The World War I Reader

General Friedrich von Bernhardi, Germany in the Next War, 1914.

Edited by

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The Great Illusion, 1910

Sir Norman Angell

I think it will be admitted that there is not much chance of misunderstanding the general idea embodied in the passage quoted at the end of the last chapter. Mr. Harrison is especially definite. At the risk of "dannable iteration," I would again recall the fact that he is merely expressing one of the universally accepted axioms of European politics, namely, that a nation's whole economic security, its financial and industrial stability, its commercial opportunity, its prosperity and well-being, in short depend upon its being able to defend itself against the aggression of other nations, who will, if they are able, be tempted to commit such aggression because in so doing they will increase their power, and thus prosperity and well-being, at the cost of the weaker and vanquished.

I have quoted largely journalists, politicians, publicists of all kinds, because I desired to indicate not merely scholarly opinion, but the common public opinion really operative in politics, though in fact the scholars, the experts on international affairs, are at one with popular opinion in accepting the assumption which underlies these expressions, the assumption that military force if great enough can be used to transfer wealth, trade, property, from the vanquished to the victor, and that this latent power so to do explains the need of each to arm.

It is the object of these pages to show that this all but universal idea is a gross and desperately dangerous misconception, partaking at times of the nature of an optical illusion, at times of the nature of a superstition—a misconception not only gross and universal, but so profoundly mischievous as to misdirect an immense part of the energies of mankind, to misdirect them to such degree that, unless we liberate ourselves from it, civilization itself will be threatened.

As one of the most extraordinary features of this whole question is that the complete demonstration of the fallacy involved, the exposure of the illusion which gives it birth, is neither intricate nor doubtful. The demonstration does not repose upon any elaborately constructed theorem, but upon the simplest statement of the plainest facts in the economic life of Europe as we see it going on around us. Their nature may be indicated in a few simple propositions stated thus:

1. An extent of devastation, even approximating to that which Mr. Harrison foreshadows, as the result of the conquest of Great Britain, could only be inflicted by an invader as a means of punishment costly to himself, or as the result of an unselfish and expensive desire to inflict misery for the mere joy of inflicting it. Since trade de-
pends upon the existence of natural wealth and a population capable of working it, an invader cannot “utterly destroy it” except by destroying the population, which is not practicable. If he could destroy the population, he would thereby destroy his own market, actual or potential, which would be commercially suicidal. In this self-seeking world, it is not reasonable to assume the existence of an inverted altruism of this kind.

2. If an invasion by Germany did involve, as Mr. Harrison and those who think with him say it would, the “total collapse of the empire, our trade, and the means of feeding forty millions in these islands . . . the disturbance of capital and destruction of credit,” German capital would, because of the internationalization and interdependence of modern finance, and so of trade and industry, also disappear in large part, German credit would also collapse; and the only means of restoring it would be for Germany to put an end to the chaos in Great Britain by putting an end to the condition which had produced it. Moreover, because also of this interdependence of our finance, the confiscation by an invader of private property, whether stocks, shares, ships, mines, or anything more valuable than jewelry or furniture—anything, in short, which is bound up with the economic life of the people—would so react upon the finance of the invader’s country as to make the damage to him resulting from the confiscation exceed in value the property confiscated. So that Germany’s success in conquest would be a demonstration of the economic futility of conquest.

3. For allied reasons, the exaction of tribute from a conquered people in our day has become an economic impossibility; the exaction of a large indemnity so difficult and so costly directly and indirectly as to be an extremely disadvantageous financial operation.

4. For reasons of a like nature to the foregoing, it is a physical and economic impossibility to capture the external or carrying trade of another nation by military conquest. Large navies are impotent to create trade for the nations owning them, and can in practice do nothing to “confine the commercial rivalry” of other nations. Nor can a conqueror destroy the competition of a conquered nation by annexation; his competitors would still compete with him—i.e., if Germany conquered Holland, German merchants would still have to meet the competition of the Dutch, and on keener terms than originally, because the Dutch manufacturers and merchants would then be within the German customs lines; the notion that the trade competition of rivals can be disposed of by conquering those rivals being one of the illustrations of the curious optical illusion which lies behind the misconception dominating this subject.

5. The wealth, prosperity, and well-being of a nation depend in no way upon its military power; otherwise we should find the commercial prosperity, and the economic well-being of the smaller nations, which exercise no such power, manifestly below that of the great nations which control Europe, whereas this is not the case. The populations of States like Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden are in every way as prosperous as the citizens of States like Germany, Russia, Austria, and France. The wealth per capita of the small nations is in many cases in excess of that of the great nations. Not only the question of the security of small States, which, it might be urged, is due to treaties of neutrality, is here involved, but the question of whether military power can be turned in a positive sense to economic advantage.
6. No other nation could gain material advantage by the conquest of the British Colonies, and Great Britain could not suffer material damage by their "loss," however much such "loss" would be regretted on sentimental grounds, and as rendering less easy a certain useful social cooperation between kindred peoples. The use of the word "loss" is misleading. Great Britain does not "own" her Colonies. They are, in fact, independent nations in alliance with the Mother Country, to whom they are no source of tribute or economic profit (except as foreign nations are a source of profit), their economic relations being settled, not by the Mother Country, but by the Colonies. Economically, Great Britain would gain by their formal separation, since she would be relieved of the cost of their defense. Their "loss," involving no fundamental change in economic fact (beyond saving the Mother Country the cost of their defense), could not involve the ruin of the Empire and the starvation of the Mother Country, as those who commonly treat of such a contingency usually aver. As Great Britain is not able to exact tribute or economic advantage, it is inconceivable that any other country, necessarily less experienced in colonial management, would be able to succeed where Great Britain had failed, especially in view of the past history of the Spanish, Portuguese, French and British Colonial Empires. This history also demonstrates that the position of Crown Colonies, in the respect which we are considering, is not sensibly different from that of the self-governing ones (i.e., their fiscal policies tend to become their own affair, not the Mother Country's). It is not to be presumed, therefore, that any European nation, realizing the facts, would attempt the desperately expensive business of the conquest of Great Britain for the purpose of making an experiment which all colonial history shows to be doomed to failure.

The propositions just outlined—which traverse sufficiently the ground covered by those expressions, British and German, of the current view quoted in the last chapter—are little more than a mere statement of self-evident fact in Europe today. Yet the mere statement of self-evident fact constitutes, I suggest, a complete refutation of the views I have quoted, which are the commonly accepted "axioms" of international politics. For the purpose of parallel, I have divided my propositions into six clauses, but such division is quite arbitrary, and the whole could be gathered into a single clause as follows:

As the only feasible policy in our day for a conqueror to pursue is to leave the wealth of a territory in the possession of its occupants, it is a fallacy, an illusion, to regard a nation as increasing its wealth when it increases its territory. When a province or state is annexed, the population, who are the owners of the wealth, are also annexed. There is a change of political administration which may be bad (or good), but there is not a transfer of property from one group of owners to another. The facts of modern history abundantly demonstrate this. When Germany annexed Schleswig-Holstein and Alsace-Lorraine, no ordinary German citizen was enriched by goods or property taken from the conquered territory. Nor in these cases where there is no formal annexation, can the conqueror take the wealth of a conquered territory, for reasons connected with the very nature of wealth in the modern world. The structure of modern banking and finance have set up a vital, and, by reason of the telegraph, an immediately felt interdependence. Mutual indebtedness and world-wide investment have made the financial and industrial security of the victor dependent upon financial
and industrial security in all considerable civilized centers. For these reasons widespread confiscation, or destruction of industry and trade in a conquered territory, would react disastrously upon the commerce and finance of the conqueror. The conqueror is, by this fact, reduced to military impotence as far as economic ends are concerned. Military power can do nothing commensurate with its cost and risk for the trade and well-being of the particular rulers exercising it. It cannot be used as an instrument for seizing or keeping trade. The idea that armies and navies can be used to transfer the trade of rivals from weak to powerful states is an illusion. Although Great Britain "owns" Canada, has completely "conquered" Canada, the British merchant is driven from the Canadian markets by the merchant of (say) the United States or Switzerland. The great nations neither destroy nor transfer to themselves the trade of small nations, because they cannot. Military power does not determine the relative economic position of peoples. The Dutch citizen, whose Government possesses no considerable military power, is just as well off as the German citizen, whose government possesses an army of two million men, and a great deal better off than the Russian, whose government possesses an army of something like four million. A fairly good index of economic stability, whether of a business organization or a nation, is the rate at which it is able to borrow money: risk and insecurity are very quickly reflected by a rise in the interest it must pay. Thus, as a rough-and-ready though incomplete indication of the relative wealth and security of the respective States, we find that the Three per Cents. of comparatively powerless Holland are quoted at 77 1/2, and the Three per Cents. of powerful Germany at 75; the Three and a Half per Cents. of the Russian Empire, with its hundred and twenty million souls and its four million army, are quoted at 78, while the Three and a Half per Cents. of Norway, which has not an army at all (or any that need be considered in this discussion), are quoted at 88. We thus get the paradox that, the more a nation's wealth is militarily protected, the less secure does it become.

The late Lord Salisbury, speaking to a delegation of businessmen, made this notable observation: The conduct of men of affairs, acting individually in their business capacity, differs radically in its principles and application from the conduct of the same men who they act collectively in political affairs.

The fact may explain the contradiction between the daily practice of the business world and the prevailing political philosophy, which security of property and high prosperity in the smaller States involves. We are told by the political experts that great navies and great armies are necessary in order to protect our wealth against the aggression of powerful neighbors, whose cupidity and voracity can be controlled by force alone; that as treaties avail nothing, and that in international politics might makes right, armaments are imposed by the necessity of commercial security; that our navy is an "insurance," and that a country without military power, with which their diplomats can "bargain" in the Councils of Europe, is at a hopeless disadvantage economically. Yet, when the investor studying the question in its purely material, its financial aspect, has to decide between the great States, with all their imposing paraphernalia of colossal armies and fabulously costly navies, and the little States, possessing relatively no military power whatever, he plumps solidly, and with what is in the circumstance a very great difference, in favor of the small and helpless. For a differ-
ence of twenty points, which we find as between Norwegian and Russian, and fourteen as between Belgian and German securities, is the difference between a safe and a speculative one.

Is it a sort of altruism or quixotism which thus impels the capitalists of Europe to conclude that the public funds and investments of powerless Holland and Sweden (any day at the mercy of their big neighbors) are 10 to 20 per cent. safer than those of the greatest Power of Continental Europe? The question is, of course, absurd. The only consideration of the financier is profit and security, and he has decided, thinking and acting as a financier, a practical economist, that the funds of the undefended nation are more secure than the funds of those defended by colossal armaments. Why does he reject the implications of this decision when he comes to settle matters of international politics?

If Mr. Harrison were right; if, as he implies, our commerce, our very industrial existence, would disappear did we allow neighbors who envied us that commerce to become our superiors in armament, and to exercise political weight in the world, how does he explain the fact that the great Powers of the Continent are flanked by little nations far weaker than themselves having nearly always a commercial development equal to, and in some cases greater than, their own? If the common doctrine be true, the financiers would not invest a pound or a dollar in the territories of the undefended nations. Yet, far from that being the case, they consider that a Swiss or a Dutch investment is more secure than a German one; that industrial undertakings in a country like Switzerland are preferable in point of security to enterprises backed by three millions of the most perfectly trained soldiers in the world. The beliefs of European financiers, as reflected in their acts, are in flat contradiction with the beliefs of European politicians as reflected in their acts. If a country's trade were really at the mercy of the first successful invader; if armies and navies were really necessary for the protection and promotion of trade, the small countries would be in a hopelessly inferior position, and could only exist on the sufferance of what we are told are unscrupulous aggressors. And yet Norway has, relatively to population, a greater carrying trade than Great Britain, and Dutch, Swiss, and Belgian merchants compete in all the markets of the world successfully with those of Germany and France.

The prosperity of the small states is thus a fact which proves a good deal more than that wealth can be secure without armaments. Exponents of the orthodox statecraft— notably such authorities as Admiral Mahan—plead that armaments are a necessary part of the economic struggle of nations, that without such power a nation is at a hopeless economic disadvantage.

The relative economic situation of the small States gives the lie to it all. This profound political philosophy is seen to be just learned nonsense when we realize that all the might of Russia or Germany cannot secure for the individual citizen better general economic conditions than those prevalent in the little States. The citizens of Switzerland, Belgium, or Holland, countries without "control," or navy, or bases, or "weight in the councils of Europe," or the "prestige of a great Power," are just as well off as Germans, and a great deal better off than Austrians or Russians.

Even if it could be argued that the security of the small States is due to the various treaties guaranteeing their neutrality, it cannot be argued that those treaties give them
the military and naval power, the "weight in the councils of the nations," which Admiral Mahan and the other exponents of the orthodox statecraft assure us are such necessary factors in national prosperity.

I want, however, with all possible emphasis, to indicate the limits of the argument that I am trying to enforce. That argument is not that the facts just cited show armaments or the absence of them to be the sole or even the determining factor in national wealth or poverty. Nor indeed that there are no advantages in large national areas. Plainly there are (e.g. the absence of tariffs and fiscal barriers). But the facts cited do show that the security of wealth is due to other things than armaments; that the absence of political and military power is, on the one hand, no obstacle to prosperity any more than the possession of such power is a guarantee of prosperity; that the mere size of administrative area has no relation to the wealth of those inhabiting it, any more than it would be true to say that a man living in London is richer than a man living in Liverpool because the former city is larger and has a bigger budget.

A very common reply to the arguments just adduced is that the security of the small states nevertheless depends upon armaments—the armaments of the states which guarantee their neutrality. But, if treaty guarantees suffice for the protection of small states, why not of great? When that is suggested, however, the militarist is apt to turn round and declare that treaties are utterly valueless as a means of national security. Thus Major Stewart Murray:

The European waste-paper basket is the place to which all treaties eventually find their way, and a thing which can any day be placed in a waste-paper basket is a poor thing on which to hang our national safety. Yet there are plenty of people in this country who quote treaties to us as if we could depend on their never being torn up. Very plausible and very dangerous people they are—idealists too good and innocent for a hard, cruel world, where force is the chief law. Yet there are some such innocent people in Parliament, even at present. It is to be hoped that we shall see none of them there in future.

But again, if the security of a nation's wealth can only be assured by force, and treaty rights are mere waste paper, how can we explain the evident security of the wealth of States possessing relatively no force? By the mutual jealousies of those guaranteeing their neutrality? Then that mutual jealousy could equally well guarantee the security of any one of the larger States against the rest.

The right understanding of this phenomenon involves, however, a certain distinction, the distinction between economic and political security. The political security of the small States is not assured; no man would take heavy odds on Holland being able to maintain complete political independence if Germany cared seriously to threaten it. But Holland's economic security is assured. Every financier in Europe knows that, if Germany conquered Holland or Belgium tomorrow, she would have to leave their wealth untouched; there could be no confiscation. And that is why the stocks of the lesser States, not in reality threatened by confiscation, yet relieved in part at least of the charge of armaments, stand fifteen to twenty points higher than those of the military States. Belgium, politically, might disappear tomorrow; her wealth would remain practically unchanged.
If this truth—that the wealth of an unprotected country is safe, that it cannot be seized—is recognized (as it is) by investors and financiers, the experts most concerned, whence comes the political danger, the danger of aggression? It is due surely to the fact that the truth recognized by investors, financiers, businessmen when dealing with facts belonging to their familiar world, has not been carried over into the realm of political ideas. The average businessman does not see the contradiction between his daily conduct as a businessman and the policy which he encourages his government to adopt. He sees no need of reconciling the fact that he will invest heavily in property that has no military or naval protection and his applause of Mr. Harrison, when the latter declares that, but for the British navy, the foreigner would run off with every penny that we possess, or words to that effect.

The actual policy pursued by financiers and investors implies that they do not believe that wealth, property can be “taken” by preponderant power. Yet preponderant power is pursued everywhere as the means of national enrichment. Power as an end is set up in European politics as desirable beyond all others. Here, for instance, are the Pan-Germanists of Germany. This party has set before itself the object of grouping into one great Power all the peoples of the Germanic race or language in Europe. Were this aim achieved, Germany would become the dominating Power of the Continent, and might become the dominating Power of the world. And, according to the commonly accepted doctrine of national advantage, such an achievement would, from the point of view of Germany, be worth any sacrifice that Germans could make. It would be an achievement so great, so desirable, that German citizens should not hesitate for an instant to give everything, life itself, in its accomplishment. Very good. Let us assume that, at the cost of great sacrifice, the greatest sacrifice which it is possible to imagine a modern civilized nation making, this has been accomplished, and that Belgium and Holland and Germany, Switzerland and Austria, have all become part of the great German hegemony: is there one ordinary German citizen who would be able to say that his well-being had been increased by such a change? Germany would then “own” Holland. But would a single German citizen be the richer for the ownership? The Hollander, from having been the citizen of a small and insignificant State, would become the citizen of a very great one. Would the individual Hollander be any the richer or any the better? We know that, as a matter of fact, neither the German nor the Hollander would be one whit the better; and we know also that, in all probability, both would be a great deal the worse. We may, indeed, say that the Hollander would be certainly the worse, in that he would have exchanged the relatively light taxation and light military service of Holland for the much heavier taxation and the much longer military service of the “great” German empire.

To the thesis here developed, the thesis that, while military conquest in the modern world involves a change of political administration which may be good, bad, or indifferent, it does not and cannot involve a transfer of property from one group of owners to another, the commonest objection is that I have overlooked the collection of taxes by the conqueror. While it may be true, say these critics, that a modern conqueror must respect titles to property since the insolvencies and insecurities produced by their destruction might well (almost inevitably would) affect securities, instruments
of credits, loans, or what nots, held by persons of the victor state; produce, in other words, insolvencies, which would have dangerous repercussions—while all that may be true, it is said, I have overlooked the fact that the conqueror collects the taxes. It may be true that the Alsatians retained their farms and houses when the Germans took over the Province, they paid their taxes to Germany instead of France. Thus a writer in the *Daily Mail* argues: “If Alsace-Lorraine had remained French it would have yielded at the present rate of French taxation a revenue of eight millions a year to the State. That Revenue is lost to France and placed at the disposal of Germany,” and on the basis of this the *Daily Mail* financier works out the “cash value” of the asset which France has lost and Germany gained.

Not once or twice since this book first appeared has that particular criticism been made. On hundreds of occasions have educated people written to me to point out this “oversight.” I really had not thought this matter out sufficiently: obviously a nation was enriched by an addition to the receipts of its treasury. And never, in these criticisms, is there any awareness that it constitutes a sort of Irish bull.

That this is perhaps the commonest of all the objections made to the argument of this chapter I regard as an extremely significant comment on the character of current political thinking. For this objection so commonly made is the outcome of pure confusion of thought, an illustration of what some writer has called “the unilateral illusion,” the kind of illusion which leads us to think of a sale without realizing that it is also a purchase; that an export must also be an import; a failure to be clear as to the meaning of the terms we use, a mixing of the symbols with the things for which it stands. “Germany,” says the *Daily Mail* critic, is now richer by eight millions a year which, but for the conquest, would have gone to “France.” But who or what is “Germany” after the annexation? “Germany” now includes the people of Alsace-Lorraine, who not only pay the taxes but receive them—receive them, that is, as much as any other German. They belong to the new entity which “owns” the asset. The number of recipients have been increased in exact proportion to the number of the contributors.

To this particular critic I replied as follows:

Conquest multiplies by x it is true, but we overlook the fact that it also has to divide by x, and that the result is consequently, so far as the individual is concerned, exactly what it was before. My critic remembered the multiplication all right, but he forgot the division. The matricular contribution of Alsace-Lorraine to the Imperial treasury (which incidentally is neither three millions nor eight, but just about one) is fixed on exactly the same scale as that of the other States of the Empire. Prussia, the conqueror, pays per capita just as much as and no less than Alsace, the conquered, who, if she were not paying this million to Germany, would be paying it—or, according to my critic, a much larger sum—to France; and, if Germany did not “own” Alsace-Lorraine, she would be relieved of charges that amount not to one but several millions. The change of “ownership” does not therefore of itself change the money position (which is what we are now discussing) of either owner or owned.

If a great country benefits every time it annexes a province, and her people are the richer for the widened territory, the small nations ought to be immeasurably poorer
than the great, instead of which, by every test which you like to apply—public credit, amounts in savings banks, standard of living, social progress, general well-being—citizens of small States are, other things being equal, as well off as, or better off than, the citizens of great States.

If the Germans are enriched by eight millions a year through the conquest of a province like Alsace-Lorraine, how much should the English people draw from their “possessions”? On the basis of population, somewhere in the region of a thousand million; on the basis of area, still more—enough not only to pay all our taxes, wipe out our National Debt, support the army and navy, but give every family in the land a fat income into the bargain. There is evidently something wrong.

In every civilized State, revenues which are drawn from a territory are expended on that territory, and there is no process known to modern government by which wealth may first be drawn from a territory into the treasury and then be redistributed with a profit to the individuals who have contributed it or to others. It would be just as reasonable to say that the citizens of London are richer than the citizens of Birmingham because London has a richer treasury; or that Londoners would become richer if the London County Council were to annex the county of Hertford, as to say that people’s wealth varies according to the size of the administrative area which they inhabit. The whole thing is, as I have called it, an optical illusion, due to the hypnotism of an obsolete terminology. Just as poverty may be greater in the large city than in the small one, and taxation heavier, so the citizens of a great State may be poorer than the citizens of a small one, as they very often are.

But there is another phase of this confusion, characterized by a strange contradiction. In the militarist view, we must fight others for trade—fight them in a literal military sense, since the need of protecting our trade is invoked as the justification of a great navy. Their trade must be checked, restrained, their goods kept from our shores. Also, we add to our wealth when we conquer their territory. But, if we conquer their territory, we don’t keep out their trade: the barriers against their goods are wiped away. The goods enter freely without let or hindrance. Conquest has not destroyed competition, it has wiped away all restraints upon it. We hear a good deal from Americans of the competition of Canadian trade, the need for barriers to keep out goods made in the factories of Ontario and Quebec. America is damaged by the free entry of those goods from those factories. So be it. But Americans of the nationalist and militarist type of mind talk of the ultimate conquest of Canada “and all its riches added to our nation’s heritage.” But it would mean that those same goods, made by the same hands in the same factories owned by the same people, would now compete freely with the goods of the conquerors. No American would dream of complaining any more than the people of Pennsylvania complain about the competition of Massachusetts (or those of Lancashire about the competition of Yorkshire). It would seem that it is the political status of the trader or manufacturer, not any economic fact, which determines whether he is a competitor or not. But then we do, indeed, labor under a delusion: the economic fight, the “inevitable biological struggle,” has given place to a quarrel about flags. The “grim struggle for bread” ceases the moment that the rival comes under our flag. Is it not time we made up our minds what we are preparing to fight about: economic needs or national insignia?
We have never perhaps asked ourselves what it is we are really fighting about; as we certainly do not, for the most part, examine the nature of that wealth which we declare to be the object of the contest. Let us examine it.

**Note**

Prince Bismarck repeatedly declared before the German Reichstag that no one should ever take upon himself the immense responsibility of intentionally bringing about a war. It could not, he said, be foreseen what unexpected events might occur, which altered the whole situation, and made a war, with its attendant dangers and horrors, superfluous. In his "Thoughts and Reminiscences" he expresses himself to this effect: "Even victorious wars can only be justified when they are forced upon a nation, and we cannot see the cards held by providence so closely as to anticipate the historical development by personal calculation."

We need not discuss whether Prince Bismarck wished this dictum to be regarded as a universally applicable principle, or whether he uttered it as a supplementary explanation of the peace policy which he carried out for so long. It is difficult to gauge its true import. The notion of forcing a war upon a nation bears various interpretations. We must not think merely of external foes who compel us to fight. A war may seem to be forced upon a statesman by the state of home affairs, or by the pressure of the whole political situation.

Prince Bismarck did not, however, always act according to the strict letter of that speech; it is his special claim to greatness that at the decisive moment he did not lack the boldness to begin a war on his own initiative. The thought which he expresses in his later utterances cannot, in my opinion, be shown to be a universally applicable principle of political conduct. If we wish to regard it as such, we shall not only run counter to the ideas of our greatest German Prince, but we exclude from politics that independence of action which is the true motive force.

The greatness of true statesmanship consists in a knowledge of the natural trend of affairs, and in a just appreciation of the value of the controlling forces, which it uses and guides in its own interest. It does not shrink from the conflicts, which under the given conditions are unavoidable, but decides them resolutely by war when a favourable position affords prospect of a successful issue. In this way statecraft becomes a tool of Providence, which employs the human will to attain its ends. "Men make history," as Bismarck's actions clearly show.

No doubt the most strained political situation may unexpectedly admit of a peaceful solution. The death of some one man, the setting of some great ambition, the removal of some master-will, may be enough to change it fundamentally. But the great disputes in the life of a nation cannot be settled so simply. The man who wished to
bring the question to a decisive issue may disappear, and the political crisis pass for the moment; the disputed points still exist, and lead once more to quarrels, and finally to war, if they are due to really great and irreconcilable interests. With the death of King Edward VII of England the policy of isolation, which he introduced with much adroit statesmanship against Germany, has broken down. The antagonism of Germany and England, based on the conflict of the interests and claims of the two nations, still persists, although the diplomacy which smooths down, not always profitably, all causes of difference has succeeded in slackening the tension for the moment, not without sacrifices on the side of Germany.

It is clearly an untenable proposition that political action should depend on indefinite possibilities. A completely vague factor would be thus arbitrarily introduced into politics, which have already many unknown quantities to reckon with; they would thus be made more or less dependent on chance.

It may be, then, assumed as obvious that the great practical politician Bismarck did not wish that his words on the political application of war should be interpreted in the sense which has nowadays so frequently been attributed to them, in order to lend the authority of the great man to a weak cause. Only those conditions which can be ascertained and estimated should determine political action.

For the moral justification of the political decision we must not look to its possible consequences, but to its aim and its motives, to the conditions assumed by the agent, and to the trustworthiness, honour, and sincerity of the considerations which led to action. Its practical value is determined by an accurate grasp of the whole situation, by a correct estimate of the resources of the two parties, by a clear anticipation of the probable results—in short, by statesmanlike insight and promptness of decision.

If the statesman acts in this spirit, he will have an acknowledged right, under certain circumstances, to begin a war, regarded as necessary, at the most favourable moment, and to secure for his country the proud privilege of such initiative. If a war, on which a Minister cannot willingly decide, is bound to be fought later under possibly far more unfavourable conditions, a heavy responsibility for the greater sacrifices that must then be made will rest on those whose strength and courage for decisive political action failed at the favourable moment. In the face of such considerations a theory by which a war ought never to be brought about falls to the ground. And yet this theory has in our day found many supporters, especially in Germany.

Even statesmen who consider that the complete abolition of war is impossible, and do not believe that the ultima ratio can be banished from the life of nations, hold the opinion that its advent should be postponed so long as possible.

Those who favour this view take up approximately the same attitude as the supporters of the Peace idea, so far as regarding war exclusively as a curse, and ignoring or underestimating its creative and civilizing importance. According to this view, a war recognized as inevitable must be postponed so long as possible, and no statesman is entitled to use exceptionally favourable conditions in order to realize necessary and justifiable aspirations by force of arms.

Such theories only too easily disseminate the false and ruinous notion that the maintenance of peace is the ultimate object, or at least the chief duty, of any policy.
To such views, the offspring of a false humanity, the clear and definite answer must be made that, under certain circumstances, it is not only the right, but the moral and political duty of the statesman to bring about a war.

Wherever we open the pages of history we find proofs of the fact that wars, begun at the right moment with manly resolution, have effected the happiest results, both politically and socially. A feeble policy has always worked harm, since the statesman lacked the requisite firmness to take the risk of a necessary war, since he tried by diplomatic tact to adjust the differences of irreconcilable foes, and deceived himself as to the gravity of the situation and the real importance of the matter. Our own recent history in its vicissitudes supplies us with the most striking examples of this.

The Great Elector laid the foundations of Prussia's power by successful and deliberately incurred wars. Frederick the Great followed in the steps of his glorious ancestor. "He noticed how his state occupied an untenable middle position between the petty states and the great Powers, and showed his determination to give a definite character to this anomalous existence; it had become essential to enlarge the territory of the State and corriger la figure de la Prusse if Prussia wished to be independent and to bear with honour the great name of 'Kingdom.'" The King made allowance for this political necessity, and took the bold determination of challenging Austria to fight. None of the wars which he fought had been forced upon him; none of them did he postpone as long as possible. He had always determined to be the aggressor, to anticipate his opponents, and to secure for himself favourable prospects of success. We all know what he achieved. The whole history of the growth of the European nations and of mankind generally would have been changed had the King lacked that heroic power of decision which he showed.

We see a quite different development under the reign of Frederick William III, beginning with the year of weakness 1805, of which our nation cannot be too often reminded.

It was manifest that war with Napoleon could not permanently be avoided. Nevertheless, in spite of the French breach of neutrality, the Prussian Government could not make up its mind to hurry to the help of the allied Russians and Austrians, but tried to maintain peace, though at a great moral cost. According to all human calculation, the participation of Prussia in the war of 1805 would have given the Allies a decisive superiority. The adherence to neutrality led to the crash of 1806, and would have meant the final overthrow of Prussia as a State had not the moral qualities still existed there which Frederick the Great had ingrained on her by his wars. At the darkest moment of defeat they shone most brightly. In spite of the political downfall, the effects of Frederick's victories kept that spirit alive with which he had inspired his State and his people. This is clearly seen in the quite different attitude of the Prussian people and the other Germans under the degrading yoke of the Napoleonic tyranny. The power which had been acquired by the Prussians through long and glorious wars showed itself more valuable than all the material blessing which peace created; it was not to be broken down by the defeat of 1806, and rendered possible the heroic revival of 1813.

The German wars of Unification also belong to the category of wars which, in spite of a thousand sacrifices, bring forth a rich harvest. The instability and political
weakness which the Prussian government showed in 1848, culminating in the disgrace of Olmütz in 1850, had deeply shaken the political and national importance of Prussia. On the other hand, the calm conscious strength with which she faced once more her duties as a nation, when King William I and Bismarck were at the helm, was soon abundantly manifest. Bismarck, by bringing about our wars of Unification in order to improve radically an untenable position and secure to our people health conditions of life, fulfilled the long-felt wish of the German people, and raised Germany to the undisputed rank of a first-class European Power. The military successes and the political position won by the sword laid the foundation for an unparalleled material prosperity. It is difficult to imagine how pitiable the progress of the German people would have been had not these wars been brought about by a deliberate policy.

The most recent history tells the same story. If we judge the Japanese standpoint with an unbiased mind we shall find the resolution to fight Russia was not only heroic, but politically wise and morally justifiable. It was immensely daring to challenge the Russian giant, but the purely military conditions were favourable, and the Japanese nation, which had rapidly risen to a high stage of civilization, needed an extended sphere of influence to complete her development, and to open new channels for her superabundant activities. Japan, from her own point of view, was entitled to claim to be the predominant civilized power in Eastern Asia, and to repudiate the rivalry of Russia. The Japanese statesmen were justified by the result. The victorious campaign created wider conditions of life for the Japanese people and State, and at one blow raised it to be a determining co-factor in international politics, and gave it a political importance which must undeniably lead to great material advancement. If this war had been avoided from weakness or philanthropic illusions, it is reasonable to assume that matters would have taken a very different turn. The growing power of Russia in the Amur district and in Korea would have repelled or at least hindered the Japanese rival from rising to such a height of power as was attained through this war, glorious alike for military prowess and political foresight.

The appropriate and conscious employment of war as a political means has always led to happy results. Even an unsuccessfully waged war may sometimes be more beneficial to a people than the surrender of vital interests without a blow. We find an example of this in the recent heroic struggle of the small Boer States against the British Empire. In this struggle they were inevitably defeated. It was easy to foresee that an armed peasantry could not permanently resist the combined forces of England and her colonies, and that the peasant armies generally could not bear heavy losses. But yet—if all indications are not misleading—the blood shed by the Boer people will yield a free and prosperous future. In spite of much weakness, the resistance was heroic; men like President Stein, Botha and De Wett, with their gallant followers, performed many great military feats. The whole nation combined and rose unanimously to the fight for the freedom of which Byron sings:

“For freedom’s battle once begun,
Bequeathed from bleeding sire to sin,
Though baffled oft, is ever won.”
Inestimable moral gains, which can never be lost in any later developments, have been won by this struggle. The Boers have maintained their place as a nation; in a certain sense they have shown themselves superior to the English. It was only after many glorious victories that they yielded to a crushingly superior force. They accumulated a store of fame and national consciousness which makes them, though conquered, a power to be reckoned with. The result of this development is that the Boers are now the foremost people in South Africa, and that England preferred to grant them self-government than to be faced by their continual hostility. This laid the foundation for the United Free States of South Africa. President Kruger, who decided on this most justifiable, war, and not Cecil Rhodes, will, in spite of the tragic ending to the war itself, be known in all ages as the great far-sighted statesman of South Africa, who, despite the unfavourable material conditions, knew how to value the inestimable moral qualities according to their real importance.

The lessons of history thus confirm the view that wars which have been deliberately provoked by far-seeing statesmen have had the happiest results. War, nevertheless, must always be a violent form of political agent, which not only contains in itself the danger of defeat, but in every case calls for great sacrifices, and entails incalculable misery. He who determines upon war accepts a great responsibility.

It is therefore obvious that no one can come to such a decision except from the most weighty reasons, more especially under the existing conditions which have created national armies. Absolute clearness of vision is needed to decide how and when such a resolution can be taken, and what political aims justify the use of armed force.

This question therefore needs careful consideration, and a satisfactory answer can only be derived from an examination of the essential duty of the State.

If this duty consists in giving scope to the highest intellectual and moral development of the citizens, and in co-operating in the moral education of the human race, then the State’s own acts must necessarily conform to the moral laws. But the acts of the State cannot be judged by the standard of individual morality. If the State wished to conform to this standard it would often find itself at variance with its own particular duties. The morality of the State must be developed out of its own peculiar essence, just as individual morality is rooted in the personality of the man and his duties toward society. The morality of the State must be judged by the nature and raison d’être of the State, and not of the individual citizen. But the end-all and be-all of a State is power, and “he who is not man enough to look this truth in the face should not meddle in politics.”

Machiavelli was the first to declare that the keynote of every policy was the advancement of power. This term, however, has acquired, since the German Reformation, a meaning other than that of the shrewd Florentine. To him power was desirable in itself; for us “the State is not physical power as an end in itself, it is power to protect and promote the higher interests”; “power must justify itself by being applied for the greatest good of mankind.”

The criterion of the personal morality of the individual “rests in the last resort on the question whether he has recognized and developed his own nature to the highest attainable degree of perfection.” If the same standard is applied to the State, then “its highest moral duty is to increase its power. The individual must sacrifice himself for
the higher community of which he is a member; but the State is itself the highest concep­tion in the wider community of man, and therefore the duty of self-annihilation does not enter into the case. The Christian duty of sacrifice for something higher does not exist for the State, for there is nothing higher than it in the world's history; consequently it cannot sacrifice itself to something higher. When a State sees its downfall staring it in the face, we applaud if it succumbs sword in hand. A sacrifice made to an alien nation not only is immoral, but contradicts the idea of self-preservation, which is the highest ideal of a State."

I have thought it impossible to explain the foundations of political morality better than in the words of our great national historian. But we can reach the same conclusions by another road. The individual is responsible, only for himself. If, either from weakness or from moral reasons he neglects his own advantage, he only injures himself, the consequences of his actions recoil only on him. The situation is quite different in the case of a State. It represents the ramifying and often conflicting interests of a community. Should it from any reason neglect the interests, it not only to some extent prejudices itself as a legal personality, but it injures also the body of private interests which it represents. This incalculably far-reaching detriment affects not merely one individual responsible merely to himself, but a mass of individuals and the community. Accordingly it is a moral duty of the State to remain loyal to its own peculiar function as guardian and promoter of all higher interests. This duty it cannot fulfill unless it possesses the needful power.

The increase of this power is thus from this standpoint also the first and foremost duty of the State. This aspect of the question supplies a fair standard by which the morality of the actions of the State can be estimated. The crucial question is, How far has the State performed this duty, and thus served the interests of the community? And this not merely in the material sense, but in the higher meaning that material interests are justifiable only so far as they promote the power of the State, and thus indirectly its higher aims.

It is obvious, in view of the complexity of social conditions, that numerous private interests must be sacrificed to the interest of the community, and, from the limitations of human discernment, it is only natural that the view taken of interests of the community may be erroneous. Nevertheless the advancement of the power of the State must be first and foremost the object that guides the statesman's policy. "Among all political sins, the sin of feebleness is the most contemptible; it is the political sin against the Holy Ghost." This argument of political morality is open to the objection that it leads logically to the Jesuitic principle, that the end justifies the means; that, according to it, to increase the power of the State all measures are permissible.

A most difficult problem is raised by the question how far, for political objects moral in themselves, means may be employed which must be regarded as reprehensible in the life of the individual. So far as I know, no satisfactory solution has yet been obtained, and I do not feel bound to attempt one at this point. War, with which I am dealing at present, is no reprehensible means in itself, but it may become so if it pursues unmoral or frivolous aims, which bear no comparison with the seriousness of warlike measures. I must deviate here a little from my main theme, and discuss shortly some points which touch the question of political morality.
The gulf between political and individual morality is not so wide as is generally assumed. The power of the State does not rest exclusively on the factors that make up material power—territory, population, wealth, and a large army and navy: it rests to a high degree on moral elements, which are reciprocally related to the material. The energy with which a State promotes its own interests and represents the rights of its citizens in foreign States, the determination which it displays to support them on occasion by force of arms, constitute a real factor of strength, as compared with all such countries as cannot bring themselves to let things come to a crisis in a like case. Similarly a reliable and honourable policy forms an element of strength in dealings with allies as well as with foes. A statesman is thus under no obligation to deceive deliberately. He can from the political standpoint avoid all negotiations which compromise his personal integrity, and he will thereby serve the reputation and power of his State no less than when he holds aloof from political menaces, to which no acts correspond, and renounces all political formulas and phrases.

In antiquity the murder of a tyrant was thought a moral action, and the Jesuits have tried to justify regicide. At the present day political murder is universally condemned from the standpoint of political morality. The same holds good of preconcerted political deception. A state which employed deceitful methods would soon sink into disrepute. The man who pursues moral ends with unmoral means is involved in a contradiction of motives, and nullifies the object at which he aims, since he denies it by his actions. It is not, of course, necessary that a man communicate all his intentions and ultimate objects to an opponent; the latter can be left to form his own opinion on this point. But it is not necessary to lie deliberately or to practise crafty deceptions. A fine frankness has everywhere been the characteristic of great statesmen. Subterfuges and duplicity mark the petty spirit of diplomacy.

Finally, the relations between two States must often be termed a latent war, which is provisionally being waged in peaceful rivalry. Such a position justifies the employment of hostile methods, cunning, and deception, just as war itself does, since in such a case both parties are determined to employ them. I believe after all that a conflict between personal and political morality may be avoided by wise and prudent diplomacy, if there is no concealment of the desired end, and it is recognized that the means employed must correspond to the ultimately moral nature of that end.

Recognized rights are, of course, often violated by political action. But these, as we have already shown, are never absolute rights; they are of human origin, and therefore imperfect and variable. There are conditions under which they do not correspond to the actual truth of things; in this case the summum just summa injuria holds good, and the infringement of the right appears morally justified. York's decision to conclude the convention of Tauroggen was indisputably a violation of right, but it was a moral act, for the Franco-Prussian alliance was made under compulsion, and was antagonistic to all the vital interests of the Prussian State; it was essentially untrue and immoral. Now it is always justifiable to terminate an immoral situation.

As regards the employment of war as a political means, our argument shows that it becomes the duty of a State to make use of the ultima ratio not only when it is attacked, but when by the policy of other States the power of the particular State is threatened, and peaceful methods are insufficient to secure its integrity. This power, as
we saw, rests on a material basis, but finds expression in ethical values. War therefore seems imperative when, although the material basis of power is not threatened, the moral influence of the State (and this is the ultimate point at issue) seems to be prejudiced. Thus apparently trifling causes may under certain circumstances constitute a full justifiable *casus belli* if the honour of the State, and consequently its moral prestige, are endangered. This prestige is an essential part of its power. An antagonist must never be allowed to believe that there is any lack of determination to assert this prestige, even if the sword must be drawn to do so.

In deciding for war or peace, the next important consideration is whether the question under discussion is sufficiently vital for the power of the State to justify the determination to fight; whether the inevitable dangers and miseries of a war do not threaten to inflict greater injury on the interests of the State than the disadvantages which, according to human calculation, must result if war is not declared. A further point to be considered is whether the general position of affairs affords some reasonable prospect of military success. With these considerations of expediency certain other weighty aspects of the question must also be faced.

It must always be kept in mind that a State is not justified in looking only to the present, and merely consulting the immediate advantage of the existing generation. Such policy would be opposed to all that constitutes the essential nature of the State. Its conduct must be guided by the moral duties incumbent on it, which, as one step is gained, point to the next higher, and prepare the present for the future. “The true greatness of the State is that it links the past with the present and the future; consequently the individual has not right to regard the State as a means for attaining his own ambition in life.”

The law of development thus becomes a leading factor in politics, and in the decision for war this consideration must weigh more heavily than the sacrifices necessarily to be borne in the present. “I cannot conceive,” Zelter once wrote to Goethe, “how any right deed can be performed without sacrifice; all worthless actions must lead to the very opposite of what is desirable.”

A second point of view which must not be neglected is precisely that which Zelter rightly emphasizes. A great end cannot be attained except by staking large intellectual and material resources, and no certainty of success can ever be anticipated. Every undertaking implies a greater or less venture. The daily intercourse of civic life teaches us this lesson; and it cannot be otherwise in politics where account must be taken of most powerful antagonists whose strength can only be vaguely estimated. In questions of comparatively trifling importance much may be done by agreements and compromises, and mutual concessions may produce a satisfactory status. The solution of such problems is the sphere of diplomatic activity. The state of things is quite different when vital questions are at issue, or when the opponent demands concession, but will guarantee none, and is clearly bent on humiliating the other party. Then is the time for diplomatists to be silent and for great statesmen to act. Men must be resolved to stake everything, and cannot shun the solemn decision of war. In such questions any reluctance to face the opponent, every abandonment of important interests, and every attempt at a temporizing settlement, means not only a momentary loss of political prestige, and frequently of real power, which may possibly be made good in
another place, but a permanent injury to the interests of the State, the full gravity of which is only felt by future generations.

Not that a rupture of pacific relations must always result in such a case. The mere threat of war and the clearly proclaimed intention to wage it, if necessary, will often cause the opponent to give way. This intention must, however, be made perfectly plain, for "negotiations without arms are like music-books with instruments," as Frederick the Great said. It is ultimately the actual strength of a nation to which the opponent's purpose yields. When, therefore, the threat of war is insufficient to call attention to its own claims the concert must begin; the obligation is unconditional, and the right to fight becomes the duty to make war, incumbent on the nation and statesman alike.

Finally, there is a third point to be considered. Cases may occur where war must be made simply as a point of honour, although there is no prospect of success. The responsibility of this has also to be borne. So at least Frederick the Great thought. His brother Henry, after the battle of Kolin, had advised him to throw himself at the feet of the Marquise de Pompadour in order to purchase a peace with France. Again, after the battle of Kunersdorf his position seemed quite hopeless, but the king absolutely refused to abandon the struggle. He knew better what suited the honour and the moral value of his country, and preferred to die sword in hand than to conclude a degrading peace. President Roosevelt, in his message to the Congress of the United States of America on December 4, 1906, gave expression to a similar thought. "It must ever be kept in mind," so the manly and inspiriting words ran, "that war is not merely justifiable, but imperative, upon honourable men and upon an honourable nation when peace is only to be obtained by the sacrifice of conscientious conviction or of national welfare. A just war is in the long-run far better for a nation's soul than the most prosperous peace obtained by an acquiescence in wrong or injustice... It must be remembered that even to be defeated in war may be better than not to have fought at all."

To sum up these various views, we may say that expediency in the higher sense must be conclusive in deciding whether to undertake a war in itself morally justifiable. Such decision is rendered more easy by the consideration that the prospects of success are always the greatest when the moment for declaring war can be settled to suit the political and military situation.

It must further be remembered that every success in foreign policy, especially if obtained by a demonstration of military strength, not only heightens the power of the State in foreign affairs, but adds to the reputation of the Government at home, and thus enables it better to fulfil its moral aims and civilizing duties.

No one will thus dispute the assumption that, under certain circumstances, it is the moral and political duty of the State to employ war as a political means. So long as all human progress and all natural development are based on the law of conflict, it is necessary to engage in such conflict under the most favourable conditions possible.

When a State is confronted by the material impossibility of supporting any longer the warlike preparations which the power of its enemies has forced upon it, when it is clear that the rival States must gradually acquire from natural reasons a lead that cannot be won back, when there are indications of an offensive alliance of stronger ene-
mies who only await the favourable moment to strike—the moral duty of the State towards its citizens is to begin the struggle while the prospects of success and the political circumstances are still tolerably favourable. When, on the other hand, the hostile States are weakened or hampered by affairs at home and abroad, but its own warlike strength shows elements of superiority, it is imperative to use the favourable circumstances to promote its own political aims. The danger of a war may be faced the more readily if there is good prospect that great results may be obtained with comparatively small sacrifices.

These obligations can only be met by a vigorous, resolute, active policy, which follows definite ideas, and understands how to arouse and concentrate all the living forces of the state, conscious of the truth of Schiller's lines:

"The chance that once thou hast refused
Will never through the centuries recur."

The verdict of history will condemn the statesman who was unable to take the responsibility of a bold decision, and sacrificed the hopes of the future to the present need of peace.

It is obvious that under these circumstances it is extremely difficult to answer the question whether in any special case conditions exist which justify the determination to make war. The difficulty is all the greater because the historical significance of the act must be considered, and the immediate result is not the final criterion of its justification.

War is not always the final judgment of Heaven. There are successes which are transitory while the national life is reckoned by centuries. The ultimate verdict can only be obtained by the survey of long epochs.

The man whose high and responsible lot is to steer the fortunes of a great State must be able to disregard the verdict of his contemporaries; but he must be all the clearer as to the motives of his own policy, and keep before his eyes, with the full weight of the categorical imperative, the teaching of Kant: "Act so that the maxim of thy will can at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation."

He must have a clear conception of the nature and purpose of the State, and grasp this from the highest moral standpoint. He can in no other way settle the rules of his policy and recognize clearly the laws of political morality.

He must also form a clear conception of the special duties to be fulfilled by the nation, the guidance of whose fortunes rests in his hands. He must clearly and definitely formulate these duties as the fixed goal of statesmanship. When he is absolutely clear upon this point he can judge in each particular case what corresponds to the true interests of the State; then only can he act systematically in the definite prospect of smoothing the path of politics, and securing favourable conditions for the inevitable conflicts; then only, when the hour for combat strikes and the decision to fight faces him, can he rise with a free spirit and a calm breast to that standpoint which Luther once described in blunt, bold language: "It is very true that men write and say often what a curse war is. But they ought to consider how much greater is that curse which is averted by war. Briefly, in the business of war men must not regard the massacres,
the burnings, the battles, and the marches, etc.—that is what the petty and simple do who only look with the eyes of children at the surgeon, how he cuts off the hand or saws off the leg, but do not see or notice that he does it in order to save the whole body. Thus we must look at the business of war or the sword with the eyes of men, asking, Why these murders and horrors? It will be shown that it is a business, divine in itself, and as needful and necessary to the world as eating or drinking, or any other work."

Thus in order to decide what paths German policy must take in order to further the interests of the German people, and what possibilities of war are involved, we must first try to estimate the problems of State and of civilization which are to be solved, and discover what political purposes correspond to these problems.

**Notes**


1. During the Boer War (1899–1902) the British deployed 500,000 soldiers to subdue the Boers, Dutch settlers in modern-day South Africa.