



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE STORY OF  
THE GREAT WAR

Roland G. Usher

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# THE STORY OF THE GREAT WAR

*by*

Roland G. Usher





Westward Ho — 1620  
Eastward Ho — 1917

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## PREFACE

**T**he justification for this book must be found in a remark once made to me by an Oxford professor. I had made a seminar report and had “demonstrated” that nothing adequate could possibly be known about the subject until elaborate research had been prosecuted. “Yes, yes,” said the professor. “Very good, but what are we going to think in the meantime? Just tell us something brief and probable.” That is exactly what I have tried to do in this book.

It would be idle to pretend that an adequate history of the war can be written so soon after the event or within such brief compass as this volume. But it is equally idle to suppose that we who have lived and fought the war can afford to wait before we think something about it until the historians can complete any portion of the monographs upon which any truly scientific notion of the war must rest. Surely, it is scant comfort to us to know that our grandchildren may understand the war. We need to know something about it now, for our opinion of its origin and course will be significant elements in every relevant decision we reach on statecraft and reconstruction. Nor am I at all prepared to admit that the generation who fought the war is entirely in error as to why and for what it was fought. Over the details of battles and diplomacy future students may wrangle to their hearts’ content, but the spiritual truth about the reasons for the conflict, and the spiritual forces which won it, I feel sure we correctly apprehend now. One of the most essential facts to make clear, I feel, is this

very spiritual purpose with which we fought the war. Any future impartiality — so called — or present (assumed) idealism which leaves out of the story such spiritual elements will falsify it, however numerous the details they correct.

It was tragic that the men and women who fought the war were too busy to study it. The greatest peril of the new era is that they will still be too busy with reconstruction to devote even casual attention to the great event itself, in the light of which alone can the decisions be made by which the new era is to be shaped. People are weary of working and weary of reading. Yet there was never a time when effort was more necessary nor when a little would have such significant results upon national and international events.

I hope that this volume may serve the purpose for some at least of those who have neither the time nor the inclination to read more detailed accounts, and who are not among those hypercritical gentry who will reject all present attempts as unscientific and necessarily unsuccessful. I have tried to make text, maps, and illustrations tell their lesson at a glance, to make that glance reveal something important and interpretative, to pack into these few pages the gist of the view about the war which has cost me much time and effort and which would be the core of any account I might write, however lengthy and technical. To say so much so briefly meant inevitably the possibility that some portion might not be clear and that other parts might be misunderstood. The narrative had to be reduced rigidly and much material often included in brief texts had to be left out in order that the interpretative material might find place. There was danger that the latter might fail to carry conviction without a greater area of facts about events and people. Such a decision meant in particular the complete subordination of the process by which I achieved my conclusions and the omission of the whole panoply of qualifications so dear to the professional historian. But I felt the gain more than commensurate.

I shall not be disturbed if reviewers and correspondents point out that Mr. This and General That differ from me. I am already

aware that the witnesses are as numerous as the sands on the seashore and the divergencies in their accounts are like unto the leaves on the trees. A great deal of water must run under the bridge before these controversies can be authoritatively settled.

I have devoted almost as much research and thought to the selection and preparation of the illustrations and maps as to the text itself. They represent a comprehensive survey of French, Italian, and German as well as of British and American illustrated periodicals and official photographs. They will, I hope, repay study. They tell much that the reader will want to know, which I felt could be better told in this way than by direct description. So far as I know, this book is the first to contain any number of illustrations from German sources. I have particularly attempted to show how the various nations sought to rouse patriotism and stimulate endeavor by graphic methods. Many of the illustrations are therefore in themselves historical material, and show better than mere description can the spiritual attitude toward the war of the various combatants.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, ST. LOUIS

*June, 1919.*



BOOK I

THE CAUSES OF THE WAR



## THE OUTBREAK

Not in the limp and bleeding body of an Austrian Archduke, lay the cause of the great world war. That assassination, the work of an obscure rascal in a practically unknown city of southeastern Austria, was the formal excuse for the demands made by Austria upon Serbia which were the technical reasons for the war's outbreak. It was the work of men, the Austrians said, who meant to destroy Austria-Hungary; the work of men in Serbian and Russian pay; the result of a secret conspiracy against Austrian unity.

A scene connected with the assassination occurred in Berlin. There, in a splendid room, was a magnificent table, covered with damask, glittering with cut glass, spread with a profusion of flowers and expensive food. Around it sat officers of the German army, clad in their finest uniforms. At the head of the table, none other than the Crown Prince himself. He rose in his chair and said, "Gentlemen, I toast—To the Day." They leaped to their feet, and drained their glasses and cheered again and again. To what day? He meant to the day when war should be declared between Germany and England.

Another scene took place in Paris in the official residence of the President of the French Republic. The President himself stood, quite simply clad, and addressed the German Ambassador, also plainly-clad. There was here no pomp and ceremony. Few words passed, but they referred to the fate of nations. The President said very quietly: "You are arming. We know it." The Ambassador started

to protest. The President raised his hand for silence. "We shall not be caught napping a second time," he said very quietly. He bowed to the Ambassador, signifying that the interview was at an end.

A man shot in southern Austria; a toast to a war between Germany and England; Germany arming against France; what connection was there between them?

One further scene took place in this chain of events, again in Berlin, again in a splendid room. The Kaiser stood, himself in full military dress, and received the greatest generals, admirals, and statesmen of Germany. He asked them solemnly if they could assure him that Russia was preparing her army for war. They told him it was true: Germany must arm immediately in self-defense. After some hesitation he signed with a gold pen the order for the mobilization of the German army. He knew and they knew that that order would produce a general European war. They all chose to precipitate it.

And where did the war begin? In Belgium, thirteen hundred miles from Serbia, a thousand miles from the Russian frontier! That tiny nation, connected neither with Austria, nor Russia, nor France, was responsible for none of their deeds. And yet in August, 1914, the first overt act of the war was its invasion by the German army—a mighty host of gray-green troops, the sun glancing from their bayonets. On they came—company after company, regiment after regiment, hundreds of thousands of them, a line apparently without end, hours passing a given point, days marching through any single city; always marching, marching to the shrill music of the fifes, the rattle of the drums, the tramp, tramp of iron-shod boots on the pavements. On they came,—Bavarians in dark blue, Saxons in light blue, Austrians in beautiful silver and gray, Prussians in gray-green.

Why should there be Germans in Belgium because an Austrian Archduke had been murdered, because Russia had mobilized her army? The reason given by the Austrians for the outbreak of the war was a fiction. It did not begin because the Archduke was killed

nor because the Russians prepared their army for war. It was not begun by Germany and Austria in self-defense. Months before the murder of the Archduke the war had been decided upon. We know it from official documents and from the testimony of the men who knew. The decision was reached in April or May, 1914, if not earlier. The first preparations came in May and June. The murder of the Archduke on June 28 was employed as the best excuse they could find for beginning the war in the way most favorable for them. The Germans began an unprovoked war. Its causes lay deep in German and European history and life.

## THE CAUSES OF THE WAR

The true fundamental cause of the war was a belief in German national superiority. They were better; therefore they deserved more; being better, they ought easily to be able to get more, even if it were necessary to get it with the sword. They believed that they understood better than any other nation how to live, how to govern, how to manufacture, how to write music, paint pictures, clean streets, or grow potatoes. The word Kultur covered everything. The whole process of life was clearer to them than to others, they thought, and hence they were able to organize the community better, and to make more progress in industry, agriculture, the fine arts, in government itself. As the Kaiser declared, "The German people will be the granite block on which the good God will build and complete his work of culture in the world." Another important German said, "The German race—there can be no doubt of it—because of its nature and character, was designed by Providence to solve the great problem of directing the affairs of the whole world, of civilizing the savage and barbarous countries and of populating those which are still uninhabited."

Upon Germany, then, depended the fate of civilization itself! Without Germany civilization was lost. As Treitschke, one of their great historians, said, "The greatness and good of the world is to be found in the predominance there of German Kultur." Must not Germany then be a nation of people, powerful enough to defend this Kultur upon which the whole future of the world depended,

strong enough to spread it to the nations that did not already have it? "Germany should civilize and Germanize the world, and the German language will become the world language."

The Germans must also develop their idea of civilization. "The German race is called by God to bring the earth under its control." To make their civilization permanent, they must make Germany powerful. "We intend to become a world power that will overtop other world powers so greatly that Germany will be the only real world power." Germany must be made the most powerful, the most wealthy, the largest, and the most important country in the world.

But it was very clear to the Germans long ago that Germany was not the most powerful country in the world, nor as rich as others, nor indeed as well situated as others to become either rich or powerful. She was not able to control the world; she was not strong enough to control even her own destinies. The thought galled them inexpressibly. They could not longer endure it. Germany must have her Place in the Sun; she must become a power on the sea; she must have colonies; she must have everything that any other nation had; she must have more than other nations had.

All this, certainly, other nations would not yield without force; so much the Germans knew. But if they must have it, if God meant them to have it, they should therefore get it as best they could and as soon as possible. They must conquer in war the nations who refused to recognize what Germany must have. The Crown Prince wrote, "It is only by relying on our good German sword that we can hope to conquer that Place in the Sun which rightly belongs to us and which no one will yield to us voluntarily."

And what now was Germany's position, about which they complained so bitterly? Europe is a small continent compared with America, Africa, or Asia, but in it live more large nations of people than in any of the other continents except Asia. Germany herself had some seventy millions, Austria nearly sixty, Great Britain forty-five, France forty, Russia one hundred and eighty millions. If we leave out Russia, we find these other big nations



AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE GERMAN WAR  
HORSE IN "OUR HOLY WAR," 1914.  
An excellent example of the pictorial attempt  
to rouse the german people.

all crowded into an area nothing like as large as the United States and with about three times as many people. The land in Europe, therefore, was all occupied; there were already too many people to live there prosperously and happily. But Germany was growing very fast in numbers, and, if she was to promote Kultur as the Germans planned, the population must increase at a still faster rate. She must grow also in wealth; her people must make more to sell, so

that they might have more with which to buy. But Germany could not continue to grow larger without making her people poorer.

One of two things must happen. The surplus people might leave Germany and go elsewhere to live, just as many Germans had already come to the United States. They would then cease to live in Germany and would therefore cease to be a part of the true nation, however much they might still feel that they were Germans. This was not thinkable. The alternative was that all Germans must stay in the Fatherland, which must be made a place where all living Germans and all that would be born for an indefinite number of years could live in prosperity and happiness. This could be arranged only by an astounding development of manufacturing, of commerce, and of colonies.

But Germany did not have herself any supply of the most important raw materials. Clothes cannot be made without wool or cotton, and the Germans had no supply of either. Most kinds of machinery could not be made without copper and various metals of which the Germans had only a very small supply or none at all. Electricity plays a very important part in modern life and requires a great deal of rubber; the Germans had none. Gasoline for auto-mobiles; kerosene for lamps and stoves; and all sorts of petroleum products are imperative to prosperity and comfort. But Germany had no wells of oil. Without those and a good many other things, profitable manufacturing and prosperous living could not be continued.

And the Germans still lacked customers to whom they should sell the new goods they were to make. If they were to make more and more goods every succeeding year, they must sell more and more each year, and they could not sell any such increase in Germany. Customers they found in France, England, the United States, South America, Asia. But how could they be sure they would continue to buy? Raw materials they found at long distances from Germany. Cotton, copper, and oil came from the United States, rubber from

South America, wool from Australia. How could they be sure the supply would continue to arrive?

To reach both raw materials and customers, the Germans must cross the ocean. Ships must take their exports out and ships must bring imports back. Yet neither Germany nor Austria was placed on the ocean itself. The greater part of the German sea coast was on the Baltic Sea, which had a very narrow entrance controlled by Denmark. While there were many rivers in Germany, only one flowed into the North Sea, or what the Germans call the German Ocean, and Germany had only one good harbor, Hamburg. The river Rhine was a very great German river, but it was controlled by Holland. The German railroad system, which connected German trade with the rest of Europe, really centered in Belgium. All German trade, therefore, found itself a long way from its ultimate market.

Other nations were in a position to prevent the Germans from using the sea and thus could stop the stream of raw materials into Germany and of manufactured goods out. Those German ships which must go through the Baltic might meet opposition from Russia. All German ships must go through the English Channel, controlled by England on one side and by the French, Belgian, and Dutch coasts on the other side. The Germans had no coast on the Channel and no harbor there.

When the German ships got into the open ocean, they found it controlled by the British navy. Being the largest fleet, it controlled as well all water highways which German ships must take going to America, South America, and Asia. If they wished to go through the Mediterranean, they found it in the hands of the British and the French, and the Suez Canal, through which ships going to India and China passed into the Red Sea, was held by Great Britain. If they sailed around Africa, they found the Cape of Good Hope controlled by the British. If they went to the Gulf of Mexico, they found the Panama Canal owned by the United States. No water

routes which the Germans must use to reach the necessary raw materials or their own customers were within German control.

But were the Germans unable to get raw materials in these countries or to sell to customers in England or in America, in India or in South America? Did any German ships ever fail to get through the English Channel or to reach a port across the Atlantic because of opposition from the British, the French, or the Americans? The Germans never claimed that any such case had occurred. German ships sailed where they pleased; Germans had customers in every country in the world, and they had never sold so many goods as in the ten years before the war. They were doing proportionately more business in fact than any other nation.

Where then was the trouble? What were they complaining about? They said that the nations who did control the sea and its approaches *might* close it and *might* refuse to let German ships go through. The British *might* close the Suez Canal, or the United States *might* refuse the Germans the use of the Panama Canal. The British *might* close the English Channel, and the Germans would not be able to go around the British Isles because there were so many rocks and storms that a ship was almost certain to be wrecked. Their customers in these nations might also refuse to buy German goods, not because they did not want the goods but because they wished to hurt Germany. The fact that Germany was great, that other nations were jealous of her civilization and did not wish to be taught by Germany how they ought to live, would cause them to injure Germany by refusing to sell to her raw materials or to buy of her manufactured goods or by closing the seas. The Germans must therefore create a situation which would make it impossible for any nation or any number of nations to prevent Germany from getting as many raw materials as she wanted or from selling as many goods as she could make. Germany must not depend upon the good will of other nations nor conduct a trade which others had it in their power to stop.

The difficulty was that in Europe Germany had enemies. There

were many people, the Germans felt, who hated them. They were surrounded by enemies. There was France on the west, and Russia on the east. South of Austria-Hungary was Italy. Beyond the Channel were the British Isles. See, implored the Germans, we lie between two enemies. On one side is France, whom we defeated in the war of 1870 and from whom we took Alsace-Lorraine, for which the French have ever since longed to revenge themselves on us. Then on the other side is Russia, millions of people occupying a huge country, with vast resources. How can we cope with both France and Russia?

We have, they complained, no frontiers to defend us, no mountains to stand between us and the Russians and the French, no deep rivers which they cannot cross. Germany lacks a defensive frontier. The only protection we have is the German army, and if we should be attacked on both sides at once, we probably could not defend ourselves at all.

The Germans therefore took extended measures to deal with this peril which they believed menaced them in Europe. They made an alliance with Austria and Italy that was to provide them with help in case either France or Russia should attack them, for then Italy would attack France and Austria would attack Russia.<sup>1</sup> Of course they also agreed that if Russia attacked Austria or France attacked Italy, they would help in their turn. But they were more concerned about themselves than they were about others. They built a great fleet of merchant ships so that goods going to Germany might not wait on the shore somewhere for transportation because the British refused to carry them in their ships. They then

<sup>1</sup> This was the Triple Alliance, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, first made in 1883 and ruptured by Italy at the outbreak of the war in August, 1914, pursuant of reservations made by the Italians at the outset. It was followed by the Dual Alliance of France and Russia in 1892; by the Anglo-French Entente of 1904; and by the Triple Entente of France, Great Britain, and Russia of 1907. An alliance is a written engagement; an entente is an informal understanding, the vital portions of which are commonly verbal; the terms of an alliance are precise, those of an entente vague; the alliance binds the nations under certain conditions, the entente is subject to further agreement before it is operative. Neither term, Triple Alliance or Triple Entente, was used during the war period, for the former at once became something less and the latter something more.



THE TRIPLE ENTENTE AND TRIPLE ALLIANCE IN 1914.

built a great navy literally to frighten the British and prevent them from closing the English Channel, the Mediterranean Sea, or the various ocean roads which the German ships followed.

They then concluded that a country to be great must have colonies. They had established long ago a few in Africa and some in the Pacific, but had failed to make money out of them, or to find them valuable customers. They must create a great colony which would provide not merely customers but also raw materials and which would not be open to attack from the sea. The British fleet was so large and so capable that the Germans were afraid they might never be able to defeat it. Hence they must locate their colony in some place which they could reach by land and which the British could not reach by sea.

They selected Mesopotamia. There had been some of the greatest empires of history; there some of the wealthiest of peoples had lived; there should rise a New Germany. They thought that they might raise cotton, grow wool, and perhaps cultivate rubber. Petroleum existed there and copper they would find in the mountains. There too was room for millions of Germans to settle and create a community which would produce for sale in Germany what Germans wished to buy and which would buy from Germany what the latter made and wished to sell.

And it was out of the reach of the British fleet. The Germans themselves would reach it by means of the Bagdad Railroad. This would run from Berlin to Vienna, down through the mountains to Constantinople, and then through Asia Minor to Bagdad. It would provide them with transportation. But they must not forget to protect it. Bagdad was a long distance from Berlin and the railroad passed through many countries which the Germans did not control. The British fleet, too, might land troops in Syria, a very short distance from the railroad and Bagdad and Berlin and the German army would be too far away to help. A new state must be created to protect the railroad and the new colony, a federated state created out of many states. Austria would be an all-important

part; Turkey too must become an ally of Germany and a part of the new state, for the Turks owned the territory in which Mesopotamia was situated and most of the territory through which the railroad ran after leaving Germany and Austria. But there were two states between Austria and Turkey, Bulgaria, with whose king the Germans and Austrians easily made an alliance, and Serbia. But Serbia declined their offers. Pleading, urging, threatening failed. To control the section of the railroad that ran through Serbia, Austria must seize Serbia itself. They must have Serbia. They must control Belgrade and the crossing of the Danube. So Serbians feared and hated Austria; so men could believe in 1914 that a Serbian would kill the Austrian Archduke.

These alliances and conquests once complete, a great empire would have been created, strong enough to be independent of Europe and of the rest of the world, strong enough perhaps to dominate the rest of the world without having to conquer it. For the Germans truthfully said that they would prefer not to be compelled to conquer the world in order to Germanize it. This great empire would also be able, they thought, to destroy the British Empire. A land attack on the Suez Canal would deprive the British of their connection by sea with India and Australia, and compel them to go around Africa. Meanwhile, the Germans themselves would proceed by land along the Persian Gulf, reach India first, and conquer it. They even thought that they might afterwards conquer the whole of Asia. This is the true Pan-Germanism. It began with an attempt to keep German those who left Germany and went to live in other countries like the United States; hence the name, All-Germans, meaning that all Germans in all parts of the world should stay together and cooperate with one another. But the plan grew from that quite simple idea into this vast scheme of world conquest and dominion.