerce, at a luncheon of the Canadian Club of Ottawa held at the Chateau Laurier on Saturday, February 13th, 1915. The chair was occupied by Mr. H. I. Thomas, Vice-President of the Club, and there was a large attendance of members, the Prime Minister being among those at the guests' table.]

I propose to ask two or three questions and endeavour to answer them as briefly as possible. The first question is this:

Are we convinced that Britain did everything she possibly could to avert this war? That is a question which appeals to our individual consciences. However enthusiastic we may be in a war because it is a war conducted by the country to which we owe allegiance, there is always behind this enthusiasm a desire to feel assured personally that, although our country is in the war and we must therefore see it through, the cause for which we are fighting is absolutely a worthy cause, and that the war is therefore thoroughly justifiable. But when we pass from the individual to the wide world area, the importance of being satisfied upon a question of that kind is all the greater. For many thousands of years humanity has been working up towards the formation of a public conscience, a wide world tribunal, before which the causes of war are reviewed and by which decisions are arrived at in accordance with the facts as ascertained. This public conscience, this world opinion, was never so strong as it is at the present day. Never have the facilities for gathering information with reference to such an issue been so ample, and consequently at no period in the world's history could the verdict which has been, or is being, or will be rendered by that tribunal have greater force as a deciding factor.

First, then, let me answer the question as to whether it is a fact or not that Britain has done everything she possibly could to avert this war.

In the first place let me remark that Great Britain, much as counter opinions may run in some portions of the world, is not and has not been for the last century or two an aggressive nation. She has been the opposite of an aggressive nation. For the last century, to go back no further, Britain has been engaged in only one first-