

Belgium.

London: Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, 1914

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BELGIUM.



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AT THE POST OF HONOUR.

LIBERTY (to Belgium): "Take comfort. Your courage is vindicated; your wrongs shall be avenged."

"We are fighting to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed in defiance of international good faith by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering Power."

Mr. ASQUITH, House of Commons, August 6th, 1914.

[OVER.]

Belgium's Fight for Freedom.

The following Resolution was passed unanimously by the House of Commons, on August 27th, 1914:—

"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty praying him to convey to His Majesty the King of the Belgians the sympathy and admiration with which this House regards the heroic resistance offered by his army and people to the wanton invasion of his territory, and an assurance of the determination of this Country to support in every way the efforts of Belgium to vindicate her own independence and the public law of Europe."

The following speeches were made in support of the Resolution:—

MR. ASQUITH: "Very few words are needed to commend to the House the Address, the terms of which will shortly be read from the Chair. The War which is now shaking to its foundation the whole European system originated in a quarrel in which this country had no direct concern. We strove with all our might, as everyone now knows, to prevent its outbreak, and when that was no longer possible, to limit its area. It is all important, and I think it is relevant to this Motion, that it should be clearly understood when it was and why it was that we intervened. It was only when we were confronted with the choice between keeping and breaking solemn obligations, between the discharge of a binding trust and of shameless subservience to naked force, that we threw away the scabbard. We do not repent our decision. The issue was one which no great and self-respecting nation, certainly none bred and matured like ourselves, in this ancient home of liberty could, without undying shame, have declined. We were bound by our obligations, plain and paramount, to assert and maintain the threatened independence of a small and neutral State. Belgium had no interests of her own to serve, save and except the one supreme and ever-widening interest of every State, great or little, which is worthy of the name, the preservation of her integrity and of her national life. History tells us that the duty of asserting and maintaining that great principle—which is, after all, the well-spring of civilisation and of progress—has fallen once and again at the most critical moment in the past to States relatively small in area and in population, but great in courage and in resolve—to Athens and Sparta, to the Swiss Cantons, and, not least gloriously three centuries ago, to the Netherlands. Never, Sir, I venture to assert, has the duty been more clearly and bravely acknowledged, and never has it been more strenuously and heroically discharged, than during the last weeks by the Belgian King and the Belgian people. They have faced without flinching and against almost incalculable odds, the horrors of irruption, of devastation, of spoliation, and of outrage. They have stubbornly withstood and successfully arrested the inrush, wave after wave, of a gigantic and overwhelming force. The defence of Liège will always be the theme of one of the most inspiring chapters in the annals of

liberty. The Belgians have won for themselves the immortal glory which belongs to a people who prefer freedom to ease, to security, even to life itself.

"We are proud of their alliance and their friendship. We salute them with respect and with honour. We are with them heart and soul, because by their side and in their company we are defending at the same time two great causes—the independence of small States and the sanctity of international covenants. We assure them—as I ask the House in this Address to do—we assure them to-day, in the name of this United Kingdom and of the whole Empire, that they may count to the end on our whole-hearted and unflinching support."

MR. BONAR LAW: "I am glad to have the opportunity of seconding the Resolution which, in terms so eloquent and moving, has just been proposed by the Prime Minister, and which I know commands the warmest approval, not only of this House, but of this whole Nation and Empire. In a struggle which, as we have just been told, was not sought by them, which neither the wisdom nor the forbearance of their Government could have averted, the Belgian Army have displayed a resistance against overwhelming odds as steadfast as it has been heroic—a resistance which has excited surprise, and has won the admiration of the whole world. Now, when that small Army is able no longer to stem the tide of its advancing enemy, it is still with undaunted courage and unbroken spirit playing a noble and an effective part in the War. Our admiration and our sympathy are not confined to the Belgian Army. They go out in fullest measure to the Belgian people, who have endured, and are now enduring, all the horrors of war. After making every allowance for the sources from which our information comes, we do not doubt that they are enduring them in a form which ought to be impossible amongst civilised nations. Whatever doubt may have been felt among us as to the justice or the necessity of our taking part in this war has, I think, been removed by what has happened and is happening in Belgium. What has happened there confirms the belief in which we entered upon this war, that it is in reality a struggle of the moral influences of civilisation against brute force—a force which is none the less brutal because it has at its disposal all the material resources of invention and of science.

"Belgium has deserved well of the world. She has added another to the long list, of which the Prime Minister has spoken, of great deeds which have been done by the heroic patriotism of small nations; but to us and our Allies she has done more than set an example. She has placed us under an obligation, which as a nation we shall not forget. It is fitting, Mr. Speaker, that we should acknowledge that debt in words; but it is a debt which cannot be paid by words, and, at this moment, in my belief, the best way in which we can attempt to pay that debt is that we should realise, as I think our country has not yet fully realised, that this is, for us as much as for Belgium, a struggle of life and death, and that we must without haste, but without rest, employ to the utmost all our resources to bring it to a successful end."

MR. JOHN REDMOND: "I can assure the House that I am not guilty of the silly presumption of thinking that I can add anything to the force or eloquence of the speeches that have just been made by the two right hon. Gentlemen who have spoken. But I think the House will agree that it may not be altogether inappropriate that, in a definite way, I should be permitted to associate Ireland to the full with this Motion. Sir, in no quarter of the world, I feel convinced, has the heroism of the Belgian people been received with more genuine enthusiasm and admiration than within the shores of Ireland, and there is no compliment which it would be possible for the Irish people to pay to Belgium that they would not willingly pay, and there is no sacrifice I believe which Ireland would not be willing to make to come to her assistance. In this regard I am glad and proud to be able to think that at this moment there are many gallant Irishmen willing to take their share of the risks, and to shed their blood, and to face death in the assistance of the Belgian people in the defence of their liberty and their independence.

"The spectacle of this small nation making these heroic sacrifices in defence of their independence and honour against overwhelming odds, appeals in a very special way to the sentiments and the feelings of Ireland. . . . I have risen for one purpose only—that is, to make it clear, that with all their hearts the people of Ireland are in sympathy with Belgium in this matter, and that they are willing to do what rests with them to assist her in the maintenance of her independence."

**The men of Belgium are fighting
for the cause of LIBERTY—
Our cause as well as theirs.**

**WILL YOU FIGHT FOR BRITAIN AS
THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR BELGIUM?**

**MEN ARE WANTED
—ENLIST NOW.—**