

forced to fight ourselves. What would be the position in the Mediterranean then when trade routes vital to this country might be interrupted? Nobody can say that in the course of the next few weeks there is any particular trade route, the opening of which might not be vital to this country. What would be our position then?

"The thing is going on practically within the sight of our eyes. Our arms are folded and we are looking on dispassionately; doing nothing, but I believe the feeling in this country is that if circumstances actually did arise that feeling would spread irresistibly.

#### The Point of View of British Interest.

"But I want to look at this thing also without sentiment. From the viewpoint of British interest I am going to justify what I propose to say to the House.

"Let us assume that unforeseen consequences arise which make it necessary at a sudden moment that in the defence of vital British interest we should go to war; and let me assume, what is quite possible, that Italy, which is now neutral, legitimately consulting her own interests, may depart from her attitude of neutrality.

"We have not kept in the Mediterranean a fleet which is equal to deal with a combination of the other fleets there; and at this very moment, when we could not detach more ships for the Mediterranean, we might expose this country through our negative attitude to most appalling risks.

"I say that, from the point of view of British interest, we felt strongly that France was entitled to know at once whether or not, in the event of an attack upon her unprotected northern and western coasts, she could depend upon British support. Under these compelling circumstances, yesterday afternoon I gave the French Ambassador the following statement:

"I am authorized to give assurance that if the German fleet comes into the German Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts and French shipping, the British fleet will give all protection in its power."

"This assurance is subject to the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding upon the Government until the contingency of action by the German fleet takes place.

"Things move so rapidly that I cannot give this in more than an informal way, but I understand that the German fleet will not attack the northern coast of France. I only heard that shortly before I came to the House; but it is far too narrow an engagement for us.

#### Germany's Effort to Barter Belgium's Neutrality.

"There is a more serious consideration, and one which is coming more serious every hour, namely, that of the neutrality of Belgium. The governing factor in this is the treaty of 1839 and that of 1870. Bismarck gave the assurance that the neutrality of Belgium would be respected, which is a valuable recognition on Germany's part of the sacredness of

treaty rights. That treaty is old, but we cannot take a less serious view of our obligation than did the Gladstone government in 1870.

"When the mobilization was beginning last week I knew that this question would be the most important element of our policy. I therefore telegraphed to Paris and Berlin saying that it was essential to know whether the French and German Governments were prepared to undertake an engagement in respect to the neutrality of Belgium. The French Government replied that it was resolved to respect the neutrality and would only in the event of some other power violating that neutrality find herself under the necessity of acting otherwise.

"Germany replied that the Secretary for Foreign Affairs could not possibly answer before consulting the Emperor. Chancellor Goschen said he hoped that an answer would not be long delayed. The Secretary of State gave Goschen to understand that he rather doubted whether he could answer at all, as any reply could not fail, in the event of a war, to have an undesirable effect in disclosing a part of their plan of campaign.

"We were sounded last week as to whether, if Belgian integrity were guaranteed at the conclusion of war, that would content us. We replied that we could not bargain away whatever interest and obligation we had in Belgian neutrality.

"King George received the following telegram from the King of the Belgians:

"Remembering the numerous proofs of Your Majesty's friendship and that of your predecessor, and the friendly attitude of England in 1870, and the proof of friendship she has just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the diplomatic intervention of Your Majesty's Government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium."

"We intervened diplomatically last week; what can diplomatic intervention do now?

"Great Britain could not proclaim unconditional neutrality. We made a commitment to France which prevents us doing that. We have to take into consideration also our obligation to Belgium, which prevents us also from any unconditional neutrality. We are bound not to shrink from proceeding to use all our force and all our powers.

"The intervention with Germany in regard to the independence of Belgium was carried out by England last night. If the independence of Belgium should be destroyed, the independence of Holland also would be gone.

"The one bright spot in this whole terrible condition is Ireland. The general feeling throughout Ireland, and I would like this to be thoroughly understood abroad does not make that a consideration which we have to take into account."

"With our tremendous responsibilities in India and other parts of the Empire, we must take very carefully into consideration the use which we make in sending an expeditionary force out of the country until we know how we stand.