

Why We are at War

(Prepared for the Victoria League)

By SIR EDWARD COOK

IV.

Belgium was constituted "an independent and perfectly neutral state" by treaties of 1831-2 and 1839. To these treaties Germany as well as Great Britain was a party. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the government of Mr. Gladstone proposed a treaty to Prussia and to France, providing that if the armies of either violated the neutrality of Belgium, Great Britain would co-operate with the other for its defence. Both countries assented. To this action "Mr. Gladstone then and always attached high importance." "We do not think it would be right," he said, "even if it were safe, to announce that we would in any case stand by with folded arms, and see actions done which would amount to a total extinction of public right in Europe." "I do not think we could look on while the sacrifice of freedom and independence was in course of consummation." "There is also this further consideration, the force of which we must all feel most deeply, and that is the common interests against the unmeasured aggrandizement of any power whatever."

The same question confronted Mr. Asquith's Government in 1914, and they took the same view of it. On July 31st, Sir Edward Grey—in view of existing treaties, asked both France and Germany "whether they were prepared to engage to respect neutrality of Belgium as long as no other power violates it." On the same day he "assumed" in a communication to Belgium, "that the Belgian government will maintain to the utmost of her power her neutrality." Belgium in reply "expects and desires that other powers will observe and uphold her neutrality, which she intends to maintain to the utmost of her power." France immediately gave Sir Edward Grey the desired assurance. Germany gave no answer.

Violation of Law.

On August 3rd Germany addressed an ultimatum to Belgium, saying that she would be treated as an enemy unless she consented to the violation of her territory. Belgium "categorically refused this as a flagrant violation of the law of nations," and the King of the Belgians appealed in the following terms to King George: "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 you have just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the diplomatic intervention of your Majesty's government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium."

On August 4th the British government addressed an ultimatum to Germany, saying that unless by midnight she gave a satisfactory reply to the question asked on July 31st, "His Majesty's government feel bound to take all steps in their power to uphold the neutrality of Belgium and the observance of a treaty to which Germany is as much a party as ourselves." Germany gave no reply except by the forcible violation of Belgian territory, and Britain accordingly declared war.

What We are Fighting For.

Thus, by an instructive coincidence, a crisis which began by the determination of Austria (backed by Germany) to apply brute force against the independence of a small state in South-eastern Europe came to a head, so far as Britain is concerned, by the determination of Germany (in alliance with Austria) to ride rough-shod over the neutrality of a small state in North-western Europe. "Gentlemen," said the German chancellor in the Reichstag (August 4), "we are now in a state of necessity, and necessity knows no law. Our troops have occupied Luxembourg, and perhaps are already on Belgian soil. Gentlemen, this is contrary to the dictates of international law. . . . Anybody who is threatened, as we are threatened, and is fighting for his highest possessions, can have only one thought—how he is to hack his way through."

"If I am asked what we are fighting for," said the prime minister in the House of Commons (August 6th), "I can reply in two sentences. In the first place, to fulfil a solemn international obligation—an obligation which, if it had been entered into between private persons in the ordinary con-

cerns of life, would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law, but of honor, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated.

"I say, secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle which, in these days when material force sometimes seems to be the dominant influence and factor in the development of mankind, that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering power. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy—and this is one of the greatest history will ever know—with a clearer conscience and stronger conviction that it is fighting, not for aggression, not for the maintenance even of its own selfish interest, but in defence of principles, the maintenance of which is vital to the civilization of the world, and with the full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice, but of the obligations which lay upon us to challenge this great issue."

The Issues at Stake.

"I ask the house," said Sir Edward Grey (August 3rd), "from the point of view of British interests, to consider what may be at stake. If France is beaten in a struggle of life and death, beaten to her knees, loses her position as a great power, becomes subordinate to the will and power of one greater than herself—consequences which I do not anticipate, because I am sure that France has the power to defend herself with all the energy and ability and patriotism which she has shown so often—still, if that were to happen, and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland and then Denmark, then would not Mr. Gladstone's words come true, that just opposite to us there would be a common interest against the unmeasured aggrandizement of any power?"

"It may be said, I suppose, that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and that, whatever happened in the course of this war, at the end of it intervene with effect to put things right and to adjust them to our own point of view. If in a crisis like this we ran away from those obligations of honor and interest as regards the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether whatever material force we might have at the end it would be of very much value in face of the respect that we should have lost."

At End of the War.

"At the end of this war, whether we have stood aside or whether we have been engaged in it, I do not believe for a moment—even if we had stood aside and remained aside—that we should be in a position, a material position, to use our force decisively to undo what had happened in the course of the war, to prevent the whole of the west of Europe opposite to us, if that had been the result of the war, falling under the domination of a single power, and I am quite sure that our moral position would be such—" (The rest of the sentence was lost, says the Times, in a loud outburst of cheering.)

The issues being thus vital to the civilization of the world, and to the freedom and integrity of Great Britain and of the British Dominions, "let us be sure," as the prime minister said, that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale." And let us bear ourselves through the struggle in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln's war motto: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right—let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up this nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace."

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That the United States embargo on Canadian livestock will not affect the livestock industry in Saskatchewan in the near future is the opinion of the deputy minister of agriculture of Saskatchewan. In speaking of this matter he stated: "Our own Canadian market is strong, owing to war conditions. It is still possible to ship hogs to South St. Paul provided they are immediately slaughtered. Last season there was a movement of feeder stuff, but it is probably not a bad thing that at this time such exports should be checked."