

THEODORE ROOSEVELT ON THE DANGER OF MAKING UNWISE PEACE TREATIES

By Theodore Roosevelt.

In the Second of a Series of Articles on the European War He Discusses the Difficult Task of Securing Peace Without the Sacrifice of Righteousness.

concerned, because there is no way provided of enforcing the treaty. America can keep at peace and remain neutral only by declining to do what, according to the spirit of The Hague treaty, she would be expected to do in securing peace for Belgium. To make a verbal protest, unbacked by action, would be merely mischievous. Yet in practice The Hague treaties have proved and will always prove useless while there is no sanction of force behind them.

For the United States to proffer "good services" to the various powers entering such a great conflict as the present one accomplishes not one particle of good; to refer them when they mutually complain of wrongs done to a Hague court which is merely a phantom does less than no good. The Hague treaties can accomplish nothing, and ought not to have been entered into, unless in such a case as this of Belgium there is willingness to take efficient action under them. There could be no better illustration of how extremely complicated and difficult a thing it is in practice instead of in theory to make even a small advance in the cause of peace.

Of course, I believe that international opinion can do something to arrest wrong; but only if it is aroused and finds some method of clear and forceful expression. For example, I hope that it has been aroused to the point of preventing any repetition of the expense of Brussels of the destruction which has befallen Louvain. The peaceful people of Brussels now live in dread of what may happen to them if the Germans should evacuate the city. In such an event it is possible that half a dozen fanatics, or half a dozen young roughs of the "Apache" type, in spite of everything that good citizens may do, will from some building fire on the retiring soldiers. In such event the offenders ought to be and must be treated with instant and unsparring rigor, and those clearly guilty of aiding or shielding them should also be so treated.

Hague's Limited Service.

But if in such case Brussels is in whole or in part destroyed as Louvain was destroyed, those destroying it will be guilty of a capital crime against civilization; and it is heartily to be regretted that civilized nations have not devised some method by which the collective power of civilization can be used to prevent such crimes. In every great city there are plenty of reckless or fanatical or downright evil men eagerly ready to do some act which is abhorrent to the vast majority of their fellows; and it is wicked to punish with cruel severity immense multitudes of innocent men, women and children for the misdeeds of a few rascals or fanatics. Of course, it is eminently right to punish by death these rascals or fanatics themselves.

Kindly people who know little of life and nothing whatever of the great forces of international rivalry have exposed the cause of peace to ridicule by believing that serious wars could be avoided through arbitration treaties, peace treaties, neutrality treaties and the action of The Hague Court, without putting force behind such treaties and such action. The simple fact is that none of these existing treaties and no function of The Hague Court hith-

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(Continued on Page 82)

In studying the lessons which should be taught the United States by this terrible world-war, it is not necessary for us to try to assess or apportion the blame. There are plenty of instances of violation of treaties to be credited to almost all the nations engaged on one side or the other. We need not try to puzzle out why Italy and Japan seemingly construed similar treaties of alliance in diametrically opposite ways; nor need we decide which was justified or whether both were justified. It is quite immaterial to us for our purposes whether the treaties alleged to be violated affect Luxemburg on the one hand or Bosnia on the other, whether it is the neutrality of China or the neutrality of Belgium that is violated.

Yet, again, we need always to keep in mind that, although it is culpable to break a treaty, it may be even worse recklessly to make a treaty which can not be kept. Recklessness in making promises is the surest way in which to secure the discredit attaching to the breaking of promises. A treaty at present represents usually merely promise, not performance; and it is wicked to promise what will not or cannot be performed. Genuine good can even now be accomplished by arbitration treaties if they are not all-inclusive, if they deal with subjects on which arbitration can be accepted.

This nation has repeatedly acted in obedience to such treaties; and great good has come from arbitrations in such cases as, for example, the Dogger Bank incident, when the Russian fleet fired on British trawlers during the Russian-Japanese war. But no good whatever has come from treaties that represented a sham; and under existing conditions it is hypocritical for a nation to announce that it will arbitrate questions of honor or vital interest, and folly to think that opponents will abide by such treaties. Bad although it is to negotiate such a treaty, it would be worse to abide by it.

The Case of China.

Under these conditions it is mischievous to a degree for a nation to trust to treaty to protect it in great crises. Take the case of China as a living and present-day example. China has shown herself utterly impotent to defend her neutrality. Again and again she made this evident in the past. Order was not well kept at home, and above all she was powerless to defend herself from outside attack. She has not prepared for war. She has kept utterly unprepared for war. Yet she has suffered more from war, in our own time, than any military power in the world during the same period. She has fulfilled exactly the conditions advocated by these well-meaning persons who for the last eight weeks or so have been saying in speeches, editorials for syndicates and the like that the United States ought not to keep up battleships and ought

not to trust to fortifications nor in any way to be ready or prepared to defend herself against hostile attack, but should endeavor to secure peace by being so inoffensive and helpless as not to arouse fear in others. The well-meaning people who write these editorials and make these speeches ought to understand that though it is a bad thing for a nation to arouse fear, it is an infinitely worse thing to excite contempt; and every editor or writer or public man who tells us that we ought not to have battleships and that we ought to trust entirely to well-intentioned foolish all-inclusive arbitration treaties and abandon fortifications and not keep prepared, is merely doing his best to bring contempt upon the United States and to insure disaster in the future.

Japan and Korea.

Nor is China the only case in point. Luxemburg is a case in point. Korea is a case in point. Korea was utterly inoffensive and helpless. It neither took nor was capable of taking the smallest aggressive action against any one. It had no forts, no warships, no army worthy of the name. It excited no fear and no anger. But it did excite measureless contempt and therefore it invited aggression. Under these circumstances Japan had to decide not whether Korea would remain independent, but whether it would be under the influence of Japan or of some people hostile to Japan. The situation of Korea in reference to Japan rendered it impossible for patriotic Japanese statesmen to tolerate its being in the possession of a hostile power. As the only alternative they took possession of it themselves. I do not question that this was a national necessity.

The point I wish to make is, first, the extreme unwisdom and impropriety of making promises that cannot be kept, and, second, the utter futility of expecting that in any save exceptional cases a strong power will keep a promise which it finds to its disadvantage, unless there is some way of putting force back of the demand that the treaty be observed.

America has no claim whatever to superior virtue in this matter. We have shown an appalling recklessness in making treaties, especially all-inclusive arbitration treaties and the like which in time of stress would not and could not be observed. When such a treaty is not observed the blame really rests upon the unwise persons who made the treaty. Unfortunately, however, this arraignment of blame cannot be made by outsiders. All they can say is that the country concerned—and I speak of America—does not keep faith. The responsibility for breaking an improper promise really rests with those who make it; but the penalty is paid by the whole country.

There are certain respects in which I think the United States can fairly claim to stand ahead of most nations in its regard for international morality. For example, last Spring when we took Vera Cruz, there were individuals within the city who fired at our troops in exactly the same fashion as that which is alleged to have taken place

in Louvain. But it never for one moment entered the heads of our people to destroy Vera Cruz. In the same way, when we promised freedom to Cuba, we kept our promise and after establishing an orderly Government in Cuba withdrew our army and left her as an independent power, performing an act which, as far as I know, is entirely without parallel in the dealings of stronger with weaker nations.



Col. Theodore Roosevelt.

(Photo by Newton R. Henderson.)

In the same way our action in Santo Domingo, when we took and administered her Custom Houses, represented a substantial and efficient achievement in the cause of international peace which stands high in the very honorable but scanty list of such achievements by great nations in dealing with their less fortunate sisters. In the same way, our handling of the Panama situation, both in its acquisition, in its construction, and in the attitude we have taken toward the Jewellers on the Isthmus and all the nations of mankind, has been such as to reflect signal honor on our people. In the same way we returned the Chinese indemnity, because we deemed it excessive, just as previously we had returned a money indemnity to Japan. Similarly the disinterestedness with which we have administered the Philippines for the good of the Philippine people is something upon which we have a right to pride ourselves and shows the harm that would have been done had we not taken possession of the Philippines.

American Inconsistency.

But unfortunately, in dealing with schemes of universal peace and arbitration, we have often shown an unwillingness to fulfill proper promises which we had already made by treaty, coupled with a reckless willingness to make new treaties with all kinds of promises which were either improper and ought not to be kept or which, even if proper, could not and would not be kept.

It has again and again proved exceedingly difficult to get Congress to appropriate money to pay some obligation which under treaty or arbitration or the like has been declared to be owing by us to the citizens of some foreign nation. Often we have announced our intention to make sweeping arbitration treaties or agreements at the very time when by our conduct we were showing that in actual fact we had not the slightest

intention of applying them with the sweeping universality we promised.

In these cases we were usually, although not always, right in our refusal to apply the treaties, or rather the principles set forth in the treaties, to the concrete case at issue; but we were utterly wrong, we were, although unintentionally, both insincere and hypocritical, when at the same time we made believe we intended that these principles would be universally applied. This was particularly true in connection with the universal arbitration treaties which our Government unsuccessfully endeavored to negotiate some three years ago. We announced at that time that we intended to have universal arbitration treaties under which we would arbitrate everything, even including questions of honor and of vital national interest. At the very time that this announcement was made and the negotiation of the treaties begun, the Government in case after case where specific performance of its pledges was demanded responded with a flat refusal to do the very thing it had announced its intention of doing.

Recently there have been negotiated in Washington thirty or forty little all-inclusive arbitration, or so-called "peace" treaties, which represent as high a degree of fatuity as is often achieved in these matters. There is no likelihood that they will do us any great material harm, because it is absolutely certain that we

would not pay the smallest attention to them in the event of their being invoked in any matter where our interests were seriously involved; but it would do us moral harm to break them, even although this were the least evil of two evil alternatives. It is a discreditable thing that at this very moment, with before our eyes such proof of the worthlessness of the neutrality treaties affecting Belgium and Luxem-

burg, our nation should be negotiating treaties which convince every sensible and well-informed observer abroad that we are either utterly heedless in making promises which cannot be kept or else willing to make promises which we have no intention of keeping. What has just happened shows that such treaties are worthless except to the degree that force can and will be used in backing them.

Righteousness Above Peace.

There are some well-meaning people, misled by mere words, who doubtless think that treaties of this kind do accomplish something. These good and well-meaning people may feel that I am not zealous in the cause of Peace. This is the direct reverse of the case. I abhor war. In common with all other thinking men I am inexpressibly saddened by the dreadful contest now waging in Europe. I put Peace very high as an agent for bringing about Righteousness. But if I must choose between Righteousness and Peace I choose Righteousness. Therefore, I hold myself in honor bound to do anything in my power to advance the cause of the Peace of Righteousness throughout the world. I believe we can make substantial advances by international agreement in the line of achieving this purpose and a little later I intend to state in outline just what I think can be done toward this end.

But I hold that we will do nothing and less than nothing unless, pending the accomplish-

ment of this purpose, we keep our own beloved country in such shape that war shall not strike her down; and furthermore, unless we also seriously consider what the defects have been in the existing peace, neutrality and arbitration treaties and in the attitude hitherto assumed by the professional pacifists, which have rendered these treaties such feeble aids to peace and the ultra-pacifist attitude a positive obstacle to peace.

Feeble Peace Folk.

The truth is that the advocates of world-wide peace, like all reformers, should bear in mind Josh Billings's astute remark that "it is much easier to be a harmless dove than a wise serpent." The worthy pacifists have completely forgotten that the Biblical injunction is two-sided and that we are bidden not only to be harmless as doves, but also to be wise as serpents. The ultra-pacifists have undoubtedly been an exceedingly harmless body so far as obtaining peace is concerned. They have exerted practically no influence in restraining wrong, although they have sometimes had a real and lamentable influence in crippling the forces of right and preventing them from dealing with wrong. An appreciable amount of good work has been done for peace by genuine lovers of peace, but it has not been done by the feeble folk of the peace movement, loquacious but impotent, who are usually unfortunately prominent in the movement and who excite the utter derision of the great powers of evil.

Sincere lovers of peace who are wise have been obliged to face the fact that it is often a very complicated thing to secure peace without the sacrifice of righteousness. Furthermore, they have been obliged to face the fact that generally the only way to accomplish anything was by not trying to accomplish too much.

The complicated nature of the problem is shown by the fact that some thoroughly good men believe at the present time that our duty to peace must be fulfilled by protesting against the violation of the rights secured to Belgium by treaty, while other good men point out that such a course would expose us to the accusations of abandoning our neutrality. In theory it is supposed to be our duty to uphold The Hague treaties of which we were among the signatory powers; and the pathetic believers in the all-sufficiency of signatures placed on bits of paper have believed that everything put in these treaties was forthwith guaranteed to all mankind.

In dealing with the rights of neutrals Article X. of Chapter I explicitly states that if the territory of a neutral nation is invaded the repelling of such invasion by force shall not be esteemed a "hostile act" on the part of the neutral nation. Unquestionably under this clause Belgium has committed no hostile act. Yet, this sound declaration of morality, in a treaty that the leading world powers have signed, amounts to precisely and exactly nothing so far as the rights of poor Belgium are

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(Continued from Page 1.)

to planned and exercised have exerted or could exert the very smallest influence in maintaining peace when great conflicting international passions are aroused and great conflicting national interests are at stake.

It happens that wars have been more numerous in the fifteen years since the first Hague conference than in the fifteen years prior to it. It was Russia that called the first and second Hague conferences, and in the interval she fought the war with Japan, and is now fighting a far greater war. We bore a prominent part at The Hague Conference; but if The Hague Court had been in existence in 1898 it could not have had the smallest effect upon our war with Spain; and neither would any possible arbitration treaty or peace treaty have had any effect.

At the present moment Great Britain owes its immunity from invasion purely to its navy and to the fact that that

navy has been sedulously exercised in time of peace so as to prepare it for war. Great Britain has always been willing to enter into any reasonable—and into some unreasonable—peace and arbitration treaties; but her fate now would have been the fate of Belgium and would not have been hindered in the smallest degree by these treaties if she had not possessed a first-class navy. The navy has done a thousand times more for her peace than all the arbitration treaties and peace treaties of the type now existing that the wit of man could invent. I believe that national agreement in the future can do much toward minimizing the chance for war; but it must be by proceeding along different lines from those hitherto followed and in an entirely different spirit from the ultra-pacifist or professional peace-at-any-price spirit.

The Hague Court has served a very limited, but a useful, purpose. Some, although only

a small number, of the existing peace and arbitration treaties have served a useful purpose. But the purpose and the service have been strictly limited. Issues often arise between nations which are not of first-class importance, which do not affect their vital honor and interest, but which, if left unsettled, may eventually cause irritation that will have the worst possible results. The Hague Court and the different treaties in question provide instrumentalities for settling such disputes where the nations involved really wish to settle them, but might be unable to do so if means were not supplied. This is a real service and one well worth rendering. These treaties and The Hague Court have rendered such service again and again in time past.

It has been a misfortune that some worthy people have anticipated too much and claimed too much in reference to them, for the failure of the

excessive claims has blinded men to what they really have accomplished. To expect from them what they cannot give is merely shortsighted. To assert that they will give what they cannot give is mischievous. To promise that they will give what they cannot give is not only mischievous but hypocritical; and it is for this reason that such treaties like the nineteen or twenty-one all-inclusive arbitration or peace treaties recently negotiated at Washington, although unimportant, are slightly harmful.

The Hague Court has proved worthless in the present gigantic crisis. There is hardly a Hague treaty which has not in some respect been violated. However, a step toward the peaceful settlement of questions at issue between nations which are not vital has been accomplished by The Hague Court and by rational and limited peace or arbitration treaties in the past. Our business is to try to make this court of

more effect and to enlarge the class of cases where its actions will be valuable. In order to do this, we must endeavor to put an international police force behind this international judiciary. At the same time we must refuse to do or say anything insincere. Above all, we must refuse to be misled into abandoning the policy of efficient self-defense, by any unfounded trust that The Hague Court as now constituted, and peace or arbitration treaties of the existing type, can in the smallest degree accomplish what they never have accomplished and never can accomplish. Neither the existing Hague Court, nor any peace treaties of the existing type, will exert even the slightest influence in saving from disaster any nation that does not preserve the virile virtues and the long-sightedness that will enable it by its own might to guard its own honor, interest, and national life.

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