# CHAPTER XIV

## RECRIMINATION

"THAT there exists between France and Germany a sentimental animosity; and that between Germany and England there is an economic rivalry, we do not deny; but what we deny is that there exists from country to country, between these three great nations, any fundamental and irreconcilable antagonism. It is, therefore, our claim to put an end to all enmity between them and do away with all animosity. War would no longer settle anything. The times are gone when the conqueror destroyed the vanquished people and reduced it to slavery. A war would henceforward be a useless disaster and vain crime."

— Anatole France, London, December 11th, 1913.

Of all the many organizations started in Germany and Britain to promote a clearer understanding and a better feeling between the two peoples, the Albert Committee under the presidency of Lord Avebury, was the best. It invited the co-operation of every one interested in seeing that our relations with Germany should be conducted according to reason and not clouded and endangered by ignorance and prejudice. The Anglo-German Friendship Committee and the Associated Councils of Churches for fostering friendly relations between the two peoples, were strong bodies. These Councils and Committees enrolled most of Britain's worthiest men. How powerless they were to avert the strife when the

diplomatists took control of affairs in July, 1914, is a lesson which must not be forgotten. The bench of Bishops, the leading nonconformist divines, the Catholic prelates, eminent professors, members of the Houses of Parliament, distinguished men of science, literature, and art, were as little children in the hands of the men of the chancelleries.

Looking over the pre-war literature published by these Councils and Committees is a heart-breaking business. The article published by Mr. Basil Williams in the *Edinburgh Review,* October, 1909, reads like pages from a Utopia written long years before Sir Thomas More ordered Wolsey from the precincts of the Commons. In that article Mr. Williams says " for more than four hundred years Englishmen and Germans have fought side by side in almost every European war." And he quotes Stubbs:

" England in spite of the Reformation maintained her alliance with Germany: her instincts were German and her antipathies were anti-French. As the Hapsburgs divided and grew weak, England sought new allies among the younger Powers; but in all the great struggles of Europe she has had Germany, whether Austrian or Prussian, on her side."

Then Mr. Williams goes on to show how the grievous work of ignorance and prejudice brought about misunderstanding and enmity. He says:

" Barely four years ago men of responsibility in Germany were quite convinced that England designed a sudden attack upon their country without any previous declaration of war or other warning. Fears have been expressed that Hamburg, lying, it may be noted, some fifty miles up a river well

fortified on either bank, is liable to bombardment by the British fleet; and many Germans have long seriously believed that we intend to annihilate the German navy while it is still comparatively small and an easy morsel for ours. German writers and even German statesmen see in England's every act of friendship to another Power a fixed policy of isolating Germany."

Was Mr. Lloyd George conscious of such a fixed policy on January 1st, 1914, when in the *Daily Chronicle* he gave his views on armaments? He said:

"Both countries seem to have realized what ought to have been fairly obvious long ago, that they have nothing to gain and everything to lose by a quarrel, and that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose by reverting to the old policy of friendliness which had been maintained, until within recent years, for centuries between Germany and this country. . . . The German army is vital, not merely to the existence of the German Empire, but to the very life and independence of the nation itself, surrounded as Germany is by other nations each of which possesses armies almost as powerful as her own. We forget that, while we insist upon a 60 per cent. superiority (so far as our naval strength is concerned) over Germany being essential to guarantee the integrity of our own shores — Germany herself has nothing like that superiority over France alone, and she has, of course, in addition, to reckon with Russia on her eastern frontier. Germany has nothing which approximates to a two-Power standard. She has, therefore, become alarmed by recent events, and is spending huge sums of money on the expansion of her military resources."

What the "recent events" which occasioned alarm in Germany were we now know. And since ministers have started their campaigns of recrimination on the

platform and in the Press much has been brought to light which shows how difficult it is to get at the truth of foreign affairs and armaments under the present system. Much has been written and said recently in connection with the Berlin conversations. Since the war began the political and diplomatic giants of Britain and Germany have been busily at work informing their peoples of one another's perfidy and chicanery. A pretty spectacle for decent simple folk! Perhaps it would have been better to leave the mud at the bottom of the well and let the rank water lie undisturbed. It is not nice to find political leaders of any country hoodwinking the people, saying things which are not true, making friendly speeches to cover unfriendly business. Again the year 1912 has been brought into the limelight, this time by Mr. Asquith, who in a speech at Cardiff, October 2, 1914, told us more about the negotiations which passed between Germany and Britain, than he condescended to tell the House of Commons in the debates of 1912. Referring no doubt to the conversations between Lord Haldane and the German Chancellor, Mr. Asquith said:

"We laid down — and I wish to call not only your attention, but the attention of the whole world to this, when so many false legends are now being invented and circulated — in the following year, in the year 1912, we laid down, in terms carefully approved by the Cabinet and which I will textually quote, what our relations with Germany ought in our view to be. We said, and we communicated this to the German Government: 'Britain declares that she will neither make nor join in any unprovoked attack on Germany. Aggression upon Germany is not the subject, and forms no part of any treaty, understanding, or combi-

nation to which Britain is a party; nor will she become a party to any thing that has such an object.' There is nothing ambiguous or equivocal about that. But that was not enough for German statesmanship. They wanted us to go further. They asked us to pledge ourselves absolutely to neutrality in the event of Germany being engaged in war — and this, mind you, at a time when Germany was enormously increasing both her aggressive and defensive resources, and especially upon the sea. They asked us for a free hand, so far as we were concerned, if and when they selected the opportunity to overbear, to dominate the European world. To such a demand but one answer was possible, and that was the answer we gave."

This is exceedingly interesting, for it proves the utter impossibility of the House ever learning from Ministers just how international affairs stand. On July 25th, 1912, Mr. Asquith made a speech in the House of Commons and referred to the Berlin conversations begun by Lord Haldane six months earlier in that year. Question after question had been put by private members on the subject during the spring without drawing much definite information from the Treasury. It was a matter for congratulation in July to learn from the Prime Minister that:

"Our relations with the great German Empire are, I am glad to say, at this moment — and I feel sure are likely to remain — relations of amity and good will. My noble friend Lord Haldane paid a visit to Berlin early in the year. He entered upon conversations and an interchange of views there which have been continued since in a spirit of perfect frankness and friendship both on one side or the other and in which I am glad to say we now have the advantage of the participation of a very distinguished diplomatist in the person of the German Ambassador."

There is nothing ambiguous or equivocal about that. But what would have happened if the statement made by Mr. Asquith at Cardiff, October, 1914, had been made in July, 1912, to the Commons when he said to the House:

"I say, and I say this deliberately, we have no cause, and so far as I know no occasion, for quarrel with any country in any part of the world."

Did the Prime Minister then know that Germany had asked for a free hand and that Britain should pledge herself absolutely to neutrality in the event of Germany being engaged in war? These, then, were the amicable conversations carried on between Lord Haldane and the German Chancellor! But why did Germany test us in that way? In July, 1912, according to rumour she had just about reached the end of her financial tether; her military preparations had been then stretched nearly to the utmost; she had reached the climax of expenditure on her navy — notwithstanding Mr. Asquith's statement at Cardiff about Germany in 1912 enormously increasing her aggressive and defensive resources, especially on sea. He was misinformed. Though her gross naval expenditure rose, Germany reduced her expenditure on new construction by £500,000 in 1912; but she saw both France and Russia vote an additional £6,963,124 on new construction for 1912–13. Russia, alone for that year spent more on new construction than Germany did. Why should Germany ask us for a free hand? Did she glean from the amicable conversations that we were fettered, and wish to test the strength of our engagements? Anyway, her request that we should remain neutral shows

how much faith she placed in the declaration of the Cabinet, referred to by Mr. Asquith. Germany then no doubt knew more about Britain's obligations to France and Russia than did the vast majority of the members of the House of Commons.

The result of all the frank and friendly conversations between Germany and Britain in 1912 was seen in the new military laws of France and Germany. Ever since Britain departed from her isolated position in diplomacy, since she threw in her lot with France and aided and abetted France in the sordid schemes of exploiting territory in Africa, Germany has worked with unremitting energy to perfect her military system and build up a modern navy which would be the equal of that of France. What else was to be expected? When Jingo ministers in Britain and France express such sentiments against Germany as those attributed to M. Delcassé and Lord Roberts no other result could be looked for than German military and naval preparation on the h'ghest scale. Blame Germany for her ruthless policy in taking French territory, blame France for her policy in Africa, curse the Kaiser for all the sins of divine-right monarchs, and when the full course of all-round denunciation is complete, there is left the palpable conspiracy of Entente Powers to isolate Germany. Diplomacy destroyed every bridge raised by pacifists in the principal European States, to march the workers into an international corps which would overthrow militarism and bureaucratic rule. Diplomacy in dividing Europe into two hostile camps stimulated militarism in all its branches; in each State it fostered the vast international armament interests; it raised up a literature of enmity

and hatred; and threw the fate of democracies into the hands of military and naval experts. After the British Foreign Office became entangled in the meshes of the Continental System, war-lords flourished to greater extent than at any time since 1870. The outcome of ten years of diplomatic labour in entente enterprises amounted to suspicion and enmity, distrust and hate, leading up to the only possible climax,— a Continental War. And the pity and pain of it is that the British Foreign Secretary had no desire to engulf his country in war. Labouring for peace under such a system was a task Sisyphus would not envy. What effort worth while could be made by the most pacific Foreign Secretary against the system which could bring nothing but war? No, Sir Edward Grey is not to be charged with belligerent intentions. He sinned in hiding the whole discreditable business of foreign affairs from the Commons and the people. He was the slave of secret diplomacy, and not the servant of the country. If he had thought as much of the British people as he thought of French diplomatists, he would have had the courage to tell the country the whole truth about foreign affairs and the engagements he inherited from his predecessor. Rather than the onus of Morocco and Persia, resignation, political oblivion,— anything, so long as the people knew the whole truth.

We shall perhaps never know all that passed between Germany and Britain in that year 1912, and an attempt to weave a story of the inwardness of the diplomatic negotiations is well-nigh impossible; so inconsistent, so contradictory, are minister's speeches and the writings of publicists of the time. Now that we have Mr. Asquith's Cardiff speech the whole affair

is thrown up in a light which does not make our case look any better. Lord Haldane's speech in March, 1912, when he said, "Strategy must respond to policy, the policy of the Foreign Office," and Mr. Churchill's reference in February of that year to the German navy as "more in the nature of a luxury" do not harmonize with Mr. Asquith's description in the following July of our cordial relations with Germany. The debates on Imperial Defence and the Navy, in 1912, might be read now with profit by many people who wish to know something of the origin of the war; but nothing in these debates gives one a shred of evidence as to any useful purpose being served by the conversations between Lord Haldane and the German Chancellor. "What is the good of diplomacy?" Disraeli asked. The debates of 1912 in the light of recent statements, proves how utterly absurd it was for any one to hope for pacific relations so long as Europe was divided into two vast camps arming to destroy each other. Mr. Balfour in the House, July 22nd, said:

"If we are to contemplate the horrible, and, as I hope, the impossible — if there is to be this universal Armageddon, then, looking at it from a naval point of view, it seems to me that the fleets of the Triple Entente are not inadequate now, and are not going to be inadequate to any strain that is going to be placed upon them. If we can conceive, if we are driven to conceive, if we are obliged to conceive this condition of universal warfare, then I do not say that the fleets with which our interests are concerned can be regarded as inadequate, in any theatre of operations, to the strain which will be thrown upon them. I decline to believe it possible that we alone should be concerned with all the navies of the world except those, let us say, of France

and Russia, who remain neutral in their ports. I hope and believe we should not be unequal even to that strain, but it is a strain which is surely not probable. Surely, if we are to draw these dreadful pictures of international disaster, and if that is a necessity forced upon us, we need hardly suppose that our evil fate, or even the most imbecile diplomacy, would force us into conflict with these nations with whom we have no cause of quarrel, with whom we have been — at all events as regards the Mediterranean Powers — on the most friendly terms within the memory of man, and who, I can hardly believe, will be driven to attack us, and attack us alone in anybody else's quarrel. We must prepare even for that danger, but I think it most improbable. In any case, if I understand the policy of the Government aright, it will be the most perilous adventure that any State could in future engage in, to drag Europe into a war."

All through the year 1912, in debates in the House and speeches in the country, Germany was the one Power speakers challenged on naval supremacy. The organization of the North Sea Fleet was regarded in Germany as a direct threat and a menace — even German pacifists lost hope; and after the Agadir affair, British estimates and preparations had all the appearances of a Government heading straight for war. Though the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary poured oily words on the waters troubled by our foreign policy, the tempest of recrimination abated not one jot.

It is, however, quite clear why Germany tested our neutrality. In asking us to give her a free hand she was really inquiring if we were in a position to give her a free hand. Certainly the time had come when a free hand was necessary for her Imperial existence. She could not imperially afford another diplomatic humiliation. Forces had been unchained by the

events of the Anglo-French interests in Africa which desired other methods of dealing with international quarrels. The Crown Prince and his party were in the ascendency, and they were no courtiers of the pen and the forum; their arena was the place for swords and shells. The more evidence they gathered of British Jingo feeling, the greater naval preparations we made, the easier became their task of overbearing the moderate party in Germany. It would be no difficult task to collect statements from speeches and reviews published over a period of years in Britain which would serve to influence the German Jingo with notions of British belligerence; but our actions were sufficient. In debate after debate in the House, numbers of members have pointed out where ministers and ex-ministers and other more or less responsible men have said things calculated to annoy Germans. Lord Charles Beresford censured the First Lord for dragging Germany into his speeches, and when Lord Roberts at Manchester in 1912, made his famous reference to German preparedness, the *Evening Standard* said of it:

"At a time when all prudent people on both sides of the North Sea are endeavouring to establish better relations between the two peoples, it is mere wanton mischief-making for a man with Lord Roberts's unequalled prestige to use words which must drive every German who reads them to exasperation."

Mr. Churchill went to the Admiralty in the autumn of 1911, shortly before the Agadir question was explained by the Foreign Secretary to the House. We now know why Mr. Churchill was sent at that anxious time to take charge of the navy. Bit by

bit the truth leaks out. A Coalition Government has taken the place of the Liberal Government, and Mr. Balfour has replaced Mr. Churchill at the Admiralty. Now that the latter is free of direct responsibility for naval policy he has told his constituents in Dundee a bit of history. Indeed, at a meeting there on June 5th, 1915, Mr. Churchill, intentionally or unintentionally, let a Cabinet cat out of the bag — a cat too which explains a lot of the spilt milk and broken crockery of the year 1912.

Speaking at the Kinnaird Hall, Dundee, on June 5th, 1915, Mr. Churchill said:

"I was sent to the Admiralty in 1911, after the Agadir crisis had nearly brought us into war, and I was sent with the express duty laid upon me by the Prime Minister to put the fleet in a state of instant and constant readiness for war in case we were attacked by Germany."

Such a statement made three years too late, proves how utterly helpless the House of Commons and the electors are to save their country from the horrors of war.

In the debate on the Naval Estimates 1914, Mr. Philip Snowden referred to something Lord Welby said earlier in that year. Lord Welby was once at the head of the Treasury; he had held the highest position in the Civil Service of Britain and was regarded as a great financial authority. Lord Welby said:

"We are in the hands of an organization of crooks. They are politicians, generals, manufacturers of armaments, and journalists. All of them are anxious for unlimited expenditure, and go on inventing scares to terrify the public and to terrify Ministers of the Crown."

Lord Welby knew what he was talking about. "Crooks" is the precise word, the accurate, the inspired word. No other word would quite meet the occasion.

In support of what has been written on the Treaty of 1839 another paragraph or two must be added. Since the war began some more information has been gained.

It is said that the neutrality of Belgium was the one sole question which kept the Cabinet together on August 2nd; when that treaty was made the *casus belli*. Then those Ministers who had handed in their resignations withdrew them,— excepting, of course, Lord Morley and Mr. Burns. This view of Cabinet action is now put forward by many writers, but it does not explain the strange position of the men in the Cabinet who protested against the policy which enmeshed the Government in the Continental System. The critical day for the Cabinet was August 2nd, the day after Sir Edward Grey informed the French Ambassador at London that, "Germany had explained that she was not in a position to reply" to the question of observing Belgian neutrality, and that he would "propose to his colleagues that he should state that it (the British Fleet) will oppose the passage of the Straits of Dover by the German Fleet, or, if the German Fleet should pass through, will oppose any demonstration on the French coasts." The French Ambassador sent that information to M. Viviani, the President of the French Council, on August 1st, the day before the British Cabinet gave its sanction to the proposal, and twenty-four hours before Sir Edward Grey notified the Cabinet that Ger-

many was not in a position to reply to the question about the neutrality of Belgium.

This method of conducting the affairs of Britain was perhaps quite in order, and a Cabinet which was left in the dark about so many diplomatic negotiations perhaps felt grateful for any second-hand information which happened to come its way. Nevertheless we are told the crisis was bridged by the Treaty of 1839, and uneasy spirits were soothed by the mention of the holy relic upon which presumably some sanguine statesmen thought no Government would lay sacrilegious hands. What the revolters in the Cabinet thought of the Foreign Minister on August 2nd, when he got them to consent to the proposal of naval aid to France before the violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany took place, and what they now think since they have had time to read the diplomatic correspondence, would be of deep interest to those who do not accept the view that making the neutrality of Belgium the *casus belli* was the one sole reason for the withdrawal of all but two resignations on August 2nd. How can any Minister say he was satisfied to remain in the Cabinet for that reason when he consented to naval aid to France before Germany invaded Belgium?

Consider the position of Mr. Lloyd George who, in an interview published in a magazine, explained the attitude he and several of his colleagues took up before the war broke out. He said:

"This I know is true — after the guarantee given that the German fleet would not attack the Coast of France or annex any French territory, I would not have been a party to a declaration of war had Belgium not been invaded; and

I think I can say the same thing for most, if not all, of my colleagues."

Whether the guarantee referred to by Mr. Lloyd George carried any weight with Sir Edward Grey or Mr. Asquith is another matter, but it should be borne in mind that Belgium was not invaded by Germany on August 2nd. Anticipation may be wise as a policy, but it can never constitute realization. Invasion of Belgium on August 4th could not justify Mr. Lloyd George's anticipation of August 2nd.

The *National Review* said several members of the Cabinet on August 2nd "were casting about for a life-buoy to save their righteous souls, which was ultimately provided by Belgium." Now the *Times*, that mirror of Foreign Office reflections, tells us "even had Germany not invaded Belgium, honour and interest would have united us with France." The "imperious reason of self-interest" was our motive in all connected with the Treaty of 1839. Would it not have been the better policy from the first to tell the people the bald truth? Now that the Tory press is bent on mining the neutrality trench in which Mr. Lloyd George and his colleagues took cover, their position becomes every day more untenable and stupid.

No, the neutrality of Belgium will not serve for a pretext, since those who do not take every ministerial utterance as gospel have taken the trouble to study all the diplomatic correspondence and the history of treaties. It is all very well and good for us to be told day after day that Britain must fight this war to a successful finish, but the more the British people are told they must shut their minds to all

inquiries as to the real causes of the war, the more will great sections of them feel disposed to get all the information on the question they can gather. Already the effects of the fatal policy of secrecy and shuffle are evident all over the country. Newspapers cry out to the Government to be frank and tell the people the truth about the conduct of the war and what the real position is after many months of bloodshed; they complain that the seeming apathy of the masses is caused by the policy of withholding news that the enemy and neutrals possess. But no one is bold enough to attribute the apathy to another cause — anterior and more grave — to the amazing inconsistencies and suppressions in the diplomatic correspondence and the stupid stories faked up in certain newspapers about the neutrality of Belgium. The masses read; and many of the papers issued to Socialists and Labourites are singularly well-informed and deal week after week most ably with the questions which forced the Government into a Continental war. It is worse than folly to try to ignore these facts, for if our masses are to be organized along with industries to bring the conflict to a successful and speedy end, the Government should seek now to remove the suspicion and distrust which lie down deep in the minds of the more intelligent workers. That the two great parties should tell different stories of our participation in the struggle is not the way to induce the workers of the country to show any real enthusiasm for the war. Mr. Bonar Law on August 2nd, in his letter to Mr. Asquith, said nothing about the neutrality of Belgium; the support of the Opposition was given "in support of France and Russia." Lord Lansdowne said "we had to

consider our obligations to France, by which we were bound."

Leaving the invasion of Belgium out of the question for the moment, how can the Government continue to base its case on the violation of the Treaty of 1839? We know now how the treaty came into existence, we also know what happened in 1870 to preserve the integrity of Belgium. The full story of our military negotiations with Belgium in the spring of 1906, the interview of Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges with General Jungbluth in April, 1912, and the report of Baron Greindl from Berlin (where he was Belgian Ambassador) to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, is now known. It is an ugly story and none of its worst features are removed by denials of complicity published from our Foreign Office nor is its brutality effaced by the silly explanations sent out by the Belgian authorities in March, 1915. No one who has studied Foreign Office methods will at this time of day rest content with the phrase "not binding." That military attachés may act as did Lieutenant-Colonels Barnardiston and Bridges, with the Foreign Office ready to repudiate responsibility when the work of its military attaché is discovered,— and at the same time ready to benefit so long as the secret is kept,— will not deceive those who desire straightforward methods in Foreign Affairs. When the Belgian General Jungbluth was told by Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges that Britain was ready to land a force of 160,000 in Belgium, General Jungbluth objected and said that the consent of the Belgian Government was necessary. To this Lieut.-Colonel Bridges said that he knew that, "but that since we (Belgium) were not able

to prevent the Germans from passing through our country — England would have landed her troops in Belgium under all circumstances (*en tout etat de cause*)."

Numbers of British and Belgian soldiers of high rank know that ever since Algeciras, since January, 1906, the British and Belgian armies had looked to one another for common defence. The Belgians looked for 160,000 British soldiers to land at Antwerp where they would be met by a quarter of a million Belgians. The General Staffs of both armies had long consulted on the problem and the plans. The Government not only failed to carry out its pledge contained in No. 155 (British White Paper), it failed utterly to keep the military understanding of the General Staffs. Belgium was thrown away. And when the day of reckoning comes it will be found that Britain will have to answer for broken pledges as terrible to Belgium as Germany's violation of a treaty.

While we are engaged in our usual business of lecturing other countries, belligerents and neutrals, on international law and the sanctity of treaties, we have no time to examine our own position. Indeed it would be difficult to find it now under the slather of whitewash poured on by the unctuous "leaders of thought" since the war began. But it may be said, no question in the history of politics was started with so little knowledge as this one of the neutrality of Belgium. We have not shone as historians. The best said and written in our favour has been scrappy, vamped, and partial. The speeches of statesmen on the question have been remarkable for what was not said; and the surge of sentimentality which arose

from the story of atrocities had no bearing on the Treaty of 1839. The sudden change in the Liberal press on the question, which amounted to a complete volte-face in twenty-four hours, was paralleled only by the action of the Cabinet which made the neutrality of Belgium a *casus belli* on the day naval aid was granted to France. The importance given to the Belgian treaty in the first week of August was quite modern, indeed suddenly new. It was not always held so precious. And now that the walls of our towns are plastered with copies of the signatures of the Powers who signed the treaty, one wonders what is the position of Palmerston in his grave, if any Jingo occurrence can disturb him now. In 1855, when Disraeli proposed the neutrality of the Danubian Principalities, he said:

"There certainly are instances in Europe of such propositions, and it has been agreed by treaty that Belgium and Switzerland should be declared neutral; but I am not disposed to attach very much importance to such engagements, for the history of the world shows that when a quarrel arises and a nation makes war and thinks it advantageous to traverse with its army such neutral territory, the declarations of neutrality are not apt to be very religiously respected."

Palmerston when he spoke no doubt knew the real value of the treaty to which he had put his name. He was not disposed to attach very much importance to such engagements. What action would he have taken early last August? When Germany did not very "religiously" respect the neutrality of Belgium and thought it advantageous to traverse neutral territory, would Palmerston have wasted time lecturing Germany on the sanctity of treaties? Not likely.

The *Times,* sick, presumably, of the slavering about Belgian neutrality, reminded us, on March 8th, 1915, that:

"There are still, it seems, some Englishmen and Englishwomen who greatly err as to the reasons that have forced England to draw the sword. They know that it was Germany's flagrant violation of Belgian neutrality which filled the cup of her indignation and made her people insist upon war (*sic!*). 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."

It is all very painful controversy, for it casts a slur on the statements of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary when they replied to questions in the House before the war, and said we were under no obligation to go to war in the interests of France and Russia.

In the 'eighties the Treaty of 1839 was subjected to examination, at home and abroad, and it was then widely known that it was no complete guarantee. One Belgian War Minister, General Brailmont, decided that Belgium must arm and look to her own defences for securing her neutrality. A British Ministerial organ, the *Standard,* in 1880 had told Belgium not to rely on British assistance in all cases. Probably the termination of the treaties of 1870 made the Belgian authorities think seriously of their future position. That the efficacy of the Treaty of 1839 was generally doubted — after the lapse of the treaties made for the period of the Franco-German War — is plain, and in 1887, when another war cloud loomed up, the *Standard* came out with a lead-

ing article on the question. It was, however, a letter signed "Diplomaticus," published by the *Standard,* February 4th, 1887, which raised the question then, and caused the discussion which followed in several of the chief London dailies and weeklies. The *Standard* was then regarded to be the official organ of the Government (Tory). The letter is as follows:

"To the Editor of the *Standard.*

"Sir: Military experts are of the opinion that France has spent so much money, and spent it so well during the last sixteen years in providing herself with a fresh military frontier, that a direct advance by the German armies into France, past the new fortresses and forts that have been erected and linked together, would be, even if a possible, a very hazardous undertaking.

"But if Germany was, or considered itself to be, provoked into a struggle of life and death with France would Prince Bismarck, with the mighty forces he can set in motion, consent to be baffled by the artificial obstacles to which I have alluded, so long as there existed a natural and undefended road by which he could escape from his embarrassment? Such a road or way out does exist. It lies on Belgian territory. But the neutrality of Belgium is protected by European guarantee and England is one of the guarantors. In 1870 Earl Granville, then at the head of the English Foreign Office, alive to this danger, promptly and wisely bound England to side with France if Prussia violated Belgian territory and with Prussia if France did so.

"Would Lord Salisbury act prudently to take upon himself a similar engagement in the event of a fresh conflict between these two countries? It is for Englishmen to answer the question. But it seems to me, as one not indifferent to the greatness and interests of England, that such a course at the present moment would be unwise to the last degree. However much England might regret the invasion

of Belgian territory by either party to the struggle, she could not take part with France against Germany (even if Germany were to seek to turn the French flank by pouring its armies through the Belgian Ardennes) without utterly vitiating and destroying the main purpose of English policy all over the world.

"But it will be asked, must not England honour its signature and be faithful to its public pledges? I reply that your Foreign Minister ought to be equal to the task of meeting this objection without committing England to war. The temporary use of a right of way is something different from a permanent and wrongful possession of territory; and surely England would be easily able to obtain from Prince Bismarck ample and adequate guarantees that, at the close of the conflict, the territory of Belgium should remain intact as before?

"You will see, sir, that I raise, in a very few words, an exceedingly important question. It is for the English people to perpend and pronounce. But it is high time they reflected on it.

"I am, sir, your obedient servant,
"DIPLOMATICUS."

The leading article refers to its correspondent as one "who speaks with high authority," and after setting out the military positions of France and Germany it draws the following conclusion:

"Would the violation of Belgian territory, whether by Germany or France, be such an injury to our honour and such a blow to our interests? It might be so in certain circumstances, and it would assuredly be so if it involved a permanent violation of the independence of Belgium. But, as 'Diplomaticus' ingeniously suggests, there is all the difference in the world between the momentary use of a 'right of way,' even if the use of the right of way be in a sense wrongful, and the appropriation of the ground cov-

ered by the right of way. We trust that both Germany and France would refrain even from this minor trespass. But if they did not? If one or other were to say to England, 'All the military approaches to France and Germany have been closed, and only neutral approaches lie open to us. This state of things is not only detrimental but fatal to our military success, and it has arisen since the treaty guaranteed the sacredness of the only roads of which we can now avail ourselves. We will, as a fact, respect the independence of Belgium, and we will give you the most solemn and binding guarantees that at the end of the conflict Belgium shall be as free and independent as before,' if Germany (and of course our hypothesis applies also to France) were to use this language — though we trust there will be no occasion for it — we cannot doubt what would be the wise and proper course for England to pursue, and what would be the answer of the English Government. England does not wish to shirk its true responsibilities. But it would be madness for us to incur or to assume responsibilities unnecessarily when to do so would manifestly involve our participation in a tremendous war."

That was the official Conservative opinion in 1887; but when, in 1914, Germany did just what was suggested by "Diplomaticus" and the *Standard,* Liberal statesmen were mortally shocked, and advised Belgium to decline Germany's proposal. Must it be said that Belgium strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel? Of course her diplomatic honour is intact, though little else seems to be left at present. But whose opinion will guide the people in the years to come? Whose counsel will be worth heeding when the next war cloud casts its gloom over Europe? Statesmen and "leaders of thought" give us no hope. Only statesmen and diplomatists could

make such a mess of affairs as we see now in Europe. Certain it is, if the people had had control in July there would have been no war.

How to avert another such cataclysm is the question which must concern us now; and, so that we shall know what steps to take to make another such war improbable, we must learn the whole truth of our long connection with international militarism. We cannot crush Germany, we cannot destroy Prussian militarism, we cannot liberalize Russia, we cannot make the Powers disarm, we cannot affect the royal and republican despotisms of the Continent, no matter how great a victory we achieve. And the greatest victory to British arms will serve no democratic purpose unless the British people now firmly make up their minds to set their own house in order first. That is a matter they can turn their attention to without waiting for the war to end. First things first.