

Washington, D. C.,  
March 15, 1916.

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I must apologize for not sooner having answered your letter containing the clipping from the Boston Transcript by Mr. Arthur Stanwood Pier, entitled "Wilson's Muzzle for Americans," and in this tardy reply I shall endeavor to eliminate all personal feelings and devote myself to the national aspects of the matter.

Mr. Pier is evidently deeply offended because the United States will not give up its time honored position of neutrality and intervene in the war now going on between the great powers of Europe. He seems to think that it was the duty of the United States to protest when Belgium was entered by Germany, and that if we were fulfilling our duty we would now be at war with Germany, joining the Allies.

So far as the violation of Belgium neutrality goes, it would be sufficient to say that Germany did not violate the Hague Convention when it entered Belgium, for prior to entry it delivered an ultimatum to Belgium equivalent to a declaration of war. This fulfilled, absolutely, all requirements laid down by the Hague Convention. Germany, however, did violate the treaty of 1839 which Prussia signed with Austria, Russia, England and France, and which provided for the neutralization of Belgium. The United States, however, was not a party to this treaty, and, therefore, it could not, consistent with neutrality, protest against its violation. To have protested would have been equivalent to giving up neutrality and siding with the Allies.

I am aware that Senator Root, in his recent speech in New York, and Ex-President Roosevelt, have both recently contended that the United States should have protested because of the alleged violation of the Hague Convention. In answer to this, however, it is sufficient to point out that Senator Root was in the Senate when Germany entered Belgium, and, so far as I know, never protested or never introduced any resolution of protest, nor did any other member of the Senate or the House. Furthermore, shortly after this entry, Ex-President Roosevelt, in public interviews and in a magazine article, made it perfectly clear that he did not believe that the

United States should protest against this action of Germany. For example, four days after the invasion of Belgium, in a speech in New York, he stated that "we should be thankful beyond measure because we are Americans and not at war." He further urged support of the Administration in securing peace and justice. He said nothing of any duty to Belgium.

Again, at Hartford, Conn., on August 15, 1914, he discussed the Bryan peace treaties, but said nothing about any obligation under the Hague treaties.

Again, seven weeks after the Belgium invasion, he printed, in the Outlook, on September 23, 1914, an elaborate article on the war, with long discussions of this Belgium phase. In this article he states that there is even a possible question whether we are not, ourselves, like other neutral powers, violating obligations which we have explicitly or implicitly assumed in the Hague treaties, but adds that, under actual conditions this Hague guarantee would excite laughter were not the tragedy such as to move us to tears instead.

In another part of the article, however, he deals directly with the question of our duty to intervene because of the German invasion of Belgium. Here is what he says:

"A deputation of Belgians has arrived in this country to invoke our assistance in the time of their direful need. What action our Government can or will take, I know not.

It has been announced that no action can be taken that will interfere with our entire neutrality. It is certainly eminently desirable that we should remain entirely neutral, and nothing but urgent need would warrant breaking our neutrality and taking sides one way or the other.\* \* \*

Of course, it would be folly to jump into the gulf ourselves to no good purpose, and very probably nothing we could have done would have helped Belgium. We have not the smallest responsibility for what has befallen her, and I am sure that the sympathy of this country for the suffering of the men, women and children of Belgium is very real.

Nevertheless this sympathy is compatible with full acknowledgment of the unwisdom of uttering a single word of official protest unless we are prepared to make that protest effective; and only the clearest and most urgent national duty would ever justify us in deviating from our rule of neutrality and non-interference."

Furthermore, Ex-President Taft, in a speech at Morristown, N. J., publicly expressed his full concurrence in the attitude of President Wilson.

Even, however, if the Hague Convention had been violated, it would have imposed no duty on any nation which had signed the treaty to protest unless its interests were injured by the act. For example, none of the signers of the Hague Convention protested when Austria-Hungary assumed sovereignty over Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, nor did any of them protest when Italy siezed Tripoli in 1911. Nor did the British Government protest because of any violation of the Hague Convention of 1907, for it had never ratified it; its protest and action were based upon the violation of the treaty of 1839, to which, as I have said, the United States was not a party. I may add, also, that if the United States was bound to protest at the Belgium invasion, it was equally bound to protest at the invasion of Luxemburg by Germany, for Luxemburg also was neutralized by the treaty of London in 1867, to which Prussia, and the other nations now at war were parties.

I think, on reflection, you will see what a position the President of the United States would have been in if, as the official head of one hundred million people, without any action on the part of Congress, he had protested to Germany. Supposing Germany replied that we were not affected and that, in short, it was none of our business. The President then would have had to back up that protest with force, which he could not do without the authority of Congress, and which we could not possibly do because of our unpreparedness, even if Congress had advocated such a course. Can you not see what a humiliating position this would have placed the United States in?

President Wilson, however, soon after the outbreak of the war, offered his services as a mediator, - the Hague Convention providing that such an offer should not be considered an unfriendly act, - but neither party availed itself of this offer.

Our country has always proceeded on the theory of keeping out of the quarrels of Europe. We have said in the Monroe Doctrine and now say to Europe, you must keep your hands off the New World, and then follows the necessary corollary - we must keep our hands off of Europe unless we are directly injured by the act of some belligerent. This is well brought

out in the declaration attached by the United States Senate to one of the most important Hague Convention treaties. This declaration read as follows:

"Nothing contained in this convention shall be so construed as to require the United States of America to depart from its traditional policy of not intruding upon, interfering with or entangling itself in the political questions of policy of any foreign State; nor shall anything contained in the said convention be construed to imply a relinquishment by the United States of its traditional attitude toward purely American questions."

This would seem to be a clear and explicit statement of the policy of the United States. It has bound us in the past and I trust it will always be our rule of action in the future.

If by protesting we were drawn into the war on the side of the Allies, against Germany, it would not only violate the established policy of the United States, but it would lay the foundation for a repudiation by foreign nations of the Monroe Doctrine.

A nation can observe neutrality only when its Government treats all belligerents alike. That has been President Wilson's endeavor throughout, and that attitude naturally prevented the Government of the United States, as it has prevented that of Spain, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Latin-American Republics, from making any official protest or interfering in any way in this unfortunate war.

Whenever Germany has injured the United States, or its people, by a violation of International Law, President Wilson has been quick to demand redress. How far he has been helped by Congress in this attitude you can gather from recent events in that body. In any event, I think you will agree with me that the President has no right, by any official act, to put the United States in any other position than that of a strict neutral, without the direct authority of Congress, in which body is vested the right to declare war, and a violation of neutrality under these circumstances would be equivalent to a declaration of war.

Mr. Pier also claims, in his article, that President Wilson should have protested against the atrocities in Belgium. It would seem, however, to be clear that no President, or country, should ever protest

against actions in any foreign country without first making an independent investigation for itself by sending a commission, or otherwise; for however clear the atrocities may seem, it should never be forgotten that evidence should be taken on both sides of the controversy before any action is taken. For example, President Cleveland notified the British Government that its acts in Venezuela were in violation of the Monroe Doctrine, but he was careful to state that he should appoint an independent commission to investigate the whole matter and report, and that then he should sustain the report of said commission with all the authority of the United States.

There seems to be a feeling that President Wilson has, by failing to protest against the atrocities in Belgium, in some way changed the traditional policy of the United States. It would seem to be a sufficient answer to this to point out that between 1901 and 1909 when Mr. Roosevelt was President, and, during the greater part of which time, Mr. Root was in the cabinet, there occurred various atrocities abroad. For example, in 1903 occurred the terrible massacre at Kishineff. At the same time Macedonia was running red with blood; in 1905 the horrors of the Congo were revealed.

In the same year Korea was absorbed by Japan, although the United States had entered into a treaty with Korea promising to use its best efforts in case Korea was unjustly treated by any power. Ex-President Roosevelt, in the Outlook for September 23, 1914, among other things, writes the following with regard to Korea:

"Korea is absolutely Japan's. To be sure, by treaty it was solemnly covenanted that Korea should remain independent. But Korea was itself helpless to enforce the treaty, and it was out of the question to suppose that any other nation with no interest of its own at stake would attempt to do for the Koreans what they were utterly unable to do for themselves. Moreover, the treaty rested on the false assumption that Korea could govern herself well. It had already been shown that she could not in any real sense govern herself at all. Japan could not afford to see Korea in the hands of a great foreign power. She regarded her duty to her children and her children's children as overriding her treaty obligations. Therefore, when Japan thought the right time had come, it calmly tore up the treaty and took Korea, with the polite and businesslike efficiency it had already shown in dealing with Russia, and was afterwards to show in dealing with Germany. The treaty,

when tested, proved as utterly worthless as our own recent all-inclusive arbitration treaties - and worthlessness can go no further."

In 1906 Morocco was parceled out, and in the same year occurred the terrible Russian massacre. In 1909 we had the Armenian horrors.

All of these terrible events occurred during Republican Administrations, yet, to my knowledge, no official protest was ever made, either by the President or by Congress.

May I also point out to those claiming that the unwarranted death of a single American demands an immediate declaration of war, that President Grant, in the *Virginius* case, accepted an indemnity from Spain for the brutal murder, without trial, of a large number of Americans in Cuba.

Mr. Pier, in his article, makes the surprising statement that chivalrous feeling caused the United States to take sides with the Cuban revolutionists. Even a limited knowledge of history would be sufficient to satisfy anyone that the United States interfered in Cuba primarily for the reason that its own interests were deeply affected by the terrible conditions in that island. Cuba is within the sphere of influence of the United States, and, furthermore, our citizens were deeply affected by the incidents there.

In this connection let me say that I have recently read a pamphlet prepared by Dr. Morton Prince, who severely criticises President Wilson for not protesting against the German entry into Belgium, and citing the fact that President Monroe, in a message in 1821, expressed the hope that the Greeks, who were then struggling with the Turks for independence, might be successful. Dr. Prince also cites the fact that Daniel Webster, at that time in the House of Representatives, made a strong speech in behalf of Greek independence.

It is a fact that President Monroe, in one of his annual messages, expressed the personal hope that the Greeks would succeed, but no resolution was passed in Congress or the slightest assistance given to the Greeks in their valient fight. It is true that Daniel Webster introduced a resolution providing for sending a commission to Greece to

investigate conditions, and that he, in a strong speech upon this resolution, expressed the deepest sympathy with the Greeks. It is a fact, however, that Mr. Webster never asked for a vote on this resolution; on the contrary, he expressly asked that it be laid on the table. He introduced it merely as a basis for a speech, and, as a fact, as I have stated, no expression of sympathy or aid to Greece was given by Congress.

Mr. Webster's feeling as to the duty of the United States to maintain neutrality can be well illustrated in another case; that of the Hungarian rebellion in 1850. You will remember that Kossuth had fled to Turkey, and that he was brought to America on a United States warship. He was received everywhere with acclamation, and every attention was paid to him personally, but Congress passed no resolution of sympathy, nor did it aid him in the slightest degree in his efforts. On the contrary, the President told Kossuth that he could do nothing for him. Webster and Clay told him the same, which made him deeply indignant.

Mr. Webster, in writing about this, said to a friend that if Kossuth should speak to him of the policy of intervention "I shall have ears more deaf than adders".

In conclusion, let me say that, so far as I can find, our Government has never protested at the conduct of nations abroad engaged in war when that conduct did not directly injure us. Our policy has been that of neutrality. We demand that foreign nations shall keep their hands off of our continent, and, as I have said, the necessary corollary of this is that we must keep out of interference with their affairs. This has been the policy laid down by Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Monroe, and by every other President of the United States, including President Wilson, and I must express the firm conviction that it will prove an unhappy day for the United States if ever we shall reverse that policy.

Very sincerely yours,