

Spirit of the Nobler American Now Awake

Former Critic of the President Says There Are Practically No Dissenters From President Wilson's Clarion Call to Duty

By James M. Beck,

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For the revised and enlarged edition of "The War and Humanity," which G. P. Putnam's Sons will publish about the middle of February, the author, James M. Beck, has rewritten the introduction and has brought his discussion of the moral issues of the war down to and including the severance of diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany.

In the first edition of this book, which appeared in the middle of November, 1916, the author, in discussing the questions of preparedness and the submarine controversy, criticised the Administration of President Wilson. In his introduction of the new edition the author has modified the views therein expressed in the light of more recent developments and, by the courtesy of G. P. Putnam's Sons, THE TIMES publishes Mr. Beck's comments upon the present relations between the United States and Germany in advance of the publication of the revised edition.

DR. ALFRED ZIMMERMANN, von Jagow's successor as the Imperial Secretary for Foreign Affairs, has expressed his "astonishment" at the prompt and summary action of President Wilson in severing diplomatic relations with Germany. Dr. Zimmermann has an extraordinary faculty for "astonishment," for when Edith Cavell was shot and the civilized world joined in a chorus of execration, he then expressed his astonishment that the world should show so much concern about the execution of one woman.

We suspect that Dr. Zimmermann's astonishment has also the character of disappointment and that Germany did not expect the prompt action which President Wilson so wisely and courageously took. This was probably the more disappointing, for, as a result of President Wilson's well meant but, as the event proved, misguided attempts at intervention, Germany had, for the moment, and until she issued her audacious challenge to civilization by her note of Jan. 31, a clear advantage in the more recent diplomatic negotiations. The morale of the Entente Powers was temporarily impaired by the attempt of the United States to bring about premature negotiations.

At this point Germany made another of its stupendous diplomatic blunders. Just as the invasion of Belgium probably lost for her an early triumph in the assault on France, and cost it the goodwill of the neutral world, similarly her threat to "run amuck" on the high seas has now precipitated the crisis between the two countries and undone all the extraordinarily clever work of Count von Bernstorff.

President Wilson's address to the Senate in explanation of his dismissal of the German Ambassador leaves nothing to be desired in dignity and effectiveness. Its suggestion of further and more drastic action is based upon the condition that "American ships and American lives should in fact be sacrificed," but those who may feel disappointed that the ground of America's action was thus based exclusively upon the rights of its own nationals and not upon the broader and more vital rights of noncombatants,

without respect to nationality, should remember that this narrower contention may have its justification in the possibility that public opinion in America would not sustain its Government in any more advanced position.

This objection, if sound at all, cannot mar the value and worth of President Wilson's action. As he thus treads the path of honor and dignity, all Americans, of whatever party, race, section, creed, or ancestry, or whether in the past his eulogists or critics, should loyally stand behind their leader and pledge to the Government he represents their "lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor." Let it appear to the world that we are in fact as in name the "United States of America."

For the spirit of the nobler American is neither dead nor sleeping. Under the surface an intellectual and moral fermentation is in progress, such as the United States has not known since the days of the slavery agitation. To the spirit of patriotism which swept over America at its President's clarion call to duty there were few dissenting notes, save that of William J. Bryan and a small group of extreme pacifists, who at once attempted, by special appeals to the public and specifically to Congress, to paralyze the united will of America to vindicate its long violated rights. The anticipated disloyalty of foreign-born citizens, which a year ago frightened so many timid politicians in Washington, has failed to materialize.

What will follow is at the moment "in the lap of the gods." Whether this severance of diplomatic relations shall be followed by more drastic action or not, it nevertheless morally aligns America with its sister democracies as a militant force in civilization.

The value of this action to the United States is immeasurable. It saves it from a possible abyss of disaster. Had America failed to act and show a willingness to make sacrifices for the basic principles of civilization, the hand of every nation might hereafter have been against her. President Wilson's action has saved for the United States the respect of the world, (including Germany, which overestimated America's unwillingness to fight for its rights,) the leadership of the neutral nations, and the good-will of our sister democracies in Europe, with whose final triumph the interests of America are so vitally concerned.

In this changed situation, former critics of President Wilson's policies are not required either to make explanations or express regrets. President Wilson's "peace at any price" policy, pursued by him for over two years with extraordinary patience, was a mistaken policy and nearly destroyed America's prestige in the commonwealth of nations. It failed to gain for the United States either the friendship or respect of a single nation.

As the result has proved, it did not even have the merit of maintaining a real peace, for while the severance of diplomatic relations may not necessarily result in the status of belligerency, yet, with those relations severed, it is idle to pretend that America is now on terms

of amity, except technically, with Germany. From Aug. 1, 1914, until Feb. 3, 1917, the United States, at some sacrifice to its standing as a great power, consistently cried "Peace, peace," only to find on Feb. 3, 1917, that "there was no peace" and could be none as long as Germany was willing to affront the United States and all the world by its rude and ruthless challenge to civilization.

This is written with full recognition of the manly courage with which President Wilson finally recognized the deliberate purpose of Germany and by handing the German Ambassador his passports gave to this wanton challenge its fitting reply.

President Wilson bravely faced the inevitable, and if in so doing he reversed a policy which he had consistently pursued for more than two years and which I have ventured to criticise in "The War and Humanity," he showed in such reversal the greater moral courage.

His experience was not unlike that of Sir Edward Grey at the beginning of the world war. The English Foreign Minister was also a pacifist of noble ideals. When Germany treacherously assaulted civilization, Sir Edward Grey could not quickly put by the pacific ideals of his lifetime and for some days England hesitated on the verge of an abyss, for had England deserted France in its hour of trial, it is possible that the fate of the British Empire would have been sealed.

Fortunately for civilization, Germany committed the stupendous blunder of invading Belgium, and this left to Sir Edward Grey, the unwearying friend of peace, no alternative except to commit his great empire to the ordeal of battle. Men who saw him in those final days saw tears in his eyes, as he beheld his pacific plans fall as a fragile house of cards.

Similarly President Wilson cherished from the beginning of the great conflict the persistent purpose to save his country for the so-called "processes of peace" and to make it the mediator and not the participant in the world war. To do this, it was necessary to ignore the everlasting right and wrong of the struggle, but this sacrifice he made presumably from the highest motives for the cause of peace.

Once again Germany made the stupendous blunder in its note of Jan. 31, whereby it arrogantly served notice of its intention to trample upon the rights of every neutral State. The challenge was specifically directed to the United States, and to every American it must be a source of the greatest gratification that President Wilson took up that challenge with dignity and power, and he has found his reward in the cordial support of his fellow-citizens, whether in the past they were his eulogists or critics.

If America, as now seems only too probable, shall be drawn into the war as an actual belligerent and shall make great sacrifices of life and treasure in helping to extinguish this almost universal conflagration, then its right to sit at the Council Board of the Nations, when the terms of peace are determined, can-

not be gainsaid. If so, what shall be its especial demand? It has no selfish purpose or desire for territorial aggrandizement. One demand it should make in the name of justice.

For nearly two years past the German Government has refused to "disavow" the Lusitania. By its note of Jan. 31, 1917, it has "avowed" it anew. For this shameless crime the United States should at the Council of Nations demand that the Kaiser, who caused the Lusitania to be sunk, shall for that crime forfeit his crown.

When the author was in London and Paris in the Summer of 1916 a subject that was uppermost in the minds of the Entente publicists was whether those nations should not announce that they would make no peace with the Hohenzollern dynasty. The proposed policy was not without embarrassments growing out of dynastic considerations and the nature of their Governments.

The United States, as the greatest Republic of all time, and from its very beginning the foremost interpreter of democratic institutions, can make this demand with better grace than the Entente Powers. There would be a "peace without [complete] victory," if the house of Hohenzollern, which from the time of Frederick the Great has cursed all nations, (and most of all Germany,) and which added the rape of Belgium to that of Silesia, was permitted to continue its baleful influence upon the world and the growth of democratic institutions. Neither the Lusitania nor Belgium crime will be fully atoned while the Hohenzollerns remain in power.

The United States has no cause of quarrel with the German people. The "mystic chords of memory" remind us that they are our friends, and their blood is so intermingled with our own that a lasting enmity between these two great peoples is or ought to be unthinkable. If they have sustained the Kaiser and his war, it is because they have been deluded by the baseless fiction that their great nation was suddenly and treacherously attacked by England, France, and Russia. They will at no distant day know the truth, and "the truth shall set them free."

Germany's high qualities of courage, steadfastness, and infinite self-sacrifice are worthy of all praise. Only a callous heart could fail to be touched by their present infinite suffering.

I venture the prediction that no nation will, before this century is ended, profit more by the stupendous sacrifices of this war than the land of Goethe, Schiller and Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. It only needs to be relieved from the incubus of Hohenzollern tyranny to become an infinitely greater people than ever its poets, prophets, and seers have dreamed.

With the Hohenzollerns dominating its destinies with mediaeval despotism, it will not have a true friend in the world. A truly democratic Germany will, despite all present bitterness, be cordially welcomed into the full fellowship of the commonwealth of nations.

The continuance of that despotism is a menace to democracy and civilization. As the cry rang through Europe in 1814, "Enough of Bonaparte!" so let the cry now sound through civilization with reference to the Hohenzollern dynasty—"Ecrasez l'infame!"