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WHY GREAT BRITAIN IS NOW ENGAGED IN WAR

(Continued from page 3.)
would be a disgrace for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover.

"The Chancellor also in effect asks us to bargain away whatever obligation or interest we have as regards the neutrality of Belgium. We could not entertain that bargain either."

Sir Edward Grey went on, as already stated, to suggest other terms on which good relations between England and Germany might be secured.

BRITAIN BECOMES INVOLVED

The historic interview between the German Chancellor and the British Ambassador, and the British Government's reply to the Chancellor's proposal, show how Britain was driven to take part in the war by honour, by obligation, and by the interests of self defence.

The case falls under two heads—France and Belgium, with which we will deal in turn.

In the case of our relation to France, there was the call of honour and self-interest, but no direct obligation; in that of our relation to Belgium, honour, obligation and self-defence all combined.

The Case of France

In 1904 the Conservative Government concluded an agreement with France, settling all outstanding questions between her and this country.

In 1907, the Liberal Government concluded a similar Agreement with Russia. What is called the "Triple Entente" thus grew up between England, France and Russia.

It was often regarded as a balance against the "Triple Alliance" (Austria, Germany and Italy). But so far as England was concerned, it was a friendly relationship, not a formal alliance.

Except in the specific matters dealt with by the two Agreements, England was under no obligation to support either France or Russia.

Some Instances

In 1906, when Germany was giving trouble to France on account of Morocco, Sir Edward Grey expressed the personal view to the French Government that if war were forced upon France in consequence of the Anglo-French Agreement, public opinion in this country would favor the giving of material as well as diplomatic support.

In 1908, when the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria caused an international crisis (Russia protesting against the annexation and Germany "in shining armour" supporting her Austrian ally), Sir Edward Grey told the Russian Government that this being a Balkan affair, in which England had no direct interest or concern, nothing more than diplomatic support could be given by her.

Thus each case was left to be decided on its own merits.

ON THE EVE OF THE WAR IN EUROPE

What, then, was the case as it existed in the critical days at the end of July and beginning of August?

France, having no longer anything to fear from England, had concentrated her fleet in the Mediterranean. Her northern coasts were unprotected. Sir Edward Grey's opinion was, "that if a foreign fleet, engaged in a war with France had not sought and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and battered the unprotected coast of France," we could not honourably stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded."

British Interests

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 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 authorized 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.

PART PLAYED BY KINGDOM 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."

Could Not Stand By

"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 deeply, and that is the common interests against the unmeasured aggrandisement of any Power whatever."

Faced Same Question

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

On July 31, 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 which she intends to maintain to the utmost of her power."

France immediately gave Sir Edward Grey the desired assurance. Germany gave no answer.

German Ultimatum

On August 3 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."

British Ultimatum

On August 4 the British Government addressed an ultimatum to Germany saying that unless by midnight she gave a satisfactory reply to the question asked on July 31, "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.

GERMANY VIOLATED THE TREATY

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, and is fighting for his highest possessions, can have only one thought—how he is to hack his way through."

What We Fight For

"If I am asked what we are fighting for," said the Prime Minister in the House of Commons (August 5), "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 concerns of life, would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law, but of honour, which no self-respecting man could 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."

Clear Conscience

"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."

GRAVEST ISSUES ARE AT STAKE

"I ask the House," said Sir Edward Grey (August 3), "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 dominant 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 aggrandisement of any Power?"

Couldn't Stand Aside

"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 honour and interest as regards the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether whatever material force we might have at the end of it would be of very much value in face of the respect that we should have lost."

Forever Dishonored

"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 dominant of a single Power, and I am quite sure that our normal position would be such—" (The rest of the sentence was lost, says The Times, in a loud outburst of cheering.)

Vital to Civilization

The issues being thus vital to the civilization of the world, and to the freedom and integrity of Great Britain and the British Dominions, "let us be sure," as the Prime Minister said, "that all the resources, not only of the United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale."

"And let us bear ourselves thro' 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.'"

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