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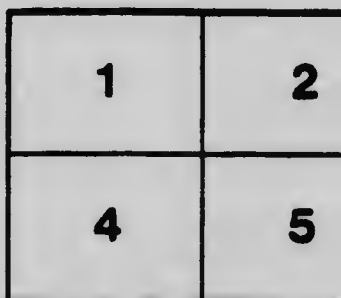
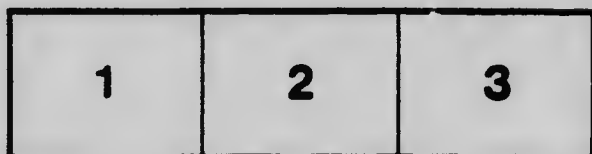
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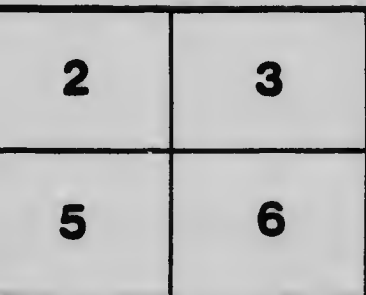
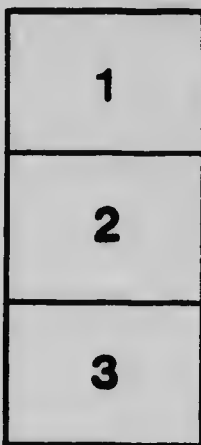
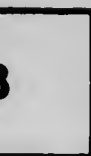
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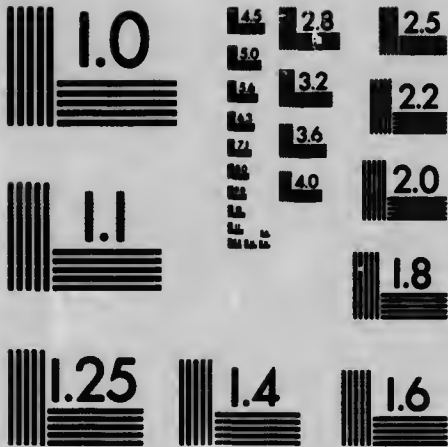
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A LETTER TO
DR. GEORGE BRANDIS

BY
WILLIAM ARCHER.

HODDER & STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

1917
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A LETTER TO DR. GEORGE BRANDES.

London, January 1, 1917.

DEAR DR. BRANDES,

A few months ago, you did me the honour to cross swords with me in a discussion arising out of the "Appeal" which you issued at the instance of the Ford Peace Committee in Stockholm. The discussion was conducted on your side, and I hope on mine, with the utmost courtesy and good feeling. But when the destinies of the world are at stake, there comes a point at which private esteem and admiration must give way to the sense of public duty. In a late number of *Politiken* I find reproduced in facsimile

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the title-page of a copy of your book on "The World-War," presented by you to some charitable enterprise, with the following autograph inscription:—

It needs only half a score of mediocrities, distributed in the right places as European Ministers of State, to plunge two hundred millions of people into misery.

GEORGE BRANDES.

When I find you harping on this catchword, I am moved to slip the button off my foil and tell you in plain language that you are taking refuge behind a poor platitude in order to evade your intellectual and moral duty as one of the leaders of European thought. If you are really so ignorant of the antecedents of this catastrophe as to think that any possible genius on the part of the Entente statesmen could have averted war, in the face of Germany's craving for plunder and domination, then I suggest that you ought to be silent until you have adequately informed yourself of the state of the German mind during the past twenty years. But it is absurd to suppose that your attitude is due to ignorance. You know very well that the fount and origin of the whole evil lies in Germany. You saw it coming—you predicted it—years ago. Then why do you now make it your business to

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distribute over all Europe the guilt which you know in your heart to rest upon the Central Empires alone? There is only one conceivable reason: your racial resentment against one of the Allies is too strong for your sense of justice, for your historic candour. I do not say that your resentment is groundless; but I do say you ought to have had the magnanimity to rise above it, and not to let the wrongs of your race make you the apologist of the authors of a colossal wrong inflicted upon all humanity.

You will tell me that you are not an apologist for Germany. Not directly, no; but indirectly you are one of her busiest champions. When a crime is committed, a man who speaks no plain word in condemnation of it, but devotes himself to arguing that the victims were ruffians and fools, may fairly be called an apologist for the criminal.

You keep repeating that the statesmen of the Entente were "mediocrities." I doubt whether history will endorse that verdict; but in any case it is nothing to the purpose, until you have shown what the most brilliant ability could have done to hold in leash the ferocious cupidity and power-hunger of Germany. You enlarge upon what you consider errors and injustices in British

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foreign policy, accepting uncritically the hostile version of the matter (often stated, I admit, by Englishmen), and taking no pains to inform yourself of the case for the defence. You have actually gone the length of comparing Britain's action in Persia with Germany's treatment of Belgium—an extravagance which I think your sober judgment will one day recognise and deplore. But supposing you were right in making a saint and martyr of Persia, what has that to do with the question of the world-war? You will scarcely pretend, I suppose, that it was sympathy for the wrongs of Persia that led Germany to devastate and enslave Belgium. All this querulous criticism of the action of the Allied Powers, whether before or during the war, is merely an excuse to your own conscience for your silence, or your inadequate and ineffectual speech, on the one great issue on which the world had a right to look to you for a clear, and decisive, and unequivocal judgment. Who could have foreseen that in this great crisis of history George Brandes, the high-souled humanist, the daring outpost-fighter for political and spiritual freedom, would be found snarling at the heels of the champions of his own ideals, and would have no word of outspoken condemnation for one of the most monstrous of recorded crimes against humanity?

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Of course I do not doubt that you are sincere in your low esteem for the intelligence of the statesmen, in all countries, who held the fate of Europe in their hands. What I suggest is that, in constantly recurring to this idle complaint, you are diverting your own and your readers' attention from the true issue, which you dare not—or, at any rate, will not—face. That issue is simply: Who willed the war? and you know as well as I do that the short, and plain, and only true answer is: Germany. You know—if you have any acquaintance with German political literature of the past quarter of a century—that not only the military caste, but all the official classes of Germany, were permeated with a theoretical and dogmatic war-worship, which made them openly contemptuous of all efforts towards the safeguarding of European peace. They frankly regarded war as Germany's most paying industry, and at the same time as a "drastic remedy" for the spiritual ills of all the world, and chiefly of Germany herself. You know that German technical efficiency had begotten in the nation at large a vast and overweening self-esteem—a megalomania which made them conceive themselves appointed by Heaven to confer their Kultur—by force, if need be—upon the whole world. If you have any doubt on this point I can refer you to scores

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of passages in which the naïve conviction is avowed. You know that these general tendencies of the national mind found definite expression in vast designs both for actual conquest and for "peaceful penetration." There is scarcely a region from the Skaw to the Persian Gulf which Pan-German ambition has not marked down for its own, planning at the same time the expropriation, if not the extermination, of the actual possessors of the soil. The Pan-Germans, you may say, are a small sect of extremists. They are not so very small, and they are elaborately organised; but I do not insist on them. It is quite sufficient to point to openly avowed ambitions and designs of official persons, from the Kaiser downwards.

You know—for who does not?—that the insular security of Britain and the extent of her oversea dominions had come to be reckoned an injury and an offence to German greatness. You know that Germany had deliberately undertaken the task of "wresting the trident" from England's hands—or in other words of making herself so strong at sea that she could force her will upon us whenever she pleased. I am sure you realise perfectly that their growing navy was the idol of the German people, simply because it gave tangible expression to their embittered

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hatred for England. Perhaps you may not have realised, but it is openly confessed by high German authorities, that the Kaiser's patronage of Turkey, and his wholly uninvited proclamation of himself as the protector of Mohammedan peoples throughout the world, were simply the first moves in a deliberate plan for attacking the British Empire in what he considered its keystone — Egypt. You know that not Pan-Germans only, but even the most moderate political thinkers in Germany, had fixed their eyes on Asia Minor as the most promising field for German expansion in the near future. You know that, for that reason, Germany could not tolerate a barrier of strong and independent Slav States interposed between her and her Turkish vassals. You know that this was her motive for backing up her accomplice, Austria, in her wanton onslaught upon Serbia, even after the almost abject submission of that little kingdom to her arrogant demands. And you know — or you ought to know, for the documents in the case are clear and readily accessible — that, when the crisis came, England, France, and Russia strove to the very last for peace, while Germany and Austria rejected or ignored every proposal for accommodation, arbitration, reference to the Hague Tribunal, or to a conference of the Powers. You know, in short, that the war was precipitated

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because, at the critical moment, German militarism took the control into its own hands, and touched the button which released its gigantic mechanism of destruction.

And what was the first exploit of the hideous machine? It hurled itself upon a small, highly civilised, industrious, inoffensive nation which Germany had sworn to protect, and which had done her no wrong save that of existing in an inconvenient situation. I am sure I need not trouble to comment upon the childish futility of her belated efforts to justify this outrage, on the plea that Belgium had "forfeited" her neutrality by considering how, in case of need, it might be defended. You know as well as I do that there is not the smallest excuse for Germany's cowardly and treacherous breach of faith. But there are different degrees of crime. It would have been possible for Germany, in view of the wrong she was doing, to treat Belgium with all the consideration and humanity that was consistent with her military ends. Instead of making any such endeavour, she chose to wreak her evil conscience upon the unhappy country by subjecting it to a martyrdom without parallel in recent history. And towards this truly diabolical crime, what, sir, is your attitude? I am aware that you regard it with mild disapproval,

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and have said one or two rather cutting things about it. But I have looked in vain for any utterance of burning indignation, for any arraignment of this gigantic baseness and brutality, at all commensurate either with the occasion, or with your well-known passion for humanity. You are troubled about many things—about Persia, about Greece, about Britain's abominable conduct in delaying, and even opening, your letters—but you accept the most deliberate and cold-blooded crime in the history of Western Europe with something nearly approaching to philosophic tolerance. When I think of your great record as a hater of oppression, a fighter against "l'infâme" in whatever guise it presented itself, I am filled with amazement and sorrow.

That Germany was inspired by an aggressive philosophy, that her ruling classes cherished schemes of aggression, and that she had come to regard ruthlessness as a characteristic German virtue, you cannot possibly deny. That the same description applied, in anything like an equal degree, to any of the Allied Powers, you cannot possibly maintain. You may perhaps hold that Germany's motives for aggression were justified, and that she was bound, in her own legitimate interests, to bring about this world-

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catastrophe; but in that case why do you insist on distributing the responsibility among all the nations concerned? Would you have had England, France, and Russia place themselves unresistingly under Germany's heel? I do not understand, however, that, even apart from the question of Belgium, you actually justify the action of Germany. You only refrain from speaking out about it, while you speak out boldly and bitterly about the sins of the Allies. I know that this is not inexplicable. I know that your country lives in the very jaws of Germany, while from the Allies she has nothing to fear. That might be a good reason for holding your tongue altogether; but it is a very poor reason for displaying the *triste courage* to attack and malign the nations who are pouring out their blood and treasure in defence of the very things which—unless your spirit has become hopelessly Prussianised—you hold most precious for the future of civilisation.—Yours truly,

WILLIAM ARCHER.

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