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Extracts from Royce's letter to the editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, L. P. Jacks. The letter gives permission to publish. The *Hibbert Journal* title is the editor's.

AN AMERICAN THINKER ON THE WAR.¹

PROFESSOR ROYCE.

IN my last letter I believe that I laid some stress to you upon the necessity, both patriotic and academic, of my trying to preserve a formally strict neutrality of expression, not merely because the community of mankind as a total community is my highest interest, as it is yours, but because our President's advice to the nation, and our manifold relations to foreigners, both in academic life and in the world at large, limit our right, or have limited our right, to express ourselves regarding matters of the war and of current controversy. It is now a relief to be able to say with heartiness, that one result at least of the *Lusitania* atrocity has been and will be to make it both necessary and advisable to speak out plainly many things which an American professor in my position has long felt a desire to say upon occasions when he still supposed it to be his duty not to say them. Thus, for instance, immediately after the *Lusitania* incident, and before Wilson's first letter, addressed to Berlin, I quite deliberately told my own principal class in metaphysics that, and why, I should no longer endeavour to assume a neutral attitude about the moral questions which the *Lusitania*

¹ The title is the Editor's. The text consists of the relevant extracts from a letter written by Professor Royce to the Editor, permission for the publication of which is given on p. 41. With the exception of two passages (in the first paragraph on p. 40 and the end of the last paragraph), the extracts were published in the London *Morning Post* of July 5, 1915.

It will be noted that whereas Dr Förster's pamphlet, discussed by Mr Lowes Dickinson in the preceding article, was written *before* the sinking of the *Lusitania*, Professor Royce writes *after* that event.—EDITOR.

incident brought to the minds of all of us. That friends of mine, and that former pupils of mine, near to me as the students whom I was addressing are near to me, were on the *Lusitania*—this, as I said to my class, made it right for me to say, “Among these dead of the *Lusitania* are my own dead.” And so, I went on to say, “I cannot longer leave you to suppose it possible that I have any agreement with the views which a German colleague of mine, a teacher at Harvard, recently maintained, when he predicted what he called ‘the spiritual triumph of Germany.’ It makes very little difference to anybody else what I happen to think, but to you, as my pupils, it is my duty to say that henceforth, whatever the fortunes of war may be, ‘the spiritual triumph of Germany’ is quite impossible, so far as this conflict is concerned. I freely admit that Germany may triumph in the visible conflict, although my judgment about such matters is quite worthless. But to my German friends and colleagues, if they chance to want to know what I think, I can and do henceforth only say this: ‘You may triumph in the visible world, but at the banquet where you celebrate your triumph there will be present the ghosts of my dead slain on the *Lusitania*.’”

I insisted to my class that just now the especially significant side of this matter is contained simply in the deliberately chosen facts which the enemy of mankind has chosen to bring into being in these newest expressions of the infamies of Prussian warfare. I should be a poor professor of philosophy, and in particular of moral philosophy, if I left my class in the least doubt as to how to view such things. And that, then, was my immediate reaction on the *Lusitania* situation.

Of course, one still has to live with his German colleagues in the midst of this situation. I am glad to know at least one such German colleague—and, I believe, a thoroughly good patriot—who views the *Lusitania* atrocity precisely as any honest and humane man must view it, unless wholly blinded by the present personal and social atmosphere of

ferocity and confusion in which so many Germans live. I do not endeavour to have unnecessary controversy with these colleagues, or with anybody else, and have spoken of the matter both to colleagues and to students precisely as much and as little as the situation seemed to me to permit and require. But it might interest you to know that, in my opinion, the *Lusitania* incident has affected and will affect our national sentiment—and what has been our desire for a genuine neutrality—in a very profound and practical way.

Of the political consequences of the incident up to this date, you will have, I hope, a sufficiently definite ground for judgment. Fortune is fickle; and war is a sadly chaotic series of changes. But this I warmly hope: henceforth may the genuine consciousness of brotherhood between your people and mine become more and more clearly warm, and conscious, and practically effective upon the course of events. The *Lusitania* affair makes us here, all of us, clearer. A deeply unified and national indignation, coupled with a strong sense of our duty towards all humanity, has already resulted from this new experiment upon human nature, which has been “made in Germany,” and then applied to the task of testing what American sentiment really is. I do not know how often the changing fortunes of war, or the difficulties about neutral commerce, will bring to light causes of friction or of tension between our two peoples. But I cordially hope that we shall find ourselves, henceforth, nearer and nearer together in conscious sentiment and in the sort of sympathy which can find effective expression. It is a great thing to feel that Wilson, in his last two notes to Germany, has been speaking the word both for his nation and for all humanity. I am sure that he has spoken the word for a new sort of unification of our own national consciousness. Unless Germany substantially meets these demands, I am sure that she will find all our foreign populations more united than ever through their common resentment in the presence of international outrages, and through their common consciousness that our unity and

active co-operation must have an important bearing upon the future of all that makes human life precious to any of us. In so far as our German-American fellow-citizens fail to appreciate the call of humanity in respect of such matters as this, they have further lessons to learn which America will teach them,—peaceably if we can, but authoritatively if we must, whenever an effort is made to carry dissensions into our national life for the sake of any German purpose. As a fact, I believe that unless Germany meets the essential demands of President Wilson, our German-American population will be wholly united with us, as never before, in the interests of humanity and of freedom. In brief, the *Lusitania* affair, and its consequences, give one further tiny example of that utter ignorance of human nature and of its workings which the German propaganda, the German diplomacy, and the German policy have shown from the outset of the war. Submarines these people may understand, certainly not souls.

I do not love the words of hate, even now, or even when uttered over the bodies of those who were slain on the *Lusitania*. It is not hate, but longing and sorrow for stricken humanity, which is with me, as I am sure it is with you, the ruling sentiment. I have no fondness for useless publicity. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the words which I have just written down may not only have a little friendly interest to you as expressing a certain change in my own attitude towards those problems about neutrality which I mentioned to you before, but may conceivably suggest to you some way in which a more public expression of mine might be of real service to some cause which you, or which other of my English friends, hold dear. The controversial literature of the war is, as you know, and as you yourself have said, a cup which seems to be overfull. Yet I now no longer feel that any duty or desire makes me hesitant concerning the expression of whatever plain speech and worthily strong sentiment might be able to contribute to a good cause. You will see from the way in which I spoke to my class, after long

dutifully preserving a deliberate reticence in the classroom regarding the war,—you will see that my mouth is now open enough, if only any words that could be of use for the cause of true peace, or against the deeds and the motives of the declared enemies of mankind, could be uttered by me. It is a relief to have in such matters not only a free soul, but a perfectly free right of speech, so long as one's speech promises to contribute anything, however little, to the cause of mankind which such bitter and cruel enemies are now assailing in the sight of us all. So do with this letter, or with any part of it, precisely as you think best,—not indeed making it seem as if I were at all fond of notoriety, but merely using the right which I give you as my friend to let anybody know where I stand. I am no longer neutral, even in form. The German Prince is now the declared and proclaimed enemy of mankind, declared to be such not by any “lies” of his enemies, or by any “envious” comments of other people, but by his own quite deliberate choice to carry on war by the merciless destruction of innocent, non-combatant passengers. The single deed is indeed only a comparatively petty event when compared with the stupendous crimes which fill this war. But the sinking of the *Lusitania* has the advantage of being a deed which not only cannot be denied, but which has been proudly proclaimed as expressing the appeal that Germany now makes to all humanity. About that appeal I am not neutral. I know that that appeal expresses utter contempt for everything which makes the common life of humanity tolerable or possible. I know that if the principle of that appeal is accepted, whatever makes home or country or family or friends, or any form of loyalty, worthily dear, is made an object of a perfectly deliberate and merciless assault. About such policies and their principles, about such appeals, and about the Prince who makes them, and about his underlings who serve him, I have no longer any neutrality to keep. And without the faintest authority in any political matter, without the faintest wish for any sort of notoriety, I am

perfectly willing to let this utterance receive any sort of publicity that, in its utter unworthiness to express adequately or effectively the nature of the crimes and of the infamy which it attempts to characterise, it may by chance get, should you or anybody else wish to make use of it. Of course, I need not tell you that a Harvard professor speaks only for himself, and commits none of his colleagues to anything that chances to be in his mind or on his tongue.

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