

# Through Europe on the Eve of War

A Record of Personal Experience

## LONDON IN WAR TIME

Our last four days were spent in London, with England at war with Germany. It was a unique experience. As will be seen from the correspondence between Sir Edward Grey and the different Powers, printed in the "White Book," England dotted all her energies to making peace up to the night that Germany entered Belgium. Dragged out of her position at the last moment, she declared herself in a state of war with Germany on the very evening we reached London. Our train from Brussels arrived about 8 p. m. Dr. Macfarland and I had telegraphed ahead to several hotels for accommodations and finally secured a room at the Cecil. After dinner we went out on the streets. London was setting excited. As we strolled down toward the Parliament buildings the crowd grew denser and denser and more demonstrative. It was about 10 p. m., and the Commons was awaiting Germany's answer to the British ultimatum concerning Belgium. The time limit expired at midnight and no answer had come. While we were on the streets the unsatisfactory answer came.

The whole city had been at fever heat since Mr. Asquith's declaration, made in the afternoon, that in view of Germany's continued refusal to make the same promise France had made, to respect Belgian neutrality, he had sent an ultimatum to Germany to respect the neutrality of Belgium and that the time limit had been set at midnight. My readers will be interested in seeing the exact words which Mr. Asquith used in his memorable speech—a speech which set all England on fire and which assured all Europe that England, whose attitude had hitherto been uncertain, was now committed to the general war. It was as follows:

In conformity with the statement of policy made by my Right Hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, yesterday, here a telegram was sent early this morning by him to our Ambassador in Berlin, and it was to this effect:

The King of the Belgians has made an appeal to His Majesty's government for diplomatic intervention on behalf of Belgium.

His Majesty's government are also informed that the German government has delivered to the Belgian government a note proposing friendly neutrality pending a free passage through Belgian territory, and promising to maintain the independence and integrity of the kingdom and its possessions on the conclusion of peace, and threatening in case of refusal, to treat Belgium as an enemy.

An answer was required within twelve hours.

We also understand that Belgium has categorically refused this flagrant violation of the law of nations. (Cheers.)

His Majesty's government are bound to protest against this violation of a treaty to which Germany is a party in common with ourselves and we must request an assurance that the demand made upon Belgium will not be proceeded with and that their neutrality will be respected by Germany. We asked for an immediate reply. (Loud cheers.)

We received this morning from our Minister at Brussels the following telegram:

"The German Minister has this morning addressed a note to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, stating that, as the Belgian government has declined the well-intentioned proposal submitted to them by the Imperial Government, the latter, deeply to their regret, will be compelled to carry out, if necessary by force of arms, the measures considered indispensable in view of the French menace."

Simultaneously we received from the Belgian Legation here the following telegram from the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs:

"The general staff announce that territory has been violated at Verwiers, near Aix-La-Chapelle."

Subsequent information tends to show that the German force has penetrated still further into Belgian territory.

We also received this morning from the German Ambassador here a telegram sent to him from the German Foreign Secretary and communicated by the Ambassador to us.

It is in these words: "Please dispel any distrust that may subsist on the part of the British government with regard to our intentions by repeating most positively the formal assurance that, even in the case of an armed conflict with Belgium, Germany will not under any pretense whatever annex Belgian territory." (Cries of "Oh! Oh!" and laughter.)

The sincerity of this declaration is borne out by the fact that we solemnly pledged our word to Holland strictly to respect their neutrality. It is obvious that we could not profitably annex Belgian territory without making a territorial acquisition at the expense of Holland.

Please impress upon Sir E. Grey that the German army could not be exposed to French attack across Belgium, which was planned according to absolutely unimpeachable information. Sir E. Grey has in consequence disregarded Belgian neutrality to prevent what means to her a ques-

tion of life and death, the French advance through Belgium.

I have to add this on behalf of H. M. government—we cannot regard this as in any sense a satisfactory communication.

We have in reply to it repeated the request made last week to the German government that they should give us the same assurance with regard to Belgian neutrality as was given to us and to Belgium by France last week, and we have asked that a reply to that request and a satisfactory answer to the telegram of this morning, which I have read to the House, should be given before midnight. (Loud and prolonged cheers.)

This announcement of the Premier was received with sadness in spite of the cheers, but with practically unanimous assent by the House. Men cried and cheered at the same time. It was the answer to the request in the last paragraph that all England was awaiting. Demonstrations were beginning as it drew on towards midnight and no answer came. Then, while all England was waiting, the news rushed down the streets shouting, "Germany has entered Belgium." That was the answer of Germany to the ultimatum. For the first time in my life I saw a mob go wild. The papers were snatched up by the surging crowd and in a moment all were gone. It drew on towards midnight and again the mob grew quiet. There was a hush that was terrible as the big clock struck twelve. At ten minutes past midnight someone rushed out of Commons and shouted: "War has been declared with Germany," and again the mob broke loose. Great hordes fell into line and marched through the streets shouting and singing, but the more serious portion shook their heads, for they knew what it meant—all Europe at war. One man turned to me and exclaimed: "It is the end of the world." I must confess I felt at that moment that he was not far off in his estimate. But since then I have gained more hope. It was an awful hour, however, when one learned that every great nation of Europe was involved in a universal war.

Wednesday morning dawned on a nation at war. The whole aspect of London had changed. The German steamship companies were boarding up all their office windows, the German shopkeepers were closing all their stores, and the German Ambassador was preparing to leave. The screams of news vendors filled the air. Merchants and business men wore serious faces. Little boys were marching through the streets in companies, carrying British flags and beating tin pans for drums. Before the war offices great crowds of young men were waiting to enlist. The King was reading the official proclamation from the steps of the War Office. The banks had all been ordered closed until Friday, to avoid panic and a sudden rush upon them by depositors. This last act greatly inconvenienced the Americans who had landed from the Continent with no English money or gold. The American Express Company opened their offices mornings and cashed checks up to \$40. One of the finest things of all was the act of the Great Eastern Railroad, which opened an office at its station and cashed any kind of checks for Americans up to \$50 in gold. (The superintendent of this railroad is an American, Mr. H. W. Thornton, and this truly philanthropic act was probably due to him.)

At the American Embassy great crowds of Americans were gathered. These were referred to the American Relief Committee, which had opened headquarters at the Savoy and was working in harmony with the Embassy. It was there I met Mr. Oscar S. Straus, who told me something of what the committee was doing. He afterwards gave out a statement to the London papers, which greatly relieved the Americans in London, although, unfortunately, it could not reach the 30,000 Americans left on the Continent. I went straight from the Embassy to the Savoy and got in touch with the American committee, which was doing remarkable work.

They informed me that the American cruiser Tennessee was about to sail with a great sum of money in gold to assist the Americans to get home. A banking office was opened, with Mr. F. I. Kent, vice-president of the Bankers' Trust Company of New York, at the head, which cashed many checks and helped any who were in immediate distress. By Friday the financial situation was relieved; the banks were opened, and it was possible to draw money on letters of credit. Also on this day the government issued notes for one pound and others for ten shillings. Then the American committee turned its attention to securing passage to America for stranded tourists. All the German and French boats had been called off and only a few boats of the Dutch and English lines were sailing. The tickets on the continental lines were useless, although they will probably be redeemed in New York. On Friday news came that the Omard line had fitted up the steamer of the Laconia for first-class passengers, and some of the men who had tickets for the Aqu-

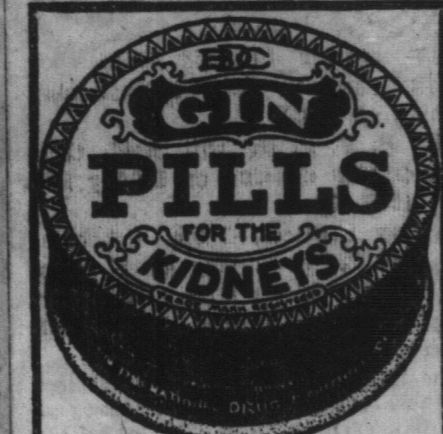
ila got passage on the Laconia. In this way some of the men of our party, myself among them, who had urgent family reasons for getting home immediately, got berths. (We sailed the next Saturday sleeping in the steerage, but in all other regards travelling first cabin. Our rooms were very satisfactory and clean and well ventilated.) The American committee assured all that they would be cared for and returned home sooner or later. It was also announced that the United States would soon be sending transports for those who could not get passage on the regular lines.

Wednesday was one of the most memorable days in the House of Commons that English history has seen. It was the day of the great debate on the first appropriation for the war—an appropriation of \$500,000,000. Some of our party, through the kindness of our English delegates who were members, were privileged to hear Mr. Asquith's memorable speech to the following motion:

"That a sum, not exceeding £100,000,000, be granted to His Majesty, beyond the ordinary grants of Parliament, toward defraying expenses that may be incurred during the year ending March 31, 1915, for all measures which may be taken for the security of the country, for the conduct of naval and military operations, for assisting the food supply, for promoting the continuance of trade, industry, and business communications, whether by means of insurance or indemnity against risk, or otherwise for the relief of distress, and generally for all expenses arising out of the existence of a state of war."

This speech will be one of the great documents of history, and represents the English point of view fairly. It showed conclusively how England strove to the bitter end not only to preserve peace between Germany and Russia and Germany and France, but even assured Germany that, would she refrain from aggression and keep calm, England would do everything to insure her against attack from Russia and France. Even after the bid of Germany to England to betray France, England still stood for peace.

It is needless to say that this speech was received with great enthusiasm; so great was the enthusiasm that some of the peace advocates in Parliament felt saddened at the seeming joy at going to war with Germany. These men had been working with Germans for years in establishing good-will between the two nations. They believed that there was no quarrel between the Germans and the English people, that the German people had been plunged into this war by a military caste; that we ought to be sad at having to fight them rather than joyful. The speeches made to this effect by our own friends, the English chairman and the English secretary of the Conference, Mr. J. Allen Baker, and Mr. Hon. W. H. Dickinson, were so brave and put this feeling so splendidly that I quote them here. I quote them from the Blue Book just as they were given, retaining the interruptions and all, that my readers may see how they were received:

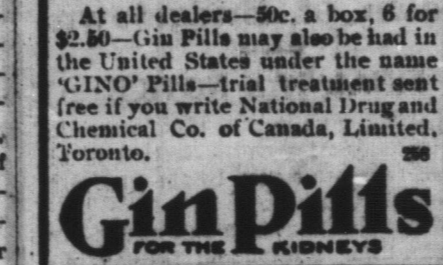


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altogether failed. They have not fared better, and later on we think we may still be able to establish that friendship between the two peoples. That is one of the reasons why I believe that Germany will be beaten in this great conflict, because it will ring the knell of the great military supremacy of those who rule in that country. We are fighting that military caste, and not the people of Germany. The people of Germany have had nothing to do with this war. Of course, it is true that they are enthusiastic for it. I have travelled through the towns of Germany, and have seen enthusiasm similar to that which is to be seen in our streets now, due to war fever, and also to the same more laudable sentiment of sympathy with the men who are going out to fight for their country. But the people of Germany have no knowledge of why they are fighting this war, and in particular why they are fighting against Great Britain. They will, I am sorry to say, not read these debates. They will be told that it is all our fault.

But I do think that, as far as we possibly can, we ought to tell them what is the true reason why Great Britain has entered in this war, and we may hope that, if we can win, we may lay down such conditions as will destroy that military supremacy which has brought Europe to the brink of destruction. (Inter-ruption.) I want, with great respect to the House—I do not know why they do not listen—to make three suggestions. For one thing, I would urge very strongly that we should not lose heart and lose all feelings of consideration for the Germans who are amongst us, many of whom have nothing but loyal and friendly feelings toward us. In the second place, I wish to ask that we shall have every opportunity of bringing about a satisfactory termination to the war. It will be a war involving great suffering and causing a torrent of blood in Europe, and therefore we should take every possible opportunity of seeing whether some arrangement could be arrived at or not to carry it further than necessary. And lastly, we ought to be prepared with some plan of settlement we ought to let Germany feel that we know exactly what we are really fighting for. We are fighting for the status quo. We are not fighting for any territorial changes in Europe, one way or the other. I know the feelings of Germany. I know that the feelings of the possibility of a strong combination over the Teutonic nations, and we should do our utmost to see that result does not accrue to us. (Inter-ruption.) I want, with great respect to the House, because I feel that we are entering upon a terrible war. When that war comes to an end, the problem will be only just begun. We have a task during the war, and at the end of the war it should be understood that our objects and intentions are as honest as those which we entertain at the present moment. (To be continued.)

Mr. Dickinson: I hope that the House will allow me to say a few words on this occasion, and for this reason, that for many years I have worked with other friends of mine for friendship between ourselves and the German nation, and I happened only last week to be sitting at the table with French and German and other individuals whose object was to assist in the promotion of friendship between nations. But do not rise to refer to that now, nor do I rise in order to criticize the government. I believe myself, from reasons and facts which came to my knowledge in Germany, that this war will be handed down to history as having been caused in the same way as every other war has been caused, by a mutual misunderstanding. (Hon. Members: "Divide.") But I do not want to raise that question at the present moment; I only rise because I hope that the House will give me the opportunity to say a few words upon the present situation. (Hon. Members: "No!" and "Order!") This is not the time for Hon. Members to "hear, hear!" for criticism or reprimand; we are in war, and we have to go forward with that war, and personally, as is the case with every man here, my vote and my voice, and every action of which I would be capable, will be given to the support of our soldiers and sailors in this conflict. It is for this reason that I ask to be allowed to say a few words upon this occasion.

Many of us have been laboring for years to bring about an extended friendship between the English and German people, and with great respect I venture to think that we have succeeded. The sentiment of the mass of the German people towards us has improved enormously. (Hon. Members: "Agreed.")

The Chairman (Mr. Whitley): Hon. Member should listen to the Hon. Member. He is entitled to be heard.

Mr. Dickinson: But the great obstacle that we have experienced has been the existence of a great and powerful military caste. A weapon which was formed for the purpose of defense has become an uncontrolled instrument of offense now in that country. It is a class that lives for war, that battens on the lust of aggrandizement, and is always aiming at and preparing for war. It has no regard for man's rights, and no respect for international rules, and its motto is that "Might is right!"

That caste has acquired such strength that it controls not only the feelings and thoughts of the people, but even has two great influences upon the wishes of its sovereigns. Europe is now witnessing the results of the curse of conscription. This war has been of course, foreseen, not only by Hon. Gentlemen opposite, but by those who have been working for peace as between Germany and ourselves, and it is for that very reason that we have labored to achieve some success in that direction. Our efforts have not

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