Sir Edward Grey

By G. Bernard Shaw

Sir Edward Grey's interview, which furnishes Mr. Bernard Shaw's text for the following article, was published simultaneously in The New York Times and The Chicago Daily News on May 14 of this year.

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The interview accorded by our Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to The Chicago Daily News, and authorized for reproduction in the British press, is alarming, because its apparent date is August, 1914. Now, if Sir Edward Grey has not advanced a step since that distressful month, when everybody was talking a great deal of nonsense, and Sir Edward was contributing his full share of it, the prospect is disquieting. For it must not be forgotten that in spite of all British discussions as to the terms on which England will sheathe the sword, as Mr. Asquith puts it, and all the declamations of London Journalists that they will insist on this, and die rather than suffer that, and fight to the last man and the last penny and the last drop of blood for the other, yet what will actually happen is that one day Sir Edward Grey will come down to the House of Commons and inform it that he has just signed a treaty and that if England does not like it she can lump it. That was the procedure when Britannia went to war. That was the procedure when she bound herself not to stop fighting until her allies have had enough. And as that will be the procedure when all the belligerents have had enough, it seems rather silly for persons not in the Foreign Office to be excitedly writing and haranguing as if they were going to have any finger in Sir Edward Grey's pie. It cannot be too clearly understood that, for the ending of the war as for its beginning, England is entirely in the hands of her Foreign Office, and that as long as Sir Edward Grey remains Foreign Secretary her Interests, her honor, and indeed, the future of Europe, as far as her diplomatic action can affect it, are absolutely at the mercy of Sir Edward's capacity and character.

This is a serious responsibility; and on the most favorable estimate of Sir Edward's genius the British Empire will be taking more chances than can be heartily enjoyed by any one but a confirmed gambler or a fanatical devotee of British Junker government. That is why it is so startling to read, in an utterance of his which must be presumed to be as closely up to date as any utterance during war time can be, assumptions and statements which have dropped out of currency among serious students of the war since public opinion began to steady itself toward the middle of 1915.

Sir Edward, it appears, is still going to negotiate on the assumption that he is engaged in a crusade against certain sentences written by Treitschke, for which the German Government and the German Nation are no more responsible (having mostly never read them) than the British Nation and the British Government are responsible for precisely similar sentences written by General Butler and other English militarist writers. And if the Imperial Chancellor should take it into his head to negotiate on the assumption that Germany is engaged in a crusade against Lord Roberts's British "will to conquer" and his aspiration to save the world by bringing it under the rule of gentlemen educated in the public schools of America, we can imagine what sort of understanding is likely to be reached on these lines, and how long it will take to reach it.

Sir Edward is still under the impression that when Belgium appealed to Germany, France, and Britain for a pledge that her neutrality would be respected, Germany refused it and Britain and France gave it. This delusion may have helped out our recruiting at a moment when recruiting was the supreme consideration; but now that we have compulsory military service, and can afford to employ 200,000 soldiers as officers' valets, and are therefore sure of as many men in the army as we can prudently spare from civil industry, it is no longer necessary to resort to such expedients. The truth is, as Sir Edward can easily ascertain from his own