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SCANDINAVIA AND
THE WAR

BY

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE following articles are reprinted from the *Morning Post*, by the courteous permission of the proprietor. The author is peculiarly fitted to speak with knowledge, and at the same time with impartiality, on the subject of Scandinavian hopes and fears. His articles will probably come as a revelation to many even of those Englishmen who have visited Scandinavia. In this country too little attention has been paid to Scandinavian politics, although the achievements of the Scandinavian countries in literature, in sculpture, and in the sciences are better known and more admired by Englishmen than Dr. Bjorkman is aware.

H. W. C. D.

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SCANDINAVIA AND THE WAR

I

FIRST of all, I must point out that, literally speaking, there is no Scandinavia as yet. There is a Scandinavian peninsula and a Scandinavian group of nations, but nothing that may be regarded as a political, economical, or even geographical entity. It is convenient, of course, to have a term that can be applied collectively to the three northern kingdoms; and to the world at large such a term has more validity than the nations comprised within it seem willing to admit. At home, in the United States, I find it next to impossible to make my closest and most intelligent friends remember whether, by birth, I am a Swede, a Norwegian, or a Dane. When I set them right, they answer commonly: 'Well, what is the difference anyhow?' Scandinavians are apt to take offence at an attitude which they regard as expressive of nothing but ignorance. To me that attitude is a most significant symptom, indicating that differences which seem very radical at close quarters may seem quite negligible at a distance. And no matter how much importance the Scandinavians themselves attach to the divergence of their respective natures and interests, an impartial outside observer can only conclude that all divergences are outweighed by their community of race and culture, their practical community of language, their extensive, although far from total, community of political position, and their steadily increasing community of economic interests. In any crisis they find themselves in a position almost

identical with that of Holland and Belgium, which countries, although separated by much greater racial distinctions, are constantly made to feel that the independence of one is essential to the independence of the other.

All this I grant, and the truth of it is more and more being brought home to those whom it principally concerns. In fact, I hope that one of the good results produced by the present upheaval will be to make the Scandinavians fix their gaze on what they have in common rather than on their differences. But, to understand the bearing of the great war on their countries, it is absolutely necessary to keep in mind that they still think and speak and act as Swedes, Norwegians, or Danes, and not primarily as Scandinavians. All of them are just now seriously agitated by hopes as well as fears; but their hopes and fears are not identical except in one point—that they are above all desirous of preserving their national integrity and independence. To make clear the distinctions modifying that common, general desire, I shall consider the three nations separately in their relation to the present crisis, as well as to the new international situation likely to spring from it.

Geographically Denmark belongs to the Continent rather than to the Scandinavian peninsula. But for racial differences it would form a logical part of the German Empire. And to Germany the advantages of such a union would be tremendous. It would turn the Baltic into a German lake, and multiply the chances for a bold stroke at England. It would give Germany the sailors she so badly needs. At the same time it would make it harder than ever for Sweden and Norway to maintain a complete independence, even if they were never openly attacked. In fact, Denmark would be so

valuable as a German province that I think its conquest would long ago have been made one of the main German objectives but for England. Denmark fears Germany, of course, and fears her more than any other Power. But that fear is mixed with hatred, too—a hatred that has lost very little of its intensity by the passing of fifty years since the Duchies of Sleswick and Holstein were taken by Germany. Racially and linguistically one of those provinces, Holstein, had always been German and could be rightly claimed by a united Germany. The southern part of Sleswick had and has a mixed population, with the German element in ascendancy. Northern Sleswick was, and practically is still, as Danish as the island of Fünen. Had Germany been content to take Holstein and the German districts of Sleswick, the rancour caused by that seizure might not have been of long duration. But Germany took the whole of Sleswick ; and what has been done during the last fifty years to uproot all traces of Danish nationality within that province goes far beyond anything done by the Russians in Poland and Finland, or by the Austrians in their Slavonic and Italian provinces. And however willing Denmark might have been to forget, the sufferings inflicted—and inflicted in vain—on the Danes of Sleswick have prevented it from doing so.

Though Denmark has always been akin to Germany in civilization, and though the economical community of interest between the two countries has been steadily increasing, the prevailing Danish attitude toward Germans remains distrustful to the verge of open hostility. For a long period of years the political life of Denmark was coloured and warped by the struggle between conflicting opinions as to what could and should be done to protect the badly exposed capital against the menace

of German conquest. On the other hand, Denmark has been drawn more and more toward England, not only because here Denmark has found one of her best markets, but because of its keen realization that England more than any other Great Power has an interest in protecting a country which may be said to hold the only key to the Baltic and one of the main keys to the North Sea. The events of 1801 and 1807 have grown very vague in memory ; and it is probably the Fleet of Great Britain which more than anything else has drawn the friendship of Denmark. At the same time, Denmark alone among the Scandinavian countries has established friendly relations with Russia. The original cause was sentiment—and the Danes are at once very sentimental and very practical—based on the marriage of a Danish Princess to the Heir to the Russian Throne. But this friendship has acquired more and more of a practical import with the growth of Russian hostility toward Germany and friendliness toward England. Thus it is not surprising that in the present conflict the sympathies of the Danish people turn almost exclusively toward the Allied cause.

But just because of these sympathies, which are not unknown in Berlin, the little country to the north, with a population of less than three millions, and with open shores, that lie almost within gunshot of the German coast, has been forced to maintain its neutrality as punctiliously as did Belgium. I do not think anything but a direct invasion of her territory could bring Denmark to forget the caution enforced by her dangerous proximity to the most unscrupulous of the warring Powers. That all fears for Denmark's safety are not directed southward will probably surprise Englishmen very much. But several travellers recently returned from Denmark assure me that one of the most harrowing apprehen-

sions of the Danish people is the possibility of England's trying to establish a naval base on Danish ground. 'Harrowing' is the word deliberately used, because the Danes feel that under such circumstances they would be forced to fight beside their natural enemies against their natural friends and allies. The time when such a fear might have been warranted is long gone by ; and just now, when a sense of responsibility on behalf of Belgium has so largely caused England's decision to take up arms, such a fear is particularly groundless. A step of that kind, however advantageous in some ways, would in other ways prove all but fatal to the cause of the Allies. And this fact ought to be as clear to Denmark as I know it is to England. What, then, can make the Danes, against their will and against all reason, cling to this fear ? Well, here we have another evidence of German 'diplomacy'. False statements with regard to England's intentions have no doubt been sedulously circulated—and this has been done not only in Denmark, but in Norway as well, where fears of exactly the same kind have been encountered by numerous trustworthy and well-informed travellers. Of course, we know that, if Danish distrust of England be explicable though unwarranted, such a fear on the part of Norway must be held nothing less than ridiculous. But it is there, it has to be counted with, and it should be dispelled.

To return to the more deep-lying Danish friendliness toward the Allies, this is probably strengthened by a realization on the part of Denmark that this may be not only its best but its only chance of recovering Sleswick. But, as I have already said, the Danes are intensely practical in spite of their sentimentality (their practical tendency being enforced by a strongly-developed sense

of humour), and they realize no less clearly that a headlong plunge into the whirlpool of war might at the best prove a very expensive way of achieving their cherished goal. To what extent they entertain any hopes of getting what they want without fighting for it I do not know. But should the Allies prove completely victorious in the end, as I believe they will, it would, particularly on the part of England, be good business, if nothing more, to insist on the belated return of the Danish part of Sleswick to the country of which it forms a natural adjunct.

Because of her position, sheltered by the Koelen mountains on the one side and by the Atlantic on the other, with Sweden acting as a buffer toward Russia and Denmark toward Germany, Norway remains almost unconcerned by the war as long as the two sister nations are unaffected and England does not suddenly desert a policy that has become expressive of one of Norway's main ideals. I do not think much account needs to be taken of any Norwegian fears of England, however much Germany may strive to foster them. But it is always better to meet such fears half-way, and England should not deem it beneath her dignity to do so. More than immediate defeat or victory is at stake just now. A new order of things is likely to emerge from this ordeal of fire. And, when this happens, the nature of the new order may depend in no little degree on the confidence reposed in England by the smaller nations. Such a confidence takes time to develop, though it may disappear in a moment; and it is more determined by public gossip than by the inside knowledge of men in power. Norway's fear of being dragged into the fight by one of the other two Scandinavian countries is much more real and much more significant. But there is a silver

lining to this cloud. In this case German inability to analyse human nature has again frustrated German hopes and intrigues. For years the German Emperor has done his best to win the heart of Norway, and I fear he has long deemed it well won. It is notorious that, while the Norwegians were still struggling to rid themselves of the union with Sweden, the Emperor repeatedly encouraged them, while at the same time he professed the utmost love for the Swedes and his particular good friend the aged King Oscar. I have never had any fault to find with the desire of the Norwegians to be completely independent (which they were not within the Union); but I know that they were more than once on the point of going to war for what could be had peacefully, and I suspect that their trust in German support may have had something to do with their impetuosity.

When the dissolution of the Union actually took place in 1905, war was averted; but relations between the two nations became badly strained, and remained so until not very long ago. As late as last spring several Norwegian poets of high standing bewailed in provocative verses the fact that the fight with Sweden had not come off in 1905. And one might have expected that a fratricidal war on the Scandinavian peninsula would be among the first results of the opportunity offered by the general *mêlée* on the Continent. But instead the Swedes and the Norwegians behaved as if they had never had a single misunderstanding. They arrived quickly at agreements meant to dispose of all mutual fear, and to ensure a common as well as mutual neutrality in the face of anything and everything but the open violation of that neutrality by a third party. It might be said that German interest in Sweden had

exercised pressure on Norway, directly or indirectly. But even if such pressure might have averted an impending crisis, I do not think it could have produced an understanding of the scope and completeness actually existing. Now just as the wonderful common sense of those two peoples—based, I think, on an unusually developed power of imagination—had asserted itself in 1905, so it reasserted itself in this case; and by their action I believe that all possible German hopes of bringing Sweden into the fray on its own side were effectively disposed of.

But this understanding, so helpful by ridding Sweden and Norway of all mutual fear, might under certain circumstances involve both of them instead of only one. And this is the possibility which, in spite of all reassurances, keeps the Norwegians from feeling wholly secure. There are two quarters from which the danger might appear. The Russians might invade Sweden, or at least seize a naval base on the island of Gothland. The alleged designs of Russia on the northernmost part of the Scandinavian peninsula are well known to everybody who gives the least attention to international politics. I shall return to them later when discussing the position of Sweden. For the present I can dismiss them as buried under an avalanche of new events and opportunities too exciting to permit Russian attention to dwell on the distant north. I think this has been realized by the Norwegians, and that in so far as Russia still figures in their apprehensions it is rather as a temptation to Swedish aggressiveness than as a direct aggressor. And the Swedish attitude toward Russia since the beginning of the war has gone far toward dispelling the last vestige of this particular fear. It is the hold of Germany on Sweden—based on circumstances to be

related further on—which continues to cause anxiety to the Norwegians, in spite of the practically perfect guarantee furnished by the understanding between the sister nations. And this is just the point where the futility of the German intrigues shows itself. In spite of the North Cape excursions of the German Emperor, in spite of the glowing Pan-Germanism of the late Björnstjerne Björnson (whose ideas I do not mean to belittle by this reference), and in spite of the employment of Björn Björnson as the Emperor's principal Scandinavian press agent, the Norwegians do not trust the Germans very much. Perhaps a reason for this anomalous and ungrateful attitude on their part may be furnished by what happened at the time when Norway, after the separation from Sweden, was preparing to start a completely new Government of its own. The democratic and republican tendencies of the country are too well known to need mention. Yet a Monarchical Government was decided on; and it is pretty well understood that this concession was the price paid for Germany's acceptance of the new state of affairs.

Be this as it may, the fact remains that the Norwegians find it hard to believe that Germany may not force Sweden into the fight after all. The silver lining to this cloud—though it may not appear as such to Englishmen for the time being—is that the Norwegians seem to take it for granted they must fight on the same side as the Swedes. I think this feeling on their part bodes well not only for the future but for the present, as it will go far toward quieting the Swedes. The sum and substance of all this is that the Norwegians do not want to fight anybody, and that they would be particularly chagrined at having to fight for Germany against the

English. Their sympathies are beyond all doubt with the Allies. And with England Norway has probably more in common than with any other non-Scandinavian nation. To England, and to its Fleet, Norway, like Denmark, would instinctively look for support in a moment of dire need. I insist that promise of such support should be given before the fatal moment arrives, and that it should be given in the most unequivocal terms.¹ Her independence is what Norway cherishes above anything else. An assault on it is the one thing she fears. She stands more outside than her sister nations, with less to fear and less to gain from the events that are now shaking Europe to its foundations. Her incentive to neutrality is the more potent because she has recently entered on a career of industrial development that promises great things for her future. Like Sweden, she is bound to be of tremendous importance to England during the rest of this century, provided she is permitted to grow in peace and in accordance with her own nature. For this reason, if for no other, England should spare no effort to dispose of whatever fears may be still haunting her.

II

Sweden now remains to be considered. I have on purpose put Sweden last, because she needs to be dealt with at somewhat greater length. Her position is more difficult than that of Norway or even of Denmark. Her problem is more acute. Her attitude has seemed more questionable. The sympathies of Denmark are undoubtedly with the Allies, no reservation being made against Russia. The sympathies of Norway are in the

¹ The Belgian Grey Book shows that the *offer* of support has been made by England [Ed.].

main with England, though Norwegians view Russia with some apprehension. The sympathies of Sweden are to a large extent with Germany, although this implies no animosity toward England, and is coupled with a great deal of genuine love for France. The key to the situation is that Sweden does not love Germany so much as she fears, and for that reason hates, Russia. The main features of Sweden's geographical situation are in themselves an explanation of the Swedish state of mind. Sweden and Norway are joined along four-fifths of their entire length, and the Koelen Ridge, which screens Norway so effectively, is of little use to Sweden in this respect, a difference rising out of the conformation of the peninsula. The sound between Sweden and Denmark is only a mile and a half wide at one point. From Germany to the southern coast of Sweden is only a short cruise. The Island of Gothland, on the eastern coast of Sweden, projects far into the Baltic, offering an equal temptation to Russia and Germany. The Aland Islands practically form a bridge from Finland to the Swedish coast just north of Stockholm. There are a dozen points along the northernmost half of Sweden where a landing of troops from Finland could be easily effected. And finally, Sweden and Russia meet at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, at a point whence a railway starts across the Koelen Mountains to an ice-free harbour on the Norwegian coast. And the region tapped by that railway contains unlimited stores of some of the best iron ores known to the world, not to mention other mineral resources and a wonderful wealth of timber.

Let us also recall a few historical data. When Sweden lost Finland to Russia in 1809 the two countries had been at war for more than two hundred years,

clashing incessantly, as did England and France up to the close of the Napoleonic era. Although the Finns have neither race nor language in common with the Swedes, Finland had never been a mere colony to Sweden. It was an integral part of Sweden, bound to her by innumerable ties. And to this day there remains in Finland a Swedish-speaking population of about 250,000. Neither the long, hopeless struggle against the unrelenting Russian advance, nor the sense of responsibility toward the Finnish people, has ever been forgotten by the Swedes. The union with Norway, achieved by Bernadotte in 1814, was meant as a compensation for the loss of Finland. In one sense it was ; in another sense it was not. Through many decades that union undoubtedly meant Swedish control of Norway's military and naval resources, as well as of Norway's foreign policy, thus bringing to Sweden added power and security. But almost from the first Norway was rebellious against an arrangement which palpably foiled her aspiration at absolute self-determination. Of the details or merits of that long family quarrel we shall not have to speak here. Suffice it to say that, in spite of all quarrelling—and foolishly, perhaps—Sweden clung to the idea of the union as a guarantee against any aggression from a third party. And it was only when the union broke in 1905 that Sweden seemed to become aware of the full extent and significance of the Russian menace. Behind this realization, warranted or not, lay undoubtedly a fear that Norway might play into the hands of Russia.

Whether the Russian menace to Sweden has ever existed cannot and need not be decided here. The probability is that it has been exaggerated by the Swedes and under-estimated by the rest of the world.

The main facts advanced by the Swedes as grounds for their apprehensions were the violent Russian attacks on Finnish nationalism, the massing of Russian troops in Finland, the revelations of Russian espionage within Sweden, and the building of railways through Finland to the common border in the extreme north—railways that could bring no reasonable commercial or industrial advantages. The Swedes also saw an increase, rather than a decrease, of bitterness in Norway, although the separation had been accomplished without bloodshed and without the open interference of any third Power.

That all these factors tended to make the position of Sweden precarious in the extreme no one can deny. To make matters still worse, the relationship to Denmark seemed also to have taken a turn for the worse—perhaps because a Danish Prince had accepted the Norwegian Throne, and perhaps because of the known Danish friendliness toward Russia. At this juncture the Swedes appeared to be seized with a sense of utter isolation. But this sense produced no discouragement. Instead, it put them on their mettle and led to an outburst of fierce determination to preserve their country and their nationality at any cost. Reforms of every kind were started or hastened. The whole people seemed to undergo a process of rebirth. Physical and moral discipline became salient characteristics where not long before laxity of every kind had reigned. A period of feverish upbuilding followed, and not only material but also human resources were subject to this process. Nevertheless the Swedes felt compelled to look abroad for help. On this point I dare not speak with too much assurance, but I believe that the nation as a whole would have been most inclined to turn westward, and especially toward England, in this search.

Both because of her large financial interests in Sweden, and because of her long-standing trouble with Russia, England must at one time have seemed the logical ally and protector. Repeatedly I have heard Swedes declare: 'England can never afford to let Russia get a foothold on the Atlantic.' Why this natural tendency never had a chance to make itself felt will be explained further on.

Another possible ally was Germany, of course, and for years a very close friendship had joined the Royal House of Sweden to the Hohenzollerns and other reigning dynasties. The present Swedish King is married to a German Princess, as was his father, and one of his sons is named after the Emperor. One of the latter's sons is named after the late King Oscar. Symptoms of this kind cannot be overlooked, even in these days of constitutional government. And the interchange of ideas has always been brisk between Sweden and Germany. In this connexion it is not without point that for many years no author has pushed to the forefront in Sweden without having his works promptly translated into German. The same is true of Norwegian and Danish works; and while it need not have formed a part of any premeditated campaign on the part of Germany, it has nevertheless had its inevitable effect—an effect that has been greatly enhanced by the contrasting English indifference to all but a small part of the Scandinavian literatures.

Considering all these circumstances, Englishmen might well be surprised, not at the extent but at the limitation of the pro-German sentiment in Sweden. The situation is both curious and entertaining—from an English viewpoint. In spite of the known leanings of the Royal House, in spite of all overtures from

Germany, in spite of military admiration of Prussian methods, in spite of the reckless agitation carried on by men like Sven Hedin, the Swedes have found it extremely hard to become enthusiastic about the Germans, whose arrogance, smug self-complacency, and unflinching tactlessness are constantly grating on them. During the war of 1870-1, for instance, Swedish sympathies were overwhelmingly with France. For all their hatred of official Russia, the Swedes have never hated the Russians as individuals. On the other hand, the feeling against the individual German has at times been so strong that I have heard of German travellers in Sweden speaking English or French in order not to reveal their nationality. Toward the Prussian military spirit and methods the people of Sweden have always manifested a profound distrust and dislike. Although strongly individualistic, the Swedes are at bottom very democratic. What, then, has given Germany the hold on Swedish sympathies which undoubtedly it has to-day? The answer is very simple: the rapprochement between Russia and England. As long as those two Powers remained mutually suspicious of each other, Sweden felt comparatively secure. The understanding between England and France was probably a disappointment, and the effect of it was augmented by the simultaneously increasing hostility between Germany and Russia. But it was only the final completion of the Triple Entente that was felt as a direct blow—the worst one received by Sweden for a long time. For with England tied to Russia, not only by diplomatic engagements but by the exigencies of her own situation, what hope could there be for Sweden in a case of Russian aggression?

If we also bear in mind the dismay caused in German

circles by the Entente—even though its full value to France may never have been realized until after the war had broken out—and the incessant activity of Germany's intriguing diplomacy, with its established policy of international embroilment and its disingenuous methods, we can hardly wonder at the attitude of Sweden to-day. By their isolation within the Scandinavian group, by the apparent or real threats of Russia, by the combination of English and Russian interests, by the intrigues of Germany, and, finally, by the violent agitation of a socially influential pro-German group at home, the Swedes have simply been driven to look upon Germany as their only remaining friend.

No Englishman who has grasped this combination of powerful influences, all of them pressing in the same direction, can fail to respect and admire the restraint shown by the Swedish people since the beginning of the present crisis. No matter what the sympathies of individuals or groups may have been, the behaviour of the nation as a whole has been scrupulously correct, nothing being undertaken in the way of mobilization, for instance, but what was absolutely required for the protection of Swedish neutrality at an extremely critical period. Nor have the Swedes at any time been betrayed into any resentment against England. On the contrary, I have been told by several Englishmen, who have recently passed through Sweden on their way to or from Russia, that they were passed the moment their nationality became known, while the passports and luggage of Germans as well as Russians were carefully examined. To be perfectly frank, however, I do not know what might have happened if the present war had not been preceded by that awakening of the Swedish nation already referred to. The Swedes present a

curious mixture of idealism and practical instincts. Both as individuals and as a nation they are seized at times by an irresistible passion for adventures, for tremendous achievements. The spirit of Charles XII is not quite dead in the country. From time to time the old dreams of world-power seem to haunt the nation, bringing it to a dangerous point of disregard for the hard realities of the current hour.

Perhaps this spirit of adventure will never depart entirely from the Swedish character. Perhaps its departure would be a distinct loss not only to the Swedes but to the world at large. But of late it has turned in a new direction, at once safer and more promising. The Swedes have begun to see visions of power based not on conquest but on internal development. The richness of their natural resources, particularly in metals, has long been known. Up to a brief time ago there seemed small hope of their extensive exploitation, because the needed fuel had to be imported. The progress of electricity has changed this situation radically. Swedish electrical engineers are counted among the best in the world to-day. The waterfalls, in which the country abounds, can now be put to use. New methods of smelting the ore have been devised and are constantly being perfected. The ore can be used at home instead of being shipped abroad. As I was coming across the ocean a few weeks ago I heard an English metallurgist remark that men of his profession expect the Swedes in less than fifty years to lead the world in steel production.

The Swedes have firmly grasped these new possibilities, in which there is adventure enough to suit their ardent souls. To make their new dreams real, they need nothing but their own ingenuity, industry, capacity

for social organization, and—security against interruption from without. No nation in the world is more passionately devoted to its own independence. This has always been true. It is now more true than ever. Freedom to pursue their own course within their own country is all that the Swedes care for—and the world at large, all mankind, will be sure to profit if this desire of theirs is not foiled. The Swedes will be neutral until forced by open infringement of their neutrality to take up arms. They will be friendly with every nation that leaves them alone—even Russia. They will be grateful for any action on the part of greater Powers tending to rid them of the fear of unprovoked aggression that has so long been haunting them. They are looking for no expansion of their territory. If Finland were offered them by the Concert of Powers to-day their answer would probably be: ‘Finland is a nation by itself and should be subject to no other nation.’ If, on the other hand, Finland were once more to become an autonomous member of a Russian Federation, with all its grievances disposed of, I think the Swedes would shed three-fourths of the nervousness that has possessed them in recent years. They do not fear a practically free Finland, tied to Russia by bonds of affection. They do fear a harassed and oppressed Finland that may be prepared as a tool against themselves.

There is in these desires of theirs no vestige of the impossible. What they ask for is eminently practicable and desirable from the viewpoint of every nation wedded to democratic principles. And, as the war goes on, I think the mood in Sweden may change considerably. There, as elsewhere, time is fighting on the side of the Allies. In the meantime nothing is wanted on the part of England but patience. But, when the time comes

to make peace, it would be well if England took steps to ensure to Sweden as well as to Norway and Denmark the neutral independence which to them means life itself. The treaty of 1855, making England and France joint guarantors of Swedish and Norwegian independence and integrity, was abrogated in 1908, because Sweden and Norway considered it injurious to their prestige. It might, however, be wise if they now accepted some similar agreement which should take into account the numerous changes that have occurred since the old treaty was signed. It would also be well, I think, if England could depart from her customary policy of proud indifference—to the extent of really trying to win the friendships of the Scandinavian nations. No one is stronger than he who can learn from his enemies. And England has much to learn from Germany. Those Scandinavian countries possess things that England needs, and will need more and more. They belong naturally to the Anglo-Saxon group—with Great Britain, the United States, and the British Colonies—rather than with Germany. So little will be needed to win them: nothing but an open declaration of intentions, a firm support of principles that have long been dear to the English mind, and some genuine interest in the life, culture, and aspirations of the three nations that have lately brought mankind gifts out of all proportion to their own numerical or political importance.

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