

# The War in Europe and Its Lessons for Us

[Address delivered by William Jennings Bryan at Johnstown, Pa., November 1, 1915. This address presents the line of argument which he has, during the past four months, followed in urging peace and opposing preparedness.]

Mr. Chairman: I appreciate the opportunity which this occasion affords to present to the people of Johnstown a subject which is in their minds and on my heart. I am grateful, too, for the gracious words which have been employed in presenting me to you. If you feel, as I do, that the chairman has been more than generous, please remember that one in public life must be over-praised by his friends in order to make up for the unjust criticism which he receives from his enemies.

While I have found receptive audiences all over the country, there is no community in which I would expect a more sympathetic hearing than in this, because the distinguished gentleman who represents you in congress views the subject from the same standpoint that I do. Whenever a new question arises upon which the people have not expressed themselves, it is important that each individual should make known his views in order that public opinion may represent the voters generally and not a portion of the people only. The country would be fortunate if all of our public men were as candid and as courageous in taking a position as Congressman Bailey, who honors you as he is honored by you.

In order that you may follow me the more easily, I shall outline in advance the address which I am to deliver to you. It naturally divides itself into three parts: first, the war as it is and its injury to neutrals; second, the false philosophy out of which the war has grown and the natural result of that false philosophy; and, third, the way out, or the road to permanent peace. The subject is presented with a view to emphasizing the lessons which this ocean can draw from the conflict beyond the ocean.

No matter by what standard you measure this war, it is without precedent or parallel. I will not call it the greatest war in history, for the word great implies something more than bigness. When we speak of a great institution or a great movement, we have in mind something more than mere size. There have been, I think, greater wars than this, but none that have approached it in bigness. It is the biggest war ever known if we measure it by the population of the nations at war—never before have so many people lived in belligerent nations. It is also the biggest war of which history tells if we measure it by the number of enlisted men who face each other upon its many battle fields. The estimates run from twenty-one to thirty-one millions. Rather than risk exaggeration, let us take the lowest estimate; it is sufficient to make the war impressive. In fact, the number is so great that the mind can scarcely comprehend it. Let men translate it into everyday language by comparing it with our voting population. We have never cast as many as twenty-one million votes at an election. That means that if all in every state who have on a single day exercised the right of suffrage could be gathered together in one place, the concourse, vast as it would be, would fall several millions short of the number now actually engaged in fighting.

More than two million have been killed thus far. If on any part of the globe one hundred thousand persons were swept to death by pestilence, or flood, or famine, the world would stand appalled; and yet, in a little more than a year, more than twenty times one hundred thousand have been summoned to meet their God, and everyone owes his death to the deliberate intent and act of a fellowman. More than five million have been wounded—this will give you some idea of the awful toll that this awful war is exacting in life and suffering.

If we measure the war by the destructiveness of the implements employed, nothing so horrible has ever been known before. They used to be content to use the earth's surface for the maddening of the air, and thunderbolts more deadly than the thunderbolts of Jove fall as if from the clouds on unsuspecting people. And they have taken possession of the ocean's depths as well, and death dealing torpedoes rise from out the darkness to multiply the perils of the sea. They have substituted a long range rifle for a

short range rifle, a big mouthed gun for a little mouthed gun, a dreadnaught for a battleship, and a super-dreadnaught for a dreadnaught, to which they have added the submarine. And they now pour liquid fire on battle lines and suffocate soldiers in the trenches with poisonous gases. Inventive genius has been exhausted to find new ways by which man can kill his fellowman!

And the nations which are at war are not barbarous nations—they are among the most civilized of the earth; neither are they heathen nations—they are among the Christian nations of the globe. They all worship the same God; and most of them approach God through the same mediator. They offer supplications to a common Heavenly Father and then rise up to take each other's lives.

It would be bad enough if the penalties of this war fell only upon the guilty; but a vast majority of the men who die and of the women who weep have had neither part nor voice in determining whether there should be peace or war. It would be bad enough if the burdens of this war fell only upon the nations participating in it, but like a mighty flood this war has inundated the world, and neutral nations as well as belligerent nations are suffering.

The Latin-speaking republics are kept busy night and day trying to preserve neutrality, they maintain an extensive patrol over the three mile strip along their coasts to keep big nations from violating their neutrality by fighting within their territorial limits. And all the neutral nations are bearing burdens of taxation which would not be necessary but for the war; they are compelled to resort to new and unusual methods for the collecting of revenue because the war has put their fiscal systems out of joint.

The trade of the world is deranged and our nation, the greatest of the neutral nations and the one with the largest foreign commerce, is suffering more than any of the others. When the war began we were using the ships of other nations largely for the carrying of our merchandise, when, all at once, the very nations whose ships we employed became involved in war, and then one side drove the ships of the other side into our harbors and compelled them to interne there, and, according to international law, these ships must remain during the war, idle and useless, while we suffer for lack of ships. And the nations that drove these merchantmen from the seas are not under any obligation, according to international law, to supply vessels to take the place of the ones of which they have deprived us. On the contrary, they are at liberty to withdraw their own vessels for use in the transport service, and to some extent they have done so, still further crippling the carrying trade of the ocean. Because of lack of ships and because of the increased risks of the sea it has sometimes cost seven times as much to send a bale of cotton across the ocean as it cost in normal times. When on the Pacific coast a few weeks ago, I learned that it then cost nearly three times as much to transport a bushel of wheat to Europe as it cost in time of peace. These are some of the burdens which neutral nations are bearing; and, in addition to these, all of them are in danger of being drawn into this war although none of them desire to take part in it.

When you understand international law as now interpreted and applied, you will feel as I do, that international law seems to have been written for the benefit of nations at war rather than for the benefit of nations at peace. I am hoping that, when this war is over, we shall be able to secure such changes as may be necessary to write international law upon the theory that peace, and not war, is the normal relation between nations—amendments which will make the rule read, not as it seems to now; namely, that nations at peace may attend to their own business so long as they do not interfere with the fight; but will provide that nations that do fight must not disturb the peace, the commerce, or the prosperity of the nations that prefer to substitute reason for force in the settlement of their international differences.

I have called attention to the outstanding features of this war that you might comprehend its magnitude; and I have mentioned some of the injuries suffered by neutrals that you might understand how earnestly the neutral nations long for the return of peace, but I can not con-

clude this part of my address without impressing upon your minds two facts which it is necessary for you to keep in mind. If all the newspapers had obeyed the President and observed neutrality, his tasks would not have been so delicate and the people would have been better informed. But while most of the newspapers have tried to be neutral, we have had two unneutral groups—the pro-ally and the pro-German group. The pro-ally group has emphasized our disputes with Germany, and the pro-German group has emphasized our disputes with Great Britain. We have had disputes with both; we have protested to Germany against the use she has made of submarines, and to Great Britain against interference with our trade with neutrals. If you will read the notes which our government has sent, you will find that our rights, as we understand those rights, have been violated, not only by one side, but by both sides, and that injuries have come to us from both sides.

This is the first fact which we must keep in mind, and the second is related to it; namely, that while both sides have injured us, neither side has desired to do so. The injuries which we have suffered have not been intended against us, but have been incidental to the injury which each has intended against the other. They are like two men shooting at each other in the street, who are too much interested in killing each other to pay any attention to the bystanders who get the stray bullets from both sides. In order to deal patiently with the problems presented by this war it is necessary that we should understand both of these facts—I repeat the statement of them—namely, that both sides have injured us, but that neither side desired to do so. It would be unfortunate enough for us to go to war with a nation that hated us and wanted war with us; God forbid that we shall ever compel a nation to go to war with us if it is not an enemy and does not want war with the United States.

And now allow me to ask you to consider the false philosophy out of which this war has grown and the natural results of that false philosophy. Before speaking of the real cause, it is worth while to note that some of the causes which have produced war in the past are not responsible for this war. There have been race wars in history—wars that have been the outgrowth of race prejudices which have sometimes extended through centuries. But this is not a race war; the races all are mixed up in this war. Saxon and Slav are allies; Latin and Frank are allies; Teuton and Turk are allies. And now, since Bulgaria has entered the war, Slav is fighting Slav, and it is not yet known whether the Greek, if he enters the war, will side with Turk or Roman. The races are inexplicably mixed.

And it is not a religious war. There have been religious wars, although we can not understand how a war could arise over a religious difference. We have learned to believe that the right to worship God according to the dictates of one's conscience is an inalienable right, and it would never occur to us that a man would kill another in order to prove that his religion is better than the other man's religion. According to our theory, if a man desires to prove the superiority of his religion, he lives it, for we do not count a religion as worthy of the name if it does not manifest itself in the life. There have, however, been religious wars, but this is not one of them. On the Bosphorus the crescent and the cross float above the same legions; a Protestant Emperor of Germany is the ally of a Catholic Emperor of Austria; and you will find fighting in the same army corps representatives of three great branches of the Christian church, Catholics, members of the Church of England and members of the Greek church. The religions are as badly mixed in this war as the races.

And it is not a family war. There have been family wars—wars that have had their origin in family feuds or in family greed, but in this war the families are mixed. The Emperor of Germany, the King of England, and the Czar of Russia are cousins, members of one royal family, although you would never suspect from the way they treated each other that they are closely related by ties of blood.

And there was no cause of war apparent on the surface. Within a month of the beginning of the war the rulers who are now fighting each