

Until to-day (Tuesday) there had been much speculation as to whether Great Britain was bound by the obligations and spirit of the *Entente* to throw in her lot with France and Russia at the present juncture, and whether she would, in fact, do so. It is hardly open to question that Britain was under no strict obligation, by virtue of the *Entente*, to take the grave step of plunging into a European war merely because France and Germany were embroiled. An *Entente* is not necessarily an alliance; and the *Entente* between Britain and France and between Britain and Russia is something very far short of either the Dual or the Triple Alliance. When Austria declared war against Serbia, and Germany, Russia, and France became involved, the whole situation, so far as Britain was concerned, was open to review; and that Power could either have participated or refused to participate in the struggle without any loss of honor or respect amongst the nations. At the outset, indeed, she would have been reasonably justified in standing aloof, for as far as could be seen the war was one in which she had absolutely nothing to gain and very much to lose. When, however, Germany showed her hand by the violation of the neutrality of Luxembourg and of Belgium the situation was entirely altered. In this connection the considerations addressed to the House of Commons by Sir Edward Grey are irresistible. 'If Germany,' he said, 'had given an ultimatum to Belgium asking her to compromise her neutrality Belgium's independence would have gone, and if that had gone the independence of Holland would follow. He must ask the House to consider what would be their position if France were beaten and subordinate to Germany, with Belgium, Holland, and Denmark under the same dominating influence. It had been said that we might stand aside, husband our resources, and intervene in the end to put things right, but if we ran away from our obligations of honor and interest regarding the Belgium Treaty he doubted whether any material force would be of much value in the face of the respect we should have lost.' In such a case Britain would not only have lost respect but she would have allowed Germany to obtain a permanent position of vantage which would have been a constant menace. Under the circumstances, to have remained aloof would have been to imperil her very existence as a nation.

The probable or possible effects of the war on New Zealand have been already sufficiently indicated in the daily press. The obvious position is that if our staple products—such as meat and grain—can be assured of safe transport there will be an almost unlimited demand and a considerable rise in prices. It is, however, a tolerably big 'if.' For it is an accepted axiom of British naval policy that it is not, primarily, the duty of the fleet to 'protect' anything at all, but that its one business is to seek out the enemy's ships and destroy them. That principle has been recently re-affirmed by Mr. Churchill, and assuredly it will be acted upon in the present struggle, the defence of the trade routes remaining, necessarily, a secondary matter. The Committee on a National Guarantee for the War Risks of Shipping, whose Report was issued in 1908, considered at some length a scheme for a national guarantee or indemnity to merchant shipping; and this is being, in part, adopted by the Government. A still more hopeful way of obviating the danger is the promised inauguration of a freight and passenger service by some neutral Power, such as America. Some such device is urgently desirable; for it seems clear that wireless telegraphy will make it easier than ever it has been in the past for men-of-war to hold up merchant ships.

What course, generally, the war will take, or what will be the outcome of it all, no man, of course, can say. Japan, it is to be noted, has offered Britain her active support; and if the offer is availed of, Australasia will assuredly be called upon to modify her talk and her legislation regarding 'the yellow peril.' The whole business is in the last degree grave and deplorable; and the one melancholy consolation that is per-

mitted to us is the hope that the very magnitude of the scale upon which operations are being conducted will militate against a prolonged or protracted struggle.

Notes

The 'Entente Cordiale'

In view of the wide-spread discussion which has taken place as to whether or not Britain is bound by the *Entente Cordiale*, or friendly understanding with France, to become the open and active ally of that country in the present struggle, it is interesting to note the opinion—expressed before the outbreak of war—of one who was instrumental in bringing about that rapprochement between the two countries. Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, Senator of France, and member of the Hague Tribunal, is one of the most indefatigable workers for the peace of the world; and when he was French Charge d'Affaires in London he helped largely to bring about the *Entente Cordiale*. In an article contributed a few weeks ago to the London *Daily Chronicle*, advocating a Franco-German rapprochement, Baron d'Estournelles argues that the Anglo-French rapprochement—that is, the *Entente Cordiale*—was an *entente* for peace, not an *entente* for war like that of the rapprochement between France and Great Britain at the time of the Crimean War. 'For this reason the Anglo-Russian rapprochement followed the Anglo-French *Entente Cordiale* as a matter of course. In that fact lay the great innovation, one of the applications of the new policy we are pursuing. This policy would have been at once vitiated and warped were the *Entente Cordiale* to have become a weapon in the hands of the Anglo-French diplomacy, and, after that, of the Triple *Entente*, against Germany.'

Is the Religious Referendum Democratic?

In his speech at the Wellington Town Hall demonstration the other day Mr. P. J. O'Regan to some extent broke new ground on the referendum question—not, indeed, on the fundamental principles relating to the proposal, but rather in his illustration and application of them. Mr. O'Regan has been a politician, and may be a politician again; and he met the political advocates of this peculiar plebiscite on their own ground. 'He would not,' he said, 'attempt a definition of the limits of legislation, but it could be laid down as a safe rule that any subject beyond the functions of government was not a fit subject for a plebiscite or referendum. In conceding that any given question might be referred to a popular vote, we implicitly conceded that it was competent for Parliament to legislate on that question, and hence to demand a plebiscite on a religious issue amounted to a demand for the inculcation of religious teaching by the State. It was the current opinion and practice of the age that all religions, so long as they did not violate the plain precepts of justice and morality, should be treated with perfect equality by the State. Then we were told that the proposal of the Bible-in-Schools Party was democratic, but surely that which was unjust could never be democratic? And it was certainly unjust to compel dissenting taxpayers to support religious principles to which they were opposed in conscience. Personally he did not limit the rights of minorities to matters of religion. What was the significance of the Osborne judgment? The Osborne judgment affirmed the principle that a majority could not coerce the minority to pay for the promulgation of political principles with which they disagreed. If, however, the political rights of minorities were to be protected by the strong arm of the law, how much more their religious rights. He recollected that one of their opponents had quoted the maxim, 'The greatest good for the greatest number.' Unless they took that maxim of Bentham's with proper limitations it was a fallacy. The limitation to it was that the greatest good of the