

# **HOW THE WAR BEGAN**

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How the war began by J. M. Kennedy

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**J. M. KENNEDY**

# **HOW THE WAR BEGAN**



# CAUSES OF THE GREAT EUROPEAN WAR

## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

IN studying great historical movements and revolutions, there is no truer principle than that wars, though they may arise from small and insignificant conditions, are concerned with large issues. There could be no more striking exemplification of this truth than the present European war, which, as everyone knows, began with an ultimatum addressed by Austria-Hungary to Serbia in consequence of the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand at Serajevo. If we like to phrase it so, we may say that the war took its rise from the murder of an Archduke, and the indignation of the Austrian Government with Belgrade, where, it maintained, the plot was in reality hatched. These were, indeed, the antecedent conditions of warfare, but they do not explain how from a purely local quarrel the world saw with astonishment the whole Continent embroiled, with every plain resounding to the tramp of armed men. Moreover, the average man of intelligence, who reads his daily newspaper with care, is apt to be so distracted with the series of telegrams constantly put before him, that he cannot see the wood for the trees. A great number of people are asking themselves

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why Europe is at the present moment convulsed with war, and especially why we are dragged into the quarrel. If the man in the street merely refers back to alleged causes, to which we have already referred, his confusion only grows the greater. He readily understands that often, in the course of history, mountains are in labour, and, as the Roman poet said, only "a ridiculous mouse" is born. The contrary proposition is more difficult to understand—how an event occurring in Bosnia, even though it should be the murder of an Archduke, should put so many towering mountain ranges in labour. The first thing then that any student of contemporary events has to seek to comprehend is the wide scope of those underlying movements in Europe, which have at last come into such blazing prominence in the European war of 1914.

### SPLENDID ISOLATION AND ITS RESULTS

We must take up the history a little way back, and first of all consider some of the transmutations in English diplomacy. Most people are aware that the main policy of Lord Salisbury, as Foreign Minister of Great Britain, was one of non-intervention in Continental disputes, and of what has sometimes been termed "splendid isolation." The theory in this case was that, owing to her geographical position as an island, England could afford to stand aloof and pursue her own aims as an Imperial Power, undisturbed by wars and rumours of wars in the rest of the

world. A policy of splendid isolation could, indeed, be excellently carried out, if two antecedent conditions could be granted. The first is that we had such an undisputed mastery of the sea that the various links between the Motherland and her Dominions and dependencies could be easily safeguarded. The second condition is that we possessed a real army, whether based or not on conscription, comparable with that of European Powers. In other words Great Britain could sit still as complete mistress of her own house, if her Empire was safe abroad and her army made her secure at home. Unfortunately, neither of these conditions has been, or could be, realised. The steady growth of the German fleet, for instance, proved that Berlin also had pretensions to be a world-power, together with the corollary that the building of German ships formed a direct attack on British maritime supremacy. Then, suddenly, we discovered in the Boer War that it might easily happen during a European conflagration that most of the Powers of Europe were ranged against us, and that if, for whatever reason, our little army were engaged elsewhere, British isolation was not a source of strength but one of pre-eminent danger. Hence arose the change of policy which we generally associate with the name of King Edward VII., but which was, of course, in reality the policy of Lord Lansdowne. From this point of view Great Britain, sorrowfully recognising that Germany was a determined and persistent

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enemy, sought for alliances which might help her in the case of an eventual struggle.

### BIRTH OF THE ENTENTE

King Edward's tact and *savoir-faire* enabled him to serve as an admirable, though unofficial, envoy of his country's change of view. His successive visits to foreign capitals, especially those to Paris, and the interview with the Czar of Russia at Reval, laid the foundations for what afterwards blossomed into the Triple Entente. Almost by a miracle a complete change took place in the relations between Paris and London. Hitherto they had been, for all practical purposes, enemies in Europe, Africa, and in the New World. The date is, roughly speaking, 1903: the chief names on both sides for a better understanding are M. Delcassé, M. Paul Cambon, Lord Lansdowne, Sir Edward Grey, and Edward VII. An arbitration treaty inevitably led to a more complete understanding between the two nations. France in her turn brought Russia on the field, and although the unfortunate affair on the Dogger Bank, when the Russian Navy, under the influence of a mistake, fired at innocent English fishermen believing them to be Japanese, for the moment endangered the chances of a *rapprochement*, Lord Lansdowne was able to carry out his original designs of amity with Russia, and as we have already seen, Edward VII. met the Czar of all the Russias at Reval in June, 1908. At this time the precise bearing of the treaties between the



three nations was not very clearly understood. There was, of course, no idea of an offensive and defensive treaty between France and England, still less between England and Russia. But it was taken for granted that the three nations were to pursue a more or less identical foreign policy, and as a matter of fact during some of the Conferences over the Moroccan difficulty, England was able to give material help to her friend France, in opposition to the wishes of Germany.

#### GERMANY ENCIRCLED

If we ask what was the general effect of this diplomatic arrangement, initiated by Lord Lansdowne and carried out by Sir Edward Grey, the answer is clear. Its immediate object was to encircle the German Empire with a chain of more or less allied countries, in order that her pretensions to be lord of Central Europe might be less perilous to Europe. Berlin statesmen quickly recognised how much was involved in these Ententes Cordiales. They realised that they were aimed at them, and at the restriction of their ambitious policy. Naturally, therefore, Germany was careful to clasp in still closer bonds to herself the other great Teutonic Power—Austria-Hungary; while Italy, which was the third member of the Triple Alliance, was forced to throw in her lot—somewhat unwillingly as we have since discovered—with that of the Central European Powers. As a matter of fact, no love was lost between Italy and Austria either then or in the subsequent period.

But it suited Rome to join hands with Vienna in order that she might still hold her own in the Adriatic, while, owing to a series of diplomatic blunders, she was induced to regard France as her bitter enemy.

#### GERMANY'S AGGRESSIVE POLICY

Rapidly Germany gave the world to understand that she was going to do all that lay in her power to consolidate and strengthen her own hegemony. Three successive opportunities presented themselves, of each of which Germany made instant use. The first occurred in Morocco. In 1905 the German Government complained that they had been ignored in an Anglo-French arrangement, whereby France was allowed a free hand in Morocco, while England was left to develop her own policy without external interference in Egypt. On March 31st, 1905, the German Emperor landed at Tangier in order to aid the Sultan of Morocco in his demand for a Conference of the Powers to check the military dispositions of France. M. Delcassé, France's Foreign Minister, demurred to this proposal, asserting that a Conference was wholly unnecessary. Thereupon Prince Bülow used menacing language, and Delcassé resigned in June, 1905. This was, undoubtedly, a diplomatic victory for Germany. It was, however, hardly sustained in subsequent negotiations. The Conference of Algeciras was held in January, 1906, and although Austria proved "a brilliant second" to Germany, the British delegates stoutly

supported France. The conclusion of the Act of Algeciras on April 7th, practically confirmed France in her right to deal with Morocco partly by armed force and partly by "peaceful penetration."

The second opportunity for Germany, of which she made brilliant use, took place in 1908. Austria, in pursuit of her undeviating policy to spread herself in the Near East, proclaimed through the mouth of Count Aerenthal that she was about to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia immediately protested, and so did most of the other great Powers. But Germany at once took up the Austrian cause. In the picturesque language of the Kaiser, Germany was prepared to stand "in shining armour" side by side with her ally, and inasmuch as Russia was in 1908 only just recovering from the effects of her disastrous war with Japan, and was in no condition to take the offensive, the Triple Alliance gained a distinct victory. Then came the third opportunity for Germany, in 1911, once more in Morocco. It was asserted that the French military occupation of Morocco formed what was to all intents and purposes a new situation, and Germany complained that without some sort of compensation she was unable to tolerate the existing posture of affairs. In July, 1911, the world was startled by the news that the German gunboat *Panther*, joined shortly afterwards by the cruiser *Berlin*, had been sent to the closed fort of Agadir near the mouth of the Sus River. Clearly Berlin