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GERMAN "TRUTH"

and European Facts about the War.

BY

THE RIGHT HON.
SIR FREDERICK POLLOCK,
Bart., LL.D., D.C.L., F.B.A.,
Correspondant de l'Institut de France, Membre associé de l'Académie
Royale de Belgique.

PRICE TWO PENCE.

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Let me have war, say I ; it exceeds peace as far
as day does night.

Coriolanus, Act iv., sc. 5.

Measureless liar . . .

Pardon, my lords, 'tis the first time that ever I
was forc'd to scold.

Coriolanus, Act v., sc. 5.

Well held out, i' faith . . . Nothing that is
so is so.

Twelfth Night, Act iv., sc. 1.

INTRODUCTORY.

A pamphlet entitled "Truth about Germany: Facts about the War" has been largely circulated in the United States in the interest of the German Government. It purports to be vouched for by a committee of persons holding high or very respectable positions in Germany. For some reason it was kept out of these islands as long as possible (one would have thought the "Truth" which was good in America should be good in Britain) and a few copies have only quite lately become accessible. The present answer is English and does not pretend to be impartial, but the writer has endeavoured to rely on well-known facts and verifiable documents. We have thought it beneath us to notice mere idle vituperation of England unconnected with any question now at issue; but we cannot help wondering whether the German author is aware that there are still Southerners as well as Northerners in the United States, and that Virginia, now thoroughly loyal to the Union, claims as good a right to her traditions as Massachusetts. His discreet silence about the war of 1898 and the European coalition that failed to come off does not show, of course, that he never heard of these fairly recent happenings. If we were at peace with him, we would try and persuade him gently that offering a gratuitous shoe-stand to American citizens is not the readiest way to win their affections, and certainly not if you tell them, with an ominously bulging hip pocket, that no other brand of polish will do at all.

The British Blue Book, issued at a nominal price in the autumn of 1914, embodying former White Papers, and entitled "Great Britain and the European Crisis. Correspondence and statements in Parliament, together with an introductory narrative of events," is cited as "European Crisis."

THE PEACEFUL PEOPLE.

The German spokesmen say, "Not one human being among us dreamed of war." (1) What, then, was General von Bernhardt dreaming about when he wrote and published a book on "Germany and the Next War"? Did he regard that war as indefinitely distant? And why did not the peaceful Germany protest with authority against the common belief of the world that Bernhardt represented the mind, if not of Germany itself, at any rate of a powerful and unscrupulous party within the German ruling classes? Bernhardt is taken only as a recent example of a type which has of late years been more and more conspicuous in German political writing. In Britain we do not pretend that nobody dreamed of war. The fear of European war, as a consequence of the forceable annexation of Alsace and Lorraine by Germany, was before our eyes ever since 1871. Few men, if any, were so sanguine as to think it an idle fear. It could not be disregarded while the war of 1870 was in living memory, unless France and Germany could come to a new agreement. Some of us thought war was certain or highly probable; others thought the tremendous risks involved in modern warfare were so strong a check on aggressive warlike enterprise (besides the really peaceable disposition believed to be increasing among most civilized nations) as to make it improbable though possible. (2) Some proclaimed danger on the housetops; others thought it wiser to prepare for it with as little talk as possible, insisting meanwhile that peace was the normal and reasonable state of things, and endeavouring, as far as might be, to promote good will all round. But as for not dreaming of war, ignorance of notorious facts has been carried to that pitch of innocence only in Germany—and then only in German fiction since the war has broken out.

Then Germany is said to "have given an example of tranquillity and peace." Why an example? The other Great Powers too have been at peace in Europe for many years. It seems to be implied that for Germans, and Germans alone, it is a specially meritorious act of self-denial to abstain from attacking one's neighbours. But how is it, then, that for at least twenty years Germany and not any other Power has set the pace in naval and military expenditure? How is it that all proposals and suggestions for limiting armaments

(1) Truth about Germany, p. 1.

(2) It was hoped by many, not only in England, that the general sense of civilized people would revolt against the burden of competing armaments. "Es wird durch Übertreibung zu Grunde gehen," said a South-German colleague to the writer several years ago. That hope has been baffled.

by common understanding have been persistently rejected by the German Government and laughed to scorn by German publicists? One obvious answer is that people who have worked themselves into a state of hatred and suspicion of all their neighbours are incapable of believing their neighbours' motives to be any better than their own, and see deep-laid plots in every peaceful offer of business—except from those who are willing to subordinate their own interest to Germany's and make themselves mere tools of German ambition.

In any case it is known to every one except this super-innocent committee of generals, professors, politicians and men of letters that in 1911 Europe was brought to the verge of war by the wholly unexpected interference of Germany in Morocco. Whatever excuses might be made for this action, it was not an example of tranquillity. Or did no German gunboat ever go to Agadir, and were all the nations dreaming? The only mention of this incident in the "Truth" is made in order to drag in the impudent calumny that "England and France were resolved not to respect the neutrality of Belgium." Those of us who are old enough to remember the Second Empire in France remember very well how Louis Napoleon insisted on having a finger in every pie and trying to pick something out of it for the glory of his dynasty and the Napoleonic legend. After eighteen years of this policy the world, rather notably including the United States, got tired of it, and when the war of 1870 came the Second Empire had no friend who thought it good enough to fight for. The recent policy of the victors in that war has been conducted on similar lines for about the same time (the date of the famous Kruger telegram was 1895) and apparently with similar results. Germany and Austria have at this day no friend in Western Europe, not even Italy, their nominal ally.

Most grotesque of all is a complaint of other nations employing spies. The efficacy of this art in time of peace is probably exaggerated in popular belief; but the Prussian tradition of it goes back to Frederick the Great.

In the earliest pages of this book, and in many others, as well as in letters which have been officiously circulated by private hands, there is talk about the "serious and conscientious" character of the German nation, and the things no serious and conscientious nation could possibly do. All such talk is irrelevant, for the question is not what Germany, or any nation, might be expected to do, but what has in fact been done in the sight of the world. It is no less irrelevant to protest that "Germany cannot be wiped from the face of the earth." If this means that the German people, speech and customs cannot be extinguished, it is true but superfluous. Belgium is much smaller than Germany, but the Belgians also cannot be wiped from the face of the earth—and will not. If it means that the German Empire as constituted in 1871 is eternal, and the supremacy of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Central Europe a necessity of European civilization, it is at least a rash assertion. It is just because "America fully appreciates Goethe and Kant" that America will not lightly accept the claim of Prussian militarism to dominate the body and soul of Germany.

HOW THE WAR CAME ABOUT.

The section of "Truth" thus headed brings out one important fact which perhaps was not well understood before the war. German rulers had been unpleasantly surprised by the quick revival of French prosperity after the war of 1870, and had directed their diplomacy to stir up mistrust between France and her possible allies; for a certain time they obtained a good deal of the desired effect. Somewhat later, they formed the design of creating a naval power which should rival or excel that of France and be a matter for serious consideration, perhaps even a menace, to England: a plan which was executed with great zeal and pertinacity, and with the result of increasing naval expenditure all round and not producing any corresponding improvement in the relative strength of Germany. But it was another disturbing element that upset the balance. In the last year or two the prevailing motive of German military policy has been an almost panic dread of Russian expansion, taking form in a determination to uphold Austrian influence against Russian among the Slavonic nations of the Balkans, even at the cost of a general war. No reason is given for the necessity of such extreme measures to protect Germany from "the attacks of Muscovite barbarism." Barbarous or not, it was a vital part of Bismarck's policy to keep on good terms with the Russian Government; and Bismarck, of course, knew that Russian population and resources were increasing, and their growth could not be permanently checked. One can well understand, however, that the Prussian military clique is jealous of the young and vigorous Russian spirit which, in spite of long continued governmental repression, has never been silenced, and which has now come to the front with a bound. The German ultimatum united all parties in Russia. We hope that a free Russia will emerge from this war: not all at once, for German formalism and pedantry have bitten deep into Russian administration; but with such speed that oldish men may live to see it. The German invasion of Belgium, in like manner, united all parties in Great Britain and even in Ireland. Thus we may give credit to the German War Lord for having already achieved great and beneficent results, but not those which he intended or expected.

As for the immediate causes of the war, the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand was murdered in Bosnian territory which Austria had annexed, and by Bosnians. The Austrian Government professed to have proofs (which have never been made public) ⁽¹⁾ that the murder was planned in Serbia with the connivance of the Serbian authorities. Many persons in Russia and elsewhere believe that as much was known about it in Vienna as at Belgrade: but let that pass. A month after the event Austria quite suddenly made a series of requisitions to Serbia the like of which have seldom, if ever, been addressed to an independent Power, whether great or small. They amounted to demanding that, for the purpose of tracing out the

(1) The so-called *dossier* stated to have been published in Vienna (German White Book, not in the English version) is a statement, not of evidence, but of conclusions from evidence of which the sources and value remain undisclosed. Americans, like Englishmen, expect to have the means of verifying testimony for themselves, or at least of estimating its weight.

alleged Serbian plot, Serbian jurisdiction and police should be put under Austrian control. ⁽¹⁾ Rivalry between Austria and Russia in the Balkan peninsula was of long standing, and Serbia had formerly been under Austrian influence but now looked to Russia as the natural protector of the lesser Slavonic States. If the directors of Austrian foreign affairs did not know that such a demand, being in substance an ultimatum, addressed to Serbia in such fashion, was an almost intolerable provocation to Russia as well as Serbia, their stupidity must have been astounding. The provocation was aggravated by the requirement of an answer within forty-eight hours. Contrary to expectation, the Serbian Government yielded on all material points, with only such reserves as were necessary to prevent Serbia from being treated as an Austrian protectorate. Even this did not suffice. Austria was bent on war, by preference a merely local war to humiliate Serbia; but if Russia did interfere, there was the fear of Germany to restrain her (in which case Austria would score a diplomatic triumph at Russia's expense, for the second time in a few years); and if that failed, there was the assurance of German support in war, and the hope that the Triple Alliance was strong enough to deal not only with Russia but with France. And what did the German Government do? It simply backed up the Austrian attack on Serbia and refused or evaded every proposal for avoiding the horrors of a European war by mediation or conference. ⁽²⁾ Let any impartial person consider what would be the probable conduct of two allied Powers intent on using the Serajevo murder as a pretext for humbling Serbia, discrediting Russia, and establishing Austrian and incidentally German predominance in the Balkans, by war with Russia and Russia's allies if necessary; and then let him look through the published and authentic documents and ask himself in what material respect the conduct of the Austrian and German Governments differed from that which he would expect from deliberate peace-breakers. It is true that they waited for a pretext and did not begin warlike operations on the bare allegation of military necessity. Perhaps Austro-Hungarian diplomacy was not educated quite up to the level of the newest Prussian public morality. Let the impartial reader ask himself, moreover, why, if Russia had wanted war, she could not bring it about by the simple and quite plausible method of advising Serbia to reject the Austrian demands altogether.

Events ran their fatal course. There was a round of preparation, mobilizing, hurried attempts by the Western Powers to suggest some acceptable formula which might at least gain time. Serbia was already in the background, Russia was arming against Austria, German armies mustering against Russia. There was a moment of relaxation when the Austrian Government was willing to re-open discussion, not with Serbia indeed but with Russia, and Russia to hold her hand if only Austria would admit the existence of a European question. ⁽³⁾ But at that very moment came a German

(1) In the German view these demands were "equitable and moderate."—European Crisis" No. 9.

(2) "European Crisis," Nos. 2, 9, 11, 13, 25, 34, 43, 54, 60, 71, 76, 85, 108, 112, 117. Compare the Russian Orange Book, Nos. 34, 53, 55.

(3) "European Crisis," No. 132.

ultimatum demanding that Russia should stop mobilizing. ⁽¹⁾ The time given for a reply was twelve hours. And this is what the German apologists call the attacks of Muscovite barbarism. Germany having thus assumed the offensive, it was not possible for France, as Russia's ally, to stand aloof. The Power that did stand aloof was Italy, whose Government, though bound by a defensive alliance to Germany and Austria, refused to join in such a war. The rulers of Italy were prepared to stand by their allies against aggression; but now Germany and Austria were, in their clear judgment, the aggressors, and not entitled to call for aid. ⁽²⁾ Of Italy's judgment there is not one word in the German "Truth." The real truth is that it is a crushing refutation of the German pretences.

France, we have said, could not be expected to be neutral; but so anxious was the German General Staff to be foremost, for military reasons, that the German Government, without waiting for any French action, addressed a simultaneous ultimatum to France together with the demand that Russian mobilization should cease. It is best to state this action in the words of unimpeachable German authority: "At the same time the Imperial Ambassador in Paris was instructed to demand from the French Government a declaration within 18 hours, whether it would remain neutral in a Russo-German war." ⁽³⁾ Since the beginning of the war German stories of French and Russian aggressions on the Frontier have been circulated. In "Truth about Germany" itself there is vague talk of French aeroplanes crossing Belgium into German territory (no date is given). Not a scrap of evidence for any of these stories has ever been produced, and we believe them to be wilful fabrications. It is a curious little fact that Austria did not declare war against Russia until five days after Germany had done so.

We do not think it profitable to enter on disputes about the exact dates of mobilization or earlier stages of military preparation. Such questions may be proper for minute students of war and diplomacy, but can hardly affect conclusions reached on larger grounds. No two States have exactly similar arrangements for putting their armies in final readiness for war. Preliminary measures may be carried further, before actual mobilization, in one system than in another. The operation of mobilizing may be quicker in one country than in others, and the Power which mobilizes faster can easily claim credit for superior patience, and lose no military advantage, by issuing the final order to mobilize a little later than the adversary. However, much evidence has gradually come to light, since the war began, of official and semi-official hints to look out for trouble being circulated many weeks earlier among German business establishments all over the world.

(1) "European Crisis," Nos. 110, 120, 121, 135. It is extremely difficult to reconcile the promotion of direct discussion between the Austrian and Russian Governments by the German Government, in the last days of July, with the German ultimatum to Russia of July 31. But this is not the only indication of conflicting influences at work, down to the last moment, in the highest places in Berlin. The British Ambassador at Vienna thought the tension was much greater between Russia and Germany than between Russia and Austria.

(2) "European Crisis, No. 152.

(3) German White Book, authorised translation, p. 14.

Neutral readers will observe that all this breathless flinging of ultimatum took place just as if neither Germany nor Austria had ever heard of a Peace Conference, or Subscribed any of the Conventions made at The Hague with a view to substitute arbitration for war, or been party to an arbitration treaty. In the professed and undisguised views of the Prussian military school, arbitration treaties, Hague tribunals, and such like toys are amusing diversions, and may sometimes be useful diplomatic instruments, for people who do not want to fight, or who want to gain time before they are ready to fight. But as soon as there appears a good chance of getting anything one wants by fighting, arbitration treaties and conventions are to be wholly disregarded, and indeed other kinds of treaties too, more especially those which purport to guarantee the neutrality of small States lying on the most convenient path for German invasion.

The most favourable line for attacking France was through Belgium; Belgium, whose neutrality Prussia herself had guaranteed, as one of the Great Powers, when Belgian independence was established, and had honourably respected in the War of 1870. Since that time the ethics of Prussian militarism had developed. According to the art of war, the German armies ought to march through Belgium, and if that was contrary to the obligation of treaties, so much the worse for the treaties. The Belgian Government had to be cajoled or intimidated into quiescence; if not, then at worst Belgian resistance would not be very serious. And the outstanding guarantor of neutrality, Great Britain? Well, Englishmen, being only shopkeepers, would never plunge into a European war for Belgium; they could be put off with some excuse. And had they not a civil war imminent in Ireland? But the fate of Belgium, and consequent conversion of the Triple Entente between Britain, France and Russia into an Alliance, are matter for a separate section.

BELGIUM.

We must now depart from the order of topics in "Truth about Germany." What is said in the publication about the violation of Belgian neutrality and the German treatment of Belgium is scattered in different places, and the fragments are separated by a thick layer of pompous panegyric on the unanimity of the German public and the excellence of German mobilization. Of these collateral topics we can only say, as we have already said of others, that they are irrelevant. It is very true that the German military machine is a skilfully planned, elaborate, huge and formidable machine. It is also true that the German field artillery is inferior to the French, and the shooting and fire-discipline of the German infantry nowhere in comparison with the British. None of these truths has anything to do with the justice of the war or with the political issues involved. But the German apologists were wise enough, after their kind, when they mixed up the

question of Belgian neutrality with idle miscellaneous declamation rather than face it squarely. We turn to the facts.

In one sense there was very little ground for surprise. The scene had been, as it were, set long in advance. On the one hand all the Great Powers had pledged themselves to guarantee the neutrality of Belgium, and their pledge was reinforced by the Hague Conference of 1907 (Convention v., ch. i. arts. 1, 2), declaring neutral territory inviolable and forbidding the passage of belligerent troops, etc., across it. On the other hand invasion of Belgium had been quite freely discussed as a military problem by German and other writers, and every one who considered the subject was aware that from the military point of view the temptation was great. (Thus, about ten years ago, an engineer officer worked out the lessons of the South African War, and explained "How armies fight,"⁽¹⁾ for the benefit of civilians, in the imaginary campaign of a British expeditionary force in Belgium. The German commanders were supposed to have yielded to the temptation of invading Belgium after prolonged and indecisive attempts on the French frontier elsewhere.) Charitable publicists might assume that the soldiers of various nations were only constructing technical exercises, as one may hold manœuvres in one's own country, or that at any rate the plans of campaign in question assumed, as a preliminary condition, some violation of neutrality by the enemy or by the Belgians themselves. For such events, if they should occur, the German General Staff had every right, and were indeed bound to be prepared. Further, it was perfectly well understood that Great Britain had a special interest in not allowing Belgium to be dominated by any Continental military Power, and it was notorious that she had assumed a special duty of guarding Belgian neutrality in 1870, when the Minister in office was, perhaps more averse to war than any British Ministry before or since. In the face of these matters of common knowledge, the professed astonishment of educated Germans, from the Imperial Chancellor downwards, that England should now go to war with Germany for a "scrap of paper" is very hard to explain.

Indeed it had been quite a common supposition that, if and whenever the German war party's counsels prevailed, war with England might be not the last but the first step in their execution. Among the reasons or conjectures on which that supposition was grounded there were, certainly, some pretty bad military and some worse naval ones; nevertheless it was entertained by many publicists and some German military authorities. Then, apart from the point of the specific manner in which the coming general war would begin, the hypothesis of British neutrality did not seem to General von Bernhardi, for instance, probable enough to be so much as discussed.

When war between France and Germany was seen to be imminent, there were two pressing questions for Great Britain. What should be our attitude if Belgium were not touched? We were prepared, in one word, to oppose our fleet to a German attack on the French coast, and at that stage, not to do more; but it is needless to consider how long that kind of limited neutrality could

(1) Re-issued with this title, 1914.

have served, or would have been respected. For the second and greater question, whether we could tolerate the march of hostile armies through Belgium, promptly swallowed up the lesser, and as to this only an insignificant minority of Englishmen had any substantial doubt. German historians are very learned persons; yet they have forgotten that King Edward I.'s motto was "Pactum serva." That may be medieval culture, but it is still ours.

As in 1870, Great Britain addressed identical inquiries to France and Germany whether each was prepared to respect the neutrality of Belgium provided it was violated by no other Power. ⁽¹⁾ As in 1870, France assented. ⁽²⁾ But in marked contrast to the conduct of the Prussian Government as advised by Bismarck in 1870, Germany made a dilatory excuse almost amounting to a refusal, but not quite, mixed up with a suggestion of imaginary hostilities committed by Belgium. ⁽³⁾ Belgium, being also questioned, expected other powers to observe and uphold her neutrality, and intended to maintain it "to the utmost of her power." ⁽⁴⁾ On August 2nd German troops entered Luxemburg, another guaranteed neutral State. What might have come of that, if it had stood alone, it is, again, useless to speculate. A demand on Belgium for friendly neutrality—that is, allowing passage of German troops—was excused by the pretence of a French plan for "attack across Belgium," and mitigated by the proffer of an assurance that even in case of armed conflict Germany would not annex Belgian territory ⁽⁵⁾ (which now, by the way, is being treated not merely as occupied but as conquered country). On August 4th the Belgian Government was informed that the German Government must "carry out, if necessary by force of arms, the measures considered indispensable in view of the French menaces." ⁽⁶⁾ Nobody has ever heard what those pretended menaces were. Receipt of this news in London, and the actual entry of German troops into Belgium, were followed by the British ultimatum, or rather conditional declaration of war. ⁽⁷⁾ This was the last expiring word of diplomacy. "Krieg ist das Losungswort": so Germany willed it.

The pretence that Belgian neutrality had already been broken by French officers acting with the connivance of the Belgian Government is best answered by the German Chancellor's official declaration in the Reichstag on that same fatal 4th of August:—

"We are now in a state of necessity, and necessity knows no law. Our troops have occupied Luxemburg, and perhaps are already on Belgian soil. Gentlemen, that is contrary to the dictates of international law. . . . The wrong—I speak openly—that we are committing we will endeavour to make good as soon as our military goal [? Paris] has been reached."

The only excuse given is that the military consequences of not invading Belgium "might have been disastrous." As to any French attack through Belgium, the Chancellor knew well enough that any such action would, at the very least, have destroyed the under-

(1) "European Crisis." Nos. 114, 115.

(2) No. 125.

(3) No. 122. Really the fable of the Wolf and the Lamb becomes tedious by repetition in the history of Prussian apologetics. It is not the narrator's fault.

(4) No. 123

(5) No. 157, cp. Nos. 85, 101.

(6) No. 154.

(7) Nos. 153, 159. See further, No. 160, report from the British Ambassador at Berlin of his final interviews with the German Secretary of State, Chancellor, and others.

standing between Great Britain and France. However, Germany was going to make good the wrong, the admitted wrong. How does it stand with that promise?

GERMANY IN BELGIUM.

In the German "Truth" we read with amazement this paragraph, written, let us hope in charity, before the destruction of Louvain and Termonde.

"The German troops, with their iron discipline, will respect the personal liberty and property of the individual in Belgium, just as they did in France in 1870."

The only comment we have to make on this assurance is in the words of an American journal, the "New York World," published about the beginning of November. "Practically the whole of Belgium has been devastated." The laws of war sanction the summary punishment of inhabitants who commit irregular acts of hostility against troops in actual military occupation, and the destruction of buildings actually used as cover for such hostilities. Until this war no one has pretended that they sanction the destruction of whole towns and the massacre of whole families and groups of non-combatants of whom one or two members are believed or suspected to have fired an effective or ineffective shot. This and nothing less is what German officers and soldiers in Belgium have claimed to do and done quite openly, without regard to the sacred, historical or artistic qualities of buildings, or to the sex or age of persons. If it was not by superior orders, where is the iron discipline? If it was, where are the usages of civilized nations about which German writers—especially for American readers—can protest so loudly when it suits them?

It must not be supposed that we are satisfied of the existence of any *francs-tireurs* in Belgium, nor can we accept in its full extent the German view that, on pain of death, no man without a uniform may defend his own house or his own wife and children. We have thought it needless to enter on controvertible points.

As to the charges of wanton cruelty towards Germans in Belgian cities in the first days of war, we shall only say that, as made, they are too vague to be examined, and nothing has been heard of them in Europe so far as we know. If they were true, they would not justify or excuse retaliation in cold blood. All the world knows what has been reported from the smaller places captured and occupied by German soldiery. We hope, for the credit of humanity, that much of it will prove to be false or exaggerated. But, in face of the serious attitude of the Belgian Government, we cannot assume that all German hands are clean.

Looking only to that which is notorious and indisputable, the doings of the Prussians in Belgium are like unto those of Chinghiz Khan, as described by the one man who escaped from the sack of Bokhara: "They came, destroyed, burnt, slew, plundered and went." Not yet is the last word fulfilled. The German horde has not gone from Belgium. But it will go perforce: and if there be any people on the earth so deceived as to send any blessing after the defeated host of William the Hun, it will not be the American.

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