

of a German submarine is within his rights in holding up, and, under certain circumstances, in sinking British merchantmen. If a captor cannot bring in a merchant vessel which he has seized for adjudication by a Prize Court, he is at liberty to sink her after the removal of the crew, passengers, and papers, this last proviso being in accordance alike with the express requirements of international law and with the most elementary dictates of humanity. It would appear that Germany now holds herself free to disregard this hitherto universally observed condition at her discretion. In the case of the *Falaba*, full particulars of which have appeared in the cables, the captain was given ten minutes to launch the boats and get crew and passengers away—an utterly impossible task in so short a time. While the operation was in progress, with some dozens of passengers still standing on the deck, the submarine, 100 yards away, deliberately torpedoed the vessel, with the result that over 100 passengers were killed or drowned. As the daily papers have amply pointed out, this was not war, nor even piracy—it was simple murder. The worst feature of the business is not the circumstance that German sailors are stated to have laughed and jeered at the struggles of the drowning—horrible and incredible as that is—but the fact that the sinking of the *Falaba*, with its destruction of human lives, is hailed by the German press as ‘a glorious feat,’ and is officially ‘justified’ by the German authorities, apparently showing that the new policy has the endorsement of the German nation generally.

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The ‘justification’ of this piece of inhumanity which is advanced by the Berlin authorities is that ‘the destruction of human lives is now a painful duty, as submarines are compelled to act quickly.’ This is only another version of the now familiar principle that signed treaties and the laws of humanity are only to be respected when it is strictly convenient to do so. It is the principle which was acted upon in the violation of Belgium, in the shelling of certain unfortified English bathing places, in the bombing of undefended towns without any concomitant military operation, and now acted upon and ‘justified’ as applied to the destruction of the innocent, non-combatant, travelling public, some of the members of which are citizens of neutral nations. As has been said, it is not war, nor fighting of any honorable kind, but merely wanton and useless taking of human life. Such action and policy could be understood—even though it could not be defended—if its successful execution meant the accomplishment of some substantial military advantage to Germany. But the very contrary is the case—so far from involving a military gain, commerce destruction as now practised by Germany is a confession of naval weakness. The German submarines were not built to destroy passenger boats; and the German naval authorities would not be wasting time on small British merchant ships if they could sink British men-of-war. The primary object—for both parties—of the war on the seas is the injury and destruction of the enemy’s war fleet; and the fact that Germany is employing these valuable war-vessels, sea-going submarines, in subsidiary objects, with a view not to reducing the nation attacked to impotence, but to causing irritation and annoyance, is an acknowledgment that the primary purpose of genuine sea warfare is beyond her power to accomplish.

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Viewed even from the purely commercial point of view, the results of the German submarine policy are quite insignificant. As a matter of fact, the interference with British commerce is for all practical purposes so slight that, were it not for the newspapers, the general public would hardly be conscious of it. It must be remembered that precisely similar attempts to destroy British commerce have been made in previous great wars; and they have not only failed, but have in the end resulted in the increased prosperity and development of British trade. ‘In the old wars which were fought before the introduction of

steam,’ writes L. G. Carr Laughton in *The British Navy in War*, ‘the enemies of Great Britain on more than one occasion attempted systematically to ruin her by destroying her commerce after they had proved unable to defeat her fighting fleets at sea. This they did by ceasing to fit out fleets of men-of-war, and sending to sea instead small squadrons of ships of considerable power, whose first duty was to make prizes of British merchantmen. They also sent great numbers of petty cruisers to sea to pick up what they could. In the old wars these swarms of small cruisers were always employed by both sides. Many were caught, but it was like killing wasps, for others continually appeared. In this way they did at times succeed in doing much harm to our trade, and sometimes captured many more of our merchantmen than we succeeded in taking of theirs. It might be supposed that by doing this damage they would have succeeded in crippling Britain’s resources; but the event proved always to be quite contrary. The result in every war was that the oversea trade of Britain grew, and that of her enemy gradually disappeared. If the enemy succeeded in taking three hundred ships in a year out of ten thousand at sea, the loss looked heavy, but was in fact almost negligible; if in the same time we took from them only two hundred out of, say, a thousand ships, the blow was very serious. And something of this sort happened more than once. At the end of the Napoleonic wars our ships had almost ceased to capture enemy merchant ships, for the simple reason that practically none were left to capture. Such as remained could not go to sea. At the same time the enemy’s cruisers continued to capture many British merchantmen, which we could well afford to lose, seeing that by far the greater part of the sea-borne trade of the world was in our hands. That this was so was simply due to the protecting power of the stronger navy, a statement which sounds contradictory in some respects, but still is true. Exactly the same thing is happening in the present war. The sea-borne trade of our enemies has utterly stopped, so that few captures of their merchant ships have been made at sea since the first few days of the war. On the other hand, British and French commerce has been but little interrupted, and the inconvenience caused by war grows steadily less as men’s minds become acclimatised to the unusual conditions.’ In respect to the insignificance of the injury which is being inflicted on British commerce, and to the immense extension of British trade which will take place on the conclusion of hostilities, the indications are already clear that history will repeat itself.

Notes

Belgium and the Peace Prize

The Nobel Peace Prize is not to be awarded in this year of war, but two French Deputies are inviting their colleagues to sign a petition praying that the prize should be allotted to the Belgian people. They urge that Belgium, in upholding the principle of the inviolability of treaties, has rendered pre-eminent services to the cause of peace and justice—a suggestion and a contention that have very much to commend them.

Where Submarines Fail

The fatal defect and essential weakness of an exclusively submarine warfare against enemy commerce is well illustrated in some facts set forth in a recent issue of the *Pall Mall*. After pointing out that Germany stands in need of certain things—corn, oil, copper, cotton, among others—the London paper continues: ‘Last week he torpedoed a big neutral tanker, carrying oil to Amsterdam. Yesterday he sank a British steamer with 800 tons of copper on board. A few days ago an American ship laden with cotton for Bremen was sunk by a mine off Borkum, and among the latest victims of the Kronprinz Wilhelm was a four-