

THEODORE ROOSEVELT ON ULTIMATE CAUSES OF THE WAR

In the Third of a Series of Articles He Discusses These Causes and the Need of Their Removal to Prevent a Repetition of the Same Awful Tragedy.

FROM what we have so far considered, two things are evident. First, it is quite clear that in the world, as it is at this moment situated, it is literally criminal, literally a crime against the nation, not to be adequately and thoroughly prepared in advance, so as to guard ourselves and hold our own in war. We should have a much better army than at present, including especially a far larger reserve upon which to draw in time of war. We should have first-class fortifications, especially on the Canal and in Hawaii. Most important of all, we should not only have a good navy, but should have it continually exercised in manoeuvring. At present our navy does not begin to have the manoeuvring in fleet formation indispensable to its efficiency.

Of all the lessons hitherto taught by the war, the most essential for us to take to heart is that taught by the catastrophe that has befallen Belgium. One side of this catastrophe, one lesson taught by Belgium's case, is the immense gain in the self-respect of a people that has dared to fight heroically in the face of certain disaster and possible defeat. Every Belgian throughout the world carries his head higher now than he has ever carried it before, because of the proof of virile strength that his people have given. In the world at large there is not the slightest interest concerning Luxembourg's ultimate fate; there is nothing more than amusement as to the discussion whether Japan or Germany is most to blame in connection with the infringement of Chinese neutrality. This is because neither China nor Luxembourg has been able and willing effectively to stand for her own rights. At this moment Luxembourg is enjoying "peace"—the peace of death. But Belgium has stood for her own rights. She has shown heroism, courage, and self-sacrifice, and great though the penalty the ultimate reward will be greater still.

Preparation Essential.

If ever this country is attacked and drawn into war as Belgium, through no fault of her own, was drawn into war, I hope most earnestly that she will emulate Belgium's courage, and this she cannot do unless she is prepared in advance, as Belgium was prepared. In one point, as I have already stated, I very earnestly hope that she will go beyond Belgium. If any great city, such as New York or San Francisco, Boston or Seattle, is held for ransom by a foreign foe, I earnestly hope that Americans, within the city and without, will insist that not one dollar of ransom shall be paid, and will gladly acquiesce in the absolute destruction of the city, by fire or in any other manner, rather than see a dollar paid into the war chest of our foes for the further prosecution of the war against us. Napoleon the Great made many regions pay for their own conquest and the conquest of the nations to which they belonged. But Spain and Russia would not pay, and the burning of Moscow and the defense of Saragossa marked the two great stages in the turn of the tide against him. The prime lesson of this war is that no nation can preserve its own self-respect, or the good-will of other nations, unless it keeps itself ready to exact justice from others, precisely as it should keep itself eager and willing to do justice to others.

The second lesson is the utter inadequacy of existing peace and neutrality treaties, and of all treaties conceived in the spirit of the all-inclusive arbitration treaties recently adopted at Washington; and, in fact, of all treaties which do not put potential force behind the treaty, which do not create some kind of international police power to stand behind international sense of right as expressed in some competent tribunal.

It now remains to consider whether there is not—and I believe there is—some method which will bring nearer the day when international war of the kind hitherto waged and now waged between nations shall be relegated to that past which contains the kind of private war that was habitually waged between individuals up to the end of the Middle Ages. By degrees the work of a national police has been substituted for the exercise of the right of private war. The

growth of sentiment in favor of peace within each nation accomplished little until an effective police force was put back of the sentiment. There are a few communities where such a police force is almost non-existent, although always latent in the shape of a sheriff's posse or something of the kind. In all big communities, however, in all big cities, law is observed, innocent and law-abiding and peaceful people are protected and the disorderly and violent classes prevented from a riot of mischief and wrong-doing, only by the presence of an efficient police force. Some analogous international police force must be created if war between nations is to be minimized as war between individuals has been minimized.

It is, of course, essential that, if this end is to be accomplished, we shall face facts with the understanding of what they really signify. Not the slightest good is done by hysterical outcries for a peace which would consecrate wrong or leave wrongs unredressed. Little or nothing would be gained by a peace which merely stopped this war for the moment and left untouched all the causes that have brought it about. A peace which left the wrongs of Belgium unredressed, which did not leave her independent and secured against further wrong-doing, and which did not provide measures hereafter to safeguard all peaceful nations against suffering the fate that Belgium has suffered, would probably be mischievous rather than beneficial in its ultimate effects. It is perfectly possible to take the view that, as conditions now are, Germany, from the standpoint of the preservation of her national life, may have felt it necessary to act as she did toward Belgium, and yet also to take the view that Belgium has been terribly wronged, and that the civilized world owes it to itself to see that this wrong is redressed, and that steps are taken which will guarantee that hereafter conditions shall not be permitted to become such as either to require or to

permit such action. Surely all good and honest men who are lovers of peace and who do not use the great words "Love of Peace" to cloak their own folly and timidity must agree that Peace is to be made the handmaiden of Righteousness, or else that it is worthless.

England's attitude in going to war in defense of Belgium's rights, according to its guarantee, was not only strictly proper, but represents the only kind of action that ever will make a neutrality treaty or peace treaty or arbitration treaty worth the paper on which it is written. The published dispatches of the British Government show that Sir Edward Grey clearly, emphatically, and scrupulously declined to commit his Government to war until it became imperative to do so if Great Britain was to fulfill, as her honor and interest alike demanded, her engagements on behalf of the neutrality of Belgium. Of course, as far as Great Britain is concerned, she would not be honorably justified in making peace unless this object of her going to war was achieved. The case of Belgium in this war stands by itself. As regards all the other powers, it is not only possible to make out a real case in favor of each nation on each side, but it is also quite possible to show that, under existing conditions, each nation was driven by its vital interests to do what it did.

Wrong Picture of Kaiser.

The real nature of the problem we have ahead of us can only be grasped if this attitude of the several powers is thoroughly understood. To paint the Kaiser as a devil, merely bent on gratifying a wicked thirst for bloodshed, is an absurdity, and worse than an absurdity. I believe that history will declare that the Kaiser acted in conformity with the feelings of the German people, and as he sincerely believed the interests of his people demanded; and, as so often before in his personal and family life, he and his family have given honorable proof that they possess the qualities that

are characteristic of the German people. Every one of his sons went to the war, not nominally, but to face every danger and hardship. Two of his sons hastily married the girls to whom they were betrothed, and immediately afterward left for the front.

This was a fresh illustration of one of the most striking features of the outbreak of the war in Germany. In tens of thousands of cases, the officers and enlisted men, who were engaged, married immediately before starting for the front. In many of the churches there were long queues of brides waiting for the ceremony, so as to enable their lovers to marry them just before they responded to the order that meant that they might have to sacrifice everything, including life, for the nation. A nation that shows such a spirit is assuredly a great nation. The efficiency of the German organization, the results of the German preparation in advance, were strikingly shown in the powerful forward movement of the first six weeks of the war. Not only is this organization, this preparedness, highly creditable to Germany, but even more creditable to the spirit lying behind the organization. The men and women of Germany, from the highest to the lowest, have shown a splendid patriotism and abnegation of self. In reading of their attitude, it is impossible not to feel a thrill of admiration for the stern courage and lofty disinterestedness which this great crisis laid bare in the souls of the people. I most earnestly hope that we Americans, if ever the need may arise, will show similar qualities.

It is idle to say that this is not a people's war. The intensity of conviction in the righteousness of their several causes shown by the several peoples is a prime factor for consideration, if we are to take efficient means to try to prevent a repetition of this incredible world tragedy. History may decide in any war that one or the other party was wrong and yet also decide that the highest qualities and

powers of the human soul were shown by that party. We here in the United States have now grown practically to accept this view as regards our own civil war, and we feel an equal pride in the high devotion to the right, as it was given each man to see the right, shown alike by the men who wore the blue and the men who wore the gray.

The English feel that in this war they fight not only for themselves but for principle, for justice, for civilization, for a real and lasting world peace. Great Britain is backed by the great free democracies that under her flag have grown up in Canada, in Australia, in South Africa. She feels that she stands for the liberties and rights of weak nations everywhere. One of the most striking features of the war is the way in which the varied peoples of India have sprung to arms to defend the British Empire.

The Russian Viewpoint.

The Russians regard the welfare of their whole people as at stake. The Russian Liberals believe that success for Russia means an end of militarism in Europe. They believe that the Pole, the Jew, the Finn, the man of the Caucasus, will each and all be enfranchised, that the advance of justice and right in Russia will be immeasurably furthered by the triumph of the Russian people in this contest, and that the conflict was essential, not only to Russian national life, but to the growth of freedom and justice within her boundaries.

The people of Germany believe that they are engaged primarily in a fight for life of the Teuton against the Slav, of civilization against what they regard as a vast menacing flood of barbarism. They went to war because they believed the war was an absolute necessity, not merely to German well-being, but to German national existence. They sincerely feel that the nations of Western Europe are traitors to the cause of Occidental civilization, and that they themselves are fighting, each man for his own hearthstone, for his own wife

and children, and all for the future existence of the generations yet to come.

The French feel with passionate conviction that this is the last stand of France, and that if she does not now succeed and is again trampled under foot, her people will lose for all time their place in the forefront of that great modern civilization of which the debt to France is literally incalculable.

Of Austria and Hungary, of Serbia and Montenegro, exactly the same is true.

To each of these peoples the war seems a crusade against threatening wrong, and each man fervently believes in the justice of his cause. Moreover, each combatant fights with that terrible determination to destroy the opponent which springs from fear. It is not the fear which any one of these powers has inspired that offers the difficult problem. It is the fear which each of them genuinely feels. Russia believes that a quarter of the Slav people will be trodden under the heel of the Germans unless she succeeds. France and England believe that their very existence depends on the destruction of the German menace. Germany believes that unless she can so cripple, and, if possible, destroy her Western foes, as to make them harmless in the future, she will be unable hereafter to protect herself against the mighty Slav people on her Eastern boundary and will be reduced to a condition of international impotence. Some of her leaders may be influenced by worse motives; but the motives above given are, I believe, those that influence the great mass of Germans, and these are in their essence merely the motives of patriotism, of devotion to one's people and one's native land.

We nations who are outside ought to recognize both the reality of this fear felt by each nation for others, together with the real justification for its existence. Yet we cannot sympathize with that fear-born anger which would vent itself in the annihilation of the conquered. The right attitude is to limit militarism, to destroy

the menace of militarism, but to preserve the national integrity of each nation. The contestants are the great civilized peoples of Europe and Asia. Japan's part in the war has been slight. She has in this contest borne herself with scrupulous regard not only to the rights but to the feelings of the people of the United States; and from all questions of the politics of this generation and possibly even of the next generation, and looking at matters from the standpoint of the ages, Japan's progress should be welcomed by every enlightened friend of humanity, because of the promise it contains for the regeneration of Asia. All that is necessary in order to remove every particle of apprehension caused by this progress is to do what ought to be done in reference to her no less than in reference to European and American powers, namely, to develop a world policy which shall guarantee each nation against any menace that might otherwise be held for it in the growth and progress of another nation.

The destruction of Russia is not thinkable, but if it were, it would be a most frightful calamity. The Slavs are a young people, of limitless possibilities, which from various causes have not been able to develop as rapidly as the peoples of Central and Western Europe. They have grown in civilization until their further advance has become something greatly to be desired, because it will be a factor of immense importance in the welfare of the world. All that is necessary is for Russia to throw aside the spirit of absolutism developed in her during the centuries of Mongol dominion. She will then be found doing what no other race can do and what it is of peculiar advantage to the English speaking peoples than she should do.

As for crushing Germany or crippling her and reducing her to political impotence, such an action would be a disaster to mankind. The Germans are not merely our brothers; they are largely ourselves. The debt we owe to German blood is great; the debt we owe to German thought and to German example, not only in governmental administration, but in all the practical work of life, is even greater. Every generous heart, and every farseeing mind throughout the world should rejoice in the existence of a stable, united and powerful Germany, too strong to fear aggression and too just to be a source of fear to its neighbors.

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World's Debt to France.

As for France, she has occupied, in the modern world, a position as unique as Greece in the world of antiquity. To have her broken or cowed would mean a loss today as great as the loss that was suffered by the world when the creative genius of the Greek passed away with his loss of political power and material greatness. The world cannot spare France.

Now, the danger to each of these great and splendid civilizations arises far more from the fear that each feels than from the fear that each inspires. Belgium's case stands apart. She inspired no fear. No peace should be made until her wrongs have been redressed, and the likelihood of the repetition of such wrongs provided against. She has suffered incredibly because the fear among the plain German people, among the Socialists, for instance, of the combined strength of France and Russia made them acquiesce in and support the policy of the military party, which was to disregard the laws of international morality and the plain and simple rights of the Belgian people.

It is idle merely to make speeches and write essays against this fear, because at present the fear has a real basis. At present each nation has cause for the fear it feels. Each nation has cause to believe that its national life is in peril unless it is able to take the national life of one or more of its foes, or at least hopelessly to cripple that foe. The causes of the fear must be removed, or, no matter what peace may be patched up today, or what new treaties may be negotiated tomorrow, these causes will at some future day bring out the same results, bring about a repetition of this same awful tragedy.

Theodore Roosevelt
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