

By ARTHUR  
PONSONBY  
M.P.

*Falsehood in War-Time*

An  
amazing  
collection of care-  
fully documented  
lies circulated in Great  
Britain, France, Ger-  
many, Italy and America  
during the Great War.















# FALSEHOOD IN WAR-TIME



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CAMEL AND THE NEEDLE'S EYE  
THE DECLINE OF ARISTOCRACY  
DEMOCRACY AND DIPLOMACY  
WARS AND TREATIES (1815-1914)  
A CONFLICT OF OPINION  
(A discussion on the failure of the Church)  
RELIGION IN POLITICS  
NOW IS THE TIME. (An appeal for peace)

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THE PRIORY AND MANOR OF LYNCHMERE  
AND SHULBREDE  
ENGLISH DIARIES  
MORE ENGLISH DIARIES  
SCOTTISH AND IRISH DIARIES

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*With Dorothea Ponsonby*

REBELS AND REFORMERS



may be more on their guard when the war cloud next appears on the horizon and less disposed to accept as truth the rumours, explanations, and pronouncements issued for their consumption. They should realize that a Government which has decided on embarking on the hazardous and terrible enterprise of war must at the outset present a one-sided case in justification of its action, and cannot afford to admit in any particular whatever the smallest degree of right or reason on the part of the people it has made up its mind to fight. Facts must be distorted, relevant circumstances concealed, and a picture presented which by its crude colouring will persuade the ignorant people that their Government is blameless, their cause is righteous, and that the indisputable wickedness of the enemy has been proved beyond question. A moment's reflection would tell any reasonable person that such obvious bias cannot possibly represent the truth. But the moment's reflection is not allowed; lies are circulated with great rapidity. The unthinking mass accept them and by their excitement sway the rest. The amount of rubbish and humbug that pass under the name of patriotism in war-time in all countries is sufficient to make decent people blush when they are subsequently disillusioned.

At the outset the solemn asseverations of monarchs and leading statesmen in each nation that they did not want war must be placed on a par with the declarations of men who pour paraffin about a house knowing they are continually striking matches and yet assert they do not want a conflagration. This form of self-deception, which involves the deception of others, is fundamentally dishonest.

War being established as a recognized institution to be resorted to when Governments quarrel, the people



are more or less prepared. They quite willingly delude themselves in order to justify their own actions. They are anxious to find an excuse for displaying their patriotism, or they are disposed to seize the opportunity for the excitement and new life of adventure which war opens out to them. So there is a sort of national wink, everyone goes forward, and the individual, in his turn, takes up lying as a patriotic duty. In the low standard of morality which prevails in war-time, such a practice appears almost innocent. His efforts are sometimes a little crude, but he does his best to follow the example set. Agents are employed by authority and encouraged in so-called propaganda work. The type which came prominently to the front in the broadcasting of falsehood at recruiting meetings is now well known. The fate which overtook at least one of the most popular of them in this country exemplifies the depth of degradation to which public opinion sinks in a war atmosphere.

With eavesdroppers, letter-openers, decipherers, telephone tappers, spies, an intercept department, a forgery department, a criminal investigation department, a propaganda department, an intelligence department, a censorship department, a ministry of information, a Press bureau, etc., the various Governments were well equipped to "instruct" their peoples.

The British official propaganda department at Crewe House, under Lord Northcliffe, was highly successful. Their methods, more especially the raining down of millions of leaflets on to the German Army, far surpassed anything undertaken by the enemy. In *The Secrets of Crewe House*,<sup>1</sup> the methods are described for our satisfaction and approval. The declaration that

<sup>1</sup> *The Secrets of Crewe House*, Sir Campbell Stuart, K.B.E.



## PREFACE

IN compiling and collecting material for this volume, I am indebted to Lord Tavistock for his sympathetic help and useful suggestions. Professor Salvemini, Mr. Francis Nielson, Mr. T. Dixon, Mrs. C. R. Buxton, Mrs. Urie, Miss Durham, and Mrs. Wallis have also assisted me with contributions and in making investigations. My thanks are due to various correspondents who have furnished me with material. I am specially grateful to Miss Margaret Digby for her research work and for the revision of the proofs.

A. P.







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“A lie never lives to be old.”

SOPHOCLES.

“When war is declared, Truth is the first casualty.”

“Kommt der Krieg ins Land  
Gibt Lügen wie Sand.”

“You will find wars are supported by a class of argument which, after the war is over, the people find were arguments they should never have listened to.”

JOHN BRIGHT.

“In the arena of international rivalry and conflict men have placed patriotism above truthfulness as the indispensable virtue of statesmen.”

STANLEY BALDWIN.

“It is easier to make money by lies than by truth. Truth has only one power, it can kindle souls. But, after all, a soul is a greater force than a crowd.”

G. LOWES DICKINSON.

“And when war did come we told youth, who had to get us out of it, tall tales of what it really is and of the clover-beds to which it leads.”

J. M. BARRIE.







# FALSEHOOD IN WAR-TIME

## INTRODUCTION

THE object of this volume is not to cast fresh blame on authorities and individuals, nor is it to expose one nation more than another to accusations of deceit.

Falsehood is a recognized and extremely useful weapon in warfare, and every country uses it quite deliberately to deceive its own people, to attract neutrals, and to mislead the enemy. The ignorant and innocent masses in each country are unaware at the time that they are being misled, and when it is all over only here and there are the falsehoods discovered and exposed. As it is all past history and the desired effect has been produced by the stories and statements, no one troubles to investigate the facts and establish the truth.

Lying, as we all know, does not take place only in war-time. Man, it has been said, is not "a veridical animal," but his habit of lying is not nearly so extraordinary as his amazing readiness to believe. It is, indeed, because of human credulity that lies flourish. But in war-time the authoritative organization of lying is not sufficiently recognized. The deception of whole peoples is not a matter which can be lightly regarded.

A useful purpose can therefore be served in the interval of so-called peace by a warning which people can examine with dispassionate calm, that the authorities in each country do, and indeed must, resort to this practice in order, first, to justify themselves by depicting



the enemy as an undiluted criminal; and secondly, to inflame popular passion sufficiently to secure recruits for the continuance of the struggle. They cannot afford to tell the truth. In some cases it must be admitted that at the moment they do not know what the truth is.

The psychological factor in war is just as important as the military factor. The *morale* of civilians, as well as of soldiers, must be kept up to the mark. The War Offices, Admiralties, and Air Ministries look after the military side. Departments have to be created to see to the psychological side. People must never be allowed to become despondent; so victories must be exaggerated and defeats, if not concealed, at any rate minimized, and the stimulus of indignation, horror, and hatred must be assiduously and continuously pumped into the public mind by means of "propaganda." As Mr. Bonar Law said in an interview to the United Press of America, referring to patriotism, "It is well to have it properly stirred by German frightfulness"; and a sort of general confirmation of atrocities is given by vague phrases which avoid responsibility for the authenticity of any particular story, as when Mr. Asquith said (*House of Commons, April 27, 1915*): "We shall not forget this horrible record of calculated cruelty and crime."

The use of the weapon of falsehood is more necessary in a country where military conscription is not the law of the land than in countries where the manhood of the nation is automatically drafted into the Army, Navy, or Air Service. The public can be worked up emotionally by sham ideals. A sort of collective hysteria spreads and rises until finally it gets the better of sober people and reputable newspapers.

With a warning before them, the common people



# FALSEHOOD IN WAR-TIME

CONTAINING AN ASSORTMENT OF LIES CIRCULATED  
THROUGHOUT THE NATIONS DURING  
THE GREAT WAR

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only "truthful statements" were used is repeated just too often, and does not quite tally with the description of the faked letters (page 99) and bogus titles and book-covers (page 104), of which use was made. But, of course, we know that such clever propagandists are equally clever in dealing with us after the event as in dealing with the enemy at the time. In the apparently candid description of their activities we know we are hearing only part of the story. The circulators of base metal know how to use the right amount of alloy for us as well as for the enemy.

In the many tributes to the success of our propaganda from German Generals and the German Press, there is no evidence that our statements were always strictly truthful. To quote one: General von Hutier, of the Sixth German Army, sent a message (page 115), in which the following passage occurs:

The method of Northcliffe at the Front is to distribute through airmen a constantly increasing number of leaflets and pamphlets; the letters of German prisoners are falsified in the most outrageous way; tracts and pamphlets are concocted, to which the names of German poets, writers, and statesmen are forged, or which present the appearance of having been printed in Germany, and bear, for example, the title of the Reclam series, when they really come from the Northcliffe press, which is working day and night for this same purpose. His thought and aim are that these forgeries, however obvious they may appear to the man who thinks twice, may suggest a doubt, even for a moment, in the minds of those who do not think for themselves, and that their confidence in their leaders, in their own strength, and in the inexhaustible resources of Germany may be shattered.

The propaganda, to begin with, was founded on the shifting sand of the myth of Germany's *sole* responsi-



bility.<sup>1</sup> Later it became slightly confused owing to the inability of our statesmen to declare what our aims were, and towards the end it was fortified by descriptions of the magnificent, just, and righteous peace which was going to be "established on lasting foundations." This unfortunately proved to be the greatest falsehood of all.

In calm retrospect we can appreciate better the disastrous effects of the poison of falsehood, whether officially, semi-officially, or privately manufactured. It has been rightly said that the injection of the poison of hatred into men's minds by means of falsehood is a greater evil in war-time than the actual loss of life. The defilement of the human soul is worse than the destruction of the human body. A fuller realization of this is essential.

Another effect of the continual appearance of false and biased statement and the absorption of the lie atmosphere is that deeds of real valour, heroism, and physical endurance and genuine cases of inevitable torture and suffering are contaminated and desecrated; the wonderful comradeship of the battlefield becomes almost polluted. Lying tongues cannot speak of deeds of sacrifice to show their beauty or value. So it is that the praise bestowed on heroism by Government and Press always jars, more especially when, as is generally the case with the latter, it is accompanied by cheap and vulgar sentimentality. That is why one instinctively wishes the real heroes to remain unrecognized, so that their record may not be smirched by cynical tongues and pens so well versed in falsehood.

When war reaches such dimensions as to involve the whole nation, and when the people at its conclusion

<sup>1</sup> See page 57.



find they have gained nothing but only observe widespread calamity around them, they are inclined to become more sceptical and desire to investigate the foundations of the arguments which inspired their patriotism, inflamed their passions, and prepared them to offer the supreme sacrifice. They are curious to know why the ostensible objects for which they fought have none of them been attained, more especially if they are the victors. They are inclined to believe, with Lord Fisher, that "The nation was fooled into the war" (*"London Magazine," January 1920*). They begin to wonder whether it does not rest with them to make one saying true of which they heard so much, that it was "a war to end war."

When the generation that has known war is still alive, it is well that they should be given chapter and verse with regard to some of the best-known cries, catchwords, and exhortations by which they were so greatly influenced. As a warning, therefore, this collection is made. It constitutes only the exposure of a few samples. To cover the whole ground would be impossible. There must have been more deliberate lying in the world from 1914 to 1918 than in any other period of the world's history.

There are several different sorts of disguises which falsehood can take. There is the deliberate official lie, issued either to delude the people at home or to mislead the enemy abroad; of this, several instances are given. As a Frenchman has said: "Tant que les peuples seront armés, les uns contre les autres, ils auront des hommes d'état menteurs, comme ils auront des canons et des mitrailleuses." ("As long as the peoples are armed against each other, there will be lying statesmen, just as there will be cannons and machine guns.")



A circular was issued by the War Office inviting reports on war incidents from officers with regard to the enemy and stating that strict accuracy was not essential so long as there was inherent probability.

There is the deliberate lie concocted by an ingenious mind which may only reach a small circle, but which, if sufficiently graphic and picturesque, may be caught up and spread broadcast; and there is the hysterical hallucination on the part of weak-minded individuals.

There is the lie heard and not denied, although lacking in evidence, and then repeated or allowed to circulate.

There is the mistranslation, occasionally originating in a genuine mistake, but more often deliberate. Two minor instances of this may be given.

*The Times* (agony column), July 9, 1915 :

JACK F. G.—If you are not in khaki by the 20th, I shall cut you dead.—ETHEL M.

The Berlin correspondent of the *Cologne Gazette* transmitted this :

If you are not in khaki by the 20th, *hacke ich dich zu Tode* (I will hack you to death).

During the blockade of Germany, it was suggested that the diseases from which children suffered had been called *Die englische Krankheit*, as a permanent reflection on English inhumanity. As a matter of fact, *die englische Krankheit* is, and always has been, the common German name for rickets.

There is the general obsession, started by rumour and magnified by repetition and elaborated by hysteria, which at last gains general acceptance.

There is the deliberate forgery which has to be very



carefully manufactured but serves its purpose at the moment, even though it be eventually exposed.

There is the omission of passages from official documents of which only a few of the many instances are given;<sup>1</sup> and the "correctness" of words and commas in parliamentary answers which conceal evasions of the truth.

There is deliberate exaggeration, such, for instance, as the reports of the destruction of Louvain: "The intellectual metropolis of the Low Countries since the fifteenth century is now no more than a heap of ashes" (*Press Bureau, August 29, 1914*), "Louvain has ceased to exist" ("*The Times*," *August 29, 1914*). As a matter of fact, it was estimated that about an eighth of the town had suffered.

There is the concealment of truth, which has to be resorted to so as to prevent anything to the credit of the enemy reaching the public. A war correspondent who mentioned some chivalrous act that a German had done to an Englishman during an action received a rebuking telegram from his employer: "Don't want to hear about any good Germans"; and Sir Philip Gibbs, in *Realities of War*, says: "At the close of the day the Germans acted with chivalry, which I was not allowed to tell at the time."

There is the faked photograph ("the camera cannot lie").<sup>2</sup> These were more popular in France than here. In Vienna an enterprising firm supplied atrocity photographs with blanks for the headings so that they might be used for propaganda purposes by either side.

The cinema also played a very important part, especially in neutral countries, and helped considerably in turning opinion in America in favour of coming in on

<sup>1</sup> See page 140.

<sup>2</sup> See page 135.



the side of the Allies. To this day in this country attempts are made by means of films to keep the wound raw.

There is the "Russian scandal," the best instance of which during the war, curiously enough, was the rumour of the passage of Russian troops through Britain.<sup>1</sup> Some trivial and imperfectly understood statement of fact becomes magnified into enormous proportions by constant repetition from one person to another.

Atrocity lies were the most popular of all, especially in this country and America; no war can be without them. Slander of the enemy is esteemed a patriotic duty. An English soldier wrote ("The Times," September 15, 1914): "The stories in our papers are only exceptions. There are people like them in every army." But at the earliest possible moment stories of the maltreatment of prisoners have to be circulated deliberately in order to prevent surrenders. This is done, of course, on both sides. Whereas naturally each side tries to treat its prisoners as well as possible so as to attract others.

The repetition of a single instance of cruelty and its exaggeration can be distorted into a prevailing habit on the part of the enemy. Unconsciously each one passes it on with trimmings and yet tries to persuade himself that he is speaking the truth.

There are lies emanating from the inherent unreliability and fallibility of human testimony. No two people can relate the occurrence of a street accident so as to make the two stories tally. When bias and emotion are introduced, human testimony becomes quite valueless. In war-time such testimony is accepted as

<sup>1</sup> See page 63.



conclusive. The scrappiest and most unreliable evidence is sufficient—"the friend of the brother of a man who was killed," or, as a German investigator of his own liars puts it, "somebody who had seen it," or, "an extremely respectable old woman."

There is pure romance. Letters of soldiers who whiled away the days and weeks of intolerable waiting by writing home sometimes contained thrilling descriptions of engagements and adventures which had never occurred.

There are evasions, concealments, and half-truths which are more subtly misleading and gradually become a governmental habit.

There is official secrecy which must necessarily mislead public opinion. For instance, a popular English author, who was perhaps better informed than the majority of the public, wrote a letter to an American author, which was reproduced in the Press on May 21, 1918, stating :

There are no Secret Treaties of any kind in which this country is concerned. It has been publicly and clearly stated more than once by our Foreign Minister, and apart from honour it would be political suicide for any British official to make a false statement of the kind.

Yet a series of Secret Treaties existed. It is only fair to say that the author, not the Foreign Secretary, is the liar here. Nevertheless the official pamphlet, *The Truth about the Secret Treaties*, compiled by Mr. McCurdy, was published with a number of *unacknowledged excisions*, and both Lord Robert Cecil in 1917 and Mr. Lloyd George in 1918 declared (the latter to a deputation from the Trade Union Congress) that our policy was not directed to the disruption of Austro-Hungary, although they both knew that under the Secret Treaty concluded with Italy in April



1915 portions of Austria-Hungary were to be handed over to Italy and she was to be cut off from the sea. Secret Treaties naturally involve constant denials of the truth.

There is sham official indignation depending on genuine popular indignation which is a form of falsehood sometimes resorted to in an unguarded moment and subsequently regretted. The first use of gas by the Germans and the submarine warfare are good instances of this.<sup>1</sup>

Contempt for the enemy, if illustrated, can prove to be an unwise form of falsehood. There was a time when German soldiers were popularly represented cringing, with their arms in the air and crying "Kamerad," until it occurred to Press and propaganda authorities that people were asking why, if this was the sort of material we were fighting against, had we not wiped them off the field in a few weeks.

There are personal accusations and false charges made in a prejudiced war atmosphere to discredit persons who refuse to adopt the orthodox attitude towards war.

There are lying recriminations between one country and another. For instance, the Germans were accused of having engineered the Armenian massacres, and they, on their side, declared the Armenians, stimulated by the Russians, had killed 150,000 Mohammedans (*Germania*, October 9, 1915).

Other varieties of falsehood more subtle and elusive might be found, but the above pretty well cover the ground.

A good deal depends on the quality of the lie. You must have intellectual lies for intellectual people and crude lies for popular consumption, but if your popular

<sup>1</sup> See page 146.



lies are too blatant and your more intellectual section are shocked and see through them, they may (and indeed they did) begin to be suspicious as to whether they were not being hoodwinked too. Nevertheless, the inmates of colleges are just as credulous as the inmates of the slums.

Perhaps nothing did more to impress the public mind—and this is true in all countries—than the assistance given in propaganda by intellectuals and literary notables. They were able to clothe the rough tissue of falsehood with phrases of literary merit and passages of eloquence better than the statesmen. Sometimes by expressions of spurious impartiality, at other times by rhetorical indignation, they could by their literary skill give this or that lie the stamp of indubitable authenticity, even without the shadow of a proof, or incidentally refer to it as an accepted fact. The narrowest patriotism could be made to appear noble, the foulest accusations could be represented as an indignant outburst of humanitarianism, and the meanest and most vindictive aims falsely disguised as idealism. Everything was legitimate which could make the soldiers go on fighting.

The frantic activity of ecclesiastics in recruiting by means of war propaganda made so deep an impression on the public mind that little comment on it is needed here. The few who courageously stood out became marked men. The resultant and significant loss of spiritual influence by the Churches is, in itself, sufficient evidence of the reaction against the betrayal in time of stress of the most elementary precepts of Christianity by those specially entrusted with the moral welfare of the people.

War is fought in this fog of falsehood, a great deal of



it undiscovered and accepted as truth. The fog arises from fear and is fed by panic. Any attempt to doubt or deny even the most fantastic story has to be condemned at once as unpatriotic, if not traitorous. This allows a free field for the rapid spread of lies. If they were only used to deceive the enemy in the game of war it would not be worth troubling about. But, as the purpose of most of them is to fan indignation and induce the flower of the country's youth to be ready to make the supreme sacrifice, it becomes a serious matter. Exposure, therefore, may be useful, even when the struggle is over, in order to show up the fraud, hypocrisy, and humbug on which all war rests, and the blatant and vulgar devices which have been used for so long to prevent the poor ignorant people from realizing the true meaning of war.

It must be admitted that many people were conscious and willing dupes. But many more were unconscious and were sincere in their patriotic zeal. Finding now that elaborately and carefully staged deceptions were practised on them, they feel a resentment which has not only served to open their eyes but may induce them to make their children keep their eyes open when next the bugle sounds.

Let us attempt a very faint and inadequate analogy between the conduct of nations and the conduct of individuals.

Imagine two large country houses containing large families with friends and relations. When the members of the family of the one house stay in the other, the butler is instructed to open all the letters they receive and send and inform the host of their contents, to listen at the keyhole, and tap the telephone. When a great match, say a cricket match, which excites the whole



district, is played between them, those who are not present are given false reports of the game to make them think the side they favour is winning, the other side is accused of cheating and foul play, and scandalous reports are circulated about the head of the family and the hideous goings on in the other house.

All this, of course, is very mild, and there would be no specially dire consequences if people were to behave in such an inconceivably caddish, low, and underhand way, except that they would at once be expelled from decent society.

But between nations, where the consequences are vital, where the destiny of countries and provinces hangs in the balance, the lives and fortunes of millions are affected and civilization itself is menaced, the most upright men honestly believe that there is no depth of duplicity to which they may not legitimately stoop. They have got to do it. The thing cannot go on without the help of lies.

This is no plea that lies should not be used in war-time, but a demonstration of how lies *must* be used in war-time. If the truth were told from the outset, there would be no reason and no will for war.

Anyone declaring the truth: "Whether you are right or wrong, whether you win or lose, in no circumstances can war help you or your country," would find himself in gaol very quickly. In war-time, failure to lie is negligence, the doubting of a lie a misdemeanour, the declaration of the truth a crime.

In future wars we have now to look forward to a new and far more efficient instrument of propaganda—the Government control of broadcasting. Whereas, therefore, in the past we have used the word "broadcast" symbolically as meaning the efforts of the Press



and individual reporters, in future we must use the word literally, since falsehood can now be circulated universally, scientifically, and authoritatively.

Many of the samples given in the assortment are international, but some are exclusively British, as these are more easily found and investigated, and, after all, we are more concerned with our own Government and Press methods and our own national honour than with the duplicity of other Governments.

Lies told in other countries are also dealt with in cases where it has been possible to collect sufficient data. Without special investigation on the spot, the career of particular lies cannot be fully set out.

When the people of one country understand how the people in another country are duped, like themselves, in war-time, they will be more disposed to sympathize with them as victims than condemn them as criminals, because they will understand that their crime only consisted in obedience to the dictates of authority and acceptance of what their Government and Press represented to them as the truth.

The period covered is roughly the four years of the war. The intensity of the lying was mitigated after 1918, although fresh crops came up in connection with other of our international relations. The mischief done by the false cry "Make Germany pay" continued after 1918 and led, more especially in France, to high expectations and consequent indignation when it was found that the people who raised this slogan knew all the time it was a fantastic impossibility. Many of the old war lies survived for several years, and some survive even to this day.

There is nothing sensational in the way of revelations contained in these pages. All the cases mentioned are well known to those who were in authority, less



well known to those primarily affected, and unknown, unfortunately, to the millions who fell. Although only a small part of the vast field of falsehood is covered, it may suffice to show how the unsuspecting innocence of the masses in all countries was ruthlessly and systematically exploited.

There are some who object to war because of its immorality, there are some who shrink from the arbitrament of arms because of its increased cruelty and barbarity; there are a growing number who protest against this method, at the outset known to be unsuccessful, of attempting to settle international disputes because of its imbecility and futility. But there is not a living soul in any country who does not deeply resent having his passions roused, his indignation inflamed, his patriotism exploited, and his highest ideals desecrated by concealment, subterfuge, fraud, falsehood, trickery, and deliberate lying on the part of those in whom he is taught to repose confidence and to whom he is enjoined to pay respect.

None of the heroes prepared for suffering and sacrifice, none of the common herd ready for service and obedience, will be inclined to listen to the call of their country once they discover the polluted sources from whence that call proceeds and recognize the monstrous finger of falsehood which beckons them to the battlefield.







# I

## THE COMMITMENT TO FRANCE

OUR prompt entry into the European War in 1914 was necessitated by our commitment to France. This commitment was not known to the people; it was not known to Parliament; it was not even known to all the members of the Cabinet. More than this, its existence was denied. How binding the moral engagement was soon became clear. The fact that it was not a signed treaty had nothing whatever to do with the binding nature of an understanding come to as a result of military and naval conversations conducted over a number of years. Not only was it referred to as an "obligation of honour" (Lord Lansdowne), "A compact" (Mr. Lloyd George), "An honourable expectation" (Sir Eyre Crowe), "the closest negotiations and arrangements between the two Governments" (Mr. Austen Chamberlain), but Lord Grey himself has admitted that had we not gone in on France's side (quite apart from the infringement of Belgian neutrality), he would have resigned. That he should have pretended that we were not "bound" has been a matter of amazement to his warmest admirers, that the understanding should have been kept secret has been a subject of sharp criticism from statesmen of all parties. No more vital point stands out in the whole of pre-war diplomacy, and the bare recital of the denials, evasions, and subterfuges forms a tragic illustration of the low standard of national honour, where war is concerned, which is

demo-  
cracy!



accepted by statesmen whose personal honour is beyond reproach.

It will be remembered that the conversations which involved close consultations between military and naval staffs began before 1906. The first explicit denial came in 1911. The subsequent extracts can be given with little further comment.

MR. JOWETT asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if, during his term of office, any undertaking, promise, or understanding had been given to France that, in certain eventualities, British troops would be sent to assist the operations of the French Army.

MR. MCKINNON WOOD (Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs): The answer is in the negative.

*House of Commons, March 8, 1911.*

SIR E. GREY: First of all let me try to put an end to some of the suspicions with regard to secrecy—suspicions with which it seems to me some people are torturing themselves, and certainly worrying others. We have laid before the House the Secret Articles of the Agreement with France of 1904. There are no other secret engagements. The late Government made that agreement in 1904. They kept those articles secret, and I think to everybody the reason will be obvious why they did so. It would have been invidious to make those articles public. In my opinion they were entirely justified in keeping those articles secret because they were not articles which commit this House to serious obligations. I saw a comment made the other day, when these articles were published, that if a Government would keep little things secret, *a fortiori*, they would keep big things secret. That is absolutely untrue. There may be reasons why a Government should make secret arrangements of that kind if they are not things of first-rate importance, if they are subsidiary to matters of great importance. But that is the very reason why the British Government should not make secret engagements which commit Parliament to obligations of war. It would be foolish to do it. No British Government could embark



upon a war without public opinion behind it, and such engagements as there are which really commit Parliament to anything of the kind are contained in treaties or agreements which have been laid before the House. For ourselves, we have not made a single secret article of any kind since we came into office.

*House of Commons, November 27, 1911.*

The whole of this is a careful and deliberate evasion of the real point.

Nothing was clearer to everyone in Great Britain in August 1914 than that our understanding with France was a "secret engagement which committed Parliament to obligations of war."

Mr. Winston Churchill, in a memorandum to Sir E. Grey and the Prime Minister, August 23, 1912, wrote: "Everyone must feel who knows the facts that we have the obligations of an alliance without its advantages and, above all, without its precise definitions" (*The World Crisis*, vol. i, p. 115).

In 1912 M. Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, reported to the Czar:

England promised to support France on land by sending an expedition of 100,000 to the Belgian border to repel the invasion of France by the German Army through Belgium, expected by the French General Staff.

LORD HUGH CECIL: . . . There is a very general belief that this country is under an obligation, not a treaty obligation, but an obligation arising owing to an assurance given by the Ministry in the course of diplomatic negotiations, to send a very large force out of this country to operate in Europe.

MR. ASQUITH: I ought to say that it is not true.

*House of Commons, March 10, 1913.*

SIR WILLIAM BYLES asked the Prime Minister whether



he will say if this country is under any, and if so, what, obligation to France to send an armed force in certain contingencies to operate in Europe; and if so, what are the limits of our agreements, whether by assurance or Treaty with the French nation.

MR. KING asked the Prime Minister (1) whether the foreign policy of this country is at the present time unhampered by any treaties, agreements, or obligations under which British military forces would, in certain eventualities, be called upon to be landed on the Continent and join there in military operations; and (2) whether in 1905, 1908, or 1911 this country spontaneously offered to France the assistance of a British army to be landed on the Continent to support France in the event of European hostilities.

MR. ASQUITH: As has been repeatedly stated, this country is not under any obligation not public and known to Parliament which compels it to take part in any war. In other words, if war arises between European Powers, there are no unpublished agreements which will restrict or hamper the freedom of the Government or of Parliament to decide whether or not Great Britain should participate in a war. The use that would be made of the naval and military forces if the Government or Parliament decided to take part in a war is, for obvious reasons, not a matter about which public statements can be made beforehand.

*House of Commons, March 24, 1913.*

SIR EDWARD GREY: I have assured the House, and the Prime Minister has assured the House more than once, that if any crisis such as this arose we should come before the House of Commons and be able to say to the House that it was free to decide what the attitude of the House should be; that we have no secret engagement which we should spring upon the House and tell the House that because we had entered upon that engagement there was an obligation of honour on the country. . . . I think [the letter] makes it perfectly clear that what the Prime Minister and I have said in the House of Commons was perfectly justified as regards our freedom to decide in a crisis what our line should be, whether we should intervene or whether we should abstain.



The Government remained perfectly free and *a fortiori* the House of Commons remained perfectly free.

*House of Commons, August 3, 1914.*

Yet all preparations to the last detail had been made, as shown by the prompt, secret, and well-organized dispatch of the Expeditionary Force.

As far back as January 31, 1906, Sir Edward Grey had written to our Ambassador at Paris describing a conversation with M. Cambon.

In the first place, since the Ambassador had spoken to me, a good deal of progress had been made. Our military and naval authorities had been in communication with the French, and I assumed that all preparations were ready, so that, if a crisis arose, no time would have been lost for want of a formal engagement.

Lord Grey writes in his book, *Twenty-Five Years* (published in 1925), with regard to his declaration in August 1914:

It will appear, if the reader looks back to the conversations with Cambon in 1906, that not only British and French military, but also naval, authorities were in consultation. But naval consultations had been put on a footing satisfactory to France in 1905, before the Liberal Government had come into office. The new step taken by us in January 1906 had been to authorize military conversations on the same footing as the naval ones. It was felt to be essential to make clear to the House that its liberty of decision was not hampered by any engagements entered into previously without its knowledge. Whatever obligation there was to France arose from what those must feel who had welcomed, approved, and sustained the Anglo-French friendship, that was open and known to all. In this connection there was nothing to disclose, except the engagement about the north and west coasts of France taken a few hours before, and the letters exchanged with Cambon in 1912, the letter that expressly stipulated there was no engagement.



One of the things which contributed materially to the unanimity of the country (on the outbreak of war) was that the Cabinet were able to come before Parliament and say that they had not made a secret agreement behind their backs.

*Viscount Grey, receiving the Freedom of Glasgow, January 4, 1921. Reported in "The Times."*

His constant repetition of this assurance is the best proof of his natural and obvious doubt that it was true.

But he continues the attempt at self-exculpation years after in his book, *Twenty-Five Years*. Outlining the considerations in his mind prior to the outbreak of war:

(3) That, if war came, the interest of Britain required that we should not stand aside while France fought alone in the west, but must support her. I knew it to be very doubtful whether the Cabinet, Parliament, and the country would take this view on the outbreak of war, and through the whole of this week I had in view the probable contingency that we should not decide at the critical moment to support France. In that event I should have to resign. . . .

(4) A clear view that no pledge must be given, no hope even held out to France and Russia which it was doubtful whether this country would fulfil. One danger I saw. . . . It was that France and Russia might face the ordeal of war with Germany relying on our support; that this support might not be forthcoming, and that we might then, when it was too late, be held responsible by them for having let them in for a disastrous war. Of course I could resign if I gave them hopes which it turned out that the Cabinet and Parliament would not sanction. But what good would my resignation be to them in their ordeal?

After quoting the King-Byles questions, June 11, 1914, he says:

The answer given is absolutely true. The criticism to which it is open is that it does not answer the question put to me. That is undeniable. Parliament has unqualified



right to know of any agreements or arrangements that bind the country to action or restrain its freedom. But it cannot be told of military and naval measures to meet possible contingencies. So long as Governments are compelled to contemplate the possibility of war, they are under a necessity to take precautionary measures, the object of which would be defeated if they were made public. . . . If the question had been pressed, I must have declined to answer it and have given these reasons for doing so. Questions in the previous year about military arrangements with France had been put aside by the Prime Minister with a similar answer.

Neither the Franco-British military nor the Anglo-Russian naval conversations compromised the freedom of this country, but the latter were less intimate and important than the former. I was therefore quite justified in saying that the assurances given by the Prime Minister still held good. Nothing had been done that in any way weakened them, and this was the assurance that Parliament was entitled to have. Political engagements ought not to be kept secret; naval or military preparations for contingencies of war are necessary, but must be kept secret. In these instances care had been taken to ensure that such preparations did not involve any political engagement.

In the recently published official papers Sir Eyre Crowe, in a memorandum to Sir Edward Grey, July 31, 1914, says :

The argument that there is no written bond binding us to France is strictly correct. There is no contractual obligation. But the *Entente* has been made, strengthened, put to the test, and celebrated in a manner justifying the belief that a moral bond was being forged. The whole of the *Entente* can have no meaning if it does not signify that in a just quarrel England would stand by her friends. This honourable expectation has been raised. We cannot repudiate it without exposing our good name to grave criticism.

I venture to think that the contention that England cannot in any circumstances go to war is not true, and that any endorsement of it would be political suicide.



This is the plain common-sense official view which Sir E. Grey had before him. To insist that Parliament was free because the "honourable expectation" was not in writing was a deplorable subterfuge.

Lord Lansdowne, in the House of Lords on August 6, 1914, after referring to "Treaty obligations and those other obligations which are not less sacred because they are not embodied in signed and sealed documents," said :

Under the one category fall our Treaty obligations to Belgium. . . . To the other category belong our obligations to France—obligations of honour which have grown up in consequence of the close intimacy by which the two nations have been united during the last few years.

The idea that Parliament was free and was consulted on August 3rd also falls to the ground as a sham, owing to the fact that on August 2nd the naval protection of the French coast and shipping had been guaranteed by the Government. Parliament was not free in any case, owing to the commitments, but this made "consultation" and parliamentary sanction an absolute farce.

As *The Times* said on August 5th, by this guarantee Great Britain was "definitely committed to the side of France"; and M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, in an interview with M. Recouly, said : "A great country cannot make war half-way. The moment it has decided to fight on the sea it has fatally obligated itself to fight also on land." <sup>1</sup>

A Press opinion of the commitment may be given :

Take yet another instance which is fresh in everyone's recollection, viz. the arrangements as to the co-operation of the military staffs of Great Britain and France before the

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<sup>1</sup> *Les Heures tragique d'avant Guerre*, p. 55.



war. It was not until the very eve of hostilities that the House of Commons learned anything as to the nature of those arrangements. It was then explained by Sir Edward Grey that Great Britain was not definitely committed to go to the military assistance of France. There was no treaty. There was no convention. Great Britain, therefore, was free to give help or to withhold it, and yet, though there had been no formal commitment, we were fast bound by every consideration of honour, and the national conscience felt this instinctively, though it was only the invasion of Belgium which brought in the waverers and doubters. That situation arose out of secret diplomacy, and it is one which must never be allowed to spring again from the same cause. For we can conceive nothing more dangerous than for a Government to commit itself in honour, though not in technical fact, and then to make no adequate military preparations on the ground that the technical commitment has not been entered into.

*"Daily Telegraph," September 1917.*

Lord Haldane frankly admits, in *Before the War*, what he was doing in 1906. He says that the problem which presented itself to him in 1906 was "how to mobilize and concentrate at a place of assembly to be opposite the Belgian frontier," a British expeditionary force of 160,000.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE (speaking of the beginning of the war): We had a compact with France that if she were wantonly attacked, the United Kingdom would go to her support.

MR. HOGGE: We did not know that!

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: If France were wantonly attacked.

AN HON. MEMBER: That is news.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE: There was no compact as to what force we should bring into the arena. . . . Whatever arrangements we come to, I think history will show that we have more than kept faith.

*House of Commons, August 7, 1918.*



In spite, then, of Lord Grey's assurances of the freedom of Parliament, it becomes clear that had Parliament taken the other course, Great Britain would have broken faith with France.

Some foreign opinions may be given :

In the French Chamber, September 3, 1919, M. Franklin-Bouillon, criticizing the Triple Alliance, suggested in 1919 between French, British, and American Governments, declared that France was better protected by the Anglo-French understanding of 1912, "which assured us the support of six divisions," and—upon an interruption by M. Tardieu—agreed that the "text" of the understanding did not specify six divisions, but that staff collaboration had "prearranged everything for the mobilization and immediate embarkation of six divisions."

In April 1913 M. Sazonov reported to the Czar :

Without hesitating, Grey stated that should the conditions under discussion arise, England would stake everything in order to inflict the most serious blow to German power. . . . Arising out of this, Grey, upon his own initiative, corroborated what I already knew from Poincaré, the existence of an agreement between France and Great Britain, according to which England engaged itself, in case of a war with Germany, not only to come to the assistance of France on the sea, but also on the Continent by landing troops.

The intervention of England in the war had been anticipated. A military convention existed with England which could not be divulged as it bore a secret character. We relied upon six English divisions and upon the assistance of the Belgians.

*Marshall Joffre before a Paris Commission, July 5, 1919.*

A comparison of the successive plans of campaign of the French General Staff enables us to determine the exact moment when English co-operation, in consequence of these promises, became part of our military strategy. Plan 16 did not allow for it; Plan 16A, drawn up in Sep-



tember 1911, takes into account the presence of an English Army on our left wing. The Minister of War (Messimy) said: "Our conversations with General Wilson, representing the British General Staff at the time of the Agadir affair, enabled us to have the certainty of English intervention in the event of a conflict." The representative of the British General Staff had promise of the help of 100,000 men, but stipulating that they should land in France because, as he argued, a landing at Antwerp would take much longer.

*From "La Victoire," by Fabre Luce.*

The British and French General Staffs had for years been in close consultation with one another on this subject. The area of concentration for the British forces had been fixed on the left flank of the French and the actual detraining stations of the various units were all laid down in terrain lying between Maubeuge and Le Cateau. The headquarters of the army were fixed at the latter place.

*Lord French's book on the war, 1919.*

As to the danger of the secrecy which was the cause of the denials and evasions, three quotations may be given.

MR. BONAR LAW: . . . It has been said—and I think it is very likely true—that if Germany had known for certain that Great Britain would have taken part in the war, the war would never have occurred.

*House of Commons, July 18, 1918.*

Lord Loreburn, in *How the War Came*, says: "The concealment from the Cabinet was protracted and must have been deliberate."

MR. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN: . . . We found ourselves on a certain Monday listening to a speech by Lord Grey at this box which brought us face to face with war and upon which followed our declaration. That was the first public notification to the country, or to anyone by the Government of the day, of the position of the British Government and of the obligations which it had assumed. . . . Was



the House of Commons free to decide? Relying upon the arrangements made between the two Governments, the French coast was undefended—I am not speaking of Belgium, but of France. There had been the closest negotiations and arrangements between our two Governments and our two staffs. There was not a word on paper binding this country, but in honour it was bound as it had never been bound before—I do not say wrongfully; I think rightly.

MR. T. P. O'CONNOR: It should not have been secret.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN: I agree. That is my whole point, and I am coming to it. Can we ever be indifferent to the French frontier or to the fortunes of France? A friendly Power in possession of the Channel ports is a British interest, treaty or no treaty. . . . Suppose that engagement had been made publicly in the light of day. Suppose it had been laid before this House and approved by this House, might not the events of those August days have been different? . . . If we had had that, if our obligations had been known and definite, it is at least possible, and I think it is probable, that war would have been avoided in 1914.

*House of Commons, February 8, 1922.*

There can be no question, therefore, that the deliberate denials and subterfuges, kept up till the last moment and fraught as they were with consequences of such magnitude, constitute a page in the history of secret diplomacy which is without parallel and afford a signal illustration of the slippery slope of official concealments.



## II

### SERBIA AND THE MURDER OF THE ARCHDUKE

THE murder at Serajevo of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, nephew of the Emperor Francis Joseph, and the consequent Austrian ultimatum, are sometimes referred to as the cause of the war, whereas, of course, they were only the occasion—the match which set fire to the well-stored powder magazine. The incident was by no means a good one for propaganda purposes. Fortunately for the Government, the Serajevo assassination, together with the secret commitment to France, was allowed to fall into the background after the invasion of Belgium. It was extremely difficult to make the Serbian cause popular. *John Bull* exploded at once with “To Hell with Serbia,” and most people were naturally averse to being dragged into a European war for such a cause. Some wondered what the attitude of our own Government would have been had the Prince of Wales been murdered in similar circumstances, and a doubtful frame of mind existed. The Serbian case, therefore, had to be written up, and “poor little Serbia” had to be presented as an innocent small nationality subjected to the offensive brutality of the Austrians.

The following extract from *The Times* leader, September 15, 1914, is a good sample of how public opinion was worked up :

The letter which we publish this morning from Sir Valentine Chirol is a welcome reminder of the duty we owe



to the gallant army and people. . . . We are too apt to overlook the splendid heroism of the Servian people and the sacrifices they have incurred. . . . And Servia has amply deserved support. . . . Nor ought we to forget that this European war of liberation was precipitated by Austro-German aggression upon Servia. The accusations of complicity in the Sarajevo crime launched against Servia as a pretext for aggression have not been proved. It is more than doubtful whether they are susceptible of proof. . . . While there is thus every reason for not accepting Austrian charges, there are the strongest reasons for giving effective help to a gallant ally who has fought for a century in defence of the principle of the independence of little States which we ourselves are now fighting to vindicate with all the resources of our Empire.

Mr. Lloyd George, speaking at the Queen's Hall on September 21, 1914, said :

If any Servians were mixed up with the murder of the Archduke, they ought to be punished for it. Servia admits that. The Servian Government had nothing to do with it. Not even Austria claimed that. The Servian Prime Minister is one of the most capable and honoured men in Europe. Servia was willing to punish any of her subjects who had been proved to have any complicity in that assassination. What more could you expect ?

*Punch* gave us "Heroic Serbia," a gallant Serb defending himself on a mountain pass.

Between June 28 and July 23, 1914, no arrests were made or explanation given by the Serbian Government. The Austrian representative, Von Storck, was told : "The police have not concerned themselves with the affair." The impression given was that entirely irresponsible individuals, unknown to anyone in authority, were the criminals. As the war proceeded the matter was lost sight of, and our Serbian ally and its Govern-



ment were universally accepted as one of the small outraged nationalities for whose liberation and rights British soldiers were willingly prepared to sacrifice their lives.

The revelations as to the complicity of the Serbian Government in the crime did not appear till 1924, when an article was published entitled, "After Vidovdan, 1914," by Ljuba Jovanovitch, President of the Serbian Parliament, who had been Minister of Education in the Cabinet of M. Pashitch in 1914. The relevant extracts from this article may be given.

I do not remember if it were the end of May or the beginning of June when, one day, M. Pashitch told us that certain persons were preparing to go to Serajevo, in order to kill Franz Ferdinand, who was expected there on Vidovdan (Sunday, June 28th). He told this much to us others, but he acted further in the affair only with Stojan Protitch, then Minister of the Interior. As they told me afterwards, this was prepared by a society of secretly organized men, and by the societies of patriotic students of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Belgrade. M. Pashitch and we others said (and Stojan Protitch agreed) that he, Stojan, should order the authorities on the Drin frontier to prevent the crossing of the youths who had left Belgrade for the purpose. But these frontier authorities were themselves members of the organization, and did not execute Stojan's order, and told him, and he afterwards told us, that the order had come too late, for the youths had already crossed over. Thus failed the Government attempt to prevent the outrage (*atentat*) that had been prepared.

This makes it clear that the whole Cabinet knew of the plot some time before the murder took place; that the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior knew in which societies it had been prepared; that the frontier guard was deeply implicated and working under the orders of those who were arranging the crime.



There failed also the attempt of our Minister of Vienna, made on his own initiative, to the Minister Bilinski, to turn the Archduke from the fatal path which had been planned. Thus the death of the Archduke was accomplished in circumstances more awful than had been foreseen and with consequences no one could have even dreamed of.

No official instruction was sent to Vienna to warn the Archduke. The Minister acted on his own initiative. This is further substantiated by a statement of M. Pashitch quoted in the *Standard*, July 21, 1914.

Had we known of the plot against the late Archduke Franz Ferdinand, assuredly we should have informed the Austro-Hungarian Government.

He did know of the plot, but gave no warning to the Austro-Hungarian Government.

In an article in the *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*, June 28, 1924, Jovan Jovanovitch, the Serbian Minister in Vienna, explained that the warning he gave was in the form of a personal and unprompted opinion that the manœuvres were provocative and the Archduke might be shot by one of his own troops.

Ljuba Javanovitch describes his reception of the news :

On Vidovdan (Sunday, June 28, 1914) in the afternoon I was at my country house at Senjak. About 5 p.m. an official telephoned to me from the Press Bureau telling what had happened at Serajevo. And although I knew what was being prepared there, yet, as I held the receiver, it was as though someone had unexpectedly dealt me a heavy blow. When later the news was confirmed from other quarters a heavy anxiety oppressed me. . . . I saw that the position of our Government with regard to other Governments would be very difficult, far worse than after May 29, 1903 (the murder of King Alexander).



In *La Fédération Balcanique* Nicola Nenadovitch asserts that King Alexander, the Russian Minister Hartwig, and the Russian military attaché Artmanov, as well as Pashitch, were privy to the plot.

The Austrian Government, in its ultimatum, demanded the arrest of one Ciganovitch. He was found, but mysteriously disappeared. This man played an important part. Colonel Simitch, in *Clarté*, May 1925, describes him as a link between Pashitch and the conspirators, and says: "M. Pashitch sent his agent into Albania." The report of the Salonika trial shows that he was a spy and agent provocateur to the Serb Government. He was "Number 412" in the list of "the Black Hand," a revolutionary society known to and encouraged by the Government (M. Pashitch's nephew was a member). Its head was Dimitrijevitich, the chief officer of the Intelligence Staff, an outstanding figure who led the assassination of King Alexander and his Queen in 1903. The agent of the Black Hand in Serajevo was Gatchinovitch, who organized the murder, plans having been laid months beforehand. The first attempt with a bomb was made by Chabrinovitch, who was in the Serbian State printing office. Printzip, a wild young man who was simply a tool, actually committed the murder. When he and the other murderers were arrested they confessed that it was through Ciganovitch that they had been introduced to Major Tankositch, supplied with weapons and given shooting lessons. After the Salonika trial the Pashitch Government sent Ciganovitch, as a reward for his services, to America with a false passport under the name of Danilovitch. After the war was over Ciganovitch returned, and the Government gave him some land near Uskub, where he then resided.



That the Austrian Government should have recognized that refusal to either find Ciganovitch or permit others to look for him meant guilt on the part of the Serbian Government and therefore resorted to war is not surprising.

A postcard was found at Belgrade "poste restante," written from Serajevo by one of the criminals to one of his comrades in Belgrade. But this was not followed up. As Ljuba says :

On the whole it could be expected that Vienna would not succeed in proving any connection between official Serbia and the event on the Miljacka.

The remark of a Serbian student sums up the case : "You see, the plan was quite successful. We have made Great Serbia." And M. Pashitch himself, on August 13, 1915, declared :

Never in history has there been a better outlook for the Serbian nation than has arisen since the outbreak of war.

It came as a surprise to the Serbian Government that any excitement should have been caused by the revelation of Ljuba. They thought that Great Britain understood what had happened, and in her eagerness to fight Germany had jumped at the excuse. When, however, the truth came out, proceedings were instituted to expel Ljuba from the Radical Party. Nothing which transpired on this occasion, however, produced a categorical denial from M. Pashitch of the charge made by Ljuba. He evaded the issue so far as possible.

There appears to be no doubt that before the end of the war the British War Office was officially informed that Dimitrijevitich, of the Serbian Intelligence Staff, was the prime author of the murder. He was executed



at Salonika in 1917, his existence having been found to be inconvenient. But when it came to the framing of the Peace Treaties at Versailles, there was a conspiracy of silence on the whole subject.

This terrible instance of deception should be classed as a Serbian lie, but its acceptance was so widespread that half Europe became guilty of complicity in it, and even if the truth did reach other Chancelleries and Foreign Offices of the Allied Powers during the war, it would have been quite impossible for them to reveal it. Had the truth been known, however, in July 1914, the opinion of the British people with regard to the Austrian ultimatum would have been very different from what it was.



### III

## INVASION OF BELGIUM AS CAUSE OF WAR

WHATEVER may have been the causes of the Great War, the German invasion of Belgium was certainly not one of them. It was one of the first consequences of war. Nor was it even the reason of our entry into the war. But the Government, realizing how doubtful it was whether they could rouse public enthusiasm over a secret obligation to France, was able, owing to Germany's fatal blunder, to represent the invasion of Belgium and the infringement of the Treaty of Neutrality as the cause of our participation in it.

We know now that we were committed to France by an obligation of honour, we know now that Sir Edward Grey would have resigned had we not gone in on the side of France, and we also know that Mr. Bonar Law committed the Conservative Party to the support of war *before* the question of the invasion of Belgium arose.

The Government already know, but I give them now the assurance on behalf of the party of which I am Leader in this House, that in whatever steps they think it necessary to take for the honour and security of this country, they can rely on the unhesitating support of the Opposition.

*Quoted in "Twenty-Five Years," by Viscount Grey.*

The invasion of Belgium came as a godsend to the Government and the Press, and they jumped to take advantage of this pretext, fully appreciating its value from the point of view of rallying public opinion.



We are going into a war that is forced upon us as the defenders of the weak and the champions of the liberties of Europe.

*"The Times," August 5, 1914.*

It should be clearly understood when it was and why it was we intervened. It was only when we were confronted with the choice between keeping and breaking solemn obligations, between the discharge of a binding trust and of shameless subservience to naked force, that we threw away the scabbard. . . . We were bound by our obligations, plain and paramount, to assert and maintain the threatened independence of a small and neutral State (Belgium).

*Mr. Asquith, House of Commons, August 27, 1914.*

The treaty obligations of Great Britain to that little land (Belgium) brought us into the war.

*Mr. Lloyd George, January 5, 1918.*

Neither of these statements by successive Prime Ministers is true. We were drawn into the war because of our commitment to France. The attack on Belgium was used to excite national enthusiasm. A phrase to the same effect was inserted in the King's Speech of September 18, 1914.

I was compelled in the assertion of treaty obligations deliberately set at naught . . . to go to war.

The two following extracts put the matter correctly :

They do not reflect that our honour and our interest must have compelled us to join France and Russia even if Germany had scrupulously respected the rights of her small neighbours, and had sought to hack her way into France through the Eastern fortresses.

*"The Times," March 15, 1915.*

SIR D. MACLEAN : We went into the war on account of Belgium.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN : We had such a treaty with Belgium.



Had it been France only, we could not have stayed out after the conversations that had taken place. It would not have been in our interests to stay out, and we could not have stayed out without loss of security and honour.

*House of Commons, February 8, 1922.*

But in addition to the attack on Belgium being declared to be the cause of the war, it was also represented as an unprecedented and unwarrantable breach of a treaty. To this day "the Scrap of Paper" (a facsimile of the treaty) is framed on the walls of some elementary schools.

There is no nation which has not been guilty of the breach of a treaty. After war is declared, treaties are scrapped right and left. There were other infringements of neutrality during the war. The infringement of a treaty is unfortunately a matter of expediency, not a matter of international morality. In 1887, when there was a scare of an outbreak of war between France and Germany, the Press, including the *Standard*, which was regarded at that time more or less as a Government organ, discussed dispassionately and with calm equanimity the possibility of allowing Germany to pass through Belgium in order to attack France. The *Standard* argued that it would be madness for Great Britain to oppose the passage of German troops through Belgium, and the *Spectator* said: "We shall not bar, as indeed we cannot bar, the traversing of her soil." We were not more sensitive to our treaty obligations in 1914 than we were in 1887. But it happened that in 1887 we were on good terms with Germany and on strained terms with France. The opposite policy, therefore, suited our book better.

Moreover, the attack on Belgium did not come as a surprise. All our plans were made in preparation for it.



The Belgian documents which were published disclosed the fact that the "conversations" of 1906 concerned very full plans for military co-operation in the event of a German invasion of Belgium, but similar plans were not drawn up between Belgium and Germany. The French and British are referred to as the *Allied* armies, Germany as "the enemy." Full and elaborate plans were made for the landing of British troops.

Politically the invasion of Belgium was a gross error. Strategically it was the natural and obvious course to take. Further, we know now that had Germany not violated Belgian neutrality, France would have. The authority for this information, which from the point of view of military strategy is perfectly intelligible, is General Percin, whose articles in *l'Ère Nouvelle* in 1925 are thus quoted and commented on in the *Manchester Guardian* of January 27, 1925.

## VIOLATION OF BELGIAN NEUTRALITY INTENDED BY FRANCE.

### ALLEGATIONS BY A FRENCH GENERAL.

(*From our own Correspondent.*)

PARIS, Monday.

Immediately before Great Britain's entry into the war in 1914 the British Government inquired both in Berlin and Paris whether Belgian neutrality was going to be respected. Was the addressing of this inquiry to France a pure matter of form?

If General Percin, the well-known Radical non-Catholic French General, is to be believed, apparently not, for he declares authoritatively in a series of articles that he has begun in the *Ère Nouvelle* that the violation of Belgian neutrality had for many years been an integral part of the war plans of the French General Staff and even of the French Government.



The controversy that has started, it need hardly be said, is of world importance, for it disposes in a large moral degree of the Scrap of Paper stigma against Germany.

General Percin, it must be admitted, is an embittered man, though no one has yet been found to question his honour or capacity. He is a Protestant—a rare thing in the high ranks of the French Army—and has always been at loggerheads with the military hierarchy of the General Staff. That is little wonder, for he was chief of the Cabinet to General André, Minister of War in the Combes Cabinet, when in the Dreyfus affair a more or less vain effort was made to purge the High Command. General Percin's principal interest was in artillery, and the German papers during the war credited him with having been principally responsible for the adoption of the famous .75. The deposition of General Percin from the military command at Lisle in the first few weeks of the war has never been clearly explained. It seems to have been part of a vendetta. At any rate, that no disgrace was implied was shown by the later grant to him of the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour.

#### A DISCOVERY OF 1910-11.

General Percin's evidence in *Ère Nouvelle* dates from the time when he was one of the chiefs of the Superior Council of War. "I took a personal part," he writes, "in the winter of 1910-11 in a great campaign organized in the Superior Council of War, of which I was then a member. The campaign lasted a week. It showed that a German attack on the Alsace-Lorraine front had no chance of success; that it would inevitably be smashed against the barriers accumulated in that region, and that (Germany would) be obliged to violate Belgian neutrality.

"The question was not discussed whether we should follow the German lead in such violation and if necessary anticipate it ourselves, or whether we should await the enemy on this side of the Belgian frontier. That was a question of a Governmental rather than of a military kind. But any commander of troops who in time of war learns that the enemy has the intention of occupying a point the position of which gives him tactical advantage has the imperative



duty to try to occupy that point first himself, and as soon as ever he can. If any of us had said that out of respect for the treaty of 1839 he would on his own initiative have remained on this side of the Belgian frontier, thus bringing the war on to French territory, he would have been scorned by his comrades and by the Minister of War himself.

"We were all of us in the French army partisans of the tactical offensive. It implied the violation of Belgian neutrality, for we knew the intentions of the Germans. I shall be told that on our part it would not have been a French crime, but a retort, a riposte to a German crime. No doubt. But every entry into war professes to be such a riposte. You attack the enemy because you attribute to him the intention of attacking you."

On August 31, 1911, the Chiefs of the French and Russian General Staffs signed an agreement that the words "defensive war" should not be taken literally, and then affirmed "the absolute necessity for the French and Russian armies of taking a vigorous offensive as far as possible simultaneously."

According to General Percin, that "vigorous offensive" meant French violation of Belgian neutrality.

"Could we take a vigorous offensive without the violation of Belgian neutrality? Could we really deploy our 1,300,000 men on the narrow front of Alsace-Lorraine?"

#### VIOLATION OF BELGIUM INEVITABLE.

He asserts categorically that in the mind of the French General Staff the war was to take place in Belgium, and, indeed, six months after the signature of the agreement between the French and Russian General Staffs quoted above, Artillery-Colonel Picard, at the head of a group of officers of the General Staff, made a tour in Belgium to study utilization, when the time should come, of this field of operations.

General Percin concludes: "The treaty of 1839 could not help but be violated either by the Germans or by us. It had been invented to make war impossible. The question that we have to judge upon, then, is this: Which of the two, France or Germany, wanted war the most? Not



which showed most contempt for this treaty. The one that willed war more than the other could not help but will the violation of Belgian territory."

A number of extracts might be given to show that the invasion of Belgium was expected. Yet no steps were taken in the years before the war to reaffirm the obligations under the old treaty of 1839 and make them a great deal more binding than in actual fact they were.

The invasion of Belgium was *not* the cause of the war; the invasion of Belgium was *not* unexpected; the invasion of Belgium did *not* shock the moral susceptibilities of either the British or French Governments. But it may be admitted that, finding themselves in the position which they had themselves largely contributed to create, the British and French Governments in the first stages of the Great War were fully justified, and indeed urgently compelled, to arrange the facts and distort the implications as they did, given always the standard of morality which war involves. To colour the picture with the pigment of falsehood so as to excite popular indignation was imperative, and it was done with complete success.



## IV

### GERMANY'S SOLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WAR

THE accusation against the enemy of *sole* responsibility for the war is common form in every nation and in every war. So far as we are concerned, the Russians (in the Crimean War), the Afghans, the Arabs, the Zulus, and the Boers, were each in their turn unprovoked aggressors, to take only some recent instances. It is a necessary falsehood based on a momentary biased opinion of one side in a dispute, and it becomes the indispensable basis of all subsequent propaganda. Leading articles in the newspapers at the outbreak of every war ring the changes on this theme, and are so similarly worded as to make it almost appear as if standard articles are set up in readiness and the name of the enemy, whoever he may be, inserted when the moment comes. Gradually the accusation is dropped officially, when reason returns and the consolidation of peace becomes an imperative necessity for all nations.

It is hardly necessary to give many instances of the universal declaration of Germany's sole responsibility, criminality, and evil intention. Similar declarations might be collected in each country on *both* sides in the war.

It [the declaration of war] is hardly surprising news, for a long chain of facts goes to show that Germany has deliberately brought on the crisis which now hangs over Europe.

“*The Times*,” August 5, 1914.



Germany and Austria have alone wanted this war.

*Sir Valentine Chirol, "The Times," August 6, 1914.*

And with whom does this responsibility rest? . . . One Power, and one Power only, and that Power is Germany.

*Mr. Asquith at the Guildhall, September 4, 1914.*

(We are fighting) to defeat the most dangerous conspiracy ever plotted against the liberty of nations, carefully, skilfully, insidiously, clandestinely planned in every detail with ruthless, cynical determination.

*Mr. Lloyd George, August 4, 1917.*

Lord Northcliffe, who was in charge of war propaganda, saw how essential it was to make the accusation the basis of all his activities. "The whole situation of the Allies in regard to Germany is governed by the fact that Germany is responsible for the war," and again, "The Allies must never be tired of insisting that they were the victims of a deliberate aggression" (*Secrets of Crewe House*).

Among the few moderate voices in August 1914 was Lord Rosebery, who wrote :

It was really a spark in the midst of the great powder magazine which the nations of Europe have been building up for the last twenty or thirty years. . . . I do not know if there was some great organizer. . . . Without evidence I should be loath to lay such a burthen on the head of any man.

So violently and repeatedly, however, had the accusation been made in all the Allied countries, that the Government were forced to introduce it into the Peace Treaty.

Article 231.—The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals



have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

When war passions began to subside, the accusation was gradually dropped. The statesmen themselves even withdrew it.

The more one reads memoirs and books written in the various countries of what happened before August 1, 1914, the more one realizes that no one at the head of affairs quite meant war at that stage. It was something into which they glided, or rather staggered and stumbled, perhaps through folly, and a discussion, I have no doubt, would have averted it.

*Mr. Lloyd George, December 23, 1920.*

I cannot say that Germany and her allies were solely responsible for the war which devastated Europe. . . . That statement, which we all made during the war, was a weapon to be used at the time ; now that the war is over it cannot be used as a serious argument. . . . When it will be possible to examine carefully the diplomatic documents of the war, and time will allow us to judge them calmly, it will be seen that Russia's attitude was the real and underlying cause of the world conflict.

*Signor Francesco Nitti, former Premier of Italy.*

Is there any man or woman—let me say, is there any child—who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry? . . . This was an industrial and commercial war.

*President Woodrow Wilson, September 5, 1919.*

I do not claim that Austria or Germany in the first place had a conscious thought-out intention of provoking a general war. No existing documents give us the right to suppose that at that time they had planned anything so systematic.

*M. Raymond Poincaré, 1925.*