The Immediate Causes of the Great War

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THE IMMEDIATE CAUSES
OF
THE GREAT WAR

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PREFACE

The object of this volume is to narrate briefly the direct causes of the European war as they are given in the published documents of the belligerents. These sources are abundantly adequate for determining the immediate responsibility of each nation and apportioning the guilt for this great crime. It may be thought that, inasmuch as each government in publishing its official correspondence has tried to convict its enemies and clear itself and its allies, the statements made are so biased as not to be accepted as evidence. This, however, is not the case. The documents corroborate each other sufficiently to show that statements of fact given in official despatches by ambassadors to foreign ministers and vice versa can usually be accepted at face value. The numerous cross-references in the published correspondence enable us sometimes to detect false claims based on the omission, misinterpretation, or even the distortion of facts. Some discrepancies, however, are irreducible, and where such occur, the evidence presented by both sides is given.

In Part I, I have not attempted a general dis-
cussion of the indirect causes of the war, but have only tried to restate some well-known facts that constitute the background of the great conflict.\footnote{In preparing these two chapters, I have made use of secondary sources almost exclusively. For fuller reading on Part I, the following works are recommended: *Europe Since 1815*, by Charles Downer Hazen; *The Diplomacy of the War of 1914*, by Ellery C. Stowell; *A Political and Social History of Modern Europe*, by Carlton J. H. Hayes; *The International Year Book for 1912 and 1913*; *The Balkan Wars*, by J. G. Schurman; *European History*, by Holt and Chilton; *The New Map of Europe*, by H. A. Gibbons; *The Diplomacy of the Great War*, by A. Bullard; *The Diplomatic Background of the War*, by Charles Seymour. For a brilliant interpretation of these facts see *The European Anarchy*, by G. Lowes Dickinson.} Of course, to understand thoroughly the causes of the war, we should have to go back and explain commercial rivalries, race hatreds, and historic enmities. But for the correct placing of the responsibility for the conflict, a knowledge of remote causes is not so necessary as an intimate acquaintance with the immediate causes. The present generation is not altogether to blame for national antipathies. Many of them are the heritage of former decades and even centuries. Many of them are based on groundless fears growing out of the condition of anarchy that has always characterized international relations. No country can be judged too harshly if she harbors a feeling of jealousy toward her neighbor because she supposes that the line of her rival’s ambition crosses the path that Providence has marked out for herself. The nation that fans a
smoldering feeling of rivalry into an act of hostility has the greater sin.

Besides, the spirit of jealousy was not more active in 1914 than it had been in former times. Indeed the relations between the rival groups was less tense at that time than it was a few years earlier. France and Germany had settled all of their important differences except the Alsace-Lorraine question and it had grown too old to figure prominently as a cause of a European war. England and Germany had also about come to an agreement as to the Bagdad railroad, one of the most serious causes of dispute between them. They had even been negotiating with reference to a joint limitation of naval armaments. It is true that no agreement had been reached but the fact that negotiations had been carried on shows that an amicable settlement of the quarrel was within the range of possibility. There is also strong evidence in support of the belief that both the British and German foreign ministers were in favor of a German-English rapprochement. Von Jagow, the German foreign minister, declared on August 4, 1914, that he and the chancellor had favored a policy of making "friends with Great Britain, and then through Great Britain, to get closer to France." Even if we should be skeptical as to the sincerity of this statement, we have to admit that the Ger-
man foreign office for about two years (1912-14) kept as its representative in London, Prince Lichnowsky, who was unquestionably in favor of a friendship between the two Governments. His efforts in this direction were cordially received and reciprocated by Sir Edward Grey, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, who, in the opinion of Lichnowsky, was anxious to have the differences between his country and Germany settled just as had been done in the case of Anglo-French and Anglo-Russian disputes. That the Balkan question had as yet found no satisfactory solution has to be admitted, but the powers that had sustained the greatest grievances in connection with it had accepted, though protestingly, the settlement of the treaties of London and Bukarest (1913).

There was then no question facing Europe in 1914 that a desire for peace and wise diplomacy could not solve. It seems evident, therefore, that the direct causes of the war are more important than the indirect for apportioning the guilt of this great crime. The principal immediate cause of this war was Teutonic aggression in the Balkans. This aggression began as early as 1878, became dangerous in 1908, and criminal in 1914.2

All of Parts II and III, except Chapter XIII

2 S., 1007; Lichnowsky Memorandum, Intcr. Conciliation, No. 127, pp. 33, 130.
and a few other pages, has been written entirely from the documents given out by the various belligerents. The principal collections of official papers used are the following: The translations made by the New York Times and other documents published by the American Association for International Conciliation; Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the European War, edited by James Brown Scott and published under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Collected Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the European War and Miscellaneous Correspondence, printed under the authority of His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1915; the Austro-Hungarian Red Book, official English translation; Diplomatic Correspondence with Belligerent Governments Relating to Neutral Rights published by our State Department; and supplements to volumes 9 and 10 of the American Journal of International Law.

In presenting this digest of the source material on the causes of the war, my aim is not to argue the case, but only to give and systematize the evidence—not all the evidence on all the points, but only adequate evidence on the main points. In this second edition I have been able in some cases to make positive statements where in the original work I could only express
opinions. This has been made possible by the recent publication of some documents that were not known when the first edition came out last year.

I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professors Charles Downer Hazen and Carlton J. H. Hayes of Columbia University, and Frank Maloy Anderson, of Dartmouth College, for the very valuable suggestions and criticisms that they have kindly offered. My thanks are also due to my colleagues, Professor David Dale Johnson, of the English department, and Dean James M. Callahan, head of the department of history, who have read portions of my manuscript and have made helpful suggestions and criticisms.

Inasmuch as so many books have already been written on the causes of the war, I feel that I should offer an explanation, if not an apology, for adding to the list even a small volume. My only excuse for so doing is the hope that a brief work will prove useful to college students and others who do not have time to read the fuller accounts. My own experience as a teacher of current European history has caused me to feel the need of such a work.