

KING ALBERT'S POLICY.

BY THE EDITOR.

IT is strange that although Belgium's policy is well known in Europe and the questionable character of Belgium's neutrality is recognized by Sir Edward Grey himself, yet in this country Belgium is persistently made the main reason for keeping up a propaganda against Germany and condemning her as the most faithless and barbarous of nations. Almost all my critics fall back on Belgium and treat the discoveries in the Brussels archives either as inventions or as of no significance. Nor have our daily papers been sufficiently unprejudiced to publish the facts which speak loudly against British policy.

One of the most important documents discovered by the Germans in the Brussels archives is a letter written by Baron Greindl, Belgian ambassador at the court of Berlin, who claims that in planning to enter into a close alliance with the Triple Entente and open its country to a British army for the purpose of proceeding against Germany, the Belgian government has violated the laws of neutrality and has thereby exposed herself to the danger of surrendering her fortresses to her foreign friends whom he deems not less dangerous than the Germans. The letter reads in part as follows:

"From the French side danger not only threatens us in the south, by way of Luxemburg, but also along our whole common frontier. This assertion is not based on conjectures alone; we have positive support for it. An encircling movement from the north forms without doubt part of the scheme of the *entente cordiale*. If that were not the case, the plan to fortify Flushing would not have raised such a hue and cry in Paris and London. There the reasons have by no means been kept secret, why it was desired that the Schelde should remain without defense. What they wished was to be able to transport English troops to Antwerp without hindrance, i. e., to create with us a basis of operation for an offensive movement against the Lower Rhine and Westphalia, and then

to compel us to fall in line, a thing which would not have been difficult, for in handing over our national stronghold we should have deprived ourselves, by our own foolhardiness, of every possibility of resisting the demands of our questionable protectors, once we had been so unwise as to let them in. The overtures, as perfidious as naive, of Colonel Bernardiston at the time of the conclusion of the *entente cordiale* have shown us plainly how the matter really stood. When, eventually, we allowed ourselves to be intimidated by the pretended danger of a closing of the Schelde, the plan indeed was not given up, but so altered that the English auxiliary army was not to be landed on the Belgian coast but at the nearest French ports. For this we have as witness the disclosures of Captain Faber which have been contradicted just as little as the reports in the newspapers, by which they were confirmed or supplemented in individual points."

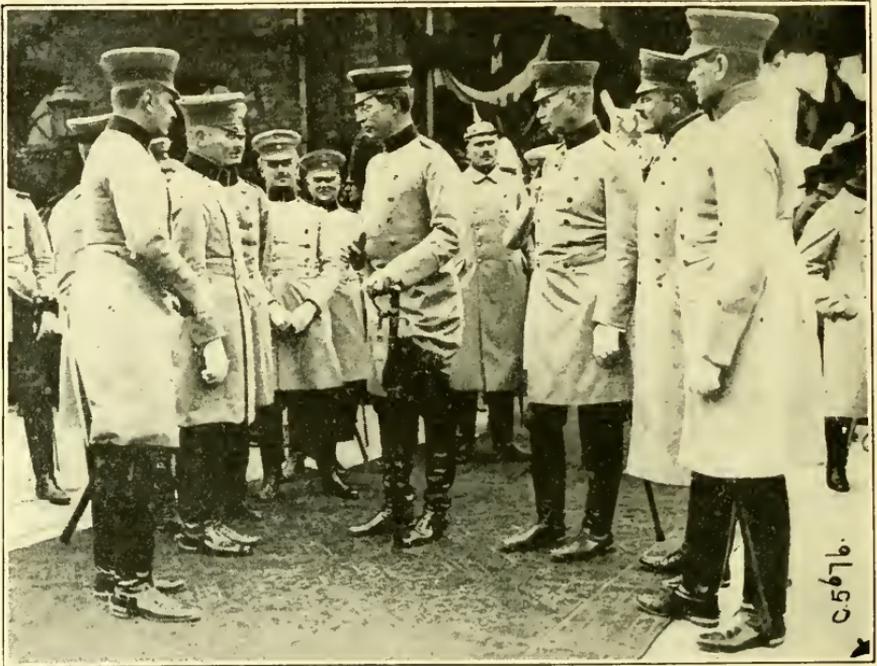
We will not here condemn Belgium for breaking her neutrality, for to remain absolutely neutral under such circumstances is very difficult and actually prevents the self-assertion of a small nation. Belgium had been intended as a buffer state. It was established for the purpose of separating the frontiers between France and Germany and its establishment was mainly in the interest of England whose policy is well described in the recent article of Field Marshall Earl Roberts in the *Hibbert Journal* of October, 1914.¹

England naturally has an interest in the coast of the continent facing her own shore and has always been anxious that it be retained in the hands of a weak nation. An invasion of Belgium is felt by English statesmen as an invasion of English territory, and we must understand that this feeling is a sort of Monroe Doctrine to Great Britain. This explains why the English could go to war in defense of Belgium.

Upon the whole England has always favored the smaller countries on the continent and has always been the enemy of whatever power took the lead in continental politics. Originally the neutrality of Belgium was aimed against France, but since the establishment of the German empire the tables turned and it was intended to be used against Germany. But just here lies the equivocal nature of England's attitude. She wished to use Belgian neutrality against either France or Germany, but did not intend to respect it herself; this two-faced policy is positively proved by the documents found in Brussels and is plainly indicated in Baron Greindl's letter.

¹ Quoted in the December number of *The Open Court*, pp. 761-762.

King Albert is apparently an ambitious monarch. King Leopold, his uncle, had a keen mind and enriched himself as well as enlarged Belgium by the acquisition of African territory. Experts in international law have considered that this step threw doubt on the old neutral character of Belgium or even entirely disposed of it, and this view was shared by no less an authority than Gladstone. King Leopold's policy induced Gladstone to establish a new treaty during the war of 1870-1871, which was to last for one year after the close of the war. A correspondent of mine who prefers that his name be omitted, writes to me as follows:



KING ALBERT AND HIS STAFF.

“It has often occurred to me that very little explanation has yet been offered as to the real reason for Belgium's siding with the allies. They must have had more motives than just plain neutrality. Is there anything in the fact that the throne of Belgium personally owns such large tracts in Africa that, had the throne been neutral in spirit, they would have been endangered by the English and French? Might it not be a purely selfish motive which induced the king of Belgium to join with the Allies, believing that he would thereby avoid losing his estate, which I understand is the largest in the world?”



THE QUEEN OF BELGIUM AND HER CHILDREN.

Of whatever value, or lack of value, the old treaty concerning Belgium's neutrality may be, King Albert has certainly not respected it. He has been on very friendly terms with England, and this in itself is certainly commendable; but he has also shared the view of the British government which regards Germany as the main foe of English supremacy on the seas and is expressed in the formula, *Germania est delenda*. He did not doubt that Germany could easily be crushed between France and Russia. He seemed fully confident that Belgian forts could resist invaders for an indefinite length of time and could not be taken except at an enormous loss of life, and so he saw no danger in joining the Allies. He even ventured so far as to extend his own influence over the other small powers by proposing to establish an alliance among them of which he was to be the leading spirit. This in itself was also a breach of neutrality. Like the English he regarded the neutrality of Belgium as a protective measure against Germany; he saw in it a privilege, not a duty.

The alliance between the small states, however, fizzled out because Holland, which was the very first one approached, became suspicious of its purport and hesitated to join. And since Holland was more important to Belgium than Denmark, Sweden or Norway, and since the latter were influenced by Holland's misgivings, the whole scheme was abandoned.

We do not know what part Albert will play in the future, but it is certain that he is a unique character not to be underrated. His wife, too, is a distinguished woman. She is the daughter of that Bavarian prince, Rupert, who studied medicine and practised among the poor just like any other physician except that he would not take fees. He lived like a civilian, and, among his children, the present Queen of Belgium was brought up like a professor's daughter.

We will repeat in extenuation of King Albert's mistakes that it is by no means an easy matter to play a truly neutral part; and while his ambitious plans for an alliance of the smaller states failed, he has cut a dashing figure in recent history, and has shown sufficient energy to overcome even the traditional antipathy against royalty in democratic Belgium. He has never been so popular as now in times of war, and his popularity has spread into France so that in the present dissatisfaction with the republican government isolated voices have been heard which would welcome him to the throne of France.