

The Causes of the War

(*Second Paper*)

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[In preparing the following summary much use has been made of the presentation of Britain's case by the members of the Oxford Faculty of Modern History in the book entitled "Why we are at War". The book is commended to teachers, who will find it dispassionate and comprehensive.]

THE CASE OF BELGIUM.

THE Treaty of London in 1839 finally established the status of Belgium. Both her independence and her neutrality were guaranteed by Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Russia.

Bismarck made full use of this in 1870 in order to prevent Britain from supporting the cause of France, when he published proposals of the French made in 1866, that Prussia should help France to get Belgium, if France acquiesced in Prussian annexations in northern Germany. The result was that Britain asked Prussia and France to sign the same treaty, stipulating that, if either violated Belgium, Britain would join the other in defence of it.

By the seventh article of the Treaty of London, the existence of Belgium is dependent on her perpetual neutrality. By the fifth article of the Convention drawn up at the Hague Peace Conference in 1907, neutral powers are forbidden to permit belligerents to move troops or convoys across their territories. The Belgians kept the faith in proclaiming to the Germans "no thoroughfare". The Germans in forcing the passage broke the faith. In fighting for Belgium, Britain is fighting for the law of nations, that is to say, for the peace of nations and the right of the weak to live.

BRITAIN AND SMALL NATIONS.

In 1803 Britain demanded that the French should evacuate Holland and Switzerland. Napoleon replied, "Switzerland and Holland are mere trifles." Compare the "scrap of paper" interview between Sir Ed. Goschen and Bethmann-Hollweg. Neither the First Consul nor the Imperial Chancellor could understand why Britain should object to the violation of treaties.

Great Britain now, as in the case of Napoleon, regards the rights of smaller nations to exist as most important. For not only would it endanger her security to have a military state menacing her in the position of Belgium, but also the sanctity of treaties must be maintained;