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THE WAR

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THE GREAT WAR

INTRODUCTION

1 The Balkans

The great war began in the Balkans. The eye of the world has long turned toward this region as one where trouble might occur with little warning.

In the Balkan peninsula there are four states of considerable importance—Greece, Bulgaria, Roumania and Serbia. In addition there are the two little kingdoms of Albania and Montenegro.

Each of the first four is distinct in nationality from the rest. Greece is inhabited largely by descendants of that ancient people made forever famous and immortal by accomplishments in art and architecture and by ideals set so high that all posterity would forever follow them but seldom reach their full realization. Philosophy and science also owe to the ancient Greeks a great debt of gratitude for their achievements along these lines.

The Bulgarians are descended from the Bulgars who during the seventh century A D completed their settlement of that country. They came originally from eastern Asia and were of Tartar stock. In the tenth century we find the Emperor of the East paying tribute to Simeon the Great who was the ruler of Bulgaria. Three centuries later Bulgaria reached the summit of her power as a nation and waged war on equal terms with the Greeks at Constantinople and with western European nations, which were then engaged in the crusades. After this her power rapidly waned and Serbia gained ascendancy over Bulgaria which lasted until the Turks overran both countries about 1400 A D

The Serbians are mainly of Slav descent. The Slavs established themselves in the Balkans about 650 A D somewhat earlier probably than the Bulgars. Stephen Dushan the greatest ruler of the Serbians extended his power over Macedonia Thessaly Albania and Bulgaria about 1350 A D. With his death the importance of Serbia declined and the Turks less than fifty years afterward conquered the whole region.

The Rumanians claim to have descended from the Dacians who settled in the valley of the lower Danube several centuries before the Christian era and there erected a flourishing empire which contended with the Romans for many years and resisted them successfully until the emperor Trajan about 100 A D conquered it and brought it under Roman rule. Roman colonists were settled among the Dacians and intermarried with them. The race thus constituted claims to have kept itself from contamination by the successive hordes of barbarians who during the dark ages when Rome had succumbed to their attacks, invaded and ravished the Danube valley. The Rumanians resisted the advance of the Turks and while they were not wholly successful, Roumania did not become a Turkish province but merely acknowledged Turkish supremacy and paid tribute to the Sultan.

The people of Montenegro are of the same origin as the Serbians and have had much the same history, though Montenegro has never been an important state.

The origin of the Albanians is uncertain but they are an independent and warlike people. The Turks never exercised much actual control over the Albanians though from time to time they attempted by harsh measures to reduce them to subjection.

In religion the people of the Balkans are as mixed as in race. Some are Roman Catholics, some Greek Christians and some Mohammedans. The Greek church is however the state church in all the countries of the Balkans.

Serbia was the first of the four states to attempt to gain its freedom from the Turks. This occurred between the years of 1796 and 1830. In the latter year the Sultan acknowledged the practical independence of Serbia though he still retained nominal control over the country. During the revolt from Turkey there had arisen factions among the Serbians and the nineteenth century from that time on was a history of the quarrels between two families which had been leaders of the Serbians in their struggle for independence. Members of one or the other of these two families held power in Serbia from 1830 until by the assassination of King Alexander in 1903 one of them was annihilated and King Peter the representative of the other family was elected to the throne. This long internal struggle has kept Serbia from advancing in civilization and wealth.

Greece gained its independence from Turkey in 1833 after twelve years of fighting. Unlike Serbia it chose a foreigner for its king and all its rulers since have been of foreign blood. While the country has made considerable progress it has been slow because Greece was shut off from contact with other European countries by Turkey and communication with them by land was difficult. Greece remembers the ancient glories of her race and eagerly longs for the time to come when she shall control all the lands where Greeks are settled in the eastern Mediterranean.

Roumania was bound to Turkey by rather loose ties until the election of King Carol—a German prince—to the throne in 1866. By devotion to the best interests of his adopted country Carol finally won her complete independence from Turkey. Roumania has made rapid progress in the last few years.

Bulgaria gained her independence from Turkey in 1878 though Turkey still held Bulgaria tributary. At that time the European powers stepped in and dictated the terms of peace between Turkey and the other Balkan states which were fighting her. The terms of the treaty were contrary to the deep seated convictions of the Balkan states and sowed the seeds for future trouble, which finally sprang up in the Balkan League composed of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and the small state of Montenegro. This league was responsible for the Balkan war of 1912 which ended by nearly driving the Turks from Europe. Interference of the European powers kept the League from doing all it intended and a later quarrel between Bulgaria and the other Balkan states led to the unfortunate war of 1913 in which the Bulgarians were defeated and their hopes of making their country more important were wrecked. This left bitter feeling in the Balkans and made possible the action of Bulgaria in coming into the present war on Germany's side.

Each of the Balkan states is anxious to win for itself all the territory near it which contains people of its own nationality. Owing to the confusion of races in the Balkans this is impossible.

2 Belgium

History records many acts of individual and national heroism; acts of unselfish sacrifice for principles of national honor and faithfulness. While some of these may unfortunately have been of no avail many have had great influence in later history and have changed the whole course of civilization. Among these will be placed Belgium's heroic stand for treaty rights and international law in 1914. Because she, an unoffending nation chose to resist by force of arms encroachment upon her rights of neutrality as she was under moral obligations to do she is now in ruins.

In point of size Belgium is really the smallest independent nation in the world. If you multiply the area of Connecticut by two and add the area of Rhode Island you will have a state practically the size of Belgium. It is not so large as Connecticut and Massachusetts combined. This, however,

does not indicate the true importance of Belgium among the nations of the world. Though small in area she has the greatest density of population and ranks eighth in wealth and sixth in commerce. Her location on a fine sea coast and between powerful nations has strategic importance.

The little kingdom is divided into two natural sections, which together consist of nine provinces. To the north and west are the lowlands known as Flanders and to the south and east are the hilly lands known as Walloon. Most of the people living in Flanders are of Teutonic origin while those living in Walloon are of Latin descent and French. Their government is a constitutional monarchy and consists of a king and a legislature composed of a senate and a house of representatives. The senators are appointed by the provinces while the representatives are elected directly by the people.

The people maintain excellent schools and the government owns and operates the railroads successfully. Walloon is rich in coal, iron, zinc and sand used for making glass. Agriculture is highly developed and the farms are intensively cultivated in all parts and especially in Flanders but it is to manufactures and commerce that Belgium owes its high economic position. Iron and steel goods of all kinds including rifles and cannons are manufactured. Textile and lace mills are common.

These people have always been an industrious people with a great love for freedom yet their destiny has been largely decided by other peoples. Their undying love of freedom has prevented them through many ages from submitting peaceably to the political discipline of any one central government. City governments as highly developed as those of the Greeks and Romans first grew up and later gained control of surrounding territories thus forming provinces. The provinces though usually having the same ruler maintained their distinct political existence until very recently. Their growth and development has been great. Each has its own history, its own personality and its own wealth of treasures and art.

The idea of Belgian nationality is older than the existence of the present kingdom. Belgium is literally an artificial state and a comparatively recent one at that. She was established and sanctioned by European powers. Geographically she is not bounded by natural barriers within which a national spirit might spring up and thrive. The population as already stated is heterogeneous and consists of races historically antagonistic. In the face of these adverse conditions however Belgian nationality has lived and grown through the turmoil of European wars and local conflicts. That her patriotism and national morality is unsurpassed by any people cannot be doubted in view of the glorious stand the little country has made in the world war now raging.

The little provinces now comprising Holland and Belgium have always been a rich prize coveted by more powerful European nations. The Belgian provinces were controlled by Spain and known as the Spanish Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Early in the eighteenth century (Treaty of Utrecht 1713) Holland became independent and Belgium passed over to Austria then the chief rival of France on the continent of Europe. In 1792 it was annexed to France. By annexing Belgium France threatened Holland. She with Austria had guaranteed the independence of Holland but in 1801 Napoleon forced her to adopt a French made constitution. This drew England into the Revolution for she had also guaranteed the independence of Holland and she construed her obligations rigidly. In 1813 Belgium was taken from France and joined to Holland for protection against any future French aggression. In the Treaty of Chaumont 1814 and the Congress of Vienna 1815 the United Kingdom of Holland which included Belgium was declared an independent and PERPETUALLY NEUTRAL state by all the European powers.

To be a perpetually neutral state meant to be debarred from entering into any treaty of alliance with any other nation. Such a state could not seek the protection of any single Power. In return for this the neutral state had its independence guaranteed by all the Powers. Its territory was declared inviolable and belligerent nations were forbidden to move troops or convoys of either munitions of war or supplies across it. The neutral state however could resist, even by force of arms attempts to violate its neutrality. In fact a neutral state was under moral obligations to maintain its neutrality by force if necessary.

Thus the United Kingdom of Holland consisted of two little "buffer" states formed by the joint agreement of the great powers of Europe because not any one of these Powers was strong enough to annex her against the combined strength of all the other Powers. The annexation of either of these little countries to any one Power was objected to by the others because it would not only increase the strength of the Power annexing it and disturb the balance of power in Europe but would also make it easier for that Power to carry on an aggressive war against the others. While the arrangement resulted in many advantages for Belgium and Holland the motives of the great powers for bringing it about were largely selfish.

The union of Belgium with Holland was never satisfactory to the Belgians and after fifteen years they rose in revolt and expelled the Dutch officials. They had the sympathy of England and France and these countries finally persuaded the other powers to recognize their independence. The international status of Belgium was firmly established by the Treaty of London in 1839 when her independence and perpetual neutrality were absolutely guaranteed by England France Austria Russia and Prussia.

Prussia at present the most important kingdom in the German empire was in 1839 the most important kingdom in a confederacy of kingdoms situated in central Europe between Austria and the North Sea which has since been united into the German Empire. The treaty to which Prussia was a party in 1839 was rigidly observed by her during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and was accepted by Germany when she signed a compact with England which distinctly stipulated that the treaty of 1839 should remain in force. Germany has many times since signified her intention to abide by this treaty—once particularly in 1907 when the Hague Peace conference considered the matter and when Germany's representatives with those of 43 other nations endorsed the principles of neutrality outlined by it. She has also recognized the treaty as binding in more recent notes to the Belgian government.

By all the obligations which are supposed to bind nations to observe their pledged word Belgium ought to have been kept neutral in this present war.

3 Alsace—Lorraine

These two provinces border on the northeast corner of France. Alsace extends nearly north and south and is separated from France by the Vosges Mountains. It is bounded on the east by the Rhine river. Lorraine extends northwest from Alsace.

This region was in the early years of the Christian era inhabited by Celtic tribes and was part of Roman Gaul. Later it was overrun by the Franks who were of Teutonic blood. By the tenth century it had become pretty thoroughly Germanized and was a part of the German empire. Rich cities sprang up in it and it became prosperous and important.

In the seventeenth century the French invaded and conquered a part of the region and their encroachment continued until by 1814 they con-

trolled the whole of the two provinces. As the majority of the inhabitants were Germans attempts on the part of the French to assimilate the people with themselves were not successful until the French revolution when in the struggle between democracy and autocracy the two peoples were drawn together and soon the two provinces became French in language, culture and sympathy. When the Franco-Prussian war broke out in 1870 the people of Alsace-Lorraine in part took the side of the French and in part remained neutral but did not side with their former country—Germany.

Germany wanted these provinces back from France then because they would make her a good defence against invasion on the part of France since the Vosges mountains would then be between France and Germany. Naturally she felt also that the provinces had once been German and ought again to be under her power. Hence when Germany had defeated France she insisted as one of the conditions of peace that France should give up to her these two provinces. France was forced to yield. The people of Alsace-Lorraine felt very strongly that they ought not to have been handed over to Germany without any voice in the matter and in the French Assembly their delegates uttered this protest—"Handed over in contempt of all justice by an execrable abuse of power to the domination of a foreign sovereign, we declare once more null and void the agreement which disposes of us without our consent. Your brothers of Alsace-Lorraine separated in this manner from the common family will preserve though absent from the fireside a faithful affection for France until the day when we shall return once more to our places in our home."

The inhabitants were called on to declare themselves as either German or French subjects and were given until October 1 1872 to remove to France or to remain and be considered German subjects. Probably over 50,000 went over the border into France before the date set.

The German government then set at work systematically to uproot all that was French in the provinces. German language and not French must be used in the schools and French customs and manners as far as possible were given short shrift by the German masters of the provinces. In spite of all that the Germans have done however they have not appeared to win the affections of the people though German science and system have without doubt done much to aid their material prosperity. Whether the people are now French in sympathy is a question, but they can hardly be said to be German. The experience of the people of these provinces is a severe criticism of the system of making treaties which disposes of peoples without their having a chance to be heard as to their disposition. Probably this is one of the questions which the present war will settle.

Germany says she will never give up Alsace-Lorraine. France says she will never make peace until she gets it back. Meanwhile the people of the region do not say clearly what they wish—from previous experience it does not seem worth while to say it.

4 Poland

The early history of Poland is shrouded in the mists of legend and story but about the end of the tenth century the conversion of the Poles to Christianity brings the country into the light of actual history. From this time on for nearly eight hundred years the kingdom of Poland was important in European history. The Poles were originally of the Slav race. They ruled over a large part of central Europe and fought on equal terms with all the rulers of countries about them keeping the Tartars out of their country and curbing the growing power of Russia for a long time. Hungary was for some time under their rule.

Gradually the election of the king came to be a right of the Polish nobles and in the Polish Diet it came about that the veto of a single member could put an end to the consideration of any law. Thus it required a unanimous vote of the Diet to pass any law and this fact made it easy for bad government to remain in power and difficult for reforms to be carried out. The nobles were all powerful and yielded little to the authority of the king who came to be a figurehead without real power. The nobles and the officials became corrupt and it is said that few of them could not be bought by a bribe. The kingdom was impoverished and the lower classes of people were downtrodden and miserable, while the upper classes had all the power. The Jews who had no political rights controlled business.

Under such conditions there was little hope for the country when ambitious neighbors wished to gain territory at Poland's expense. Catherine the Russian Empress, Frederick the Great of Prussia, and Maria Theresa of Austria formed a plan to each seize a piece of Poland and carried out their scheme without any serious resistance from the Poles. Later the first two rulers seized another slice of Poland and a little later the three divided what was left of it between them. Of the three Russia got the largest share but Prussia got enough to make her a compact country and better still enough to make herself a power in Germany. From this time on Prussia and Austria contended for the control of Germany, a contest in which Prussia was finally victorious.

The Poles could not long have maintained themselves as a nation with the unfortunate condition of their government but this fact does not make the partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia, and Austria any less a crime among nations.

The fact that the nobles were so little willing to bow to any authority but their own indicates the love of the Poles for independence. Turbulent though they were as a nation they nevertheless loved their freedom and have always looked forward to the time when they might again be a nation—free from control by any other country. During the present war the Polish question has assumed much importance and perhaps after the war is over the ancient kingdom of Poland may again take its place as a free nation. For more than 120 years Poland has been under the domination of foreign powers but at no time has the love of the Poles for freedom been extinguished and never have they ceased to think and plan for liberation and a government of their own. Austrian and Russian Poland have had rebellions which have been put down with severity but Prussian Poland has been more fortunate though probably it is losing its Polish character more completely than the other parts of Poland, under the German system of government.

5 Italy

Italy is a long peninsula stretching down into the Mediterranean—with Sicily at the point of its toe nearly reaching the African coast. It is exposed to attack on the side of the sea along nearly its whole extent. Less than fifty miles away across the Adriatic lies the coast of Albania while the Austrian and Montenegrin shores are scarcely further away. Austria maintains a considerable fleet the headquarters of which is near the Italian coast and though Austria until the outbreak of the present war was an ally of Italy there has been little love lost between them for Austria is suspected by the Italians of designs on some of their territory as she formerly held much of it and exercised much influence in the peninsula.

Further Italy has not forgotten her interest in the provinces of Trent and Trieste which were kept from her when United Italy was formed in 1866. The Adriatic was once an inland sea of the Roman Empire and

Italy feels herself the heir to the glories of ancient Rome. The people in these unredeemed provinces as they are called are largely Italian in sympathy race and sentiment. It is the ambition of the Italians to control the whole eastern shore of the Adriatic. When the present war broke out and it appeared that Austria was aiming to gain for herself a large amount of territory in the Balkans Italy according to the treaty which she had with Austria felt that she was entitled to something in return for keeping her hands off while Austria was getting what she wanted there.

There had been an agreement between Germany, Austria and Italy that all would go to the aid of any one of them that should be attacked by another country. As Austria was clearly the aggressor in the war Italy did not feel bound in honor to go to her aid and from the first maintained a neutrality which was very pleasing to France because she did not have to defend her eastern boundary and could throw all her army against the Germans. Then began a long attempt on the part of Italy to get Austria to give up to her the two provinces she had long desired in return for allowing Austria a free hand in the Balkans. This came to nothing and finally Italy declared war on Austria.

The present war is directly caused in large measure by the system of making treaties which has prevailed in Europe for ages—the system of give and take without regard to the desires of the people concerned in the distribution of territory. Out of this has grown the bitterness which is at the root of the entrance of some of the smaller countries into the war, as well as the entrance of France and Italy. Italy has not been thought to have played a very agreeable part in the matter of entering the war—but with her desire to get the territory which the Italians have long called “Italia irredenta” or “Unredeemed Italy” she felt herself at liberty to use whatever means she felt most likely to win. If one studies the terms of the treaty between Italy and Austria it is likely that less blame will be laid on her method of attempting to gain her end. Clearly any attempt on the part of Austria to gain more control in the Balkans justified Italy in trying to get recompense for Austria has never been a good friend of Italy and the shores of Serbia and Montenegro are near Italy.

The way in which the whole Italian nation has rallied around the cause of gaining the provinces she has always desired has aroused the admiration of the world and made it feel that Italy must have a very deep feeling for the provinces she is trying to redeem from the Austrian yoke. This yoke has not been easy for Austria has sought by every means in her power to stamp out in the provinces the feeling of sympathy for Italy. The Italian language is forbidden in the schools and every expression of sympathy for Italy in the past has been sternly repressed but Austria has not been able to make the people in the two provinces yield to her control willingly or to weld them to her by other than the bonds of repression and fear.





