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## The Reconstruction of Belgium After the War

BY DR. CHARLES SAROLEA, K.O.L.\*

DR. CHARLES SAROLEA, representative of the King and Government of Belgium, was tendered an ovation on entering the hall at the regular meeting of the Club, on the 15th March, and again on rising to address the Club was greeted with long applause. He said:

*Mr. President and Gentlemen*,—I shall have the great honor to-morrow night to address a meeting of your fellow citizens on "The Martyrdom of Belgium." This afternoon I shall, therefore, divert your attention from the tragic happenings in my native country to anticipations of the future.

Before I enter on the subject of the reconstruction of Belgium, it is well, however, that I should impress upon you the fact that it is future—this reconstruction of Belgium is not yet! On every occasion I impress upon audiences who have not got in touch, have not got familiar, with Belgian facts—I impress this other fact, that the worst is still to come for Belgium. For us, for Great Britain, even for France, the worst is over. I don't think that we shall ever have to pass again through the anxiety, the agony, which we went through in the second half of August and in September. For us the worst is over; the future is certain! (Applause.) For Belgium there is still a very tragic future in store. Every blow aimed at Germany for the next few months will be at the same time a blow aimed at Belgium. Every victory of ours will have to be paid for by additional suffering on the part of the Belgian people. That is absolutely inevitable! We know it in Belgium, and we are prepared for it!

What is going to happen when our victorious armies drive the German hordes out of Belgium? Those hordes will be driven back into Belgium again, and until the end Belgium

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will remain the main theatre of war. The Germans may be eventually expelled from Belgium, but it will be a very hard military job; and the object can only be attained at a cost of the complete destruction of whatever remains of Belgium!

The Germans for the last six months have entrenched themselves, have fortified themselves, in almost impregnable positions. Even such beautiful and peaceful cities as Brussels have become fortified cities. The Germans will have to be bombarded out of every city of Belgium which has not been destroyed yet, and in the process of bombardment the German vandals, as well as our own artillery, will complete the work of destruction. That is the tragedy in front of Belgium for the next few months; and there may be more to follow!

You know that the German Huns have revived in this war one of the most atrocious practices of savage warfare: they have used, systematically and consistently—I have seen it myself!—they have used women and children as living shields, living screens, to protect them from Belgian and French and British artillery! I have seen Germans, having to cross a bridge, put a troop of sixty men and women, civilians, in front of them, and thus advance! That has been their systematic practice. Now it just would seem as if it were the thought of the German hordes to use the whole of Belgium, the whole Belgian people, as a living screen, a living shield, by which they will cover their retreat.

And perhaps do they expect that even the Allies should hesitate, if this war were to be protracted for a very long time,—that the Allies would hesitate to give up the whole of Belgium to complete destruction. So then we should well impress upon our minds this fundamental fact, that the tragedy of Belgium is not over, the worst is still to come. It is all the more necessary for us, therefore, speaking for the Belgians, to divert our thoughts from the haunting vision of sufferings to-day and the sufferings to-morrow to the anticipations of the future.

As for the remote future, I don't think there is one Belgian who has any doubt. (Applause.) We know—(applause)—we know that a new Belgium, a greater Belgium, a nobler Belgium, will arise from the ruins. (Hear, hear, and applause.) And speaking to citizens in a great country which is essentially a country of hope, that always looks forward to the future, I can assure you that to-day there is that sentiment, that instinct, in common between Canada and Belgium: they are both, Belgians and Canadians, thinking mainly in terms of the future. (Hear, hear.)

And therefore I do not think it is premature or irrelevant for me to-day to discuss with you the future of Belgium—the reconstruction of Belgium. Of course it is a formidable problem, and it is really impossible in one half hour even to touch the fringe of it. Of course there is the problem of material reconstruction: the whole of Belgium will have to be rebuilt. Belgium also in that respect is like Canada, for the West is a new country,—but with this difference, it is far more difficult to build in a new country which is also an old country than to build on the prairie. Thousands of villages razed to the ground have to be rebuilt; our cities have to be rebuilt; our farms have to be restocked. But what is far more important, what is even more difficult, is the reconstruction of our trade and industry, to which I shall come presently.

To come back to the problem of material reconstruction, of course, as you know, irreparable damage has been done to our ancient cities. The monuments sacred to art and religion, memorials of an ancient and glorious civilization, as at Ypres, you cannot rebuild,—one of the sublime monuments of architecture of the Middle Ages. Irreparable loss has been done: we shall not attempt to minimize it.

With regard to the material rebuilding of our cities on modern plans, that will only involve a huge amount of capital; and that will only involve this difficulty, that for some years to come it may be very difficult to find the necessary capital. So much destruction will have been accomplished all over Europe that every nation will require all the available capital. And capital will go much more abundantly to the remunerative fields of new countries than to old countries.

With regard to the rebuilding of our trades and industries,—that will present problems much more difficult to solve than the problems of material reconstruction. Remember that before the war Belgium was the most thickly populated country of the world! Little Belgium had a population superior to the whole population of the Dominion of Canada, over eight millions, and that population might only be supported because the Belgian people had built up a very complex and artificial fabric of trade and industry. Many of those trades were trades of luxury—the lace industry of Malines, the fashions of Brussels, the tourist industry, the crystal and glass industry of Liège, the horticulture and market gardening of early vegetables,—all luxuries. These industries, artificial in their nature, and being luxuries, will not be rebuilt so easily or so immediately after the war.

Of course we are constantly told that the huge indemnity that we are given to expect from Germany will solve this difficulty. I am rather skeptical about this German indemnity; at any rate this indemnity will not solve the problem within the future immediately following the war. At present there are perhaps a million Belgian refugees in acute distress. These people cannot remain in Holland, France, Great Britain, living on the charity of the world. Until the German indemnity is paid, that cannot be affected by any compensation from the German indemnity.

Let us take—we have several distinguished representatives of the press here,—they will understand the position,—let us take the Belgian newspaper press: Belgium, like this country, had a very numerous, and on the whole a very enterprising and prosperous press. These Belgian newspapers of course to-day as enterprises are ruined. How are these going to be re-established? Is a newspaper press going to be subsidized by Germany? Can you have a subsidized press grow out of the German indemnity? I confess I am afraid of a newspaper press that receives support in the form of a subsidy.

But the complex artificial fabric of trade and industry cannot be rebuilt by the German indemnity. We must rebuild it by private enterprise, by private capital. We must not expect magic results that this German indemnity is going to give.

But there is a much more serious consideration we need to be reminded of: it is this, that after the war, as before, Belgium to some extent will be dependent on Germany economically. As you know, geographically Germany is the hinterland of Belgium. Before the war Antwerp was a German port. All our Belgian seaside places, Nieuport, Ostend, etc., are German resorts.

If Germany had only waited, Belgium would almost inevitably have become a part of the German Staats-Verein. Belgium was more and more coming within the economic dependency of Germany. Of course, after the war, this we confidently hope, we shall shake off that Teutonic dependency. (Hear, hear, and applause.) Of course, let us not be overconfident; let us not minimize the difficulties in the way.

In the first place, Belgium is and always will be to some extent interconnected economically with Germany and Austria. I would even go farther: the prosperity of Belgium is even bound up to some extent with the prosperity of Central Europe,—to some extent, not wholly. There can be no doubt that if Belgium had only listened to the dictates of commer-

cial interest, Belgium would have allowed the German armies to pass through its territory, and become a part of the German Empire. To put the matter on the low level of commercial interest—you will excuse me if I use that expression, the low level of economic and commercial interest, because when I am addressing audiences of business and professional men they are generally not ready to admit that commerce stands any lower than other interests,—but to put the matter on this plane, there can be no shadow of doubt that it would have been to the commercial interest of Belgium to have been incorporated in the German Empire. Belgium, if she had come to terms with Germany, would have remained a self-governing country under the suzerainty of Germany, and Belgium would have shared in the economic expansion of the German Empire. It is almost certain, because Belgium would have been the richest part of that ideal German confederation, that Belgium would probably have been the most prosperous, the most flourishing vassal State of the magnificent Pan-Germany. But of course Belgium, as you know, has not for one moment listened to the dictates of commercial interests. (Applause.) But the fact remains that these commercial interests are there all the same. The geographical factor remains; you cannot eliminate it; we must take it into account in all our future calculations. And it will not be an easy matter.

We shall do our utmost, you may be sure, to eliminate Germany in the future from our trade. This is Great Britain's great opportunity, a unique opportunity in your history. In one moment Great Britain, the British Empire, can establish itself firmly, both economically and politically, upon the continent of Europe, having Belgium as its centre. (Applause.)

At present, of course, the Belgian people feel that the whole future is bound up with the future of Great Britain. (Hear, hear.) There is nothing which a Belgian patriot desires more earnestly than that in the future there should be brought about the most intimate and closest possible connection, politically and economically, between Belgium and Great Britain. (Applause.) And remember, that the opportunity, while it is with us to-day, may not be with us ten years hence, if we don't take advantage of it. We talk very glibly to-day of the capture of German trade. We assume that it will be the easiest thing in the world for the British Empire, for Great Britain, to establish itself economically in Belgium. It will not be an easy task; it will be a very difficult task, because of these economic and geographical factors; and another thing—Germany after the war will be as dangerous as, if not more

dangerous than, to-day. The paradox of the war, it seems to me, to-day, is this tragic paradox, that we are fighting not only to make Europe free, we are fighting not only to make America free—although America does not understand it (applause)—my American friends have repeatedly told me, "What is Hecuba to me?"—we are fighting also, and this is the tragic paradox of this war, to liberate the German people! (Hear, hear.) Millions of Canadian, Prussian, Russian, French, British soldiers are dying on the battle fields of the world, of Europe, in order to make the German people free!

And what is going to be the result? Supposing,—I am only assuming—it might be distant, but it is certainly likely, that the German people are free; will they be less efficient economically or more? I would assume that a free people is more efficient economically than a people which is enslaved. But another factor is this: the German people will retain, even after the war, all the magnificent qualities of efficiency and organization. They will be impoverished, but they will be ambitious. And you know there is no more dangerous competitor in trade than a very ambitious rival, who wants to work up his way. And therefore I seem to feel that this task of capturing German trade will not be quite as easy a task as some of our British friends imagine.

I have tried to be a prophet in previous years. I have been maligned as a prophet of evil; I don't want to be a prophet of evil again. But I am just afraid that if we do not apply to this task the same qualities of organization, efficiency, and education, which have made Germany so formidable, we shall not succeed. And then, if we don't succeed, we Belgians shall again be the victims, again fall under the heel of Germany, again—who knows? twenty or thirty years hence, then in a most subtle way again be in the grip of a people whom we shall respect in future, but whom we can never love, because the German and the Belgian temperaments can never get on together.

In the face of the problem, is Great Britain going to realize her opportunity? Is Canada going to join in this work of reconstruction? I know Canada will not be able to do much. Canada is doing the best she can for us; she is doing the greatest service, and the best she can render. The best Canada can do for us now is to fight for us. (Hear, hear, and applause.) And that is what Canadian people have done and are doing heroically. In the future we do not and cannot expect Canadian capital can be applied to the reconstruction of Belgium. All available capital will be needed by Canada. But Canada

can help us a very great deal. What we shall need in the future is that spirit of hope, of enterprise, of initiative, which distinguishes the Canadian people. Let the Canadian people, the Canadian managers and captains of industry, come to us and help us to rebuild our industries. Let Belgians come to Canada, to imbibe here that spirit of initiative and enterprise.

I am afraid after the war we shall have too much of the spirit of paternalism, shall expect too much from the German Government, and there will be great danger that the spirit of independence and initiative may be undermined. In Belgium we are all trying to do our best to anticipate future developments; yet we shall have the danger of paternalism and protectionism, and if we are to overcome this it will be by the spirit of independence and initiative which is the great characteristic of the Canadian people.

I may tell you,—and I am not committing any indiscretion,—we are going to establish in the Capital of Belgium, a great educational institution, I hope, a British-American University, a great international school of politics and economics, and we hope in that great school we shall have a Canadian section. (Applause.) You will excuse me for saying I do believe in education, and this war should convince us of the supreme force of education; this war is largely on the German side a professors' war. Germany has educated her people for forty or fifty years and prepared them for this war—an end of course diabolical, but let us pay due homage to the fact that the means have been adapted, to a mischievous end, it is true; and I must confess, in the face of the military questions of theory, organization and machinery, I have a higher idea of German education to-day than I had seven months ago. We all, I hope, shall realize the potentiality of education. Only we shall use this tremendous educational force to a noble end. (Hear, hear.) And I think where the German publicists, teachers and preachers can do no better task is in allying themselves with the Government, and getting the captains of industry to do their part; while we on our side can do no better than to make our resurrected little country a great centre of British influence, to make Great Britain as powerful in moral and political affairs as she will be in economic affairs. Because I am convinced this war has proved to the satisfaction even of the most skeptical that after all it is Great Britain and the British Empire that stands for the political and moral ideals of the future!"

Here Dr. Sarolea sat down, and his speech was followed by long and enthusiastic applause, while some one called for

"Three cheers for Belgium," which were heartily given. Then he requested permission to add a few words, as follows:

"As I have the great privilege of addressing a meeting composed largely of business men, I would only like to say a word, to make one practical intimation. Business men and professional men are practical men, and they will understand me. I have just told you we are going to have in our international British-American University or school a Canadian section, because I am certain that in the future there will be a very close connection between Canada and Belgium. (Hear, hear.) And we hope to have in our institution a Canadian scholarship. We shall want to send every year one or two of our ablest scholars to Canada to study Canadian resources, Canadian life, Canadian opportunities, and to be missionaries for Canada in Belgium. (Hear, hear.) I think the best missionaries for Canada on the continent in the future will be Belgian scholars who will have made on the spot a study of the infinite opportunities and resources of your great Dominion. So I merely intimate that fact, and in case any in the audience may fortunately be interested in the scheme, and inclined to assist in this patriotic enterprise, we should feel very grateful for any support which we might get from Toronto." (Applause.)