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# THE GERMAN IDEA OF PEACE TERMS

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## THE GERMAN IDEA OF PEACE TERMS

It is essential to a clear view of the present stage of the war that exact note should be taken of the German denunciation of the Peace Terms of the Allies, as indicated in their reply to the Note of President Wilson. In so many words the Kaiser has told his people that these terms mean "the crushing of Germany, the dismemberment of the Powers allied to us, and the enslavement of the freedom of Europe and the seas." "The destruction of our Fatherland" is now the current German description of the aims of the Allies. These aims are, in brief :

1. The restoration of Belgium, Serbia, and Montenegro, with compensations.
2. The evacuation of the invaded territories of France, Russia, and Roumania, with reparation.
3. International settlements guaranteeing land and sea frontiers against unjustified attack.
4. Restitution of Alsace-Lorraine.
5. Liberation of Italians, Slavs, Roumanians, and Czecho-Slovaks from Austrian and German domination.
6. The freeing of non-Turkish populations from Turkish rule, and the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from Europe.

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7. As regards Poland, the creation of a new Polish State.

In rejecting these terms as intolerable, the German Government pointed with professed indignation to "the fate of the Irish people" and of the Boer Republics, the Protectorates of Britain and France in North Africa, "the suppression of foreign nationalities in Russia, and, finally, the oppression of Greece, which is unexampled in history." It would appear, then, that the German Government regards all these as cases which ought not to have been allowed to occur. On the same principle, clearly, the cases of the subjection by Germany of Danes in Sleswig, Poles in Poland, and French in Alsace-Lorraine; and of the subjection of Slavs, Czechs, and Roumanians by Austria, ought not to have been allowed to occur. So far there is a semblance of common ground for discussion.

If it be asked, however, whether (1) the release of Greece from all Ally control, which she can obtain by simple observation of strict neutrality, would be regarded by Germany as a ground for yielding any one of the demands of the Allies, it will at once be perceived that her action is in no way determined by what the Allies have done. If it be asked, again, (2) whether the granting to Ireland of complete Home Rule as soon as the Irish people can agree on a settlement would be admitted by the German Government to be a ground for freeing the Poles and Danes, either by way of Home Rule or otherwise, it will be at once realised that the reference to Ireland does not imply the slightest disposition to do for Poles and Danes what it is declared by im-

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plication ought to be done for Ireland. The German Government has not the remotest intention of freeing the Danes, or doing anything it is not compelled to do for the Poles.

Still less is it to be supposed that, in the event of its success, it would dictate to its Turkish ally the liberation of Armenia, or to its Austrian ally the liberation of any of the Slav peoples now under Austrian dominion. The assumed indignation of the German Government, then, is a mere diplomatic or dialectic device. As regards British and French Protectorates in Africa, the pretence is still more transparent. Either these are or they are not justifiable in the present stage of Moslem civilisation. If they are not, not only is Turkish rule over Armenians doubly unjustifiable, in that it is murderous as well as unnatural, but the German Colonies in Africa were unjustifiable. But the seizure of these Colonies by the Allies is denounced in the bitterest terms by German representative and official writers as a crime against civilisation, and Turkey, they tell us, must not be touched.

A common moral basis for discussion, then, as between the Central Powers and the Allies, does not appear to exist. The former affect to view with indignation political procedures which, as regards their own action, they are determined upon carrying, to say the least, to immeasurably further lengths. The reference to the Boer Republics is decisive. Those subjected States, having received responsible self-government, have entered into a voluntary union with the neighbouring British Colonies, the former leader of the Boer forces in the Boer War becoming

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President of the Union. So far from considering his country latterly oppressed, he has with supreme efficiency carried out the expulsion of the Germans from one of their South African Colonies, and one of his ablest Boer colleagues is now completing the work in other regions. The Boer populations are thus in the mass avowedly content with their relation to the British Empire. No such content exists with regard to Germany in Sleswig, in Prussian Poland, or in Alsace-Lorraine.

It is hardly necessary, further, to dwell on the moral significance of the pretence that Greece has been suffering an "oppression unexampled in history." When future historians read this proposition, and note that it comes from the Power which in August, 1914, murderously invaded Belgium, not only inflicting military slaughter and frightful devastation but committing savage massacres of non-combatants, including women and children; which thereafter wrung from the prostrate people, again and again, enormous money contributions; then left them to subsist by the contributions of the Allies and of neutrals; and still later has brutally deported them by thousands for compulsory labour—when the historians of the future assimilate these facts, they will be divided between pronouncing German psychology an impenetrable mystery and summing up the German people as morally insane. For there is not the faintest intention on the part of the German Government to make amends to Belgium for the immeasurable wrongs she has endured. So far as can be gathered from any German utterance, official or unofficial, there is no reason to doubt that the mass

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of the German people of all classes regard the act of attempted self-defence by Belgium as having exonerated her assailant from guilt.

Thus on the face of the official manifesto of the German Government it is plain that the Allies have to deal with a Power which recognises no moral standards in its dealings with other States. That any morally sane mind could at once find the "oppression of Greece" monstrous and the devastation of Belgium innocent is not thinkable. It would be unfair to the normal savage to say that such an ethic is on the savage plane. Savages do not thus add insane sophistry to savage deeds. We must either suppose the German Government to be jesting (a thing not readily associable with German officialdom), under circumstances in which jesting would certainly be symptomatic of moral insanity, or pronounce it so radically iniquitous as to call for an international treatment analogous to that meted out to individual criminals.

But the official attitude of the German Government in this matter only partially indicates the moral realities of the case. While it affects boundless indignation at the proposition that it and its allies should make amends and yield territory, it has quite certainly been planning to take territory from the States it had so far been able to victimise. As to this there has been no disguise among the general run of German publicists. It is not merely the common run of the newspapers and the propagandists of the stamp of Bernhardt that have been proclaiming the necessity of the annexation of Belgium. A number of them did that before the war

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when the Pan-German movement openly mooted also the annexation of Holland. As for mere invasion, it had been notorious throughout Germany for many years that "in the next war" with France an invasion by German armies through Belgium was part of the prepared military plan. But since the invasion men who could not before have been suspected of harbouring such ideas have declared themselves strongly in favour of making the occupation of Belgium permanent.

It was bad enough that the initial crime—matched in modern history only by that of the last massacre of Armenians by the Turks—should be zealously defended by many German jurists and other academic authorities after their Chancellor had avowed that it was a wrong for which reparation would have to be made. The assumption that a wrong *could* be compensated for was an indication of the moral standards of the Chancellor. Feeling that he had seemed too scrupulous for German taste, he took the earliest opportunity of saying so. After declaring on August 4th, 1914, that his Government were aware of the readiness of the French to invade Belgium—a statement for which no evidence has ever been produced—he later took refuge in the pretext that Belgium had broken her neutrality by previously conferring with France and Britain as to how she should act when the expected invasion came. But even this lupine dialectic was outdone in the official publication, "Truth about Germany: Facts about the War." As thus:—

"The inalienable right of self-defence gives the individual whose very existence is at stake the moral



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liberty to resort to weapons which would be forbidden except in terms of peril. As Belgium would nevertheless not acquiesce in a friendly neutrality which would permit the unobstructed passage of German troops through small portions of her territory, although her integrity was guaranteed, the German General Staff was obliged to force this passage in order to avoid the necessity of meeting the enemy on the most unfavourable ground.

“In our place the Government of the United States would not have acted differently. *Inter arma silent leges*—in the midst of arms the laws are silent.

“The Belgians would have been wise if they had permitted the passage of the German troops. They would have preserved their integrity, and, besides that, would have fared well from the business point of view, for the army would have proved a good customer and paid cash. . . .

“On these conditions it would have been absolutely impossible to us to give up passing through Belgium. *Moreover*, we had just learned *with mathematical certainty* that a French army was getting ready to march *in the direction of Belgium.*”

We shall return later to the general ethic of this pronouncement. For the moment the point to be kept in view is the formula substituted for the Chancellor's official assertion that he knew the French were ready to invade Belgium. The question has been pertinently put: “In how many parts of France is it possible to march to the north without advancing more or less in the direction of Belgium?” It has not been answered.

The general principle that “necessity knows no law” of reciprocity may be said to have been endorsed by the German nation in the mass, the only

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dissentients being the small section who hold with the author of "J'Accuse," and who include a minority of the most advanced Social Democrats. Professor Haeckel, in the early period of the war, proposed the annexation of Luxembourg, with some additional territory, as a new German State, and the annexation of the greater part of Belgium with a part of France to make another; the remainder of Belgium being assigned to Holland. The equally distinguished Professor Wilhelm Wundt, of Leipzig, also in 1914 told the Belgians that "in their stiff-necked blindness they had conducted the war only to prove to the whole world their incapacity to exist as a State." The no less distinguished Professor Wagner, in a speech delivered at a meeting of the German Defence Union in February, 1915, put this view:—

"Even after our great success we will not turn our arms against Holland, Switzerland, and the other neutral German countries. But I fail to see why we should not keep Belgium, which we have conquered, inhabited as it is by many Germans."

The statement was loudly applauded. And yet a fourth distinguished specialist, Professor Oncken, thus disposed of the moral problem of the invasion as early as October, 1914:—

"The fate which Belgium has brought on her own head is hard for the individual, but it is not too hard for this State, for the destinies of the immortal great nations stand too high for it not to be necessary for them, in case of necessity, to step over existences which are not in a position to protect themselves, but lead a

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parasitic life on the oppositions of the great. This 'neutral' Belgium had for a long time been in the world economically a dependent of our enemies, France and Russia. We know that it was neither in a position, nor, in accordance with the views of the population which we now know, did it desire, to take upon itself the duties of neutrality. And the proofs are increasing that before we marched into Belgium it had already broken its duties in favour of France in more than one point. Let us leave Belgium to its fate."

It is unnecessary to multiply quotations from less eminent publicists. The simple fact that the protest against a German policy of annexation had admittedly come only from the small Socialist minority is the proof that such a policy was in general favour, and was expected to be followed by the Government. If in course of time, as German hopes sank, there was a more common willingness to abandon conquests which there was small hope of holding, there had clearly been no change of moral attitude. Probably no honest pacifist in any country, belligerent or neutral, will deny that had Germany won the war she would have annexed Belgium, dismembered France and Russia, and taken every British colony which she could have hoped to handle. There is a whole German literature of proposals, of the year 1915, for the division of the British carcass, the imposition of "helot" tasks on the British population, and so forth.\* It is the nation which in very large part acclaimed these proposals that now affects burning indignation at demands for reparation, for restoration of stolen territory, and for the liberation

\* See Mr. Alexander Gray's *The Upright Sheaf*, and his *The New Leviathan* (Methuen, 1915).

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of subject races, as being a policy of "destroying our Fatherland."

It is broadly and irrefutably true to say that the Central Powers and their allies would gleefully have "destroyed" all the other Fatherlands in Europe could they have done so. Germany would certainly have handed over Serbia and Montenegro to Austria and annexed Belgium. How long it would have abstained from annexing Holland is an interesting question. We have seen that Professor Wagner thought it worth while to make a point of stating that "even after our great success we will not turn our arms against Holland, Switzerland, and the other neutral German countries" [*i.e.*, presumably the Scandinavian States]. The implication is that Germany might rightfully do so: else why the proposition? For any other Power the thing would be a matter of course, not to be even considered. For Germany it is otherwise. The situation being so understood, the States in question had notice of what they might expect in the fullness of time.

In this connection we have now to consider the cases of Switzerland and Holland. The German sections of the Swiss people, while in the main maintaining the correct attitude of neutrality observed by the Swiss Government, have certainly been more in sympathy with Germany than with the Powers of the Entente. Yet it is equally certain that the entire Swiss people would have resisted to the utmost any German infraction of their territory, just as did Belgium. The Dutch people would no less certainly have done the same. This being perfectly well known to the German people, they either regard

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those States as equally with Belgium deserving of annexation, or they have one moral test for a "Latin" State and another for a "Teutonic." Either way they rank for international purposes on the same criminal footing. They are either the unscrupulous enemies of all States which they can hope to oppress, or the cultivators of a special form of racial mania which makes them the unscrupulous enemies of all races not supposed to be related to theirs.

Strictly speaking, the former is the correct solution, if we can attach any meaning whatever to the above-cited pronouncements in regard to Belgium. The principle that the right of self-preservation includes the right to trample down any fellow-creature is the specific negation of all morality, and the last word of human baseness. It would entitle the German on a sinking ship to take a woman's life-preserver for himself and let her drown. "Individual" right, be it remembered, is expressly pleaded as giving the cue to State right; it is not argued that a State, to save itself, may fitly commit acts of murderous selfishness which in an individual would be abominable. The German jurists who argue the case appear to be men who reason from their individual ethic to State ethic. When, then, it is officially denied that German troops have used women and children as "living shields" in warfare, we are not required to believe that Germans in general would think the practice indefensible. On the Belgian precedent it would be sound war policy if it could be shown to be useful.

It is hardly necessary to add that the plea of

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having promised reparation is no defence at all. No real security was offered to Belgium. By yielding to the German demand she would have constituted herself Germany's ally, and incurred the hostility of France and Britain, which would then have been perfectly entitled to treat her as an enemy and fight on her territory as the Germans have done. Nor could Germany guarantee a reparation which, in the event of her own complete defeat, she would be left unable to make. But even to discuss such issues is to obscure the vital fact that the demand made by the German Government was one which, if put to them, the entire Swiss people, including all of German stock, would have pronounced an insult, to be resented to the death.

The summing-up of the whole matter is that the German Government, which really represents the bulk of the German people, recognises no principle of reciprocity in its dealing with others. Its refusal of the Allies' Peace Terms, which was, of course, to be expected, proceeds not upon any moral basis, but upon the simple animal egoism which in war would joyfully inflict any humiliation upon others, but recognises no duty of making even the most inadequate amends for immeasurable injury done. Any sympathy given to such a Power by neutrals is the sympathy of simpletons, who would fitly be the next victims of the criminal whom they compassionate. German "holy wrath" is directed against the demand for reparation to Belgium as much as against any of the other proffered terms.

On calm reflection it may well seem to some neutrals difficult to believe that the bulk of a civilised

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and "cultured" nation, and notably of its academic class, should at this stage of humanity have developed a moral attitude in international matters which belongs to the time of Rome and Carthage. But this phenomenon is the due result of the special political evolution of the German people for two centuries past. They have never for a moment lived in the political conditions which generate a political or national as distinguished from an individual moral sense. The group of German theologians who in 1914 signed a manifesto proclaiming the superiority of German "Kultur" declared that most of them knew of the existence of Bernhardt's works only through the sensation they had made abroad. This may quite possibly be true. The mass of learned men in Germany are specialists, each engrossed in his specialty, and all shut out from the political life which in other countries tends to moralise men in their national relations. Having no possibility of influencing national policy, they resign themselves to the political position of atoms in "the State," concerning which, in common with most of their countrymen, they have been trained to repeat a daily litany of national self-praise. That is their sole mode of political existence. And they indemnify themselves for their individual obliteration under an autocracy by assuming a collective greatness which is held to be reflected upon all. Individual political nullity is felt to be compensated by collective vainglory. The result is a Cæsarean State.

But while many individual specialists may have known nothing of any one German Chauvinist work

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hounding on the nation to acts of aggression, only the most recluse life can have kept any of them from knowing of the general Chauvinist propaganda. The 150 German Protestant clergymen who in or about 1913 signed an appeal for a peace policy did so because they knew of a general war sentiment. At least four Generals—von Eichhorn, von Wrochem, von Liebert, and Keim, to say nothing of the Crown Prince—took active part in war propaganda in 1912-13, a thing not possible without the assent of the authorities. And here we have one more memorable illustration of German national ethic. The Austrian case against Serbia, it will be remembered, was not merely the assassination at Serajevo, but the "agitation" which had been going on for years. It was on the score of that agitation that Austria proposed to make war on Serbia in 1913, and wanted Italy to co-operate.

Now just such an "agitation" had been going on in Germany for fully twenty years, in the shape of the propaganda of Pan-Germanism. That propaganda, in the name of a religion of race-character and race-destinies, menaced all the smaller "Teutonic" States with ultimate absorption by Germany, and all the non-Teutonic States with ultimate overthrow. Bernhardt only turned to specific military ends a line of propaganda which had been laid out by a score of Chauvinists before him. No German statesman is known ever to have set his face against such "agitation." The theologians who disclaimed Bernhardt never dreamt of asking themselves whether his work was not morally and practically on all fours with the "agitation" in Serbia which



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they thought was righteously to be punished by an Austrian invasion. As passive atoms in the Cæsarean State they were inaccessible to such considerations.

Professor Wilhelm Wundt, who has definitely associated himself with the worst manifestations of German national immoralism, might usefully, as a specialist in psychology, set himself the problem of tracing the process of the "Cæsarean madness" as it arises in a people. The Cæsarean madness is, in the psychology of crime, to be regarded as a form of "induced" insanity, the result, in an ill-balanced and ill-trained nature, of the sense of unlimited power. There is a close analogy between it and the political psychosis of the German people in the past dozen years. As to the symptoms, we are not dependent on the testimony either of Pacifism or of Kaiserist theologians. They are fully recorded in Professor O. Nippold's work, "Der Deutsche Chauvinismus" (1913), which, as Mr. Alexander Gray observes, "has become a work of the highest historical importance." It records a rapidly rising pressure of war-madness, induced by a special chorus of German self-glorification, and a ritual of rapturous praise of war as war.

Many, of course, protested; but by 1914 most of them had also been carried away. Men who had seemed to be internationalists a few years before joined in the chorus, all asseverating the national falsehood that the war had been forced on Germany. There was nothing more needed. A people so politically incompetent as to be capable of giving currency to such a mendacious formula was further

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incapable of a rational estimate of its own actions. The creed of German super-greatness fused all other forms of thought. A dozen leading specialists, atoms in the Cæsarean State-consciousness, acclaimed the initial crime. Eucken supplied the latterly resumed formula of "holy wrath"; and von Harnack, helping to draw up "peace terms" for the to-be-vanquished, suggested an item of £50,000,000 "for having told lies." Meanwhile, he was circulating the official falsehood as to the storing of British ammunition at Maubeuge before the war. The Cæsarean madness was dominant.

That this evolution should take place in an aggregate supposed to be on the whole good-natured is no anomaly. Nero began as a very amiable and promising youth, as did Henry VIII. It is the conditions that normally determine the development of the organism, and the Pan-German conditions—feudalism, autocracy, a mere simulacrum of self-government, habitual national vainglory, past military triumphs, and a vast military power—all made for national Cæsarism to a degree never before seen in human history. As Athens, the self-conscious crown of Greek life, became a "tyrant-city," vainglorious Germany became a tyrant State.

This is the Power upon which the Allies have ultimately to impose "peace terms." It must be dealt with as what it is, a neurotic nation, liable to "civicidal" madness. There can be no question of vengeance. Vengeance for the wrong done is simply impossible. That which accrues by national suffering falls equally on the innocent and the guilty. All that is possible, all that is planned, is simply a

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process (1) of material reparation, lamentably inadequate to balance the ruin wrought; (2) of undoing of old German iniquities, from the Partition of Poland to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine; and (3) of vigilant safeguarding of the future.

