

**THE THIRTEEN DAYS, JULY  
23-AUGUST 4,  
1914; A CHRONICLE  
AND INTERPRETATION**

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The thirteen days, July 23-August 4, 1914; a chronicle and interpretation by William Archer

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**WILLIAM ARCHER**

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THE  
THIRTEEN DAYS

JULY 23—AUGUST 4, 1914

A CHRONICLE AND INTERPRETATION

BY

WILLIAM ARCHER

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THE relations between two States must often be termed a latent war, which is provisionally being waged in peaceful rivalry. Such a position justifies the employment of hostile methods, cunning and deception, just as war itself does.

GENERAL VON BERNHARDI.

The determined attitude of the German Empire [in the Bosnian Crisis of 1908] had sufficed to show the other Powers, acting under England's leadership, that they must draw in their horns as soon as it came to the final test, namely war. . . . To her ally, Austria-Hungary, the German Empire had done a great, nay, a decisive, service. . . . A further gain for Austria-Hungary lay in the proof that her confidence had brilliantly justified itself. The natural result was a great increase in the political self-reliance of Austria-Hungary. It had hitherto been thought that the Dual Monarchy was incapable of vigorous action in foreign affairs. The Bosnian Crisis had shown this to be an error.

COUNT REVENTLOW.

## FOREWORD

THE following pages contain the sum and substance of a great historic drama—certainly the greatest and most momentous that ever was enacted in a similar space of time. The stage is Europe ; the actors are four Empires and a Republic, speaking through the mouths of their statesmen and ambassadors. The dialogue is carried on, in part, face to face ; but its determining factors are, as a rule, telegraphic declarations and instructions. Nor is it altogether fanciful to divide the drama into the traditional five acts, as follows :

ACT I : From the Austrian Ultimatum to the Serbian Reply. (July 23-5.)

ACT II : From the Serbian Reply to the Declaration of War on Serbia. (July 26-8.)

ACT III : From the Declaration of War on Serbia to the War Council at Potsdam. (July 28 and 29.)

ACT IV : From the War Council to Germany's Declaration of War on Russia. (July 30 to August 1.)

ACT V : From Germany's Declaration of War on Russia to Britain's Declaration of War on Germany. (August 2-4.)

In one important respect, however, this drama differs from those of Aeschylus or Shakespeare. In plays prepared for the stage, the speeches follow each other in regular sequence, only one actor speaking at a time ;

whereas in the European Drama all the actors speak at once, and in the resultant babel it is often impossible to make out the order of question and answer, statement and counter-statement. To put it in another way, the plot develops at different rates of speed in the different capitals, so that, in spite of the boasted annihilation of space by the telegraph, those ambiguities are constantly arising on which Charles Lamb descants in his essay on 'Distant Correspondents'. One actor may think he is still in the second act, while the others have passed irrevocably into the third; and it is sometimes very difficult to decide what stage of development any particular speaker is, or imagines himself to be, contemplating.

An attempt is made in the following pages to reduce this confusion of voices to something like logical sequence, and in so doing to determine who was responsible for the fact that a 'happy ending' was obstinately staved off, in favour of the sanguinary catastrophe now working itself out. It would, of course, be absurd to pretend that I approached this question without any preconceived opinion. I had long ago read enough of the negotiations to assure me that the fault did not lie with Britain. But this I may say, without unduly anticipating my argument, that the more carefully I co-ordinated and the more minutely I examined the documents, the stronger became my conviction that Britain had neglected nothing that could possibly have conduced to a peaceful solution of the crisis. I went into the investigation believing, in a general way, in Sir Edward Grey's ability and good sense; I came out of it with an enthusiastic admiration for the skill, the tact, the temper, the foresight, the unwearied diligence and the unflinching greatness of spirit with which he ensued and strove for peace. Let me add that his laurels are fairly shared by the Russian Foreign



Secretary, M. Sazonof. No statesman could possibly have shown a more long-suffering spirit of conciliation.

This book was half written before Mr. J. W. Headlam's *History of Twelve Days* appeared, and was almost finished before that excellent work came into my hands. I had it before me, however, in revising my manuscript, and it enabled me to correct some not unimportant errors into which I had fallen.

No one who has not tried it can quite realize the difficulty of weaving the dispatches issued by the various Governments into a rational narrative. Each country has put together hastily, and with small care for lucidity, a sheaf of documents. The British Blue Book is certainly the clearest. It is compiled with some care, and contains valuable cross-references. Next comes the French Yellow Book, the most readable of all the collections. It presents excellent summaries of the situation from day to day, and admits, now and then, a touch of human feeling amid the cold formulas of diplomacy. The Russian Orange Book is good so far as it goes, but far from complete. The Austrian Red Book is largely occupied with the one-sided indictment of Serbia, but contains some really helpful dispatches. The German White Book is a mere harangue for the defence, illustrated by meagre fragments of telegrams. All the books contain documents which are pretty evidently misdated, and none of them (except in the rarest instances) give any indication of the hour of dispatch or receipt of a telegram. The investigator, then, has to seize upon the most trifling indications, and sometimes to rely upon long trains of reasoning, in his effort to establish the chronological order of the various documents. At best, he is often baffled.

My effort has been to tell the story of the fateful days

simply as it appears in the official documents, seldom going outside them, and making little attempt to place the events in relation to their historical or political background. That is admirably done in Professor Gilbert Murray's study of *Sir Edward Grey's Foreign Policy* (Clarendon Press, 1915, 1s. 6d. net), to which the reader is hereby referred. I have assumed without discussion certain notorious facts of recent history, such as the Kaiser's boast of the support given by Germany 'in shining armour' to Austria's Bosnian exploit of 1908-9; but I have tried to dispense with collateral evidence, to read the documents in their own light, and to make them, so to speak, self-interpreting.

I have not (consciously at any rate) selected evidence with a view to making a case, but have tried to give the substance of all the really significant documents, cutting away repetitions and verbiage, and condensing very freely, but quoting verbatim such passages and expressions as seemed to me of crucial importance. Wherever quotation-marks are employed, I have taken only the most trifling liberties with the text, such as substituting 'Austria' for 'Austria-Hungary', changing the first person into the third, and so forth. Italics are throughout my own. They appear very rarely in the original documents, perhaps because of the fact that most of these are telegrams.

Before undertaking this investigation, I had not read any of the other critical studies of the documents except that of Mr. M. P. Price (*The Diplomatic History of the War*), with whom I found myself in almost constant disagreement. Where my interpretations and appraisements, then, coincide with those of other students, it is not because I have copied them, but because I have independently arrived at the same conclusions.

Though Mr. Price's discussion of the documents seems to me singularly unfortunate, his book contains a good deal of subsidiary matter (text of treaties, newspaper extracts, &c.) which has been of great use to me.

Practically the whole of the evidence here dealt with is included in the *Collected Diplomatic Documents relating to the Outbreak of the European War* (Miscellaneous, No. 10, 1915), issued by the British Government at the price of one shilling. Numbered dispatches I have referred to by their number, which is of course the same in all editions. Quotations from unnumbered documents I refer to the page on which they appear in the C.D.D. (*Collected Diplomatic Documents*). References to 'Headlam' and 'Price' apply respectively to the *History of Twelve Days* (T. Fisher Unwin, 10s. 6d.) and the *Diplomatic History of the War*, second edition, with paging very different from that of the first (Allen & Unwin, 7s. 6d.).

WILLIAM ARCHER.