

“The Day”

-and After

War Speeches of

## The Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes Prime Minister of Australia

-Arranged by Keith A. Murdoch

With an Introduction by

The Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George

### On the Issues at Stake

**Delivered before the Pilgrims at the Savoy Hotel, London, March 17, 1916 Viscount Bryce presiding.**

I am glad of the opportunity of stating again what is at present the very inspiration of our life and the burden of all our immediate hopes, activities, and desires – our determination to save our civilisation and our liberties from the onslaught of barbarous Prussia.

Many of the members of this Society are Americans, and I do not think this is the time to judge America's attitude towards this war. For the help that has been given we are, of course, distinctly grateful. To the American members of this Society I will say only two things.

### Victory Assured

The first is that we in Australia face the United States across the Pacific, and in the past we have liked her well and longed for closer friendship. The second is that we are winning – we shall win. I speak as one from the frontier of Anglo-Saxonism when I say that, to those who know the British Empire, and the resolute men and women who inhabit it, there is not a shadow of doubt that the vast might of our Empire, and of our race, as it will and can be organised, will be invincible and completely victorious.

This dreadful war was forced upon us. By no act of ours did we provoke it. No people desired war less than those who make up that congeries of nations which we designate by the term “British Empire.” We were, and are by instinct, a peaceful people. We may be, indeed, best described as a civilised people. No better and no clearer distinction can be drawn between us and that great nation with which we are now locked in deadly struggle than the fact that the British nation stands for the highest ideals of civilisation. What the other stands for, let all their dreadful deeds since war began, and the vile doctrines upon which their nation for forty years has battered, say.

## **Trembling in the Balance**

It may be said with certainty that there is not an ideal cherished by us that finds an answering echo in the minds of the enemy. With them Might is Right. There is between the ideals of Britain and Germany a gulf as wide as divides heaven from hell, right from wrong.

The issues at stake are vital, and the fate of the world hangs upon them. And the people of the earth – although some may look on with an air of indifference and hold themselves aloof – are being enveloped, against their will, in this struggle, which, like some great tidal wave, sweeps resistlessly over the whole earth, and cannot be dammed here or there by the act of any man or any nation. The destiny of the world to-day is trembling in the balance, and every nation, as every man, must make up its mind on which side it shall take its stand.

This war will leave the world very different from what it found it. There were many of us drifting along pleasant, profitable channels. The call of duty fell dully on our ears. We turned our backs on the purifying waters of self-sacrifice. We thought only of pleasures, or, at best, of privileges, rather than duties.

## **Under the Veneer of Kultur**

This war has come as a mighty incentive to urge us on – a spur needed perhaps by our race for its salvation. At any rate, it has come, and it will profoundly affect the destiny of the whole world.

If by any malign stroke of fate the issue should turn against us, the clock of civilisation would be set back a hundred years. The outlook of mankind would be profoundly changed. Evil would have overcome good. Force would have trampled upon right. We should fall back into what, although it might be disguised under the thin veneer of Kultur, would nevertheless be a real state of barbarism, for barbarism does not differ from civilisation in appearance, but in reality; not by their garments alone do civilised men differ from barbarians, but in their thoughts, in their outlook upon life, in their conduct, and by the acceptance of the standard of right not might.

## **A United Empire**

We have gone out to battle with the enemy. Out of evil cometh good. The war fell upon an Empire menaced with turmoil. But at the first rattling of the sabre turmoil died down, dissensions ceased, we were a united people. There is not from Dan to Beersheba, from one end of this mighty Empire to the other, a place where the people do not stand four-square against their common enemy. This war has welded together, by bonds that time will not dissolve, that nothing but our own incredible folly can wholly break asunder, the loose federation known as the British Empire into one homogeneous nation.

## Labour's Ideals

I have come here, after some eighteen months of war, as the representative of a Dominion. During this time the Dominions – Canadians and South Africans and Australians – have, on the field of battle, proved that the ancient valour of their sires still burns in their veins. They have all proved themselves worthy of their breeding. They have realised clearly that this war is not one that concerns Britain only, but is a war which affects their very existence as free men. I have come here as the chosen representative of the most democratic Government in the world. I stand here as a representative of Labour and all the ideals that you and I jointly cherish and the ideals of organised Labour. And all these, I say, rest upon the foundations of liberty, and must fall if we lose this battle.

## In Defence of Democracy

We in Australia have fought, are fighting, and shall continue to fight to the end for those free institutions which to free men are dearer than life itself. We fight not for material wealth, not for aggrandisement of Empire, but for the right of every nation, small as well as large, to live its own life in its own way. We fight for those free institutions upon which democratic government rests. In Australia what the people say goes; whatever they choose to make law is law; they are the rulers of their own destiny. But in the country against which we are fighting to-day the will of the German proletariat, though ten millions, though fifty millions stand behind it, is as nothing beside the will of the Kaiser.

## Creatures of Despotism

Liberty does not dare to venture into that cold and chilling atmosphere - I do not speak of that poor, pallid cadaver of liberty that slinks through the land surrounded by the Prussian Guards. Our ancestors have fought and died for liberty, and shall we, if needs be, do less?

We fight, therefore, in this war for liberty. We fight for those free democratic institutions without which life as we know it would lose its flavour. We could have purchased an ignoble peace had we wished to do so, to bend the knee to Baal. If we had but abased ourselves before this mighty Moloch all would have been well. The Germans were prepared to hold out the hand of friendship to Australia. But we, like Belgium, knowing that their friendship was even more fatal than their enmity, chose rather to die as free men than live as the creatures of despotism. And it is in this spirit that the British race faces this great crisis to-day.

## Ireland's Valiant Sons

Although we are a peace-loving people, although we have slumbered in a lotus land for many years, we have shown to the world that we have not lost the valour of our forefathers. The Dominions have proved themselves worthy to stand alongside the men from the Motherland. To-day, whatever Germany may not know, she does know that, when she fights Britain, she fights not merely the forty-five million people in the United Kingdom, but also those millions of free men scattered throughout the world who look to Britain as the cradle of their race – men

of adventure, men of resolution, who will fight to the bitter end alongside those from the land of their sires, to whom they owe their liberties and institutions of free government.

And here, on St. Patrick's Day, let us pay a tribute to the loyalty of the Irish people and the valour of the Irish troops. And I, as an Australian, pay tribute to those thousands of young Irish-Australians in the Australian Forces, who have put the cause of liberty above life itself.

## Heroes Indeed

I feel that I stand here to-day in the reflected glory of the Australian soldier. I never speak, I cannot speak, of their bravery but that I choke with emotion. We speak with pride, and rightly, of the glorious charge of Balaclava. There men went out in the broad light of day, with pulses leaping under the stimulus that a knee-to-knee charge on swift-galloping horses gives to men. They raced, side by side, into the jaws of death, and their glory lives after them. But the story of how the men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Light Horse of Australia went out to die in the dark hour before the dawn, when the tides of life are at their ebb, is one by which even that of the Charge of the Light Brigade must pale its fires.

There were some five hundred of them, and they were to attack in three waves. They were given their orders six, eight, ten hours before. Every man believed that he was going out to certain death. Yet they did not hesitate. They made their preparations. They handed to those who were to remain in the trench their poor brief messages of farewell, and waited calmly for the order.

## Australia's Imperishable Glory

In the dark hour when night is yielding doggedly to day, these young soldiers of Australia went out to almost certain death. As the whistle blew, the first wave leaped from the trench, but nearly all fell back dead upon their fellows who were waiting their turn in the trench. None got more than a few yards before being shot down. In the face of this awful sight the second line, undaunted, leaped out to die. Of these only five or six remained on their feet after they had gone ten or twelve yards. The third wave followed in their turn and met the same fate. The wounded lay exposed to the pitiless machine-gun fire of the Turks, which poured a veritable hail of death into their poor, bleeding bodies. The colonel was killed fifty yards from the trench – he was in the lead. Eighteen officers went out – two only returned. Of the men the merest handful survived.

We must look back into the grey dawn of history before we find a deed parallel with this. The Spartans of Thermopylae have left a name imperishable, whose glory has shone through the ages with a lustre that can never die and which will burn brightly when the Pyramids have crumbled to dust and the proudest monuments of kings are no more. But surely what these young Australian soldiers did that day – these men of a new nation, the last but one in the family of the great British Empire – what these men did, too, will never die.

## To the Common Cause

We have fought, and we are fighting, this battle as if it were a battle of life and death. We did not enter it lightly, nor shall we quit it while life remains in us. Australia has sent out of the country, to the European or Asiatic battlefields, up to the first week in March, 150,000 men. We have enlisted, to the first week in March, 268,000 men. We shall have enlisted, by the beginning of June, 300,000 men. The Australian is coming out to do battle for the country that made him what he is. Australia is a great country; indeed, it is a continent – a country of tremendous distances, a country in which men imbibe the spirit of liberty with every pore, and in which men, of necessity, take a wider outlook than those whose environment is more cramped. It is a country in which men would rather die than lose liberty.

## In Deadly Earnest

They are coming out, these men nurtured in the free air of a great land, with bodies magnificently developed and spirits unbroken and unbreakable; they are coming out to do battle for the country that made them. They are showing to-day the mettle of their pasture. They are fighting for everything they hold dear by land or sea. They are fighting this battle in deadly earnest, knowing it to be a battle to the death. It is a battle from which we are to emerge triumphant, with our great Empire welded insolubly together, or in which we must go down with all prospects of achieving our destiny for ever damned.

## Germany's Barbarous Practices

Germany's barbarous practices – her submarines, her gases, her devilish cruelties – are with us still; but the policy of frightfulness, though it horrifies the world, cannot daunt the men of our race. And it has been powerless to affect more than a very small percentage of the mighty mercantile marine of Britain. From the most distant seas her argosies cleave their way undismayed. To her shores they are going from distant Australia and the Canadian coast, carrying grain, provisions, ammunition – everything necessary for the successful prosecution of this war. The German navy, built for our destruction, is locked within the narrow waters of its home.

True, Britain was unprepared in a military sense. Yet she has done wonders. One can hardly forbear to ask what she would have done *had* she been prepared.

## A Free Man's First Duty

I only know that Australia has been able to do what she has, because we adopted as the corner stone of our democratic edifices the system of compulsory military training. We believe that there is but one way by which a nation, being free, can remain so, and that is that every man shall be willing to defend his country, his home, and his liberties.

The defence of one's country is the primary duty of citizenship; it is the first duty of free men. Two years before the outbreak of war we had established in Australia a system of universal military training. To this we owe that complex and widespread organisation for training officers and non-commissioned officers, for manufacturing small arms, ammunition, clothing, and so on, without which we should have been almost helpless in this great struggle.

A small community of under 5,000,000 of people, we have been able to train, to equip from head to foot, a great army of men. It is a great thing, and one which we may mention with pride and satisfaction, that Canada and Australia together have put into the field nearly twice the number of the original British Expeditionary Force.

### **Caught at a Disadvantage**

I have no doubt, nor has any Britisher or Australian any doubt, of what the result will be. Britain and her Allies at the outset of this fight were caught at a disadvantage. We were like peaceful citizens taken unaware by bandits. But we are gradually mustering our tremendous resources. We are turning our men of peace into men of war. We are gathering against our great opponent – and I pay every tribute to the bravery of the great German nation – the tremendous resources of a free people who will die to the last man rather than be defeated.

And we shall win. We have encircled this tremendous and ferocious foe with a wall of steel which, despite her most frantic efforts, she cannot break.

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