

Lama Friedrich Ritter von  
Peace Action  
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# Peace Action of Pope Benedict XV

A summary by

THE HISTORY COMMITTEE

of

FRIEDRICH RITTER VON LAMA'S *Die Friedensvermittlung  
Papst Benedikt XV. und ihre Vereitlung durch den  
deutschen Reichskanzler Michaelis*



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THE CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE  
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WASHINGTON, D. C.

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# Peace Action of Pope Benedict XVI

A summary of  
THE HISTORY OF MARTIN  
OF



# The Peace Action of Pope Benedict XV

The Great War had lasted nearly three years, from August, 1914 to the summer of 1917, when Pope Benedict XV made his valiant effort to bring to an end the murderous activity in which the most civilized nations of Europe destroyed their own and their neighbors' manhood and property. And it was through no fault of the Pontiff that his unselfish endeavors ended in failure, that the mutual destruction and murder continued, and that the war ended, a year later, in a peace which crushed one party to the dust and hardly benefited the other.

Of this Papal peace action we now possess an objective, truthful representation, in a book written by Friedrich Ritter von Lama, and entitled "*Die Friedensvermittlung Papst Benedikt XV. und ihre Vereitelung durch den deutschen Reichskanzler Michaelis,*" published in München in 1932. The following is an all too brief extract from a volume of 310 rather closely printed pages. Ritter von Lama, well-known from a number of books referring to this and other similar subjects, is wont to make no statement which he cannot substantiate by irrefragable arguments. One third of his treatise consists of references to and quotations from documents, books, and other reliable publications. There is, of course, no room for them in this brief summary, which can touch upon only the very highest points in the development of that sad affair, and in which many important events had to be omitted.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>When finished, this summary was sent to the author of the original, and after giving it a thorough examination Ritter von Lama sent the following communication:

"Your summary contains all the essential points of the affair in such a way that despite the necessary omissions, there is no disfigurement, no displacement of lines, in the historical picture. I found little to amend, though I know very well, how

Meanwhile the book was prohibited by the police, and all copies in book stores and libraries were confiscated. We do not think that this autocratic measure will diminish the interest which Ritter von Lama's able publication deserves.

## I

The Holy Father's peace efforts lasted from April, 1917 to the end of September of the same year, but cover chiefly the months of August and September.

In April, 1917, the Papal Nuncio to Bavaria (who, though residing at Munich, was accredited also to the Imperial Government at Berlin) began investigations with the definite plan of some large move for the purpose of peace. On June 13, an official communication went from Rome to Berlin asking confidentially on what conditions Germany was ready to enter upon peace negotiations. It was in the form of a personal letter to Emperor William II. Before handing it to the monarch, the Nuncio, Archbishop Eugenio Pacelli, placed a transcript of it before the German Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg, and the latter declared orally that on the part of the German Government there would be no objection to the following four points:

- ( i ) General limitation of armaments;
- ( ii ) Establishment of international courts;
- ( iii ) Restoration of the independence of Belgium;
- ( iv ) Alsace-Lorraine and other such territorial questions to be settled by agreements between the countries concerned.

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surpassingly important it is to be absolutely correct in a publication which amounts to a formidable indictment. My book has not remained without replies and attacks, though my defense was extraordinarily easy. The attacks themselves only corroborated my representation and argumentation. I shall therefore in future be entirely at your disposal as soon as replies will arise. Should a translation be considered, I am most willing to point out what passages, footnotes, etc., may be omitted in an edition for a non-German public."

A few days later, the Emperor also expressed his consent.

The move for peace was made at the right time. The populations of the Central Powers and still more those of the Entente, especially France, were sick of war.

Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg had for some time been the butt of ever-increasing attacks. What in particular the objections against his administration were matters little for our considerations. The Supreme Command of the Army, and the Crown Prince were his chief opponents. In the light of the events which were to follow, it is tragic that the Center Party also suddenly lined up against him, and that one of its most prominent members, Matthias Erzberger, it is said, brought about the fall of the Chancellor. Several statesmen, who had been in the limelight, were proposed as successors. The choice fell (July 13) upon Dr. George Michaelis, the head of the War Food Office, an efficient official of the old Prussian stamp, but one who was politically entirely untried and had never been in the diplomatic service.

The new Chancellor, to whom would fall the task of carrying on the transactions with the Holy See, was a believing Protestant. Long before this time he had identified himself with the revival societies which had been imported from America. He belonged to a "Brotherhood" which had its center at Kassel and he considered himself "bound to it in conscience."

In Germany the people, while suffering under the ravages of the terrible contest, were split into their various parties, which engaged in heated discussions concerning the aims of the war. A Pan-German wing advocated the enlarging of Germany's boundaries by the inclusion of all Belgium and that French territory occupied by the German armies — a demand to which the saner and by far more numerous part of the nation strongly objected. In this connection, and when the secret Papal Letter was already in the hands of the government, the Center Party, prompted by Matthias Erzberger, proposed in the Reichstag the famous "Peace Resolution," which stated in so many words that Germany did not intend to annex any territory or to force political, economic, or financial limitations upon any State.

A considerable majority of members of the Reichstag had been secured for its adoption. It had found the approval of the supreme heads of the army, von Hindenburg and Ludendorff, and had been favored by the former Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg. But before it was put to the vote, the new Chancellor entered upon his office. One of the first of Michaelis' tasks was to deal with the Peace Resolution.

On July 19, he presented himself for the first time to the Reichstag. He spoke on the war aims of Germany almost entirely along the lines fixed by the Resolution, perhaps even more pacifically, and stated, that "within the limits of your Resolution, as I understand it, all these aims can be realized." Thunderous applause greeted these words. Chancellor Michaelis had won the approval of the people's representatives. A loan of fifteen billion marks for further war purposes was granted without difficulty. But the representatives had failed to pay attention to the little phrase, "as I understand it," whereby the interpretation of the Resolution was entirely given into his hands. This is what he really wanted. Only a week later he wrote to the German Crown Prince: "the infamous Resolution was adopted. But by my interpretation I have rid it of its most dangerous feature. With that Resolution we can conclude any sort of peace we want." To destroy the effect of the Resolution upon the foreign Governments, only such parts of the event in the Reichstag were allowed to be spread abroad as gave the whole a more warlike aspect and almost made it appear that the Reichstag had changed its attitude. The real text of the Peace Resolution was never officially published. The Peace Resolution was choked in the moment of its birth by the man whom Germany greeted as the Peace Chancellor.

## II

Meanwhile the Letter of Pope Benedict XV to the Emperor, which had been handed to the former Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg on June 13, was waiting for an answer. As late as July 14, the draft of a reply was laid before William II (who wrote on the margin, "Four weeks, very impolite towards the aged Pontifex"). This



reply has never been published. It is not even known whether it was really dispatched to Rome. At any rate, it does not seem to have had any particular influence upon the Pope's further action.

In his anxiety to see the end of the horrible war, which now had been devastating Europe for three years, Benedict XV resolved to address all the belligerent Powers on the subject of peace. On July 24, Nuncio Pacelli went to Berlin to inquire what the Government, i. e., Michaelis, in whom he had the greatest confidence, would say to seven points which Benedict XV intended to propose. They were:

- ( i ) Liberty of the seas;
- ( ii ) Restriction of armaments;
- ( iii ) An international court;
- ( iv ) Full restoration of Belgium, evacuation of the occupied French provinces, and the return by England of the German colonies;
- ( v ) Certain economical regulations;
- ( vi ) Boundary questions between Germany and France, Italy and Austria;
- ( vii ) Poland, Serbia and other nationalities.

The most important was the fourth, referring to the territories occupied by the German armies. England should declare its willingness to return the German colonies; Germany should promise to give up the French provinces it had conquered and to restore fully Belgium's independence.

After discussions with the Chancellor, which lasted two days, the Nuncio was informed that the German Government stood in principle upon the basis of the Papal propositions, and was going to word its reply accordingly, after conferring with the Emperor and Vienna. Pacelli left Berlin in high hopes. But it was sixteen days before he received the German Note, which was to be sent to the Pope.

So long had it taken to put into writing what was already fully agreed to orally. It does not seem unjust to speak of intentional procrastination. On account of

further delays encountered in the transmission of the document across the Italian frontier, it had not reached the Holy Father on August 14. This was a great disappointment for the Pope, since he wished to utilize its contents for a further step in his endeavors for peace.

The Powers of Europe had an inkling that the Pope was preparing some general document to further and perhaps to bring to some result the strong desire for peace, which he knew existed in all countries. Through information gathered by his Nuncios and Envoys he had discovered that several demands were common to all Powers and that practically all were prepared to make certain concessions. These several points, on the whole those laid in writing before the German Government, he thought might serve as a common basis for the beginning of peace negotiations, and to make possible the meeting of plenipotentiaries.

The new document was dated August 1, the date of the beginning of the war. But the Pope wanted to wait until he had received the answer to his Note to Germany of July 24. After waiting for a whole week, he resolved to use what information from Germany he could gather through the correspondence of his Nuncios. But not to offend Germany, the Papal Letter did not speak of peace conditions but merely of "some suggestions which might serve to end the strife and restore peace among the nations." The Holy Father's purpose was that upon these suggestions the warring parties might get into communication with one another. The Note contains no indications that he expected the Powers to make him the intermediary of their transactions. Its very nature demanded that it should be treated as a secret communication to the Cabinets of Europe, and its success greatly depended upon its being kept out of the newspapers and their one-sided and ill-inspired discussions. But to the great dismay of the Holy Father translations began at once to appear in London and Rome.

### III

The peace note of Benedict XV was dispatched on August 7.

Benedict XV, Pope, to the Leaders of the Belligerent Peoples:

Since the beginning of Our Pontificate, when the horrors of a terrible war were let loose in Europe, We have had in view above all three things: to observe perfect impartiality toward all belligerents, as becomes him who is the common Father and who loves all his children with equal affection; to attempt constantly to do all the good possible without exception of person and without distinction of nationality or religion, as is dictated to Us by the universal law of charity and the supreme spiritual charge confided to Us by Christ; finally, as Our pacific mission also requires, to omit nothing in Our power which may contribute to hasten the end of this calamity by trying to guide the peoples and their leaders to greater moderation and so hasten a serene deliberation of a just and durable peace.

Whoever has followed Our work during these three painful years past can easily recognize that, always faithful to Our resolve of absolute impartiality and to Our attitude of benevolence, We have not ceased to exhort the peoples and the belligerents to become brethren again, although all that We have done to attain this very noble aim has not been made public.

Toward the end of the first year of the war We addressed most earnest exhortations to the nations in conflict and indicated the course to pursue in order to arrive at a stable and honorable peace. Unfortunately Our appeal went unheeded. The war continued desperately for another two years with all its horror and became even more cruel and extended over earth, sea and the air. We witnessed desolation and death descend upon defenseless cities, upon peaceful villages, and their innocent population. If months, or worse still, years, are to be added to these three years of bloodshed, no one can imagine the accumulation of suffering to mankind.

Is the civilized world to be only a field of death? Is Europe, so glorious and flourishing, to rush into the abyss as if stricken by a universal madness, and commit suicide?

In such a terrible situation, confronted by so serious a menace, We, who cherish no political aim and are swayed neither by the suggestions nor by the interests of the belligerent parties, moved solely by the sentiment of Our supreme duty as the common Father of the Faithful, heedful of Our children imploring Our intervention and message of peace, raise again Our voice in the name of humanity and reason, and renew Our appeal for

peace to those who hold the destinies of nations in their hands.

To speak in general terms no longer, as circumstances counseled in the past, We now wish to make more concrete and practical proposals and to invite the Governments of the belligerent peoples to agree to a consideration of the following points, as a basis for a just and durable peace, leaving to them the task of analyzing and completing them.

First of all, as a fundamental principle, moral right must be substituted for the material force of arms. Out of this shall arise a just agreement for a simultaneous and reciprocal diminution of armaments, according to rules and guarantees to be laid down hereafter, without impairing, however, the force needed for the maintenance of public order in each State. In place of armed force should be substituted the noble and peaceful institution of arbitration according to regulations to be made and penalties to be imposed upon any State which might refuse either to submit a national question to such a tribunal or to accept its decision.

Once the supremacy of right has been established, all obstacles to means of human communication between peoples would disappear; the true liberty and community of the seas would be assured by rules to be established later, a consummation which would help to do away with the present numerous causes of conflict as well as open new sources of prosperity and progress.

We see no other means of solving the question of damages and indemnities than by proposing as a general principle complete and reciprocal condonation, which would be fully justified by the immense benefit to be derived from disarmament. So evident is this consideration that continuation of the present carnage solely for economic reasons is incomprehensible.

In some instances there may be special reason for discussing this question on a basis of justice and equity. But pacific agreements, with the immense advantages that would accrue from such discussion, are not possible without a reciprocal restitution of the territories at present occupied.

Therefore, Germany, on her part, should completely evacuate Belgium and give guarantees for the latter's full political, military, and economic independence.

Germany should also evacuate French territory, while the opposing belligerents, on their part, should make similar restitution of the German colonies.

As regards such territorial questions as have arisen between Italy and Austria, and between Germany and France, there is reason to hope that the parties in conflict will be disposed to approach them in a conciliatory mood in view of the great advantages of a durable peace with disarmament, taking into consideration, as We have said formerly, the aspirations and the special interests of the peoples concerned, as well as the general good of humanity.

The same spirit of equity and justice should be followed in the consideration of other territorial and political questions, notably those relative to Armenia and the Balkan States and the territories making a part of the ancient Kingdom of Poland, whose noble and historical traditions and whose sufferings, especially during the present war, should enlist the sympathies of the nations.

Such are the principal bases whereon, We believe, the future reorganization of the peoples should be built. They are of such a nature that their acceptance would render impossible the return of similar conflicts and would prepare a way to the solution of the economic situation, fraught as it is with such importance for the future and the material well-being of all the belligerent States.

Therefore, in presenting these considerations to you, who direct at this hour the destinies of the belligerent nations, Our sole desire and purpose is to see them accepted and in their acceptance the conclusion at an early date of the terrible struggle which appears more and more to be only a useless massacre.

The whole world recognizes that the honor of the armies of both sides is safe. Incline your ears, therefore, to Our appeal. Accept the fraternal invitation which We send you in the name of the Divine Redeemer, the Prince of Peace. Reflect on your grave responsibility before God and before man.

On your decision depends the repose and the joy of innumerable families, the lives of thousands of young people, in a word, the happiness of the people whose welfare it is your absolute duty to obtain.

May the Lord inspire your decision in conformity with His most holy will. May God grant that while meriting the applause

of your contemporaries you may also obtain with future generations the splendid name of peacemakers.

As for Us, closely united in prayer and in penance with all those faithful souls who sigh for peace, We implore for you the light and counsel of the Divine Spirit.

(Signed) Benedict XV

At the Vatican, August 1.

Although information had been obtained from Nuncios and Papal Envoys and from the representatives of States accredited to the Holy See, the Note in contents and wording was entirely the work of His Holiness and had not been discussed with anybody outside the Vatican. But with the exception of some sober-minded organs, the press in all Europe began to find partiality in its lines. Prominent German papers ascribed it to English initiative, great French journals saw in it the catspaw of the Germans.

#### IV

What was the attitude of the man who at this moment held the fate of Germany in his hands, Chancellor Michaelis? In a communication to Count Wedel, the German Ambassador at Vienna, he writes, August 22:

In my opinion our endeavor must be to throw the odium of a possible failure of the Pope's mediation upon our enemies and show them to be in the wrong. . . . My intention is therefore to proceed in this matter rather procrastinatingly [*ziemlich dilatorisch*], until a more accurate knowledge of the sentiments [of our enemies] will make it possible for us to assume a suitable attitude.

Before this communication was dispatched, the Chancellor had already acted upon this principle. In an official meeting of the heads of the several political parties he had, August 21, after words of the greatest appreciation of the Pope's effort, declared that a reply was impossible before the views of the Austrian Government had been sounded — an absolutely futile subterfuge, since Austria's attitude was only too well-known in Berlin. It was the sentiment of the committee, that peace negotiations would be endangered if nothing were said about Belgium. No reply

was formulated in this meeting. Action was postponed until Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey had been sounded as to their views. But the Committee expressly reserved to itself an active collaboration in the final draft of the Reply Note.

Three days later, in a conversation with the Crown Prince of Bavaria, Michaelis granted that Belgium would have to be restored.

It must be recognized that in the Protestant population there were not lacking those who welcomed Pope Benedict XV's peace move with joy. "This step is not Catholic but Christian." However, the voices of opponents soon became louder. On the very day that the Papal Note was published, several influential papers began to speak of "Papal arrogance." The Reichstag's Peace Resolution of July 19 was attributed to Roman influence, though even the commanding Generals had approved of it. "The Pope wishes France to win, in order to welcome back that daughter of the Church. . . . He steps in because England is badly off, and he desires to gain new converts from English Protestantism." A Protestant pastor, Dr. Traub, traveled up and down the country as special emissary of that incorporation of bitterest hatred against Rome, the Evangelical Alliance. When Catholic public opinion rose in indignation against his tirades, he coolly replied: "as Evangelical I cannot see the end of the war in an untimely peace offered by the Pope just in the jubilee year (1917) of Luther's rising." The Protestant revival society of Kassel did not remain idle. The Brotherhood was in fact in no small anxiety lest "Brother Michaelis" might waver. Letter upon letter reached him, warning him "not to go into the devil's net." A petition signed by a large number of prominent members called the possibility of a Papal peace "a most terrible thing" (*etwas ganz Entsetzliches*) and appealed to the Chancellor's sense of most sacred duty towards the Protestant Church.

The public opposition, however, greatly subsided, with the exception of the agitation kept up by the Evangelical Alliance and the Brotherhood of Kassel.

Though England hesitated in replying to the Papal peace document of August 1, it made another very remarkable move towards an understanding between the hostile parties. Under date of August 21, the English Minister of the Exterior, Mr. Balfour, sent a Note to Count de Salis, the British Envoy with the Holy See. The most important passages of it were these:

Although the Central Powers have recognized their guilt concerning Belgium, they have never expressly declared that they intend to restore it in its former state of complete independence or to undo the damage it has suffered through their hand.

As long as they and their allies do not officially declare how far they are willing to go in the matter of the restoration of Belgium and repairing the damage done to that country — and as long as they do not determine their war aims and express what measures they would consent to in order to prevent the terrors of another war, His Majesty's Government considers it as unlikely that any progress towards peace can be made.

This was a rather determined peace move. It was the official promise of the British Government, that if Germany would express its willingness to restore Belgium, England was ready to enter into negotiations for peace.

England had not beforehand informed any of her allies of this important step in order to confront them with an accomplished fact. But when acquainted with the Note, France at once gave its full adhesion.

Count de Salis communicated the Note to the astounded Cardinal Gasparri. But when the latter said, there was already such a declaration in the Peace Resolution of the Reichstag, De Salis replied: "Germany is not governed by the Reichstag, and we do not even have the official text of that resolution."

Full of hopes, however, the Cardinal at once dispatched a transcript of the British Note to Nuncio Pacelli at Munich, further explaining the situation in a memorandum of his own. And from Pacelli it went without delay, again accompanied by an explanatory communication, to the address of the Chancellor at Berlin. Though not in form, the British Note was in reality a communication of the English Government to Germany by way



of the Papal Chancery. How much England was in earnest it showed when a day or two later the text was handed in the form of an official Note to the Cardinal Secretary of State.

On September 3, the transcript of the English document was in Michaelis' hands. Of course, it enormously increased the force of the appeal of Benedict XV. If this Note would come to the eyes of those in power in Germany it was as good as sure that peace negotiations would be started — peace negotiations through the intervention of the Pope — which must not be. For two days the communications were treated as a private letter. During these days von Kühlmann had an interview with Michaelis, in which, without knowing of the English peace feeler and referring only to the Papal Note of August 1, he proposed to "sound" England as to its real sentiments through some neutral country. Though the Chancellor had just received the official statement as to England's demands he approved of the project. It was resolved to approach Spain for this purpose. Should a reply come through Spain, he might continue the negotiations through the Spanish Government and disregard the Pope's notes entirely; if not, at least that much time would be "gained" for postponing the reply to the Papal communications.

## V

Chancellor Michaelis' mind was made up. The promise that Germany would restore Belgium was to be given neither to the Pope in answer to his Note of August 1, nor through the Pope in answer to the English communication of August 21. For this purpose it was absolutely necessary that the British Note be kept a perfect secret from all those, high and low, who upon the strength of it were likely to urge a favorable reply. The Chancellor must be the only one to determine the contents and wording of the Note which should go to the Pope. The Chief Committee of the Reichstag, we remember, had expressly demanded that the final draft be laid before a Committee of Seven. This was the first obstacle the Chancellor had to overcome. Another obstacle was the Crown Council

consisting of the Emperor and other persons in high positions. We shall see by what means Michaelis succeeded in blindfolding both these assemblies.

The Committee of Seven was to meet on September 10. The day before von Kühlmann (who, however, meanwhile had been initiated into the secret of the English Note) had a private preparatory conversation with the Socialist Scheidemann, one of the members of the Committee. Von Kühlmann told him: that the Government's reply to the Papal Note would follow the lines drawn by the Peace Resolution of July 19; that the Curia was already informed of the character of the reply and was satisfied with it; that Rome no longer insisted upon a public statement concerning Belgium; that just at present transactions were going on between him and Rome about the Belgian question; that in short Rome did not expect an answer different from the one the Chancellor was going to send. Each of these assertions was a lie. Nor was the English Note, the knowledge of which would have put the whole affair upon a very different basis, mentioned either in this private interview or in the session of the Committee.

In the meeting on the following day von Kühlmann explained the draft of the Reply Note. Belgium, he said, was not mentioned, because, anyhow, it was too important for Germany to retain that country as a security. (Neither Benedict XV nor the English Note had demanded immediate evacuation but only the conditional promise of future restoration.) The Cardinal Secretary of State, besides, had made a very confidential inquiry on account of some hostile Power which wished to know our attitude towards Belgium. He could state in harmony with all persons connected with the Government that the Peace Resolution of July 19 was necessarily to be the sole rule of conduct concerning Belgium. The Chancellor repeated this statement emphatically, but suggested that the actual mode of treatment of the Belgium question be left to the Government, i. e., to himself. The Committee members no doubt were glad to hear that the Reichstag's Peace Resolution was to be made the guide of the imperial diplomacy, for which purpose, of course, it had been adopted.

They knew that, as had been stated by all parties, a clear reference to it would exclude any intention of annexing Belgium. Their trustfulness in the Chancellor's honesty had not yet been shaken. So Chancellor Michaelis was given full liberty to act by a Committee which was in ignorance of the actual status of affairs, and which in truth did not know what it was talking about.

The Committee of Seven thought, and rightly so, that a clear reference to the Peace Resolution (the *real* Peace Resolution) would fully satisfy the Roman diplomats as a declaration concerning the German Government's attitude towards the Belgian question. But it was Michaelis who was going to word this reference. And this is the way he finally worded it:

Fully appreciating the significance of His Holiness' manifestation the Imperial Government has not failed to subject the suggestions it conveyed to a serious and conscientious examination. The several measures taken [by the Imperial Government] in closest touch with the representatives of the German people for the discussion and settlement of the questions under consideration show clearly, how much it has at heart, in harmony with the desires of His Holiness and the Peace Resolution of the Reichstag of July 19, to find suitable foundations for a just and enduring peace.

It is not surprising that neither the Pope nor any other party concerned could find in this text the promise to give up Belgium, especially since the genuine text of the Peace Resolution was absolutely unknown.

By giving this passage, which is really the heart of the Reply Note, we have been anticipating.

## VI

Meanwhile Michaelis had still to win over the Crown Council. On September 11, the day after the meeting of the Committee of Seven, the Crown Council met. It consisted of the Emperor, the Crown Prince, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, and nine other prominent members of the ministry and army. We must register the astounding fact that besides Michaelis and von Kühlmann neither the Emperor nor any other participants had or received any knowledge of the English Note to the Vatican or of

its official transcript already for more than a week in the Chancellor's possession. They were merely told that a peace move had been made by a neutral party — an untruth, since the Note had come from the most formidable of the enemy Powers.

Von Kühlmann spoke first. He wound up with the request that he be permitted to "sound" the peace sentiments of England through some neutral power. This was granted. Concerning the conditions under which Germany would enter upon regular peace negotiations, the Chancellor himself recommended the promise of the restoration of Belgium, and this was also the Emperor's view. Von Hindenburg and Ludendorff, though personally of a somewhat different opinion, bowed to the decision of William II. The Emperor only added, that if there were no peace brought about by Christmas, he was to be consulted again. In the details of the negotiations full liberty was given to the Chancellor. After the meeting the Emperor approached von Kühlmann with the words: "Now you have your hands free. Show what you can do, and take care that by Christmas the German people is in full enjoyment of peace." Von Kühlmann's, and of course Michaelis', hands were free. As in the case of the Committee of Seven, this liberty had been granted by men who were sitting under a dense smoke screen. The Chancellor was going to use his liberty, not to give peace to a war-torn Germany, but to throw his Fatherland into another year of unspeakable misery and final military disaster.

The Crown Council had empowered the Chancellor to find out through some neutral Power what were the sentiments and demands of England concerning the opening of peace negotiations. So Michaelis, through his chief secretary, von Kühlmann, at once entered upon the execution of the plan made before the Crown Council's meeting to "sound" England through the Spanish government. The interpellation was to be entrusted to the Spanish Ambassador to Belgium, Marquis Villalobar, who still resided in Brussels. Villalobar was empowered to give, in the name of Germany, the binding promise, that Germany was willing to restore the full integrity and sovereignty of Belgium, provided England declared on its part that this

official promise given by Germany would lead to peace negotiations. As a supposition for this promise Germany expected England to agree to the following four points:

- ( i ) Germany's boundaries to remain intact;
- ( ii ) The German colonies to be returned;
- (iii) No war indemnities;
- (iv) No economic war to follow.

It was a clearly formulated official, though conditioned, offer based on the conviction of the opponent's sincere desire for an understanding. We shall have to refer to it later on.

Marquis Villalobar, who as Ambassador could not act directly with England, informed his Government of the German declaration. The Spanish Government not wishing on the one hand to conceal from England the fact that Germany was ready for peace transactions, had good reasons not to pose as mediator. It simply stated to the English Ambassador in Madrid, that a prominent personality in Berlin had expressed Germany's desire to enter upon a peace parley without alluding to the detailed contents of Villalobar's communication. Thus the attempt to get into a communication with England by way of Madrid came to nothing.

The chief characteristic of this abortive endeavor is the fact that the English Government (and the French administration to boot) had already given the fullest proof of its sincerity by invoking Pope Benedict's good services in transmitting its offer to the enemy and depositing the official Note in the archive of the Papal Secretary of State. Why was this important Note disregarded? Did it not contain the information sought in vain through the Spanish diplomats?

Meanwhile, on August 29, had been published the Reply of President Wilson to the Papal Note of August 1, which stated that there could be no talk of peace transaction as long as the Central Powers remained under the control of their present domination. It had no influence upon the attitude of the European belligerents.

## VII

The Crown Council had taken place on September 11. On September 13, Michaelis placed the draft of the reply which he intended to send to Rome before the Emperor. The draft had been ready before the Crown Council assembled, and had been "discussed" in the Committee of Seven of the Reichstag. In the Crown Council, as we have seen, the Emperor had consented to the restoration of Belgium, which Michaelis himself declared to be necessary, and had given the Chancellor "free hand" to proceed upon this supposition. The actual draft itself had not been asked for and had been touched upon only in general terms. Nor was it asked for in the meeting of the Committee of Seven. Its members were bamboozled into consent by the solemn assurance of Michaelis that the draft followed closely the lines drawn by the Peace Resolution; that Rome was already informed of the contents of the future Letter and was perfectly satisfied.

The draft was worded in very polite and respectful language. But it contained no promise as to the future treatment of Belgium, the one point on which the success of the whole peace move depended. It is not surprising that the Emperor gave his consent, for he knew nothing about the existence of the Nuncio's Letter and the British Note; he supposed, besides, that what had happened two days before in the Crown Council would immediately be communicated by the "neutral mediator" to the British Government.

Under date of September 19, a transcript of the draft was sent to Nuncio Pacelli at Munich, ostensibly for the purpose of learning the Nuncio's reaction and to arrive at a text agreeable to both parties. But since it had already been signed by the Emperor, this submission to the Nuncio was a mere farce.

Chancellor Michaelis felt uneasy under the thought that he himself was responsible for the frustration of the Papal peace move. So, right after the Crown Council of September 11, on the twelfth of that month, he addressed a letter to Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, "for the purpose of restating correctly the imperial decision arrived at." He first expressed his thanks to the Field-

Marshal for having supported the Chancellor's endeavors to fix the German war aims on a moderate scale. Then he continued:

I presume that the demands of the Supreme Command, demands on which we must insist decidedly, are that, to keep safe our western industries we need in the first place Liege and a stretch of land to serve as protection; that from a close economic connection of Belgium to Germany both of you expect a condition which in future will make it impossible to the Belgians, from purely egotistical motives, to get into military differences with us; and that after Belgium will have done everything we demand to make an economic connection [with Germany] safe — which of course will take several years after the beginning of the peace transactions — the military precautions can be dropped. We would, therefore, demand Liege only as a security and only for some time. . . .

In the Crown Council the Generals had bowed to the supreme decision of the Emperor. Here the Chancellor went back on that decision. He suggested that Liege and some more territory were to be kept at least for some time.

General Ludendorff, too, was asked by the same letter to write down the wishes he had expressed in the Crown Council (which had been overruled). But only von Hindenburg went into the trap. He stated that in his opinion the permanent possession of Liege and several other points were necessary: "I am unable to think that within any appreciable time, such as can be fixed by agreement, we can let go of Liege." Of course, this was merely the Field-Marshal's personal view. We cannot presume that by uttering it he wished to set it up as a rule for the Chancellor's action in opposition to the Emperor's decision. But it was what Michaelis wanted. He was now backed by the Supreme Command. The Emperor at the time knew nothing of this correspondence, the gist of which went so directly contrary to the order given to Michaelis to take care that the German people have peace by Christmas. To raise such demands as von Hindenburg expressed, meant to make every peace move illusory. That von Hindenburg did not intend to obstruct the peace move by his letter becomes clear from the fact that his co-commander, Ludendorff, a few days later through his chief officer, von

Haeften, almost urged a clear declaration of the Government concerning the restoration of Belgium.

For years the world knew nothing of the letter by which Michaelis had goaded von Hindenburg into his utterances. But the Field-Marshal's own reply soon became public, and friend and foe considered the Supreme Command as the party which had frustrated the hope of ending the war calamities when the realization of that hope was within easy reach. The man solely guilty of that criminal deed was the Chancellor Michaelis, who, besides, was mean enough to allow the blame of it to be fastened on Field-Marshal von Hindenburg and the Supreme Command.

### VIII

When drafting the Reply Note the Chancellor was well aware how it would be received by the Roman Curia. He later on declared under oath:

Secretary von Kühlmann and myself knew very well that the Note such as it had been drafted would provoke the opposition of the Pope resp. the Nuncio Pacelli. It was contrary to their expectation. We knew that, we expected the contradiction. We were not surprised by it.

The Vatican was painfully waiting for the German answer, which would open the road to peace for the war-torn world. About this time a German prelate, who enjoyed the kind favor of the Holy Father, once asked him, whether there was hope for the return of peace through his action. He records:

The Pope looked at me thoughtfully, raised his eyes to heaven, and said in a very sad voice "let us go and pray." He led me to a statue of the Madonna della Guardia, where he knelt down and prayed. I myself and a monsignore knelt behind him. After some time of earnest prayer he arose with great seriousness and imparted to us his blessing. My impression was, little hope. My poor Fatherland, you are done for, if you do not listen to the call from the Vicar of Christ. . . . Germany had many friends in Vatican circles. They remained its friends, but became more reserved.

The draft of the Reply Note was sent to the Nuncio at Munich on September 14. Immediately the answer of



the Nuncio arrived, stating that he had at once telegraphed the text in cipher to Rome, and expressing his own utter amazement at the text. A communication, which contained nothing about Belgium, he said, would make the whole peace action valueless. A similar answer came from Cardinal Gasparri, the Papal Secretary of State. The wires were kept hot between Rome and Munich, and between Munich and Berlin. The Vatican diplomats implored, adjured, reminded the Chancellor of his duty towards his Fatherland and nation. It was all to no purpose. The entreaties were not noticed, let alone answered. The man who sat in the smoke screen at Berlin was adamant. On September 19, the draft, without the slightest alteration, was officially dispatched as Germany's answer to the Holy Father's peace circular. The communication sent by the Munich Nuncio, Pacelli, which contained the transcript of the British inquiry, was answered in the same strain under date of September 24. The peace efforts of Pope Benedict XV had come to nothing.

It was not the work of the Emperor or generals or people. All were eager to see the cessation of the terrible war. The people, by their representatives, had passed the Peace Resolution of July 19, which the Supreme Command had expressly sanctioned, and which the Government, including the Chancellor himself, had repeatedly declared to be the guide in their attitude towards an understanding with the enemy Powers. It was by a method of continued misrepresentation and lies (only some of which have been pointed out on these pages) that the Chancellor enabled himself to reply to the Papal Document in a way which made the opening of peace transactions an impossibility.

He had certainly carried out his resolve to proceed procrastinatingly. The Papal Peace Note which had reached him on August 15, was replied to on September 19, and the communication of Pacelli, as just stated, was answered on September 24, though it had been in Berlin since August 30.

Meanwhile, the pledge to give up Belgium had been sent to Spain to be forwarded to England. It failed to arrive. Why was it not given to the Pope who already

possessed in his archive the official declaration of England's willingness to accept it?

Archbishop Noerber of Freiburg wrote in 1919: "The war was definitely lost in the moment when the peace of reconciliation which Benedict XV tried to bring about was rejected for no other reason but that it had come from the Pope."

Pope Benedict XV remained true to his position. During the last year of the Great War he continued to work for the oppressed and suffering of both parties. After the war his efforts to help were chiefly directed to the countries where he knew existed the great misery, the Central Powers and Russia. As true representative of the Divine Prince of Peace he had endeavored to restore peace to Europe. It was not his fault that he failed.

The Catholic Association for International Peace has grown out of a series of meetings during 1926-1927. Following the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago in 1926, representatives of a dozen nations met with Americans for discussion. In October of the same year a meeting was held in Cleveland where a temporary organization called The Catholic Committee on International Relations was formed. The permanent name, The Catholic Association for International Peace, was adopted at a two-day Conference in Washington in 1927. Annual Conferences were held in the same city in 1928, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936; in New York City, 1931; and in Cleveland, 1932. All-day regional Conferences took place in Chicago on Armistice Day, 1930; in St. Louis on Washington's Birthday, 1932; at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, on November 19, 1933; at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on November 25, 1934; College of Notre Dame of Maryland, Baltimore, February 9, 1935; Villanova College, Villanova, Pennsylvania, May 25, 1935; and at the University of Detroit, November 10, 1935. It is a membership organization. Its objects and purposes are:

- To study, disseminate and apply the principles of natural law and Christian charity to international problems of the day;
- To consider the moral and legal aspects of any action which may be proposed or advocated in the international sphere;
- To examine and consider issues which bear upon international goodwill;
- To encourage the formation of conferences, lectures and study circles;
- To issue reports on questions of international importance;
- To further, in cooperation with similar Catholic organizations in other countries, in accord with the teachings of the Church, the object and purposes of world peace and happiness.

The ultimate purpose is to promote, in conformity with the mind of the Church, "The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ."

The Association works through the preparation of committee reports. Following careful preparation, these are discussed both publicly and privately in order to secure able revision and they are then published by the organization. Additional committees will be created from time to time. The Association solicits the membership and cooperation of Catholics of like mind. It is seeking especially the membership and cooperation of those whose experience and studies are such that they can take part in the preparation of committee reports.

The Committees on Ethics, Law and Organization, and Economic Relations serve as a guiding committee on the particular questions for all other committees. Questions involving moral judgments must be submitted to the Committee on Ethics.

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