

Doyle Arthur Conan

# The German War



Arthur Doyle

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# Arthur Conan Doyle

## The German War

### PREFACE

These essays, upon different phases of the wonderful world-drama which has made our lifetime memorable, would be unworthy of republication were it not that at such a time every smallest thing which may help to clear up a doubt, to elucidate the justice of our cause, or to accentuate the desperate need of national effort, should be thrown into the scale. The longest essay appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* and the shorter ones for the most part in *The Daily Chronicle*. I have left them as written at the time, even where after-events have caused some modification of my views.

*Arthur Conan Doyle.*

*Windlesham, Crowborough,  
November 1914.*

# I

## THE CAUSES OF THE WAR

This article, stating the British case, was issued as a recruiting pamphlet in Great Britain, but was used abroad as a simple explanation which would enable neutrals to understand the true facts. It was published in full by fifty leading journals in the United States, and was translated into Dutch and Danish, 25,000 copies being distributed in each country.

The causes of the war are only of moment to us, at this stage, in that we gain more strength in our arms and more iron in our souls by a knowledge that it is for all that is honourable and sacred for which we fight. What really concerns us is that we are in a fight for our national life, that we must fight through to the end, and that each and all of us must help, in his own fashion, to the last ounce of his strength, that this end may be victory. That is the essence of the situation. It is not words and phrases that we need, but men, men – and always more men. If words can bring the men, then they are of avail. If not, they may well wait for the times to mend. But if there is a doubt in the mind of any man as to the justice of his country's quarrel, then even a writer may find work ready to his hand.

Let us cast our minds back upon the events which have led up to this conflict. They may be divided into two separate classes – those which prepared the general situation, and those which caused the special quarrel. Each of these I will treat in its turn.

It is a matter of common knowledge, one which a man must be blind and deaf not to understand, that for many years Germany, intoxicated by her success in war and by her increase of wealth, has regarded the British Empire with eyes of jealousy and hatred. It has never been alleged by those who gave expression to this almost universal national passion that Great Britain had in any way, either historically or commercially, done Germany a mischief. Even our most bitter traducers, when asked to give any definite historical reasons for their dislike, were compelled to put forward such ludicrous excuses as that the British had abandoned the Prussian King in the year 1761, quite oblivious of the fact that the same Prussian King had abandoned his own allies in the same war under far more damaging circumstances, acting up to his own motto that no promises are binding where the vital interests of a State are in question. With all their malevolence they could give no examples of any ill turn done by us until their deliberate policy had forced us into antagonism. On the other hand, a long list of occasions could very easily be compiled on which we had helped them in some common cause from the days of Marlborough to those of Blücher. Until the twentieth century had turned they had no possible cause for political hatred against us. In commerce our record was even more clear. Never in any way had we interfered with that great development of trade which has turned them from one of the poorest to one of the richest of European States. Our markets were open to them untaxed, whilst our own manufactures paid 20 per cent. in Germany. The markets of India, of Egypt, and of every portion of the Empire which had no self-appointed tariff, were as open to German goods as to British ones. Nothing could possibly have been more generous than our commercial treatment. No doubt there was some grumbling when cheap imitations of our own goods were occasionally found to oust the originals from their markets. Such a feeling was but natural and human. But in all matters of commerce, as in all matters political before the dawn of this century, they have no shadow of a grievance against us.

And yet they hated us with a most bitter hatred, a hatred which long antedates the days when we were compelled to take a definite stand against them. In all sorts of ways this hatred showed itself – in the diatribes of professors, in the pages of books, in the columns of the Press. Usually it was a sullen, silent dislike. Sometimes it would flame up suddenly into bitter utterance, as at the time of the unseemly dispute around the deathbed of the Emperor's father, or on the occasion of the Jameson

Raid. And yet this bitter antagonism was in no way reciprocated in this country. If a poll had been taken at any time up to the end of the century as to which European country was our natural ally, the vote would have gone overwhelmingly for Germany. “America first and then Germany” would have been the verdict of nine men out of ten. But then occurred two events which steadied the easy-going Briton, and made him look more intently and with a more questioning gaze at his distant cousin over the water. Those two events were the Boer War and the building of the German fleet. The first showed us, to our amazement, the bitter desire which Germany had to do us some mischief, the second made us realise that she was forging a weapon with which that desire might be fulfilled.

We are most of us old enough to remember the torrent of calumny and insult which was showered upon us in the day of our temporary distress by the nation to whom we had so often been a friend and an ally. It is true that other nations treated us little better, and yet their treatment hurt us less. The difference as it struck men at the time may be summarised in this passage from a British writer of the period.

“But it was very different with Germany,” he says. “Again and again in the world’s history we have been the friends and the allies of these people. It was so in the days of Marlborough, in those of the Great Frederick, and in those of Napoleon. When we could not help them with men we helped them with money. Our fleet has crushed their enemies. And now, for the first time in history, we have had a chance of seeing who were our friends in Europe, and nowhere have we met more hatred and more slander than from the German Press and the German people. Their most respectable journals have not hesitated to represent the British troops – troops every bit as humane and as highly disciplined as their own – not only as committing outrages on person and property, but even as murdering women and children.

“At first this unexpected phenomenon merely surprised the British people, then it pained them, and finally, after two years of it, it has roused a deep, enduring anger in their minds.”

He goes on to say, “The continued attacks upon us have left an enduring feeling of resentment, which will not and should not die away in this generation. It is not too much to say that five years ago a complete defeat of Germany in a European war would have certainly caused British intervention. Public sentiment and racial affinity would never have allowed us to see her really go to the wall. And now it is certain that in our lifetime no British guinea and no soldier’s life would under any circumstances be spent for such an end. That is one strange result of the Boer War, and in the long run it is possible that it may prove not the least important.”

Such was the prevailing mood of the nation when they perceived Germany, under the lead of her Emperor, following up her expressions of enmity by starting with restless energy to build up a formidable fleet, adding programme to programme, out of all possible proportion to the German commerce to be defended or to the German coastline exposed to attack. Already vainglorious boasts were made that Germany was the successor to Britain upon the seas. “The Admiral of the Atlantic greets the Admiral of the Pacific,” said the Kaiser in a message to the Czar. What was Britain to do under this growing menace? So long as she was isolated the diplomacy of Germany might form some naval coalition against her. She took the steps which were necessary for her own safety, and without forming an alliance she composed her differences with France and Russia and drew closer the friendship which united her with her old rival across the Channel. The first-fruit of the new German fleet was the *entente cordiale*. We had found our enemy. It was necessary that we should find our friends. Thus we were driven into our present combination.

And now we had to justify our friendship. For the first time we were compelled to openly oppose Germany in the deep and dangerous game of world politics. They wished to see if our understanding was a reality or a sham. Could they drive a wedge between us by showing that we were a fair-weather friend whom any stress would alienate. Twice they tried it, once in 1906 when they bullied France into a conference at Algeciras, but found that Britain was firm at her side, and again in 1911 when in a time of profound peace they stirred up trouble by sending a gunboat to Agadir,

and pushed matters to the very edge of war. But no threats induced Britain to be false to her mutual insurance with France. Now for the third and most fatal time they have demanded that we forswear ourselves and break our own bond lest a worse thing befall us. Blind and foolish, did they not know by past experience that we would keep our promise given? In their madness they have wrought an irremediable evil to themselves, to us, and to all Europe.

I have shown that we have in very truth never injured nor desired to injure Germany in commerce, nor have we opposed her politically until her own deliberate actions drove us into the camp of her opponents. But it may well be asked why then did they dislike us, and why did they weave hostile plots against us? It was that, as it seemed to them, and as indeed it actually may have been, we independently of our own wills stood between Germany and that world empire of which she dreamed. This was caused by circumstances over which we had no control and which we could not modify if we had wished to do so. Britain, through her maritime power and the energy of her merchants and people, had become a great world power when Germany was still unformed. Thus, when she had grown to her full stature she found that the choice places of the world and those most fitted for the spread of a transplanted European race were already filled up. It was not a matter which we could help, nor could we alter it, since Canada, Australia, and South Africa would not, even if we could be imagined to have wished it, be transferred to German rule. And yet the Germans chafed, and if we can put ourselves in their places we may admit that it was galling that the surplus of their manhood should go to build up the strength of an alien and possibly a rival State. So far we could see their grievance, or rather their misfortune, since no one was in truth to blame in the matter. Had their needs been openly and reasonably expressed, and had the two States moved in concord in the matter, it is difficult to think that no helpful solution of any kind could have been found.

But the German method of approaching the problem has never been to ask sympathy and cooperation, but to picture us as a degenerate race from whom anything might be gained by playing upon our imagined weakness and cowardice. A nation which attends quietly to its own sober business must, according to their mediæval notions, be a nation of decadent poltroons. If we fight our battles by means of free volunteers instead of enforced conscripts, then the military spirit must be dead amongst us. Perhaps, even in this short campaign, they have added this delusion also to the dust-bin of their many errors. But such was their absurd self-deception about the most virile of European races. Did we propose disarmament, then it was not humanitarianism but cowardice that prompted us, and their answer was to enlarge their programme. Did we suggest a navy-building holiday, it was but a cloak for our weakness, and an incitement that they should redouble their efforts. Our decay had become a part of their national faith. At first the wish may have been the father to the thought, but soon under the reiterated assertions of their crazy professors the proposition became indisputable. Bernhardt in his book upon the next war cannot conceal the contempt in which he has learned to hold us. Niebuhr long ago had prophesied the coming fall of Britain, and every year was believed to bring it nearer and to make it more certain. To these jaundiced eyes all seemed yellow, when the yellowness lay only in themselves. Our army, our navy, our Colonies, all were equally rotten. "Old England, old, indeed, and corrupt, rotten through and through." One blow and the vast sham would fly to pieces, and from those pieces the victor could choose his reward. Listen to Professor Treitschke, a man who, above all others, has been the evil genius of his country, and has done most to push it towards this abyss: "A thing that is wholly a sham," he cried, in allusion to our Empire, "cannot, in this universe of ours, endure for ever. It may endure for a day, but its doom is certain." Were ever words more true when applied to the narrow bureaucracy and swaggering Junkerdom of Prussia, the most artificial and ossified sham that ever our days have seen? See which will crack first, our democracy or this, now that both have been plunged into the furnace together. The day of God's testing has come, and we shall see which can best abide it.

I have tried to show that we are in no way to blame for the hostility which has grown up between us. So far as it had any solid cause at all it has arisen from fixed factors, which could no more be

changed by us than the geographical position which has laid us right across their exit to the oceans of the world. That this deeply-rooted national sentiment, which for ever regarded us as the Carthage to which they were destined to play the part of Rome, would, sooner or later, have brought about war between us, is, in my opinion, beyond all doubt. But it was planned to come at the moment which was least favourable for Britain. “Even English attempts at a *rapprochement* must not blind us to the real situation,” says Bernhardt. “We may, at most, use them to delay the necessary and inevitable war until we may fairly imagine we have some prospect of success.” A more shameless sentence was never penned, and one stands marvelling which is the more grotesque – the cynicism of the sentiment, or the folly which gave such a warning to the victim. For be it remembered that Bernhardt’s words are to be taken very seriously, for they are not the ravings of some Pan-German monomaniac, but the considered views of the foremost military writer of Germany, one who is in touch with those inner circles whose opinions are the springs of national policy. “Our last and greatest reckoning is to be with Great Britain,” said the bitter Treitschke. Sooner or later the shock was to come. Germany sat brooding over the chessboard of the world waiting for the opening which should assure a winning game.

It was clear that she should take her enemies separately rather than together. If Britain were attacked, it was almost certain that France and Russia would stand by her side. But if, on the contrary, the quarrel could be made with these two Powers, and especially with Russia, in the first instance, then it was by no means so certain that Great Britain would be drawn into the struggle. Public opinion has to be strongly moved before our country can fight, and public opinion under a Liberal Government might well be divided upon the subject of Russia. Therefore, if the quarrel could be so arranged as to seem to be entirely one between Teuton and Slav there was a good chance that Britain would remain undecided until the swift German sword had done its work. Then, with the grim acquiescence of our deserted Allies, the still bloody sword would be turned upon ourselves, and that great final reckoning would have come.

Such was the plan, and fortune favoured it. A brutal murder had, not for the first time, put Servia into a position where a State may be blamed for the sins of individuals. An ultimatum was launched so phrased that it was impossible for any State to accept it as it stood and yet remain an independent State. At the first sign of argument or remonstrance the Austrian army marched upon Belgrade. Russia, which had been already humiliated in 1908 by the forcible annexation of Bosnia, could not possibly submit a second time to the Caudine Forks. She laid her hand upon her sword-hilt. Germany sprang to the side of her Ally. France ranged herself with Russia. Like a thunderclap the war of the nations had begun.

So far all had worked well for German plans. Those of the British public who were familiar with the past and could look into the future might be well aware that our interests were firmly bound with those of France, and that if our faggots were not tied together they would assuredly be snapped each in its turn. But the unsavoury assassination which had been so cleverly chosen as the starting-point of the war bulked large in the eyes of our people, and, setting self-interest to one side, the greater part of the public might well have hesitated to enter into a quarrel where the cause seemed remote and the issues ill-defined. What was it to us if a Slav or a Teuton collected the harbour dues of Salonica! So the question might have presented itself to the average man who in the long run is the ruler of this country and the autocrat of its destinies. In spite of all the wisdom of our statesmen, it is doubtful if on such a quarrel we could have gained that national momentum which might carry us to victory. But at that very moment Germany took a step which removed the last doubt from the most cautious of us and left us in a position where we must either draw our sword or stand for ever dishonoured and humiliated before the world. The action demanded of us was such a compound of cowardice and treachery that we ask ourselves in dismay what can we ever have done that could make others for one instant imagine us to be capable of so dastardly a course? Yet that it was really supposed that we could do it, and that it was not merely put forward as an excuse for drawing us into

war, is shown by the anger and consternation of the Kaiser and his Chancellor when we drew back from what the British Prime Minister has described as “an infamous proposal.” One has only to read our Ambassador’s description of his interview with the German Chancellor after our decision was announced, “so evidently overcome by the news of our action,” to see that through some extraordinary mental aberration the German rulers did actually believe that a vital treaty with Britain’s signature upon it could be regarded by this country as a mere “scrap of paper.”

What was this treaty which it was proposed so lightly to set aside? It was the guarantee of the neutrality of Belgium signed in 1839 (confirmed verbally and in writing by Bismarck in 1870), by Prussia, France, and Britain, each of whom pledged their word to observe and to enforce it. On the strength of it Belgium had relied for her security amidst her formidable neighbours. On the strength of it also France had lavished all her defences upon her eastern frontier, and left her northern exposed to attack. Britain had guaranteed the treaty, and Britain could be relied upon. Now, on the first occasion of testing the value of her word it was supposed that she would regard the treaty as a worthless scrap of paper, and stand by unmoved while the little State which had trusted her was flooded by the armies of the invader. It was unthinkable, and yet the wisest brains of Germany seem to have persuaded themselves that we had sunk to such depths of cowardly indolence that even this might go through. Surely they also have been hypnotised by those foolish dreams of Britain’s degeneration, from which they will have so terrible an awakening.

As a matter of fact, the General Staff had got ahead of the diplomatists, and the German columns were already over the border while the point was being debated at Berlin. There was no retreat from the position which had been taken up. “It is to us a vital matter of strategy and is beyond argument,” said the German soldier. “It is to us a vital matter of honour and is beyond argument,” answered the British statesman. The die was cast. No compromise was possible. Would Britain keep her word or would she not? That was the sole question at issue. And what answer save one could any Briton give to it? “I do not believe,” said our Prime Minister, “that any nation ever entered into a great controversy with a clearer conscience and stronger conviction that she is fighting, not for aggression, not for the maintenance of her own selfish interest, but in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world.” So he spoke, and History will endorse his words, for we surely have our quarrel just.

So much for the events which have led us to war. Now for a moment let us glance at what we may have to hope for, what we may have to fear, and above all what we must each of us do that we win through to a lasting peace.

What have we to gain if we win? That we have nothing material to gain, no colonies which we covet, no possessions of any sort that we desire, is the final proof that the war has not been provoked by us. No nation would deliberately go out of its way to wage so hazardous and costly a struggle when there is no prize for victory. But one enormous indirect benefit we will gain if we can make Germany a peaceful and harmless State. We will surely break her naval power and take such steps that it shall not be a menace to us any more. It was this naval power, with its rapid increase, and the need that we should ever, as Mr. Churchill has so well expressed it, be ready at our average moment to meet an attack at their chosen moment – it was this which has piled up our war estimates during the last ten years until they have bowed us down. With such enormous sums spent upon ships and guns, great masses of capital were diverted from the ordinary channels of trade, while an even more serious result was that our programmes of social reform had to be curtailed from want of the money which could finance them. Let the menace of that lurking fleet be withdrawn – the nightmare of those thousand hammers working day and night in forging engines for our destruction, and our estimates will once again be those of a civilised Christian country, while our vast capital will be turned from measures of self-protection to those of self-improvement. Should our victory be complete, there is little which Germany can yield to us save the removal of that shadow which has darkened us so long. But our children and our children’s children will never, if we do our work well now, look across the North

Sea with the sombre thoughts which have so long been ours, while their lives will be brightened and elevated by money which we, in our darker days, have had to spend upon our ships and our guns.

Consider, on the other hand, what we should suffer if we were to lose. All the troubles of the last ten years would be with us still, but in a greatly exaggerated form. A larger and stronger Germany would dominate Europe and would overshadow our lives. Her coast-line would be increased, her ports would face our own, her coaling stations would be in every sea, and her great army, greater than ever, would be within striking distance of our shores. To avoid sinking for ever into the condition of a dependant, we should be compelled to have recourse to rigid compulsory service, and our diminished revenues would be all turned to the needs of self-defence. Such would be the miserable condition in which we should hand on to our children that free and glorious empire which we inherited in all the fulness of its richness and its splendour from those strong fathers who have built it up. What peace of mind, what self-respect could be left for us in the remainder of our lives? The weight of dishonour would lie always upon our hearts. And yet this will be surely our fate and our future if we do not nerve our souls and brace our arms for victory. No regrets will avail, no excuses will help, no after-thoughts can profit us. It is now —*now*— even in these weeks and months that are passing that the final reckoning is being taken, and when once the sum is made up no further effort can change it. What are our lives or our labours, our fortunes or even our families, when compared with the life or death of the great mother of us all? We are but the leaves of the tree. What matter if we flutter down to-day or to-morrow, so long as the great trunk stands and the burrowing roots are firm? Happy the man who can die with the thought that in this greatest crisis of all he has served his country to the uttermost; but who would bear the thoughts of him who lives on with the memory that he has shirked his duty and failed his country at the moment of her need?

There is a settled and assured future if we win. There is darkness and trouble if we lose. But if we take a broader sweep and trace the meanings of this contest as they affect others than ourselves, then ever greater, more glorious are the issues for which we fight. For the whole world stands at a turning-point of its history, and one or other of two opposite principles, the rule of the soldier or the rule of the citizen, must now prevail. In this sense we fight for the masses of the German people, as some day they will understand, to free them from that formidable military caste which has used and abused them, spending their bodies in an unjust war and poisoning their minds by every device which could inflame them against those who wish nothing save to live at peace with them. We fight for the strong, deep Germany of old, the Germany of music and of philosophy, against this monstrous modern aberration the Germany of blood and of iron, the Germany from which, instead of the old things of beauty, there come to us only the rant of scolding professors with their final reckonings, their Welt-politik, and their Godless theories of the Superman who stands above morality and to whom all humanity shall be subservient. Instead of the world-inspiring phrases of a Goethe or a Schiller, what are the words in the last decade which have been quoted across the sea? Are they not always the ever-recurring words of wrath from one ill-balanced man? “Strike them with the mailed fist.” “Leave such a name behind you as Attila and his Huns.” “Turn your weapons even upon your own flesh and blood at my command.” These are the messages which have come from this perversion of a nation’s soul.

But the matter lies deep. The Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs have used their peoples as a great landowner might use the serfs upon his estate. It was, and is, their openly expressed theory that they were in their position by the grace of God, that they owed no reckoning to any man, and that kingdom and folk were committed for better or worse to their charge. Round this theory of the dark ages there gathered all the forces of the many Courts of the Empire, all the nobility who make so huge a class in Germanic countries, all the vast army to whom strict discipline and obedience were the breath of life, all the office-holders of the State, all the purveyors of warlike stores. These and their like were the natural setting to such a central idea. Court influence largely controlled the teaching at schools and universities, and so the growing twig could be bent. But all these forces together could not have upheld so dangerous and unnatural a theory had it not been for the influence of a servile Press.

How that Press was managed, how the thoughts of the people could be turned to the right or the left with the same precision as a platoon of Grenadiers, has been shown clearly enough in the Memoirs of Bismarck. Public opinion was poisoned at its very roots. The average citizen lived in a false atmosphere where everything was distorted to his vision. He saw his Kaiser, not as an essentially weak and impetuous man with a dangerous entourage who were ever at his ear, but as Germany personified, an angel with a flaming sword, beating back envious assailants from the beloved Fatherland. He saw his neighbours not as peaceful nations who had no possible desire to attack him, but, on the contrary, lived in constant fear of him, but as a band of envious and truculent conspirators who could only be kept in order by the sudden stamp of the jackboot and the menacing clatter of the sabre. He insensibly imbibed the Nietzsche doctrine that the immorality of the Superman may be as colossal as his strength and that the slave-evangel of Christianity was superseded by a sterner law. Thus when he saw acts which his reason must have told him were indefensible, he was still narcotised by this conception of some new standard of right. He saw his Kaiser at the time of a petty humiliation to Great Britain sending a telegram of congratulation to the man who had inflicted this rebuff. Could that be approved by reason? At a time when all Europe was shuddering over the Armenian massacres he saw this same Kaiser paying a complimentary visit to the Sultan whose hands were still wet with the blood of murdered Christians. Could that be reconciled with what is right? A little later he saw the Kaiser once again pushing himself into Mediterranean politics, where no direct German interest lay, and endeavouring to tangle up the French developments in Northern Africa by provocative personal appearances at Morocco, and, later, by sending a gunboat to intrude upon a scene of action which had already by the Treaty of Algeciras been allotted to France.

How could an honest German whose mind was undebauched by a controlled Press justify such an interference as that? He is or should be aware that in annexing Bosnia, Austria was tearing up a treaty without the consent of the other signatories, and that his own country was supporting and probably inciting her ally to this public breach of faith. Could he honestly think that this was right? And, finally, he must know, for his own Chancellor has publicly proclaimed it, that the Invasion of Belgium was a breach of international right, and that Germany, or rather, Prussia, had perjured herself upon the day that the first of her soldiers passed over the frontier. How can he explain all this to himself save on a theory that might is right, that no moral law applies to the Superman, and that so long as one hews one's way through the rest can matter little? To such a point of degradation have public morals been brought by the infernal teachings of Prussian military philosophy, dating back as far as Frederick the Second, but intensified by the exhortations of Press and professors during our own times. The mind of the average kindly German citizen has been debauched and yet again debauched until it needed just such a world crisis as this to startle him at last from his obsession and show him his position and that of his country in its true relation with humanity and progress.

Thus I say that for the German who stands outside the ruling classes our victory would bring a lasting relief, and some hope that in [the](#) future his destiny should be controlled by his own judgment and not by the passions or interests of those against whom he has at present no appeal. A system which has brought disaster to Germany and chaos to all Europe can never, one would think, be resumed, and amid the debris of his Empire the German may pick up that precious jewel of personal freedom which is above the splendour of foreign conquest. A Hapsburg or a Hohenzollern may find his true place as the servant rather than the master of a nation. But apart from Germany, look at the effects which our victory must have over the whole wide world. Everywhere it will mean the triumph of reasoned democracy, of public debate, of ordered freedom in which every man is an active unit in the system of his own government; whilst our defeat would stand for a victory to a privileged class, the thrusting down of the civilian by the arrogance and intolerance of militarism, and the subjection of all that is human and progressive to all that is cruel, narrow, and reactionary.

This is the stake for which we play, and the world will lose or gain as well as we. You may well come, you democratic over-sea men of our blood, to rally round us now, for all that you cherish, all

that is bred in your very bones, is that for which we fight. And you, lovers of Freedom in every land, we claim at least your prayers and your wishes, for if our sword be broken you will be the poorer. But fear not, for our sword will not be broken, nor shall it ever drop from our hands until this matter is for ever set in order. If every ally we have upon earth were to go down in blood and ruin, still would we fight through to the appointed end. Defeat shall not daunt us. Inconclusive victory shall not turn us from our purpose. The grind of poverty and the weariness of hopes deferred shall not blunt the edge of our resolve. With God's help we shall go to the end, and when that goal is reached it is our prayer that a new era shall come as our reward, an era in which, by common action of State with State, mutual hatreds and strivings shall be appeased, land shall no longer be estranged from land, and huge armies and fleets will be nightmares of the past. Thus, as ever, the throes of evil may give birth to good. Till then our task stands clear before us – a task that will ask for all we have in strength and resolution. Have you who read this played your part to the highest? If not, do it now, or stand for ever shamed.

## II

# THE WORLD-WAR CONSPIRACY

It is instructive and interesting now, <sup>1</sup> before fresh great events and a new situation obliterate the old impressions, to put it on record how things seemed to some of us before the blow fell. A mental position often seems incredible when looked back to from some new standpoint.

I am one of those who were obstinate in refusing to recognise Germany's intentions. I argued, I wrote, I joined the Anglo-German Friendship Society; I did everything I could for the faith that was in me. But early last year my views underwent a complete change, and I realised that I had been wrong, and that the thing which seemed too crazy and too wicked to be true actually was true. I recorded my conversion at the time in an article entitled "Great Britain and the Next War" in the *Fortnightly* of March, and reading over that article I find a good deal which fits very closely to the present situation. Forecasts are dangerous, but there is not much there which I would wish to withdraw. What brought about my change of view was reading Bernhardt's book on Germany and the next war.

Up to then I had imagined that all this sabre-rattling was a sort of boyish exuberance on the part of a robust young nation which had a fancy to clank about the world in jackboots. Some of it also came, as it seemed to me, from a perfectly natural jealousy, and some as the result of the preaching of those extraordinary professors whose idiotic diatribes have done so much to poison the minds of Young Germany. This was clear enough. But I could not believe that there was a conspiracy hatching for a world-war, in which the command of the sea would be challenged as well as that of the land. No motive seemed to me to exist for so monstrous an upheaval, and no prize to await Germany, if she won, which could at all balance her enormous risks if she lost. Besides, one imagined that civilisation and Christianity did stand for something, and that it was inconceivable that a nation with pretensions to either the one or the other could at this date of the world's history lend itself to a cold-blooded, barbarous conspiracy by which it built up its strength for a number of years with the intention of falling at a fitting moment upon its neighbours, without any cause of quarrel save a general desire for aggrandisement.

All this, I say, I could not bring myself to believe. But I read Bernhardt's book, and then I could not help believing. I wrote an article in the hope that others who had been as blind as myself might also come to see the truth. For who was Bernhardt? He was one of the most noted officers in the German army. And here was a book addressed to his own fellow-countrymen, in which these sentiments were set forth. You could not set such a document aside and treat it as of no account. As I said at the time, "We should be mad if we did not take very serious notice of the warning."

But the strange thing is that there should have been a warning. There is a quaint simplicity in the German mind, which has shown itself again and again in the recent events. But this is surely the supreme example of it. One would imagine that the idea that the book could be translated and read by his intended victims had never occurred to the author. As a famous soldier, it is impossible to believe that he was not in touch with the General Staff, and he outlines a policy which has some reason, therefore, to be looked upon as an official one. It is as bright a performance as if some one on Lord Roberts's staff had written a description of the Paardeberg flank march and sent it to Cronje some weeks before it was carried out. And yet it was not an isolated example, for Von Edelsheim, who actually belongs to this amazing General Staff, published a shorter sketch, setting forth how his country would deal with the United States – an essay which is an extraordinary example of bombastic ignorance. Such indiscretions can only be explained as manifestations of an inflated

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<sup>1</sup> August 20, 1914

national arrogance, which has blown itself up into a conviction that Germany was so sure of winning that it mattered little whether her opponents were upon their guard or not.

But Bernhardi's programme, as outlined in his book, is actually being carried through. The whole weight of the attack was to be thrown upon France. Russia was to be held back during her slow mobilisation, and then the victorious legions from Paris were to thunder across in their countless troop trains from the western to the eastern firing-line. Britain was to be cajoled into keeping aloof until her fate was ripe. Then her fleet was to be whittled down by submarines, mines, and torpedo-boats until the numbers were more equal, when the main German fleet, coming from under the forts of Wilhelmshaven, should strike for the conquest of the sea. Such were the plans, and dire the fate of the conquered. They were in accordance with the German semi-official paper, which cried on the day before the declaration of war: "We shall win – and when we do, 'Vae victis!'" With France it was to be a final account. Our own fate would be little better. It needs a righteous anger to wage war to the full, and we can feel it when we think of the long-drawn plot against us, and of the fate which defeat would bring.

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