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The Rights of Small Nations

Premier Asquith Recalls to Parliament the Honourable Traditions of Warfare

ALL doubts as to the absolute sympathy between Great Britain and Belgium are ended. For a time the Belgians, having taken the full impact of the Germans, were said to be disgruntled by the slow advance of the Allies. The alleged fall of Namur was set down by some alarmists as due to Belgian weakening. But the speech of Premier Asquith moving the resolution asking King George to convey to Belgium the thanks of the British nation, makes it clear that the first and last principle of the war, so far as England is concerned, is to respect the rights of small neutral states like Belgium. The Premier is an Anglo-Saxon speaker of the John Bright school. He never Latinizes. His speech, concentrated in plain words, the present temper of the British nation, not the flamboyant patriotism of France, not the blind infatuation of Germany, not the overwhelming stolidity of Russia, but the sober, steady sentiment of the race which accustomed to wars the world over, has not for centuries had a battle on her own soil. In guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium as a closed door to France, the Premier knew, as the British race knows, that the occupation of Belgium by Germany, and the probable swift defeat of France, if Britain should remain neutral, would mean the ultimate annexation of Belgium to Germany, and a still greater menace to England herself.

The Premier said:

"Very few words are necessary to commend to the House the terms of this address. The war, which is now shaking to its foundations the whole European system, originated in a quarrel in which this country had no direct concern. We strove with all our might, as every one now knows, to prevent its outbreak, and, when that was no longer possible, to limit its area. It is of importance that it should be clearly understood when it was and why it was intervened. It was only when we were confronted with the choice between keeping and breaking solemn obligations, in the discharge of a binding trust, and a shameless subservience to naked force, that we threw away the scabbard. We do not repent our decision. The issue was one which no great and self-respecting nation, certainly none bred and nurtured like ourselves in this ancient home of liberty, could without undying shame have declined.

"We were bound by obligations plain and paramount to assert and maintain the threatened independence of a small and useful State. Belgium had no interests of her own to serve except the one supreme and overriding interest of every State, great or little, which is worthy of the name—the preservation of her integrity and her national life. History tells us that the duty of asserting and maintaining that great principle, which is, after all, the well-spring of civilization, has again and again, at most critical periods in the past fallen upon States relatively small in area and in population, but great in courage and resource, on Athens, Sparta, the Swiss cantons, and not less gloriously three centuries ago on the Netherlands.

"In the annals of liberty the Belgians have won for themselves the immortal glory which belongs to a people who prefer freedom to ease and security, even to life itself."

In this speech, the Premier, voicing the sentiments of every Empire-subject, gave the glory to the small nation, Belgium. It was but due and fitting. Belgium played the part of David to the Goliath. Belgium, and with but a sling and a few small stones, was able to impede the progress of the present man of Gath. All honour to little Belgium. The Kaiser's granite is being marked not only by the British bulldog, but by his playmates.



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