

THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THE BELGIANS

A LETTER ADDRESSED TO A MASS MEETING HELD AT CARNEGIE HALL, NEW YORK, ON DECEMBER 15, 1916, TO PROTEST AGAINST THE BRUTAL TREATMENT OF THE BELGIANS BY THEIR GERMAN "CONQUERORS"

I EARNESTLY wish you all success in your meeting; and all Americans who are proud of the good name of their country and also have in them the capacity for general indignation on behalf of a foully wronged people, must join in hearty thanks to you and your associates.

Germany's campaign of methodically organized atrocities against the unhappy Belgian people has culminated in the transplanting of over a hundred thousand Belgian men into a condition of state-slavery in Germany where their labor is to be used

to aid in the conquest of their fellow-countrymen. Similar transplantings of civilian non-combatants, both men and women, into slavery in Germany have already occurred in Northern France.

This action is paralleled by the action of the Assyrian conquerors of Syria and Palestine; but until the present war broke out it was supposed that such hideous infamies were effectively checked by the system of international law which has grown up under modern Christian civilization. But Germany has trampled under foot every device of international law for securing the protection of the weak and the unoffending. She has shown an utter disregard of all considerations of pity, mercy, humanity and international morality. She has counted upon the terror inspired by her ruthless brutality to protect her from retaliation or interference.

The outrages committed on our own people have been such as the United States has never before been forced to endure, and have included the repeated killing of our men, women and children. The sinking of the *Marina* and the *Chemung* the other day, with the attendant murder of six Americans, was but the most recent in an unbroken chain of injuries and insults, which by comparison make mere wrong to our property interests sink into absolute insignificance.

As long as neutrals keep silent, or speak apologetically, or take refuge in the futilities of the professional pacifists, there will be no cessation in these brutalities. But surely this last and crowning brutality, which amounts to the imposition of a cruel form of state-slavery on a helpless and unoffending conquered nation, must make

our people realize that they imperil their own souls, that they degrade their own manhood, if they do not bear emphatic testimony against the perpetration of such iniquity.

I am glad to be one among the Americans who thus bear testimony. Yours very truly, THEODORE ROOSEVELT.