

The Great World War of 1914

Archdeacon Mac Murray said it was necessary to discriminate between the *occasion* of the Great War and its *causes*. The *occasion* flowed from the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife in the chief town of the Province of Bosnia, which took place in June, 1914. The Austrian Government held a secret enquiry into the crime, and practically charged the Serbian Government and nation with being the instigators of the murder. None of the evidence given was ever made public; the murderer was an Austrian, not a Serbian subject, and it is now known that a year previous to the murder, Austria proposed to attack Serbia, and only refrained because one member of the Triple Alliance—Italy—refused to countenance it. At the time, however, there was a general belief that Austria was making the charge honestly believing it to be true, and consequently there was wide-spread sympathy with Austria.

Now, there is good ground for believing that the crime was engineered by subjects of the Austrian Empire, who were opposed to the policy of the Archduke, and that the charge against the Serbian Government was not justified.

But Austria, backed by Germany, deemed it gave them a good excuse for doing what they wanted to do in the previous year; that is, crush Serbia, and, by doing so, secure for the central European Powers a dominant position in the Balkan Peninsula, and at the same time discredit Russia in the eyes of the Balkan States.

An ultimatum was sent to Serbia by Austria, making a series of demands which Serbia could not concede without surrendering her independence—indeed, it was so worded as to make it certain that a full surrender was not desired—and only 48 hours were allowed for a reply. In response to the advice of Russia, Serbia conceded nearly everything—far more than could have been anticipated—and on the points not fully conceded she was willing they should be referred to the Hague Tribunal for settlement. With indecent haste the Austrian Ambassador returned to Vienna, and war was declared by the great Austrian Empire against the little Kingdom of Serbia. This was the *occasion* of the

war, but its *causes* must be sought for in the past history of Austria and Germany.

At the root of these causes lay the deep-seated ambition of the German Kaiser and people for the establishment of a great world-power; and one step towards the attainment of this end was to bar Russia out of all influence over the Slav races in the Balkan Peninsula, and to substitute the ascendancy of their Austrian ally. If the ascendancy of the German people was secured from the Baltic to the Adriatic and Aegean seas, there would be secured an open door through which to extend that ascendancy over Asia Minor and the Euphrates valley, and so threaten Great Britain in Egypt and in India. Germany hoped to secure her ends by sowing discord between other nations. She had stirred up France to seize Tunis, and so roused Italy's jealousy that she joined Germany and Austria in the Triple Alliance, though she had more to fear from them than from anyone else. She sowed discord between Russia and Japan, which led to Russia being crippled by the war with Japan. Just then England and France whose rivalries had been long fomented by Germany, showed an inclination to settle their differences, and become friendly. Egypt and Morocco were the two causes of trouble, and an agreement was come to, by which France agreed not to make difficulties for England in Egypt, and England agreed not to interfere with France in Morocco. If the peace of the world was the object of the nations, then Germany ought to have rejoiced to see one menace to that peace removed; but Germany's object was not peace, and consequently, when Russia was crippled by her war with Japan, Germany showed her resentment by challenging, in 1905, the Anglo-French agreement over Morocco. To secure peace the French Government was forced by the Kaiser to dismiss her own Foreign Minister, Decassé, for no reason other than that he had brought about friendly relations with Great Britain. This use of the mailed fist humbled France, but it made Great Britain see more clearly the hostile purposes of Germany, and prepared the way, in 1907, for an agreement between England, France and Russia, to