

LLOYD-GEORGE DEFENDS BRITAIN'S HONOR

HERE is no man in this room who has always regarded the prospect of engaging in a great war with greater reluctance, with greater repugnance, than I have done throughout the whole of my political life. There is no man, either inside or outside this hall, more convinced than I that we could not have avoided it without national dishonor.

I am fully alive to the fact that every nation which has ever engaged in any war has always invoked the sacred name of honor. Many a crime has been committed in its name. There are some crimes being committed now in its name. All the same, national honor is a reality, and any nation that dishonors it is doomed. In the first place, we are bound by honorable obligations to defend the independence, liberty and integrity of a small neighbor, who has lived peaceably. She could not have compelled us. She was weak.

A man who declines to discharge his debt because his creditor is too poor to enforce it is a blackguard.

The Precedent of 1870

We entered into a treaty, a solemn treaty, two treaties, to defend Belgium and her integrity. Our signatures are attached to the document. But our signatures do not stand alone there. This was not the only country that undertook to defend the integrity of Belgium. Russia, France, Austria, Prussia—they are all there. Why are they not performing the obligations of their bond?

It is suggested that, when we quote this treaty, it is purely an excuse on our part.

It is our "low craft and cunning," just to cloak our jealousy of a "superior civilization," which we are attempting to destroy. Our answer is the answer we took in 1870. What was that? Mr. Gladstone was then Prime Minister, and Lord Granville was Foreign Secretary. I have never heard it laid to their charge that they were very jingo. What did they do in 1870?

Stood Up for Treaties.

The treaty bound us then. We called upon the belligerent Powers to respect that treaty. We called upon France, upon Germany. At that time the greatest danger to Belgium came from France, and not from Germany. We intervened to protect Belgium against France, exactly as we are doing it now to protect her against Germany. We proceeded in exactly the same way. We invited both belligerent Powers to state that they had no intention of violating Belgian territory. What was the answer given by Bismarck? He said it was superfluous to ask Prussia such a question, in view of the treaties in force. France gave a similar answer.

We received the thanks at that time of the Belgian people for our intervention in a very remarkable document. It is a document addressed by the municipality of Brussels to Queen Victoria after that intervention:

"The great and noble people over

whose destinies you preside has just given a further proof of its benevolent sentiments toward our country. The voice of the English nation has been heard above the din of arms; it has asserted the principles of justice and right. Next to the unalterable attachment of the Belgian people to their independence, the strongest sentiment which fills their hearts is that of an imperishable gratitude to the people of Great Britain."

How France Kept her Treaty

That was in 1870. "Mark what followed. Three or four days after that document was received the French army was wedged up against the Belgian frontier, every means of escape shut out a ring of flame from Prussian cannon. There was one way of escape. What was that? Violate the neutrality of Belgium. What did they do? The French on that occasion preferred ruin, humiliation, to the breaking of their bond. French emperor, French marshals, a hundred thousand gallant Frenchmen in arms, preferred to be carried captive to the strange land of their enemy rather than dishonor the name of their country.

It was the last French army in the field. Had they violated Belgian neutrality the whole history of that war would have been changed. Yet when it was for the interest of France to break the treaty, she did not do it.

It is the interest of Prussia to break the treaty, and she has done it.

Scraps of Paper

Why? She avows it. With cynical contempt for every principle of justice, she says treaties only bind you when it is to your interest to keep them. "What is a treaty?" says the German Chancellor—"A scrap of paper."

Have any of you any five-pound notes about you? I am not calling for them. Have you any of those neat little treasury one-pound notes? If you have, burn them—they are only "scraps of paper." What are they made of? Rags. What are they worth? The whole credit of the British Empire.

"Scraps of paper!" I have been dealing with scraps of paper within the last few years. We suddenly found the commerce of the world coming to a standstill. The machine had stopped. Why? We discovered, many of us for the first time, that the machinery of commerce was moved by bills of exchange. I have seen some of them—wretched, crinkled, scrawled-over, blotched, frowsy—and yet these wretched little scraps of paper moved great ships laden with thousands of tons of precious cargo

from one end of the world to the other.

What was the motive power behind them? The honor of commercial men. Treaties are the currency of international statesmanship. Let us be fair. German merchants, German traders, have the reputation of being as upright and straightforward as any traders in the world. But if the currency of German commerce is to be debased to the level of that of their statesmanship, no trader from Shanghai to Valparaiso will ever look at a German signature again.

The Road to Barbarism

The doctrine of the scrap of paper, the doctrine which is proclaimed by Bismarck, that treaties only bind a nation so long as it is to its interests, go under the root of all public law; it is a straight road to barbarism.

We are fighting against barbarism—and there is only one way of putting it right. If there are nations that say they will only respect treaties while it is to their interest to do so we must make it to their interest to do so for the future.

What is their defence? Just look at the interviews which took place between our ambassador and great German officials. When their attention was called to the treaty to which they were a party they said: "We cannot help that; rapidity of action is the great German asset."

There is a greater asset for a nation than rapidity of action, and that is honest dealing.

"Shall Caesar Send a Lie?"

What are their excuses? Germany says Belgium was plotting against her, and that Belgium was engaged in a great conspiracy with Britain and with France to attack her. Not merely is it not true, but Germany knows it is not true. What is her other excuse? France meant to invade Germany through Belgium. Absolutely untrue.

France offered Belgium five army corps to defend her if she were attacked. Belgium said, "I do not require them, I have got the word of the Kaiser. Shall Caesar send a lie?"

All these tales about conspiracy have been vamped up since. A great nation ought to be ashamed of itself to behave like a fraudulent bankrupt—and perjure its way through its obligations. She has deliberately broken this treaty, and we were in honor bound to stand by it.

What Had Belgium Done?

Belgium has been treated brutally. How brutally we shall not yet know. We know already too much. What had she done? Had she sent an ultimatum to Germany? Had she challenged Germany? Was she prepared to make war on Germany? Had she inflicted any wrong on Germany which the Kaiser was bound to redress? She was one of the most unoffending little countries in Europe. There she was, peaceable, industrious, thrifty, hard-working, giving offence to no one. And her cornfields have been trampled down, her villages burned to the ground, her art treasures destroyed, her men have been slaughtered, yes, and her women and children.

What had she done? Hundreds of thousands of her people have had their quiet, comfortable little homes burned to the dust, and they are wandering homeless in their own land. What was their crime? The crime was that they trusted to the word of the Prussian King.

Belgium's Sacred Rights.

I am not going to enter into these tales of outrages. Many of them are untrue; they always are in war. War is a grim, ghastly business at best or at worst; and I am not going to say that all that has been said in the way of tales of outrages must necessarily be true.

I will go beyond that, and I will say that if you turn 2,000,000 men, forced, conscripted, compelled, driven into the field, you will get amongst them a certain number of men who will do that of which the nation itself would be ashamed. I am not depending on that. It is enough for me to have the story which Germans themselves avow, admit, defend, proclaim. The burning, the massacring, the shooting down of harmless people. Why? Because, according to the Germans, they fired on German soldiers.

No Right There.

What business had German soldiers there at all? Belgium was acting in the pursuance of her most sacred right, the right to defend her own home. But they were not in uniform when they were shot. If a burglar broke into the Kaiser's palace at Potsdam, destroyed his furniture, shot down his servants, ruined his art treasures, specially those he had made himself—(loud laughter)—burned his precious manuscripts, do you think he would wait till he got into uniform—(laughter)—before he shot the burglar down? They were dealing with those who had broken in to their household.

But German perfidy has already failed. They entered Belgium to save time, but they have lost their good name.

Greatness of Little Nations. The greatest art of the world was



chosen little nations as the vessels by which he carries the choicest wines to the lips of humanity, to rejoice their hearts, to exalt their vision, to stimulate and to strengthen their faith and if we had stood by when two little nations were being crushed and broken by the brutal hands of barbarism, our shame would have rung down the everlasting ages.

Britain Their Protection. Britain has again and again been the protector of the little nations. You go to Greece, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and France, and all these lands, gentlemen, could point out to you places where the sons of Britain have died for the freedom of these countries.

You cannot name a single country in the world for the freedom of which the modern Prussian has ever sacrificed a single life? The test of our faith, the highest standard of civilization is the readiness to sacrifice for others.

They could not comprehend the action of Britain at the present moment. They say so. "France," they say, "we can understand. She is out for vengeance; she is out for territory—Alsace-Lorraine. Russia, she is fighting for mastery; she wants Galicia."

Can Only Understand Selfishness. They can understand vengeance,

they can understand your fighting for mastery, they can understand your fighting for greed or territory; they cannot understand a great Empire pledging its resources, pledging its might, pledging the lives of its children, pledging its very existence to protect a little nation that seeks for its defence.

You know the type of motorist, the terror of the road, with a 60-horse power car. He thinks the roads are made for him, and anybody who impedes the action of his car by a single mile is knocked down.

The Prussian junker is the road-hog of Europe. Small nationalities in his way are hurled to the roadside, bleeding and broken; women and broken; women and children crushed under the wheels of his cruel car. Britain ordered out of his road!

All I can say is this: If the old British spirit is alive in British hearts, that bully will be torn from his seat. Were he to win it would be the greatest catastrophe that has befallen democracy since the days of the Holy Alliance and its ascendancy. They think we cannot beat them. It will not be easy. It will be a long job. It will be a terrible war. But in the end we shall march through terror in triumph.

(Continued on page 6)

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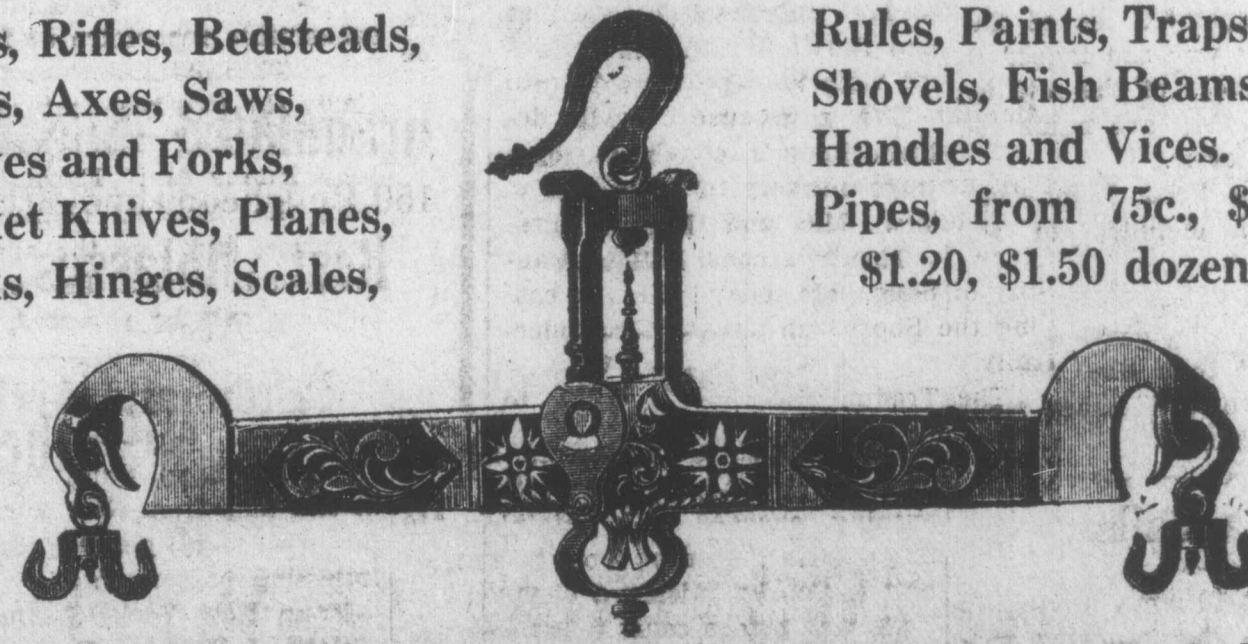
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