

"stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded."

British interests pointed in the same direction. If England had declared her intention of remaining neutral, France might have withdrawn her fleet from the Mediterranean; and as we do not now keep a fleet there strong enough to deal alone with possible combinations, our trade-routes and inter-Imperial communications through that sea would have been in danger.

Accordingly, on August 3, Sir Edward Grey was authorised by the Cabinet to give an assurance to France "that if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against French coasts or shipping, the British Fleet will give all the protection in its power."

This was not a declaration of war, but a contingent obligation to make war. The further and final decision was caused by the action of Germany towards Belgium.

### *The Case of Belgium*

Belgium was constituted "an independent and perfectly neutral State" by treaties of 1831-2 and 1839. To those 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 aggrandisement of any Power whatever."

The same question confronted Mr. Asquith's Government in 1914, and they took the same view of it. On July