The German Warnings No Justification.

In Birmingham yesterday the one topic of conversation was the Lusitania horror. On every hand the act was severely condemned. Many persons of pro-German sympathies were indignant.

In the minds of some persons, however, was found a confusion as to the weight of mitigation which should be attached to the official warnings lately given in advertisements in New York papers and also privately to persons who were about to sail on the Lusitania. They were those who argued that no American should have sailed on that vessel after those public and private warnings.

From the standpoint of expediency that may be true; perhaps no overly prudent person would have taken the risk that was intimated, though the public warnings were only general; they were not specific as to that vessel. However, those warnings did not affect the right of the Lusitania to sail, nor to carry such merchandise as the United States Government considered not contraband. Neither did they affect the legal or moral right of any American to sail on that vessel. Americans naturally had some confidence in the respect of Germany for some of the rights of non-combatants and for some of the foundation principles of international law.

It is now clear that those public advertisements and private warnings were part of the deliberate design of the German authorities to use after the torpedoeing of the Lusitania in an effort to shift the blame upon the heads of the innocents who have been massacred. But ingenious and crafty as they may have been, as much calculated as they are to confuse the minds of some people, they must fail utterly of their purpose.

Suppose individuals who have offices in one of Birmingham's great buildings were warned not to take one of the B. R., L. & P. Co.'s cars on a certain day, because that car was going to move on a certain street; that constituted some imaginary war zone in somebody's mind; would that be a justification for the death of those persons who left that building, went out on that public highway and rode on that car into that designated territory to lose their lives by the use of torpedoes? The latter imaginary case would be practically analogous to the course of Germany with the passengers of the Lusitania. There is no adequate defense, much less a justification, in the warnings the German authorities have lately given for the massacre of fifteen hundred non-combatants on the high seas. That vessel had every legal and moral right to be where she was, and no passenger had any sound reason to expect that he would be sent to a watery grave without a moment's warning.

If Germany believed the Lusitania was violating the rules of war in any way, she should have sent war vessels to capture her and then to convey her innocent passengers in safety to some port. And if Germany's navy was not equal to that task, certainly the submarine which was ordered by Berlin to torpedo the English vessel should have given at least an hour's warning, so that her lifeboats might be manned and filled before the vessel was sent to the bottom. The submarine's act was the equivalent of an assassin's act in springing out from a hiding place and shooting down his victim. The difference in this case is that the assassin had no personal grudge against any one of his fifteen hundred victims, and that his act was wholesale assassination without any sort of provocation.

The opinion of all the world outside of Germany is condemning this act of barbaric warfare in unstinted terms. It is causing a tremendous revulsion of opinion against the German cause, and especially against the dominant spirit of the German Government. The report that Von Tirpitz, the head of the German navy, is receiving thousands of telegrams of congratulation amazes the bulk of outraged American citizenship; they cannot comprehend the state of mind that the authors of such telegrams are in, that they could gloat over an act that would have shamed the hardened visages of all the pirates the world has known.

There is no doubt that American opinion is tremendously inflamed over this affair; the samples of press utterances yesterday demonstrated that fact. President Wilson is going to have his hands full in going about his serious task deliberately and calmly. Already there are demands for a session of Congress, which might be unsafe at this moment. Possibly it may be unavoidable at an early day.

Undoubtedly this affair demonstrates anew the great need of this country for a larger merchant marine of its own. Many a congressman would today vote for President Wilson's government ship bill who was not for it a few months ago. Something will have to be done promptly to care for American commerce, as well as to safeguard American lives. The President may conclude to call a special session a little later, when the country may be somewhat cooler than it is now.

In the meantime Germany will probably find out that she has made a terrific blunder, and may decide it is wise to indicate that realization in a tangible way. She will lose far more by this wholesale massacre than she can possibly gain. It may be the beginning of a quick end to the war. Possibly German craft may be so deep as to have planned and executed this horror for that selfish purpose.