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The Conscience of a Nation

A Letter From E. Phillips Oppenheim, the World's Most Popular Novelist, on the War Which He Prophesied Many Years Ago

Sheringham, Norfolk, Eng., April 15, 1915.

Joe Mitchell Chapple, Editor National Magazine, Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Chapple:
 For the last two years you have very kindly sent me a copy of The National Magazine, which I have always read with the utmost pleasure. I admire and appreciate so much the personal note which you contrive always to impart to each number, and which is an element entirely lacking in similar productions on this side. Your March number, however, has brought me a very disagreeable surprise. Frankly I have not read an article since the commencement of this gruesome war which commends itself so little to my intelligence or to my sympathy as the article by Mr. Burgess entitled "The Causes of the European Conflict."

I want you to believe, Mr. Chapple, that I am not one of those pig-headed Englishmen who see no side of any question except their own. Patriotism and nationality are great things, but there is, I believe, behind and governing them, a directing influence of thought which comes to our aid at times like this, and helps us to form an independent judgment even on matters in which our own interests and sympathies are deeply involved. I am an Englishman, but I am also, in a modest way, a thinker. To me this war comes, perhaps, with less of a shock because I have prophesied its advent by word of mouth and in print for the last six years. I lay claim to no particular insight in this matter, for Germany has all the time sharpened her sword in the sight of the world; she preached war, wanted war, and has got it. But I do claim to a mental attitude unbiased and unprejudiced.

There is, without a doubt, a reasonable German case to be presented against England. That case, however, has not been presented by your contributor. The truth about the war is so much a matter of common knowledge that it is scarcely necessary to point out the grossly distorted misstatements which all the while underlie the airy rhetoric of Mr. Burgess' article. I confine myself to one most flagrant paragraph, the one entitled "Belgium's Neutrality." Let me, if I may, rewrite that paragraph in plain and untwisted phrases. Let me offer you the truth in place of falsehood.

The independence of Belgium was guaranteed by Germany, France and England. I think you will agree that when the representative of a nation signs his name to a treaty, he commits his country and his country's honor to its observance. Germany desired to break that treaty and invade France through Belgium. She made propositions to Belgium which may or may not have been favorable. Belgium had a perfect right to refuse them, and she chose to refuse. Germany thereupon made it clearly understood that she intended, notwithstanding her written word, to persevere in her original intentions. Her pretext that France had already violated the neutrality of Belgium by invasion was false. No single French soldier had set foot upon Belgium soil. Belgium appealed to England.

"You signed the treaty guaranteeing our neutrality," she pointed out. "Germany threatens it. I call upon you to fulfill your share of the compact."
 Great Britain acknowledged her responsibility and reminded Ger-

THE WAR AND THE WEATHER

Does war affect the weather?
 It certainly affects almost everything else; and it were strange indeed if it did not affect more of this mundane sphere than the 3,000 miles of frontier along which the nations of Europe are fighting.
 If you do not believe it, look back a little to the time when the North and South fought like tigers. After the three-day battle at Gettysburg the whole of Southern Pennsylvania and of Northern Maryland had drenching rains which swelled the streams to unprecedented heights. That was the result of canonading in which not more than 300 field pieces were in use on both sides. The unexampled explosion of powder in shot and shell fire upset Jupiter Pluvius, and he wept for the greater part of a week over the entire area in which atmospheric conditions were unsettled by this memorable combat.

From the artillery standpoint the explosions in Europe are easily 25 times more extensive and disturbing in their effects on atmospheric conditions. Firing 20,000 shells in an hour, as was reported of the Austro-German assault on Przemyśl, could not but result in climatic upheavals more or less extraordinary in the areas immediately affected, to say nothing of remoter portions of the globe.
 But no one part of the atmospheric envelope that covers the earth could be so rent and sundered as that of the continent of Europe, without affecting intercontinental changes. That may account for the prolonged season of cloudiness that has hung over the eastern portion of North America, causing this unprecedentedly cool summer, which keeps our heater area going well into the middle of June. At any rate, the sun's progress north from the celestial equator does not seem to produce the usual rise in temperatures. And it is perfectly plausible that the clouds of war, including Germany's asphyxiating stunts, have so blackened the world's atmospheric belt as a whole as to screen Old Sol's rays down to an April temperature in the heart of early summer.

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