

States, the one thing they desire is that they should be left alone—(cheers)—the one thing they fear is that their independence should not be maintained. (Cheers.) If in the war that is before Europe the neutrality of one of these countries is violated, if the troops of one of the combatants violate its neutrality and no action is taken to resent that, at the end of the war, whatever the integrity may be, the independence will be gone. (Cheers.) I have one further quotation, also from Mr. Gladstone, as to what he thought about the independence of Belgium: "We have an interest in the independence of Belgium. It is found in the answer to the question whether this country would quietly stand by and witness the perpetration of the direst crime that ever stained the pages of history and thus become participators in the sin." (Loud cheers.) If it be the case that there has been anything in the nature of an ultimatum to Belgium asking her to compromise or violate her neutrality whatever may have been offered to her in return her independence is gone, and if her independence goes the independence of Holland will follow. (Cheers.) I would ask the House from the point of view of British interests to consider what may be at stake. (Loud cheers.) 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 a Power greater than herself, a consequence which I do not anticipate—(loud cheers)—because I am sure that France has the power to defend herself with all the energy and ability which she has shown in the past, but if that does happen and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland and then Denmark, Mr. Gladstone's words would come true. Just opposite to us there would be a common interest against the unmeasured aggrandizement of another Power.

If We Stand Aside.

It may be said that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and at the end of the war intervene to effect to put things right and adjust them to our own point of view. If in a crisis like this we run away—(loud and prolonged cheers)—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. (Cheers.) I do not believe that whether a great Power stands outside this war or not it is going to be in a position at the end of the war to exert its material influence. For us, with a powerful fleet which we believe able to protect our commerce, to protect our shores, to protect our interests, if we are engaged in war we shall suffer but little more than what we shall suffer even if we stand aside. Whether we are in it or whether we stand aside, foreign trade is going to stop, not because the trade routes are closed, but because there is no trade at the other end. Continental nations engaged in war—all their population, their energies and their wealth engaged in a desperate struggle—you cannot carry on such a trade as you would carry on in time of peace, whether we are parties to the war of whether we are not. If we stand aside I do not believe for a moment we should be in a position to use our material power to avoid or undo what has happened in the course of the war, to prevent the whole of Western Europe falling under the domination of a single Power, and I am quite sure our moral position will be worse. (Opposition cheers.) I am not yet sure that we know all the facts, but if the facts turn out to be as they have reached us up to the present time it is

quite clear that there is an obligation on the country to do its utmost to prevent the consequence to which those facts will lead.

British Mobilization.

I have read to the House the only engagement that we have definitely entered into. I think it is due to the House to say that we have made no engagement yet in regard to sending an expeditionary armed force out of the country. (Radical cheers.) Mobilization of the fleet has taken place; mobilization of the army is taking place. (Loud Opposition cheers.) Apart from that we have made no engagement because we recognize that we have enormous responsibilities in India and other parts of the Empire. There are unknown factors which we must take very carefully into consideration before we send an expeditionary force out of the country. We must know how we stand. One thing I would say, one of the bright spots in this very dreadful situation is Ireland. (Cheers.) The position in Ireland, and this I should like to be clearly understood abroad, is not a consideration among the things we have to take into account. Now I have told the House how far we have gone in commitment and the conditions which affect our policy. With the question of the violation of the neutrality what other policy is there before the House. There is one way by which we can make certain of keeping outside the area of conflict. It is open to us to proclaim an unconditional neutrality. We cannot do so. (Overwhelming cheering.) We have made a commitment to France which prevents us from doing that. We have the question of Belgian neutrality before us, which prevents us from taking up a position of unconditional neutrality. These conditions have to be satisfied, and we are bound not to shrink from the use of all the force in our power. If we do not take the line I have indicated—and we have to consider Belgian treaty rights, the possible position in the Mediterranean and the results to ourselves and to France through our failure to support her—if we say that these things matter nothing, I believe that we should sacrifice our respect, our name and our reputation, and that we should not escape the most serious economic consequences.

We Are Ready.

Well, Sir, my object has been to explain the view of the Government and to place before the House the issues of choice. I do not for a moment assert that what I have said is complete, more especially as to the information I have been able to convey to the House with regard to Belgium. But I have, perhaps, said enough to show that we must be prepared. (Loud cheers.) We are prepared. (Great cheering which continued for over a minute.) We are prepared for the consequences that may arise from the attitude we have adopted. We are ready to take our part. (Renewed cheers.) From the facts as I have stated them, there is nothing pointing to immediate aggressive action on our part, but in the end we may have to resort to force. So far as the forces of the Crown are concerned, we are ready. (Loud cheering.) I believe the Secretary for War (Mr. Asquith) and the First Lord of the Admiralty have no doubt that the readiness and efficiency of the forces under their charge was never before at a higher mark, and that never has there been a time when there was more confidence which was justified in the power of our navy to protect our commerce and to protect our shores. A great responsibility rests upon the Government in deciding and advising the House of Commons what to do.