

TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE SECOND GREAT WAR: THE CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION:
UNITED STATES NEUTRALITY: THE FUTURE OF
CIVILIZATION.

THE SECOND GREAT WAR of the twentieth century has come upon our unhappy world. There is no other "Topic of the Day". On all hands, its incidence has now been accepted as an inevitable struggle, and while this circumstance does not relieve the forebodings that must disturb every sensitive heart, nevertheless it stiffens the resolution to see the thing through, to whatever bitter end it may lead. Sooner or later, the German self-assertion had to be withstood. A surrender to brutal aggression would have been an infamous betrayal. Another "Munich settlement", resulting in the cession of Danzig and the Corridor to Germany, would have been followed by the annexation of Poland. After that, we could look for nothing but a steady and relentless pressure of the hateful Nazi tyranny until great sections of European life had been enslaved. With scarcely a dissenting vote in parliament, and with the pledged adherence of the entire British Commonwealth, the peoples of France and Britain have allied themselves to save the world from the menace of Hitlerism.

The actual declaration of hostilities was preceded by "a war of nerves." Herr Hitler employed his familiar methods, which had already lost any capacity to deceive, by keeping discontent alive through propaganda, by a shameless "peaceful invasion" of Danzig, and finally by a complete preparation for swift attack in the hope that through intimidation he could present his people with another bloodless victory. Through the months of summer, there was a growing sense of a new crisis, scheduled to reach its maximum tension in the month of August. But few people, probably not even Hitler himself, were prepared for the astonishing diplomatic events that provided the signal for the German battalions to march. Mr. Chamberlain, who presumably had access to better sources of information than most of us, confessed his chagrin to the House of Commons when he found that Russia and Germany had actually arranged a pact of non-aggression. It is difficult to assess which of the high contracting parties swallowed more of his own historic testimony in the hurried negotiations, but the result was undoubtedly of such immediate advantage to the German Führer

and his associates that further parleyings were reduced to a farce. The hour had come to strike, and the blow fell.

Mr. Chamberlain has fastened the blame for the conflict upon one man, Adolf Hitler. It is difficult to believe that one man could, single-handed, plunge a great part of the world into the confusion, misery and ruin that must now be our portion for a period whose length we cannot compute. Later, the nature of the struggle has been somewhat redefined as a battle to end "Hitlerism". This definition is nearer the mark, although it does not diminish by a hair-breadth the awful responsibility that must lie at the door of the inscrutable dictator who had the final word in the matter. He had become the personal incarnation of a way of life, ruthlessly brutal in its methods of internal order, and now bent on the destruction of whatever in the world stands in the way of its unlimited expansion. So long as the Nazi régime was merely imposed on the German people, we could have looked on in horrified detachment; but when it became a method of international policy, Hitlerism and democracy could no longer live in the same world. One or the other had to triumph, and however much we hate the necessity that is laid upon us, this tyranny must be destroyed.

The German case is that Britain is the culprit. The British government is accused of supporting Poland in a truculent opposition to any amendment of the Versailles treaty in respect of Danzig and the Corridor. In an unusually reasonable letter to M. Daladier, Herr Hitler put his case clearly. Here was a city, admittedly German in loyalty, and an irritating geographical arrangement whereby a considerable section of German people was cut off from the Reich. What could be more reasonable than the request for a readjustment of territories, which had been disposed under the emotional prejudices of the post-war mood? The British reply was that we had heard this tale before in the case of Sudetenland. We yielded to Hitler's "reasonableness", and despite his protestations of satisfaction with the settlement, he swallowed up overnight a free and vigorous people. Can we treat with a prevaricator and a gunman? The final and fateful ultimatum that brought Britain into the war was not: "No negotiation!" but "Call the German armies out of Poland!" When the zero hour had been reached, the war had already begun and the choice that confronted Britain and France was between a toleration of a German invasion of Poland, to result in the destruction of Polish sovereignty, and a declaration of war. Future historians will not have much difficulty in fastening the guilt for the present conflict, and if

any name is to be written into the indictment, it will be that of Adolf Hitler.

The clear duty of the allied powers is to defeat the present German régime with as much expedition and as little loss of life as possible. The factors that will decide the course of the war are not entirely military—perhaps not even mainly military. That we shall have shocks and surprises is certain. An interesting chapter of future history remains to be written concerning what exactly led Russia to conclude her pact of non-aggression with Germany. While it was an immediate gain of immense value to the Nazi cause, and probably was the final element in deciding Hitler's war move, a partnership so strange and mutually cynical can have no firm or lasting quality. If Russia still dreams of a communist régime in Europe, with frontiers on the Rhine, it is all to her interest to foment war and then to exploit the resultant chaos for revolutionary ends. Unless human nature has completely altered in a period of less than a decade, the German people have as little mind for this present war as the British or the French. What the combined force of propaganda and brutality has induced can possess no deep-seated purpose in the popular will. The Germans are a stubborn and tenacious people, but there must be deep currents of anti-Hitlerism beneath the surface. The Berlin-Rome axis has proved to be no steel-like structure, and Italy's share in the conflict remains highly uncertain.

We move among forces imponderable and uncalculable. Whatever the result, Europe will never be the same again. We may see a short and swift termination to the conflict, but it is just as possible that we are at the beginning of a long, grim struggle that will surpass even the war of 1914-1918 in misery and loss. The whole dreadful affair is like a major operation which, even if it eradicates the disease, must leave the entire body weakened and open to new and complicating sicknesses. There will be little flag-waving, and no enthusiasm. Rather, if this warfare is to be carried to a conclusion, we must look for a certain set determination that the menace of Hitlerism shall be banished from the earth, and, above all, from the spirit of the German people.

THE CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION has become the main question of Dominion political, social and economic life. Already our almost single-minded adherence to the Imperial cause has had a powerful moral effect. We take our place in the unbroken

ranks of the British Commonwealth, and our contribution is doubly strong because it is the result of a well-considered and unforced choice, the free decision of a free people. For the first time in our history, Canada has declared war in her own name. Now, our co-operation in the supply of essential food-stuff and materials, and whatever else we may be summoned to provide, must form the focus of an intense national effort.

Canada has reason to be proud of the manner in which her leaders have acquitted themselves in the high hour of national decision. Especially our Prime Minister has revealed a capacity for strong, vigorous action, and an almost unsuspected decision of character, that have combined to provide the required unity of sentiment for our people. In his manner of address before, during and subsequent to the declaration of war, in its statesman-like blending of personal courage and proper recognition of parliamentary responsibility, he has become Canada's man, matched for his hour. Even the opposition to participating in the war, by the temper of its expression, has given us no cause to hang our heads before the world. Unanimity could hardly be expected. If the opposing voices had been silenced, or had even attempted to silence themselves, parliament would not have given a true indication of the Canadian mind. But, by their moderation of statement and their acquiescence in the overwhelming decision to commit the country to war, the dissenters have made their own contribution to the maintenance of those free institutions which we are now summoned to defend.

Mr. Mackenzie King believes in the democratic form of government. He is a constitutionalist, whose faith is fixed in the supremacy of parliamentary institutions, but he has revealed himself to be more than a politician. Throughout all previous discussions as to what Canada might or might not do in the event of Great Britain's implication in war, his consistent policy has been that parliament should decide. But he was not only the leader of the government party, he was first Canadian Minister of the Crown. Parliament and people had a right to know where he stood. The decision they were called to make was for or against him and his cabinet. And we have had no reason to complain of any equivocation on his part. In the fateful days when, presumably, Herr Hitler was setting his course of action, the Prime Minister sent him a double message that rightly interpreted the mind of Canada. Mr. King appealed to the Nazi leader to preserve the peace, but he also let Herr Hitler know that if he was determined on war, Canada was on Britain's

side. When the government met parliament, the Prime Minister came with a clearly defined policy, which he stated in a noble utterance that expressed the mind of the country as a whole. When he invited parliament to ratify his decision or find another leader, he spoke as a true democrat, and in the response that parliament gave he was confirmed in the sense that he also had spoken as a true Canadian. Thus he carried our country into the struggle with a dignity and self-respect that have advanced us mightily in the evolution of our nationhood. Our subsequent self-management must be worthy of our entrance.

In the meantime, it would appear that our principal contribution is to be economic in character. There is to be no conscription, at least as yet, hardly even an urgent summons for recruits. Our population is not large. While a military contribution to the fighting forces of the allied powers would not be negligible, alike for the preservation of national unity and for wisest utilisation of our resources, we must concentrate on the supply of food and war materials. This help will be of vital importance. Our eastern ports are within a week's journey from the coasts of Great Britain, and over a short open-sea route that can be made comparatively secure from attack. Our resources in minerals, lumber and other raw materials will be an access of vast importance alike to the mother country and to France. The prairies are rejoicing in a harvest such as they have not seen for many years. Fruit, fish, livestock are all to be found here for feeding military and civilian populations. Our manufacturing activities will probably undergo a rapid development. We are the closest of all the Dominions to the European hostilities, but our vast continental area is also safe from aerial or other forms of enemy attack. Airplanes can be produced and flown across the Atlantic in large numbers. The making of other essential war products can also be undertaken on a large scale.

We may therefore expect a sudden boom in Canadian economic life. There will be grave temptations to exploit the opportunity for personal gain. It will require both resolution and ingenuity to detect and restrain the war-profiteer. "Conscription of wealth" is suggested. The phrase is easily uttered, but not so easily applied in practical life. Presumably all wealth, to the extent that it takes the form of an income to be enjoyed, may be conscribed at least in theory. Our annual income-tax returns attest that truth. But, when we speak of anything beyond that form of conscription, we mean not con-

scription but annexation. There will be no necessity to urge new taxes. Immense budgets will require new sources of national income. Beyond that, the demand that is expressed in the vague phrase "conscription of wealth" should result in a vigorous and relentless control of prices and profits, and a determined effort to ensure that nobody in Canada is going to amass money out of the war. Such an effort will require great vigilance and steadfast courage. The Prime Minister has spoken strong words about the underworld of war-profiteering, but money-making interests are powerful. We have had a long period of economic depression, and the distinction between the legitimate recovery that ought to accompany increased economic activity and the swollen rewards that will accompany speculative adventure will be hard to draw.

The duration of the war is beyond our power to compute. The factors that will determine its course are imponderable. We may hope for a swift decision, but we must prepare for a long and difficult struggle. At present, there is no suggestion of dispatching an expeditionary force to the continent of Europe. We have other more immediate and more useful help to give to the allied cause. The only military contributions that are expected in the meantime are a protection of our own shores and the training of airmen. Evidently, our Canadian youth display an unusual aptitude for aerial combat, and make splendid pilots. Probably the great wide spaces of the Canadian geographical scene enter subtly into the national psychology, and give that capacity for swift and courageous manoeuvring at great altitudes from which the airman gets his special skill. Later on, if the need becomes more acute, we cannot expect to remain aloof from the land operations of the war. We are in this war not because of any sentimental attachment to an Empire, but, because Britain's battle is our battle. As Mr. King has said, if Hitlerism wins, Canada's national existence is as much menaced as that of Poland. If we interpret the spirit of Canada aright, our Dominion will not want to stand aside from the actual military engagements through which, in the last resort, the enemy must be defeated and reduced to submission. The knowledge that Canadian young men are offering a final pledge of loyalty on the battlefield ought to be the most potent source of that moral resolution whereby war-profiteering will be kept in check.

UNITED STATES NEUTRALITY in the war was an expected decision. No other attitude was possible. Historically, geographically and politically, the people of the United States of America are outside Europe, and while they have a very direct interest in the preservation of democracy in the world, primarily the present struggle is a war against the attempted domination of continental Europe by a tyrannical régime. From their public expressions, we know that Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Hull are both sympathetic with the democratic cause. There is little love for the Nazis among the people generally, and if, for the present, they are mere spectators, their support is overwhelmingly for the allied side in the contest. Many would be prepared to take an immediate share in the fight, but probably at least as many would advocate abstention from what they conceive to be a purely European quarrel. Nevertheless, the preservation of a neutral mind as well as a formally neutral attitude will not be easy, and it will not become easier with the passage of time.

The present attitude of the United States is a logical development of their international policy since the close of the 1914-1918 war. Their eventual participation in that struggle was followed by a wide-spread reaction in public opinion. "Never again!" became a popular slogan. They deserted their President in his proposal for a League of Nations, and the subsequent history of the League could be cited almost too easily in support of their attitude. However much we may dream over how different the world to-day might be if they had thrown themselves heartily into the work of international reconstruction, like all other exercises in historical hypothesis, it serves no useful purpose for the present distress. The question of war-debts remains a source of irritation, and can always be produced by any political agitator who wants to stir up public feeling. The isolationists are determined in their opposition to any participation in what are described as foreign wars and, obviously, the first duty of the President is to preserve the unity of his own people.

Our more immediate interest is in the question as to whether the United States will maintain an economic as well as a political neutrality. Only a few months ago, the President encountered the kind of opposition to his policy which, in most other forms of democratic government, would have resulted in his resignation. He was foiled in his attempt to leave the way open for his country to throw in its economic weight behind any belligerent power, not without profit to itself. Mr. Roosevelt was quoted as retorting

that this decision of Congress in the matter of neutrality legislation actually defeated its own purpose by encouraging the Nazi aggressors in their belligerent advances. Nobody expected that the United States would provide munitions and war-materials for the German people, and, according to the present legal position, no other powers can get them. Such are the difficulties in the way of maintaining any real neutrality in the modern world.

The case of the isolationists will be strongly stated and forcefully prosecuted. Senator Borah and his friends are not only men and women of strong conviction: they are experienced political strategists. They will be supported by a powerful and easily-roused public opinion. There is much to be said in support of their contention. It requires considerable ingenuity to distinguish between the supply of warlike munitions and the actual engagement in hostilities. Nowadays, such discrimination has worn thin to the vanishing point. Trading with belligerent nations in the provision of essential materials is almost certain to lead to those entangling alliances and projected situations that result eventually in actual military participation. Cargoes will be sunk, probably lives will be lost and public opposition aroused. The clamour to keep as far apart from the struggle as possible will certainly meet with considerable public support.

On the other hand, a policy of complete economic isolation is almost impossible to maintain. The volume of international trade between the United States and Great Britain is so considerable that it cannot be suddenly dried up without disastrous results. There are dislocations enough in the present-day world, without creating others. Moreover, Canada is now at war, and has become a belligerent nation. Already we are on the proscribed list of nations to which warlike exports cannot be despatched. Canada and the United States cannot disentangle their economic life. But, where and how can you draw the line between war materials and normal exports? In a time of war, all trade, however innocent in name and character, is related to the waging of hostilities. Thus, a continuance of the present United States policy will lead to intolerable situations, to evasions and bootlegging adventures, in which our friends across the line have considerable experience. In any case, the great interests of the country that stand to gain by the provision of essential military equipment are likely to prove too strong for the high-minded advocates of economic neutrality.

The President is already moving in the direction of seeking to persuade Congress that its former decision should be reversed.*

*Written in middle of September.—EDITOR.

A special session has been called, when Mr. Roosevelt will state his case. He will require considerable agility of mind and statement to maintain the attitude of neutrality to which he has pledged his people and at the same time to induce them to break through the economic neutrality by which they have bound their trading activities. He will be equal to the task, and we have every interest in seeing it accomplished.

Meantime, the Canadian people have a peculiar responsibility in their relations with their North American neighbours. It is fatally easy to indulge in contemptuous jibes at their abstention from combat. We will provoke a like resentment if we endeavour to bombard them with incessant propagandist speeches. We may be persuaded that as Canadians we are waging a battle that is as much theirs as ours, but they have a right to determine their course, and we ought to respect it. Their hearty entrance into the quarrel on the allied side would have an immense effect, but they have their own good and proper reasons for not making that decision. Let us keep open the avenues of goodwill and understanding. These highways already exist, but they can become blocked through foolish mishandling. We may yet require the assistance of the United States as much as we did in the last struggle. The best method of ensuring that result will be to treat their neutrality as an honourable and defensible attitude.

THE FUTURE OF CIVILISATION is the real issue of the war. It was commonly suggested before the hostilities broke out that civilisation could not survive another modern conflict. The more cynically minded add that the unleashing of the dogs of war is itself a token that there is little if any civilisation to defend, and that we lash ourselves into furies of moral fervour about a fictitious entity that has no substantial existence. Again, the high souled contend that civilisation belongs to the spirit, and can rise in deathless continuity from the ruins of its temporary shapes. All of these attitudes are true, even if apparently contradictory, and therefore all of them, maintained in independent isolation, are extremely dangerous.

It is very clear that the war has brought all thoughtful people face to face with a grave, and possibly fatal, failure in the long and essential task of humanity, which we may call civilisation. Almost literally the term means the art of living together, implying a refinement and discipline of instinct and emotion, an acceptance of the rule of law, and a final obedience to conscience

whether accepted as a recognition of the essential "decency of things" or as the imposition of a Supreme Will, purposively active in the universe. Only a quarter of a century ago we went through an experience similar to that which we are now summoned to encounter, and when the smoke of the battlefield had rolled away, prophetic and discerning minds realised that we had been served with what the late Mr. C. E. Montague called "a fair warning." Time was given for repentance and amendment. But the record of the last twenty years is the best commentary on the feeble response we have made to the new human adventure in international life that summoned us. The fact is that, for good reason or bad, we have failed.

Our immediate duty is very clear. The time has gone when, in calm and hopeful mood, we could talk in idealistic terms about the building of a comity of nations. All that has become, for the moment, an unsubstantial dream—either a vision that has perished or a task to be resumed when, in the mercy of God, the sun shines again. To-day, we are like surgeons at work on an emergency operation. We do not write papers or sit in discussion on the conditions of health. We are battling with a deadly poison, in which we must proceed ruthlessly and swiftly to drive out a sinister invader of the body and save whatever of life may survive the drastic treatment. We shall be fortunate if the patient does not die on our hands.

There is a dreadful intensity about the making of war. The instinct of self-preservation, directed by emotions of fear and pugnacity, narrows the energies of social and political life into a single purpose. Political leaders are driven on by exacting duties, that leave no room for the reflective thought and constructive study out of which statesmanlike plans take form. The best asset of a nation, which is its youth, is either butchered on the battlefield or taken from the normal tasks of life during the formative years of character and experience that can never be replaced. Homes are darkened by sorrow and hearts are broken. Heroic virtues are evoked, it is true, and we still live in the afterglow that is left behind through the noble sacrifice of many a brave young life; but, over against these attitudes, there are others more sinister and enervating. War seems to be nothing but prodigal, senseless waste, only barely justifiable lest a worse thing should befall us.

There are enough of us left who passed through the last war, and who have lived through the years that have elapsed since its close, to provoke a certain scepticism about the certainty

of any noble result emerging from the conflict. By a beneficent principle, deep in the heart of the Christian faith, loss can be turned to gain, and out of suffering and death itself new life may come. But as in all the movements of the spiritual life, there is nothing automatic in the operation of these sublime principles, that must serve as an anchor of hope for our souls during the months of trial that lie ahead. If, as the cynical aver, the war only tears aside the tinsel of hypocritical morality with which we foolish folks gild our paltry lives, then, let the war go on, and let us have our fill of it. That is Hitlerism, the enemy we fight, and the only thing for the wise man to do is to withdraw from the maddening scene, and with amused contempt to regard it as a spectator might contemplate the normal life of the jungle. Too much of what gives value to life must be thrown away to make such an attitude possible for the sensitive spirit. There are values to be conserved, but war in itself will not save them from destruction. Hence, for all who are sobered by the horrible and detestable events through which we pass, the duty of saving civilization makes positive demands. This is a time for inward and outward self-discipline. We must not surrender too completely to the mood and temper of war. Only by goodwill and the lofty spirit of love will we retrieve, from the scattered ruins and desolations that we must now witness, the stones out of which the temple of civilization is to be rebuilt. There will be much wild talk, and we shall all be subdued by it, but we need not make it the only food on which we feast our souls. Even now, we must be thinking of what the new world, after the war, is to be.

Civilization is a creation of the human spirit. It has a history and a growth that are above the secular movements of the human scene. It is not dependent on material things. Nevertheless, it must find expression in temporal shapes of individual and social existence. War does not touch its essential nature, but it gravely impedes and hurts the manner of its transmission and increase through the channels in which it must operate. For this we mourn the enslavement of free peoples, and fight against the brutality that seeks to obliterate them. Vienna in the hands of the Nazis, the Jews driven homeless across the face of the earth, the Czechs engulfed overnight, Poland battered by an immense military machine, Niemöller rotting in a prison—these are the wounds and bruises that Hitlerism inflicts on civilization. Civilization may and can survive such brutality, but, meantime, what sorrow, suffering and degradation cover

the earth! Life is short, and we have no right to stand idly by in philosophic contemplation of the eternal processes, while others pay the price of our lofty imagination. That is why we must fight, even if the weapons we use seem to deny the very principles of civilized life.

Europe may become a very dreadful shambles. Her great cities may lie in ruins before this evil thing has run its course. We, who live as yet in comparative safety, draw too much of our life-blood from those ancient springs across the Atlantic to contemplate the scene with equanimity. Certainly, there must be no disdain in our minds, as we enjoy our better fortune. It is unlikely that we shall hear the drone of the bomber over Toronto or Cincinnati, and no armies will advance across the great plains of the West. Here, while the material fabric of civilization remains undamaged, we have a grave responsibility. Our civilization is still to make. It is not so glorious in its structure that we can survey it with uncritical approval. But ours may well be the task of rebuilding the edifice of human culture in this great north American continent. Salvation may come out of the West. At least, we must maintain the precious heritage of freedom, and keep pure and strong those fountains of culture and faith out of which the stream of civilization draws its life. This is the deeper duty of the war for all of us, who still believe in the future of civilization.

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