

March, 1915, for the Salaries and Expenses of the Department of Agriculture and other Industries and Technical Instruction for Ireland, and of the services administered by that Department, including sundry Grants-in-Aid." [Note.—£80,000 has been voted on account.]

Committee report Progress; to sit again to-morrow (Tuesday).

WAR IN EUROPE.

GERMANY AND BELGIUM.

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That this House do now adjourn."—*[The Prime Minister.]*

Sir EDWARD GREY: I want to give the House some information which I have received, and which was not in my possession when I made my statement this afternoon. It is information I have received from the Belgian Legation in London, and is to the following effect:—

"Germany sent yesterday evening at seven o'clock a Note proposing to Belgium friendly neutrality, covering free passage on Belgian territory, and promising maintenance of independence of the kingdom and possession at the conclusion of peace, and threatening, in case of refusal, to treat Belgium as an enemy. A time limit of twelve hours was fixed for the reply. The Belgians have answered that an attack on their neutrality would be a flagrant violation of the rights of nations, and that to accept the German proposal would be to sacrifice the honour of a nation. Conscious of its duty, Belgium is firmly resolved to repel aggression by all possible means."

Of course, I can only say that the Government are prepared to take into grave consideration the information which it has received. I make no further comment upon it.

Mr. MORRELL: I assure the House I feel very strongly and keenly the responsibility of my position. I hope the House

will give me a short hearing while I endeavour to put before it, as clearly as I can, the reasons why many of us—and I believe I speak for a good many on this side of the House—feel unable to agree with the Government in the policy they are now pursuing. I am quite ready to admit that the Foreign Secretary made, as he told us he did, every possible effort to secure peace in Europe. The only question we ask ourselves is whether, since the failure of his efforts, he has really made a sufficient attempt to make fair terms with Germany, and to secure the neutrality of this country in the war which has unhappily broken out. First of all, let me deal with what he said. The right hon. Gentleman has told us he admits there are no formal obligations binding this country to intervene in this war. None whatever. No formal obligation with regard to France, at any rate up till yesterday. As regards the letter of 22nd November, 1912, which he read out to this House, I submit that it is conclusive from that point. That letter perfectly and clearly intimated to France that we could not undertake to support her in a European war, and, as he fairly put it, it was entirely open to this House, and it is so even now, to decide whether we are going to intervene in this war at all.

We may consider our own interests, or rather we may consider and are bound to consider the views of those who send us here to this House when we are dealing with a question of this sort. What are the two formal reasons which are given us why it is essential for us, at the present time, to undertake warlike operations against Germany and Austria? There are only two reasons. They are, in the first place, that we are bound to protect the Northern coast of France, and, in the second place, that we are bound to intervene to prevent any passage of German troops across Belgian soil. In spite of the cheers which have greeted this statement, I venture to think that the right hon. Gentleman in the speech he made went some way to supply the answer to those two reasons that he urged. With regard to the coast of France, he made it perfectly clear that the German Government had offered to this country, that if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, Germany would undertake not to attack the northern coast of France. That was an undertaking which was cheered from this side of the House and which found a good deal of sympathy.

[Mr. Morrell.]

But the right hon. Gentleman went on to say that that was far too narrow an engagement.

Then I come to the second point—to the question of Belgium. I want the House to realise that we are not dealing with a country which refuses all negotiations. Germany has never put herself in that position. She has not said, "We refuse to negotiate; we claim the right to march our troops across Belgium, and we claim the right to attack the coast of France." That is not what Germany says. I quote the words of the right hon. Gentleman as I took them down. "They would guarantee Belgian integrity"—[An Hon. Member: "At the end of the war!"]—and to that the reply was, "We cannot bargain away our interests in Belgian neutrality." In other words, we are asked now to involve this country in all the perils of this great adventure, because, forsooth, Germany is going to insist on her right to march some troops—[Interruption.]—because Germany insists on her point of view. I am quite prepared to admit that if Germany threatened to annex Belgium, or to occupy Belgium, or if she disregarded the rights of nationality, we might be bound under our Treaty Obligation to go to war to protect Belgium. But what, after all, is the actual fact? What is it we are asked to do? We are asked to go to war because there may be a few German regiments in a corner of Belgian territory. I am not prepared to support a Government which goes to war under those circumstances. We are not merely proposing to go to war for inadequate reasons, but we are doing even more than the Belgian Government are asking us to do. As I understood the right hon. Gentleman, the Belgian Government asked him if he would give diplomatic support, and the reply was that he did not think diplomatic support was sufficient. We have to consider whether it is worth the while of this country to do more even than the Belgian Government asks us to do, in order to have the privilege of intervening in a European war. I do not agree with it. I do not think that these two reasons, although they may be diplomatic reasons, are the real reasons why we are going to engage in this perilous venture. I believe we are going to war now because of the fear and jealousy entertained in this country unfortunately, and fostered by large sections of the Press—the fear and jealousy of German ambition.

I believe that is the real reason why hon. Gentlemen opposite are asking this country to go to war, and I do not think there would be any war fever in the country except for the demands made by the Party opposite and their supporters in the Press. At any rate, I believe I am justified in saying it is abundantly clear that it is this fear of Germany which is to-day driving us to war. I ask myself whether we have not in times past suffered enough, paid enough treasure, and paid enough of the blood of the subjects of this country in order to preserve what John Bright once called that "foul fetish—the balance of power in Europe." I ask myself, too, whether we now can be sure we shall preserve that balance of power.

The right hon. Gentleman said very little about Russia. Let us remember that in going to war in this way we are going to war just as much to preserve the despotism of Russia as to interfere with German ambition. For my part, although I have no particular love for the German Empire, or for German methods, I have still less love for Russia or Russian methods. Without engaging in a war to support despotism, in my opinion it is perfectly possible for the right hon. Gentleman and the Government to arrange an honourable neutrality with Germany, a neutrality which would be perfectly honourable to this country. I regret very much the policy we are pursuing. I regret it still more because I think the country is being rushed into war without its knowledge. No one a week ago could have foreseen that we were going to take a step like this. After listening to the right hon. Gentleman and the reasons he has given, while we must admit the strength of his speech and its sincerity, I say I do not believe he has given a sufficient reason for our undertaking at this time, here and now, the terrible peril and danger of involving this country in war. I have only one other point. The right hon. Gentleman said, at the end of his speech, that we shall not suffer much more if we engage in war than if we stand aside. He used words to that effect. It was an unworthy remark in an otherwise able speech. It was a pity he should appeal to the British people on these grounds. If we engage in war, we shall suffer in our own country, and we shall also suffer, I believe, as regards our influence in Europe. I regret very much at the end of eight years the best you can

say of the policy which has been pursued—of the Triple Entente—is that it should have landed us into such a war as this.

Mr. WEDGWOOD: I represent, in this House, some 70,000 people in the Potteries, and I think it is about time we here considered what those people are going to endure during the coming months. The right hon. Gentleman on the Front Bench told us in his wonderful Jingo speech—can anybody deny that it was a Jingo speech?—that the Army and Navy were ready, to the last trouser button, to do their duty. But he did not tell us that the Local Government Board of England was ready to do its duty. He indicated that this country would suffer as much if it went to war as if it did not go to war; that the destitution, the collapse of our trade and credit would be equally bad whether we went to war or not, therefore, why not go to war? He did not indicate that in this country we should spend hundreds of millions of pounds, which otherwise might have gone to tide our people over the awful time to come. Perhaps hon. Members have not conceived what is going to happen during the next fortnight—orders cancelled, no remittances coming in, men sacked by the hundred thousand or the million from their employment, people getting payment with paper and unable to buy provisions at an already rising price. What arrangements have the Government made for storing provisions in this country? They have made arrangements for looking after the armament firms, but what about the people who are stopping at home, the people who are going to suffer starvation, who, in the final resort, are going to raid the country and take food if they cannot get it otherwise? They are not being considered. Those are the people we are here to consider. I think hon. Members must realise that this is not going to be one of the dear old-fashioned wars of the eighteenth century over again. This is a war in which it is not going to be a question of feeding your armies, but of feeding the people left behind, in which it is not a question of victories at sea, but whether you can get employment for the people who are starving in our big cities. It is a question whether you are going to destroy the civilisation built up on a vast organisation and on a small pin-point of credit.

When you have knocked away the credit, which is the very basis of that organisation, you have to face in this country not

a matter of battles, but a matter of sustaining a civilisation which it has taken us centuries to build up. You know how that civilisation will topple down. We have felt it already here, in the increased price we have paid for our food. We can get credit and people will let us buy goods for they know that a Member of Parliament is still good enough for a "five." But we know that other people have not got that credit and cannot buy anything, because people will not give away provisions for a piece of paper.

Mr. CROFT made an observation which was inaudible in the Reporters' Gallery.

Mr. WEDGWOOD: Will the Empire, will Canada, send us food supplies?

Mr. CROFT: Yes.

Mr. WEDGWOOD: If they will feed my Constituents, I will sit down at once, but I know they will not. Starvation is coming in this country, and the people are not the docile serfs they were a hundred years ago. They are not going to put up with starvation in this country. When it comes, you will see something far more important than a European War—you will see a revolution.

Mr. EDMUND HARVEY: I hope the House will believe me when I say it is with a real feeling of pain that I rise to differ from many of my personal friends and from Leaders whom I honour. I do not want to say one word which will make the situation more difficult. I want to recognise to the uttermost the magnificent efforts that have been made by the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues during the last fortnight on behalf of peace. One knows that the strain must have been almost intolerable, yet I feel that it ought to be possible, even at this late hour, to make yet further efforts, and not to abandon the case, as he seems to have done, as hopeless. We have had offers made from Germany, both of which he felt to be inadequate in themselves, but might they not have been, and even yet be, the basis for further negotiations? Could it not be possible, even at this last hour, for Great Britain to say that if there were no attack made on the coast of France, and if Belgium were respected, Great Britain would remain neutral? So far as we understand there has been no definite offer like that made to Germany. Surely even at this last hour, in the interests of peace, that ought to be possible. My

[Mr. E. Harvey.]

hon. Friend has referred to the sentence of the Foreign Secretary, in which he spoke of the loss to this country being almost as great if we did not go to war as if we did. I do not think merely of the loss of property, terrible as that may be, or of the suffering which it will involve to the poor, terrible as that will be. Surely we may ask the Government to think of the terrible sacrifice of human life, of the thousands of homes that will be made wretched in this country and in other countries, if this country participates in the war. If we can save that loss of life, not in our own country alone, but in other countries as well, it would be worth while that we should make the utmost efforts, even at this last moment, on behalf of peace. I am convinced that this war, for the great masses of the countries of Europe, and not for our own country alone, is no people's war. It is a war that has been made—I am not referring to our Leaders here—by men in high places, by diplomatists working in secret, by bureaucrats who are out of touch with the peoples of the world, who are the remnant of an older evil civilisation which is disappearing by gradual and peaceful methods. I want to make an appeal on behalf of the people, who are voiceless except in this House, that there should be a supreme effort made to save this terrible wreckage of human life, that we may not make this further sacrifice upon the altar of the terrible, bloodstained idol of the balance of power, but should be willing to make great sacrifices of patience in the sacred cause of peace.

Mr. KEIR HARDIE: I desire for a very few minutes to intervene in this Debate. Both Houses of Parliament have passed, with absolute unanimity, a Bill for the relief of the Stock Exchange. We Members, from these Benches, offered no objection, but we now demand to be informed what is going to be done for the relief of the inevitable destitution which is bound to prevail among the poor? As the Foreign Secretary informed us, whether we take part in the conflict or not, there is bound to be much suffering. That involves starving children. Will the Government pass with the same promptitude as we have done the Bill for the relief of the Stock Exchange and the business interests, the Bill to compel education authorities to feed hungry school-children? We ask for an answer. We are far more interested in the suffer-

ings of the poor than we are in the inconvenience to members of the Stock Exchange. Most of the Members of this House have a more direct interest in the Stock Exchange than they have in the sufferings of the poor. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, no!" "Shame!" and "Name!"] The proof of that will be found if the same promptitude be shown in redressing and alleviating the poverty of the poor as we have shown in the other case. What action is to be taken, not merely to ensure a sufficient food supply, but to safeguard the public against being robbed by food speculators? Surely that issue is urgent and important! Not only will workers be thrown out of work by the million—it will not simply be by the thousand, but by the million—but the unscrupulous gang who form the food ring will take advantage of the war crisis to rob the poor more than the market justifies. They have already commenced, without justification of any kind. We are entitled to demand from the Government—not merely to request, but to demand—to be informed what action is to be taken to safeguard the interests of the working classes in the crisis we are now approaching.

One word more. The decision of the Government has been come to without consulting the country. It remains to be seen whether the Government and the House of Commons represent the country on this question. So far as some of us are concerned—here I do not speak for the party with which I am connected for the present moment, but for myself personally—we shall endeavour to ascertain what is the real feeling of the country and especially of the working classes of the country, in regard to the decision of the Government. We belong to a Party which is international. In Germany, in France, in Belgium and in Austria, the party corresponding to our own is taking all manner of risks to promote and preserve peace. [An HON. MEMBER: "Why do they not control the German Emperor?"] I am asked, why they do not control the German Emperor? For the same reason that we do not control the Liberal Cabinet—we are not strong enough. But we are growing. My point is that in all these countries the party corresponding to our own is working strenuously for peace, and especially throughout Germany. I confess that I heard with a feeling akin to wonder this afternoon the refusal by our Foreign Secretary on behalf of the Cabinet, even to

consider the offers made on behalf of the German Government to keep this country out of the dispute. If the neutrality of Belgium can be secured after the war, if the Germans offer not to bombard the coast of France—if these can be made the basis for further negotiation, then every form of justification of the Cabinet for going into the war will have been taken away. I say respectfully to the House that some of us will do all we can to rouse the working classes of the country in opposition to this proposal of the Government, but especially we have the right to ask what action is now going to be taken to alleviate, as far as possible, the sufferings of those who are bound to be hard hit by war, whether we take part in it or not. Our honour is said to be involved in entering into the war. That is always the excuse. I suppose our honour was involved in the Crimean War, and who to-day justifies it? Our honour was involved in the Boer War. How many to-day will justify it? A few years hence, and if we are led into this war, we shall look back in wonder and amazement at the flimsy reasons which induced the Government to take part in it.

Mr. PONSONBY: I feel that I cannot remain seated at what I feel to be the most tragic moment I have yet seen. We are on the eve of a great war, and I hate to see people embarking on it with a light heart. The war fever has already begun. I saw it last night when I walked through the streets. I saw bands of half-drunken youths waving flags, and I saw a group outside a great club in St. James's Street being encouraged by members of the club from the balcony. The war fever has begun, and that is what is called patriotism! I think we have plunged too quickly, and I think the Foreign Secretary's speech shows that what has been rankling all these years is a deep animosity against German ambitions. The balance of power is responsible for this—this mad desire to keep up an impossibility in Europe, to try and divide the two sections of Europe into an armed camp, glaring at one another with suspicion and hostility and hatred, and arming all the time, and bleeding the people to pay for the armaments. Since I have been in this House I have every year protested against the growth in the expenditure upon armaments. Every year it has mounted up and up, and old women of both sexes have told us that the best way to prepare to maintain peace is to prepare for war.

This is what they have led us to—those who were foolish enough to believe it. It was inevitable that if Europe continued to arm, if every nation bled the people in order to furnish new ships and new guns, to grind all the people who devote their energy, their labour, and their enterprise to one sole object, the preparation for war, war will take place. Still I do not even at this moment wish to see the horizon entirely black. I believe there is still a ray of hope. I regret the tone of the Foreign Secretary's speech. I felt that it was in keeping with the scenes I had seen last night. But still he declared that not yet had the fatal step been taken. The House of Commons has treated those of us who are protesting to-day with the greatest patience, but it is right that those of us who hold these views should express them. It is by this House of Commons that the decision must be taken, and however small a minority we may be who consider that we have abandoned our attitude of neutrality too soon and that every effort should still be made to do what we can to maintain our attitude of peace towards the other Powers of Europe, I think in the country we have a very large body of opinion with us. War is a very different thing to-day from what it has been before. We look forward to it with horror, and men who have not got money, and must have food, and cannot buy it, will take it. We have scenes of that sort to look forward to. In the future, which is so black, I trust that my fellow countrymen will not embark on this light-heartedly and in a spirit of aggression. I trust that, even though it may be late, the Foreign Secretary will use every endeavour to the very last moment, disregarding the tone of messages, and the manner of Ambassadors, but looking to the great central interests of humanity and civilisation, to keep this country in a state of peace.

Sir A. MARKHAM: I think the House must feel that the speech we have just listened to, and those remarks in particular relating to the Foreign Secretary, were really quite unjustified. No man during the time I have been in this House has presented a case more free from bias, and in a more even manner before the country than the Foreign Secretary. Since the *entente* commenced in this country I have always opposed it for the reason that, in my opinion, unless it was accompanied by a similar undertaking to Germany, we were likely to find

[Sir A. Markham.]

ourselves in a time like this in a very grave position. No one has striven more to impress upon the Government the necessity of maintaining peace than I have, as only a humble Member on the back Bench, but at the same time there can, I think, only be one issue arising out of this question which the House of Commons has to decide, whether we in this country are going to respect the rights of small States, or whether we are going to allow a large dominant Power in Europe to sweep out all these small independent States. At the time of the Boer War, the hon. Member (Mr. Keir Hardie) was fighting for maintaining the individuality of small States. No self-respecting country can admit the right of a great power in Europe to over-ride and beat down a small nationality. We in this country have stood for the rights of small States, and we cannot become a party to allowing Belgium to be over-run by Germany in reliance on a promise from Germany, which I for one do not for a moment believe, that at the end of the war Germany will hand back to Belgium what she has already undertaken by solemn treaty not to violate. I think the House in this great crisis must remember this. This great Empire to which we belong has not been built up on the foundation of allowing close to our shores a great Power to be erected which might be a menace to the interests of the British people.

If we falter this time, we falter, in my opinion, for the end of the British Empire, for the reason that no self-respecting people on the Continent will ever believe that we, who have stood for liberty in the past, will stand for it again. Therefore, when we are told that this war will be unpopular, as we know it is unpopular, in the country, it is for us to take a courageous stand and say that it is for us, as a House of Commons, to decide what is right and what is wrong. For the reason that the country does not know the truth of the matter the issue is unpopular, but are we to be guided by what is popular or unpopular? We have to do what is our duty. If we do our duty to the State to which we belong, and in the material interest of the State, great though the sacrifice be, we ought not to shrink, whatever the cost in blood or treasure may be, from doing what is our duty towards the country, which has been handed down to us by our forefathers. The hon. Member (Mr. Keir Hardie) said it was the duty of

the Government first to protect the interests of the workers, who will undoubtedly suffer most in this war. I have no doubt in my own mind for the moment that the Prime Minister and his Cabinet will give that their first consideration. It is no use the hon. Member saying they have never done it before. They have never had the opportunity of doing it before. During the time this Government has been in office we have, mercifully, been free from the horrors of war. But I have no doubt myself that the Cabinet and the Prime Minister will see to it, with the great industrial communities in this country, that every step the Government can take to alleviate these people's sufferings will be taken. The hon. Member also said that this would be an opportunity to raise prices on the community. I can only tell him, speaking for one of the largest groups of mines in this country, that I gave instructions yesterday, on no consideration, to allow the price of coal to be raised one farthing above what it is at present. That will also be the wish and the desire of all who wish well to their country. We do not wish to use this opportunity for the purpose that the hon. Member thinks. Therefore, having listened to the speech of the Foreign Secretary, all doubt in my mind vanished, and I shall, to the best of my ability, give him every support in the policy he has enunciated.

Sir ALBERT SPICER: It is with no pleasure that I intervene in this Debate. I desire, in the first place, to dissociate myself from anything which has been said with regard to the light or harsh way in which the Foreign Secretary spoke this afternoon. I believe he has made every effort up to the present to keep this country out of the great conflict which is threatened, and it is because I believe that that day has not yet passed that I intervene now. I represent an industrial constituency, and I know only too well from the experience of the past how the masses suffer in these crises and in these states of war. They are the first to suffer. They suffer all the way through, and they are the last to recover. Many of us have reserves that enable us to maintain an easy position, and I only intervene at this moment because I have the feeling that the Government may still, with increased effort, keep this country in a neutral position. It is perfectly true that Germany has not said all we want her to say, but I listened to their first propositions with

some hope if the negotiations were still continued. After all, there is the balance of power, and I believe in the balance of power, but I do not want to put one nation in such a superior position over others, and, therefore, I do feel that one would only be betraying one's responsibility if one did not say this word in urging the Government to proceed with their negotiations, because I quite admit that if these negotiations cannot be brought further, we shall be justified in taking up a certain attitude. I am prepared to back the Government in any measures for defence, but I do plead with them to do what they can to prevent our adopting the offensive, and I am encouraged by the speech of the Foreign Secretary to hope that they will proceed with further negotiations to enable this result to be arrived at.

Mr. ROWNTREE: I quite agree with what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for West Leeds (Mr. Harvey) that in common with all the House we are indebted to the Foreign Secretary and the Government for their untiring efforts in the cause of peace, and I want to join with my hon. Friends who have already spoken in urging them not to give up the effort. As I listened to the Foreign Secretary I felt that his speech was really the most striking condemnation of the policy of the balance of power that one could think of, and I did regret—it was not unnatural, I admit—the tone that he adopted towards Germany twice or thrice in his speech. One of the points that will come out clearly when we look back on these negotiations is that no Power has done everything that was right, and just because we naturally complain of the tone and the attitude that Germany has adopted so we cannot, and we must not, I think, refuse to look fairly at any offers that they make. I cannot believe that it is impossible yet to obtain from Germany the two assurances that the Foreign Secretary specially desired—the assurance with respect to the Northern and Western coasts of France, and the assurance with respect to the integrity of Belgium. I know it is a difficult thing to get an assurance. I know it is a difficult thing to maintain the integrity of a country. I remember not long ago that we guaranteed the integrity of Persia, and yet we have seen that integrity done away with by Russia, and we have been able to do very little to support the promise that we made. I do appeal to the

Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, who, after all, stand higher in the public estimation of Europe and the world than almost any other statesmen, not to give way yet in their efforts for peace. For whom are we going to fight? We are going to fight for Russia. We shall argue that it is chiefly because of France, and yet we know that it is for Russia that we are going to fight. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Morrell) that that is not the civilisation that England wishes to fight for at the present time. I cannot help thinking that if this Government is going to increase the power of Russia at the expense of Germany, she will find in the near future that her difficulties are largely increased. I think of the frontier of India, I think of Afghanistan, and I think of Persia. We are going to increase enormously the power of Russia, and I think we shall have these difficulties to face at a very early day. Ay! and do not let us forget that when we go to war against Germany, we go to war against a people who, after all, hold largely the ideals which we hold. I do not mean the beaurocracy, I do not mean the military element, but the German civilisation is in many ways near the British civilisation. We think of their literature, we think of what they have done for progressive religious thought, we think of what they have done for philosophy, and we say that these are not the men we want to fight.

I still think that if the Government will exercise patience—I do not say that they have not exercised it already, I only ask them to exercise further patience—and if they will try to come to an arrangement with Germany on the two points I have mentioned—points, I admit, it is necessary to come to an accommodation upon—I believe that there is the greatest work still to be done in the future. How is this war to end? If you possibly can arrange, England wants to keep free from this war, so that those engaged will have the inestimable benefit of having the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to act as great mediators. You may laugh at that, and yet I ask you honestly to consider who is going to settle this war, unless it is these two right hon. Gentlemen who should be in a position to act in the settlement that must come, because you have in the last resort to appeal to reason and not to force. The more patience they exercise, the longer their exertions to bring Germany to a

[Mr. Rowntree.]

proper frame of mind at the present time, the greater will be their influence when the real time for settlement comes. I do appeal to them not to give up hope yet. I want to take this opportunity of raising my voice against England going into this war. The Foreign Secretary said that this House would have an opportunity of saying Ye. or Nay to any proposition made, but I regret to think that already he has very largely pledged the House by the answer he gave to the French Ambassador on Sunday, and I, as a very humble Member want, at any rate, to take this opportunity of saying that I for one will having nothing to do with this war.

Mr. LESLIE SCOTT: I wish to raise a question, really on a point of Order, and for the convenience of the House. There are some important questions on the Paper in my name and in the name of the hon. Member for the Wilton Division of Wiltshire (Mr. Charles Bathurst) relating to the Government proposals as to the National Insurance of ships and cargoes in the event of this country being a belligerent. These questions were postponed at the suggestion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who intimated that he would make a statement on the whole subject in the course of the Debate. It would be for the convenience of the House that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement should be made soon.

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE: The Government are considering very carefully the all-important question of food supply in the event of war. The question that was put by the hon. and learned Gentleman is, of course, one of the very first we have to take into consideration, and we have arrived at a decision with regard to that. We have arrived at a decision with regard to the question of war risks, and the protection of our cargoes and ships. I do not know that I really could, to-night, give a full description of the steps which we intend taking, when the mind of the House is occupied at the present moment with the much greater issues of war. To-morrow I propose to give a detailed account of the steps we propose to take, and I think that will meet the convenience of the House. But I should like to say one word to correct a misapprehension—a serious misapprehension—which my hon. Friend behind me has been labouring under in regard to the Act of Parliament we have introduced. I can assure

him that is not a measure to protect a small section of the business community. It is essentially a measure for the protection of the whole of our credit system, and unless you take steps of that kind a collapse might ensue, which might throw hundreds of thousands, and even millions of workpeople out of employment. I think it would be very unfortunate for the workmen of the kingdom if they were to have that impression on their minds to-morrow morning, and the Stock Exchange only comes in because of the difficulty of realising securities in order to support the market. Therefore, it is very important that I should take this first opportunity of correcting a most serious misapprehension.

It being a Quarter-past Eight of the clock, and there being Private Business set down by direction of the Chairman of Ways and Means under Standing Order No. 8, further proceeding was postponed without Question put.

PRIVATE BUSINESS.

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL (GENERAL POWERS)
 BILL.—(By Order.)

GLASGOW CORPORATION (CELLULOID) BILL.—
 (By Order.)

Consideration, as amended, deferred till to-morrow.

WAR IN EUROPE.

Postponed Proceeding resumed on Question, "That this House do now adjourn."

Mr. MOLTEÑO: As a supporter of the Government that came into power as a Government of peace, and with a sense of my responsibility to my Constituents, I do not feel that I can keep quite silent on this stupendous occasion, when we are asked practically to assent to a course which may involve us in this terrible war. No part of this country has been invaded at present; no vital interest in this country has been attacked. Yet we are asked to assent to war with all its terrible consequences. The Government have no right to plunge this country into this war for anything short of our own vital interests. The Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in his presentation of the case to-day, said

that he would be very frank with the House. I can only say that I regret that in the statements which have been made by him and by the Government in regard to this matter on various occasions we have not been treated with equal frankness, because I feel that we have been placed in a false position by these statements. The right hon. Gentleman began by saying that we were under no obligation, and that the House was perfectly free to come to a decision on this matter. Yet, before he had got very far, he told us that we were under such obligations that, in his opinion, we could not get rid of them. I may remind the House of the attempts that have been made to ascertain what was the real position of the country in the event of a European war. I will first recall what the Prime Minister said last year in the Debate on the Address. Lord Hugh Cecil, in the course of the Debate, said:—

"There is a very general belief that this country is under an obligation, not treaty obligation, but an obligation arising out of an assurance given by the Ministry in the course of diplomatic negotiations to send a very large armed force out of this country to operate in Europe. That is the general belief."

The Prime Minister rose and said:—

"I ought to say that it is not true."

That was entirely satisfactory to us. I come now to a later period of the same year, the 24th March, 1913. The question was then put to the Prime Minister—

"Whether the foreign policy of this country is at the present time unhampered by any treaties, agreements, or obligations, under which British military forces would, in certain eventualities, be called upon to be landed on the Continent, and join there in military operations, and whether in 1905, 1908 or 1911, this country spontaneously offered to France the assistance of a British Army to be landed on the Continent to support France in the event of European hostilities."

That touches on the very position which was outlined to-day. The Prime Minister, replying to that interrogatory, said:—

"As has been repeatedly stated, this country is, not under any obligation not public and known to Parliament which compels it to take part in any war. In other words, if war arises between European Powers there are no unpublished agreements which will restrict or hamper the freedom of the Government or of Parliament to decide whether or not Great Britain should participate in a war. The use that would be made of the naval or military forces if the Government and Parliament decided to take part in a war is for obvious reasons not a matter about which public statements can be made beforehand."

Those were the assurances given last year on this subject with regard to the obligations of this country and of Parliament. In the House of Commons, on the 28th April this year, the hon. Member for the Frome Division of Somerset asked the Secretary for Foreign Affairs:—

"Whether he is aware that demands have been recently put forward for a further military under-

standing between the Powers to the Triple Entente, with a view to concerted action on the Continent in case of certain eventualities, and whether the policy of this country still remained one of freedom from all obligation to engage in military operations on the Continent?"

The reply of the Foreign Secretary was as follows:—

"The answer to the first part of the question is in the negative; and as regards the latter part, the position now remains the same as was stated by the Prime Minister in answer to a question in this House on 24th March, 1913."

That, again, was entirely satisfactory. I come now to the 11th June this year, hardly more than a month ago. The Foreign Secretary was asked:—

"Whether any naval agreement has been recently entered into between Russia and Great Britain, and whether any negotiations with a view to a naval agreement have recently taken place or are now pending between Russia and Great Britain?"

And the Foreign Secretary went out of his way to give a very full and a very complete reply to that question. He said:—

"The Prime Minister replied last year to the question of the hon. Member that if a war arose between European Powers there were no unpublished agreements which would hamper or restrict the freedom of the Government or of Parliament to decide whether or not Great Britain should participate in a war. That answer covers both the questions on the Paper. It remains as true to-day as it was a year ago. No negotiations have since been concluded with any Power that would make that statement less true. No such negotiations are in progress and none are likely to be entered upon so far as I can judge. But if any agreement were to be concluded that made it necessary to withdraw or modify the Prime Minister's statement of last year which I have quoted, it ought in my opinion to be, and I suppose that it would be, laid before Parliament."

There we have the most recent undertaking on the part of the Government that no agreement of any kind, published or unpublished, was in existence, yet we are told by the Foreign Secretary to-day that there are obligations which have been incurred since 1906. He told us that negotiations had gone on with France to the extent of her naval and military commanders consulting with ours in regard to the eventuality of war. What did that mean? Surely a hope and an expectation were held out. For a period negotiations were set on foot of which the Foreign Secretary told us, and the course of those negotiations have been such that in his opinion we are now bound to France to such an extent that we are obliged to go to war. I think there must be some very curious feeling on the part of the Foreign Secretary if he thinks we can regard that statement which he made to-day as a satisfactory one. We had understood from him that we were under no obligation in regard to France, and that we were perfectly free to choose what to do. Surely

[Mr. Molteno.]

many of us in this House if we had known what was to happen, would not have rested in such a position as that in which we now stand, and we would have been clamouring for that freedom which the Foreign Secretary assured us on occasion after occasion we did possess. Yet we are now told that our obligations, though not obligations of Treaty or of agreement, are so strong and so binding that we shall be compelled to take up arms in defence of France. I complain that we, who are supporters of His Majesty's Government, should have been led into this state of false security on this most vital and important question. I ask the Prime Minister, and I ask the Foreign Secretary, I ask the right hon. Gentlemen on that Bench, who informed the people of this country that they were a Government of peace, and they would seek to maintain peace, whether they are not compelled, by their highest duties, to consider their obligations to the people of this country.

For what interests are they asking us to enter upon this tremendous struggle? Have they stated any interest? They do not pretend to tell us. They speak to us of some vague fear, some sort of obligation of honour that impels us to this course. Surely in a case so serious, so tremendous as that of war and peace, we ought to be absolutely clear, and there should be no doubt in any one's mind as to what is the real position and what the real obligations of this country are. We are not in that position to-day. It is extremely difficult for us to discuss this subject to-night, and I do not want to say a word that might do harm, in the position in which we now stand. We ought to have more information, in order that we may be immediately put in a position to make up our minds as to what our duty is on this question. I wish to ask whether we are to have a fair and straight opportunity of considering, discussing, and deciding on this question. But they have brought us to the brink of disaster without our knowing, and without our being warned. I say that, at the last moment, they should give the people of this country a chance to decide. This is a continuation of that old and disastrous system where a few men in charge of the State, wielding the whole force of the State, make secret engagements and secret arrangements, carefully veiled from the knowledge of the people, who are as dumb driven cattle without a voice on the

question. And nobody can tell the country what are the important considerations that ought to weigh with us in taking part in this tremendous struggle.

One other point, that is the question of the neutrality of Belgium. The Foreign Secretary informed us that it depends on an old Treaty, the Treaty of 1839. That Treaty does not compel us in any sense to go to war. That is admitted; in view of the fact that a fresh agreement for that very purpose was made in the year 1870 which agreement was to continue for the period of the war, and one year after. There was no question then of going back to the existing Treaty of 1839, and that fact conclusively proves that we, as one of the signatories to that Treaty, are not compelled to take up arms. In regard to Belgium, I ask for full information on the point. I support the appeal made on this side of the House to the Government not to abandon even the last shred of hope before we are committed to this frightful struggle. The Foreign Secretary has himself informed us that there have been attempts on the part of Germany to try and meet our view. We all feel and know that these nations are struggling for their very existence, and we must place ourselves in their position if we are to judge the character of their position. Germany has made, according to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, some advances to us with a view to avoiding the necessity of our going into the field. I do ask that the most should be made of those advances, and not the least, and that an endeavour should be made to enlarge them in such a way as to avoid this terrible struggle and make some settlement possible. I regret the tone of the Foreign Secretary's reference to those advances. He had the appearance—I may be wrong, and I hope my impression may be dispelled—in the course of this Debate that nothing would satisfy him short of war. That was the impression given to us by the language of the Foreign Secretary. I feel very strongly on this subject. I feel that I am engaged to my Constituents on this matter, and I must give them some account of what I am doing, and how I supported the Government which has led us up to this position. I ask the Government to be prepared to make every effort and every endeavour to maintain peace with the rest of the world, and, as to this horrid "balance of power," which one would have thought had been

disposed of by the eloquence of Cobden and Bright, it would be absurd for me to say anything more where their voices have not succeeded.

Lord EDMUND TALBOT: May I ask the Government what business will be taken to-morrow?

The **PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY** to the **TREASURY** (Mr. Illingworth): The Motion will be made to put forthwith all outstanding questions in Supply and Ways and Means. Then thereafter—

Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Acquisition of Capital) Bill;

Expiring Laws Continuance Bill;

Education (Provision of Meals) Bill;

and other measures.

Mr. ARTHUR HENDERSON: In reference to the announcement just made by the Parliamentary Secretary, may I ask him where the Home Office Vote comes in? There was a definite and distinct arrangement made through the usual channels that has been broken, and, without the Labour party being in any way informed of the change, a new arrangement has been entered into.

Mr. ILLINGWORTH: I am very sorry if there has been a misunderstanding. I thought that what I now propose was agreeable to my hon. Friends, and, in suggesting this course, I absolutely deferred to them.

Mr. A. HENDERSON: I have been speaking with Members of the Labour party, and they made no such understanding with the Patronage Secretary, and we have been very anxious to get this date in order to discuss the question of accidents, and other very important points in connection with the Factories Department. We have been held up for some weeks until the Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories appeared. It has now been published and circulated, and, as I have stated, I think this is the third time this Vote has been put down, and now, so far as I am aware, without any agreement with the Labour party the discussion of the Factory Report is once more abandoned. It seems to me if it is abandoned this time it is abandoned for the whole of the Session, and I want to enter a very strong protest against the

course that has been outlined by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury on behalf of the Government.

Mr. ILLINGWORTH: If, as the hon. Member says, there has been a misunderstanding and if the hon. Member desires to take the Vote to-morrow, I, of course, will fall in with his wishes, but that means that we could not take the outstanding Votes until half-past ten o'clock at night, according to the Standing Orders. If the hon. Member wishes to press it, I, of course, will try to comply.

Mr. FRANCE: May I say to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that I hope immediately after he makes his statement to-morrow with regard to the supply of food in this country that he will be able to touch on that other subject, namely, the alleviation of distress, whether there be a war in which this country is involved or from the economic effects of war in this country. In asking that question I desire to dissociate myself entirely from the meaning and tone of the remarks of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydvil (Mr. Keir Hardie) on this subject. I sincerely believe that the Government have had this matter under serious consideration, and I only ask that they will make some statement upon it to-morrow so as to dispel the impression which some hon. Members are trying to spread throughout the country, that the Government are conducting a campaign in the interests of certain classes only and not for the welfare of the whole community. I was very sorry to hear also the remarks of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mr. Wedgwood), delivered in his usually exaggerated tone, of which, I think, nobody now takes very much notice, and in which he tried to suggest that the people should rise and take food if there is not food possible in the ordinary course. No one will feel more sympathy, not only in his private capacity but also in a business capacity, than I do, and as one connected with the food supply, and no one will feel more anxious to do everything possible to make it easy for those who are short of wages and money, to obtain goods at reasonable prices, and I do dissociate myself from the remarks to which I have referred, and I wish that such remarks had not been made, as they will do something to make the situation more difficult than it is. May I say one word in regard to the suggestion as to the regulation of prices. It has been suggested that those engaged in the food trade

[Mr. France.]

are a gang of thieves, anxious only to make money out of the situation. I think that is a calumny and a slander which ought not to be uttered at this stage.

Mr. W. THORNE: What did the contractors do during the Boer War? They robbed everybody.

Mr. FRANCE: There are certain increases owing to a limited supply, owing to the obligations to supply the Government with food for war purposes, and owing to the increased cost in consequence of financial difficulties, and in financing business. As far as I have had any experience during the last few days, it has been the anxious thought of every firm I have been associated with or have talked with, and everyone desired, and desired only that they may not make one single extra penny of profit out of this sad situation, but as far as they are able, and if they are supported by the Government, in the financial operations, to distribute the food fairly and evenly throughout the country.

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE: I can only speak again by leave of the House, but I think the question put to me by my hon. Friend is a very important one, and I am sure that the House would like to be assured that the Government have taken steps. In fact, as soon as there was any apprehension in the mind of the Government, not that this country should be engaged in war, but that there would be a European war, one of the first questions they took into consideration was the question of the food supply for the people of this country, and we have been considering it, and been considering it carefully and anxiously. For days we have been in consultation with those who are specially informed upon the subject, because we realise that, even if we were not engaged in war, there would be difficulties which might interfere very seriously with the supply of food in this country. Some of the difficulties have already been indicated by my hon. Friend. With regard to some portions of the problem we have already arrived at a decision, very important parts of the problem, those dealing with war risks, and as my hon. Friend knows that is a very serious question; because, unless there is some guarantee as to war risks, we might not be able to get our ships to carry goods at all during war. With regard to that we arrived at a decision.

An HON. MEMBER: Does the right hon. Gentleman, as well as food supplies, mean raw material?

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE: Yes, raw material, which we regard as equally essential. We mean all cargoes brought to the United Kingdom, and not only all cargoes brought to the United Kingdom but by British ships anywhere in all parts as we consider they are engaged in the essential trade of Great Britain wherever they apply. We propose to take every step for the protection of British shipping, and to enable the trade and commerce of this country to go on whatever happens. That was the first consideration which we have been giving our minds to, and to-morrow we hope to be able to make a statement with regard to some parts of the problem. I am not quite sure whether we shall be able to make an exhaustive statement with regard to the whole problem, and I am sure my hon. Friend and the House generally would infinitely prefer that we should take time to have a carefully thought out scheme rather than prematurely launch a scheme which might be found to be unworkable and productive perhaps of more mischief than good. For that reason, it is quite possible that to-morrow I may have to confine my statement with regard to the question of war risks, but if the Government have come to a definite conclusion with regard to something which is more than that, we shall announce it at once to the country because we realise the importance of allaying the very natural anxiety which prevails, not merely in one quarter of the House, but in every quarter of the House that this terrible calamity which has befallen civilisation should be productive of as little misery and suffering to the people of this country as possible.

Mr. LLEWELYN WILLIAMS: I suppose every one of us who sit on these Benches must have been very much exercised in mind as to whether he ought to speak his mind here to-night or not. I have always been, since I have been a Member of this House, some eight and half years now, I hope a perfectly loyal Member of the Liberal Party, and a loyal follower of the Government of the day. I have among the Gentlemen who sit on the Front Bench men whom I am proud to hold, not only as leaders but as personal friends, and men in whom I have every confidence. Therefore it is with deep and profound feeling that I rise to-night to dissociate myself from the policy

which has been enunciated to-day. I listened very carefully to what the Foreign Secretary said, and I hope the House will believe me when I say that I listened with every anxiety to feel exactly as the Foreign Secretary felt, and to agree with him. The first question I asked myself was this: What British interest is there involved in this war which entitles the Government to intervene in it? No trade route is endangered as far as I was able to understand. At all events as long as this country remained neutral with its overwhelming Navy, you could keep clear any trade route for its own supply both of food and raw materials. I asked myself whether there had been any hint or suggestion that either Egypt or India or any British possession in any part of the world was menaced either by Germany or by Austria; and, as far as I could understand from the speech of the Foreign Secretary, not a single one of our possessions is endangered in any way by Germany or by Austria, or indeed by any of the belligerents. I asked myself, if that be the case, has there been an ultimatum or anything in the nature of an ultimatum addressed to this country as was addressed to France?—and I could hear no hint or suggestion of any such menacing message having been sent to this country.

What British interest then is it that is at stake, so vital and so important that this country must be hurled into this terrible cataclysm of a universal European war? The only two suggestions that seemed to me to be made by the Foreign Secretary were these. In the first place—and this he put in the forefront of his argument—a very powerful argument, the argument of a great and powerful advocate—I could not help thinking that he disguised the motives and feelings of an advocate under a very judicial manner—the first question that the Foreign Secretary raised was this. He said: "It is true that we are under no treaty obligations to come to the rescue of France in case of war. It is true that even though the French Navy is in the Mediterranean, and the Northern coast of France is therefore exposed to the attacks of any fleet from Germany, because France has hitherto trusted in our friendship." The Foreign Secretary very fairly and frankly said in one part of his speech that the distribution of the French fleet did not imply any undertaking on our part that we would go to the rescue of France in case there should be war,

even a war of aggression against France. I thought that that was a very fair admission on the part of the Foreign Secretary. Therefore, as far as treaty obligations are concerned, there is no reason why this country, as far as I was able to gather from the speech of the Foreign Secretary, should go to war in order to prevent—
[AN HON. MEMBER: "No treaty obligations with France!"] I mean with France. There are no treaty obligations with France which compel this country to go to war in order to protect French territory from an aggressive war.

Then, in order to arouse the passion of hon. Members of this House, and, I suppose, of people outside, the Foreign Secretary asked this question: What would this country do or say if they found that the German Fleet had broken through the North Sea, entered the English Channel, and was bombarding some of the towns on the Northern coast of France? I felt, as I think every hon. Member felt, that we could not stand idly by with folded hands while our friends were being attacked in that way, even though there were no treaty obligations on our part. Therefore, if that were the real reason why this country had intervened, I, for one, would not have disagreed with the Government. But then the Foreign Secretary, after having aroused our passion by asking that question, went on to allay it, as far as I could see, because he said that Germany had offered that, if we remained neutral, she would not use her fleet in order to bombard the Northern coast of France. If that be so, the great reason, the passionate argument addressed to this House by the Foreign Secretary, had gone by the board, and was irrelevant to this consideration. I say that the one vital matter which the Foreign Secretary put to this House as a matter which impelled, or ought to impel, this country to go to war to protect France from the aggression of the German Navy must go by the board, if it be true, as he said it was, that Germany had made that offer.

The other argument of the right hon. Gentleman was the neutrality of Belgium. I agree that if we were under any treaty obligations to safeguard the integrity and independence of Belgium, the Government might conceivably be called upon to intervene. But what has happened? As far as I was able to gather, up to yesterday there was no question of Germany's attacking the integrity or independence of Belgium at all. It is to-day that that

[Mr. L. Williams.]

has come to pass, and after yesterday, after the assurance given to the French Ambassador in the terms stated by the right hon. Gentleman, is it to be wondered at that, when Germany got to know that, she felt that this country had practically delivered an ultimatum to her, and was going to take part in this war by the side of France? Therefore, with all respect, I earnestly suggest that the Government should, even at the eleventh hour, or after the eleventh hour, make one more effort to ensure peace, if possible. Why is it not possible now—I am not going back to ask why it was not done last Saturday—why is it not possible to-day, to-night, for the Government to ask Germany the question: "If we remain neutral, are you willing not to bombard the towns of France with your fleet, and to respect the neutrality of Belgium?" If that be done, and Germany refuses, you have a united country and a united party behind you. Until that be done, I ask the Government to stay their hand, and give peace one more chance.

I am not under any illusions about this matter. I remember well, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer remembers better, the war fever that swept over this country during the Boer War. Every war is popular in this country. To-day this war may be unpopular. Certainly last week, if you asked any man in this country, whatever his politics might be, whether he would calmly contemplate the entrance of this country into this quarrel, he would have said, "No." He would have begged and implored the Government to stay their hand. Even to-day this country does not want war. But I know perfectly well what will happen. The incitement in the Press, with which we are too familiar, will inflame public passion, and I know that even in my own Constituency some of the best Liberals and Radicals will be in favour of this war. In another week or fortnight the whole country will be aflame with the passion for war. Now is the only time to speak, before the war fever has come to its height. I beg and implore the Government, especially some on the Treasury Bench, who know what war fever means, to use every effort in their power to avert this terrible calamity, not only to our prosperity, but to the civilisation of the world.

There was one sentence in the Foreign Secretary's speech which I thought he ought not to have uttered. He said that, whether we went to war or whether we did

not there would be very little difference in the price we had to pay. I know that inevitably the people of this country must suffer whether we go to war or not. The very Bill which was introduced and carried into law to-day, the very discussion we have had to-day about providing food for the people, the very fact that the Stock Exchange has been closed, the very fact that hundreds of our workmen are unemployed even at this time shows what a terrible calamity even a whisper of war must be, without our taking any part in it. But we shall have to pay a far greater price if we do go to war. Has anyone ever thought of the terrible misery, wretchedness, and desolation which will ensue in this country if we go to war? Hundreds and thousands of homes will be bereft of their bread-winners, and there will be thousands and hundreds of thousands of people who will be bewailing this sacrifice of blood. It is going to be a popular war in another fortnight, but I would ask the Government to take a longer view than a fortnight or a month. What is going to become of our social reform if we embark on this hideous carnage? It is not going to be a matter of a month or two months. It is not only going to be a matter of £50,000,000 or £100,000,000—thrown into the sea! It is a matter which will bring bankruptcy possible to the Insurance Act, which I have always looked upon as the grand triumph of my right hon. Friend's achievements, and it may very well be that the Old Age Pensions we have given to our poor people over seventy will be endangered in a very short time. If we go into this war the whole fabric of our social reform—of which we have been so proud—the whole achievements of this Government during the last eight years, are in peril. I urge the Government, therefore, in the name of common sense as well as humanity to stay their hand, and to avert this terrible danger from our country.

Mr. OUTHWAITE: It is a painful thing at all times for one to oppose a war once it has been inaugurated, but I think that men who feel as I do in this matter would be lacking in courage if they did not at this late hour—if it is not too late—raise their voices against it. At any rate, I am going to free my hands from the shedding of blood by saying what I have to say. I know all regard this matter as serious, but there is a greater seriousness in the matter for such a constituency as mine than in the case of the constituencies of hon. Members

opposite. They will go back to their constituencies, which are largely agricultural, and there they will find the price of the things which their constituencies sell rising; war will mean an immediate profit to them. I go to my constituency tomorrow; there the factories are already closing down—for they do not make war with earthenware. I have not heard to-night any justification from the Minister for Foreign Affairs for the bringing of such a terror upon this land. All through his speech he seemed to be actuated by a veiled hostility to Germany. Germany was the enemy. What we had to fear as the outcome of war, if we do not enter into it, was a predominant Germany terrorising the world and eating up smaller states in military aggrandisement. I say that the injustice of that speech, the sinister injustice of it, makes the position more difficult for hon. Members who think like myself, for the right hon. Gentleman suppressed one great main factor. I do not

think that during the whole of

9.0 P.M. that speech the right hon.

Gentleman mentioned the

name of Russia. We might have supposed from that speech that it was powerful Germany making an attack upon weak France! He did not tell us that the origin of this war, so far as France is now involved in it, was the mobilisation of the Russian forces, which prevented the localisation of the war between Austria and Servia. I have a picture in my mind as the outcome of this war. I think this war may end with the inevitable aggrandisement of Russia and the increase of her power in Europe and Asia. I do not see an all-conquering Germany as a result of this. I see a Germany crushed, and an all-conquering Russia. Power in the end in such a war as this rests with that nation which can bring its last hundreds of thousands to the slaughter, and it is Russia which can bring her peasantry last into the field. A powerful appeal was made by the right hon. Gentleman, an appeal that he knew would carry weight in this country, and the only one that would carry weight in this country—an appeal on behalf of Belgium. He spoke of a small nation in danger of oppression. He talked of the neutrality of Belgium. While I can undoubtedly see a technical violation of the neutrality of Belgium in the marching of troops through Belgium, that is very different to the conquest of Belgium by force and the holding of Belgium by force.

Does the Foreign Secretary ask us to believe that Germany, with such forces against her after this war, is going to hold such a country or a populous place like Belgium in subjection, as well as Holland and Denmark? That is a picture with which he tried to frighten us. The Foreign Secretary raises such an issue and makes such an appeal! I ask for whom he makes that appeal? It is for Russia. Did the right hon. Gentleman ask us to make war to maintain the integrity of Finland, which was suppressed by this semi-civilised, barbaric, and brutal race? Did he appeal to us to go to war to maintain the integrity of Persia, when we actually had a treaty of alliance with Russia for its maintenance? We have allowed Northern Persia to be overrun by Russian troops and to be secured by her. There was a time, not very long ago, when many of my hon. Friends appealed to this country to study the rights of two small States and the maintenance of their integrity against the aggrandisement of a great nation. There was then a great Liberal statesman leading a Liberal party. How did the right hon. Gentleman the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was not then even supporting his own party in the maintenance of the right of small States, act? He was splitting his party on behalf of the Government of that day.

I do not think when we realise that this view of the outcome of this war will probable be the aggrandisement of Russia, that we have any right to appeal to this country in support of this war as being a war in the interests of a small State. [HON. MEMBERS: "Divide, divide!"] I am going to say what I have to say because I shall not have an opportunity of speaking again here, as my duty lies amongst my starving Constituents, and therefore I shall now say what I have to say. There is one point to which I wish to draw the attention of the House. It seems to me to be a very vital point. The right hon. Gentleman spoke of the maintenance of the integrity of Belgium, and asked us to look upon this maintenance as the maintenance of the right of a small State. He said that the Treaty for the maintenance of the integrity of Belgium was not made so much in the interests of Belgium, but in the interests of the guarantors of this treaty. If that is so, it sweeps by the board the whole argument that we are entering into this war for the maintenance of the rights of a small State. I listened to the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

[Mr. Outhwaite.]

honestly hoping, I can honestly say, that he would be able to justify this war, as I thought it could not be justified. In every sentence he uttered I hoped that some justification would come from it. I looked for some justification from him for the shedding of blood, and from the casting on one side of the moral obligations that I always thought greater than any treaty obligations, but I did not get it. I recall the words of John Bright:—

"I cannot believe that civilization in its journey towards the sun will enter with endless night to gratify the ambition of those men who seek to wade through slaughter to a throne and shut the gates of mercy on mankind."

I regret to think that the Minister for Foreign Affairs has precipitately, as I believe, involved this country in war, instead of maintaining the position it once held of splendid isolation, when this nation could use its influence to stop the carnage involved and to stay the slaughter and to preserve some remnant of civilisation to mankind.

Sir FREDERICK LOW: I do not rise for the purpose of making a speech, but for the purpose of asking a question, and that question is this: Whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he comes to make his statement to-morrow, will be able to give us some information as to what steps it is intended to take with regard to the currency, and especially with regard to the circulation of notes?

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE: I propose to make a statement which will cover that particular question to-morrow.

Mr. REMNANT: Will that include the possibility of fixing the price of food stuffs?

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE: I am not sure I shall be able to say anything about that to-morrow.

Mr. KING: This is a question which certainly deserves long and considerable discussion. [HON. MEMBERS: "Divide! Divide!"] I do not see why those who are disinclined either to listen or to speak should stay at all. I feel very flattered myself when they begin to shout "Divide! Divide!" because then I know the remarks I am making are going home. There are one or two aspects of this Debate which struck me as rather remarkable. One of these is this. That although we have evidence of great numbers of supporters of the Government still backing them up—although we have the whole of

the official Opposition supporting the Government—we have heard during the course of this Debate, I think, only one whole-hearted speech supporting the policy outlined by the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. Why is it that supporters of this policy have lost their voice? Are they afraid or are they ashamed, or why is it that we heard practically no defence from either side of the House, with the one exception to which I have referred, for the policy of the right hon. Gentleman? This is all the more remarkable in the case of the Opposition, because only a fortnight or three weeks ago they described Gentlemen sitting on the Government Bench as the most incompetent, policyless people you could find. It was said that their only policy was that they were drifting to disaster, and I remember that the Leader of the Opposition, in the discussion on the Foreign Office Vote, telling the Foreign Secretary that if he could not use his influence to preserve peace in his own land, he could do no good at all abroad. Why is it that the Leader of the Opposition is not here now? [HON. MEMBERS: "Divide, divide!" and interruptions.]

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: This is a matter of the utmost gravity. The hon. Member should not be interrupted.

Mr. KING: It is a subject of the deepest interest, I venture to say, to the country and to the House, and if this policy is supported by the Opposition, why should we only have a few perfunctory words from the Leader of the Opposition? I feel the more compelled to ask this, because the whole of the policy which has brought us to this pass is in direct opposition to the traditional policy of the late Lord Salisbury. His policy was not the balance of power, but the concert of Europe, not making agreement on one side with one Power and having understandings on one side with another Power, but freedom from all foreign complications. It is that traditional policy of the Conservative party by one of the greatest Foreign Ministers that party has ever had up to the present day, Lord Salisbury, which was thrown overboard some ten years ago, and which has brought Europe to certainly the most lamentable condition which it has ever been in since the days of Napoleon. There is another question or two which I should like to address to the Government Front Bench. I want to know whether the policy on which we are embarking has the support of the united Cabinet. We hear rumours, both inside

the House and outside, that there are divisions, and that even one Cabinet Minister has resigned. I hope that is not so. I admire the Cabinet, and I admire some of its Members much more than others, and if it is one of those I most admire, I should find my confidence in them much shaken. If, on the other hand, they are all united, having as they have a much better opportunity for judging this question than I have, if I am told to-night that there is a united Cabinet upon this subject, I shall be very much relieved, and much more inclined to support the Government in this matter.

An HON. MEMBER: That is a wicked suggestion!

Mr. KING: The hon. Gentleman has no right to make that remark. The only suggestion I made was that we should have some information from the Front Bench: to say that is a wicked suggestion, I will not stigmatise in the way I should like the conduct of the hon. Member. The right hon. Gentleman said there was one bright spot in connection with this question, and it was Ireland. Why have we not had some assurances from the Conservative Members from Ireland that they are going to stand patriotically by the Nationalist Members in this crisis? I was glad to hear the hon. and learned Member for Waterford say that the difficulties of the nation and the Empire were going to have prior consideration in his policy, even above the demands of Ireland. Why have we not had some similar statement from the Ulster Tories?

Viscount CASTLEREAGH: There is no doubt about our patriotism.

Mr. KING: A short time ago the hon. Members with whom the Noble Lord opposite works were declaring that they would invite the Kaiser over—

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr. Whitely): We are discussing a matter of such great gravity that I hope the hon. Member will not enter into any irrelevant questions.

Mr. KING: I beg to withdraw my remark. [**An HON. MEMBER:** "It is scandalous!"] I do not think what I am going to say is irrelevant. If we are going into a war against Germany, and if that war is going to be enthusiastically supported by the Ulster Tories, let them remember this—[**HON. MEMBERS:** "Order, Order!"]

Mr. REMNANT: The matter is too serious.

Mr. KING: I ask hon. Members opposite to remember this—[**HON. MEMBERS:** "Order!"] What I am going to say is perfectly in order. They are going to fight against the most Protestant Power on the Continent of Europe—

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: In this matter I think I may act for the House, and say that we are discussing a matter of the deepest gravity, and it is most undesirable to complicate it with matters which have nothing to do with it. I hope the hon. Member will observe that.

Mr. KING: I still maintain that I have said nothing which is out of order.

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I have not attempted to deal with the hon. Member on a matter of strict order. We are here on a graver occasion than to deal with matters of order.

Mr. KING: I pass from that, and I say without any hesitation that the House and the country has not sufficiently realised that if we are going into this war, it is a war against German civilisation, and the German people who are our friends, and the German Government is not. The bureaucracy and the military caste that mismanaged, and I believe grossly mismanaged, the affairs of Germany, are the enemies of the peace of Europe, and it is that caste and those men that we have to stand out against. Old man as I am, if I were asked to take up arms and fight myself against those men, I would be glad to do it. But the misery and tragedy of the position is this: We cannot fight against those masters of tyranny, and against those men who misgovern, without fighting at the same time against the German people. That is what puts many of us in the gravest difficulty. That is what makes this matter to me personally a question of intense pain and trial. I have many dear personal friends in Germany whom I value and respect and love as much as any men on earth, and to think that from this time forward, not only for a few years but perhaps for the rest of my life, I am to be estranged from the influence of those men by a tragedy of this sort is something which I cannot contemplate in silence or light-heartedly say that it must come, and it is not something I can allow to come to pass without uttering one more warning, and if it be not too late a plea for a reconsidera-

[Mr. King.]

tion of this question. When we are going into a war like this, we cannot say we are fighting for the small independent State of Belgium. I admit that is a noble object on which to shed blood and money. We cannot even say that we are fighting for the integrity and independence of a great Power like France. We must look upon this question as a whole, and remember that we are fighting for Russia when we are fighting against Germany, and that if Germany stands for tyrannical Government, Russia stands for atrocious tyrannical Government.

Sir J. D. REES: Is the hon. Member in order in accusing a friendly Power of atrocious tyrannical government? I believe it has been ruled that an hon. Member is not in order in using such language in regard to this particular Power.

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I do not think the hon. Member was going quite so far as the hon. Baronet has indicated. I may perhaps again suggest that it does not add to the strength of the hon. Member's case to use language of that kind.

Mr. KING: I shall be glad to withdraw anything I have said which is inappropriate or objectionable, but I cannot put aside this plain fact, that in Russia at the present moment you have 100,000 people in prison without a trial. You have three executions a day, or over 1,000 a year, of men who are executed under martial law without even a semblance of a trial at all. You have, moreover, this fact, that a few weeks ago, just before the time of mobilisation in Russia, you had uprisings, strikes, and threats of civil war, such as have not been known there for half a dozen years. As one who has tried to understand the affairs of Russia, I believe that this diabolical mobilisation of the forces of Russia was largely occasioned by her own internal difficulties. In order to save the position, the emoluments and the prerogatives of men in power in that land, they have mobilised their Army, and thrown the whole of Europe into a conflagration of war. They have done that not from any patriotic motives, not because they really want to preserve any great ideal, but because their own position, power, and place are in danger. Remember—I remember it, and I cannot forget it, and as far as it is in my power I will make others remember it—that if we are fighting against Germany we are fighting for Russia, and if we are fighting for Russia at the present time we are fighting for an

amount of tyranny and injustice and cruelty which it is quite impossible to think of without the deepest indignation. We must not look merely at the question of the neutrality of Belgium, and the freedom of attack of the Northern ports of France—after all, these ports are only small spots in the great field of war. Let us at least carefully consider the whole question, and let us realise something more of the great issues involved.

I shall only touch upon one more aspect which seems to me not without deep significance. Only five weeks ago we heard of the assassination of the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary, and we all know that it was that assassination that has led by a strange, swift series of events to the present terrible state of affairs. When, on Tuesday the 30th of June, the Prime Minister came down to the House and proposed a Resolution which was accepted in solemn silence, and with the deepest feeling and approval, I believe that by the whole House, absolutely irrespective of parties or personalities, he moved an address of sympathy not only with His Imperial and Royal Majesty the Emperor of Austria and the King of Hungary on the part of this House, but their sympathy also with the peoples of the Dual Monarchy. He spoke in words which impressed the House deeply at the time, and said we felt “a tender respect for the great family of nations of which the Austrian Emperor is the head, and our hearts go out to them in affectionate sympathy.” It is affectionate sympathy five weeks ago for the men and the peoples of the nations that we are going to wage war against perhaps to-morrow! That seems to me a tragic, and I would go further and say a bitter and cynical fact. Is our foreign policy so shifting and changing, so liable to sudden emotions and rapid revolutions, that the people to whom we express with absolute unanimity one day our affectionate sympathy we declare to be our foes the next? Whatever this House decides to do, whatever may be the line taken by the Government, I may add perhaps, and add seriously, that whatever mistakes of taste or language I have made here to-night, I am not afraid and I am not ashamed to have stood up here and said that this is not a simple question of the neutrality of Belgium, nor a simple question of whether the Northern ports of France shall be shelled and bombarded. It is a question we must consider in all its bearings, and I believe, from all I have

heard and all I can think and judge of this question, that the policy of the Government has been too precipitate and that they have not sufficiently realised that though they may fight for the right, honour and just cause in one part of Europe, they on this occasion will be fighting for tyranny, injustice, and reaction in other parts of Europe.

Sir J. JARDINE (*indistinctly heard*): I feel the gravity of this occasion, and I think that I may be pardoned for saying plainly what I think about the speech made by the Foreign Secretary to-day and the policy he has outlined. As a Liberal sent here two or three times by my Constituents to carry out peace, retrenchment, and reform, I feel with the deepest seriousness any approach of war, because I know that war contradicts all those three topics. The one thing which gave me most satisfaction in the right hon. Gentleman's speech was the statement that up till now no ultimatum has been presented to Germany, nor has any threat been made. It was said, too, that there was no war proclaimed between Russia and Austria, and that neither had Germany declared war against France. There seemed therefore to be some opportunities for further negotiations. That appeared to be clear from what was said about an offer made by the German Government as regarded Belgium, and as regarded the French ports on the British Channel. The Foreign Secretary would greatly add to the laurels he has already gained in diplomacy if he could carry those negotiations further. It may take up time, but if by any chance the nation can avoid going into hostilities with Germany the gain will be immense. There are ways in diplomacy of settling without war the tearing up of a treaty, as we saw on the occasion of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and when a great Power sent her ships through the Dardenelles. I think, therefore, the matter of going through Belgium might be accomplished without loss of honour even to a great nation. After all, the one great consideration is this: What are we going to gain or lose? In nearly every war the warlike nation loses a great deal. Our commerce and our manufacturing business will be injured. The effect will be felt throughout all the British Colonies in the world, in the commercial centres, and widespread ruin is likely to occur there. Already it has begun. The working class in Germany are dead against this war. Many in France, too, are strongly against

it, and I have not the least doubt when the right hon. Baronet's speech comes to be read in the manufacturing towns in the North there will be a strong feeling against our entering into hostilities under the circumstances.

It may have to be admitted that war may result through no fault of ours, but we have to remember those who suffer so much when war begins, and we must also recognise the fact that it is likely to create feeling against the Minister who is responsible for the war. In many parts I believe the nation is not yet informed of the circumstances. It is only a few days since I returned from Scotland, and I can tell the House that there was not the least suspicion there that anything like this was going to be debated. The minds of the people were exercised more over the Irish question, and on the question whether the Amending Bill or the original Home Rule Bill would pass. Speeches were made on that subject in profusion, but not a single word was said about the balance of power in Europe or about the fact that we were likely to be involved in war on that account. I therefore put in a plea for diplomatic delay, if it be possible. Members on all sides no doubt appreciate the gravity of our Debate to-night, and I am not going to suggest that anyone is taking a light-hearted view of the subject. But there are many outside who do do so, and they help to make up public opinion, with the result that we are entering on this venture in somewhat the same spirit as we might take part in a gorgeous parade or in a magnificent picnic at somebody else's expense. In a short time the reckoning may come. There was a curious commentary on this in connection with the Crimean War. Two or three months after that war was commenced Lord Aberdeen, at Oxford, wept tears over Cobden's shoulders because he said he had been pressed into the war by his colleagues against his better judgment. I ask the Prime Minister to hold out nothing in the nature of a threat to Germany, but to delay matters as long as possible, and to remember how the reasons which were advanced for our embarking on warfare in Afghanistan—reasons which suggested an inevitable attack upon India by Russia—have been altogether falsified by events. You can always conjure up imaginary dangers, and dangers which are probable or problematic, but in so doing you may be running the risk of

[Sir J. Jardine.]

real danger, and you may incur certain evil in order to ward off a danger which in fact might never arise.

Mr. ANEURIN WILLIAMS: It is always a painful thing for a Member of this House, and especially one with comparatively little experience, to give expression to criticisms of his own party, and it is more especially painful to do it on a great and tragic occasion like this, and against what appears to be the strong stream of opinion of one's fellow countrymen. Nevertheless every Member must remember that he has a responsibility for the bloodshed and suffering which may be caused not only to his own fellow countrymen, but to all the nations of Europe in the course of the next few weeks, and I therefore feel I cannot sit silent without stating that I am not satisfied the Government has done all it possibly could for peace. It may be that within the last few weeks or months they may have done so, but I for one cannot forget the anti-German policy which had been pursued for many years, and I cannot shut my ears to the anti-German tone which, I regret to say, seemed to be so evident in the speech of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to-day. The policy which the Government is now pursuing is one which has been demanded by the anti-German Press in this country with great violence for a week or more, and the Government are now receiving the most enthusiastic support from those who have been crying out against Germany for years past. I feel bound to support, however feebly, the definite suggestion made by the hon. Member for the Carmarthen Boroughs (Mr. Llewelyn Williams), because it seemed to me that even, at the last hour, it contained some glimmer of hope and that it constituted a chance which ought not to be thrown away. The suggestion was that we should make a definite and unmistakable offer to Germany. We should not tell her in general terms that her offer is not broad enough, but we should make a definite offer that we on our part will remain neutral in this war on two conditions. The first condition, of course, is that the Northern ports of France shall not be attacked. We have been told to-day that we have no obligation to France except in regard to those Northern ports. As I understood that statement it was that the French fleet had been removed to the Mediterranean in order that our fleet might be brought into Northern waters,

and to-day we were told that that had practically created on our part an honourable obligation to defend the Northern ports of France in return. That pledge seems to have been given yesterday, and it strikes me that it is totally inconsistent with the assurances that have been given from time to time by the Government in this House—assurances quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire—which amounted to this, that we were under no obligations. However, that is done with. I think the House has been misled in that matter, and I think the House would rather have sacrificed a very large sum of money in building additional ships than that we should come under an obligation to defend the French ports in the way that we seem to have done. On this point Germany has expressed a willingness to meet us. Therefore, the remaining point is the one of greater difficulty—I mean with regard to Belgium. Here it is very easy to fix our eyes upon the wrong which Germany has done within the last few hours, but great matters between great nations cannot be wholly settled by such a short view as that. I venture to say that if the attitude of Great Britain towards Germany for years past had been different from what it has been, we might not to-day have to lament the lawless act Germany has committed towards Belgium.

If we had, even within the last ten days, not to go further back, pressed Russia not to go on mobilising her troops while negotiations were going on and while the German Emperor was doing his very utmost in the cause of peace, we might not to-day have to regret this lawless act of Germany. Did we bring such pressure upon Russia? We have had no assurance given of it to-day. Not one word was said on that point by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs. It is, in one sense, too late to think of this now. Whatever have been the sins committed by Germany and whatever have been the sins committed against her, the fact remains that she has put herself entirely in the wrong by her action towards Belgium. I do not, however, believe—I cling to the hope, at any rate, that it is not too late to try to get some agreement on this point. It is because of that that I rise to support the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for the Carmarthen Boroughs, that we should make a definite offer to Germany now, at the last moment, that if the neutrality of Belgium be respected, in addition to her promise

not to bombard or attack the Northern ports of France, then we will maintain neutrality in this war. If that offer is put definitely, it will be on record, and it will have cleared—so far as it is possible now to clear it—our responsibility in this matter. If it is not successful, we shall, at any rate, have made our effort at this last moment. If, on the other hand, it happily should be successful, then, no doubt, we shall have saved our own country, and to some extent other countries as well, from an enormous catastrophe, which seems destined to throw back the civilisation of the western world for a whole generation and, perhaps, much longer.

Sir WILLIAM BYLES (*indistinctly heard*): I feel irresistibly impelled to trouble the House with two or three thoughts which are passing through my mind on this exciting day. We saw here a remarkable scene. The House crowded at every corner, the galleries crowded, and great eagerness on the part of Members. If one goes outside the House one sees the same excitement, because England is plunging into war, which I am afraid will far too soon become popular. We heard the shouts of exultation which came from the other side. It is not more than a dozen men in Europe that have brought this thing about, yet tens of hundreds of thousands of people in these four or five nations will be reduced to terrible want and misery. That is what men shout about with glee! It is not a war to defend our hearths and homes. If it were, I could understand this exultation. It is to defend our honour. I hope I do not value honour more lightly than any of my colleagues. It is for honour that a German duellist fights his fellow officer. Whether he kills his opponent or is killed by him, honour is revenged. So it is to be now. We are to hire a number of men, a number of soldiers, to go and blow out the brains of another number of men. [An HON. MEMBER: "Why do you not serve yourself?"] To vindicate our honour. [Interruption.] I want to put considerations before the House which come from Mr. Norman Angell, the man who has, perhaps, done more to undermine the spirit and theory of war than any other living man. He asks, if England is to go to war with Germany, if the German soldiers cross the frontier, would England go to war with France if French soldiers violated the neutrality of Belgium?

Mr. CROFT: Suppose Germany declares war?

Sir W. BYLES: England contracted in 1870 that she would help either France or Germany to defend Belgian territory, but there was this proviso in the first article of the Anglo-German and the Anglo-French agreement:—

"It is clearly understood that Her Majesty the Queen does not engage herself by this treaty to take part in the general operations of the war beyond the limits of Belgium."

Can we be left out of the general limits of the war? Everybody knows that once we enter upon this terrible struggle, no man can predict how deeply we may get in, or how far-reaching may be the results. In my judgment it is the duty of the Government to defend its own people and look after their happiness and develop the arts of peace, and it is violating that duty to plunge the nation into war. There is no declaration of war yet, and the House of Commons can stop it. There is still time. I am an old man and have been fighting for peace all my life, and I should be turning my back on myself, I should be denying my whole past, if I were to vote in support of the policy which has been put before us by the Government which I have supported with fidelity, with affection, and with hope. I implore them now not to lead the nation into this disaster.

Mr. ANNAN BRYCE: The hon. Member (Mr. Aneurin Williams) assumed that he was speaking against the general stream of opinion in this country when he opposed the making of war and the giving up of neutrality by this country. I do not think he is right. I believe the great body of opinion in this country is for maintaining our neutrality in this war, and the striking evidence of that was that during the whole course of the speech of the Foreign Minister this afternoon there was not one single cheer from this side of the House. The whole of the cheering came from the other side. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is absolutely untrue!"]

Sir CHARLES HENRY: I hope no such statement as that will be made. I sat in that part of the House, and the Foreign Secretary was cheered time after time. Hon. Members above the Gangway were in complete sympathy with him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw!"]

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: If the hon. Member inadvertently made an incorrect

[Mr. Deputy-Speaker.]

statement, which he of course believes, hon. Members must allow him, if he desires, to explain his statement.

An HON. MEMBER: He ought not to make an untrue statement.

Mr. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: An hon. Member can inadvertently make an incorrect statement, but he is not likely to make any exaggerated statement unless he believes it to be true.

Mr. BRYCE: I am sorry if I made a statement which was incorrect. I was only speaking from my own observation. I was standing at the Bar during the whole of the speech, and attempted to estimate what respective support the Foreign Secretary derived from expressions of opinion in the House on the statement which he made. My impression was the impression to which I have given utterance, and if I was wrong, I am very sorry. At all events, only one Member from this side has spoken in favour of the statement of the Foreign Minister. That, at all events, is an accurate statement.

Sir G. PARKER: There are plenty of Liberals who will support you.

Mr. BRYCE: That we shall see in the future. In the meantime I think the country will want more explanation than we have had to-day as to the reasons why the Government is taking the course which they propose to take. The Foreign Minister promised papers. One interesting thing to be seen in the papers will be what efforts he has made to get the French to refuse to join

10.0 P.M. in this enterprise. He dealt very lightly with the question of the participation of France with Russia. He said it was a matter in which the French had no interest any more than we, but they felt themselves bound in honour to support the Servian and the Russian case against Austria and Germany. He made one remarkable statement that he did not know what the obligations of the French were towards the Russians under the Treaty of Alliance between those two Powers. It is a curious thing that the Foreign Minister of this country should not know what must be an elementary fact necessary for the proper diplomatic handling of various questions. However, we must accept the statement which he has made. But there is another remarkable fact that the Italians are taking up an attitude of absolute neutrality in these enterprises. If the Italians were able to

withhold from this participation, how does it come that the French were not equally able to withhold from participation in the Russian enterprise? In this course of events, we have the French joining the Russians on a point of honour and we are joining the French on a point of honour—a regular house that Jack built. The French have no direct interest and we have no direct interest, and yet we are both going to compromise the future of our history. Everyone knows that the real interest of the French is not under their engagement with Russia, but because they wish to get back Alsace-Lorraine. We have no such object. Are we going to help the French to get back Alsace-Lorraine? In fact, we are being asked to undertake an enterprise which is going to lead to the loss of perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives and certainly millions of money to us.

I was astonished to hear the minimising by the Foreign Secretary of the difference between standing out of the war and going into it. Surely there is all the difference in the world between being neutral and taking part in a war of this kind! If we take part in a war we expose ourselves to the risk of capture at sea. At the very beginning that is what will happen to us. There may be privateers fitted out against us. The trade routes by which food and raw materials come to this country may be at once interrupted, and, from the case of the "Alabama," we may know what an immense time it may take for us to capture one single hostile privateer. I always opposed the continual increases of our Navy for this very reason, that the stronger your Navy grows the more you wish to use it, and no one can have read the speeches which have been made in Parliament during the last four or five years without seeing the inevitable tendency to which we are drifting under this vastly increased expenditure. Therefore, I think the country will not be behind the Government in their present enterprise unless the Government can give much more satisfactory reasons than they have so far given for the course which they propose to adopt.

Mr. DENMAN: The value of this Debate is to show that there is in this country a certain volume of public opinion—how strong we cannot yet tell—that has not yet lost its patience. The position as we have it to-day is that the door is not yet closed. There is no declaration of war,

and the speech of the Foreign Secretary did not imply that in the immediate future there would be a declaration of war. The position that we on this side, or at any rate I myself, take is that of urging that the door shall not be lightly closed. It is very easy in these moments for patience to become exhausted, and I think the great mass of the people would feel that we in this House had committed a crime unless we, before the outbreak of war, had shown the utmost patience consistent with our national honour. What, after all, is it that we are to go to war about? It is the obligations and the vital interests in connection with two Powers. The first of these Powers is France and the second is Belgium. We have already learned regarding France that our obligations of honour and our direct interests are not inconsistent with neutrality and agreement with Germany. With regard to Belgium, I do put this one consideration to the House: How are we to enforce Belgian neutrality? There are three possible ways. We are urged to undertake a naval war with that object. Surely it is clear to everybody in this House that no naval war could preserve that neutrality! If our desire is to prevent the passage of German troops across Belgium, what naval war would prevent that? The second alternative is to wage a military campaign and land an expeditionary force in Belgium. Does anyone really think that it is in the best interests of Belgium to make it the cockpit of this Armageddon? To make Belgium the scene of a vast European War is not in the best interests of the country whose neutrality we wish to guarantee. Surely, if we were that country, small and comparatively defenceless, desiring to maintain our independence, would we not prefer that a force should pass through our boundaries rather than that our territory should be the scene of one of the bloodiest conflicts in modern times, provided that our ultimate independence was absolutely secure!

The third way is that of utilising the power which our neutrality gives. The Noble Lord inquired what independence would be left. I really cannot see the force of that argument. The Foreign Secretary made a great point of it. You, Mr. SPEAKER, are intimately acquainted by every tradition with a border county [An HON. MEMBER: "Speak up!"]—a border county which was seldom neutral in the conflicts between Scotland and England. If you had been living there then, and had had a guarantee of the

neutrality of your county in a conflict between Scotland and England, would you not have preferred that the forces of Scotland, let us say, should pass through Cumberland rather than that the conflict should take place in that county if that end could have been attained by allowing the forces to pass through? Surely it is in the interests of the smaller country that it should not be made the battleground of a European conflict, and that the forces should have a peaceful passage through it, provided that the country has a guarantee of ultimate independence. [An HON. MEMBER: "Who is to give the guarantee?"] We on this side have been accused of advocating a course that involves national cowardice. It is not always easy to analyse motives, and I do not think that the general opinion of this House would accuse the hon. Member for Leicester (Mr. Ramsay Macdonald) of cowardice. No, on the other hand, would it accuse other Members who have spoken in favour of war of showing special bravery. I would only say that if there are Members in the Government who find that they cannot support a policy of war, neither their party nor the country will think that they are guilty of cowardice.

Mr. ELLIS DAVIES: I want to express my own appreciation, and I think the appreciation of the country, of the efforts made by the Foreign Secretary in endeavouring to localise the war. I desire to dissociate myself from the attacks made to-day upon the right hon. Gentleman. I think I can go further and say that whatever may be the result of the crisis in which we find ourselves, the country undoubtedly appreciates the efforts both of the Government and the Opposition to secure an honourable peace. There can be no doubt in my mind that the paramount interest of this country is peace. The great desire of the people of this country is that the Government should, if it is in any way possible, maintain neutrality in the conflict which is taking place. I venture to ask whether it is yet too late to consider the proposal made by Germany, because I understand that the latest information is that there has been no violation of the neutrality of Belgium. If that be so, I wish to add my appeal that the suggestion put forward by Germany may be seriously considered. I can claim that I have voted for a strong Navy, costly as that has been, because I desire to see this country placed in a position not only

[Mr. E. Davies.]

to defend its own interests, but also to defend the interests of those with whom we may be allied. After being in the country, I know that I am expressing the feeling of the enormous majority of the people with whom I came in contact when I say that their earnest prayer is that the Government and the Opposition should put forward every effort possible either to localise the war in Europe, or, in any event, to maintain our neutrality in the conflict that is going on.

Mr. PRINGLE: I regret, in the first place, to dissociate myself from a number of Friends with whom on other occasions I am proud to serve. I think it is unfortunate that we have had almost a stream of speeches all on a single line on this side of the House. I think it is important to show that that section on these benches has been vocal out of proportion to its numbers, I regret some of these speeches, because of the attacks made upon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Personally, I have not always supported his foreign policy. I had always grave doubts of the policy of engagements with Continental Powers, but we have in the present situation to consider our obligations in view of the policy adopted by successive Governments in this country. But that was not the primary consideration in my mind. Like, I believe, hon. Members in all parts of the House, I have viewed the situation to which this crisis has given rise with grave anxiety, and I have endeavoured, so far as I possibly could, to reach a just conclusion regarding the proper course for this country to adopt. As a Liberal I thought the best policy to adopt was to go to the fountain of the Gladstonian tradition. The hon. Member for Leicester to-day accused the Government of departing from the traditions of the Liberal party. I do not know what title he has to speak of the traditions of the Liberal party, but I think that no Liberal can find any better exponent of the traditions of the Liberal party than the late Mr. Gladstone.

Mr. Gladstone had a situation very similar to that with which we are faced to-day. A question of the neutrality of Belgium was raised in 1870, and I find in the "Life of Mr. Gladstone," by Lord Morley, this question dealt with in two letters which Mr. Gladstone wrote at that time to Mr. Bright, and the latter portion of the second letter seems to be conclu-

sive as to the position. He said that if in this conflict Belgium was swallowed up in the maw of any great State, owing to domestic ambition, that would be the extinction of public law in Europe. And that, to my mind, brings out clearly the great fundamental issue which underlies the present war. The issue which will divide the parties, apart altogether from these minor matters of Treaty obligation and breach of them on this side or that, the fundamental issue will be the conflict between the forces which represent blood and iron and the forces which represent international morality. [HON. MEMBERS: "Russia!"] So far as we are concerned, we are not in this because of Russia's action. Those who speak of Liberal tradition are following these traditions strangely when they attack Russia. They are rather following the Beaconsfield tradition. I do not remember the conflict of 1878. The right hon. Gentleman opposite (Mr. Balfour) remembers it and he bore a share in it. But the real issue as between Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Gladstone was this matter of the distrust of Russia and the opposite position held by Mr. Gladstone. I am not here to condone many of the actions which Russia has taken, but I am prepared to substantiate this, that in every action that Russia has taken in South-Eastern Europe Russia has been the friend of liberty. [HON. MEMBERS: "Persia!"] I said South-Eastern Europe. I hold that so far as we are concerned the Russian question does not arise. It is the German attack upon France which has brought us in, and in addition to that the German violation of Belgium neutrality. And I say that in these two things is involved the fundamental issue which I have mentioned, the issue between international obligations and international morality on one side and the forces of blood and iron on the other. We are here once more face to face with that great difficulty. It is once more a question whether the tradition which triumphed in 1870 is still to be predominant in Europe. We who hold to the Liberal tradition, and still honour Mr. Gladstone's ideas, are bound in a conflict of this kind to range ourselves on the side of international morality against the forces of blood and iron.

Mr. BALFOUR: I do not rise to continue the argument upon the policy of the Government announced so eloquently and so admirably by the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. I rise simply in consequence

of an observation that fell from the hon. Gentleman who has just sat down (Mr. Pringle), at the beginning of his speech. With the general tenor of that speech I am greatly in agreement. But he began by expressing a regret, in the first instance, that there should have been a series of speeches delivered one after another on this Motion which might give, I will not say the public of this country, but the people in foreign countries, less acquainted than we are with our Parliamentary procedure and the weight and value of particular Parliamentary transactions, an entirely false view of what the impression of this House is, or of the whole public of which this House is the representative. I hope the hon. Gentleman who has just sat down is mistaken in that. I believe he is mistaken. The facts are so palpable and so obvious that I do not think that anybody who really studies the Debate doubts what those facts are. We are not now discussing in any effective sense the policy of His Majesty's Government. We are not dealing with any Resolution which touches the policy of His Majesty's Government.

The question before the House is not the policy of His Majesty's Government, but the adjournment of the House, an adjournment which must take place in the ordinary course, seeing that all the business of the day is now concluded. On that question I do not think even in ordinary circumstances that it would be possible to have an effective discussion or come to any resolution. But these are not all the circumstances. Anybody who has watched the House in this Debate knows perfectly well why we are met here, and why we have to sit here. It is because various Gentlemen below the Gangway sitting in one quarter of the House desire to express their views to us. We know perfectly well this is not a Debate upon the tremendous national issue brought before us earlier in the day. Nominally we are discussing the same subject, whereas the House of Commons, in its strength, was called together this afternoon to hear an exposition of policy upon an occasion to which there has been no parallel in our lifetime, and may be no parallel in the lifetime of those of the next generation. What we have been having to-night are the very dregs and lees of the Debate, in no sense representing the various views of Members of this House. The hon. Gentlemen who have spoken, I hope, will not for a moment think that I am attacking them

individually or suggesting for a moment there was any lack of earnestness, sincerity, or ability in their speeches.

All I say is that this is not a Debate on the great question before the country. It does not represent what the House of Commons thinks on the question, and I say that, under those circumstances, lest some general misconception, such as spoken of by the hon. Member who has just sat down, should obtain currency at Home and abroad, I would venture very respectfully to suggest, in the general interest, that this Debate should be brought to a close. Let the House remember that the Prime Minister at half-past four o'clock promised a full opportunity for debating the policy of the Government. That will come. I do not know exactly what the occasion chosen by the Prime Minister will be, but I imagine it would be on some Money Resolution. That is relatively unimportant, but I should imagine it would come upon some Vote of Credit asked from this House for dealing with a great national emergency.

Then is the opportunity for the House, by speech, and by vote, worthy of the great occasion on which it will have to pronounce to say what it has to say and vote as it desires to vote, but it is only unfortunate and lamentable that we should spend the dregs of this evening not in a proper House of Commons Debate in dealing with a great Resolution on a great subject but in a series of speeches which, whatever their intrinsic excellence may be and however earnest may be the Members who have delivered them, cannot be regarded as representative in any true sense of the views I would venture to say even of the Party for which they are speaking. I believe that Party to be relatively a small section of the House. I may be wrong, but I think when the time comes and that Party speaks, as it has the fullest right to speak upon this great issue, I am convinced they will speak when they have a Resolution before us which touches the particular issues before us with the weight and authority so far as they themselves and their own section of opinion is concerned which nothing they say to-night can possibly have. I would, therefore, earnestly ask and appeal to them, and, still more, do I appeal to the rest of the House to allow us to finish our proceedings to-night without dragging on this

[Mr. Balfour.]

relatively impotent and evil Debate, reserving ourselves, whatever our opinions may be, whether they think the Government are right or are wrong, whether they think the Government moved too hastily or too slowly, reserving themselves, if they want to emphasise those opinions, till the great occasion promised by the Prime Minister, which will be worthy of this House and the immense interests at stake. Could there be a greater illustration of the truth which I impress on the House, that this is not a serious Debate or a serious occasion, when I observe that neither the Prime Minister nor the Foreign Secretary, nor the First Lord of the Admiralty, nor the Chancellor of the Exchequer, nor any of the representatives of the great Department chiefly concerned in this policy have been able to be here to listen to one word of it. Under those circumstances, and in the absence of those with more authority than I have and more qualified to speak, I do venture to make an appeal to bring to a conclusion proceedings which I am sure are not adding to our dignity, and which, I venture to think, may possibly be misunderstood in the country, and will be certainly misunderstood abroad.

Colonel SEELY: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman, who has just spoken, that we have had only the dregs of the Debate. I have listened to the speeches on both sides of the House—[An Hon. Member: "You have not been here!"]—and I do not think that that is a correct description. I do know, although as the right hon. Gentleman knows well that I hold strong views on this subject, and no one knows better, I do know that the views expressed on this side are views which cannot be dismissed so lightly.

Mr. BALFOUR: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to correct that statement. Let him remember, in the first place, that I made no criticism of the speeches. [Hon. Members: "Dregs!"] In the second place, I said that, undoubtedly, the section of opinion represented to-night

ought to find its full expression in the great Debate, but this was not the occasion.

Colonel SEELY: It was for that reason I rose. I had not intended to take part in this Debate until I heard the right hon. Gentleman make his speech. I think it would be more unfortunate that there should go out from this House to the country the idea that the views we have heard expressed to-night are irresponsible views—

Mr. BALFOUR: I never said irresponsible.

Colonel SEELY: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish—that there should go out the idea that the views expressed in the majority of the speeches represent the majority of this House. I hold most strongly that the Government are right, and at the proper time I shall have occasion to give my reasons for so thinking. I may perhaps say that I have a special responsibility in this matter to which I must then refer. But I do protest against any idea that the speeches made to-night on this side—

Mr. REMNANT: Which you have not heard.

Colonel SEELY: Yes, I have heard every speech but two in this Debate. I hope it will not be assumed that the views so expressed are irresponsible views. [An Hon. Member: "Nobody said they were!"] At the proper time I hope we may have a debate on this subject, which will raise the true issue. To-night I agree with the right hon. Gentleman it might be well that we should adjourn the discussion. But I wished to say that I do not think it would be well that we should assume that the views so far expressed are the dregs of the Debate. They are not. I wish to combat those views at the proper time, but I think it would be well that the Debate should now be concluded.

Mr. REMNANT: A splendid contribution.

Question put, and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Thirty-seven minutes before Ten o'clock.