



ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE
Aldine Club

BY
THE REV. DR. HENRY VAN DYKE
Formerly Minister to The Hague

JUNE 20, 1917

Gentlemen and My Dear Dr. Abbott:

I WISH I could live up to your representation. I am always glad to come to the Aldine Club. I have been doing it for a great many years. The last time I was here was a most delightful occasion, a strictly private dinner of 650 men, at which no reporters were present, but the report of which was in the papers next morning. Our Colonel Roosevelt made a great speech that night, and I remember one epigram that he got off. He had signed a dinner card "T. R." and somebody said that he wanted to be Theodorus Rex, which he indignantly denied. He said, "I do not want to be a king. I have seen too many kings. I know what their job is—it is the job of a Vice-President for life." Now, that was a very witty characterization, but the qualifying clause, "for life," just now seems like a slight exaggeration.

When I was in this country, brought back on official duty, in 1915, I expressed the hope and the confidence that America, then a neutral nation, would play a large and noble part in the Peace Conference. Since then my hope and confidence have been verified, for she has taken the only way to play a part either in conferring about or in bringing about peace—namely, she has entered the war. There was no other path that gave her a part of honor to play or a hope of a drama in which to play it.

Some people say we talk too much about war nowadays. Well, perhaps we do, but I don't think that we think enough about war. And, as the average American is constituted, it is hardly possible for him to do much thinking without some talking. Every time that I think and that the majority of Americans really think

about this war, we draw an indictment. Not an indictment against a whole people, for Burke has very well said that "that is impossible," but we draw an indictment against certain guilty men who have led a whole people into the paths of shame and dishonor, we draw an indictment against the predatory Potsdam gang. We indict that gang for the very existence of this war. It ought not to be, it needed not to be, except in order to satisfy the needs of that gang. There is no nation in the world that wanted war—not one, except the nation that was controlled by that crowd of men who had prepared, trained and disciplined for war months before the unhappy Archduke and his wife were assassinated at Sarajevo. I know it, because I saw the preparations. By chance I saw them. When it came to the moment of crisis, every nation—Russia, Servia, France, England, Italy—pleaded for arbitration, begged for it. And if not arbitration then a full-power conference with both parties of the dispute equally represented. The argument was clear and strong. Servia, whatever her sins may have been, was willing to submit them for trial before the court and to accept whatever punishment an impartial court would give. That was a proposition in direct line with all that we have been pleading for, that we have been urging and trying to get for the last twenty years, namely the arbitrable settlement of national disputes. That is our idea, that is what we live for and what we purpose to live by. Therefore, America, though not venturing to say so formally, did say so: "Settle this by arbitration." But the Potsdam gang said, "No," and although Austria was in conference with Russia and trying to find a way out of the thing, the gang at Potsdam launched

the war, hell on earth, and began it by violating two solemn treaties. We indict the Potsdam gang for the unlawful, unnecessary, cruel and devilish beginning of this war in Europe and the world.

Then we indict them again for the existence of the war—we indict them for the conduct of the war. This war has produced greater atrocities and barbarities than any other war in the world. Perhaps not greater in particular cases, because if you hark back to the Thirty Year War, the One Hundred Year War, you will find in the history of the towns that were sacked things that were horrible; but this war has seen greater atrocities, because committed on a larger scale and because committed in the blazing light of the civilization of the Twentieth Century. A sin against light, all these things have been.

I haven't time to go over the ground, because you have your work to go back to and I have mine. But look at it! A violation of treaties to which the power at Potsdam was a party; the violation of the treaty guaranteeing the neutrality of Luxembourg, then of Belgium. We in this country do not think that a treaty is a thing that can be set aside except under changed circumstances and a due and sufficient notice of the abrogation of the treaty. We recognize the difference between a solemn treaty to which the name of the nation is set and a scrap of paper that can be torn up at the will of the power that says, "Necessity knows no law." That is what the burglar says when he breaks into your house—"I need this." That is what the white slaver says, that is what the militarist power says, "Law is nothing unless it has might to defend itself."

After the treaties the next great thing was the

unannounced aerial bombardment of Antwerp. Now, the law says that before you bombard a town you must send an announcement so that the inhabitants may leave. Instead of that orders came for a Zeppelin to go over Antwerp and to drop bombs in that city. I know it. I have the map of the course that the Zeppelin followed—an atrocity that began and that has gone on into this long string of barbarities, under the pretense of military necessity.

The next thing was poisoned gas, which began in the trenches and which was such a surprise to the world that none of the Belgian and British soldiers escaped. Did you ever see a man who has been "gassed"? If you have ever seen one you don't want to see another. Horrible torture to a man—that was Germany's invention. Then the enslavement and deportation of the civilian population, then the piratical use of submarines. Now, understand, the use of submarines in war is not a forbidden thing. A submarine has the right of arrest and search of any vessel of the sea, neutral or belligerent, but it has no right to sink a peaceful vessel on the sea without making provision for the lives of the crew and the passengers. Now, when Semmes of the *Alabama* captured ships he followed that law. Nobody called Semmes a coward or a pirate, nobody has a right to. But the captain of the submarine that sank the *Lusitania* and drowned American women and children without warning and without help was a Potsdam pirate.

Now, go on through the whole list of the things that have happened in this war and you will see that Germany has had the advantage in getting into each one of these atrocious methods before anybody else, and she has used it, perhaps to her advantage in one

way, but to her everlasting shame and discredit in another way.

We indict, therefore, the Potsdam gang, not only for the beginning and conduct of the war, but we indict them for the continuance of the war. Never have those men been willing to state what they were aiming at, not once in terms that could be handled by plain business men. They have kept silent. Would you go into conference with a man who didn't tell you what he was going to confer about, especially a man with a record such as that crowd has? It might have been possible long ago to arrive at some discussion in regard to terms of peace, but for the fact that this gang have worked and continue to work in secret for something which they do not dare to tell the world. We indict them for that conspiracy against the world's peace.

Now, I have talked long enough. I just want to say this: President Wilson, in that admirable and most eloquent message to Congress on the second of April, in which he recognized the existence of a state of war, drew a very fine and very memorable distinction between the German people and the German Government. The German Government is what I have this day called "the predatory Potsdam gang." We must distinguish in our minds and in our thoughts between the ruling crowd and the whole German race and people, for whom I have always had a sincere love and for whom I still cherish a sincere love. In thought and in feeling we must remember that we do not hate the German people—we love them as we love ourselves, that is to say, I hope, with a wise and sane and righteous love, the kind of love which commands

a man, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee."

Now, in our thought and feeling we must distinguish always between the German race, the German people and the German Government—the gang—but the mischief of it is that we can't get at the gang without going through the people, because the people shelter the gang behind their poisoned gas, their high explosives, their trenches, their rifles and bayonets, their hand grenades, and you can't touch those robbers who sit safely at the back—you can't touch them without going through the people whom they have deluded and to whom they have done almost as much harm as to any other people in the world. Eight million, or nearly that many, have been killed, the flower of humanity, since this war began, and three and a half million Germans.

A German officer said to me a couple of years ago: "If we win this war—and we are going to win it—what breaks my heart is to think of what will be left of Germany, our best young men gone, our resources drained, our population demoralized when we have won this war, but what will be left of us when we get up from the game, the winner." Ah, that is the pity of it, that is the thousandfold pity.

Then, for the liberation of the countries that have been invaded and oppressed, I say, America must put every scintilla of thought and invention and every ounce of gold and every muscle of power and force that she has into this great war, to down the predatory Potsdam gang.